



temporary fairy-tale scholars, "if literary fairy tales were written and published, they were transformed into didactic tales preaching hard work and pious behavior" (*Victorian Fairy Tales* xiv). As late as 1820, a Mrs. Sherwood of the "anti-fairy-tale school" wrote in her book *The Governess, or The Little Female Academy*:

Fairy-tales . . . are in general an improper medium of instruction because it would be absurd in such tales to introduce Christian principles as motive of action . . . On this account such tales should be sparingly used, it being difficult, if not impossible, from the reason I have specified, to render them really useful. (qtd. in Zipes, *Victorian Fairy Tales* xvi-xvii)

However, two other authorities on fairy tales and children's literature, Iona and Peter Opie, note that in 1823, with the publication of Edgar Taylor's translation of the Grimms' fairy tales, *Kinder-und-Haus-Märchen* (translated as *German Popular Stories*) "fairy tales became, almost overnight, a respectable study for antiquarians, an inspiration for poets, and a permissible source of wonder for the young" (32). While the Opies' assertion is an oversimplification (Romantic writers such as Southey, Lamb, and Coleridge" all "wrote interesting fairy tales"; and "Blake, Wordsworth, Keats, Byron, and Shelley helped to pave the way for the establishment of the genre," [Zipes, *Victorian Fairy Tales* xv]), it is true that until mid-century, the English public had to rely for its fairy tales mainly on continental sources: France (Charles Perrault, Madame d'Aulnoy, and Madame Leprince de Beaumont); Denmark (Hans Christian Andersen); Germany (the Grimm Brothers). Victorians who wrote fairy tales were concerned with promoting both imagination and moral improvement in middle-class children, as well as middle-class adults, yet many tales sought also to "convey both individual and social protest and personal conceptions of alternative, if not utopian, worlds" (Zipes, *Victorian Fairy Tales* xxviii-xix). From 1840 to 1880 the important fairy tale writers (such as John Ruskin and George MacDonald) tended to use the genre "in innovative ways to raise social consciousness about the disparities among the different social classes and the problems faced by the oppressed due to the industrial revolution" (Zipes, *Victorian Fairy Tales* xix). At the same time, many of these writers wanted "to recapture and retain childhood as a paradisiacal realm of innocence" (Zipes, *Victorian Fairy Tales* xx). These are largely conscious goals, goals which should not be discounted, but their consideration should be augmented by an analysis of the unconscious, archetypal images and symbols the authors produced to compensate for the psychic imbalance of the age. This imbalance includes the givens about the period: its prudishness (at least on the surface of society), its depersonalization due to industrialization and urbanization, its questioning of and lack of firm belief in traditional religion due to scientific discoveries, and its work ethic—all problems we in the late twentieth century continue to face.

Like our own age, the Victorian age tended to be unbalanced on the side of what Jung would call the Logos principle as opposed to Eros. Jungian psychotherapist Robert H. Hopcke sums up these concepts in terms that apply to the Victorian era as well as to our own:

Logos, Greek for "word," Jung termed quite appropriately the "principle of knowledge" and described it as a principle traditionally identified with men and masculinity. Logos seeks out knowledge, analysis, clear-sightedness, light, hard edges, and well-defined spaces. Eros, on the other hand, derived from the name of the goddess Aphrodite's son, is what Jung called a "principle of connection," a principle traditionally identified with women and with femininity in general. Eros seeks relationship, connection, warmth, oneness, interactions of feeling, life, spontaneity, and merger. (32)

The Victorian period, perhaps more so than our own, devalued Eros, the feminine principle. While it debated the so-called "Woman Question," most middle-class women were denied the educational and career opportunities that middle-class men took for granted, as anyone who has read Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* can attest to. It is true that a woman was on the throne, that D. G. Rossetti's paintings of women were popular, that women published successfully (albeit some, like George Eliot, chose to do so under a man's name)—but the feminine spirit, the Eros (not to be confused necessarily with flesh and blood women) was devalued. The spirit of the age emphasized material progress, acquisition of goods and foreign lands, exploration, intellect. In matters of emotion, a "stiff upper lip" tended to be the rule, certainly for men who ruled in government and as captains of industry.

That the archetype of the child—the puer, to use the Jungian term—should become prominent in mid-century is, therefore, not at all surprising. "Puer figures," as the eminent Jungian analyst James Hillman writes, "often have a special relationship with the Great Mother, who is in love with them as carriers of the spirit" (24-25). In its quest for and confusion over new scientific ideas, in its imperialism (despite assertions of the "white man's burden" to bring Christianity to the so-called "heathen"), in its materialism, the age had neglected the spirit and so archetypes like the Wise Old Man, the Trickster, the Great Mother, and the Puer appeared in contemporary literature to compensate for the imbalance. Not only did the puer archetype appear in fairy tales, but also in the nonsense literature of Lear and Carroll, in the novels (*Great Expectations* and *Oliver Twist* are but two examples), and in the many verses for children (some of them quite bad, some good) by such poets as Robert Browning, Christina Rossetti, A. C. Swinburne, and Robert Louis Stevenson. Indeed, as Antony and Peter Miall note: "The nineteenth century saw an enormous boom in the writing and publication of children's books . . ." (93). Additionally, the same period witnessed the first magazines for children and the first comic strips and funny papers (Miall 102).

## II

Wilde as a writer of fairy tales wrote in a tradition that I have outlined above, but he wrote to undermine stereotypical Victorian values. Jack Zipes notes that "Wilde was highly disturbed by the way society conditioned and punished young people if they did not conform to the proper rules . . . he had always been sensitive to the authoritarian schooling and church rigidity which most English children were expected to

tolerate." To Zipes, Wilde's "purpose" in writing his fairy tales was "subversion": "He clearly wanted to subvert the messages conveyed by [Hans] Andersen's tales, but more important his poetical style recalled the rhythms and language of the Bible in order to counter the stringent Christian code" (*Art of Subversion* 114). Moreover, Wilde unconsciously created archetypal images that compensated for contemporary psychic imbalance.

Wilde's parents were both collectors of Irish folklore, but his interest in writing fairy tales was no doubt prompted by his becoming a father. He told Richard Le Gallienne: "'It is the duty of every father . . . to write fairy tales for his children'" (qtd. in Hyde, *A Biography* 120). In *Son of Oscar Wilde*, Wilde's son, Vyvyan Holland, reports that when Wilde

grew tired of playing he would keep us [Vyvyan and the older son, Cyril] quiet by telling us fairy stories, or tales of adventure, of which he had a never-ending supply. . . . He told us all his own written fairy stories suitably adapted for our young minds, and a great many others as well. (53)

Indeed, Wilde was moved to tears by one of his own stories, "The Selfish Giant" (53-54). Wilde's gifts as a raconteur are legendary, and probably most of his stories he never put to paper.<sup>4</sup> Richard Ellmann notes that "The Happy Prince" originated as a story Wilde told friends on a visit to Cambridge even before Cyril was old enough to listen. The story was "so well received by the Cambridge students that on returning . . . [Wilde] wrote it down" (268). The spontaneity with which Wilde told his tales suggests that they arose at least in part from unconscious sources that even he was not aware of.

Fairy tales were not the only stories Wilde made up, though most of his short stories have elements of fantasy or fable in them—stories such as "Lord Arthur Saville's Crime," a sort of parody detective story, and "The Canterville Ghost," a comical ghost story. Christopher Nassar calls these two stories fairy tales (12, 21), but they are fairy tales only in the broadest definition of the genre, and perhaps here is a good place to discuss the term "fairy tale." The term itself apparently comes from France, from Madame d'Aulnoy's *Contes des fées* (1698) published in English in 1699 as *Tales of Fairies*. By at least 1748 the term had appeared in print, although it probably had been in use for a much longer time (Opie 18). Fairy tales often do not contain actual fairies. They are, however, "unbelievable" and "contain an enchantment or other supernatural element that is clearly imaginary" (Opie 18). Michael Patrick Hearn suggests that "a more accurate translation [of Madame d'Aulnoy] is 'tale of enchantment'" (xvii). That still does not answer the question as to why "Lord Saville's Crime" and "The Canterville Ghost" are not fairy tales and the stories in *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* and *A House of Pomegranates* (1891) are fairy tales. The answer is that the stories in these two books were meant

for children or appear to be meant for children (a question I shall return to), while the other stories, even with their fantastic elements, are aimed primarily at adults. Development of character is not so important in fairy tales as is revelation of the marvelous, whether there be fairies or not. We are in a world where animals and plants and inanimate objects can talk, where children are often the protagonists, where virtually anything can happen and often does. The fact is Wilde himself called the stories in the two volumes fairy tales (*More Letters* 73, 100), whereas the others he referred to as "stories," both in a letter (*More Letters* 98) and in the title of the volume they appear in: *Lord Arthur Saville's Crime and Other Stories* (1891). While a case can be made for calling these stories fairy tales, to do so broadens the definition of the genre more than I care to here.

As to whether Wilde's fairy tales were written for children, Wilde wrote to G. H. Kersley (June 1888) that *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* are "meant partly for children, and partly for those who have kept the childlike faculties of wonder and joy, and who find in simplicity a subtle strangeness" (*Letters* 219). Later (January 1889) Wilde sent what he called his "fairy tales" to Amelie Rives Chanler, an American novelist, playwright, and poet, telling her the tales were "written, not for children, but for childlike people from eighteen to eighty!" (*Letters* 237). In writing *A House of Pomegranates*, on the other hand, Wilde declared in a letter to the editor of the *Fall Mall Gazette* (December 1891): "I had about as much intention of pleasing the British child as I had of pleasing the British public" (*Letters* 302). Wilde here assumes a typical pose—his persona as the artist standing aloof from the philistine public. Taken together, Wilde's act of telling and reading the stories to his own children and his recorded comments make clear the obvious: the tales are for both children and adults. Their continuing popularity attests to this fact, although the many children's editions often abridge the text, removing such passages as authorial comments not necessary to propel the story. As C. S. Lewis has said of fairy tales: "Many children don't like them and many adults do" (qtd. in Tatar 21). In her book about the Grimms' fairy tales, Maria Tatar writes: "No age group has ever had an uncontested monopoly on fairy tales" (21-22). Because fairy tales contain archetypes from the collective unconscious in their most accessible forms, they can and do appeal to all age groups.

"The Happy Prince" is one of Wilde's better known and more popular tales. The Happy Prince is actually a golden statue of a prince of the city who, the story implies, had died young. Not until he views the inhabitants of his city from his elevated height does he realize the suffering of his former subjects. With the help of a Swallow, late for his annual migration to Egypt because of an ineffectual dalliance with a Reed, the Prince sets about helping the victims of the social system. The first person he helps is the sick son of a seamstress who is embroidering a beautiful gown for one of the Queen's maids-

<sup>4</sup> Holland includes in an appendix to his book four previously unpublished "poems in prose" given to him by a woman whom his father had known as a girl. She went home and wrote down the stories "exactly as he had told them, so far as she could from memory" (54). The stories seem authentic in their

themes of the artist, art, life imitating art, and in their biblical motifs. Wilde might easily have turned "Jezebel" into a play as he did the biblical story of Salomé. The diction, as in some of his tales, is biblical.

of-honor (Wilde here anticipates the similarly suffering weavers of the king's robe in "The Young King"). He has the Swallow bring the boy the ruby from his sword. Though the weather is cold, the Swallow remarks on how "curious" it is that he feels "quite warm." Here the Prince assumes the role of senex—an older teacher or mentor—to the Swallow's puer. The Prince replies: "That is because you have done a good action" (*Complete Shorter Fiction* 98-99; all references to the fairy tales are to this edition). Chronologically, the Prince, as a human who's been made into a work of art, would have to be older than the bird, who is apparently of courting age. More important, the Prince symbolizes an attitude, or rather two attitudes or approaches to the personal and social problems of the late Victorian era. While alive, as a sheltered young man, a puer, he symbolizes the ignorance and *laissez faire* attitude of the upper class toward the less fortunate. Through the archetype of transformation, he changes into a self-sacrificing martyr who literally gives his life for the suffering poor. Moreover, as Prince he is supraordinate personality, symbolic of the Self or the potential for Selfhood—the wholeness of the healthy psyche, so that in him we have a constellation of archetypes. He is by the end of the story both puer and senex combined into a complete whole—the Self.

The Prince helps out a struggling playwright by sacrificing one of his eyes, which "are made of rare sapphires" (100). The second eye goes, by means of the reluctant Swallow, to a "little match-girl" (101) whose matches have fallen into the gutter and been ruined. The Swallow, now quite emotionally attached to the Prince, promises to stay with him because he is blind. He thus sacrifices as has the Prince. His relationship with the Prince is an example of male bonding and development of the Eros principle of relatedness and connection which I cited earlier. This relationship is far more important and meaningful to him than his flirtation with the Reed, who, the other swallows had "twittered," had "no money, and far too many relations" (96). It is an example of the power of agape, a kind of love Wilde is not often associated with. The Swallow is no longer the "natural and capricious egotist" one critic has called him (Shewan 40).

So far we have the typical fairy tale pattern of things happening in threes. Marie-Louise von Franz, perhaps the foremost Jungian authority on fairy tales, writes: "You will always read that the number three plays a big role in fairy tales, but when I count it is generally four. . . ." And this is exactly what we have in "The Happy Prince": three parallel steps and what von Franz calls a "finale" (*Introduction* 64). Here it is the Swallow's distribution of the gold leaves that cover the statue of the Prince to the starving and otherwise suffering poor of the city, for, as the Prince tells the Swallow, again playing the role of senex, "more marvelous than anything is the suffering of men and women. There is no Mystery so great as Misery" (101). When the Swallow dies, the Prince's leaden heart breaks in two—and it is the only part of him that cannot be melted down so that the arrogant Mayor and Town Councillors can use the lead for statues of themselves. The fourth step has indeed led to the "new dimension" von Franz speaks of (*Introduction* 65)—the Prince and the Swallow are united in heaven as "the two most precious things

in the city," that God has asked his angels to bring him. The two males are united, despite their obvious surface differences, as senex and puer. (Wilde could easily have made the swallow a female, as she is in the Greek myth of Procne and Philomela.) What unites them is the Eros principle—a surpassing love of each other and loving service to others. As Hillman says of the senex, "the death which it brings is not only bio-physical. It is the death that comes through perfection and order. It is death of accomplishment and fulfillment. . ." (18).

H. Montgomery Hyde notes: "I has been suggested that the Swallow's yearning for Egypt was openly based on a poem by Théophile Gautier, where the swallows nest in the Temple of Baalbec and at the Second Cataract of the Nile" (*Plays, Prose and Poems* 107, n. 4). This suggestion accords with J. E. Cirlot's comment about the swallow: "a bird sacred to Isis and Venus. . . ." The Swallow, as I have suggested, is a kind of puer and hence is associated with the Great Mother, seen here in two manifestations: the mother goddess of Egypt and the Roman goddess of love. Cirlot also says the swallow is "an allegory of spring" (322). The irony, of course, is that both the Prince and the Swallow die in winter. The Happy Prince himself as a supraordinate personality is symbolic of the Self—psychic wholeness. But he does not achieve Selfhood until he has been united and elevated to heaven with the swallow.

Although "The Happy Prince" began as a story Wilde told to students at Cambridge, the published version contains a reference to "Charity Children" (95). These are, according to Hyde, "foundlings and orphans" (*Plays, Prose and Poems* 105). The story also refers to "two little boys . . . lying in one another's arms to try and keep themselves warm" beneath a bridge. They are hungry and chased out into the rain by a "Watchman" (102). Here Wilde shows a concern for issues he would discuss in "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" (1891). He wrote during a time when a large number of children were homeless and forced to do adult work. The authors of *Oscar Wilde's London* describe conditions in London's East End:

The degradations, and above all the overcrowding, of the East End slums led to indiscriminate sexuality, incest, and child abuse. Constantly fighting for their existence and inured to pain and brutality, a shockingly large number of women and even children became night house tarts, courtesans, sailor's whores, dolly-mops (promiscuous servant girls), synthetic virgins (whose hymens were repaired), and catamites (boy prostitutes). . . .

Furthermore, "London suffered worse working and housing conditions than other British cities, largely because its workers had few, if any, labor unions" (von Eckhardt 131). With his match-girl and his allusions to "the old Jews bargaining with each other" in the Ghetto and "the poor house," where the sick boy who receives the Happy Prince's first benefaction dwells (98), Wilde must have had London in mind as the setting for his story, for the descriptions match those of contemporary

London.<sup>5</sup> All we know, however, is that the Happy Prince stands above a "great city" (101) somewhere "in the north of Europe" (96) and that he had lived in Sans-Souci, the name of Frederick the Great's palace at Potsdam, an appropriate allusion to the Prince's previous carefree life and perhaps a hint that, like Frederick the Great, the Prince may be homosexual, which could be the foundation for his Platonic relationship with the Swallow. It is typical of fairy tales not to identify their specific locales: that makes them more universal and more easy to identify with. In any case, Wilde is portraying the shadow side of contemporary civilization—its misery and propensity for evil, its sadistic materialism. We also have negative aspects of the puer—its lack of strength, wisdom, and status which make the child vulnerable to all kinds of victimization. The story demonstrates that these negative aspects can be overcome through charity and the archetype of love, and specifically that these traits—charity and love—can bind two males into a transcendent achievement of wholeness. The wider implications for the age are that it needs these very qualities Wilde portrays in the Prince and the Swallow.

The second fairy tale in *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*, "The Nightingale and the Rose," Rodney Shewan has called "Wilde's succinctest piece of social criticism" (44). Shewan notes the influences of Tennyson's "Now sleeps the crimson petal," the *Song of Solomon*, and Wilde's poem, "The Burden of Ilys." He also demonstrates similarities to Wilde's *Salomé*: how the opening passages of both tale and play are "pregnant with irony and expressive of the same themes: misplaced romantic passion and its tragic incommunicability" (45). Also influencing the poem, as Murray shows, is "a medieval legend, that the nightingale is afraid of snakes and so keeps awake at night by pressing against a thorn: it then sings mournfully because of the pain." Additionally, Wilde employs "the ancient Persian myth of the love of the nightingale for the rose," recounted in Thomas Moore's *Lallah Rookh* (1817; Murray 267, n.1). On the most basic level, the rose symbolizes Eros in the sense of erotic love (see von Franz, *The Feminine in Fairy Tales* 133). However, as we shall see, the rose's symbolism is far more complex.

The plot is easy to summarize. A young Student is infatuated with the daughter of a Professor. She promises to dance with him till dawn at the Prince's ball if the Student will bring her a red rose. But in his garden there are no red roses. The Nightingale, who night after night romantically sings of such love as she believes she now sees demonstrated, is moved to provide the red rose so as to facilitate the love between the Student and the young woman. Whereas the Prince in the previous story had spoken of the Mystery of Misery, the Nightingale here is struck by "the mystery of Love" (105). Following the typical pattern of threes, she goes to three rose trees asking for a red rose. The first bares only

white roses, the second only yellow ones. The third is indeed a red rose tree, but because of a harsh winter, it cannot bare any roses. The "finale," to use von Franz's term, is the method by which the bird can obtain the red rose. The Tree tells her:

"If you want a red rose . . . you must build it out of music by moonlight, and stain it with your own heart's blood. You must sing to me with your breast against the thorn. All night long you must sing to me, and the thorn must pierce your heart, and your life-blood must flow into my veins, and become mine." (106)

The sexual, vampiric imagery is obvious, and critics have noted the romantic connection between love and death (Keats is a likely influence here as is Swinburne, whose *Tristram of Lyonesse* had just appeared in 1882).

Wilde himself commented in a letter to Thomas Hutchinson (May 1888):

The nightingale is the true lover, if there is one. She, at least, is Romance, and the Student and the girl are, like most of us, unworthy of Romance. So, at least, it seems to me, but I like to fancy that there may be many meanings in the tale, for in writing it I did not start with an idea and clothe it in form, but began with a form and strove to make it beautiful enough to have many secrets and many answers. (*Letters* 218)

As a literary artist, Wilde himself combines the Logos, the conscious ordering of his work, with Eros; for the "creative process," Jung says, "has a feminine quality, and the creative work arises from unconscious depths—we might truly say from the realm of the Mothers" ("Psychology and Literature" 103). Among the "many meanings" in "The Nightingale and the Rose" are the archetypal motifs and conflicts. As in "The Happy Prince," we have here the conflict between the "masculine" Logos and the "feminine" Eros. Jung writes: "Far too little attention has been paid to the fact that, for all our irreligiousness, the distinguishing mark of the Christian epoch, its highest achievement, has become the congenital vice of our age: the supremacy of the word, of the Logos. . ." (*The Essential Jung* 385, italics Jung's). Even though, unlike other of Wilde's tales, Wilde avoids explicit Christian iconography in "The Nightingale and the Rose," Jung's comments apply to the tale: "The word has literally become our god . . . even if we know of Christianity only from hearsay. Words like 'Society' and 'State' are so concretized that they are almost personified" (*The Essential Jung* 385). Here Jung might have been writing about the previous tale (except that society and the state are shown there only in their negative

<sup>5</sup>The authors of *Oscar Wilde's London* observe that "By 1891 [three years after *The Happy Prince* was published and the same year *A House of Pomegranates* came out], London's poor had become ever more numerous" from the time (1845) Benjamin Disraeli had declared Victorian England had two nations—"The Rich and the Poor." By 1891 the middle class had arisen, but that had hardly eliminated the sufferings of the ever more numerous members of the lower classes who immigrated to London from the rural and mining areas and from Russia and Poland (von Eckhardt 146). Many from Russia and Poland were Jews who came to the slums of London to escape even worse

conditions at home. Because they competed for the already scarce jobs and houses, they were often victims of anti-Semitism, "expressed in minor riots against Jews whenever things went wrong" (von Eckhardt 131). As for the poor houses: "The landlords in the East End would subdivide their tenements in ever smaller units so much that often large families were forced to live in one or two rooms, packing as many as four people—children and grownups, male and female—into one bed. . . . Rents were extortionate, a quarter to a half of the family's weekly wage" (von Eckhardt 131). Selling matches was one way poor children earned money" (von Eckhardt 158).

aspects). In "The Nightingale and the Rose," however, the Word is deified in "Logic," "Philosophy," and "Metaphysics," whose study the Student returns to after his rejection by the daughter of the Professor (an appropriate occupation in this context) and in his discarding of the red rose the Nightingale had provided. The Student's one-sided preference for Logos over Eros is clear from the moment he first sees the rose. "It is so beautiful," he says, "that I am sure it has a long Latin name" (109).

The Student, the young woman, and their society are all one-sided psychically. They have devalued the "capacity to relate" (Jung *Mysterium Coniunctionis* 179) offered in the archetypal principle of Eros, here symbolized by both the Nightingale and the rose. In *De Profundis* Wilde was to write: "every work of art is the conversion of an idea into an image" (Letters 481). Moreover, Jung says: "Images are life"; and he declares: "Logos and Eros are intellectually formulated intuitive equivalents of the archetypal images of Sol and Luna. . . . The use of these images requires . . . an alert and lively fantasy, and this is not an attribute of those inclined by temperament to purely intellectual concepts" (*Mysterium Coniunctionis* 180). The Student and the young woman are similar to those Jung writes about. The Student desecrates the rose by throwing it into the street, where it falls into the gutter and gets run over by a cartwheel. The woman rejects the rose because it won't go with her dress—she is a sort of negative female dandy, concerned only with appearances and status.

Jung refers to "the lunar nature of feminine consciousness" (*Mysterium Coniunctionis* 180), an idea explored at great length and with much insight in *Woman's Mysteries: Ancient and Modern*, by Jungian analyst M. Esther Harding. As in *Salomé*, the events in this tale take place under the moon, here a "cold crystal Moon" (*Complete Shorter Fiction* 107). What is needed for wholeness, for the Student and the young woman as well as for the late Victorian age, is balance: an honoring of the "feminine" principle symbolized by what Jung calls Eros or Luna—relatedness and the archetype of love, here romantic love.

