

# The Victorian Newsletter

Editor

Ward Hellstrom  
University of Florida

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## Hopkins, Christina Rossetti, and Pre-Raphaelitism

Jerome Bump

AS EVIDENCE MOUNTS of the importance of the Pre-Raphaelites to artists as various as Yeats, Ford, Dali, and Lawrence and movements as significant as Art Nouveau, the Imagists, and the Arts and Crafts Movement, their work is being increasingly regarded as one of the well-springs of the art of our time. One of the artists most indebted to them is Gerard Manley Hopkins. He was in fact a contemporary of theirs and they were in many respects his chief "anxiety of influence." Indeed, the influence was so pervasive, they even provided a model for his rebellion against it, and the revolt of the moderns against the Victorians generally. As Hopkins put it in his early manifesto, "On the Signs of Health and Decay in the Arts," "Recovery must be by a breaking up, a violence, such as was the Pre-Raphaelite school."<sup>1</sup>

Hopkins revealed what he meant by the term "school" in a letter to his first Pre-Raphaelite mentor and life-long friend, Richard Watson Dixon:

I must hold that you and Morris belong to one school, and though you should neither of you have read a line of the other's. I suppose the same models, the same masters, the same tastes, the same keepings, above all, make the same school. It will always be possible to find differences, marked differences between original minds; it will be necessarily so. So the species in nature are essentially distinct. Nevertheless, they are grouped into genera: they have one form in common, mounted on that they have a form that differences them. I used to call it the school of Rossetti; it is in literature the school of the Pre-Raphaelites.<sup>2</sup>

"Schools" are unusual in the English poetic tradition and poets of striking originality like Hopkins are almost by definition excluded from them, but if species of poets, despite "marked differences between original minds," can be grouped into genera, the question arises, to what group did Hopkins himself belong?

I would argue that in certain respects he too must be affiliated with the Pre-Raphaelites and their circle or, as he called them elsewhere, "the school of Keats." Keats was obviously his early master and Hopkins shared many

of the same tastes and keepings with the school of Keats in Victorian poetry. Indeed, because his early poems were even more full of imitations of Keats's sensuousness, stasis, precious diction, and dreamy otherworldliness than those of most of his contemporaries, Hopkins proceeded to remove these influences even more eagerly than they did.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, because his debt to "the school of Keats" was all too obvious, especially his debts to Christina Rossetti and to Swinburne, Hopkins made a great effort to remove the more obvious signs of their tastes and keepings as well. Nevertheless, his revolt against dualism and the metrical experimentation of his mature poetry suggest how he developed their ideas and techniques and made them accessible to modern poetry.

To understand influences as complex and antithetical as these, influences which may not even depend on actual contact with prior texts—as suggested by Hopkins' association of Morris and Dixon in one school, "even though you should neither of you have read a line of the other's"—we need a new theory of influence. Harold Bloom's approach immediately comes to mind, though he has little time for Hopkins and is more oriented to distant predecessors than to immediate contemporaries. In any case, we should begin with the embryonic poetics of influence generated by Hopkins himself. Hopkins forces us to ask a question about "difference" (a particularly felicitous choice of words for modern ears): what "one form" does Hopkins have in common with the Pre-Raphaelites, on which he constructed that "form that differences" him?

Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" was the germ from which all Pre-Raphaelite poetry sprang, according to Morris.<sup>4</sup> Hence Geoffrey Hartman was on the right track when he suggested that "Hopkins seems to develop his lyric structures out of the Pre-Raphaelite dream vision. In his early 'A Vision of the Mermaids' and 'St. Dorothea' he may be struggling with such poems as Christina Rossetti's 'The Convent Threshold' and Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 'The Blessed Damozel,' poems in which the poet stands at a lower level than the vision, or is irrev-

1. Humphry House and Graham Storey, eds. *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1959), p. 79.

2. *The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon*, ed. Claude Colleer Abbott (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), p. 98.

3. For more on Hopkins and Keats see Jerome Bump, "Hopkins and Keats," *VP*, 12, No. 1 (1974), 33-44.

4. Cited by Rayner Unwin, "Keats and Pre-Raphaelitism," *English*, 8, No. 47 (1951), 229-235, p. 233.

ocably, pathetically distanced."<sup>5</sup> Among Hopkins' early poems there are even better examples of this stance—most obviously his "A Voice from the World," which is actually subtitled, "An Answer to Miss Rossetti's *The Convent Threshold*." More importantly, we can discern Hopkins constructing the form that "differences" him on the "common" form of the Pre-Raphaelite dream vision even in his later poems. Take his most famous poem, "The Windhover," for instance. The significance of Hopkins' achievement may be better understood by perceiving this poem as a variation of one of the dream visions of the ultimate Pre-Raphaelite, Dante, the obvious source of the inspiration of the Rossettis. Place "The Windhover" beside, say, the first dream vision of the *Purgatorio*—when an eagle swoops down at dawn from the heavens and bears Dante to the sphere of heaven's fire, where both he and the bird burn—and the genetics of Hopkins' poem not only seems apparent, the invitation to comparison seems explicit.

We are not in the habit of making such comparisons, however, partly because the significance of Hopkins' relation to the Pre-Raphaelites was not even suggested until the centenary of the founding of the Brotherhood in 1948 when Humphry House asserted that "It is no accident that Gerard Manley Hopkins was devoted to [the poems of Christina Rossetti] in his youth; for it was he, not the Aesthetes, who truly developed Pre-Raphaelite aims." House insisted that "further thought along these lines is essential."<sup>6</sup> While the idea of a relationship between the Pre-Raphaelites and Hopkins is now accepted, there has been remarkably little further thought along these lines.

This is surprising because an account of Hopkins' relationship with the Pre-Raphaelites is crucial to an understanding not only of their art and our own, but also of larger cultural issues such as the modern revolt against dualism. Most of us at one time or another have been impaled on "the horns of a dilemma," as the saying is, and have taken for granted such categorical dualisms as ideal vs. real, eternal vs. mortal, man vs. nature, heaven vs. earth, or spiritual vs. material. By looking only at the opposite poles of these or other dichotomies we tend to ignore everything between them, fail to recognize the dependency of each pole on the other, the possibility of the simultaneous presence of both, or to conceive of a larger whole which contains both opposites.<sup>7</sup>

Of all the modern phases of Western civilization, the one most closely associated with this kind of dualism was Victorian England, increasingly identified in literary

history with the idea of "the divided self," with Arnold's familiar lines, "Wandering between two worlds, one dead, / The other powerless to be born," and with the opening phrases of *A Tale of Two Cities*:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period. . . .

Yet as this passage reveals, Victorian writers loved paradoxical similarities as well as sharp contrasts between supposed opposites. In our preoccupation with labeling the Victorians with our own dualisms we often forget that this was not only the era of the divided self but also of attempted reconciliation of opposites, a movement led by the Pre-Raphaelites. In his essay on Rossetti, Pater summarized their rejection of such dualisms as "the Manichean opposition of spirit and matter": "Spirit and matter, indeed, have been for the most part opposed, with a false contrast or antagonism by schoolmen, whose artificial creations those abstractions really are. In our actual concrete experience, the two trains of phenomena which the words *matter* and *spirit* do but roughly distinguish, play inextricably into each other."<sup>8</sup>

Hopkins learned a great deal from this Pre-Raphaelite defiance of dualism, especially from their attempts to create symbols for the larger whole which contains and transcends such oppositions as ideal vs. real and spirit vs. matter. While they tended to be either too specific, producing allegory rather than symbolism, or too general, choosing images with only vague, imprecise connotations of an ideal, invisible world, Hopkins felt that with centuries of Catholic iconography at his disposal he could create a truly sacramental symbolism in which the real genuinely participates in the ideal, with the result that a poem such as "The Windhover" can transmit their ultimate perception of unity in duality to some readers for whom the Pre-Raphaelites have become a lost chapter in the history of nineteenth-century art.

One of the features that attracted many critics to Hopkins in the thirties was precisely this rejection of simplistic dichotomies, which they saw in Hopkins' ambiguities, paradoxes, and metaphysical conceits. This revolt against dualism became one of the chief values not only of Hopkins' poetry but of modern poetry generally.

It may even be argued that most of the great achievements of the twentieth century derive from the repudiation of dualisms, Einstein's renunciation of the matter vs. energy dichotomy being only the most obvious example. Indeed, in 1930 Arthur Lovejoy began the Paul Carus lectures, "I propose in these lectures to review the course and to attempt to estimate the results of a movement of thought which has been, on the whole, the most characteristic and most ambitious philosophic effort of our generation in the English-speaking part of the world. The last quarter-century, it may fairly confidently be predicted, will have for future historians of philosophy a distinctive interest and instructiveness as the Age of the Great Revolt against Dualism."<sup>9</sup> But the revolt began a century earlier, with the Pre-Raphaelites in the vanguard.

Of course the Romantics had shown the way, but the Pre-Raphaelites were the first to carry the fight to the visual arts. Their rebellion against specific dualisms such as the traditional dichotomy between the verbal and the plastic arts was also significant for Hopkins and modern poetry. Preternaturally brilliant light and color and other features of Pre-Raphaelite painting recur throughout Hopkins' imagery, and his emphasis on detail, especially in his *Journal*, recalls their attempt to use minute fidelity to detail to satisfy apparently conflicting aims of science, art, and religion. These developments in the art of Hopkins and the Pre-Raphaelites foreshadowed the many twentieth-century experiments in which the verbal arts are made to adopt the features of the plastic arts and have led some to regard them as the initiators of modern art: "Pre-Raphaelitism marks the beginning of the aesthetic attempt to achieve a fusion, a self-sufficient unity among the arts, ultimately, as Gautier expressed it, "un travail dégagé de toute préoccupation autre que celle du beau en lui-même."<sup>10</sup>

Hopkins soon rebelled against this emphasis on the eye alone, but again the Pre-Raphaelites provided the model for his movement away from them. Christina Rossetti, and later Swinburne, conceived of poems as primarily songs, as music, rather than wordpainting. Christina also provided the precedent for Hopkins' rejection of her brother's art-for-art's-sake poetics. From some aspects of Pre-Raphaelite medievalism, such as their archaic diction, Hopkins remained aloof and his criticisms are still apt, but other aspects, notably the religious dimension evident in Christina Rossetti's poetry especially, he cultivated and carried to its logical conclusion, a conclusion which carried him beyond Dante Rossetti's Keatsian aesthetic. It is in this sense, as the culmination of

nineteenth-century medievalism, that Pre-Raphaelitism provides a particularly important context for Hopkins' life and art.

Readers who regard Hopkins as a modern poet will no doubt be surprised to find his name linked to Christina Rossetti, but for that very reason she is a good "test case" of Hopkins' debt to the Pre-Raphaelites. She certainly resisted the modern revolt against dualism, insisting again and again in her poetry on the irreconcilability of antithetical dualisms. The idea of the immanence of God or the Ideal in this world, for instance, is almost completely alien to her. Christina Rossetti's representation of this world in her poetry was in many respects almost as different from that of the other Pre-Raphaelites as her ascetic religion was. She shared their feeling for the plenitude of glorious sensations in this world, but she usually fought harder against that attraction than they did. Consequently, less overwhelmed by the richness of detail and the multitudinous variety of this world, she was able to provide Hopkins with examples of simple, unified songs of this world and the next which helped him break free of some of the pseudo-Keatsian excesses of his early wordpainting. She was also less interested than the other Pre-Raphaelites in a reductionist amalgamation of the verbal and visual arts, in literally imitating the stasis of the plastic arts, because she discovered that her genre was the song of heaven rather than the picture of earth.

Admittedly, the differences between Christina Rossetti's music in "Goblin Market" and her lyrics and the music of "The Wreck of the Deutschland" and Hopkins' sonnets seem more apparent than the similarities. Her sonnets were compared by one reviewer to Matthew Arnold's because both aimed for "simplicity of diction, and a directness and simplicity of syntax counterbalancing that complexity of rhyme-arrangement which is characteristic of the contemporary English sonnet as based on the Italian type."<sup>11</sup> Hopkins, on the other hand, offers a strikingly original difficulty of diction and syntax compounding the complexity of the Italian rhyme scheme. Where she erred on the side of unoriginal commonplaces and tired Biblical diction, he erred on the side of idiosyncrasy and obscurity. Thus for many readers Hopkins' style seems the opposite of that unselfconscious simplicity and restraint of hers which results in the least labored, the least precious of styles, and makes it so difficult to believe that Christina Rossetti was an important precursor for Hopkins.

Yet, aside from the revolt against dualism she was in fact the chief Pre-Raphaelite influence on his poetry, and the immediate vehicle for Dante's influence. We no

5. Geoffrey Hartman, "Introduction," *Hopkins, A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Geoffrey Hartman (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 13.

6. Humphry House, *All in Due Time* (London, 1955), p. 158.

7. For more on Hopkins' revolt against dualism see Jerome Bump,

"Hopkins, the Humanities, and the Environment," *GaR*, 28, No. 2 (1974), 227-244.

8. Walter Pater, "Dante Gabriel Rossetti," *Appreciations* (London: MacMillan, 1910), pp. 205-215, p. 212.

9. Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Revolt Against Dualism* (Lasalle, 1960), p. 1.

10. Unwin, p. 229.

11. *The Athenaeum*, No. 2811 (Sept. 10, 1881), 327-328.

longer perceive her in the center of the Pre-Raphaelite experiment, but she was its feminine embodiment in many of its most famous paintings, including *Ecce Ancilla Domini* and *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*, and, until the publication of Dante Gabriel's poems in 1870, she was their chief literary figure. The praise *The Germ* received, what there was of it, was chiefly for the seven poems she contributed.<sup>12</sup> More importantly, because Morris's *Defence of Guenevere* volume went virtually unnoticed, the publication of her *Goblin Market and Other Poems* in 1862 became the first literary victory of the Pre-Raphaelites. Swinburne hailed her as the "Jael who led their host to victory"; her brother William acknowledged her as "Queen of the Pre-Raphaelites"; and Edmund Gosse regarded her as the "high priestess of Pre-Raphaelitism."<sup>13</sup> Her influence on Hopkins was particularly great because she was also the high priestess of the Oxford Movement in poetry. Hence she embodied the more genuine medievalism he sought. As F. L. Lucas put it, "Her brother and Morris and Swinburne were moderns seeking inspiration in the medieval; she seems, rather, a medieval wraith shrinking in shy dismay before the harsh babel of modernity. In the Age of Steam she remained like some quiet anchoress of the Age of Faith—one who might have sat to Giotto, or knelt before St. Francis at Assisi."<sup>14</sup>

Nor was Christina Rossetti considered merely "the best poet" of the Oxford Movement and of early Pre-Raphaelitism. Edmund Gosse felt that "as a religious poet of our time she has no rival" except Newman, who was inferior to her, while Percy Lubbock argued that she was more religious than other famous Victorian poets and was in fact one of the greatest religious poets in the English language.<sup>15</sup> In the 1860's, therefore, her influence was apparently enough to smother many a younger poet. Hopkins, however, dared to aspire to all three of her titles—Pre-Raphaelite poet, poet of the Oxford Movement, and pre-eminent Victorian religious poet—and succeeded, unbeknownst to her and to the critics of his time, in becoming a rival far greater than Newman or any of her other contemporaries.

They confronted each other in life as well as art. Their families were well acquainted and we know that Hopkins met her at least once. Now that she has been dead for a century, it is difficult to imagine the impact her physical presence had on her contemporaries. Perhaps the best

way to suggest what effect it must have had on Hopkins, who was very susceptible at that moment to her brand of spirituality, would be to recall how easily she subdued the most determined pagan of the century:

Son visage . . . triste, pensif, sévère. . . . Toujours vêtue d'un chapeau et de longs vêtements noirs, son costume accentue encore cette impression de contrainte et de sentiments réprimés. La religion—un Anglicanisme tellement haut qu'il se confond presque avec le Catholicisme—absorbe en effet et dévore sa vie. Elle lui a déjà sacrifié et va lui sacrifier encore l'amour terrestre. Tout est en elle sévérité et renoncement. Mais ce renoncement laisse après lui quelque chose de très douloureux. . . . Swinburne est profondément impressionné par la personnalité de Christina: tout d'abord parce qu'elle est poète. . . . Mais il y a autre chose: cette austérité de cœur et d'apparence, ce mysticisme renfermé le trouble et le frappe. . . . Il y a dans cette femme un élément de pureté et de stérilité—de chasteté et de réclusion que lui en impose. . . . la foi de Christina a presque conquis (pour un instant) le scepticisme matérialiste de Swinburne.<sup>16</sup>

If she could exercise that kind of power over Swinburne, it would be hard to overestimate her impact on Hopkins in 1864.

Hopkins may never have had much personal contact with this woman who was to inspire some of his best poetry in the 1860's, but like Beatrice in Dante's poetry, Christina Rossetti became in his poetry the lady who is spiritually more advanced, clearly superior in holiness. Much as Beatrice intervened to save Dante in Hell, Hopkins' meeting with Christina Rossetti in 1864 apparently interrupted his more worldly poetic endeavors and called upon him to pursue higher ideals.

Hopkins' many references to her publications in his letters and in his journal, unlike his comments on any other contemporary, are never critical. In all his remarks she is not once subjected even to the mild criticism Hopkins directed at Bridges, Patmore, and Dixon, much less the harsh attacks reserved for Swinburne. The depth of this attraction to Christina Rossetti's poetry is evident in his response to her poem, "The Convent Threshold." Few modern readers still regard this as her finest poem, preferring to use it as a source of speculation about some actual love affair, but in the nineteenth century, when it was easier to admire a "masterpiece of ascetic passion" for its own sake, it was a very popular poem.<sup>17</sup> Hopkins

read it at a crucial moment in his career, when he was actually considering renouncing his powerful attraction to the world for a life beyond the cloister. He translated portions of "The Convent Threshold" into Latin elegiacs and devoted much of his poetic creativity of 1864 to his own response to it, subtitled "An Answer to Miss Rossetti's *Convent Threshold*." It was titled at first "A Voice from the World," later "Beyond the Cloister." The surviving fragments express the speaker's admiration for the decision of Christina's heroine to join the convent and reveal his sense of spiritual inferiority and Hopkins' debt to the Pre-Raphaelite dream vision in which the poet is represented on a lower plane than the vision. By taking the part of her earthly lover in his poem, moreover, Hopkins invited a comparison between his persona and Christina's erstwhile lover, James Collinson, who also became a follower of the Pre-Raphaelites and convert to Catholicism and, for a while, a Jesuit.

Hopkins also "differenced" himself from the Pre-Raphaelite stance of male inferiority by converting to Catholicism and joining the Society of Jesus. He thereby exchanged the inferior position articulated in "A Voice from the World" for one that Christina would have regarded as superior, as she felt that her sister, Maria, who actually did cross the convent threshold and became a religious, had achieved a higher stage of religious development than she did. In many other respects, however, the "common form" is still discernible; the basic approach to life exemplified by Christina Rossetti in "The Convent Threshold" became Hopkins' and the pattern of his career followed hers: an outwardly drab, plodding life of submission quietly bursting into splendor in holiness and in poetry. They shared a commitment to holiness above all else: whenever religious renunciation and self-expression were felt to be at odds, as they often were, self-expression was to be sacrificed. What Watts-Dunton said of Christina could be applied, with few modifications, to Hopkins: "the writing of poetry was not by any means the chief business of her life, [it was more important to] live beautifully according to the sanctions of one's own creed."<sup>18</sup> Art, when it was indulged, was, in Hopkins' words, "made vigorous and efficient by being, not its own mistress, but the helpmate of religion."<sup>19</sup>

No doubt partly as a result of this attitude toward art, both were subject to intermittent creativity. Both found poetry a gift which could not be summoned at will and each turned to prose between bursts of poetic inspiration. In fact each went through a stage of about seven years in

which prose almost entirely replaced poetry. Christina's prose period was from 1872, when *Sing-Song* appeared, to 1881, when *A Pageant and Other Poems* was published; during this time she produced four major prose works: *Speaking Likenesses*, *Annus Domini*, *Seek and Find*, and *Called to be Saints*. Hopkins' prose period stretched from 1868 to 1876, when his literary energies were devoted primarily to his journal. In addition to sharing this central prose period, both poets concluded their careers with devotional commentaries: Christina's, *The Face of the Deep*, a devotional commentary on the Apocalypse, and Hopkins', his unfinished *Commentary on the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*.