In her book *Animus and Anima* Emma Jung relates a dream in which a girl "has a ghostly lover who lives in the moon, and who comes regularly to the shallow of the new moon to receive a blood sacrifice which she has to make to him." Her sacrifice "transforms the moon-spirit, so that he himself becomes a sacrificial vessel, which consumes itself but is again renewed. . . ." Emma Jung interprets this blood sacrifice as "psychic energy," which breaks "the spell of the moon-bridegroom." And she compares this dream and the fairy tale of "Bluebeard" to the ancient rites of Dionysus, in which "living animals were sacrificed or torn to pieces by the raving maenads in their wild and god-inflicted madness" (33-34). Arthur Evans, in his book on Dionysus, shows how the Western devaluation of the cult of the bisexual Dionysus, with his female followers, parallels the patriarchal devaluation of women and homosexuals. Characteristic of this devaluation is a lack of what Barfield calls original participation and hence a devaluation of nature itself. This started as early as the fourth century B. C. when, according to Evans:

Not only was there a sharp distinction between animal, human, and god, but the human experience itself was be-

coming fragmented. The "nobler" or "better" or "higher" part of human beings was increasingly identified with reason, or rather with abstract, discursive reason. Feelings and passions, especially sexual passions, tended to be associated with animal behavior, that is, with a type of being now considered distinct from and inferior to humans. (50)

Generally speaking, and without using the Jungian terms, Evans is describing the Logos / Eros division of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is a central archetypal concern of Wilde's fairy tales. Promising to provide the red rose "out of music by moonlight" and to "stain it with my own heart's-blood," the Nightingale asks of the Student only that he "will be a true lover, for love is wiser than Philosophy, though she is wise, and mightier than Power, though he is mighty." But the Student cannot understand what the Nightingale says, "for he only knew the things that are written down in books" (Wilde, *Complete Shorter Fiction* 106-107). In the vernacular, he has too much "head" knowledge and almost no "heart" knowledge.

Barbara Seward is dead wrong when she dismisses "The Nightingale and the Rose" as "a simple allegory of the destruction of love and beauty by a materialistic civilization," although she observes that Wilde uses the Persian legend in which "the nightingale fell in love with the white rose and sang to it until he collapsed exhausted on its thorns, thereby staining it red with his life's blood" (84). The rose Seward refers to and Wilde's rose are in fact symbols of wholeness, of the androgynous union of opposites Jung calls the Self (see Zolla 53 on the white and red roses in alchemy): male and female (the rose tree with its phallic thorn is a male, the nightingale a female), the pale rose that becomes passionately, beautifully red, the Logos and the Eros. Wilde is right that the only lover is the Nightingale. The wholeness it achieves is symbolized by the discarded, devalued rose. In the end, the Student and the young woman reject the wholeness offered by that symbol.

Wilde's mentor, Walter Pater, praised "The Selfish Giant" as "perfect in its kind" (qtd. in Wilde, *Letters* 219, n.1). As we have seen, the story could move Wilde himself to tears, so that it must have sprung from deep personal as well as collective sources. The Selfish Giant is the simplest of Wilde's fairy tales and the first to exploit Wilde's favorite religious symbol: Christ. The Giant has a lovely garden, with "twelve peach-trees" and birds that sing "so sweetly . . . the children used to stop their games in order to listen to them," exclaiming how happy they are in the garden (101). After seven years of visiting the Cornish ogre until his "limited" conversation ran out, the Giant returns and selfishly expels the children from his garden and builds a wall around it. As if in punishment for his actions, winter descends perpetually on the Giant's garden. Music, also a motif in "The Nightingale and the Rose," heralds the return of spring to the garden when the children return through a hole in the wall.

As he observes the fun the children are having, the Giant has a change of heart and feels contrite about his former selfishness. Only in one corner of the garden is it still winter. That is because a little boy in the corner can't climb the Tree that beckons, "'Climb up! little boy'" (112). The Giant gently puts the boy into the tree, which

immediately blooms and attracts birds to its branches. The grateful boy hugs the Giant around the neck and kisses him. The children, who had fled upon sight of the Giant, return when the Giant beckons them: "'It is your garden now, little children'" (112). And he knocks the wall down. However, that is the last he sees of the little boy, his favorite, until the boy returns years later as Christ, with the stigmata, "the wounds of Love." Echoing Christ's words on the cross to the thief, the boy tells the Giant: "'to-day you shall come with me to my garden, which is Paradise.'" Later the children find the Giant "lying dead under the tree, all covered with white blossoms" (114).

Obviously we have here again the archetype of transformation, a frequent archetype in fairy tales. We have also elements of the Hades-Persephone-Demeter myth. The garden, according to Jung, is a feminine symbol (*Psychology and Alchemy* 72), which, by his selfishness, the Giant has devalued, rejecting the Eros principle of warmth, connection, relatedness. Just as the earth is left barren and uncared for after Hades abducts Persephone and takes her to the Underworld while her mother Demeter, vegetation goddess, grieves and searches for her, so does the Giant's garden remain under snow and hail as long as the Giant refuses his hospitality to the children.

The Giant's redemption is sealed, however, not by relating specifically to a female figure, but rather by his tenderness toward the boy.<sup>6</sup> At first glance, the boy might seem to be a puer and the Giant, since he is so much older and more powerful, a senex. Yet the boy functions more as the unconscious teacher for the Giant. He functions as the anima would function, introducing the Giant to previously unconscious dimensions of his psyche—generosity, relatedness with other people, and, most important, love. Until recently the anima has always been considered the feminine side of man's psyche in Jungian thought and been symbolized by a female. However, as Hopcke shows, this concept comes out of Jung's patriarchal, heterosexual frame of reference where women are made to carry the burden of all the so-called feminine attributes such as the Eros principle and relationship to the unconscious. As Hopcke writes:

patriarchal masculinity is never made whole if femininity is located somewhere outside of a man's basic masculine identity, in the Others of men's external lives, their wives, mothers, and sisters, or in the Others of men's dreams and fantasies, the female figure or psychological constructs of femininity such as the anima. (*Men's Dreams* 96)

Interestingly, Hopcke writes here in the context of a discus-

sion of the Hades-Persephone-Demeter myth. Hades, he notes, never changes in this patriarchal myth. Demeter, given Demophoon by his mother Metaneira in order to compensate Demeter for her loss of her daughter Persephone, fails in her attempt to grant Demophoon immortality. "The goddess," says Hopcke, "cannot save masculinity from itself within a patriarchal context . . ." (*Men's Dreams* 97). Hopcke posits the possibility of a "male anima" who functions exactly as the anima has always functioned, as "guide to the unconscious and to relatedness with others," and who, again like the traditional anima, is "a figure of often enormous erotic charge, all too frequently idealized and projected out onto a man's object of love" (122).

Jungian analyst John Beebe makes a distinction between the function of the anima and the anima figure, which, he says, is "usually female, even for homosexual men" (101). He stresses the anima more as the archetype of life than of love, declaring: "the job of the anima is better conceived as one of opening up the man's inner depths to himself, and if these depths are homosexual, the anima engagement will make him more homosexual, *not less*" (100, italics Beebe's). Beebe proceeds to show how a male figure in the film *Kiss of the Spider Woman* functions as the anima (101-102). "Women," Beebe concludes, "are touched by signs that men are beginning to understand the feminine principle of *eros*; that they are using their male relationships as a place to incubate a consciousness of their capacity for relatedness" (102, italics Beebe's). The females in Wilde's fairy tales do not always appear as positive figures, but the Eros principle is honored and shown to be needed. Wilde, as a homosexual man, was able unconsciously to portray the need for psychic wholeness in non-patriarchal ways.<sup>7</sup> If the feminine characters seem devalued in the tales, the feminine principle of Eros is not. In Wilde's crowning achievement, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, both males and female figures discover the need for connection and relatedness in a plot where patriarchal values are subverted.

In his psychotherapeutic work, Hopcke finds the male anima appearing frequently, especially in the dreams and fantasies of gay men. That the anima should take the form of a male in a fairy tale created by Wilde, a gay man, is not therefore surprising.<sup>8</sup> That the boy is an image of the male anima does not, however, preclude his being images of other archetypes as well. As the child archetype, he adumbrates psychic growth for the Giant—and the readers of the tale as well. Furthermore, as a Christ figure, he symbolizes the wholeness Jung called the Self (see Jung, *Aion* Chap. 5), a wholeness the Giant does not achieve fully until the end of the story when he is reunited with the boy who bares the "wounds

<sup>6</sup> it mirrors contemporary psychic imbalance.

<sup>7</sup> Quite probably Wilde projected his male anima unto such younger love-objects as Robert Ross and Lord Alfred Douglas. However, these young men could also be images of what Mitchell Walker calls the "double" (165-75). Clearly, Wilde's homosexuality influenced Wilde's art for the better. Ellmann says that his relationship with Ross, who became his first male lover, probably in 1886, "marked a transformation of Wilde's life" (276). Furthermore, "Homosexuality fired his mind. It was the major stage in his discovery of himself" (281); indeed, it "liberated his art" (286).

<sup>8</sup> In *The Psychological Meaning of Redemption Motifs in Fairytales*, von Franz writes: "in fairytales, redemption refers specifically to a condition where someone has been cursed or bewitched and through certain happenings or events in the story is redeemed. This is a very different condition from that in the Christian idea" (7). Here, however, the Giant is redeemed both in the Christian sense and in the sense von Franz describes, for his garden, if not himself, has been cursed. Similarly, the Star-Child will be cursed with ugliness and redeemed in both senses.

<sup>7</sup> See chapter four in my book, *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made On*, for a Jungian examination of schizophrenia in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and how

of Love."<sup>9</sup> Once again, Wilde portrays the archetype of love, this time in a positive light and in the form of agape with underlying homoerotic implications.

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<sup>9</sup>Zipes believes the ending of "The Selfish Giant" "is related to Wilde's homosexuality, and he depicted the love for the boy as a form of liberation. On another level, this love is the type of humane compassion which Wilde felt

was necessary for the building of socialism. Finally, the giant's pursuit and union with Christ is the pursuit of Christ within us . . ." (*Art of Subversion* 120).

## "The Central Truth": Phallogocentrism in *Aurora Leigh*

Patricia Thomas Srebrnik

When *Aurora Leigh* appeared in 1857, even those critics who admired the poem were made anxious by the heroine's self-assertion and by the sexually explicit imagery.<sup>1</sup> More recent assessments have raised the question of whether the political views developed within the text should be labelled "radical," "liberal" or even "conservative."<sup>2</sup> It is an injustice to any text to attack it for failing to conform to the (presumably more enlightened) views of a later century. Yet I wish to invoke poststructuralist theory to explain why *Aurora Leigh*, although an innovative text in its own time, cannot ultimately accomplish the "radical" project it sets for itself.

Barrett Browning's novel-length poem—ostensibly written by Aurora Leigh herself—is full of gratifying surprises for the theoretically inclined reader: passage after passage suggests an intuitive awareness of insights eventually to be articulated by such late-twentieth-century thinkers as Derrida, Lacan, Irigaray, Cixous and Kristeva. Many lines seem to describe the type of "semiotic chora" postulated by Kristeva (see, for example, 1: 896-901, 3: 339, 5: 340-44, 5: 442-43, 7: 1270-71). Even more suggestive in light of poststructuralist theories concerning language and subjectivity, is the passage in which Aurora asserts that the soul is not "a clean white paper," but rather,

A palimpsest, a prophet's holograph  
Defiled, erased and covered by a monk's,—  
The apocalypse, by a Longus! poring on  
Which obscene text, we may discern perhaps  
Some fair, fine trace of what was written once,  
Some upstroke of an alpha and omega  
Expressing the old scripture. (1: 826-32)

Certainly Aurora's mind is a "palimpsest." As a child she studies Greek and Latin literature and philosophy with her father. From these texts she derives the images of Woman—ghost, fiend, angel, fairy, witch, sprite, Muse, Psyche, Medusa, Lamia, Our Lady of the Passion—which she then utilizes in her attempts to interpret the painting of her dead mother; as she remarks, "I mixed, confused, unconsciously, / Whatever I last read or heard or dreamed" (1: 147-48). After her father's death, the adolescent Aurora is forced by her aunt to model herself upon the even more restrictive images of Woman to be found within nineteenth-century conduct books. She attempts to counteract the effect of the conduct books by secretly devouring the scholarly volumes she finds in the garret, "Piled high with cases in my father's name" (1: 834). But in this "world of books" Aurora is buffeted by "men's opinions . . . press and counter-press" (1: 792, 802). She relieves her "anguish" by appealing to God to guide her to "the central truth" (1: 797-801).

Passages such as these imply the existence within the individual psyche of the two interconnected "registers" which Luce Irigaray, following Lacan, refers to as the "Imaginary" and the "Symbolic."<sup>3</sup> The "Imaginary" is composed of pre-verbal images. Usually these images remain at the level of unconscious phantasy. However, selected images can become apparent to the conscious mind in dreams, myths, and literary works. When this happens, the images have already been structured by the "Symbolic," that is, by the order of discourse and meaning into which every individual must be inserted. The "Symbolic" order in fact depends for its content upon the raw material of the "Imaginary."

The logic of the Symbolic is both logocentric and phallogocentric (thus "phallogocentric"). It is logocentric in assuming that signs or words have fixed meanings, meanings "anchored" by some absolute foundation or entity outside language itself. It is phallogocentric in that it privileges the "masculine" term in each of the binary oppositions which constitute the patriarchal value system (for example, "father" as opposed to "mother," "culture" as opposed to "nature," "rational" as opposed to "emotional"). By repressing all that is not "masculine," the Symbolic order deprives women of the means of representing or symbolizing their relationship to themselves and to other women. Thus Irigaray refers to this register as the "male Symbolic," despite the fact that within phallogocentric discourse—the only discourse we know—there can be no "female Symbolic." Because we can use only those portions of the Imaginary which have been structured by the "male Symbolic," the Imaginary, also, is referred to as "male." Irigaray calls for a "female Imaginary": by this she means, a restructuring of the Imaginary which would enable us to access those portions of the unconscious which are not "male," and thus not assimilable to "phallogocentric" discourse. Then, the raw material of the "female Imaginary" would in turn lead to the development of a "female Symbolic," female in that it would allow women to assume the subject position in discourse. The Imaginary cannot be restructured, however, until the binary oppositions of the Symbolic have been deconstructed, so as to break through the barriers of "phallogocentrism."

But how to begin such an unprecedented task? One of Irigaray's suggestions is that before we can develop a "female Imaginary," it is necessary that women love women. Obviously, Irigaray is referring to an emotion different from any sanctioned or even imagined in patriarchal society. Irigaray suggests also that to enable such love between women, and to introduce sexual difference into the Symbolic register, we must be able to imagine a female God.<sup>4</sup>

With these theoretical considerations in mind, let us turn

<sup>1</sup> For a review of the critical response to *Aurora Leigh*, see Freiwald.

<sup>2</sup> Kaplan, for example, regards the poem as "revolutionary" in its description of Aurora as an independent author living and working in London but merely "liberal" in its attitudes toward class (11, 36). David argues that the poem is "a coherent expression of Barrett Browning's conservative political views, with which her sexual politics are consistently coherent" (98).

<sup>3</sup> Irigaray discusses the "Imaginary" and the "Symbolic" in *The Speculum of the Other Woman* and in *This Sex Which Is Not One*. See also Jameson and Whitford.

<sup>4</sup> Culler explains "phallogocentrism"; see especially the section on "Reading as a Woman" (43-64). For a more detailed exposition of Irigaray's theories, see Whitford.

back to *Aurora Leigh*. Because this text describes, in the rational, conscious, "Symbolic" register, a woman who insists on having a career as a poet before she will marry the man she loves, it has been regarded as revolutionary. More significant than the plot of the poem, is the fact that Aurora seems to recognize the need to restructure the "Imaginary" register implied by the image of the "palimpsest." I have already explained that Aurora's unconscious is stocked with misogynistic images derived from her reading, and I have quoted passages which indicate her desire to escape the logic of the "male" Imaginary / Symbolic. But by appealing to God to guide her to "the central truth," Aurora demonstrates that she is bound by phallogocentric assumptions concerning the validity of patriarchal authority, the unity of meaning, and the certainty of origin. Thus when Aurora comes upon the works of the male poets included in her father's collection, she abandons any attempt at independent thought or analysis, describing the poets as "the only truth-tellers now left to God, / The only speakers of essential truth" (1: 859-60).

In her desire to become a poet herself, Aurora simultaneously violates the dictates of her society concerning appropriate gender roles, and affirms the "truth" of phallogocentric discourse. At times, it seems that the need to rebel will prevail. For example, at the end of Book 5, Aurora abruptly decides to sell her father's scholarly books in order to raise the money to visit Italy, the country of her mother. She recalls that her father once chided her for staining one of the books: "Silly girls, / Who plant their flowers in our philosophy"—a complaint which should remind us that, as Irigaray has demonstrated (in *Speculum of the Other Woman*), philosophy is one of the "master" discourses of patriarchal society.

Aurora's father's last command to her before his death was that she should "love" (1: 211-213). But Aurora rejects Romney's initial proposal of marriage, and despite her eventual change of heart, it is entirely possible that Aurora is correct when, in the first half of the text, she repeatedly denies loving Romney. While in Italy (Book 7), Aurora develops a loving bond with Marian: the two women establish a home together, and Aurora says that she will be a parent to Marian's illegitimate child.<sup>5</sup> Aurora and Marian thus undertake one of the steps described by Irigaray as a necessary prelude to developing a "female Imaginary." Yet Aurora continues to interpret other women, and even herself, according to conventionally misogynistic imagery. Marian is imagined at various times as the incorruptible innocent, the depraved whore, the saintly madwoman, even the Virgin Mary. Lady Waldemar is described as a Lamia or a Medusa. Aurora is compared to a Muse and to a Psyche. Ultimately, her domestic experiment with Marian is doomed because she persists in thinking of herself as a woman made by God, thus a woman who needs the love of an individual man.

It is in fact Aurora's uncritical belief in a traditional God—the ultimate phallic signifier—which prevents her from persisting in her preliminary, tentative attempts to revise the

Symbolic and restructure the Imaginary. The text is pervaded by references to God, to God the Father, and to women who pray to God. God is repeatedly described as the supreme Artist (5: 435) who created every individual human as either male or female; at one point Aurora asserts that "God made women, to save men by love" (7: 184-85). In other passages, Aurora conflates her human father, who taught her to read and thus to enter the Symbolic order, with the heavenly Father. For example, Aurora recalls her human father's "regal way / Of giving judgement on the parts of speech, / As if he sat on all twelve thrones up-piled, / Arraigning Israel" (5: 1224-27). Apparently the heavenly Father is also a keen grammarian in the discussion between Aurora and Romney which concludes the poem, God is said to reveal himself, not in complete sentences, but in adverbs (8: 671). It is a cliché, of course, to note that God created the world by means of language: Aurora remarks that when the poet speaks a "true word," "'tis God's, not ours" (7: 874-75). In short, God is the ultimate source of meaning: He determines the essential (gendered) nature of each individual, He guarantees the "truth" of words, and, as the recipient of prayers, He controls access to the satisfaction of desire.

Precisely because Aurora continues to believe in a God who guarantees fixed meaning and satisfies desire, she is unable to deconstruct the Symbolic or revise the Imaginary. This becomes evident after Aurora confesses her sexual longings to God (7: 1265-72) and is rewarded by the fantastical appearance of Romney, her "king" (8: 61). Already, in an earlier passage, the painter Vincent Carrington has dismissed, with benign condescension, the affection of his fiancee for Aurora: "'Tis pretty to remark / How women can love women" (7: 612-13). Now, as Aurora and Romney meet again, Marian steps forward to renounce any claims she may have on either of them; we are not informed of her subsequent fate.

The account of Aurora's reconciliation with Romney is pervaded by sexual imagery which suggests a reversal of traditional gender roles: Aurora is a sword and Romney her sheath; he is blind and thus dependent on her radiant light: she is in control of the phallic "key" to spiritual understanding (9: 834, 908-909, 916). But as Margaret Whitford remarks, "one cannot simply step outside phallogocentrism, simply reverse the symbolism or just make strident or repetitive claims that women are in fact rational" (70). And so, despite the role reversals experienced at the conscious level by this particular heterosexual couple, no radical change has been effected in the Symbolic / Imaginary structure as a whole: indeed, the disappearance from the text of Marian—whose most important function has been to signify abject, self-sacrificing Motherhood—indicates that, to borrow a phrase from Mary Jacobus, the feminine has merely been reinstalled "within a logic that represses, censors, or misrecognizes it" (65).

In the concluding pages of her poem, Aurora insists that "Art symbolises heaven, but Love is God / And makes heaven" (9: 658-59). Aurora proceeds to explain that she has

erred in refusing to "be a woman like the rest, / A simple woman who believes in love . . . And, hearing she's beloved, is satisfied / With what contents God" (9: 660-64). By repudiating her love for Marian, by failing to imagine a female God, Aurora has abandoned her rebellion against the patriarchal order. Instead, by affirming her belief in a God who guarantees the masculine Symbolic / Imaginary, Aurora has inscribed in her Art, her capitulation to the "central truth" of phallogocentric discourse.

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## "I Magnify Mine Office": Christina Rossetti's Authoritative Voice in her Devotional Prose

Joel Westerholm

There is one dangerous science for women—one which they must indeed beware how they profanely touch—that of theology. Strange, and miserably strange, that . . . they will plunge headlong, and without one thought of incompetency, into that science in which the greatest men have trembled, and the wisest erred. . . . Strangest of all, that they should think they were led by the Spirit of the Comforter into habits of mind which have become in them the unmixed elements of home discomfort; and that they dare to turn the Household Gods of Christianity into ugly idols of their own;—spiritual dolls, for them, to dress according to their caprice; and from which their husbands must turn away in grieved contempt, lest they should be shrieked at for breaking them.

John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* (79-80)

Because Christina Rossetti's devotional prose works, *Annus Domini*, *Called to Be Saints, Seek and Find, Time Flies, Letter and Spirit*, and *The Face of the Deep*, reveal her at odds with the place her church assigned her, they are more significant as personal and cultural documents than their relative critical neglect suggests. Biographers usually describe them

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without enthusiasm.<sup>1</sup> The interpretive critics have concentrated on her poetry. Only Ralph Bellas (108-15) and P. G. Stanwood have sought to introduce readers to the works, Stanwood in more detail. At least two factors contribute to this neglect. First, the texts are hard to come by, now long out of print. Second, several have argued, Jerome McGann most eloquently (207-208), that the poems themselves, except "Goblin Market," have also suffered from critical neglect, though that is changing. Certainly Rossetti was primarily a poet, and even Stanwood calls the prose "of minor significance when set beside the poetry" (231). But surely six volumes of work by a significant Victorian poet demand some attention.

I suspect that, like Poe's purloined letter, the most interesting question about Christina Rossetti's devotional prose works, both for our understanding of Rossetti herself and of her place in her society, is too obvious to be noticed: how could a woman write and publish what are printed sermons and biblical commentaries at a time when her church forbade women's preaching? Rossetti turned to writing devotional prose late in her career, from which one can infer contradictory messages. While some Rossetti critics have argued that the move represents a retreat from claiming authority,<sup>2</sup> the

classics of its kind" (234). "Her great devotional work *The Face of the Deep* is almost worthy of a place beside Donne and Hooker or Lancelot Andrewes" (236).

<sup>2</sup> Dolores Rosenblum believes that devotional prose offered Rossetti an easier outlet than did poetry, for devotional prose need not be original: "poverty of a certain kind of literary originality, that is, is not an issue" (57). Ralph Bellas agrees, saying that much of the devotional works is "dutiful articulations of Christian doctrines, of biblical attitudes and sentiments" (69), and he adds that they involve "very little intellectualizing" (108).