Hopkins' decisive judgments and his spirited defenses of his own work, especially his metrics, moreover, reveal more affinities with Christina Rossetti. Both were right to be defensive, of course, as their attitudes toward art and religion have destined them to share much the same fate at the hands of twentieth-century readers: to be criticized for deliberately narrowing their subjects to a range too limited for modern palates, for expressing religious convictions with which it is now difficult to sympathize, for allowing religion to displace poetry, or for actually impairing the poetic gift itself. On the other hand, both are often praised by twentieth-century readers for the same feature: the expression of counterpoised forces generating dramatic tensions.<sup>20</sup>

In fact despite the apparently diametrically opposed styles, even the technical innovations for which Hopkins received such praise between the wars may be linked to Christina Rossetti. For example, when placed in the context of Pre-Raphaelitism and especially Christina Rossetti's poetry, the "sprung rhythm" for which Hopkins is so famous is seen to be essentially a development of the widespread Victorian and especially Pre-Raphaelite preoccupation with metrical experimentation.<sup>21</sup>

The early critical response to the metre of Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market," for example, is so similar to the response to "The Wreck of the Deutschland" that it is difficult not to associate the metres of the two poems, however different they may be in some respects. In view of the difficulties the rhythm of "Goblin Market" faced when it first appeared we realize that the rejection of "The Wreck" on metrical grounds alone was virtually inevitable. Dante Rossetti protested his sister's "metrical jerks" while Ruskin, a friend of hers, wrote to her brother about her poems that "no publisher—I am deeply grieved to know this—would take them, so full are they of

12. Eleanor Walter Thomas, *Christina Georgina Rossetti* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1931), pp. 46-47.

13. Cited by Edmund Gosse, *The Life of Algernon Charles Swinburne* (London: MacMillan, 1917), pp. 136-137; William Michael Rossetti, *Some Reminiscences* (London, 1906), I, 74; Edmund Gosse, *Critical Kit-Kats* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1903), p. 158.

14. F. L. Lucas, *Ten Victorian Poets* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1948), p. 117; her medievalism is also stressed by Thomas, pp. 33, 162, 166-167, 176-177, 206, and 211.

15. Gosse, *Critical Kit-Kats*, p. 156; Percy Lubbock, "Christina Rossetti," in *The English Poets*, ed. T. H. Ward (New York, 1918), V, 289.

16. Georges Lafourcade, *La Jeunesse de Swinburne* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1928), I, 174-176.

17. See *The Catholic World*, 4, No. 24 (1867), 841; *The London Quarterly Review*, N.S. 8, No. 2 (1887), 344-345; *The New Review*, 12, No. 69 (1895), 203.

18. *The Life and Letters of Theodore Watts-Dunton*, ed. Thomas Hake and Arthur Compton-Rickett (London: T. C. and E. C. Jack, 1916), II, 38.

19. Campion MS. D.V., "On the true idea and excellence of sculpture," p. 4.

20. Lubbock, V, 289; Mackenzie Bell, *Christina Rossetti* (Boston: Rob-

erts Bros., 1898), p. 372; D. M. Stuart, *Christina Rossetti* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1931), p. 18; and Marya Zaturenska, ed. *Selected Poems of Christina Rossetti* (London, 1970), pp. 12-13.

21. See W. H. Gardner, *Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), II, 163, 175.

quaintnesses and offences. Irregular measure (introduced to my regret in its chief wilfulness, by Coleridge) is the calamity of modern poetry. . . . your sister should exercise herself in the severest commonplace of metre until she can write as the public like."<sup>22</sup> Reviewers were less kind. One found the metre of her poems of the 1860's "simply execrable. Miss Rossetti cannot write contentedly in any known or human measure. We do not think there are ten poems that are not in some newfangled shape or shapelessness."<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, at the turn of the century, when Hopkins' poems were beginning to be accepted in a few anthologies, her metres also began to win some guarded praise. Alice Meynell, for instance, wrote,

It is only in the lax metres which keep—more or less—musical time rather than account of numbers, that one might wish she had more theory. Her versification then is apt to be ambiguous and even incorrect. . . . Now, even if Christina Rossetti has more than the inevitable ambiguity, and really mingles her measures, she had done a very serious service to English versification by using afresh this voice of poetry—a voice that sings in musical time. It had been much neglected since Coleridge, and he used it so seldom! That is, he used redundant syllables freely, but a rest within the line most rarely. . . . If Coleridge's hint comes to be better obeyed, it will be much for the sake of Christina Rossetti's lovely example.<sup>24</sup>

Coleridge's hint had already been better obeyed, of course, by Hopkins. Profiting from "Christina's lovely example," he perceived the need for more theory of metre and for a consistent application of it to minimize criticism of such measures as simply ambiguous or incorrect. A few years later when Saintsbury discovered that the more the "dedoggerelised Skeltonic" metre of "Goblin Market" is studied, "the more audacious may its composition seem," his comments seemed to fit "The Wreck of the Deutschland" as well: "a mix of meters which would

have been regarded by earlier reviewers as a 'Bedlam of discord'. . . . there is something of the *tour de force* in an effect so complicated . . . the way in which the most apparently lawless excursions can be reduced to law."<sup>25</sup> Finally, in the thirties when Hopkins' "sprung rhythm" was coming into its own, we tend to forget that Christina Rossetti's sprung rhythm was also being praised for much the same reasons. Arthur Waugh, for instance, insisted that in fact Christina Rossetti effected "in *Goblin Market*, something very like a revolution in English metrical resources, and all with so natural a grace that it needs a prosodist as learned as Mr. Saintsbury himself to analyse her innovations."<sup>26</sup> In the end, the Victorians' initial criticisms were as completely rejected in her case as they were in Hopkins'; Geoffrey W. Rossetti was not alone in his assertion that "the apparent irregularity of the poem is completely ordered and disciplined, the variations of pace in the verse are fully controlled."<sup>27</sup>

The similarity of critical responses to Hopkins and to Christina Rossetti suggests the direct influence of her pioneering metrical emancipations, but it was reinforced by other Pre-Raphaelites as well, of course. Edmund Gosse observed that it was Christina Rossetti "who, of living verse-writers, has left the strongest mark on the metrical nature" of Swinburne, for instance; Waugh agreed: "when Swinburne acclaimed her as the 'Jael who led our hosts to victory', he was only, in his characteristically flamboyant fashion, paying tribute to the influence which her natural and untutored mastery of rhythm exercised over his own early experiments in quantitative verse."<sup>28</sup> Through Swinburne and in her own right she exercised a similar influence over Hopkins' poetry as well. In short, Gerard Manley Hopkins was also among the "hosts" she led to victory.

University of Texas

## The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and Their Circle: The Formation of the Victorian Avant-Garde

Herbert Sussman

AS THE TOPIC selected for this meeting indicates, scholars have recognized two distinct "Pre-Raphaelite" groups—the Brotherhood, those artists and artist-poets, including Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Holman Hunt, and John Millais, who worked as a clearly defined group from 1848 to 1853; and a looser "circle," formed in the later 1850's around Rossetti, in which the leading figures are William Morris and A. C. Swinburne. These later artists and writers are often called the "second generation" Pre-Raphaelites and their aesthetic and style described by the term "Pre-Raphaelitism." What might be called "the Pre-Raphaelite problem" lies in finding continuities between the Brotherhood and the Circle.

The Pre-Raphaelite problem continues to puzzle because of genuine disparities between the two groups in terms of style and subject matter. The poetry of Morris's *Defence of Guenevere* volume of 1858, of Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* of 1866, and of Rossetti's *Poems* of 1870 deals openly with wholly non-respectable forms of sexuality, employs a style that often moves toward the evocative and *symboliste*, and is presented as the expression of an adversary culture. In contrast, the work of the Brotherhood deals with traditional scriptural subjects, such as the Life of Mary and the Life of Jesus or with moralized genre, uses a detailed, hard-edge representationalism, and is self-consciously presented as part of a communal program aimed at the revitalization of sacred art. To compound the difficulty, if we contrast Millais' *Christ in the House of His Parents* of 1850 with his enigmatic *Autumn Leaves* exhibited in 1856; or Hunt's moralized illustration of Shakespeare, *Claudio and Isabella* of 1850, with his necrophiliac illustration of Keats' *Isabella and the Pot of Basil* in the late 1860's; or even Rossetti's historical representations of Dante in the Brotherhood period to the subjective and erotic *Beata Beatrix* completed in 1870, it is clear that the major figures of the Brotherhood themselves work in both a Brotherhood and a post-Brotherhood style.

Scholars have attempted to reconcile these oppositions through two methods. The first offers general descriptive terms that, like the well-known romanticisms, contain

contradictory qualities. "Medievalism" applies both to the historical realism of Morris's "The Haystack in the Floods" and the dream visions of Rossetti's water colors of the later 1850's such as *The Wedding of St. George*. Even more seductive is the mental habit of dismissing the moralized, religiously orthodox and representational work of the Brotherhood as somehow inauthentic—the folly of youth, a false start, a dead-end. Behind this dismissal of the "Pre-Raphaelite" qualities of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood lies a constellation of implicit value judgments and artistic strategies described by the term "modernism," a structure of thought that not only governs our own conception of the Pre-Raphaelites, but that emerges in England with the founding of the Brotherhood and that accounts for the often paradoxical connection between the two groups.

In a recent essay, Professor James Ackerman describes the artistic dynamic implicit in the term "modernism": "In place of a fixed paradigm in the past, modernism posits a momentum generated by a sequence of avant-garde works, a momentum that propels art along a definable trajectory. This made the history of art rather like a relay race in which each runner hands the baton to his successor, who is praised if he continues to run along the defined path, but damned if he stops, veers sharply from it or turns around. It is not by chance that the avant-garde concept was formulated at the same time as Darwin's theory of evolution."<sup>1</sup> But as much as this avant-garde model of art history has lead twentieth-century critics to dismiss the Brotherhood as failed modernists, quite paradoxically it was the Ruskinian aim of reviving sacred art and restoring the high moral position of the artist that thrust the Brotherhood, within the cultural situation of mid-Victorian England, into modernist strategies and an avant-garde artistic role. Furthermore, I would suggest that it is the continuation of these avant-garde methods and of an avant-garde position, rather than similarities of style and subject matter, that provides the essential link between the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and their circle.

Looking back to the early-Italian artists, those painters

22. Lionel Stevenson, *The Pre-Raphaelite Poets* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of N. Carolina Press, 1972), p. 113; *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and A. Wedderburn (London: G. Allen, 1903-1912), XXXVI, 354-355.

23. *The Catholic World*, 4, No. 24 (1867), 839-846.

24. Alice Meynell, "Christina Rossetti," *The New Review*, 12, No. 69 (1895), 201-206.

25. George Saintsbury, *A History of English Prosody* (London: MacMillan, 1910), III, 354-355.

26. Arthur Waugh, "Christina Rossetti," *Nineteenth Century*, 8, No. 646 (1930), 787-793.

27. Geoffrey Rossetti, "Christina Rossetti," *The Criterion*, 10, No. 38 (1930), 95-117, p. 102.

28. Gosse, *Critical Kit-Kats*, p. 153; Waugh, p. 793.

1. "On Judging Art Without Absolutes," *Critical Inquiry*, 5(1979), 446.

who, within the Ruskinian model of art history, were the last to work within a representational style not yet corrupted by Renaissance secularization, the Brotherhood sought to use the historicist and scientific styles of their own time to indicate the immanence of the divine within the events of the Bible, of post-Biblical history, and even, in Carlylean fashion, within the activities of contemporary urban life. But to create a vital contemporary religious art, these artists had to shake the burden of the past, in particular the exhausted conventions of academic art that were said to be derived from Raphael. And to restore intensity to the perception of familiar subject matter, the Brotherhood self-consciously engaged in the familiar avant-garde strategy of defamiliarization through radical stylistic innovation. In their scriptural paintings, the Brotherhood rejected the traditional decorum of Western religious art. In *Christ in the House of His Parents*, Millais employs a detailed, historicist style rather than the idealizing manner of Raphael to treat the "high" events of the Life of Christ in the mode reserved for the "low" events of genre painting. The intensity of the public shock on the exhibition of the painting at the Royal Academy is well-known, as is Dickens' outrage at the representation of Jesus as a "hideous, wry-necked, blubbing . . . boy, in a bed-gown" and of Mary as "so horrible in her ugliness that . . . she would stand out from the rest of the company as a Monster, in the vilest cabaret in France, or the lowest gin-shop in England."<sup>2</sup> But Dickens' words show not the eccentricity of genius, but, in his allusion to Hogarth's *Gin Lane*, a widespread public sense that the Brotherhood's detailed realism was appropriate only to the depiction of the lower classes. For Hunt, as for Millais, the aim of stylistic innovation was to create a shock of recognition, a freshness of response to the familiar scriptural story. Speaking of a work of his own, *Christ and the Two Marys*, begun during this same period, Hunt says, "I have been trying for some treatment that might make them see this Christ with something of the surprise that the Maries themselves felt on meeting Him as One who has come out of the grave."<sup>3</sup> And even Rossetti during the Brotherhood period employed this new decorum to startle the viewer into a recognition of the historicity of the Scripture. His *Annunciation* shows Mary as a young girl crouching, withdrawing in a simply furnished room, as a girl who, in the words of Rossetti's sonnet on the painting "woke in her white bed, and had no fear." This same typological or figural fusion of the sacred and the domestic governs his poetic treatment of Mary's Life in the Brotherhood version of "Ave."

Although this purposeful rejection of the received artistic decorum is aimed at strengthening for the Protestant audience the figural reading of scripture, this desire to shock the bourgeoisie inevitably extended into other areas. The repudiation of Raphaelite decorum shifted Jesus' social class, transforming Him from a person of high station into a worker actively engaged in making a living in the family shop. Two years after the 1848 revolutions, these democratic implications were not lost on the reviewers who condemned the painting for identifying Jesus with the working class of London. In the words of one critic for the public journals, Jesus is an "unwashed brat, scratching itself against the rusty nails in a carpenter's shop in the Seven Dials."<sup>4</sup>

Certainly the creation of all art involves some innovation, some divergence from earlier models, but the work of the Brotherhood sets the modernist model for Victorian art in that the central strategy is to achieve freshness of response through radical innovation. Furthermore, this innovation or rejection of the forms offered by the culture is programmatic, here involving the formation of a society to oppose the academy and the publication of a manifesto in *The Germ*; and this posture of opposition is overt, rather than covert as in the work of Tennyson, Browning and Arnold.

It is this avant-garde artistic role and strategy that, once established by the Brotherhood, is continued by their followers. In *The Defence of Guenevere* volume, Morris takes up familiar medieval material, which he treats in two opposing styles. Yet the volume continues Brotherhood practice in reversing the reader's stylistic expectations, both to achieve intensity and to transcend public middle-class values. The tactile, historicist manner of such poems as "The Haystack in the Floods" or "The Defence of Guenevere" itself, a manner similar to the detailed tangibility of Brotherhood style, evokes the historicity of the middle ages while suggesting not the ideals of chivalry, but cynical violence and an often brutal sexuality. The stylistically divergent, dreamy *symboliste* manner of such poems as *The Blue Closet* or *The Tune of Seven Towers* also follows avant-garde practice in running counter to the expectation of narrative, particularly of narrative working out moral issues, to present only enigmatic, diffuse emotion. Swinburne, in *Poems and Ballads*, treats not medieval but classical material. His style bears little direct relation to that of Morris or of the Brotherhood, but his strategy is similar. In poems like "Faustine," "Dolores," "Sapphics," he revalues the received interpretation of the classical tradition to show the Greeks and Romans not as exemplars of Arnoldian

stoicism but as participants in an intense sexual life that accepts homosexuality and sado-masochism.

For these second-generation Pre-Raphaelites, this modernist strategy is expressed through an avant-garde attitude toward tradition exemplified by the Brotherhood. The Brotherhood justified their own sacramental and moralistic aims by seeing themselves as the continuers of the single true tradition of western religious art cut off by the Renaissance. This justification of stylistic innovation in the present as the continuation of the authentic tradition cut off in the past is turned to more secular purposes by the second generation. While creating distinctly Victorian patterns and household objects, Morris saw himself as restoring what he called the "art of the people," the pure tradition of English folk art destroyed by the introduction of foreign styles and the division of labor in the high Renaissance. For Swinburne as classicist, his poetry appears as the restoration of the authentic Hellenist tradition that worships the darker sexual impulses, a tradition that, as he dramatizes in "Laus Veneris," has been suppressed, forced underground by Christianity. Even the fatal women of Rossetti's last paintings, such as *Astarte Syriaca*, appear as goddesses of a more elemental religion supplanted by Christianity.

## "The Thing Signified" in *The Dynasts*: A Speculation\*

William E. Buckler

DESPITE DIFFERENCES OF PERCEPTION and emphasis among the critics of *The Dynasts*, critical orientation toward the poem's "outlook" has been essentially ideological, centering on the nature of the poem's metaphysics and the degree of Hardy's intellectual assent to the monism figured in the Immanent Will. An interest centered in these matters has naturally, perhaps, led critics to assume that, when Hardy spoke in his preface about "the thing signified," he was pointing the reader's attention toward such ideologically ordering concepts. But if one assumes that these ideological issues, being so large and reiterative a part of the simulated drama itself, are aspects of "the insistent, and often grotesque, substance," then he is forced to look further for "the thing signified."

That Hardy meant to unveil, at least fleetingly, matters somewhat different in kind from ideological or metaphysical perception is surely suggested by the vibrations he sets in

That the connection between the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and their circle lies less in subject matter and style than in the transmission of modernist avant-garde roles and strategies is strengthened by the particulars of literary history. Of the original Brothers, Millais moved most quickly from the Bohemian life and, although his later works deserve recognition for their *symboliste* quality, he became the epitome of the Victorian artist as bourgeois gentleman. Hunt alone continued the typological mode of the Brotherhood throughout his career, but he became more the artist as eccentric than the founder of a school. It was to Rossetti that the young Morris and the young Swinburne came, to the house on Cheyne Walk that, as the conclusion to John Fowles' *French Lieutenant's Woman* brilliantly dramatizes, became the center of the art of opposition, the art of conscious rejection of received styles and middle-class values, an avant-garde art that was, ironically, generated by the Brotherhood attempt to restore the tradition of sacred art in Victorian England.

Northeastern University

motion by phrases like "scenes laid 'far in the Unapparent'"; the "older, more invidious, more nervous, more quizzical" unhappy perplexity of the modern "meditative world"; the "Riddles of Death Thebes never knew." Such phrases induce, not analytical poise, but experiential disquiet. And even experiential disquiet has to be transformed to cosmic terror the more we reflect upon the perpetual bombardment of awarenesses to which we have been subjected throughout *The Dynasts*. We, *homo agonistes*, have certainly been treated to some harsh lessoning in the course of the poem: that we are without any control over our lives, the puppets of an unconscious energy that evolves morally valueless patterns; that even our most magnificent representatives—our greatest heroes—are no more significant, historically perspected, than the most minute insect on the most mutable leaf; that our dynasts, remnants of the old order and restored monitors of our social and political lives, are

2. *Household Words* 1 (15 June 1850), 265-266.

3. Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* (London: MacMillan, 1905), I, 85.

4. *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* 18 (August 1851), 512.

\*All quotations from and references to *The Dynasts* have as their basis *The Dynasts: An Epic-Drama of the War with Napoleon*, by Thomas Hardy (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977). This is a reprint of the text of the edition issued by Macmillan in 1924 with the same consecutive

pagination throughout, and quotations used have been checked against the 1924 text. Passages are identified by Part, Act, Scene, and page and are given in parentheses in the text as appropriate.

conspicuously incompetent, even though we of the masses are still in life-and-death service to them; that there is likely to be little correlation between the truth of our perceptions and the ardor with which we hold them; that people alter their perceptions of reality hardly at all even in the face of the most harrowing and relevant experiences. It would be an intimidating programme of human diminution if it were coherently articulated by a centered authority in the poem, and even as a cluster of possibilities with which the reader-spectator, as ultimate judge, must deal, these perceptions of the human situation in the universe dislocate most of the traditional devices and structures by which we have sought to give ordered and self-satisfying expectations to our world.