<sup>5</sup> The domestic arrangements of Aurora and Marian, arrangements designed to provide a refuge from the sexual exploitation of women by men, recall those of the two sisters in Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market."

authors of *The Woman Question* believe that women's writing poetry was more readily accepted than women's preaching: "Literature allows the sharing in and even the coopting of ministerial functions" (183). Rossetti, then, writing the equivalent of sermons, bravely used the reputation she established as a poet to move into a proscribed field.

The historical data on Victorian acceptance of a woman's writing devotional prose is not definitive. Ruskin's remarks quoted in my epigraph are preceded by the comment, "Thus far, I think, I have had your concurrence; perhaps you will not be with me in what I believe is most needful for me to say" (79); he apparently expected people to have accepted women's writing theology. And five of Rossetti's six books were published by an Anglican house, the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, so one could argue that her devotional prose had the imprimatur of the church. But if publication indicates acceptance, Rossetti had little difficulty publishing her poetry, either.

Dolores Rosenblum argues that Rossetti's difficulty in writing poetry expresses itself in the limited projects she attempts, for she could not try to be as original as a man. But in writing devotional prose, Rosenblum notes, Rossetti herself declared that she need not be original: "No graver slur could attach to my book than would be a reputation for prevalent originality" (*Called to be Saints* xvii). Originality in biblical interpretation entails speaking authoritatively and prophetically, claiming to represent God, and Rossetti claims that she writes only what she learned from others. But we shall see that Rossetti often uses her prefaces for disclaimers that she does not abide by within the texts.

And that is the point. Rossetti's devotional prose works contain many signs of strain, much evidence that she felt that she was writing what her society would not accept. In fact, Ruskin's readers and audience were far more likely to agree with him than he suggests. In the next section I try to establish what kind of devotional writing from a woman would be acceptable, and what would not. The question is one of shifting cultural horizons beyond which women could not go, for certain behaviors were acceptable to some, and not to others: obviously, what a suffragist would accept differed from what Ruskin would accept.<sup>3</sup> But we can say fairly authoritatively what was generally acceptable, for even the feminists who accepted a woman's authority in theology described the restrictions that they opposed.

The second section of the essay describes the cultural transactions within Rossetti's devotional works. I deal with two different, intertwined parts of those transactions: Rossetti's limited claims of authority in what she does, and the evidence of how her usually conservative contemporary readers read her.

In the third section of the essay, I show how Christina Rossetti's devotional prose violated the restrictions that she believed were placed on women's devotional writing, especially in her examinations of the biblical passages thought to

proscribe women's authority as teachers within the church. She wrote theology, and though she has no place in the history of theology—at least, not yet—her devotional prose has a place in the history of the women's movement within Christianity.

#### Cultural Horizons

Women's roles were sharply limited in the Victorian Anglican church. In the early days of the Methodist movement some women took the pulpit, but as the Methodists moved toward social respectability, women moved back to the pew. Similarly, at the end of the nineteenth century, some women became preachers within the Salvation Army, as Shaw's *Major Barbara* attests. Those early Methodist and Salvation Army women were exceptions granted only in groups on the fringe; within the mainstream the authors of *The Woman Question* point out that "[female] preachers threaten more than an ancient clerical tradition; they threaten male supremacy itself. Woman in the pulpit is literally elevated—not on the insubstantial pedestal of chivalric respect, but in the very place of traditional authority" (175).<sup>4</sup> Within the Anglican communion, women were not allowed to preach; they could "teach catechism but not theology" (*Woman Question* 177).

Josephine Butler, one of the best-known Victorian crusaders for the rights of women, complains that "'the Church' has treated woman very much as 'the world'—as Society has treated her," in spite of "the fact that woman is, equally with men, God's minister upon earth in matters spiritual" (30). Butler believes that women ought to do what they may not do: preach God's word. Even Butler adds that women are "not necessarily chosen to work in precisely the same fashion; no, happily not," excluding women from church offices. But she insists that since women were the first messengers of Christ's resurrection, they should be allowed to continue as messengers. She hopes for the day when a woman can act "as man's equal absolutely, in her relation to spiritual things" (32), and praises the Salvation Army's allowing women to act as men's equals.

If Butler represents one horizon of understanding within Victorian England, the Tractarian leader H. P. Liddon probably represents the opposite. In a fascinating sermon on "The Ordering of the Household," Liddon engages in the fundamentalist strategy of attacking feminism as a threat to the family. He describes "a small section of modern women, who are apparently anxious to emulate the distinctive work and life of men," instead of engaging in "the woman's way" of "unostentatious charities" outside the home, and nurturing and caring for children and husband within it (5). Liddon calls women's work "that noblest of all human ministries," but he warns women that "water cannot rise above its level," revealing that he believes that "noblest" work inferior to men's work.

Liddon lists the biblical good women whom modern women ought to emulate, and the lesson to be learned from each, two of which are particularly curious: "the encouragement which women can give to men in Deborah; . . . her holy widowhood in Anna the prophetess" (5-6). Both Deborah and Anna are prophetesses—he even calls Anna a prophetess. Thus, these women brought God's word to humanity, as he himself was doing in this sermon. But he praises, not their prophesying, but Deborah's encouraging a man, and Anna's "holy widowhood"—whatever Liddon means by that.

Liddon's selective reading probably is sincerely unconscious, a product of his incapacity to imagine a woman as the bringer of God's message. His difficulties in admitting that biblical women were prophets reveal how difficult some would find a woman's taking the role of God's messenger, revealing the attitude about which Josephine Butler complained.

Liddon is also a preeminent Tractarian, right-hand man of E. B. Pusey, and the pre-conversion confessor of Gerard Manley Hopkins. Stanwood declares that "Rossetti was an Anglican in the High Church tradition, and much of her writing reflects the depth of her belief. One need hardly know more about her biography than that she was above all else an inheritor of Tractarianism in the supreme flowering of the Oxford Movement" (243). Stanwood slightly overstates the case: as Waller and McGann have pointed out, Rossetti had sympathies with other groups as well. Nonetheless, Liddon was one of the leaders of Christina Rossetti's party within the Anglican church. However orthodox her Oxford Movement devotion is, in their existence her devotional writings contradict the teachings of the Tractarian leaders.

Thus, within the Anglican community at large, but especially within the Tractarian branch of it, women were permitted to teach to children what others had taught them, and they were counted upon to be moral examples to the rest of society. Beyond that, they were to remain silent, under the authority of the male preachers and interpreters, who would tell them how they ought to understand the Bible.

#### Cultural Transactions

Christina Rossetti claimed little authority for her work, deprecating her own scholarship and understating her intentions. Her readers apparently accepted her deprecations at face value, without critically considering what Rossetti actually did in the rest of the prose. Rossetti's limited claims were disingenuous, as I shall demonstrate in the third section of the essay. Here I want to show what she had to say in order to be read.

Some people may have accepted some of Rossetti's early works as encouragement to moral behavior, the printed equivalent of teaching catechism. *Annus Domini* (1874), which is simply a collection of scriptural texts followed by collects Rossetti composed, would represent only a mother leading the family in prayer. Canon H. W. Burrows, Rossetti's pastor, who wrote the preface, comments, "Each little Prayer may be considered as the result of a meditation, and as an example of the way in which that exercise should issue in worship" (iii). The diminutive "little" applied to the parts of the work Ros-

setti composed reveals how Rossetti's praying has been safely contained within a domestic setting in Burrows's mind.

*Seek and Find* (1879) is more troublesome. Subtitled *A Double Series of Short Studies of the Benedicite*, it expounds on the lessons to be drawn from a biblical passage. The book follows the format of a sermon, and thus could have been considered an illegitimate exercise for woman. The passage involved, the apocryphal "Song of the Three Children," has a curious place within the Anglican community, included as an alternative text within Morning Prayer, and thus familiar, but not believed as authoritative as the more ancient texts surrounding it. Perhaps such an ambiguous text could be a woman's text to Rossetti's Anglican audience (this is the first of her devotional works published by S. P. C. K.).

Rossetti begins with an apology, trying to ease any discomfort with a woman's writing a sermonic text. In her opening comments, on how all works praise God, she quotes Job 28: 20-28, "[wisdom] is hid from the eyes of all living." Rossetti comments, "if at the very outset we lack wisdom, St. James (i. 5) prescribes for us a remedy: 'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him': Amen, through Jesus Christ our Lord. He helping us, let us bring love and faith to our study of the Benedicite" (13). In her use of "us" Rossetti identifies with her audience: she, like them, has no wisdom unless God gives it.

But the modesty of Rossetti's claim is contradicted by its universal application. Her strictures on her own authority apply equally well to a male commentator. Also, since she writes apparently believing in the wisdom of her words—again, the text itself is mute evidence of her belief in herself—her own authority must come directly from God, as does any male expositor's. This is an audacious claim.

Rossetti then repeats her self-deprecation.

If even St. Paul might have been exalted above measure through abundance of revelation (2 Cor. xii. 7), let us thank God that we in our present frailty know not any more than His Wisdom reveals to us: not that man's safety resides in ignorance any more than in knowledge, but in conformity of the human to the divine will. See the Parable of the Talents, St. Luke xix. 12-26; where the sentence depends on the fidelity of the servants, rather than on the amount of the trust. (14-15)

Rossetti calls herself frail; she is presumably a one-talent person, not the ten-talent St. Paul. Still, she claims to be expounding the revelation she has been given, as did St. Paul, though she believes that he was given much more revelation to expound than was she.

That *Seek and Find* was published by an Anglican house publisher certainly suggests that the book was not considered too radical in its day. Rossetti's two letters to her brother Dante that mention the book claim little for it: she calls it "a simple work adapted to people who know less (!) than I do" (*Letters* 80), and she is surprised by a favorable "mention" in the *Saturday Review*.

*Called to be Saints* (1881), while rich in source material for the study of jewel and flower images in Rossetti's poetry, has little for our purposes: Stanwood is right that its "most

<sup>3</sup> My terminology is heavily influenced by that of Hans Robert Jauss, especially in the concluding section of *Question and Answer* (197-231). Jauss notes that varieties of opinions exist at all times, so a discussion of opinions on a given issue needs to include the range of possible understandings.

<sup>4</sup> This position of authority Rossetti frequently claims for herself, for example, when she calls the prayers recorded in *Called to be Saints* "collects," that is, prayers in which the individual prayers of the people of the church are collected together, and the minister leads such prayers.

interesting portions . . . are its 'additions': hagiographical, petrographical, botanical" (237). But in the preface, Rossetti's admission of her apparently inadequate scholarly preparation for writing the book may be ironic. The relevant paragraph from "The Key to my Book" reads:

For the learned, then, I have no ability to write, lacking as I do learning and critical practice. But I suppose not that much mischief need accrue from my violating probability so far as, for instance, to accept the precious stones of our Authorized Version as gems now known to us under the same names. And if some points of my descriptions are rather flights of antique fancy than lore of modern science, I hope that such points may rather recall a vanishing grace than mislead from a truth. . . . I even think that a flower familiar to the eye and dear to the heart may often succeed in conveying a more pointed lesson than could be understood from another more remote if more eloquent. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow."  
(xvii-xviii)

Christina Rossetti certainly did not lack critical practice, as her reading and discussion of books with her brothers and friends reveal. She could have more modestly said, "I hope that no harm will accrue from my having violated probability . . ." As the statement reads, it is rather biting. And the concluding Wordsworthian appeal to the flower endeared to the heart by proximity calls into question the value of the scholarly training she admits she lacks.

The preface to *The Face of the Deep* includes a similar, modest apologia. The title, we are told, reveals the modesty of the book's goal: Rossetti claims to have touched only the surface, the face, of a subject much beyond her depth. The text appears to confirm the limitations suggested by the preface. Interspersed throughout the text are private asides, enclosed in square editorial brackets, that are self-deprecating remarks on Rossetti's competence and authority. "[I write under correction: I repudiate my own thoughts if erroneous]" (125). "[Which oversight invites me to two wholesome proceedings: to beg my reader's pardon for my errors; and ever to write modestly under correction]" (177). "[I trust such a train of thought is permissible]" (215). And the volume concludes, "If I have been overbold in attempting such a work as this, I beg pardon" (551). Bellas has said of the book, "The keynote is humility" (114), and it has more frequent disclaimers of authority, less certainty in its presentation.

Rossetti's readers, like the S. P. C. K. editors, accepted at face value these declarations of her limitations in authority and competence. The constant reminders of the humility of the author may have influenced *The Face of the Deep's* going through seven editions. The book also supplies the bulk of a curious volume of excerpts from her devotional works, *Reflected Lights from "The Face of the Deep,"* published by the S. P. C. K. six years after her death. In it W. M. L. Jay expresses admiration for the prose, and cites her preface to *The Face of the Deep* as indicating "that Miss Rossetti did not claim to have made any profound or critical study of those deep waters, but only to have sought for the lessons that she believed were to be found on or near their surface by all who studied them diligently and prayerfully" (iii). Whatever

claims of authority in interpreting the Bible Rossetti might have made are first minimized in Jay's preface, then eliminated by the excerpting of passages from the prose without their relevant Bible passages. The prose becomes merely a set of aphorisms on "The Light of Love," "The Light of Encouragement," "Light from the Cross," "Light Here and There."

Christina Rossetti's devotional prose works, then, involve a curious set of cultural transactions. Rossetti certainly believed that she was overstepping the bounds of what a woman might do, for the works are prefaced, and sometimes interlaced, with declarations of her limited ability, authority, and intentions. Apparently, most of her readers accepted the disclaimers at face value, reading her for helpful advice about how to live as Christians, but certainly not for how one should understand the Bible. As Edna Charles has described the contemporary reception of Rossetti's poetry, Rossetti was merely a female saint with a lovely lyric voice—and nothing to say to the mind. But her texts had more to say, and surely some Josephine Butler-like readers would have focussed on the passages discussed in the next section.

#### Cultural Transgressions

Christina Rossetti did not abide by the contract she made with her culture. Instead, she engaged in serious and scholarly biblical interpretation, assuming a man's role according to the standards of the time. Having gained a readership with her disclaimers of authority, Rossetti engaged in biblical interpretation. She reinterpreted some passages that have been traditionally understood to preclude a woman's teaching. Many passages amply illustrate that in her disclaimers Rossetti knew that she was writing authoritative theology, for she dismisses biblical interpretations in favor of her own.

In one section from *Seek and Find*, Rossetti analyzes the roles of men and women within Christianity. The passage expounds on the text, "God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night" (Genesis 1:16).

Both lights great: one exceeding the other: both good.  
Such a graduation of greater and less, both being acceptable to Him Who made them, pervades much if not the whole of the world in which we live: sun and moon, man and woman; or to ascend to the supreme instance, Christ and His Church. I, being a woman, will copy St. Paul's example and "magnify mine office" (Rom. xi. 13). (29-30)

In the extended analysis of women's roles within the church that follows, she draws a series of parallels between men's relationship to women and other relationships she describes as similar. All of these relationships come under the heading of "greater and less, both being acceptable to Him Who made them," yet throughout the passage we hear her chafing against the restraints put on women's roles.

First, Rossetti compares the relationship between men and women to that between Peter and Paul, and the comparison appears to end in women's favor.

Probably there were in [Paul's] day persons who rated the Apostle of the Gentiles, as such, far below the Apostle to



the Jews . . . yet was not the estimate exhaustive, . . . . What said God Himself when hundreds of years before He spake of Christ? "It is a light thing that Thou shouldst be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give Thee for a Light to the Gentiles, that Thou mayest be My Salvation unto the end of the earth" (Is. xlix. 6) (30)

Paul was less important than Peter "in his day," Rossetti declares, but the qualification suggests that today Paul appears more important than Peter. This, she says, is God's estimate: He declared that saving Israel was "a light thing," so He had Messiah also save the Gentiles. The text quoted actually offers no valuation of Messiah's salvation reaching all people. But Rossetti clearly understands the text to suggest that the more numerous Gentiles are more significant, so the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul, is more important than the apostle to the Jews, Peter. Thus she hopes, on the principle that "the last shall be first," that eternity will find women more significant than men.

In fact, Rossetti also compares women's lot to that of Christ, suggesting, in their identification with him, their spiritual importance.

In many points the feminine lot copies very closely the voluntarily assumed position of our Lord and Pattern. Woman must obey: and Christ "learned obedience" (Gen. iii. 16; Heb. v. 8). She must be fruitful, but in sorrow: and He, symbolised by a corn of wheat, had not brought forth much fruit except He had died (Gen. iii. 16; St. John xii. 24). She by natural constitution is adapted not to assert herself, but to be subordinate: and He came not to be ministered unto but to minister; He was among His own "as he that serveth" (1 St. Peter iii. 7; 1 Tim. ii. 11, 12; St. Mark x. 45; St. Luke xxii. 27). Her office is to be man's helpmeet: and concerning Christ God saith, "I have laid help upon One that is mighty" (Gen. ii. 18, 21, 22; Ps. lxxxix. 19). And well may she glory, inasmuch as one of the tenderest of divine promises takes (so to say) the feminine form: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you" (Is. lxvi. 13). (30-31)

Both Christ and women learn obedience; both must be fruitful in sorrow; both must be subordinate; both must function as helpmeets. Rossetti reverses the Pauline parallel between Christ and the husband (Ephesians 5). Concluding the paragraph, Rossetti quotes Isaiah's image of God as a mother, implying that womanly comfort need not be given from a subordinate position. Indeed she does magnify her office.

Rossetti makes two more parallels, an ambiguous one on "the twofold Law of Love," and a second parallel that involves some bad astronomy but interesting social comment: she declares that the moon "may exhibit inherent luminosity," suggesting that women may well have light of their own, too, and not merely reflect men's light. Thus, she implies that the church that ignored women's voices could never hope to hear

all the story: women have a part that men do not.

When Rossetti concludes her discussion of women's roles, she first identifies with those whose proud wills will "not be allayed" in her use of "our." "But if our proud waves will after all not be stayed, or at any rate not be allayed (for stayed they must be) by the limit of God's ordinance concerning our sex, one final consolation yet remains to careful and troubled hearts: In Christ there is neither male nor female, for we are all one (Gal. iii. 28)" (32). She who wrote this book of biblical commentary must have found questions of her right to do so difficult to accept, though she apparently admitted their biblical foundation. But she then undoes her apparent acquiescence with her final quotation from Galatians 3. Rossetti certainly considered herself "in Christ," and therefore outside the realm of gender restrictions.

Thus, while the discussion gives lip service to men's superior position within the church by framing it in the context of a parallel between men and women and the sun and moon, and declaring that she illustrates the principle of the relationship between the greater and the lesser, Rossetti's interpretations, carefully buttressed (as is all her devotional prose) with biblical quotations, undo the granting superiority to men. The passage certainly reveals a heart unquiet, perhaps unable to see an alternative, but unwilling to acquiesce to a submissive position.

In *Letter and Spirit* (1883), a commentary on both the Decalogue and the "twofold Law of Love," Rossetti goes directly to the heart of the issue, offering an interpretation of the one biblical passage usually thought most clearly forbidding women's preaching or doing theology.<sup>5</sup> Rossetti quietly challenges the Pauline reading of the Fall in 1 Timothy 2: 11-15. Rossetti's contemporaries usually read Paul as legislating against women's teaching, and thus, Rossetti's writing devotional prose.

Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.

The passage is immensely confusing, especially Paul's reasons why women should be silent. Initially he attributes man's supremacy simply to his being created first. But his explaining that Eve was deceived by the serpent, and Adam was not, contradicts our usual understanding of culpability: one who willfully sins is usually thought more culpable than one who sins through ignorance.<sup>6</sup>

On deception and culpability, Rossetti wrote:

Adam and Eve illustrate two sorts of defection (1 Tim. ii. 14). Eve made a mistake, "being deceived" she was in the

<sup>5</sup> The Trinity can that not be said?

<sup>6</sup> A lengthier discussion of Victorian readings of this passage is in *The Woman Question* 2: 167-74.

<sup>5</sup> Stanwood is right that the book is "somewhat awkwardly organized . . . a peculiar and unnecessary confusion of parts without headings or obvious breaks" (240-41), though he perhaps lacks charity in saying, "We can learn little from Rossetti's discussion of the Trinity" (239-40): of what discussion of

transgression: Adam made no mistake: his was an error of will, hers partly of judgment; nevertheless both proved fatal. (16-17)

To this point Rossetti follows Paul, agreeing that Eve's transgression was a mistake, and Adam's willful. But she continues that Eve is "that first and typical woman." Her errors sprang from her virtues: "Her very virtues may have opened the door to temptation. By birthright gracious and accessible, she lends an ear to all petitions from all petitioners" (17). She adds that Eve's misquoting God is "blameless infirmity," and the consequences of what is blameless surely should not be onerous.

Following Milton, Rossetti believes that in the prelapsarian state men operated by the heart, and women, by the mind. Eve "desires to instruct ignorance, to rectify misapprehension" (17); with her, "the serpent discussed a question of conduct, and talked her over to his own side" (18); her mind was diverted from God. Adam was won over without argument by his love for his wife; his heart was diverted from God. When Rossetti returns to the subject later, she calls Adam Christ-like in his love for Eve, a curious description of the attitude that produced the Fall! She dismisses as unimportant the issue of which did the greater sin: "Nor need we attempt to settle which (if either) committed the greater sin" (56). Paul had declared the woman's greater sin the reason for women's subjection to men; he found it extremely important.

One could argue that Rossetti's interpretation suggests that she thought that women should not use their minds: they caused trouble when they tried. In defense of that position one could cite her later praise of Esther for being humble and reverent to her husband, though she was his superior (58). But in spite of Rossetti's later disclaimers, her interpretation of Genesis 3 in fact suggests that Adam was both less intelligent in and more culpable for the Fall. We thus should not be surprised to find her later, in a discussion of the prophetess Deborah, suggesting that the conventional norm of men's superior position need not universally apply.

Deborah startles us both by her official dignity and her personal prominence; for although she is defined as "wife of Lapidoth," after-ages only know of his existence as husband of Deborah (Judges iv. 4, 5). The rule is prominence for the husband, retiredness for the wife; nevertheless, the Source and Author of all rule once emphatically declared, "Many that are first shall be last; and the last first," which authoritative declaration has already even in this world oftentimes been verified. (57)

Rossetti apparently believes that on occasion women can be prominent, and they can speak as prophets.

Rossetti thus cites example to claim the right to do what she does. If I am right that her reinterpretation of the Fall story puts greater blame on Adam, then she has disposed of Paul's reason for women's being silent on religious matters.

Of course, the line between teaching catechism and teaching theology is not always clear. But Rossetti knew that she was doing theology: as she did with Paul's reading of the Fall narrative, she was perfectly willing to offer her own

authoritative reading of a passage in the face of a familiar reading that she thought wrong. In *Letter and Spirit*, for example, Rossetti begins one section with a reading of Christ's encounter with the rich young ruler (Matthew 19: 16-30) as instruction against overzealousness in the faith—a reading that she shall swiftly demolish.

Who has not seen the incident of the Young Ruler (St. Mark x. 17-27) utilized as a check to extravagant zeal? so far, that is, as a preliminary stress laid on what it does *not* enjoin can make it act as a sedative. It does not, we are assured, by any means require us to sell all; differences of rank, of position, of circumstances, are Provisionally ordained, and are not lightly to be set aside, our duties lie within the decorous bounds of our station. The Young Ruler, indeed, was invited to sell all in spite of his great possessions; therefore we must never suppose it impossible that that vague personage, "our neighbour," may be called upon to do so; we must not judge him in such a case, nay we must not view it as his penalty but rather as his privilege: only we ourselves, who are bound by simple every-day duties, shall do well in all simplicity to perform them soberly, cheerfully, thankfully, not overstepping the limits of our vocation: wherefore let us give what we can afford; a pleasure or a luxury it may be well to sacrifice at the call of charity. (28-29)

Though I have been unable to trace the source for Rossetti's misreading of this passage, she believes that her readers will certainly have heard it. Her powerful sarcasm ("that vague personage, 'our neighbour,' may be called upon to do so") suggests that she had taken this reading personally, that some would think her overzealous. Her brother William Michael called her overscrupulous, and Bellas notes that her January 3 entry in *Time Flies* describes an overscrupulous person in unflattering terms. He calls the description a fine example of her self-awareness (113). But if in *Time Flies* she concedes the point about herself, here she strikes back with a force unparalleled in her devotional works.