Perception in its infinite aspects, how people suppose and state fact, is perhaps the central exploratory awareness upon which *The Dynasts* turns. But one aspect of human perception, intimately related to man's sense of anxiety in his universe, is so inevitable a dimension of experiential reinforcement that it is insinuated into the reader's consciousness in a relentless way. The poet-designer of the piece is determined to maintain the integrity of *The Dynasts* as an aesthetic structure, but he is also insistent that the reader-spectator be brought face to face with all the realities of war. Those realities go far beyond the hellish horrors and lurid rituals of eyeball-to-eyeball death-dealing. They include pageantry, gamesmanship, power-broking, the basic concepts of alliances and jealous regard for national borders, the balance of power, the establishment of new and the maintenance of old dynasties, and so forth. The fragility of such arrangements and the confrontal consequences of their collapse keep even older civilized centers of the world poised on the brink of war; and ancient discontents and a ruler's personal ambitions may alike upset the precarious balances and draw clusters of nations into conflict.

Hardy realized, of course, that it was beyond any writer's capacity to affect directly the international arrangements that seemed to increase the likelihood of war, but he knew too that it was not the people at the top of the social scale (the dynasts themselves) who were likely to suffer war's actual brutalities. War was induced by dynasts, but fought by soldiers; and soldiers at the very lowest echelon were likely to be the greatest bearers of war's devastation with the least access to such spiritually compensatory roles as leadership and individual charisma. Hence, the lowliest foot-soldier became generically the genuine victim of the games dynasts play. Like the cavalry horse itself, he could find least reason to justify his wounds. This awareness of the penetrating irony of those who had the least to gain suffering the most became a way of perceiving the hellish disproportion and madness of war and the object of a special sort of literary endeavor.

To the perceptual possibility of an abrupt and all-pervasive diminution of human significance is thus added a massive demonstration of raw, undeniably real human pain, brutal and unreasonable. Man emerges as negligible, largely deluded, and tortured. It is a crushing perceptual cluster capable of casting over the human prospect a terrifying light.

Further, one's attempts to define "the thing signified" by *The Dynasts* demand that he weigh in the significant ac-

cumulation of symbolist images of absurdity in the poem, oblique suggestions that are inexhaustibly disturbing. The poem's apprehensive tone is so keenly ironic that its potentialities as a grand spectacle of the absurd are insistently present throughout: the poet-designer could have screamed with grotesque laughter at almost every turn. Hardy chose a different aesthetic center: he counterpointed the manifest examples of absurdity with equally manifest examples of genuine degrees of heroism, pathos, fidelity, high purpose, and authentic tragedy. Hence the very tangible strain of the grotesque in the piece is serious rather than light, tragic rather than comic.

The images of absurdity are numerous and very real, functioning within an aesthetic medium in which the discrepancy between reality and perception or between perception and perception constantly threatens the consciousness with absurdity of mind-blowing proportions. An all-pervasive discrepancy of this sort is that between men's sense of themselves as responsibly engaged in a moral contest called life and Years' visualization of them as simply particles of vitalized matter "writhing, crawling, heaving, and vibrating in their various cities and nationalities"—their habitats and sub-species. A more localized but quite grotesquely absurd discrepancy is implicit in George III's capricious response to Pitt's request for the personal relief and national unity of a coalition government: he thrusts himself like a colossal anachronism between the exhausted Pitt and his frustrating but fortitudinous efforts to create in Europe a sufficient international counterpoise to paralyze Napoleon's aggression. It is dynasties like George III's that are at stake, yet the King prattles on about the strains of his own office, "Our just crusade against the Corsican," the divine right of kings, the soundness of reasons never in fact thought of, climaxing with a royal petulance: "Rather than Fox, why, give me civil war!/Hey, what?" (I, IV, I, 67-68). At the end of their totally deflating conversation, Pitt makes polite reference to a "curious structure" outside, to which the King replies as follows:

It's but a stage, a type of all the world. The burgesses have arranged it in my honor. At six o'clock this evening there are to be combats at single-stick to amuse the folk; four guineas the prize for the man who breaks most heads. Afterwards there is to be a grinning match through horse-collars—a very humorous sport which I must stay here and witness; for I am interested in whatever entertains my subjects.

The flatulence of the King's reply in juxtaposition to Pitt is itself disquieting, but the succession of images that George unwittingly releases become symbolist implants of absurdity: (1) life is a stage (2) on which men are paid for breaking the most heads (3) after which people play the amusing sport of grinning through horse-collars. It is inexhaustibly disturbing because of the wry truth of it, the piquant irony of the context in which it is released, and the essentially unmediated imagery from which it draws its memorableness.

The reader may shudder at the full reverberations set in motion by this scene between Pitt and George III, but the

cumulative effect of such images of absurdity is greater than the sum of them individually; and they do darken as the poem progresses. The story of how the crew "broached the Adm'l" reveals a considerably darkened image of absurdity. The broad humor with which the FIRST BOATMAN tells how the crew of the "Victory," when they "brought the galliant hero home," "fairly saved their lives" by puncturing his casket and drinking him dry—that is, consuming the alcoholic spirits in which his body was being preserved on the long journey home—is counterpoised by the inevitable realization, however delayed, that a cadaver thus preserved would release into the preservative its body wastes (residual excrement, urine, semen, and a host of body chemicals and stored substances), thus converting the broad humor intended by the teller into a symbolist image of a grotesque and psychically distressful sort. The dark side of this image is then deepened in the direction of the authentically tragic by the song that closes the fifth act, "The Night of Trafalgar," in which images of futility sweep over images of heroism:

Dead Nelson and his half-dead crew, his foes from near and far,  
Were rolled together on the deep that night at Trafalgar!  
The deep,  
The deep!  
That night at Trafalgar!

These symbolist implants accrete rapidly. An indelible image is imprinted on the mind when, at Austerlitz, Napoleon quite capriciously and "with a vulpine smile" has the battery turned on the frozen lake which 2000 Russians are crossing: "A ghastly crash and splashing follows the discharge, the shining surface breaking into pieces like a mirror, which fly in all directions. Two thousand fugitives are engulfed, and their groans of despair reach the ears of the watchers like ironical huzzas" (I, VI, IV, 121, emphasis added). Even the mirror metaphor is symbolic since it reflects the multifarious tragedy that will be served up to Napoleon in his Moscow adventure; and the description of the Russians then in turn mirrors his action here: "My God, they are Scythians and barbarians still!" (III, I, VIII, 349) That Pitt should receive the news of Austerlitz while he is in the Picture Gallery at Shockerwick House having highly cultivated talk of Gainsborough and Sir Joshua Reynolds, Churchill and Quin stuns the nerves with a penetrating awareness that Pitt himself points up. Against the elegant perpetuation motif of eighteenth-century literary and artistic decorum is set Pitt's total sense of personal dissolution:

So do my plans through all these plodding years  
Announce them built in vain.  
His heel on Europe, monarchies in chains  
To France, I am as though I had never been!

(I, VI, VI, 128)

One of the most complex symbolist images imprinted on the mind is that of the war as perspected by a group of English deserters in a house-cellar on "A Road Near Astorga." The grotesque humor with which the scene is projected by the several deserters cannot disguise the bizarre low to which their world has degenerated, nesting as they are in wet straw among dead or drunk or naked men, women, and children and looking out upon a civilization in reverse motion—"dying downwards," as it were. What they see is horses falling from exhaustion, being pistoled in the head; soldiers who have pillaged being executed by lot; people who have died in transport being laid out beside the road with "some muddy snow scraped over them"; a momentary display of soldierly behavior in absurd pantomime. This is what, from inside the English ranks, the war looks like—a complex image burnt deep into the reader-spectator's consciousness without authorial interpretation or judgment.

Walcheren represents a different kind of nadir to the English. That it is authentically historical in no way detracts from its massive metaphorical quality: one of the inevitable dimensions/possibilities of war is that one may, like the speaker in "Hap," have to forego the satisfaction of a combatant, may have to forego one's personal Prometheism for lack of an available tyrant. One is perhaps fairly reminded of the soft, nerveless, pithless, misty world of Lotoland as an ironically reversed analogue: the narcotic-laced Lotos-eaters crave a death-in-life state, while the soldiers sinking into the sediment of Walcheren, sliding toward an inertia-point of human misery, crave but the chance to "yield their lives" in fair fight within sound of the echoes of "the aggressor's arrogant career." It is the most haunting error of English strategy, and it is the victims' fear that

Our country's chiefs, for their own fames afraid,  
Will leave our names and fates by this pale sea  
To perish silently!

(II, IV, VIII, 251-252)

But of course the most devastating images of a grotesque absurdity are implanted in Napoleon's Russian campaign (III, I); and there, if anywhere, we can expect to find a revelation, however oblique, of "the thing signified."

The first scene of Part Third, in which massive anxiety is projected, functions at two very different levels—that of the *dramatis personae* and that of the reader-spectator, the latter having gradually learned through the literary procedures of the piece to translate even its denotative action into symbolist awareness. Napoleon himself is the primary dramatic personage in the scene, so what we are essentially faced with is Napoleon's view of himself versus our view of him. That he is somewhat shaken though defiant, is overwrought and has lost his fine-tuning, begins to see history as closing in on him, feels fated even against his "better mind," but faces his gloom in a spirit of grim irony—these aspects of his self-hood

we perceive and can believe that he perceives them too. But there are dimensions of our awareness that he does not share, and these move the experience of the scene for the reader-spectator to a deep ironic level. Napoleon is beginning the long slide toward moral and psychological shabbiness, and he is blinding himself to glaring contradictions in his self-projection: his haughtiness toward the Russian sense of destiny countervenes his own oft-repeated claim of a manifest destiny; he attempts to equate the disastrous strategy of invading Russia at an inopportune time of the year, wholly his wilful error, with the need to lesson Russia in French insuperability; he falls back upon the "force" that moves him "inexorably" to offset the sense of ominous foreboding that has enveloped his psyche. But it is the images induced by the scene that scarify the mind. Napoleon's version of the "Malbrough" air projects his self-serving return after abandoning his troops starving and freezing in Lithuania, while Sinister's revision of the same air projects the chaotic destruction of half-a-million men "dead and buried"—at least till the coming of spring! This is then immediately followed by an image of this "Christ of war" shrinking, shrinking to the aspect of a doll while the heavens burst with thunder and lightning and torrents of rain as if a divine dispensation were in fact ending. It is a literary realization worthy of Aristophanes.

The scene in "The Open Country Between Smorgoni and Wilna" (III, I, XI, 357-359) that closes the Russian sequence is widely recognized as the nadir of horror represented in *The Dynasts*, and it deserves that recognition because of the literary manner Hardy brings to it. The symbolist technique is complete. "These stricken shades in a limbo of gloom" perambulate as tattered skeletons (scarecrows) in a merciless wintry desert of which there is no beginning and no end, no alpha and no omega. Like Dante's limbo-inhabitants, they are without hope, and they move about like iced automatons building their bivouac fire and having their meal of horse and rat. Word that Napoleon has abandoned them drives them variously into paroxysms of "grief, rage, and despair," some sobbing like children, some becoming wildly insane. The "Mad Soldier's Song" becomes their aria of ironic salvation since they have reached a state of being that has finally exceeded pain as ordinarily understood. Then they gather in their physical exhaustion for the ultimate symbolist tableau of *The Dynasts*: the last survivors of the Grand Army gathered around the bivouac fire, pressed close for shared body heat, cindered in front, caked hard with frost in the back, with the tears on their cheeks "in strings of ice." Thus they are found by Kutúzof and his men; thus they are left to be buried by the falling snow. And the reader-spectator is spared intrusion in his awed contemplation of the scene.

What happens within this symbolist envelope provides the chief key to "the thing signified" by *The Dynasts*.

It should be noted that, when Napoleon arrives at Mos-

cow, he has been seriously depleted: the ardors of the march and battle-butcherly have already destroyed three-quarters of his army. As he says, "And it was time." Thus he is ill-prepared, in physical or psychological resource, for the failure of expectation that Rostopchin and Kutúzof have prepared for him. Here he is, the supreme European, face to face with Asia, and Asia has prepared a bag of "foul tricks" for him: "My god, they are Scythians and barbarians still!" For Napoleon to arrive, after such hardship, at an abandoned Moscow is as bizarre as for Marlowe, in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, to witness a French man-of-war firing into the continent of Africa: it is surreal, defying comprehension by the highly coded European mind. It is a "crazed act," an "infernal scheme" which some "Satan" has devised. This Europe-Asia dichotomy is made explicit, in Hardy's oblique, ironic way, on Napoleon's journey to Elba. He says to Bertrand, "Yes—all is lost in Europe for me now!" Bertrand replies, "I fear so, sire." Then Napoleon: "But Asia waits a man./ And—who can tell?" (XXX, IV, VI, 420) And just before this (III, III, II, 383), the poet-designer has noted, "Nationalities from the uttermost parts of Asia here meet those from the Atlantic edge of Europe for the first and last time."

This climactic revelation—that for the coded European mind to look into Asia is to look into a vast mystery, an incomprehensibility, with which it is not prepared to cope—is a perception that has haunted the twentieth century. Hardy suggests it somewhat circumspectly, to be sure; but it is highly significant as one of a cluster of perceptions that draw us to the terrifying conclusion—perhaps "the thing signified" in *The Dynasts*—that the modern European is possessed of a whole repertoire of strategies for coping that are simply irrelevant to the things to be coped with; that his reality is a preferential disposition, not the true truth; that beyond the painted shell of his privately packaged universe there are "deep wells of nothingness" with which he has no capacity to deal. It is a frightful vision, and if one takes Hardy's epic analogy seriously, *The Dynasts* spells the doom of modern Europe as surely as the *Iliad* spelled the doom of ancient Troy.

But Hardy does not seem to have been inclined to translate these dire imaginings into a voice in *propria persona* and to assume the role of a modern vates. Like his own, the preceding, and the following generations of poets, he was "dramatic," "personative," creating structures in which truth was not authorially mediated but authentically explored through the aesthetic placement of a reader-spectator who is not infallible in a position analogous to that of an author who is not infallible watching a protagonist who is not infallible. Such structures could be as comparatively simple as the dramatic lyric in sonnet form entitled "Hap" or as epically direct, dramatically complex, and aesthetically inexhaustible as *The Dynasts*. But the mark of their modernism, being attitudinal, is the same. The modern

artist has no obligation to dismantle the past, however anachronistic it may have become; indeed, the modern artist, as Arnold said, does not deal in pastness or presentness, but in relevance; he makes the past and the present creative bedfellows to the degree that he makes his individual talent and his inherited literary traditions organic. Thus both modernism and the modern artist are in a perpetual state of becoming. Like the Immanent Will, in many ways a fit analogue to the artist right down to the unconscious center of his creativity, the modern poet-designer is an instrument of creative evolution, his aim "to alter evermore/Things from what they were before" (III, VII, VIII, 518); or, to translate this into words from Hardy's preface to *The Dynasts*, to adopt as one's single aim "the modern expression of a modern outlook."

Thus the modern poet puts a premium, not on action, but on awareness: consciousness-raising (spiritual transformation, imaginative elevation) is the goal to which everything else he does is subordinate. His faith is not in social arrangements or in political or religious creeds but in metaphors and myths because they are his instruments of metamorphosis. The imagination, he knows, is an organic part of everyman; and the cultivation of the imagination, for which the poet-designer has special gifts, is an organic cultivation promising organic (and hence permanent) results. Every dimension of man's consciousness—from day-to-day perception to loving-kindness to cosmic symbolism—is dependent on the state of cultivation of that man's individual imagination.

What we have in *The Dynasts*, then, is a frightful vision set against an irrefragable faith. The *vrai verité* of a universe that very quickly outstrips rational comprehensibility (a universe centered in the consciousness as well as in the cosmos) is juxtaposed to an aesthetic way of ordering reality, a way exemplified by both *The Dynasts* and its analogue, the *Iliad*. At the time Hardy published his epic-drama, the *Iliad* and *The Dynasts* constituted, for the moment, a literary frame, an alpha and an omega of sorts, of man's imaginative efforts to deal with his woes and to establish, at least suggestively, a symbol of reconciliation to his frightful condition. That symbol became literature itself, *The Dynasts* and all those instruments of imaginative awareness, from Homer and Aeschylus and Sophocles to Dante and Shakespeare and Shelley, through which man has been enabled to perceive imaginative coordinates in what would otherwise be a chaos both within and without. Like Shelley, in whose *Defence of Poetry* he found the text, Hardy seems to have endorsed Tasso's perception—*Non merita nome di creatore, se non Iddio ed il Poeta* [No one deserves the name of creator, except God and the Poet]—with this fundamental difference: that by the time Hardy wrote *The Dynasts*, the poet stood alone.

It should be clear from the foregoing that anyone who does

not know *The Dynasts* simply does not know Hardy. To ignore his epic-drama is to ignore his efforts to create a truly monumental work, to wed his individual talent and his keen sense of contemporary spiritual ambience to the most ancient theory and practice of the Western literary tradition, to convert history into myth and thus to place the nineteenth century in Europe in the literary pantheon of the Indo-European ages. It is to ignore, too, a fine literary achievement that, in retrospect, is more and more seen as the twentieth century's prototypical literary formulation, the aesthetic structure that gathers in the fright and the fragments, the pulverizations and the importunities, the inheritances and the alienations—the epic, narrative, dramatic, lyrical, elegiac, symphonic, panoramic, picturesque, impressionistic, grotesque, symbolist artistic expectancies and despairs of "these disordered years of our prematurely afflicted century. . . ." Hardy brings to bear on the literary procedure of the poem his complete literary repertoire as he tries to create a massive artistic structure in which there is a place and function, not only for the sweeping panoramic spectacle, but also for the thousands of bits of individual dramatic role-playing, in high and low alike, that go to make up a densely textured, Breughel-like, vibrant representation of life. And he does this, in what must be called a grand literary paradox, Homerically rather than Miltonically: he overleaps the whole Christian experience in literature and finds his analogical mirror in a literary text that, as Hardy read it, did not depend on "an indivisible and regular system, which occupies the whole extent of the believing mind," but is "composed of a thousand loose and flexible parts."

*The Dynasts* represents, in a quiet new degree, a breakthrough from systematic ideology to genuine metaphoric awareness, even from a closed system used metaphorically to a metaphoric open-endedness in which one's own system-making can undergo fundamental restructuring and renewal. It is authorially non-judgmental as a literary work, and in it even the soul-warts of representative modern men are allowed to surface and show. It is a work that creates a massive collision of individual "systems"—some austere and disciplined, some soft-headed and limply sentimental, some conscientiously researched, some got up on the run and for the occasion—for the singular purpose of exposing in the raw and in the mass modern man's perceptual resources and perceptual techniques; and against these are set relentless exposures of man's perceptual needs if he would hope, with anything like the "complete rationality" necessary for human survival, to reconcile himself through his individual consciousness to his cosmic situation.

Twentieth-century poets have long since recognized that Hardy had discovered in his long dramatic poem a "modern expression of a modern outlook" that was eminently usable by pursuers of their craft. Twentieth-century critics have been slower—perhaps because they have been imaginatively

duller, perhaps because they have felt no need, in the pursuit of their craft, for the recognition. Nevertheless, it has been an unfortunate critical short-sightedness, allowing one of the pedestal documents in modern literary transmutation and definition to lie gathering dust in the full but glazed sight of all.

The critic who presses *The Dynasts*, however belatedly, upon the attention of the student of the twentieth century's imaginative life must be cautioned by Hardy's judgment that for a certain type of reader, his poem was unsuitable—specifically the reader “unwilling or unable” to participate along the co-creative lines designated. Reversing the implications of Hardy's astute judgment here, one can perhaps identify the type of reader for whom *The Dynasts* is most suitable. He is a reader who knows that a literary experience worthy of our best efforts is a complex and strenuous activity demanding full use of the enriched resources of writer and reader alike; that, with few exceptions, it is an experience that must be repeated several times before he gets a practiced feel for the individuality of the work being assayed and the literary traditions upon which it is drawing; and that the experience is its own end, the exercise of some of the most refined and pleasurable resources of his consciousness for purely organic reasons having little to do with political or cultural or philosophical direction or wisdom. For such a reader, *The Dynasts* should be an extraordinary adventure. An ambitious poem monitored by a pervasive awareness that poetry itself has become the chief instrument of order and

significance in a godless modern world, Hardy's “Iliad of Europe” has an open aesthetic center out of which hundreds of individual poetic structures emerge in an incremental but flexible surfacing of varied human efforts to systematize reality through or in response to language. These poetic structures in turn become metaphors of human reality (perceivers perceived perceiving) within a symphonic magnitude of complex variations that absorbs these individual poetic structures into a densely configured awareness of epic proportions and significance. The historical subject—a decade of Pan-European struggle—is translated into a modern myth having a genuine analogue in the *Iliad*; the human subject—how people suppose and state fact or the head-games people play with reality—is gradually enriched through poetic technique in this mythohistorical structure until ultimately two of the most insistent subjects of both historical and modern man come to dominate the poem and, through their interlocking, define its central concern: war and peace, perception and truth.