Yet is a caution against "righteousness overmuch" the gist of our Master's lesson? His recorded comment on the incident was "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" which He goes on to explain as they "that trust in riches." Is our most urgent temptation that which inclines us to do too much, or that which lulls us to do too little, or to do nothing? Is it so, that the bulk of professing Christians are likely to be dazzled by the splendid error of excessive "corban," and fairly consume themselves by zeal? or are they not more likely so sedulously to count the cost as never to undertake building? It may be worst of all to put hand to plough and then look back: nevertheless it is no light evil so to gaze backwards as never to grasp the plough. When we detect ourselves calculating how little will clear us from breach of any commandment, and paring down our intention accordingly, we shall (I think) have grounds for searching deeper, lest already we be breaking the first commandment. (29-30)

The irony is withering: the rhetorical questions establish how far even from common sense, let alone from good interpretive

practices, such a reading of the passage is. And Rossetti claims to know better. Nor is this powerful dismissal of a (probably) male reading of the passage an isolated example in *Letter and Spirit*: later Rossetti will do an extended satire on biblical scholasticism (85-87).

Christina Rossetti, then, transgressed cultural boundaries when she wrote her devotional prose. She overtly claimed little authority, declaring that she lacked scholarship, that she sought only to scratch the surface of her texts, that women continue under men's authority. But within the works we find considerable tension, for she deprecates the scholarship she lacks, cites examples of women's preeminence over men, and willingly contradicts other interpreters of the passages.

The same lack of respect for male authority can readily be traced in Christina Rossetti's poetry. Even when Rossetti quotes the Bible, she never leaves the text alone, and her revisions of the text always shape the meaning. I hope to return to the subject in another essay, but for now a single example will perhaps illustrate the point. In the conclusion of "Goblin Market," Rossetti's "There is no friend like a sister" rewrites Proverbs 18: 24, "There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." According to Rossetti, friends are better than brothers, but sisters are better than friends.

In Virginia Woolf's summary of Christina Rossetti's poetry, she wrote, "you were not a pure saint by any means. You pulled legs; you tweaked noses. You were at war with all humbug and pretence. Modest as you were, still you were drastic, sure of your gift" (220). Woolf describes an element of subversion within Rossetti's poetry also present in her prose. Christina Rossetti was not the passive saint, perfectly accommodated to the position her church granted her, that her contemporary audience believed her. She was convinced of her vision, of her understanding of the Bible, so she was uncomfortable with her place within the church. That in prefaces and editing the church tried to place her back in the contexts it found acceptable only makes her refusal to be silent more honorable. True, she did much to accommodate her readers: she needed to reassure them in order to be read. But in spite of all of her disclaimers about her own authority and intention, Christina Rossetti's devotional prose stands as a fact. Samuel Johnson's sarcastic likening of a woman's preaching to a dog's standing on its hind legs, "It is not done well, but the wonder is that it is done at all" (Boswell 169), certainly does not apply to Rossetti's devotional prose, which is often done well. But that an Oxford-Movement Anglican woman wrote devotional studies is a surprise; that she sometimes did so boldly is a matter for wonder and admiration.

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## The Sterile Star of Venus: Swinburne's Dream of Flight

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(But is it so decisively easy to grasp the difference between eroticism and poetry, and between eroticism and ecstasy?)  
George Bataille, *The Tears of Eros* (19)

Swinburne made a high and brilliant attempt to be an erotic, that is to say, an ecstatic poet.

By means of endless deflections, ingeniously provoking in others the horror he sought to escape in himself, he succeeded in nothing so much as in adroitly eluding if not in completely alienating his public. Only too delighted by the high profile he cut as one of fashionable London's *enfants terribles*, he remained a master parodist, convincing all but the most astute if cynical of socialites that his lurid sexual antics betrayed the monstrous depravity of a death-doing voluptuary. As for his poetry, George Meredith would seem to have formulated once and for all the underlying suspicion, even for those who caught gleams of its undeniable greatness, when he proposed as a notable aesthetic flaw its "lack of an internal centre" (qtd. in Klingopoulos 93).

Around the middle of the twentieth century, as his reputation sank to what was probably its nadir, a mainstream British critic like W. W. Robson, while conceding that "Swinburne has his own music," could elaborate with all the confidence of closure that Swinburne's "well-known sacrifices of sense to sound, his rhythmic self-intoxication, his hypnotic cadences dissolving inextricably into one another" (359), add up to a practice of profound poetic (self-)deception. Even today, although his stature as a poet is arguably greater than before, Swinburne's reputation continues to be suspect, ambiguous. Is he not even salacious, but superficial?

The question of superficiality, at least, disappears, I believe, as soon as we recognize that dialectical tension is to be sought in Swinburne, not between surface and depth, but between surface and nothingness. Here, nothingness displaces depth. Not nothingness in terms of a simple inconsequentiality of statement, but ultimately in terms, as it were, of the shining, ubiquitous and (as the poet dreamt it) all-engulfing void. What this poetry demonstrates time and again is how not even the most consummate control, entrancing euphony and striking metrical mastery can conceal what is everywhere revealed: the vanishing of the word into itself, the void. As a corollary, such poetry clearly gives the lie to the word, let alone the Word, as the guarantee of anything like a solid reality.

It seems possible, therefore, that to the Victorians, the threat posed by Swinburne did not simply consist in his flaunting of a scandalous licentiousness compounded by an "impossible" poetic elusiveness, but in the telltale image of themselves that his parodies unerringly produced. To the bad faith of an era overwhelmingly dedicated to the myth of its own monumental stability, an era heavily over-invested in solid-seeming notions like "progress," "scientific fact," "materialism," etc., Swinburne's adulation of empty words, far from evading all understanding, may well have been only too clear, too intelligible. As it may yet remain for us.

Certainly, vacuity is not the problem in a poetry which

presents itself as a conscious polishing of the void; a polishing which, at times, in its perfect emptiness, achieves an immaculate mirroring of the void.

But what was it that this poet most needed to (a)void?

In pursuit, as he adored to depict it, of the deadliest sweets of perversion, he was on the contrary in blind if open-eyed flight from what he felt to be the (very female) abyss. In classic Victorian mode, he erected an uncompromising ego consciousness dedicated to total control. His immediate as well as his ultimate defense was repression, but a policy of heightened repression in the face of the return of the repressed led only to a vertiginous spiral of repetition.

The dream-images are revealing. To Swinburne, as we shall see, the peril of the abyss presented itself as the mouth of a flower that might drink him in; as a slowly falling star whose splendor might overcome him; as a sudden gusting of the sea in which he might drown. What he sought most actively to exclude, therefore, tended inexorably to be revealed at heart as the void—in effect, as none other, I think, than that "lack of an internal centre" to which Meredith first objected—but which would now appear to require rewriting precisely as the Swinburnian center.

Before I go any further, however, it might be as well to put forward a word or two on methodology. In terms of the structural impulse animating this paper, I am indebted to Jerome J. McGann's full-length study *Swinburne: An Experiment in Criticism*. In his *Experiment*, it will be remembered, McGann ventriloquizes the dead, setting up a Socratic symposium of deceased peers and / or admirers, and rotating their apparently authoritative views on the absent (and thus even more dead?) poet. Criticism, McGann implies "in a spirit of earnest self-parody," (3) is, among other things, inevitably post-mortem, condemned to limbo, inconclusive. As such, his work would seem to amount to no more than an exercise in ironical (self-)reflection, thanatotic narcissism. But it can also be seen in a different light.

If critical practice is, as McGann suggests, a continual braiding and unbraiding of arguments that intersect, contradict, overlap and diverge, then criticism in action is not only interminable, but also, and more importantly, inextricably dialogical—polyphonic, even beneath the pen of a single critic. What McGann seeks to expose as absurd is therefore to be found not only in a *Huis Clos* of dead egos, but perhaps more blatantly in the ambitions of any critical practice bent on demonstrating univocality and closure.

Without duplicating the mechanics of a Socratic dialogue, (its dependence on *dramatis personae*, for instance) it is possible, I think, to develop here a kind of McGannian approach. By means of staggered angles of reflection, switching from one discursive tack to another, (political, psychoanalytic, new critical, etc.) I will implicitly attempt to draw into dialogical cross-connection critical practices otherwise usually kept more strictly separate. On the one hand, this will undoubtedly disconcert the logical expectations of linear argument; on the other, it may reproduce the perspectival mul-

tiplicity necessary, I think, to so prismatic a poet. Should some sort of systemic coherence nevertheless be required, it may in fact be found in my reliance on the Freudian, or rather, Bloomian theory of the self-definitive struggle of the poet with his closest influences, his major predecessors.

In the end, if the strategy I have elected to follow does no more than suggest the need for proliferating modes of access to Swinburne, or if, by perpetual shifting of lenses, it does no more than intensify the act of reading, it will, I think, have sufficed.

Swinburne himself was nothing if not daring.

He had the audacity not only to force to the surface, but also to adopt as his own and then to develop (to a sometimes absurd extreme) the eroticism latent in the delicately traced and all too dedicated-to-the-divine vision of his master, Dante Gabriel Rossetti—whose blessed damozel, for instance, her robe suggestively parted, leans against the "gold bar of heaven" in slightly breathless longing for her living lover

Until her bosom must have made  
The bar she leaned on warm.

It is not the tender imprisonment of woman by sovereign and immutable law that rouses Swinburne's keener sensibility, however, but the possibility of more striking statement implicit in the notion of the of the loved one in death as sexually provocative. In "A Ballad of Death," he redoubles the impact and complicates it to excess by allowing a vision of no gentle nameless saint but the depraved Lucrezia Borgia in death, robed like a queen and lying in state in his own bedchamber, to be mourned as the lost object of desire.

Ah! that my tears filled all her woven hair  
And all the hollow bosom of her gown—  
Ah! that my tears ran down  
Even to the place where many kisses were,  
Even where her parted breast-flowers have place,  
Even where they are cloven apart—who knows not this?

The measured but rapturous sigh or exclamation, "Ah!" emphasizes simultaneously the formal pace and the amorous dissolution of the verse. Why do not the poet's tears fill "all her woven hair," etc.? Clearly, because this is only a perfection of vision, of seeing—it is his "lady's likeness," as he points out a number of lines earlier, and thus not his lady herself nor even her dead body. His tears cannot touch her: she is not there. The immaculate image before him serves only to intensify her absence and, in the void, to heighten his desire.

Far from being one of Swinburne's facile fillers, "hollow" can be seen as significant even beyond the immediate dramatic demands of the poem. If taken as marking the essential emptiness of the beautiful image (in open contradiction of Rossetti's subtle fleshly warmth, again) "hollow" can be seen to be raising the problem at (or of) the core of aestheticism itself. In addition, it is an aestheticism pictured here as patently necrophiliac long before Perry Meisel could coin the succinct phrase, "Pater's Necropolis" (59). Before Pater himself had begun to publish, in fact, Swinburne, Pater's pater, wrote critical poetry, not only poetic

(as distinct from analytic) criticism like the pioneering study *William Blake*, on which he was working at the same time as *Poems and Ballads, First Series* (1865).

Placed back to back in the original edition, both "A Ballad of Death," the second poem in the book, and "A Ballad of Life," the first, are dedicated to Lucrezia Borgia as the troubadour's lady, in ironic imitation of the tradition of courtly love. As Julian Baird (49ff.) has shown, the two ballads are to Swinburne what the "Songs of Innocence & of Experience" are to Blake. The Borgias, in essence, are Swinburne's tyger.

It is the very mildness and sham pictism of the Pre-Raphaelite sublime, then, with its idealized Medieval Christianity that Swinburne seeks to ex- as well as op- pose by means of a counter ideal of a lurid and bloodstained Renaissance. If Pater comes to mind again, it is because the genealogical links are so distinct. The Mona Lisa in Pater's early essay "Leonardo da Vinci" (1869), for instance, is his Lucrezia Borgia.

Set her [the Mona Lisa] for a moment beside one of those white Greek goddesses or beautiful women of antiquity, and how would they be troubled by this beauty, into which the soul with all its maladies has passed! All the thoughts and experiences of the world have etched and moulded there, in that which they have of power to refine and make expressive the outward form, the animalism of Greece, the lust of Rome, the mysticism of the middle age with its spiritual ambition and imaginative loves, the return of the Pagan world, the sins of the Borgias. She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave; and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her. . . . (80)

A Mona Lisa older than the aeons and marked by them all, glutted with all the knowledge and experience of this world and the realms of the deep beyond, is set by Pater in direct and deliberate contrast with the harmonious ideals of the classical age—a move which duplicates, I think, the very act of dialectical opposition by which Swinburne challenged the Pre-Raphaelites. In doing so, Pater reveals himself as one of the few good readers of Swinburne, understanding that the "soul with all its maladies" is exactly what Swinburne proposed as the antithesis to the Brotherhood's placidly divine and erotically lukewarm visions. Inadvertently occurring just before his intense and unforgettable description of the Mona Lisa, Pater's last phrase, "the sins of the Borgias," offers the strongest associative link for this passage as unconsciously based on Swinburne. More importantly, however, both Pater's Mona Lisa and Swinburne's Lucrezia Borgia overlap in terms of the erotic allure of the insatiable but vanished dead, part of whose fascination resides in the illusion of their accessibility.

For Swinburne, the Borgias' glory lay in their blazing ascent to power. Bloodthirsty and ambitious, legendarily lascivious, even incestuous, the Borgias allowed nothing to check their immense rapacity, usurping, at the zenith of their power, the papacy itself—a tale that mimics in the telling Swinburne's own Oedipal drive against Rossetti, perhaps. In addition, however, a triumphantly reductive revelation of the inner workings of religion in terms of lust and power politics could

only have been a delight to Swinburne's intellect.

To Swinburne, heir to Shelley's concept of the poet as the unacknowledged legislator of all mankind, poetic worth is a function of poetic power, which springs in turn from passion. "Art for art's sake" is, as Swinburne understands it, the inflexible rule of a real aesthetic, as independent of all moral considerations in its universal application as its equivalent, *realpolitik*. It follows, therefore, that art can make any alliance which will awaken its passion and offer an enhancement of its power. At the time of his own most manifestly political poetry, *Songs before Sunrise*, and his devotion to the Italian patriot Mazzini, Swinburne wrote:

Therefore, as I have said elsewhere, the one primary requisite of art is artistic worth; "art for art's sake" first, and then all things shall be added to her—or, if not, it is a matter of quite secondary importance . . . . We admit, then, that the worth of a poem has properly nothing to do with its moral meaning or design . . . but on the other hand, we refuse to admit that art of the highest kind may not ally itself with moral or religious passion . . . . In a word, the doctrine of art for art is true in the positive sense, false in the negative; sound as an affirmation, unsound as a prohibition. (qtd. in McGann 37)

We need not look to *Songs before Sunrise* for Swinburne's political passion, however. It is present in the apparition of the temptress Lucrezia Borgia, "crowned and robed and dead" in his bedchamber.

Swinburne's nostalgia for the lost licentiousness of the aristocracy reveals his deepest political allegiance, for all his republican protestations, as inextricably bound up with the omnipotence fantasies of total power. Total power as sovereignty of the individual is inscribed into every page of the immeasurably more brutal, grueling and obsessive works of the Marquis de Sade. The association is not simply gratuitous. As a thinker, de Sade is in certain respects crucial to Swinburne. Consider the following proposition by de Sade:

There is no better way to know death than to link it to some licentious image. (qtd. in Bataille 11)

Aware that the six lines from "A Ballad of Death" on which we have been concentrating form the central such image to the poem, let us return to the section quoted above and read it more closely.

As so often with Swinburne, the pace is deceptively light and rapid. The lines are elegant and even slightly quaint in their self-consciousness, in their belated imitation of a vaguely biblical stateliness. They depend for their effect upon the tension between the highly wrought artificiality of the verse with its ceremonious observance of convention, like metrics and euphony, and an unspeakable impulse, (or at least, an impulse which remains *unspoken* throughout, but arises in the ceaseless play of ambiguity in the words) the upshot of which is to

overturn convention by using it as the vehicle of its own subversion. It is this which makes "A Ballad of Death" parodic, not simply of poetic but of cultural form. In a culture like the Victorian, wracked by religious doubt, the attitude towards death is heavily laden with the outward observance of form as a compensation for the loss of genuine belief in immortality. Swinburne appears to exalt decorous grief in the sacred appearance of the lines, but mocks it by presenting, as the natural concomitant of the highest mourning, the urge towards sex with the corpse. To "know death" in Swinburne's terms is therefore to "know" it biblically, a daring fusion of God and de Sade—but delicately, reverently stated, all taking place through the myriad suggestions and shifting play of the language.

"Breast-flowers," for example, might convey the literal position of certain of the funeral flowers, but the double or compound noun very simply and clearly also suggests the dead Borgia's breasts, while the copulative use of the hyphen prepares the way for the climactic dash. Between his lady's breasts is "the place where many kisses were"—the shrine for the dotting worship of this demonic anti-Virgin by her many lovers—but together with the phrase "cloven apart," the cleft "place" of cunnilingual "kisses" is suggested at least as strongly. The dignity of mourning is parodied in the poet's display of an impassioned need to let his tears trickle down to penetrate and fill up the corpse, making it sexually wet. In a sense, to desecrate the desecrator constitutes in itself an act of homage, however—proof of the extravagance of the poet's devotion—for this is after all Lucrezia Borgia, the incestuous conspirator and murderess, who, at least to Swinburne's imagination, might have discovered in the idea of the violating of her own newly laid-out and flower-bedecked body only the ultimate sexual act. In addition to being sanctified in terms of a beautification of death, then, necrophilia is justified—but as such can function as no more than a substitute convention. Hence, the inescapable predicament of parody. The force of the parody is increased by the fact that no actual body is at stake, it is all pure fantasy, a play of speculation on the (im)possibility of coitus with (this vision of) a corpse. With the rhetorical question, "Who knows not this?" Swinburne implicates the reader intellectually in the fantasy, but only intellectually. What he avoids is the horror, preferring to smother it in flowers, until in the end, all we are left with is an image of flowers drenched in tears.

Not sex but its absence, then. Flowers and the faint taste of salt. (We shall return to this.)

Typical of Swinburne's erotic flauntings, the necrophilia in "A Ballad of Death" functions solely as what Foucault would call an incitement to discourse. To float the notion of necrophilia as every man's fantasy ("Who knows not this?") is actually to focus less on the possibility of the particular sexual act than on the imputed universality of the fantasy. Which explains the lightness of the verse, and the success of the parody in drawing a strong reaction.

In possibly the wittiest if the crudest of the Victorian

<sup>1</sup> Cf. ". . . There are (witness my works passim) two writers whom I cannot refrain from quoting, God, and de Sade. I am aware that they are both

obscene and blasphemous." From a letter to William Michael Rossetti in *Lectures* 1: 195.

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reactions, Carlyle described Swinburne as "a man standing up to his neck in a cesspool and adding to its contents."<sup>2</sup> Anticipation of the poet's swallowing or better still, drowning in what could only be (at least in part) his own words, hovers over the remark as a malicious if unstated consequence. Parody provokes parody. In terms of this epigram, it seems as if Swinburne has waded as far as possible into the cesspool *in order* to "add . . . to its contents." Either because he knows no better or because it is to his taste, he seems to Carlyle's mind voluntarily to have broken the boundaries of common human decency, not to mention sanitation and / or sanity. Carlyle is strongly dedicated to repulsing *ad hominem* the proposal implicit to so much of Swinburne's work, that all men have similar tendencies.

At least one of Swinburne's contemporaries, however, Ivan Turgenev, (whose own most interesting work, *Fathers and Sons*, is an attempt to establish the limits of nihilism) appreciated with keen insight what the poet was up to.

"You shouldn't get so excited, gentlemen," Turgenev once remarked—the gentlemen in question having been shocked by a tale told by one of their group, who claimed to believe that Swinburne had once bestialized a monkey. After which, the poor little creature was supposed to have been slaughtered, roasted and eaten with relish by the poet, who dished it up, too, to his unwitting acquaintance, the story-teller himself. "Absolutely anything can be expected of Swinburne, whom I personally know rather well, as he is, of course, hardly a normal person . . . I once jokingly asked him 'What is the most original and unrealizable thing you would like to experience at the moment?' 'I'll tell you,' Swinburne replied, 'to ravish Saint Genevieve during her most ardent ecstasy of prayer—but in addition, with her secret consent!'" (qtd. in Henderson 148).

Urbanely countering one anecdote with another, Turgenev suggests a more tolerant if more skeptical picture of the poet. Swinburne is shown as rapturously embracing whatever is "most original and unrealizable," at the same time as wittily reducing any pretensions to the sublime (his own as well as Saint Genevieve's) to a secret fixation on sex. The epigrammatic quality of Swinburne's reply might make analysis seem irrelevant, but that would be a mistake. Compact and intricate, the epigram requires both reflection and amplification. In its terms, the ecstatic is reduced to a secret wish for the erotic, which is in turn revealed as a need to exert power over the ecstatic, while both in their complicity define the poetic—for it is the poet himself who is consciously capturing his predicament in the first place.

Metaphysically, the fusion erotic / ecstatic / poetic traces the arc of unrealizable desire. Parody is the poet's revenge on infinite desire, his exposing of its ultimate absurdity. What is at stake in the anecdotes of the monkey and the saint, then, is not simply (as Turgenev would have it) the balancing of extremes, but also the absurdity implicit in their being identi-

cal. In terms of the blind and unremitting pressure of desire as all that is left when the center of gravity to existence, the authority of God, has been lost, a monkey is as good a sex object as a saint, or, at the level of debate in Victorian society, Darwin interchangeable with Loyola. As levity replaces gravity, the parodic poet replaces God, putting himself forward as needing only to be implicitly acknowledged as such by the praying saint.

Infinite desire, unappeasable, produces inescapable pain. With a characteristic intellectual twist, Swinburne seeks to encompass pain by making it the direct object of desire, aware that at best he is setting up an infinite regress of pain / desire / pain / desire / pain . . .<sup>3</sup> In poetry, any shaping of fantasy that stays true to the nature of desire can therefore only be exquisite in its pain, infinite in its longing, and impossible of fulfillment. Thus, Lucrezia Borgia, Anactoria, Felise, Dolores, and many others, in a potentially endless procession.

Such is Swinburne's critique of infinite desire.

Wilde's later demystification of Swinburne inadvertently reinforces the argument for him as cultural parodist. Swinburne, said Wilde, was "a braggart in matters of vice, who had done everything he could to convince his fellow citizens of his homosexuality and bestiality, without being in the slightest degree a homosexual or a bestializer" (qtd. in Henderson 149).

Unimpressed by the poet's (parodic) facade, Wilde draws attention to the evident nothingness behind it. It is certainly in the specter of nothingness that the real problem resides, making the parody, I think, far from an idle distraction. But it is possible to say, too, that for Swinburne such nothingness did not correspond to what Wilde might have regarded with contempt as mere personal normalcy. Swinburne was far from the blameless Victorian gentleman. It is no secret (and may well have been known to Wilde) that his active sex life was that of a flagellant.