How well Hardy sustains such a challenging concern in the working out of his literary procedures is ultimately a judgment to be made by the individual reader; but obviously to anyone who thinks that he sustains it superbly, every other item in the Hardy canon will be seen in literary magnitude and importance as secondary to *The Dynasts*.

New York University

## Druids, Bards, and Tennyson's Merlin

Catherine Barnes Stevenson

Tennyson began his composition of the *Idylls of the King* with the tale of the “fall” of the mythic necromancer of Arthur's court, with an account of the vision, the despair, and the retreat from society of a character who is, as several recent critics have argued, a type of artist.<sup>1</sup> The Merlin of the 1856 “Merlin and Vivien,” however, is not only an artist but also a prophet/bard, a member of a family of such figures who appear in Tennyson's poetry for fifty years. A product of Tennyson's reading in the 1840's and 50's about Druids,

bards, and the legendary wizard of Camelot, this 1856 Merlin embodies Tennyson's reflections on the aesthetic limitations of bardic art on the personal costs of prophetic vision. Moreover, when Merlin reappears in the idylls of 1869 and 1872 his character and the nature of his artistry have been subtly modified in accordance with Tennyson's reading and his evolving ideas about the function of art and the relationship between the gifted artist and his often unreceptive society.

In 1856 Tennyson depicted Merlin as

... the most famous man of all those times,  
Merlin, who knew the range of all their arts,  
Had built the king his havens, ships, and halls,  
Was also Bard, and knew the starry heavens;  
The people called him Wizard; (11.165-68)<sup>2</sup>

Vivien adds to this description the fact that “the people” call Merlin “a prophet” (1.315). Thus, the “Mage at Arthur's court” who knows all arts joins a long tradition of prophets in Tennyson's works. In the *Juvenalia*, a figure emerges which combines the characteristics of the Old Testament prophet, the Romantic inspired poet of, say, “Kubla Khan,” and the legendary Welsh bard, particularly as he was depicted by Gray. The persona in early works like “God's Denunciations Against Pharaoh Hophra,” “The Fall of Jerusalem,” “The High Priest to Alexander,” and “Babylon” are, like Old Testament prophets, divine mouthpieces who pronounce an authoritative judgment on the evils of society and also prescribe the punishment for those evils—almost always the destruction of the prevailing order through some catastrophe willed by God. In these early poems, which evidence a providential view of history,<sup>3</sup> the prophet is clearly the agent of the controlling order. Tennyson seems to consciously identify himself with this prophetic persona.<sup>4</sup> For example, in the autobiographical “Youth,” not published during Tennyson's lifetime, the speaker reviews his early days:

The months, ere they began to rise,  
Sent through my blood a prophet voice, (11.9-10)

Again in an unpublished 1832 poem “What Thor Said to the Bard Before Dinner” Tennyson dwells with a certain relish on the denunciatory prerogatives of the bard/prophet. In this work “Thor” urges the bard to “break through with the hammer of iron rhyme” the “evil customs” of the time, assuring him that “thy rhyme hammer shall have honour.” Hallam Tennyson believes that this poem was written to defy the “malignant censure of his critics,”<sup>5</sup> but the invective is directed at all of society, not just the criticasters. There is a fiercely—even physically—vengeful ring to lines like:

On squire and parson, broker and banker,  
Down let fall thine iron spanker,  
Spare not king or duke or critic,  
Dealing out cross-buttock and flanker  
With thy clanging analytic!  
If she call out lay harder upon her,  
Stun her, stagger her. (11.19-25)

The hard “c's” and the predominant dental sounds of lines twenty-one through twenty-five give a vituperative quality to this verse which is inconsistent with the insouciant title: the words “before dinner” seem to establish a casual social context in which Thor would be more likely to deliver some pleasant remarks than to launch this harshly vitriolic tirade. Is Tennyson striking out viciously at a society that has rejected his poetry, or is he engaging in consciously extreme, almost self-mocking, revenge fantasies? It is hard to say for sure, but the verse itself, considered independently of the title, reads without any hint of an ironic intention on Tennyson's part.

This poem notwithstanding, the bard's primary role is not denunciatory; most often he is a visionary who looks to the future consequences of present actions, the destiny of his society. As Herbert Schneidau's recent study argues, Old Testament prophets were the first critics of culture who, in their alienation from society, denounced the faithlessness of Jews and predicted inevitable punishment for these defections from Yahweh but who also prophesied that such punishment would terminate in the future, that there were grounds for hope.<sup>6</sup> Consistent with this characterization, the prophetic speaker of Tennyson's “The Fall of Jerusalem” not only mourns the city's destruction and moralizes over the actions which precipitated such a catastrophe, he also foresees the future reconstitution of the Jewish nation:

Yet an hour shall come, when ye,  
Though scattered like the chaff, shall be  
Beneath one standard once again united;  
When your wandering race shall own,  
Prostrate at the dazzling throne  
Of your high Almighty Lord,  
The wonders of his searchless word,  
The unfailing splendours of his Son! (11.96-103)

Although lines ninety-six to ninety-eight sound Zionistic, the following lines make clear that the speaker is envisioning the millennium. The personae of “The Druid's Prophecies” and “Lamentations of the Peruvians,” on the other hand, foresee the historical future: after lamenting the fall of their own civilization and cursing their conquerors, these prophetic speakers look forward to the retribution which will fall on those same conquerors. Instead of directing invective against their own societies, they offer consoling words to the fallen which are designed to engender hope for an improved future. The

1. William Brashear, *The Living Will: A Study of Tennyson and Nineteenth Century Subjectivism* (The Hague: Mouton, 1969), p. 132, calls Merlin “the creative imagination, being seduced by the forces of chaos and nature”; Fred Kaplan, “Woven Paces and Waving Hand's: Tennyson's Merlin as Fallen Artist,” *VP*, 7 (1969), 286-98, sees Merlin as an artist destroyed by his Romantic imagination as

represented by Vivien. Gordon Haight, “Tennyson's Merlin,” *SP*, 44 (1947), 549-566, identifies Tennyson with Merlin; and A. Dwight Culler, *The Poetry of Tennyson* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 214-241, argues that Merlin's seduction is Tennyson's seduction away from his youthful ideals to the writing of “tender rhymes” like Vivien's.

2. All textual quotations are taken from Christopher Ricks, *The Poems of Tennyson* (London: Longmans, 1969). Hereinafter cited as *Poems*.

3. Henry Kozicki, “Philosophy of History in Tennyson's Poetry to the 1842 *Poems*,” *ELH*, 42 (1975), 88-90.

4. Elizabeth A. Francis, “Tennyson's Political Poetry, 1852-55,” *VP*, 14 (1976), 113-123, relates the prophetic voice in Tennyson's early

verse to the personae of his political poems: “Tennyson's public voice, early and late, is one of declaration, exclamation, and authority through which the poet celebrates himself, vicariously, in celebrating or deploring a cause.”

5. Ricks, *Poems*, p. 500n.

6. *Sacred Discontent: The Bible and Western Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1976), p. 216.



Druid who delivers "The Druid's Prophecies" while watching the destruction of his sanctuary, Mona, is a direct descendant of Gray's bard, that larger-than-life thunderer whose stance, whose actions, and whose words became paradigmatic for the Romantic bard. Identifying himself as the follower of the Druidical bard Taliesin, Gray's bardic poet heaps curses on the tyrannical persecutor of the Druids, Edward I, and prophesies that the now victorious king will be plagued by future misery; moreover, before taking an Empedoclean plunge into the abyss at the poem's end, this bard sees "visions of glory" of the "unborn ages." Although Tennyson's bards never indulge in this kind of spectacular self-immolation, they do often assume the composite bardic role of inspired speaker of hidden truth, chastizer/consoler of society, and prophet of future hope or doom. According to Murray Roston, this blending of the characteristics of the biblical prophet and the primitive bard, which takes place in Tennyson's early poetry, reflects a set of ideas which came into vogue at the end of the eighteenth century; "Parallel with the conception of the prophet as sublime poet, the ballad movement, fostered by the biblical interest, had begun to idealize the ancient bard . . . . It was inevitable that these two parallel concepts should fuse to form the composite image of the prophet-bard, which became the new ideal for the pre-romantics."<sup>7</sup>

Tennyson's early fascination with this personality was reinforced and his knowledge of it broadened by his reading in the late 1840's of Edward Davies' *The Mythology and Rites of the British Druids* (1809) which, according to its inscription, was given him in 1846. An exponent of the Helio-Arkite interpretation of Arthurian legend,<sup>8</sup> Davies influenced both Tennyson's treatment of this material in the *Idylls*<sup>9</sup> and his portrayal of the bardic speaker. Davies reconstructs the social and religious history of the Druids, argues that bards were one particular branch of Druids, and claims that the Welsh bards of the twelfth through fourteenth centuries consciously preserved the Druidic lore and traditions. In his view,

Druids were magicians, poets, mystics, prophets, and also "the supreme judges in public and private matters in their society."<sup>10</sup> The title "bard," he argues, signified eminence and dignity; it could be conferred only on men of distinguished rank who also held a sacred office.<sup>11</sup> The social standing of these Druidical bards was enhanced, according to Davies, by their access to the esoteric rites celebrated in honor of the sun god, Hu, and to the stages of enlightenment through which an initiate would pass. Such mystical insights the Druids embodied in their obscure poetry: hence, Davies contends, many of Taliesin's most famous poems are really narratives of the initiation rites of the Helio-Arkite cults.