His sexual career is sometimes defended in terms of his class position. As one of his biographers, Philip Henderson, has pointed out, Swinburne belonged to the "highest circles of Victorian society, where such inclinations seem not to have been uncommon" (208). But if considered specifically in terms of its implications for the image of the ruling class, flagellation can be demonstrated as a cultural indictment. The spectacle of the upper-class gentleman letting down his breeches to be flogged by a working-class prostitute constitutes a parodic role-reversal of the relations of total power obtaining both in the scepter'd isle and its dominions throughout the world. It makes a perfect fool of John Bull(y) to picture him with stripes across his fat arse from a solid birching by a woman, not only at his own request but his own expense, too. Flagellation as a favored perversion of the English upper classes amounts to a political caricature, grotesquely revealing the plight of those truly at the bottom of Empire: the abused ("naughty") child and the abject native.

Whatever else it may have been (and it was plenty)

<sup>2</sup>Carlyle's comment was in turn quoted by Ralph Waldo Emerson who "had gone out of his way," according to Philip Henderson, "to describe Swinburne as a 'perfect leper and a mere sodomite'" (184).

<sup>3</sup>Cf. "Atalanta in Calydon" ll. 1069-70, where the gods are said to have subtly fashioned madness together with sadness on earth:

"And circled pain about with pleasure,  
And girdled pleasure about with pain . . ."

Swinburne's sado-masochism was outrageously parodic. His own frequent mention of flogging in his letters tends to present a front of light-hearted and amused superiority. It is possible to page through at random and find passages like the following:

What a charming book a History of the Birch-rod in England would be. I must get sight of the passage in Caxton about the "breechless feast." Anyone who has been—is—or will be a schoolboy ought to relish any allusion to birch. I wonder did they use a flogging block at Eton, or simply horse one boy on another's back. (*Letters* 1: 290)

and:

My copy of [de Sade's] monstrous offspring is still in the hands of an Eton friend, who having been incessantly whipped during the rosy years of boyhood—rosy in bottom as well as face—takes, I fear, a voluptuous interest in the Titanic flagellations which crown its pages. (*Letters* 1: 216)

"Hors[ing] one boy on another's back" is a powerfully if unconsciously homo-erotic image, bringing to mind Steven Marcus's theory that the focus on flagellation among Victorian gentlemen was a defense against latent homosexuality. Swinburne's recurrent interest in schoolboys' bottoms betrays obvious pederastic inclinations, while the light-hearted treatment simultaneously facilitates and deflects what is under discussion.

It is interesting to find that Swinburne seems to have regarded de Sade, too, as a (lost) parodist. The following, an extract from a letter to Richard Monckton Milnes, describes the initial impact on him of his long-anticipated first reading of de Sade:

At first, I quite expected to add to the gifted author's list of victims; I really thought I must have died or split open or choked with laughing. I never laughed so much in my life: I couldn't have stopped to save that said life. I went from text to illustrations and back again, till I literally doubled up and fell down with laughter.... (54)

A parodic reaction in itself, this records an attempt to dismiss de Sade as a colossal and painful joke. At the same time it is excited. Swinburne's witty sophistication has to strain to present de Sade as a real disappointment. It could with equal truth be said that de Sade knocked him over, rendered him breathless, speechless.

To the extent that he succeeded in his poetry in defining himself precisely in reaction to de Sade, however, he wrote some of his most magnificent work. From de Sade he had expected, as he points out a little farther on in the letter to Monckton Milnes: "some sharp and subtle analysis of lust—some keen dissection of pain and pleasure" (54). But the brutal sexuality of de Sade's slaughterhouse of desire proved too bulky, cumbersome and repetitive, and relied too heavily on exteriority and a merely quantitative body count, to intrigue or stimulate his own highly charged critical

sensibility. De Sade, Swinburne perceives acutely, is no more than a "Christian ascetic bent on earning the salvation of the soul through the mortification of the flesh" (*Letters* 1: 57). The only difference is a systematic reversal: de Sade lusts to visit upon the flesh of others the torments an earlier Christian might have been dying to inflict upon himself. The lengthy display of a first-person address to de Sade into which the letter has developed, concludes with the words:

We took you for a burlesque Prometheus; you are only a very serious Simeon Stylites—in an inverted posture. You worship the phallus as those first Christians worshipped the cross; you seek your heaven by the very same road as they sought theirs. That is all. (57)

Unable to find in de Sade what he sought, Swinburne supplies his own exquisite erotics of pain. "Anactoria," his masterpiece, is a brilliant analysis of unslaked lust. It is spoken by Sappho to her young lover who has abandoned her.

Take the opening lines:

My life is bitter with thy love; thine eyes  
Blind me, thy tresses burn me, thy sharp sighs  
Divide my flesh and spirit with soft sound,  
And my blood strengthens, and my veins abound.  
I pray thee sigh not, speak not, draw not breath;  
Let life burn down, and dream it is not death.  
I would the sea had hidden us, the fire  
(Wilt thou fear that, and fear not my desire?)  
Severed the bones that bleach, the flesh that cleaves,  
And let our sifted ashes drop like leaves.

Harshly sibilant and dramatically vital, the lines tend to work in mounting tension with the meter. The opening remark is laconic, centered round the word "bitter." In the next line, the violence of the emotion leaps out in a phrase like "Blind me," in which a reversal of the iambic beat signals the impact of a disruptive and demanding passion at odds with convention, and the rest of the line bears out the impression of an abrupt intensity impatient of predictable pauses. A sigh from Sappho's lover is sufficiently cutting to her to constitute a torture, dividing her spirit from her flesh, allowing her to "die" languidly in the very moment she feels most stimulated. The surge of erotic desire in "my blood strengthens, and my veins abound" appears to end on a note of exhilaration, but "abound" marks an ambiguity—not only do the veins contain a vibrant and leaping sense of life, but also, it seems, they "are bound," as though they themselves form the body's inner bonds, and a strengthening of desire constitutes at the same time a strengthening of bondage. Sappho's response is to wish to silence Anactoria, to smother her, stop her breath, above all to let her die slowly, although she would like her to "dream it is not death." This wish becomes a longing for the end of all consciousness, in a drowning that is a hiding from the intolerable exposure of consciousness, culminating in the total annihilation of desire (which is fire) by fire, and the marriage of the bodies as ashes in a return to earth as natural as the falling of leaves.

Anactoria" is a great poem. "In the course of the poem,"

Geoffrey Carter argues, "Swinburne manages to universalize the psychology of lust. . ." (153). Poetry as an incitement to discourse, specifically to the emergent *scientia sexualis* of the nineteenth century, seems, as we have already noted in terms of "A Ballad of Death," to have been one of Swinburne's aims. His disappointment in de Sade is phrased almost in the language of anatomical science with key terms like "analysis" and "dissection." But de Sade, as we have seen, wanted to know death through the images of lust. Brutality and desecration bring death nearer. Or at least, some grasp of the horror of it.

In the "Hymn to Proserpine," which was printed back to back with "Anactoria" in *Poems and Ballads, First Series*, and thus stands in dialectical relation to it, Swinburne resumes a worship of death. Proserpine, the goddess of death, chthonic and older than any of the gods, is regarded as ultimate, outlasting them all. Death in the poem is identified with sleep as a heaviness, a fullness, a state of complete satiety.

With none of the tense inner contradictions that complicate but make compelling the more reckless rhythms of "Anactoria," the poem tends to be dominated by euphony and metrics:

Thou has conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has grown  
grey from thy breath  
We have drunken of things Lethæan, and fed on the fulness  
of death.

Predicated structurally on the opposition between an anti-life and a pro-death stance, which is dramatized in terms of a choice between a blighting Christianity that spreads premature age and anxiety, and a joyous Paganism that makes even of death and oblivion a sumptuous alternative, "Hymn to Proserpine" inverts Victorian pieties by taking comfort in the thought of death. Christianity has brought with it to ancient Rome, the setting of the poem, the cult of the Virgin Mary, ("pale and a maiden, and sister to sorrow") which has supplanted the worship of Venus, goddess of sexuality and abundance. Later in the poem, in order to intensify the loss incurred by the assumption to power of the new regime, Venus is depicted as purer than the Virgin and more benign. In the lines on which I wish to concentrate, her birth from the waves to her transformation into an earth-loving force is shown, as Venus,

Her deep hair heavily laden with odour and colour of  
flowers,  
White rose of the rose-white water, a silver splendour, a  
flame,  
Bent down to us that besought her, and earth grew sweet  
with her name.

"Heavily laden" is a phrase fraught with associations of the drowsiness that belong to Proserpine, while "odour and colour of flowers" conveys an image of flowers that makes them oddly colorless, odorless—unlike the flowers of the underworld, a number of lines later:

Where the poppies are sweet as the rose in our world, and  
the red rose is white,

a significant line that allows us to double back and reread the figure of Venus as a "white rose" in a different way. As well as rising white as the foam from the foam of the waves, Venus, the "red rose" of passion, is bled or blanched white if viewed through the prism of death. And in this poem, all is under the spell of death.

"Deep" hair, problematic if taken in terms of a literal description of the goddess's hair (Why "deep"? Why, if literal, not simply "long" or "luxuriant," or some other melodious word that might work? Why the need for a more profound resonance? needs to be understood in cross-connection with other uses of the term in the poem. To begin with, "deep," is a quality of death, (cf. "deep death waits," l. 50) as well, of course, as being a term applied to the sea (l. 65). In a poem invoking death, the "deep hair" of the goddess is more than a sensory image of her hair as wet and thus reminding one of the deep—although it could be seen as that. "Deep" functions at multiple levels simultaneously. In the Underworld section, (lines 95-102) again, we find the phrase

"... deep as the deep dim soul of a star . . ."

Venus, we remember, is both Morning Star and Evening Star. "Deep" hair at its simplest can mean "luxuriant," certainly, but when her hair is seen as her aura, that is to say, as the soul-frame of her face and body, as in the Botticelli Venus, for instance, "deep hair" could be taken to evoke the dimension of the soul, too.

"White rose of the rose-white water" is incantatory, working against sense in a virtually hypnotic monotone and ritualistic reversal of terms. Yet the white rose is insistently pure or, when we reflect upon it, sterile. It arises from (to the point of being identical with) the salt foam of the sea. Although Venus was born from the foam that curdled and seethed in the ocean off Cyprus at the point where Chronos's severed genitals sank on being cast from Olympus by Jupiter, the king of the gods, we have no sense here of the cruelty of blood and the sexuality of Venus's origin. Instead we have the white rose, a symbol of purity tantamount to chastity, becoming incandescent, "a silver splendour, a flame." Then instead of the flame's disappearing into the heights to which it aspires, the goddess returns to her supplicants. Having vanished into the light, she becomes the kindly mother, the sweet air (like the fragrance of the white rose) that blows over the earth.

Yet the image has been fierce, "a silver splendour," too bright, it would appear, for human eyes. The dazzle deflects, but the sexuality is oddly absent. In Proserpine's poem, sensuality has accrued to death, perhaps, in the language of heaviness, drowsiness, sleep. Venus, death's opposite, is, however, curiously rarefied into pure white light. True, Venus arises not only from the sea here, but also from a matrix of images of the Virgin Mary and, as we have seen, it is in the interests of the polemic to subvert the supposed superiority of the cult of the Virgin by depicting not sexuality but an intensely spiritual purity as the most outstanding characteristic of the deposed pagan goddess. Still, the obstacle remains, and is troubling: sexuality is absent. Venus is (unimaginably) imagined in terms of an absence of sexuality, associated with—in fact, pictured as arising from—the sterility of salt

water, the foam on the sea.

This is a cluster of associations we have encountered before. The elaborately crafted facade of the verse seems in fact to be on the point of revealing something beyond the poet's conscious control that inevitably associates sexuality (flowers) with absence (death) and sterility (salt water, tears<sup>4</sup>) as we saw in the image of Lucrezia Borgia.

It would seem that Swinburne finds it imperative to exclude the possibility of actual bodily sexuality, at the same time as being utterly aware that such exclusion spells sterility and death.

In his unfinished novel, *Lesbia Brandon*, the hero, Herbert Seyton, a self-portrait of the poet, at one point has a dream.

He saw the star of Venus, white and flower-like as he had always seen it, turn into a white rose and come down out of heaven, with a reddening centre that grew as it descended liker and liker a living mouth; but instead of desire he felt horror and sickness at the sight of it, and averted his lips with an effort to utter some prayer or exorcism; vainly, for the dreadful mouth only laughed, and came closer. And cheek or chin, eyebrow or eye, there was none; only this mouth; and about it the stary or flowery beams or petals, that smelt sweet and shone clear as ever; which was the worst. Then, with a violent revulsion of spirit, he seemed to get quit of it; but then his ears instead were vexed with sound. The noise of the sea hardened and deepened and grew untunable; soon it sharpened into a shrill threatening note without sense or pity, but full of vicious design. He woke as the salt froth seemed coming round lips and nostrils and ears, with a sense of sterility and perplexity that outwent all other pain. The torture of the dream was the fancy that these fairest things, sea and sky, star and flower, light and music, were all unfruitful and barren; absorbed in their own beauty; consummate in their own life. (97)

The interpretation imposed by the narrator and / or protagonist on the dream is a clear displacement. The sterility belongs not to the sea or the star but to the dreamer himself as narcissist. It is he who is filled with horror at the descent of the devouring vulva, he who cannot face it. Seyton / Swinburne cannot abandon himself, revolted by the apparently inexorable welding of his own mouth to the mouth of another. When (his own?) climax seems to threaten him with engulfment, his

refusal takes the form of a flight into ego consciousness, and he wakes up.

To the extent that Swinburne's poetry is an "effort to utter some prayer or exorcism" and dispel the horror, it falls under the most rigorous control—obvious in his scrupulous and overriding attention to metrical beat. Beauty and parody alike function to exclude the living center, the "dreadful mouth" that laughs and would meet him sexually, and the poetry is emptiest exactly when the exclusion is most successful.

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## Bringing to Earth the "Good Angel of the Race"

Michael Schiefelbein

I went to bed last night utterly dispirited and done up. All night I have been pursued by the child; and this morning I am unrefreshed and miserable. (*Letters* 2: 44)

I am slowly murdering that poor child, and grow wretched over it. It wrings my heart. Yet it must be. (*Letters* 2: 180)

That Nellicide was the Act of Heaven, as you may see any of these fine mornings when you look about you. (*Letters* 2: 228)

These epigraphs from his letters attest to Dickens's intense emotional involvement with the child of his own invention and his desire to preserve her from pain and poverty even if it meant sending her to heaven. John Forster and many other commentators after him explain this effect in terms of Nell's evocation for Dickens of his recently deceased sister-in-law, Mary Hogarth (Forster 1: 128). Yet the responses Nell elicited from Dickens's audience indicate the extent of her power over them too for they vehemently protest the fate dealt to her by Dickens:

[Dickens's] actor-friend Macready noted in his diary (21 January 1841): "Asked Dickens to spare the life of Nell in his story"; when the installment containing Nell's death arrived, he wrote, "I dread to read it, but I must get it over." The once ferocious critic Lord Jeffrey was found in tears: "You'll be sorry to hear," he remarked, "that little Nelly, Boz's little Nelly, is dead." . . . Another reader reacted more violently: flinging down the book in a passion of indignation, he exclaimed "The Villain! The Rascal!! The bloodthirsty Scoundrel!!! . . . He killed my little Nell—He killed my sweet little child" (letter to Forster from Mrs. Jane Green of Dublin, referring to her Uncle). Daniel O'Connell, the Irish politician, is said to have groaned, "He should not have killed her." . . . In New York, crowds waiting for the ship bringing the latest instalment to dock are said to have shouted impatiently, "Is Little Nell dead?" Edward Fitzgerald called the book a "Nelly-ad," and a popular song of the 1840s contained the lines: "She has departed, / The gentle hearted, / Her soul no longer by grief invaded; / And music lingers, / From angel fingers, / Around the death bed of Little Nell." (N. Page 110-11)

According to most critics, if Nell matters as much to Victorian society as she does to Dickens it is not because she accurately portrays pitiable nineteenth-century children in London. Why would readers want to prolong the suffering of such a representative? Even though she, like real children, is threatened by the high mortality rate, child slavery, and general negligence and abuse described by Collins and Senelick, she herself never falls victim to real torment and hunger, as do Mrs. Quilp and the Marchioness. And although she dies, "seem to disappear" for her. No, she matters because she is a beatified figure of Victorian womanhood, what Alexander Welsh calls the "angel of the hearth," integral to the secular

religion of the Victorian world. In her, and other heroines like her, Dickens "hints of a divinity that can be experienced 'on earth,' and a principle 'constant and unchanged' that ministers to our mortal needs" (Welsh quotes a speech Dickens gave at Leeds in 1847, in which he praises womankind in general [Welsh 156]).

There is no denying this spiritualized aspect of Nell. However, I want to argue that much of Nell's power for both Dickens and her audience is indeed linked to her corporeality, that as much as Dickens seems to appease himself and his audience by preserving "that poor child" from the suffering of the Birmingham steelworkers who shelter her, he actually allows her, as well as himself and his readers, to confront her vulnerability. He does this by surrounding his heroine with characters driven by physical compulsions, who see in Nell the means to satisfy their needs. In representing the perspectives of these lusty characters and the self-understanding that Nell seems to derive from these perspectives, Dickens explores Nell as a creature of flesh and blood who, in a restricted sense, enters the ranks of victims of white slavery, sexual abuse, and other forms of exploitation.

One of Dickens's most horrifyingly "physical" characters is Daniel Quilp, whose voracious appetite for power over women manifests itself in his sexuality, as the ladies sharing tea with Mrs. Quilp suggest. Despite their warning to the oppressed Mrs. Quilp about the "duty that devolved upon the weaker sex to resist [man's] tyranny and assert their rights and dignity" (30: ch. 4), they betray their own vulnerability to Quilp by "brid[ing] up" when Mrs. Quilp declares that "'the best-looking woman here couldn't refuse him'" (32) and then expressing indignation towards a widow who applies this remark to herself. For all their hypocrisy, these women are right about the depth of Mrs. Quilp's subjugation to her husband's malicious sexual appetite, which, for the sake of propriety, Dickens expresses in terms of oral fixation. Upon finding his wife among her conspiring friends, Quilp declares, "'Oh you nice creature,'" while "smacking his lips as if this were no figure of speech, and she were actually a sweetmeat" (35). He even threatens to bite her if she listens to the meddling women again, and forces her to stay up all night because he feels "in a smoking humour." Dickens develops his sexual innuendo in a masterly way by positioning Quilp, "the small lord of the creation," equipped with his "cigar," before the frightened Mrs. Quilp for a night of "smoking":

[T]he room became perfectly dark and the end of the cigar a deep fiery red, but still Mr. Quilp went on smoking and drinking in the same position, and staring listlessly out of the window with the dog-like smile always on his face, save when Mrs. Quilp made some involuntary movement of restlessness or fatigue; and then it expanded into a grin of delight. (37)

Gabriel Pearson, who first noticed the sexual innuendo in this scene, characterized it as "the closest we get to downright

<sup>4</sup>Cf. "Hymn to Proserpine." Of the apocalyptic "wave of the world," it is said that "its salt is of all men's tears" (l. 57)

copulation in early Victorian fiction" (84).

Under Quilp's lascivious gaze, the angelic Nell takes on a very corporeal dimension. One evening, unaware that Quilp has stolen into the curiosity shop, Nell urges her grandfather to flee from the dwarf. In tears, she embraces the old man—only to glance up and find Quilp leering at her—and retreats from the room after kissing her grandfather. Quilp describes the girl, whose vulnerability he has just witnessed, as the reverent Master Humphrey, the novel's initial narrator, never could:

"Such a fresh, blooming, modest little bud, neighbour," said Quilp, nursing his short leg, and making his eyes twinkle very much; "such a chubby, rosy, cosy, little Nell! . . ."

"She's so," said Quilp, speaking very slowly, and feigning to be quite absorbed in the subject, "so small, so compact, so beautifully modelled, so fair, with such blue veins and such a transparent skin, and such little feet, and such winning ways. . . ." (73, ch. 9)

While Dickens has Master Humphrey spiritualize Nell with generalizing language ("little," "youthful," "pretty," and of course "spiritual" and "fairy-like") he has Quilp (who suggestively nurses his "short leg") concretize the girl with specific physical details. She is not simply little, but "so small, and so compact." She is not only fair and petite, by has "blue veins and such a transparent skin, and such little feet." Not only does the lustiness of Quilp's speech reduce Nell to a physical being, it mocks the ephemeral descriptions by scoffing at poetic language ("such a fresh, blooming, modest little bud") and ascribing to Nell contradictory attributes in order to exaggerate her physicality: delicate Little Nell is presented as the "chubby, rosy, cosy little Nell."

Quilp hints at his designs on Nell to the girl herself when she delivers a letter to Tower Hill. "You look very pretty today, Nelly, charmingly pretty," he says, urging her to stay a while, and to become his "little cherry-cheeked, red-lipped [second] wife" (45, ch. 6). Through clever innuendo, Dickens goes on to demonstrate Quilp's power to force such an unthinkable role upon Nell when the dwarf takes over the curiosity shop. Having just playfully remarked upon Nell's comeliness and invited her to sit upon his knee, Quilp bids the girl to sleep near him in her little bed, which, we learn after Nell declines, he himself has been planning to occupy.

Restricted as Dickens is by the conventions of his time, he successfully conveys, by means of Quilp, a decidedly corporeal, vulnerable dimension of Nell, whose gender, youth, and physical attributes make her the prey of a lecherous fiend. Moreover, he represents Nell as aware of her sexual vulnerability, and—albeit in a limited way since Quilp fails to execute his designs—thereby allows himself and his readers to confront the effects of sexual abuse on young girls in his society. Nell's frequently undifferentiated anxiety springs from a very specific source when she feels it in Quilp's presence; for example when, "regarding her with extraordinary favour and complacency," Quilp asks Nell to be his second wife, "the child shrunk from him, and trembled" (45). Nell is also able to distinguish Quilp's pat on her head from an innocent caress: "Such an application from any other hand might not have produced a remarkable effect, but the child

shrunk so quickly from his touch and felt such an instinctive desire to get out of his reach, that she rose directly and declared herself ready to return" (50). And after Quilp takes over her bed, Nell flees from him and his accomplice, Sampson Brass: recoiling "from all the dwarf's advances towards conversation" and from Brass's terrible smiles, Nell "lived in such continual dread and apprehension of meeting one or other of them on the stairs or in the passages if she stirred from her grandfather's chamber, that she seldom left it . . ." (87, ch. 11).

In fact, in portraying Nell as terrified of Quilp, Dickens very methodically prevents her from suppressing her susceptibility to sexual advances. He suggests such a move in the passage describing Nell's search for the appropriate response to Quilp, as he reads the letter she has carried to him:

Little Nell stood timidly by, with her eyes raised to the countenance of Mr. Quilp, as he read the letter, plainly showing by her looks that while she entertained some fear and distrust of the little man, she was much inclined to laugh at his uncouth appearance and grotesque attitude. And yet, there was visible on the part of the child a painful anxiety for his reply, and a consciousness of his power to render it disagreeable or distressing, which was strongly at variance with this impulse and restrained it more effectually than she could possibly have done by any efforts of her own. (44, ch. 6)

Perhaps upon considering the context of Quilp's sexual victimization of his wife a few short scenes before this passage, Dickens could simply not bring himself to have Nell, naive child though she is, dismiss the tyrant before her as merely an "uncouth" and "grotesque" little man. The power of which Nell is conscious here, as the previous examples suggest, is, at least partially, the power of a man to sexually mistreat her.

Another very physical character, though more sympathetic than Quilp, is Mrs. Jarley, who also runs her life according to bodily needs, particularly her appetites for food and drink. As Nell herself notes, after the corpulent owner of the waxworks pretends to require very little nourishment, "[T]here was nothing either in the lady's personal appearance or in her manner of taking tea, to lead to the conclusion that her natural relish for meat and drink had at all failed her" (202, ch. 27). (Nell neglects to mention Mrs. Jarley's relish for the contents of "the suspicious bottle" that never leaves her sight.) While the lecherous Quilp demystifies Nell by highlighting her sexuality, the savvy, earthy Mrs. Jarley does so by revealing Nell as a repressed adolescent who needs to investigate her own wants and develop her own resources to satisfy them. Their first meeting establishes the nature of the relationship between Nell and Mrs. Jarley, as one between a woman of the world and the pitiful ingenue into whom she is trying to instill some sense:

"Hey!" cried the lady of the caravan, scooping crumbs out of her lap and swallowing the same before wiping her lips. "Yes, to be sure—Who won the Helter-Skelter Plate, child?"

"Won what, ma'am?" asked Nell.

"The Helter-Skelter Plate at the races, child—the

plate that was run for on the second day."

"On the second day, ma'am?"

"Second day! Yes, second day," repeated the lady with an air of impatience. "Can't you say who won the Helter-Skelter Plate when you're asked civilly?"

"I don't know, ma'am."

"Don't know!" repeated the lady of the caravan; "why, you were there. I saw you with my own eyes. . . . And very sorry I was . . . to see you in company with a Punch [operated by Codlin and Short] . . ."

"Do you—do you know them, ma'am?"

"Know 'em, child!" cried the lady of the caravan in a sort of shriek. "Know *them!* But you're young and inexperienced, and that's your excuse for asking such a question." (196-97, ch. 26)

Mrs. Jarley's abruptness in addressing Nell is humorous because it brings the angelic creature down to earth. Refusing to treat Nell as a delicate flower, Mrs. Jarley makes her demands of the girl clear: she must open her eyes to her immediate surroundings, both to take advantage of a potentially lucrative event like the Helter-Skelter Plate and to avoid being exploited by sharks like Codlin and Short. As though to ritualize her mission to fatten up the experience-starved Nell, the waxworks woman immediately prepares a tea for the girl (despite Nell's denial that she is hungry). "[E]at and drink as much as you can, and don't spare anything," she commands Nell and her grandfather, and upon her order the pair "made a hearty meal and enjoyed it to the utmost" (198).

With Mrs. Jarley's encouragement, Nell continues to learn how to satisfy her needs, as her successful apprenticeship as a waxworks tour guide demonstrates. Mrs. Jarley, who has promised Nell a salary once she has proven her abilities, is gratified to see that "so well did Nell profit by her instructions, and so apt was she to remember them, that by the time they had been shut up together for a couple of hours, she was in full possession of the history of the whole establishment, and perfectly competent to the enlightenment of visitors" (214-15, ch. 28). Thus, the apparently ineffectual, ephemeral child, earning her grandfather's keep as well as her own, enters the world of affairs.

Through Mrs. Jarley, Nell discovers a fundamental obstacle to securing her livelihood: her inferior social class as a waxworks girl. Arming her with advertisements, Mrs. Jarley directs Nell to the exclusive boarding school of Mrs. Monflathers. But upon her arrival, she is prevented from executing her orders by the mistress herself, who upbraids Nell in language whose rhythms and themes uncannily subvert the elegiac passages that elevate her to immortal heights after her death. Below is one of these latter passages, followed by Mrs. Monflathers's interrogation of Nell:

"Why dost thou lie so idle there, dear Nell," he murmured, "when there are bright red berries out of doors waiting for thee to pluck them? Why dost thou lie so idle there, when thy little friends come creeping to the door, crying 'Where is Nell—sweet Nell?'—and sob, and weep, because they do not see thee! She was always gentle with children. The wildest would do her bidding—she had a tender way with them, indeed she had!" (535, ch. 81)

"And don't you think you must be a very wicked little child . . . to be a wax-work child at all? . . ."

"Don't you feel how naughty it is of you . . . to be a wax-work child, when you might have the proud consciousness of assisting, to the extent of your infant powers, the manufactures of your country; of improving your mind by the constant contemplation of the steam-engine; and of earning a comfortable and independent subsistence of from two-and-ninety to three shillings per week? Don't you know that the harder you are at work, the happier you are?" (235, ch. 31)

The iambic meter at the beginning and end of this reprimand mocks the rhythm of the lyric discourse honoring Nell, while the formal, utilitarian language that has infiltrated Mrs. Monflathers's speech parodies the fragile, sanguine language of the elegy. Of course, one cannot reasonably argue that Dickens intentionally parodies the formal techniques of an epilogue he has not yet written, but one can claim that he is amusing himself at the expense of the angelic Nell. Dickens rejects the Benthamite doctrine that Mrs. Monflathers represents, but since he refrains from attacking it he leaves Nell defenseless, as it were, before the truth of her real social position, which is far inferior to that of the privileged Monflathers students. Nell's shame suggests that she has once again learned something of her place in the real world: "Poor Nell had never viewed her position in this light, and not knowing what to say, remained silent, blushing more deeply than before" (235, ch. 31).

In allowing Dickens to explore the exposure of a vulnerable, fourteen-year-old girl to exploitation, Mrs. Jarley serves a purpose similar to that of Quilp. However, whereas Dickens does not permit Quilp to carry out his designs on Nell, he does permit Mrs. Jarley to carry out hers, perhaps because hers, which are much less horrible, allow him to exercise his satiric genius on behalf of the victimized girl. Chapter 29 superbly captures Mrs. Jarley's inventive opportunism: "In the midst of the various devices for attracting visitors to the exhibition," the chapter begins, "little Nell was not forgotten" (216). We learn that Mrs. Jarley poses Nell in a cart next to a dashing wax figure of "the Brigand," decorates her with flowers, and has her wheeled around the streets for public viewing. Nell soon becomes the "chief attraction." Dickens concludes:

This desirable impression was not lost on Mrs. Jarley, who, lest Nell should become too cheap, soon sent the Brigand out alone again, and kept her in the exhibition room, where she described the figures every half-hour to the great satisfaction of admiring audiences. And these audiences were of a very superior description. . . . (216)

In teaching Nell to fend for herself, Mrs. Jarley, woman of the world, has obviously not taught her how to avoid the machinations of her own self-serving teacher.

Finally, Dickens also seeks to ground the transcendental Nell in the dark psychological drama of Grandfather Trent, a compulsive gambler who is at once friend and foe, guardian and dependent, protector and abuser of Nell. Nell's response to Trent's mysterious paradoxical behavior is marked by the



energy of honest, credible horror—an energy lacking in her own generally stylized expression of her fears, despite the narrator's claims to the contrary. Note the difference between the first passage below, which captures Nell's undifferentiated horror of evil and the second, which describes her terror of the intruder lurking in the hallway (her grandfather, unrecognized by Nell, who has just robbed her room):

"Dear grandfather," cried the girl, with an energy which shone in her flushed face, trembling voice, and impassioned gesture. . . . "oh hear me pray that we may beg, or work in open roads or fields, to earn a scanty living, rather than live as we do now." (71, ch. 9)

The rain beat fast and furiously without, and ran down in plashing streams from the thatched roof. Some summer insect, with no escape into the air, flew blindly to and fro, beating its body against the walls and ceiling, and filling the silent place with his murmurs. The figure moved again. The child involuntarily did the same. Once in her grandfather's room, she would be safe.

It crept along the passage until it came to the very door she longed so ardently to reach. The child, in the agony of being so near, had almost darted forward with the design of bursting into the room and closing it behind her, when the figure stopped again.

The idea flashed suddenly upon her—what if it entered there, and had a design upon the old man's life! She turned faint and sick. It did. It went in. There was a light inside. The figure was now within the chamber, and she, still dumb—quite dumb, and almost senseless—stood looking on. (229, ch. 30)

In the second passage Dickens has avoided the melodramatic quality of the first description by bringing Nell face to face with her own danger. He has convincingly conveyed Nell's horror by placing her feelings in the context of concrete reality—the rain on thatched roofs, the wonderful insect beating its wings against the walls—and by using succinct, even jerky sentences instead of dullingly verbose and monotonously smooth ones. Also contributing to the complexity of the passage is the triple irony involved in the scene: a man is victimizing the child he is supposed to be protecting; the little girl would trust him (although she should not) if she knew his identity; the girl is afraid for the very man who has just robbed her of the only money she has to keep herself alive.

In the past, Nell has feared vague, evil forces that seem to stalk her grandfather, but such forces were "nothing compared with that which now oppressed her" (230, ch. 31). Now she realizes that her own beloved grandfather embodies corruption, and, while she can flee from the malicious villains whose corruption she has conceptualized but has experienced only briefly in her dealings with Quilp, she cannot flee from her own grandfather. Corruption thus entangles Nell herself,

and it is this intimate contact with evil that terrifies Nell:

No strange robber, no treacherous host conniving at the plunder of his guests, or stealing to their beds to kill them in their sleep, no nightly prowler, however terrible and cruel, could have awakened in her bosom half the dread which the recognition of her silent visitor inspired. (230)

Moreover, the effects of such contact are not merely psychological, for "the man she had seen that night, wrapt in the game of chance, lurking in her room, and counting the money by the gloomy light" (230) is "a something to recoil from," not only because he reflects a grotesque version of her grandfather, but because he might deprive her of all means of subsistence. Worse yet, in his obsessive quest for money, he might use the pretty Nell herself as a source of income. This dark thought appears to loom in some corner of her mind because the "monstrous distortion" before her elicits the same repugnance she has felt towards the lecherous Quilp.

Upon considering the perspectives of Nell suggested by Quilp, Mrs. Jarley, and Grandfather Trent, as well as Nell's own responses to these perspectives, one can conclude that what Dickens has given with one hand in *Curiosity Shop*, he has taken away with the other. If he has immortalized a girl of pristine innocence, he has also conveyed her connection to a material world. It is almost as though Dickens proves to himself, and to his readers, that if it is death one wants, one can attain it only through the pain of involvement. Dickens's corporeal characters call into question Nell's inviolable status by confirming the physical and psychological attributes that make her susceptible to pain. Of course, we should not be too surprised by the demystification of Nell since it is executed by the same man who refused to romanticize workhouses and cheap distant schools, as well as the "damp rotten houses" and hungry children "scantily fed and clothed" past which Nell herself treads as she flees the city of London.

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## The Flawed Craft of A. E. Housman

A. R. Coulthard

Most textbooks acknowledge the limited tonal and thematic range of Housman's verse, a deficiency Housman defended in the prefatory piece to *More Poems*, published the year before his death:

They say my verse is sad: no wonder,  
Its narrow measure spans  
Tears of eternity, and sorrow,  
Not mine, but man's.

(*The Collected Poems* 155)

But once this narrowness is conceded, the typical anthologist then proceeds to praise Housman as a supreme craftsman. John Bowyer and John Brooks, for instance, call Housman's verse "perfect in form and feeling" (883). E. K. Brown and J. O. Bailey consider Housman "A perfect, if limited, technician" (704). Donald Gray and G. B. Tennyson say that Housman's poems are "rigorously controlled, transmuted by measure, rhyme, and a carefully chosen diction into an understated eloquence" (829), a judgment echoed by the editors of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, who applaud Housman's "control of cadence" and "quiet poignancy" (1882). Walter Houghton and Robert Stange go even farther in adamantly asserting that "to suggest that he was anything less than a superb literary technician would be obnoxious" (829).

Readers who scrutinize the entire Housman canon may find cause to question such panegyrics, for sprinkled throughout the 229 poems are instances of awkward diction and odd syntax contrived for the sake of rhyme and / or meter, as well as lapses in taste and the most hackneyed of clichés. More often than the best stylists do, Housman sacrifices gracefulness to the rigid form requirements he set for himself. Though Houghton and Stange view his art as "poetry of the word" (828), when Housman fails, it is usually a failure of idiom. Yeats's dictum that "Our words must seem inevitable" (Allen 102) is a demanding but fair standard for excellent craftsmanship. Housman fails to measure up to it with a frequency not generally recognized.

Some of the words with which Housman chose to end lines seem anything but inevitable. For instance, in poem L of *A Shropshire Lad* (hereafter *SL*), he uses the odd coinage "lighten" (for "lightning") to provide a rhyme for "Knighton." In the same otherwise serious poem, "country of easy livers" makes an inappropriately comic rhyme with "rivers." In the later *Additional Poems* (hereafter *AP*), Housman resorts to the clumsily ambiguous "Divinities disanointed" for a rhyme with "the end appointed" (XXI). In poem XLV of *More Poems* (hereafter *MP*), he awkwardly describes a child's sandcastle as an "unremaining mound" for a couplet rhyme with "found." Another poem ends with the strained coinage "ruinward" to rhyme (weakly) with "regard" (*MP* XLIII). The slangy "ail" of "Maiden, you can heal his ail" (*SL* VI) abandons the formal diction of the poem for a metrical rhyme with "pale." In a few instances, rhyme and syllable count even take precedence over euphony, as in the limping final line of this cryptic pentameter poem:

He, standing hushed, a pace or two apart,  
Among the bluebells of the listless plain,  
Thinks, and remembers how he cleansed his heart  
And washed his hands in innocence in vain.  
(*MP* XXVIII)

The merciless critic of grammatical lapses in Latin translations was not so strict in his own practices. For instance, in poem I of *Last Poems* (hereafter *LP*), Housman misplaces "on" in "And out beyond it, clear and wan, / Reach the gulfs of evening on" for the sake of meter and rhyme. Another poem allows the incorrect past tense "we sprung" to rhyme with "young" (*MP* XXXVI). In "The football sprang and fell" (*MP* XXXIV), Housman uses the correct verb form but creates with it a sort of ungrammatical metaphor by having a football spring all by itself. This poem also includes the dubious parallelism of the second line of the couplet "When I and not my heir / Was young and there." A similarly awkward compounding also forms "Good lads are left and true" (*AP* XX). Sometimes a syntactic oddity creates unnecessary ambiguity, as in "To-morrow after new young men / The sergeant he must see" (*LP* V). Does Housman mean "after tomorrow" or is "after" merely redundant with "To-morrow"?

The "sergeant he" of this last passage is one of the many instances of Housman's use of double subjects as a meter-making device. The same poem opens with "The Queen she," and "Mithridates, he died old" (*SL* LXII), the final line of "Terence, This Is Stupid Stuff," is a well-known example of this violation of standard grammar. The theory that such "folksy" utterances are appropriate to unlettered speakers like the young soldier and Terence the farmboy may be refuted by the fact that Housman never totally takes on the guise of his putative narrators. The same grenadier who says "the sergeant he" (twice) sounds like the learned poet himself when he extemporizes "For in the grave, they say, / Is neither knowledge nor device," and Terence knows his Milton and Pliny well enough, in addition to how to astutely defend Housman's pessimistic brand of verse. The voice of Housman dominates his poems, so he must take credit or blame for their mode of speech.

That there is more to praise than condemn does not negate the fact that Housman penned clunkers like "As I stand gazing down / In act upon the cressy brink" (*SL* XX). Read the passage without "In act"—the phrase serves no purpose except to give the second line eight beats to match its rhyming tetrameter, "These are the thoughts I often think." To keep in step with the fourteen- and fifteen-beat measure of another poem, Housman has a soldier-to-be throw in a meaningless "for nothing" when he refers to the queen "Who will dress me free for nothing in a uniform of red" (*SL* XXXIV). This uncharacteristic long line bests Housman again when he not only resorts to a double subject but commits comic bathos (for a couplet rhyme with "thick") by having his bellicose patriot conclude, "And the enemies of England they shall see me and be sick."

Housman doesn't always measure up to his customary

short line either. For instance, he relies on the awkward Scots dialect term for "nightfall" to make the wordy trimeter of "At to-fall of the day" (MP XLIV). An awkward, archaic "hence" (meaning "from this place") fills out "Clean of guilt, pass hence and home" (SL XLIV). The more blatantly redundant leave-taking of "Though one departs away" (AP XX) serves only to match "But he departs to-day" in syllable and rhyme. Other fillers are downright odd, as when Housman wishes a wanderer luck in his travels "By falling stream and standing hill" (SL XXXVII), as if a hill could do otherwise. Another poem reminds us what status do when the speaker says, "And brooding on my heavy ill, / I met a statue standing still" (SL LI). Such bizarre fillers indicate how far Housman would go to preserve verse form.

Housman also "unfills" some of his lines in less than felicitous ways. He abbreviates "abates," for instance, to keep intact the tetrameter of "And I shall have to bate my price" (LP V). The slangy form of "spikenerd" jangles against the elevated diction of another poem:

Their arms the rust hath eaten,  
Their statues none regard:  
Arabia shall not sweeten  
Their dust, with all her nard. (MP III)

"Tell me of runes to grave / That hold the bursting wave" (MP XLV) is nonsense until one realizes that Housman has shortened "engrave" to hold its line to a trimeter. (An engraving to hold back the waves of time also mixes a metaphor.) Again, it seems that the poet is putting measure and rhyme above higher aesthetic concerns.

Some of Housman's odder constructions result from ellipsis for the sake of form. In "Heighho, 'twas true and pity" (MP XXXIII), for example, the omission of "a" before "pity" is even more awkward than the yoking of adjective and noun in the complement. "Undone with misery, all they can / Is to hate their fellow man" (SL XLI) needs a "do" after "can" for grammar (which, of course, would have forced Housman to revise the couplet to restore meter and rhyme.) Another clumsy line could have been corrected more easily. "Fred keeps the house all kinds of weather" (SL XXV) deletes "in" for syllable count when the omission of "the" instead would have been more idiomatic and still held the line to nine beats: "Fred keeps house in all kinds of weather, / And clay's the house he keeps."

In other instances, Housman's celebrated eloquence succumbs to simple bad taste. For example, he elegizes doomed soldiers with the grotesque mixed metaphor of "Dear to friends and food for powder" (SL XXXV), and his epithet "Lovely lads and dead and rotten" is more insipid than moving (in a line made even worse by strained parallelism). In another soldier poem, a lass invents an amusingly melodramatic metaphor for a bullet when she testily tells the lad who has deserted her for war to "go lie there with your leaden lover / For ever and a day" (LP XIII).

But no Housman effort tops "The True Lover" (SL LIII) for sheer silliness. After a rather lengthy conversation with his reluctant sweetheart, a young man reveals that he is even now in the process of committing suicide over her, or, as he elegantly phrases it, "for you I stopped the clock." His beloved's next words are shaped to suggest the method of

death the unrequited swain has chosen:

"Oh lad, what is it, lad, that drips  
Wet from your neck on mine?  
What is it falling on my lips,  
My lad, that tastes of brine?"

The doomed youth's swaggering reply:

"Oh like enough 'tis blood, my dear,  
For when the knife has slit  
The throat across from ear to ear  
'Twill bleed because of it."

Were it not for the solemn conclusion lamenting the tragic way these "lovers crown their vows" (and the fact that Housman always honors suicide), this howler would pass for choice satire. "Mr. Housman's Message," Ezra Pound's parody of Housman's melodramatically gloomy metier, pales beside it.

The bogus emotion of other poems belies itself in similarly banal gestures and hackneyed expressions. The climactic line of a puerile imitation of Hardy's "The Man He Killed" has a crestfallen ex-soldier recalling the slain enemy who "laughed and kissed his hand to me and died" (MP XXXVII). A poem glorifying friendship (MP XXX) ends with the speaker, who "was born to die for you," telling his comrade to "whistle and I'll be there." In his elegy to "A. J. J." (MP XLII), that "Dear fellow," Housman even resorts to the tired "heart of gold" tribute.

To be fair, all of these last examples are from *More Poems*, which was printed from manuscript remains after the author's death (as were the first eighteen of the twenty-three *Additional Poems*). We can't be sure that Housman would not have corrected some of the faults noted in his manuscript poems or simply kept them from print. But we can be sure that Housman's slips as a poet are by no means limited to the manuscripts he may or may not have considered finished. The acclaimed *A Shropshire Lad* supplies the largest number of what I have considered Housman's worst offenses as a stylist, and approximately two-thirds of my cases in point are found in poems Housman either saw into print or approved as completed ("Note on the Text," *The Collected Poems* 7). "The True Lover," Housman's most dreadful work, is not from a possibly abandoned manuscript but from *A Shropshire Lad*.

Still, few writers could survive unscathed a close examination of their weakest poems, find them where you will. Many of the failings I have delineated, however, are present also in Housman's most popular work, the pieces usually favored by anthologists. For instance, "Loveliest of Trees" (SL II), Housman's best-loved nature lyric, is tainted by the arbitrary use of "room" to designate time in "And since to look at things in bloom / Fifty springs are little room"—a word that answers rhyme and meter but is hardly the inevitable choice required of the finest poetry, a demand that is especially reasonable for so brief a poem. "To an Athlete Dying Young" (SL XIX) is similarly flawed by the rhyme-dictated "cut" for "broken" in "Eyes the shady night has shut / Cannot see the record cut." This famous poem has other weak spots. The opening quatrain contorts syntax for meter and rhyme with "Man and boy stood cheering by," and the concluding couplet, "And find unwithered on its curls / The garland briefer than a girl's," has better sound than sense. (How

can a garland be both unwithered and brief?)

The popular "Is My Team Ploughing" (SL XXVII) opens with the deceased inquirer wondering, somewhat awkwardly, "Is my team ploughing / That I was used to drive," then shifts into a grammatical garble with "And [do you?] hear the harness jingle / [As] When I was man alive?" The grammar of "Is football playing" also is questionable, and "The goal stands up," merely states what all football goals do. The witty "When I Was One and Twenty" (SL XIII) features a similar superfluity locating the heart in "The heart out of the bosom / Was never given in vain" to balance out the six- and seven-beat lines.

Terence, This Is Stupid Stuff" (SL LXII) displays Housman in top form but nonetheless preserves the exceedingly clumsy (and ungrammatical) "They shook, they stared as white's their shirt," and "The Chestnut Casts His Flambeau" (LP IX) matches the excellent "My lad, no pair of kings our mothers bore" with the flat, fuzzy "We want the moon, but we shall get no more." "The Immortal Part" (SL XLIII), Housman's most profoundly original pessimistic statement, is tainted by the strained, banal "Now you labor not with child," and the astringent "Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries" (LP XXXVII) has earth's foundations doing the impossible in "The hour when earth's foundations fled" to contrive a rhyme for "dead."

## The Physiological Determinism Debate in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Terri A. Hasseler

"Those who see any difference between  
soul and body have neither."

"Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young"  
Oscar Wilde

A major critical focus of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is the bartering away of his soul. Temptation readings of *Dorian Gray* are fascinating because of their intertextual nature, but their tendency is to focus on the supernatural or Faustian feature of the bartering process. And in emphasizing Lord Henry Wotton's supernatural or mesmerizing influence, they neglect to consider other, more "scientific" forms of influence. In this paper, I will examine the form that this bartering takes, specifically the degree to which the Victorian controversy over physiological determinism is reflected in the separation of soul and body in *Dorian Gray*.

With the appearance of evolutionary theory, determinism became a common debate for nineteenth-century thinkers. Thomas Henry Huxley endorsed the belief that all life, thought, and behavior are reducible to the physical properties of life, in essence the body with all of its atoms and molecules. Even conscious actions are explainable in terms of their mechanistic properties: "I believe that we shall, sooner or later, arrive at a mechanical equivalent for facts of consciousness, just as we have arrived at a mechanical equivalent of heat" (qtd. in Calderwood 235). Indeed, Huxley concluded

Despite Housman's reputation as a craftsman, much of his poetry gives the impression of casual, formulaic composition. He apparently did not subject his own writing to the same rigorous standards of style and taste that he applied in evaluating the work of others. The uneven results confirm that Housman is a minor writer not only in the circumscribed emotional and philosophical universe of his poetry but in its limited stylistic achievement as well.

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that thought is nothing more than the pre-determined movement of protoplasm: "the thoughts to which I am now giving utterance, and your thoughts regarding them, are the expression of molecular changes in that matter of life which is the source of our other vital phenomena" (138).

With the writing of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde entered the conversation on physiological determinism. Wilde offers an understanding of destiny which replaces the more supernatural presence of a fate. In *Dorian Gray* the control over a personal destiny seems to be seated in the soul: once that soul is lost, the body, like an animal without a soul, determines the action. Actions become instinctually based on the vibrations and movements of the nerves and fibers of the body. After the loss of his soul, Dorian appears to be determined by the molecular arrangement of his body. In him, Wilde creates the essence of the Huxleyan predetermined automaton by denying him the capability of choice. Dorian is the creature that Huxley determines we all are.

Basil Hallward unconsciously introduces the presence of some undefinable controlling force when he discusses his introduction to Dorian. The sense of some eerie manipulative fate pervades their meeting. Basil explains to Henry,

"It was reckless of me, but I asked Lady Brandon to introduce me to him. Perhaps it was not so reckless, after all. It was simply inevitable. We would have spoken to each

... all sure of that. Dorian told me so afterwards. He, too, felt that we were destined to know each other. (29, emphasis mine)

In his conversation with Henry, Hallward continues to conjure up this unknown, external presence: "Your rank and wealth, Harry; my brains, such as they are—my art, whatever it may be worth; Dorian Gray's good looks—we shall all suffer for what the gods have given us, suffer terribly" (25-26). This undefined force is initially unlocated and confused with the supernatural concept of destiny. Slowly, however, it concentrates itself in the physiology of the characters, in particular Dorian.

Thrust into the amoral world of Lord Henry Wotton's philosophy, Dorian's internal being is awakened by Wotton's paradoxical statements, recited in Hallward's studio:

The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself, with desire for what its monstrous laws have made monstrous and unlawful.

(41-42)

Wotton's words dance about in Dorian's head and help him to concentrate on his internal reaction. In this garden temptation scene, Wilde appears to be playing with the physical property of the word "chord":

He was dimly conscious that entirely fresh influences were at work within him. Yet they seemed to him to have come really from himself. The few words that Basil's friend had said to him—words spoken by chance, no doubt, and with wilful paradox in them—had touched some secret chord that had never been touched before, but that he felt was now vibrating and throbbing to curious pulses.

(42, emphasis mine)

Lord Henry's epigrams strike a biological and almost sexual "chord" within the body of Dorian Gray, which reacts instinctively to the stimulation. Dorian's body is "touched" and responds with "pulses" and "vibrations." At this point, Lord Henry's words appear to awaken an inherent physical reaction in Dorian that readily responds to this hedonistic philosophy. That physical force which "seemed to have come really from himself" is equated with Wotton's philosophy. Dorian later tells Wotton, "For days after I met you, something seemed to throb in my veins" (73). The overtly sexual, physical overtones in this comment expose Dorian's fixation on biological terminology.

In Hallward's studio, Dorian makes the disastrous choice which separates his soul from his body. In this scene, Wilde emphasizes Dorian's obsession with his body, his physical self. At the thought of losing his beauty, "a sharp pang of pain struck through him like a knife, and made each delicate fibre of his nature quiver" (49). Dorian's whole understanding of life is based on the physical, knowable beauty of his body. Since his soul is untouchable, unseeable, he believes it to be

<sup>1</sup>Cardinal Newman preached that each person's soul has an existence separate from the body, an existence that could culminate in eternal life or perdition:

The point to be considered is this, that every soul of man which is or has been on earth, has a separate existence; and that, in

irrelevant. This sentiment mirrors the young Fisherman's comments in the Wildean fairy tale, "The Fisherman and his Soul": "Of what use is my soul to me? I cannot see it. I may not touch it. I do not know it. Surely I will send it away from me, and much gladness shall be mine" (148). Like the Fisherman, Dorian sends away the one, nonphysical part of his body:

I shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful. But this picture will remain always young. It will never be older than this particular day of June . . . If it were only the other way! If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that—for that—I would give everything! . . . I would give my soul for that! (49)

In his narcissistic love, the materialist's fall begins. Dorian's soul begins its "separate existence" in the portrait of himself.<sup>1</sup>

An interesting dilemma that is presented by this separation is the decay of the soul in the picture. In Wilde's "The Fisherman and his Soul," the young fisherman also seeks to sever his soul from his body so that he might live with the creatures of the sea. A witch in the tale locates the soul's presence in the shadow of the body, and then the fisherman cuts his soul from him. As the soul travels across the world, it slowly develops into a wicked and vile creature, epitomizing all of the vileness that the young fisherman has escaped by remaining in the sea. Like Dorian's soul, the fisherman's soul has been cast off and has a separate existence; however, there is one difference. Dorian's soul, which resides in the painting, physically represents Dorian's vile and wicked world. Since Dorian can understand only materiality, the soul must visually and physically expose his evil, otherwise Dorian would remain ignorant of its existence. More importantly, without the soul Dorian lacks volition, because the soul, according to Newman, "animates the body while life lasts" (PPS 778).

With the rejection of his soul, Dorian enmeshes himself in the life of the Huxleyan materialist. Lord Henry Wotton, always the spokesperson for scientific materialism, later defines the mechanistic understanding of the roles of volition and protoplasm: "Life is not governed by will or intention. Life is a question of nerves, and fibres, and slowly built-up cells in which thought hides itself and passion has its dreams" (255-56). Henry's comments aptly reveal the state that Dorian has fallen into. Even Dorian considers this materialistic philosophy during his flirtation with experiences:

and for a season he inclined to the materialistic doctrines of the Darwinian movement in Germany, and found a curious pleasure in tracing the thoughts and passions of men to some pearly cell in the brain, or some white nerve in the body . . . (164)

Following the murder of Basil Hallward, Dorian, interestingly enough, understands the Darwinian theories in terms of himself:

There are moments, psychologists tell us, when the passion

eternally, not in time merely—in the unseen world, not merely in this,—not only during its mortal life, but ever from the hour of its creation, whether joined to a body of flesh or not. (PPS 778)

"Whether joined to the body of flesh or not," a soul lives and functions.

for sin, or for what the world calls sin, so dominates a nature, that every fibre of the body, as every cell of the brain, seems to be instinct with fearful impulses. Men and women at such moments lose the freedom of their will. They move to their terrible end as automats move. Choice is taken from them, and conscience is either killed, or, if it lives at all, lives but to give rebellion its fascination, and disobedience its charm. (226)

This lapse into deterministic terms reveals how freedom of choice is absent from Dorian's life, precisely because he has cast it aside. And the "fibres" and "cells" are determining his actions.<sup>2</sup>

With this in mind, the reader can easily follow Dorian's predetermined fall into scientific materialism. Dorian's materialism is never hidden; he embodies the scientific detachment of Lord Henry's thought: "It was clear to him that the experimental method was the only method by which one could arrive at any scientific analysis of the passions . . ." (84). Dorian's experimentation with the passions begins with Sybil Vane. He appears to be deeply interested in and moved by Sybil, yet it is important to note that a type of determining force brought them together, a force much like the one that acquainted Basil and Dorian. Dorian tells Henry,

"You will laugh at me, I know, but I really went in and paid a whole guinea for the stage-box. To the present day I can't make out why I did so; and yet if I hadn't,—my dear Harry, if I hadn't I should have missed the greatest romance of my life." (73, emphasis mine).

His understanding of Sybil is based on artificial, romantic appearances. Yet, Basil very aptly sees that Dorian's completeness as a human rests in his love for Sybil: "If this girl can give a soul to those who have lived without one, . . . she is worthy of all your adoration, worthy of the adoration of the world" (110). Hallward prophesies, "The gods made Sybil Vane for you. Without her you would have been incomplete" (110). When Dorian rejects his Sybil, he has rejected the one character who could give to him a soul and thus make him complete.

Following Sybil Vane's suicide, Dorian speaks of the determinism that governs his existence: "The past could always be annihilated. Regret, denial, or forgetfulness could

do that. But the future was inevitable" (149). It is appropriately the physical changes in the portrait that kindle this feeling of being determined. He relinquishes control over his body, a control that is tenuous at best: "He felt that the time had really come for making his choice. Or had his choice already been made? Yes, life had decided that for him—life, and his own infinite curiosity about life" (135). Yet, the reader must remember that at this point of the novel, Dorian has already cast off his soul, a soul which, according to nineteenth-century Christian writers, would have given him the power to make choices.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, even his good intention of righting the wrong of rejecting Sybil is useless. Lord Henry notes, "Good resolutions are useless attempts to interfere with scientific laws" (129).<sup>4</sup>

With all hope behind him, the scientific thoughts of Lord Henry absorb the materialistic Dorian: "He had been always enthralled by the methods of natural science . . . And so he had begun by vivisectioning himself, as he had ended by vivisectioning others" (82). Dorian's self-vivisection begins with the objectification of his picture:

As he often remembered afterwards, and always with no small wonder, he found himself at first gazing at the portrait with a feeling of almost scientific interest. That such a change should have taken place was incredible to him. And yet it was a fact. Was there some subtle affinity between the chemical atoms that shaped themselves into form and colour on the canvas, and the soul that was within him? (124)

Apparently, Dorian has reduced both his body and soul to a scientific object. Yet, in his belief that his soul still exists within him, Dorian reveals his confusion. The soul he sent away has left him. The transformation of the picture is not indicative of an affinity between Dorian's "inner soul" and the "outer painting." Rather, the painting is the physical representation of the soul's separate existence, much like the shadow form of the young fisherman's soul.

Dorian's reliance on the biological and chemical nature of "affinity" reflects his complete mechanistic attitude. In his methodological search for a reason to explain the strange transformation of his picture, Dorian questions, "Might there not be some curious scientific reason for it all? If thought

explainable in terms of natural selection" (31). Therefore, humankind is predetermined both physically (eating, breathing, thinking) and morally.  
<sup>3</sup>Nineteenth-century writers such as Archbishop Manning and Cardinal Newman believed that volition was seated in the soul. Manning argues that, "The Will, whatever he be, is distinct from the thinking brain" (472). In his essay "The Relation of the Will to Thought," he distinguishes between unconscious and conscious thought and illuminates the role of volition:

Our unconscious acts are acts of man—that is, acts of which only man is capable; but only our conscious acts are human acts—that is, done under the normal conditions of rational action, or under the condition of a moral and responsible agent. (471)

He later identifies the agent of will: "life, intelligence, and will are all properties or faculties of a personal agent, who is in contact with matter, but is not call 'soul'" (479).

<sup>4</sup>Earlier in the novel, Lord Henry also applies physiological determinism to love: "Why, even in love it is purely a question for physiology. It has nothing to do with our own will" (53).

<sup>2</sup>In "T. H. Huxley's Rhetoric and the Mind-Matter Debate: 1868-1874" Edwin Block comments on Huxley's understanding of voluntary action and the consequences that result: "The effect of explaining voluntary action in terms of physiology is to change the meaning of voluntary action and reduce the importance or obscure the meaning of the term volition. . ." (27). In addition, this theory makes moral choices a part of the physical consciousness of a human being. Huxley states,

Assuming the position of the absolute moralists, let it be granted that there is a perception of right and wrong innate in every man. This means, simply, that when certain ideas are presented to his mind, the feeling of approbation arises; and when certain others, the feeling of disapprobation. To do your duty is to earn the approbation of your conscience, or moral sense; to fail in your duty is to feel its disapprobation, as we all say . . . Admitting its truth, I do not see how the moral faculty is on a different footing from any of the other faculties of man." (qtd. in Block 31)

According to Block, Huxley ignores volition and makes "morality something like a trait of the species, treating it as a development of the 'cosmic process'"

could exercise its influence upon a living organism, might not thought exercise an influence upon dead and inorganic things?" (136). This search leads Dorian straight into the chemical and biological elements common in all creatures: "Nay, without thought or conscious desire, might not things external to ourselves vibrate in unison with our moods and passions, atom calling to atom in secret love of strange affinity?" (136). Dorian understands only his physical nature, for that is all that is left to him.

Furthermore, if Dorian's physical existence is all that remains and if all creatures are determined by their biological make-up, then the ancestors of those creatures play an important role in determining what they will be like. In the "Critic as Artist," Wilde suggests that the body and soul relive the lives of those who have come before (383): Dorian is not only the storehouse of a million molecules and fibers, but also the amalgamation of a million ancestors' genetic influences. Donald R. Dickson, in his article "In a Mirror that Mirrors the Soul: Masks and Mirrors in *Dorian Gray*," discusses the role of genetics in Dorian's life. Dickson quotes "The Critic as Artist," where Wilde testifies to a mechanistic understanding of heredity:

By revealing to us the absolute mechanism of all action, and so freeing us from the self-imposed and trammelling burden of moral responsibility, the scientific principle of Heredity has become, as it were, the warrant for the contemplative life. (*Artist* 382-83).

Dorian's heritage becomes very important, for he is the culmination of thousands of molecules all preformed and predetermined by his ancestors' genes.

Through Lord Henry's prying, we find that Dorian is the product of a very beautiful woman: "Margaret Devereux was one of the loveliest creatures I ever saw, Henry . . . She was romantic, though. All the women of that family were. The men were a poor lot, but, egad! the women were wonderful!" (58). Henry's Uncle George concurs: "If he is like his mother he must be a good-looking chap" (57, emphasis mine). Once we are reminded that Dorian's beauty is nothing more than the "random arrangement" of the genetic influences of countless ancestors—his mother, grandmother, great-grandmother and so on—we begin to question his complete genetic make-up. What characteristics other than beauty have carried over through natural selection? Dorian's grandfather paid a mercenary to insult and kill his new son-in-law. This "treacherous crime" should not come as a surprise: all the men in Dorian's family were "a poor lot." Dorian, then, is the summation of a genetic line full of beautiful women and evil men, and Dorian is no exception. Jan B. Gordon discusses Dorian's empirical definition of self:

Although taught to think of beauty as metaphysical, the discovery that even beauty may result from the random arrangement of particles is crucial to Dorian's initiation. Seeking to rebel against middle-class respect for science, Dorian Gray is paradoxically led into dependency upon an aesthetic that is mechanistically-based. (361)

Therefore, when Dorian peers at the pictures of his ancestors, his questions are not directed towards the nature of his relatives' particular actions, but towards the "poisonous germs"

that crept from their bodies to his:

Was it young Herbert's life that he sometimes led? Had some strange poisonous germ crept from body to body till it had reached his own? . . . Had the lover of Giovanna of Naples bequeathed him some inheritance of sin and shame? Were his own actions merely the dreams that the dead man had not dared to realize? (175)

In Dorian's understanding, "man was a being with myriad lives and myriad sensations, a complex multiform creature that bore within itself strange legacies of thought and passion, and whose very flesh was tainted with the monstrous maladies of the dead" (175).

Dorian's complete physically-based determinism culminates in the murder of Basil Hallward. The key to handling this murder, according to Dorian, is "not to realize the situation" (193). This sentiment echoes Wotton's earlier thoughts concerning Sybil Vane's death: "If one doesn't talk about a thing, it has never happened. It is simply expression . . . that gives reality to things" (137). Yet a mechanistic quality tinges this theory also. "I would suggest that we should appeal to Science to put us straight. The advantage of the emotions is that they lead us astray, and the advantage of Science is that it is not emotional" (65), Henry asserts earlier. According to Gordon, Dorian ignores the moral implications of his actions; he simply reverts to the method that has worked for him best—the disinterested scientific pose suggested by Henry (362). In fact, Dorian demands this pose from others also. Having murdered Basil, Dorian blackmails an old friend, Alan Campbell, into disposing of the body by chemical means. He pleads with Campbell to remain scientifically detached: "All I ask of you is to perform a certain scientific experiment . . . Look at the matter purely from the scientific point of view" (204). Dorian maintains his stance of nonchalant indifference, "How long will your experiment take, Alan?" he said, in a calm, indifferent voice" (207). In contrast with Dorian, Campbell refuses to separate science from the moral implications of the choices he makes (Gordon 362). Later, Campbell commits suicide, because presumably he cannot deal with being an accessory to Dorian's murder.

Dorian retains an indifferent attitude towards life until his death. When James Vane hunts for him, Dorian reveals the complete physical nature of his actions and thoughts: "From cell to cell of his brain crept the one thought; and the wild desire of live, most terrible of all man's appetites, quickened into force each trembling nerve and fibre" (222). It is important to note that it is the animalistic appetites of Dorian that respond and not a metaphysical presence. Dorian's desire to live appears to be rooted in the physical, the instinctual. Even the terror of dying is reduced to the fibers and nerves that evoke the physical state of fear: "It is nothing, Duchess," he murmured, 'my nerves are dreadfully out of order'" (243) and "Upstairs, in his own room, Dorian Gray was lying on a sofa, with terror in every tingling fibre of his body" (244). Contrary to the animalistic desire to remain physically alive, Dorian, himself, remains indifferent towards life: "The next day he did not leave the house, and, indeed, spent most of the time in his own room, sick with a wild terror of dying, and yet indifferent to life itself" (237). This indifference suggests that any growth, feeling, or understanding has been stifled. The

materialistic Dorian has reached the stage in his life where death is inevitable. Because the only basis for his life, his physical body, has remained the same for numerous years, he has attained complete stasis. Henry unknowingly comments on Dorian's state of existence: "As for a spoiled life, no life is spoiled but one whose growth is arrested" (102). Having experienced all physical passions and pleasures from music to ritual, the mechanistic life is at an end. There is nowhere else to turn. All metaphysical development has been rejected.

Dorian internalizes everything, not aesthetically but physically. He was once human because all humans have a body and a soul, according to such Christian writers as Newman and Manning. In casting off his soul, he has limited himself to the physical. Only in the end does Dorian recognize the very real existence of the soul: "The soul is a terrible reality. It can be bought, and sold, and bartered away. It can be poisoned, or made perfect. There is a soul in each one of us. I know it" (254). This epiphany comes too late, for Dorian has rejected his soul. In separating the soul from the body Dorian denies himself both will and life. As Wilde had written in "The Fisherman and his Soul": "Once in his life may a man send his Soul away, but he who receiveth back his Soul must keep it with him for ever, and this is his punishment and his reward" (183). For the horrible acts which are etched on his face, the "withered, wrinkled, and loathsome . . . visage" (264) on the floor is punished in a physical death. Dorian accepts this understanding of punishment when he declares just prior to his death, "There was purification in punishment" (260). Yet, his reward? His reward is that he is fully human and his

soul resides within him once again.

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## Overdetermined Allegory in *Jekyll and Hyde*

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Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde* has frequently been criticized for its use of the "simplistic" allegorical mode. Leslie Fiedler, for example, argues that the novella's "allegory is too schematic, too slightly realized in terms of fiction and character . . . while its explicit morality demands that evil be portrayed finally as an obvious monster" (x).<sup>1</sup> Although other critics like Richard Gaughan argue in favor of the novella's complex moral outlook, they dismiss the notion of allegory itself as crude and reductive. Gaughan states that the "easiest and most treacherous way" to interpret *Jekyll and Hyde* is to read it as an allegory (187).

This dismissal of allegory as simplistic relies upon Romantic notions of allegory which view it as a mechanistic, moralistic mode.<sup>2</sup> Many reevaluations of the allegorical mode have argued for a more complex understanding of allegory. Although Romantic and post-Romantic thought has viewed allegory as limiting interpretation by imposing on the reader a rigid, moralistic scenario, many theorists refute this view by arguing that the allegorical mode is polysystemic and overdetermined. Stephen Barney states that allegory leads ultimately to indeterminacy: allegory "is at once arbitrary and

autonomous, affirming nothing, connected and referential. Allegory, like intelligence itself, respects both the different and the same" (49). Gay Clifford supports this view of the allegorical mode by arguing that "the narrative form of many allegories appears to display incompatible tendencies" (33-34). Thus, as Edwin Honig suggests, allegory works through a process of constant layering of meaning" (53).

Although allegory often utilizes binary oppositions, these oppositions do not necessarily represent the pure good and pure evil Fiedler reads in *Jekyll and Hyde*. Angus Fletcher argues that

the crux of the critical problem in the study of allegory is the way we interpret this dualism. If we simply accept the war between absolutes as the ground plan of all allegories, we are being naive in one important respect. True the war is always going on. But we should not assume the polar opposites are really separated by any distance. (224)

Thus allegory through its use of dualities does not necessarily affirm binary logic, but complicates it by demonstrating how closely related binary opposites are. It is with this concept of

<sup>1</sup>See Veeder and Hirsch's introduction to *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde after One Hundred Years* for a discussion of criticism of the novella's moral simplicity.

<sup>2</sup>Stephen Barney notes that Romantic thought maintained that allegory "mechanically lays down the whole system of reference, provides no room for play of the imagination, kills the object in favor of the concept" (26).

overdetermined allegory that I read *Jekyll and Hyde*. I argue that the novella is allegorical, but not in the sense of presenting pure good and pure evil in the figures of Jekyll and Hyde. Simplistic moral allegory is Jekyll's conception of his story, not the novella's. I read Jekyll's experiment as an attempt to reify his superego and id into separate entities. His experiment fails because the novella, like Freud's *The Ego and Id*, demonstrates the interpenetration between id and superego.<sup>3</sup>

Jekyll's experiment may be read as an attempt to literalize abstract and intertwined parts of the human psyche. Barney classifies one type of allegory as reification allegory. He argues that "reification includes personification and is like it in 'making literal,' in introducing among the physical and causative precenses of a fiction something which otherwise would remain a figure of speech, a metaphor" (34). Jekyll attempts to make abstract parts of his psyche real: he attempts to make his existence a reification allegory. In his "Full Statement of the Case" Jekyll remarks that "if each, I told myself, could be housed in separate identities, life would be relieved of all that was unbearable; the unjust might go his way, delivered from the aspirations and remorse of his more upright twin; and the just could walk steadfastly and securely on his upward path" (61). Through his experiment Jekyll attempts to bring allegory into the physical world: he attempts to make personification into a science.

Jekyll's understanding of allegory, however, is a simplistic one. As Gaughan observes, "Jekyll's own allegorical reading of his life simply reflects the duality on which he has staked everything" (187). Jekyll reads his own life according to crude binary oppositions. In his statement Jekyll continues to conceive of Hyde as "pure evil" (64) and of Jekyll as his pure "original character" (72). But Jekyll misreads the results of his experiment. Although Jekyll states that "I hazard the guess that man will be ultimately known for a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous, and independent denizens" (61), he refutes that undeveloped thought suggested in the statement by insisting upon the rigid contrast between Hyde's otherness and primitiveness as "slime of the pit" (74) and Jekyll's familiarity and rationality. Moreover, his insistence upon the independence of these "denizens" coincides with his simplistic notion of allegory. The multiplicity of personality suggested in this statement thus could be reified in the same way that the duality of personality is ostensibly reified in his experiment.<sup>4</sup>

Jekyll's statement relies upon a rigid sense of allegory, a forced (mis)reading of the results of his experiment. Jekyll's statement, however, is not the "truth" of *Jekyll and Hyde*. The novella itself works in an overdetermined allegorical mode, a mode in which Jekyll's experiment reifies the id and the superego only to demonstrate their interpenetration. Furthermore, Jekyll's experiment occurs only by displacing the very site of identity itself: his experiment deconstructs the ego, thus

presenting a complex view of personality rather than the reductive view many critics of the novel posit.<sup>5</sup>

In *The Ego and the Id* Freud conceives of the ego as a site of mediation between the superego and the id: it is the place where the id and the superego send messages to each other. Freud presents the ego as "a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface" (26). Jekyll's experiment shatters the ego through its literal transformation of the body and through its reification of id and superego. If the id and superego can exist independently, the need for the mediation function of the ego is dispensed with—the ego becomes redundant. In his statement Jekyll expresses his perception of the instability of the ego: "I began to perceive more deeply than it has ever yet been stated the trembling immateriality, the mist-like transience, of this seemingly so solid body in which we walk attired" (61). Jekyll's observation is borne out in the experiment itself. His scientific literalization of allegory dissolves the ego through the agencies of transformation and possession. Fletcher conceives the allegorical agents as demons which "compartmentalize function" (40). Through his drinking of the draught Jekyll's ego becomes displaced by the demonic agents superego and id. When the scientist's body is possessed by the ideal Jekyll (superego) his ego vanishes; conversely when his body is possessed and transformed by Hyde (id) his ego is again displaced. Ronald Thomas argues that Jekyll's purpose for creating Hyde is "to deny himself moral agency, to cease being an 'I'" (80). Through his reification of id and superego Jekyll can exclaim "think of it—I did not even exist!" (65).

In his statement Jekyll continues to align himself with the superego: he refers to himself as Jekyll, but refuses to call himself Hyde. Jekyll states "He [Hyde], I say—I cannot say I" (73). The novella itself, however, suggests the Jekyll cannot say "I" at all because he has dissolved his ego by eliminating its mediating function. Thus as Veeder suggests "Jekyll cannot call himself anything" (155).

The emphasis placed on mirrors and reflections in Jekyll's statement further illustrates the experiment's deconstruction of the "I." Lacan argues in "The Mirror Stage" that the formation of the ego begins with the infant's perception of his or her body as a stable reflection, a reflection which becomes internalized as the ego. For Lacan, however, this recognition is a misrecognition. The ego is an ideological illusion: identity is fractured and no stability is possible. Through his experiment Jekyll demonstrates the instability of the ego which lies behind the unified reflection.

Jekyll seeks out the mirror as an affirmation of his identity, but it affirms not stability but instability. Believing himself to be transformed back into Jekyll, Jekyll goes to the mirror to seek reassurance of this. He states, "I rushed to the mirror. At the sight that met my eyes, my blood was changed into something exquisitely thin and icy. Yes, I had gone to

bed Henry Jekyll and I had awakened Edward Hyde" (67). As a result of the experiment the mirror reflection demonstrates the instability and fractured nature of the subject rather than the unified "I" of the ego.

Jekyll's experiment not only displaces the ego, but also illustrates the impossibility of separating id and superego. Although the novella, like Jekyll, reifies Hyde into id and Jekyll into superego, unlike Jekyll himself, it does not conceive of them as binary opposites. Through its overdetermined allegory, it complicates their relationship rather than simplifying it. The novella's allegory, like psychoanalytic allegory, does not become a reductive system, but becomes a complex and overdetermined one. As Fletcher notes, psychoanalytic allegory tends "to overcomplicate the processes by which feeling is expressed symbolically" rather than oversimplifying them (280).<sup>6</sup>

*The Ego and the Id* Freud's schema presents an id and superego which are not only closely related but which display each other's characteristics. The id, the site of repressed violence, sexuality, primitiveness, is also the site of "unconscious guilt" (27), of the conscience associated with the superego. Freud remarks that "the normal man is not only far more immoral than he believes but also far more moral than he knows," suggesting that the unconscious id possesses as sense of morality (52). Similarly the superego, the site of morality, conscience, civilization, displays id-like characteristics. The superego is "a residue of the earliest object choices of the id" (34), and moreover uses the sadism and aggression of the id to control the ego. Freud states that the superego "can be supermoral and then become as cruel as only the id can be" (54).<sup>7</sup> Freud's conceptual model provides a view of id and superego as interpenetrated with each other's characteristics. Thus the id and superego are not rigid binary oppositions but are smeared with each other's traits.

The interconnectedness of id and superego may be read in *Jekyll and Hyde*. Unlike Jekyll himself the novella illustrates that Jekyll and the other superego-dominated representatives of Victorian society display Hyde-like characteristics and that Hyde himself is not "pure evil" but has much in common with the Victorian gentleman. I examine three sections of the novella which demonstrate the overdetermination of id and superego: "The Story of the Door," "Doctor Lanyon's Narrative," and "Henry Jekyll's Full Statement of the Case."

In "The Story of the Door" Enfield, one of the superego-dominated gentlemen in the novella, relates his account of Hyde's trampling of a little girl. Within a rigid binary logic Enfield would represent the superego voice of authority and Hyde the wild, random, anarchic id. The story itself, however, complicates this rigid dualism. Enfield relates that he "was coming home from some place at the end of the world, about three o'clock of a black winter morning" (9). A gentleman walking the street at three a.m. suggests a morality besmeared

with id-like pleasures.<sup>8</sup> Enfield, like Hyde, is out at a disreputable hour: the superego and id literally walk the same path. Enfield sees Hyde trample the girl and reacts, not by calling the police, summoning a superego authority to punish the anarchy of the id, but violently accosts Hyde: "I gave a view halloo, took to my heels, collared my gentleman, and brought him back to where there was already quite a group about the screaming child" (9). Enfield sends for a doctor, a representative of superego institutional authority, who upon seeing Hyde is filled "with the desire to kill him" (10). Both superego figures, Enfield and the doctor, display the aggressive sadism associated with the id. Moreover, Enfield explicitly comments that the superego route they choose—to punish Hyde by creating a public scandal, i.e., by using discourse to taint Hyde's "reputation"—is "the next best" thing to killing Hyde (10).

Similarly, Hyde commits an id-like act but displays superego characteristics afterward. Hyde's random violence toward the girl coincides with Freud's contention that the id's death drive is directed through sadism toward random external objects (41-45). Hyde's reaction to the public outcry against his violence, however, is that of a Victorian gentleman. Hyde says "No gentleman but wishes to avoid a scene. . . . Name your figure" (10). Threatened with public scandal, Hyde agrees to pay off the girl's family and while waiting for the check to clear he spends the night with Enfield and the girl's father. Enfield comments that "next day, when we had breakfasted, [we] went in a body to the bank" (10-11). Hyde is not "the slime of the pit" but a civilized gentleman who pays for his transgressions in a cordial manner.<sup>9</sup> Hyde's use of discourse (the check) and politeness to quell the anger of the crowd suggests the "knowing" id of Freud's schema, an id capable of understanding and obeying "moral" laws.

"Doctor Lanyon's Narrative" illustrates a similar interpenetration of superego and id. Lanyon is another of the superego figures which people the novella. Like Enfield, Uterson, and Jekyll he is a respectable professional. Jekyll's letter to Lanyon appeals to his sense of duty, yet the duty must be carried out through aggressive means: Lanyon must break into Jekyll's cabinet in order to get the chemicals. Only through a violent act in which "much damage" is done (55) can Lanyon gain access to Jekyll's chemicals and fulfill his duty. Only through calling upon id aggressivity can Lanyon appease his conscience. Furthermore, in his meeting with Hyde Lanyon displays the sadism and aggressiveness associated with the id. Lanyon illustrates the cruelty of the id of which Freud argues the superego is capable. Before receiving Hyde in his house Lanyon loads "an old revolver" (55), thus enlisting violence in the service of his duty to Jekyll. Moreover, Lanyon violates the stipulations of Jekyll's letter by forcing Hyde to drink the draught in his presence and taunts Hyde in the process "affecting a coolness" (58), sadistically torturing the impatient Hyde.

<sup>3</sup>It is of course anachronistic to assume that Stevenson was consciously influenced by Freud. Ed Block's "James Sully, Evolutionist Psychology and Late Victorian Gothic Fiction," however, provides evidence of the similarities between evolutionary psychology (which Stevenson studied at length) and the theories developed by Freud.

<sup>4</sup>Fernold E. Hogle argues that Jekyll's confession is constructed in order to affirm dualism, in order "to ensure that the notion of 'two sides' keeps con-

scious Western thought (Jekyll's included) from sensing a deeper play of differences, a nonbinary polymorphism at the 'base' of human nature" (161).

<sup>5</sup>C. Keith's assertion that "with the subtler psychology of today *Dr. Jekyll* has faded out" is called into question through an examination of Jekyll's deconstruction of the ego which illustrates that contemporaries' theories of subjectivity may easily be read in the novella.

<sup>6</sup>Joel Fineman's "The Structure of Allegorical Desire" argues that psychoanalytic discourse operates within an allegorical mode.

<sup>7</sup>Zizek comments that Freud's conclusion in *The Ego and the Id* is that "the id in itself already consists of unconscious, repressed beliefs, and that the superego consists of an unconscious knowledge" (152-53).

<sup>8</sup>Veeder notes that Enfield's statement associates "the patriarch" and "the Jug-

germoot" as questionable "men about town" (119).

<sup>9</sup>Brandlinger and Boyle comment upon Hyde's sophisticated control of discourse: "Hyde menaces society not just by criminal violence but by his ability to write checks and letters, draw up wills, and pen blasphemies in books of theology" (279).

Hyde behaves more like a gentleman than Lanyon. Veeder notes that "Hyde does the gentlemanly thing and keeps his bargain" (152). Further, Hyde defends the experiment in a Jekyll-like manner, addressing Lanyon as a fellow scientist. Hyde says, "'Lanyon, you remember your vows; what follows under the seal of our profession . . . you who have denied the virtue of transcendental medicine, who have decried your superiors behold!'" (58). Hyde defends the institutions of science, the brotherhood of the profession. Hyde is not "ape-like" here but is one possessed with a knowledge of and respect for social institutions.

Jekyll's statement of the case also demonstrates the inter-relatedness of id and superego. Although Jekyll rigidly maintains Hyde's primitiveness in his narrative—he refuses to recognize the gentleman in the beast—he does recognize that the superego participates in the id's pleasures. Jekyll states that Jekyll as superego, as reified conscience, "projected and shared in the pleasures and adventure of Hyde" (68). Jekyll as superego thus derives pleasure from the very source from which on the surface he appears to want to sever himself.<sup>10</sup> Jekyll as superego becomes morality personified, but only on the surface. The superego's derivation of pleasure from the id coincides with Zizek's discussion of the law as superego. He states that "smeared by an obscene vitality, the law itself—traditionally a pure, neutral universality—assumes the features of a heterogeneous, inconsistent, *bricolage* penetrated with enjoyment" (149). Jekyll as superego is the mask of respectability that seeks "to undo the evil done by Hyde" while deriving pleasure from that "evil" (66). Jekyll's reified superego is smeared with id.

Jekyll and Hyde may be read as an allegory, but only if allegory is understood as an overdetermined and indeterminate mode. Jekyll's allegorization of his life represents the Romantic notion of allegory as rigid and limiting. The "failure" of Jekyll's experiment and the construction of ambivalent allegorical figures throughout the novella demonstrate Fletcher's contention that allegories often operate within an "ambivalent cosmos" (145). Viewed from the perspective of overdetermined allegory Fiedler's "obvious monster" vanishes and Jekyll and Hyde remain too closely linked to represent an binary opposition of good and evil.

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- Thomas, Ronald R. "The Strange Voices in the Strange Case: Dr. Jekyll, Mr. Hyde, and the Voices of Modern Fiction." *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde after One Hundred Years*. Eds. William Veeder and Gordon Hirsch. Chicago & London: U of Chicago P, 1988. 73-106.
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- Zizek, Slavoj. *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*. Cambridge & London: MIT P, 1991.
- Dalby, Richard, ed. *Victorian Ghost Stories by Eminent Women Writers*. 1989. New York: Carroll & Graf, 1992. Pp. [xvii] + 347. \$9.95 paper. Includes stories by 21 women, English and American.
- Dennis, Barbara. *Charlotte Yonge (1823-1901) Novelist of the Oxford Movement: A Literature of Victorian Culture and Society*. Lewiston / Queenston / Lampeter: Edwin Mellen P, 1992. Pp. [vii] + 176. £29.95. Yonge's "first work was published in the second year of the Queen's reign, in 1838, and her last in late 1900, only weeks before Victoria's death. . . . Her literary career spans one of the most momentous epochs of British history, and she herself can be seen, in many ways, as a personification of it as she gives us her first-hand experience of some of the major movements of mind of the age. Those concerned with the church and the movement which convulsed it possess her pre-eminently; but as we shall demonstrate, the Oxford Movement as perceived and recorded by Charlotte Yonge becomes part of the fabric of society during the century and enters public consciousness at a level and to a degree unsuspected by the majority" (3-4).
- Duncan, Ian. *Modern Romance and Transformations of the Novel: The Gothic, Scott, and Dickens*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992. Pp. xii + 295. \$49.95. "Romance is the essential principle of fiction: its *difference* from a record of 'reality,' of 'everyday life.' . . . But even as the novel began to totalize its mimetic range it reasserted fiction, and not mimesis, as its critical principle, in an elaborate commitment to plot. Fiction in these novels is the effect above all of plot, conspicuous as a grammar of formal conventions, that is, a shared cultural order distinct from material and historical contingency. To read a plot—to take part in its work of recognition—is to imagine a transformation of life and its conditions, and not their mere reproduction" (2).
- Finn, Mary E. *Writing the Incommensurable: Kierkegaard, Rossetti, and Hopkins*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1992. Pp. 180. \$29.95. "Subjectivity and actuality are incommensurable—they have that difference with each other in common. In pitting the incommensurable—the individual, interiority, subjectivity, and, especially, faith—against actuality, infinite resignation, the ethical and the universal, Kierkegaard establishes relationships of immeasurability, but relationships nonetheless. But always at the same time, unaccountable, unknowable excess threatens to dismantle these tenuous relationships that allow at least provisional expression. Once we understand the dual nature of incommensurability, we see that it permeates the Kierkegaard lexicon. Four terms from that lexicon organize this study: anxiety, lyric voice, repetition, and choice. They are interrelated, here no less than in the pseudonymous works from which they come. Each chapter thus erects a theoretical framework based on a Kierkegaardian pseudonymous text within which to read closely poems by Hopkins and Rossetti" (10).
- Halladay, Jean R. *Eight Late Victorian Poets Shaping the Aesthetic Sensibility of an Age: Alice Meynell, John Davidson, Francis Thompson, Mary Coleridge, Katherine Tynan, Arthur Symonds, Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson*. Lewiston / Queenston / Lampeter: Edwin Mellen P, 1993. Pp. ii + 144. \$49.95. "All the writers to be studied here were considered important poets by some or many critics and other poets . . . between 1890 and 1910. I make no claim that any one of them is a great writer, although some have elements of greatness. I present them here as they were: minor poets who greatly influenced the literary world in which they lived" (ii).
- Jordan, Thomas E. *The Degeneracy Crisis and Victorian Youth*. Albany: State U of New York P, 1993. Pp. xvii + 335. \$59.50 cloth, \$19.95 paper. "This study takes an extended period of time [roughly from Trafalgar to the Great War], approximately a century, and examines stress due to health and work and social circumstances. It focuses on the young and examines height as an empirical variable in their growth" (xiii).
- Katz, Wendy R. *The Emblems of Margaret Gatty: A Study of Allegory in Nineteenth-Century Children's Literature*. New York: AMS, 1993. Pp. xii + 195. \$57.50. "In her emblems, I contend, Margaret Gatty chose an art form that indicates the apparent dichotomy of her life. Her message is didactic and conservative, but the means by which the message is expressed is innovative and indicative of a flexible mind. In the emblem, I will suggest, inheres an interpretive structure that subverts its typically conservative subject matter. Of all Gatty's work, it is the emblem book that draws together the various strands of her being and indicates the breadth of her knowledge, the scope of her varied gifts, and her place as a writer for children" (27-28).
- Kern, Stephen. *The Culture of Love: Victorians to Moderns*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992. Pp. x + 458. \$34.95. ". . . between the Victorian and the modern periods love became more authentic as men and women came to reflect more profoundly about what it means to be in love. . . ." (11). Kern divides his study by periods—1847-1880, 1880-1900, 1900-1934—"Victorian" is not intended to suggest England, a queen, or any particular sexual morality," (1) but a time period. The text includes 57 illustrations and is divided into the following chapters: "Waiting," "Meeting," "Encounter," "Embodiment," "Desire," "Language," "Disclosure," "Kissing," "Gender," "Power," "Others," "Jealousy," "Selfhood," "Proposal," "Wedding," "Sex," "Marriage," "Ending."
- Levin, Amy. *The Suppressed Sister: A Relationship in Novels by Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Women*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP; London and Toronto: Associated UPs, 1992. Pp. 156. \$29.50. "Ultimately, women's stories about sisters may be perceived as revisions of each other—comments on a women's tradition as well as on the male conventions and female psychology behind the sister plot." (30). Levin looks at Austen, Gaskell, George Eliot, Pym, Howard, and Drabble.

## Books Received

Meredith, Isabel. *A Girl among the Anarchists*. Intro. Jennifer Shaddock. Bison Book. Lincoln & London: U of Nebraska P, 1992. Pp. xvii + 302. \$35.00 cloth, \$9.95 paper. "... [This] obscure and as yet critically untreated early twentieth-century novel, is fascinating, and historically rare in its explicit focus on politics and gender and the relationship between the two, from the perspective of two bourgeois women deeply immersed in radical politics. Written in 1903 under the pseudonym Isabel Meredith by Helen and Olivia Rossetti—daughters of William Michael Rossetti . . . —the book gives a fictionalized account of the their [sic] actual experience as adolescent editors of the anarchist newspaper, *The Torch: A Revolutionary Journal of International Socialism*" (iv).

Morgan, Rosemarie. *Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*. London & New York: Routledge, 1988. Pp. xvii + 205. \$49.95. "It is important . . . to an accurate reading of his texts, to trace perspectival shifts just as one traces patterns of images and tracks the rhythmic foot. Through this approach, of clarifying points of view and differentiating narrative discourses, of letting Hardy and his characters speak in their own voices, of separating surface text from underlying meanings and getting back to and beyond the physical expression of things, we will uncover hidden essences and new significations beneath the most darkly veiled utterance" (xvii). Includes chapters on *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *The Return of the Native*, *Tess*, and *Jude*.

Rooksby, Rikky and Nicholas Shrimpton, eds. *The Whole Music of Passion: New Essays on Swinburne*. Aldershot: Scolar P, 1993. Pp. xvi + 186. \$59.95. Includes: Rikky Rooksby, "A Century of Swinburne"; David G. Riede, "Swinburne and Romantic Authority"; Terry L. Meyers, "Swinburne, Shelley, and *Songs before Sunrise*"; Nicholas Shrimpton, "Swinburne and the Dramatic Monologue"; Rikky Rooksby, "The Algermonicon, or Thirteen Ways of Looking at *Tristram of Lyonesse*"; Judith Stoddart, "The Morality of *Poems and Ballads: Swinburne and Ruskin*"; Dorothea Barrett, "The Politics of Sado-Masochism: Swinburne and George Eliot"; Murray G. H. Pitcock, "Swinburne and the 'Nineties'"; Thaïs Morgan, "Influence, Intertextuality and Tradition in Swinburne and Eliot"; Timothy A. J. Burnett, "Swinburne at Work: The First Page of 'Anactoria'"; plus three unpublished poems by Swinburne.

Shires, Linda M., ed. *Rewriting the Victorians: Theory, History, and the Politics of Gender*. New York & London: Routledge, 1992. Pp. xiv + 196. \$16.95 paper. Includes Judith Newton, "Engendering History for the Middle Class: Sex and Political Economy in the *Edinburgh Review*"; Ina Ferris, "From Trope to Code: The Novel and the Rhetoric of Gender in Nineteenth-Century Critical Discourse"; Sally Shuttleworth, "Demonic Mothers: Ideologies of Bourgeois Motherhood in the Mid-Victorian Era"; Jules Law, "Water Rights and the 'cross-

ing o' breeds': Chiastic Exchange in *The Mill on the Floss*"; Jeff Nunokawa, "Tess, Tourism, and the Spectacle of the Woman"; Marion Shaw, "'To tell the truth of sex': Confession and Abjection in Late Victorian Writing"; Christina Crosby, "Reading the Gothic Revival: 'History' and *Hints on Household Taste*"; Susan P. Casteras, "Excluding Women: The Cult of the Male Genius in Victorian Painting"; Linda M. Shires, "Of Maenads, Mothers and Feminized Males: Victorian Readings of the French Revolution"; Christine L. Kreuger, "The 'female paternalist' as Historian: Elizabeth Gaskell's *My Lady Ludlow*"; Linda M. Shires, "Afterword: Ideology and the Subject of Agent."

Small, Ian. *Oscar Wilde Revisited: An Essay on New Materials & Methods of Research*. 1880-1920 British Authors Series, No. 8. Greensboro, NC: ELT P, 1993. Pp. xi + 275. \$30.00. Chapters include: "The Myth of Wilde," "Biography Reconsidered," "Prologue to Letters," "Manuscripts," "Literary Histories," "Major Critical Studies," "General Critical Studies," "Editions," "Bibliographies," "General Bibliography."

Starzyk, Lawrence J. *The Dialogue of the Mind with Itself: Early Victorian Poetry and Poetics*. Calgary: U of Calgary P, 1992. Pp. 168. \$15.95 paper. "The following chapters . . . attempt to demonstrate the aesthetic-poetic strategies—mirrors, masks, historical and mythical recursions, shadows, and facsimiles—employed by early Victorian theorists and artists to deal with the spiritual and psychological uncompanionableness characteristic of their search for identity. The study attempts to argue that this early Victorian poetic discourse of the mind with its selves culminates in the Pre-Raphaelites', and specifically in Dante Rossetti's, artistic celebration of the mind's dialogue with itself" (4-5).

Thoms, Peters. *The Windings of the Labyrinth: Quest and Structure in the Major Novels of Wilkie Collins*. Athens: Ohio UP, 1992. Pp. viii + 182. \$35.00. "A chronological examination of the novels of the major decade [1860-1870] reveals the centrality in Collins's imagination of the quest for design. Dominant in each novel is the struggle of one or more protagonists to impose meaningful shape on their lives—to tell their own stories and thus to attain a sense of freedom and identity. But while that theme persists, Collins's handling of it changes, as his vision in the last two novels becomes darker and more complex. The providential emphases of *The Woman in White* and *No Name* are succeeded by the troubled, irresolute moods of *Armadale* and *The Moonstone*, which fail to affirm God's presence and thus to posit a governing order behind the disorderedness of life" (9).

White, Norman. *Hopkins: A Literary Biography*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1992. Pp. xviii + 531. \$45.00. "The sudden and meaningless end to Hopkins's life emphasizes its lack of shape. It was an unpatterned succession of turmoils, sometimes with an apparently successful climax which did not fulfil its promise or which led to a contradictory outcome" (lviii).

## Victorian Group News

### Announcements

Essays are solicited for a special 1996 commemorative issue of *Victorian Poetry*, devoted to the work of William Morris, to be guest-edited by Florence Boos. Reevaluations or new discussions of any aspect of Morris's poetry will be welcome, but so will papers devoted to other implications of his lifework, especially those which seem relevant to more recent attitudes and problems: his concern for the environment, for example; his utopianism and anarchocommunist; his critique of imperialism; his unconventional uses of generic forms and narrative structures; his relationship to predecessors and contemporaries; and his relation(s) to subsequent feminist, materialist, postmodern, and post-colonial thought. Please submit 15-25 page essays by August 15th, 1995, to Florence Boos, Department of English, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52242.

"Victorian Work" is the subject for a Conference sponsored by The Dickens Project at the University of California, Santa Cruz, 4-6 August 1994. Proposals for short (20 minute) papers will be accepted until February 11, 1994, by John O. Jordan, Director, The Dickens Project, 354 Kresge College, University of California, Santa Cruz, CA 95064, (408)-459-2103.

The Northeast Victorian Studies Association will hold its twentieth annual meeting at New York University 15-17 April 1994. The topic is *Victorian Interiors: Domestic, Metaphorical, Narrative, and Psychological*.

*Victorian Worlds of Work* will be the theme of the 18th Annual Meeting of the Midwest Victorian Studies Association Meeting 8-9 April 1994 at Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri. For information contact D. J. Trella, Exec. Sec., MVSA, Box 288, Roosevelt University, 430 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60605-1394; (312)-779-0620.

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