The myth of the Druid as an exalted figure, imbued with power by virtue of his arcane knowledge, began, according to Edward Hungerford, with eighteenth-century "speculative mythologists" like Bochard and Stukeley. These theorists argued that the Druids, who were the descendents of biblical patriarchs, had preserved the uncorrupted patriarchal religion of the Old Testament. As poet, prophet, priest, and social arbiter, the Druidical bard "with his flowing white hair, his harp, his impassioned . . . utterance" became the object of "veneration."<sup>12</sup> According to Hungerford, "the popular, as well as the poetic, imagination seized upon the patriarchal theory, the bards became repositories of ancient wisdom."<sup>13</sup> Moreover, as J.M.S. Tompkins has noted, authors like Thomson or Collins, who use "Druid" and "bard" interchangeably, portray this composite figure as the "poet-priest of Nature," a member of "a select body of sages equipped with learning far above the reach of the common man, though ultimately beneficial to him."<sup>14</sup> Privy to the deepest secrets of the universe, the Druids acted as "enlightened educators of youth and ardent patriots enflaming their people in the struggle for liberty and heartening them with songs to cast back the unconquered Roman over the sea."<sup>15</sup> This prophetic Druid/bard figure still occupied an important place in the imaginations of writers in the first half of the nineteenth century: for, Southey in *Madoc* (1805), Shelley in

"A Defence of Poetry" (published 1839-40), and Carlyle in "The Hero as Poet. Dante; Shakespeare" (1841) allude to versions of this myth.<sup>16</sup>

This image of the bardic poet is particularly important to Tennyson's poetry of the 1850's. When alarmed over the threat to England posed by Napoleon II (1852), Tennyson wrote three poems which he submitted to newspapers under the pseudonyms "Merlin," and "Taliessin" (sic). The bard's "rhyme hammer" clangs in the "manly"—or, in Tennyson's own words, the "forcible"<sup>17</sup>—style of verse like "The Third of February," "Hands All Round," and "Suggested by Reading an Article." Like a prophet, the speaker of these is a righteous individual who, seeing the dangers to which society is oblivious, attempts to rouse "Godlike men." Like a Druidical bard, the persona evokes a quintessential national ideal of bravery and liberty. The speaker of "Suggested by Reading an Article" attacks the animalistic sensuality and materialism of contemporary England in the same caustically reproving tone employed by the "Thor" of 1832:

I feel the thousand cankers of our state,  
I fain would shake their triple-folded ease.  
The hogs, who can believe in nothing great,  
Sneering bedridden in the down of Peace,  
Over their scrips and shares, their meats and wine,  
With stony smirks at all things human and divine!

(11.42-48)

The bard still wants to "shake" or "spank" other men as he did in the earlier poems because he alone sees what they cannot—the "frightful omen of the future":

There hangs within the heavens a dark disgrace,  
Some vast Assyrian doom to burst upon our race.

(11.40-41)

Even the diction in this passage—"Assyrian doom"—evokes the Old Testament and the prophets of the 1827 volume. Bardic poetry is the agent of the moral renewal of society; the bard himself is paradoxically both a solitary outsider and a man crucially involved in the fate of his society. He alone can

. . . raise the people and chastize the times

With such a heat as lives in great creative rhymes. (11.5-6)

## II

Merlin of the *Idylls*, the architect, the artist, the sage, the prophet of social doom, emerges only after Tennyson has reflected on the rich tradition about bardic poets, prophets, and Druids for a number of years. Tennyson's Merlin of 1856 is closer to the Druids depicted by Davies with their social importance, their architectural skills, and their visionary powers than he is to Malory's Merlin, that lascivious magician and astute politician who uses his prophetic powers and preternatural gifts to advance Uther's lust and Arthur's cause. In fact, in "Merlin and Vivien" (1.495) Merlin explicitly refutes the title, "Devil's son," given him in *Morte D'Arthur*. Merlin, according to Davies, was "a supreme judge, a priest, and a prophet" who had secret knowledge of the mysteries of the divinities revered at Stonehenge.<sup>18</sup> That Tennyson had Davies' account of the Welsh Druids in mind in the mid-1850's is evident from the poem "Harp, harp the voice of Cymry," written in 1856 while Tennyson was touring Wales. This poem praises the Welsh bards "whose music yet prevails" and lists several figures discussed by Davies: Aneurin, Taliessin (sic), and Aedd the Great, "a mystical personage."<sup>19</sup>

In "Merlin and Vivien," "the great Enchanter of the Time" (1.214), Merlin, is gifted with a vision of the future which enables him to foresee the "comming wave" that will destroy Arthur's order (much as the speaker of the 1852 political verse could see the "vast Assyrian doom" which was poised over his nation). This privileged vision brings only melancholy, however, because with it comes a certain impotence; unable to act himself, the prophet/bard seems incapable of effecting action. The bard's "rhyme hammer" can neither change history by "raising the people and chastizing the times" nor console the victims of impending disaster with the hope of an improved future. Seeing what others cannot, Merlin is appalled and flees from the inevitable doom: first, by physically deserting Arthur's court; second, by turning away from social responsibility—"name and use and fame"—and toward the satisfaction of personal needs, "ease of heart" (1.890). Insofar as Vivien seems to offer

7. Murray Roston, *Prophet and Poet: The Bible and the Growth of Romanticism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), p. 156.

8. Helio-Arkite mythology propounded by Jacob Bryant and George Stanley Faber reduced all pagan mythology to a basic paradigm which was a corruption of the patriarchal religion. The "Great Father," the sun god, died yearly, was put into a boat or an ark, and was cast out to sea as a prelude to his resurrection. On Tennyson's knowledge of this mythology see, W. D. Paden, *Tennyson in Egypt: A Study of the Imagery of His Earlier Works* (Lawrence, Kansas: Univ. of Kansas Press, 1942) and my forthcoming "Tennyson's Dying Swans: Mythology and the Definition of the Poet's Role," *SEL*.

9. Henry Kozicki, "A Dialectic of History in Tennyson's *Idylls*," *VS*, 20 (1977), 145, cites Davies' influence on Tennyson as does Hugh Wilson, "Tennyson: Unscholarly Arthurian," *VN*, 32 (1967), 5-11. For a reply to Wilson and a discussion of sources of the Arthurian material available to Tennyson, see, P. G. Scott, "Tennyson's Celtic Reading," *Tennyson Research Bulletin*, 2 (1968). J. M. Gray, *Man*

and Myth in Victorian England: Tennyson's *The Coming of Arthur*. Tennyson Society Monograph, No. 51, (Lincoln: Tennyson Research Society, 1969), also discusses Tennyson's use of Celtic materials.

10. Edward Davies, *The Mythology and Rites of the British Druids* (London: J. Booth, 1809), p. 57.

11. Ibid. p. 467. Sharon Turner, *History of the Anglo-Saxons* (London: Longman, 1823), I, 72, claims that the Druids were "so honoured, that they decided almost all the public and private controversies and all causes" and that bards were branches of the Druids. Tennyson owned the 1807 edition of Turner's work.

12. Edward B. Hungerford, *Shores of Darkness* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1941), p. 68.

13. Ibid.

14. J. M. S. Tompkins, "In Yonder Grave a Druid Lies," *Review of English Studies*, 22 (1946), 14.

15. Ibid., p. 2.

16. Tennyson owned the 1853 edition of *Madoc* in which Southey speaks of the bards as inheritors of the lore of the Druids and as preservers of "the hidden wisdom of the years of old." In this poem of the novice bard Caradoc sings an elliptical song about the mysterious fate of Merlin:

. . . in his crystal Ark,  
Whither sailed Merlin with his band of Bards,  
Old Merlin, master of the mystic lore?  
Belike his crystal Ark, instinct with life  
Obedient to the mighty master, reached  
The land of the departed; there, belike  
They in clime of immortality,  
Drink the gales of bliss. (p. 22)

He was also familiar with Carlyle's notion that the *vates*, the poet-

prophet, knows "the divine mystery" and "is sent hither to make it more impressively known to us," *Works*, ed. H. D. Traill (London, 1896), V, 80-81, and with the stirring conclusion to "A Defense of Poetry" in which Shelley says that poets are "the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present . . ." *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck (New York: Gordian, 1965), VIII, 140.

17. In the opening stanza of "Suggested by Reading an Article" and in the letter to the editor of *The Examiner* which accompanied this poem, Tennyson praised the style of his own anonymously published works, "The Third of February" and "Hands All Round."

18. Davies, p. 468.

19. Ricks, *Poems*, p. 1095 n.

him consolation by flattering "his own wish in age for Love" (1.814), she is the external agent of his "fall." But Merlin, who is throughout the idyll aware of Vivien's wiles, causes his own "fall."<sup>20</sup> His debates with Vivien about the proper social uses of one's special gifts, for example, are really attempts to talk away what he most fears but feels happening to himself—the weakening of the will to act or to resist the demands of the body. Like the rotten bough at the idyll's end, Merlin snaps under the pressure of the storm because he has been destroyed from within. Precisely the wisdom and the vision that make Merlin a great wizard and bard also doom him; he stands as an example of the particular frailties of spirit to which the prophet-bard is heir.

The interpretation of the interlocking psychological, sexual, and social motives for Merlin's surrender to Vivien in this idyll is complicated by three factors: the place of Merlin's "fall" in context of the decline of Arthur's power; the aesthetic implications of his surrender; and finally the fact that the *Idylls* offers two slightly different accounts of Merlin's "loss of himself." Seen as one of the four original idylls, "Merlin and Vivien" portrays a seduction that is parallel to the seduction of Guinevere. The song urging utter faith in love which Vivien sings to Merlin was originally, she claims, Lancelot's carol to the Queen. When Merlin yields to Vivien's fleshly lure, his blood is said to take on "gayer colours, like an opal warmed" at her touch; so too when Guinevere prefers Lancelot to Arthur she is indulging her yearning for "warmth and colour" ("Guinevere," 1.642), for "the low sun that makes the colour" ("Lancelot and Elaine," 1.134). Merlin's fall resonates with the Queen's: both he and Guinevere yield to the imperatives of the flesh rather than to the demands of intellect or duty; both place the satisfaction of personal needs before social responsibility; both desert Arthur. Tennyson stresses the parallel between Merlin's defection and that of Guinevere in two scenes which are mirror images of each other. At the conclusion of "Merlin and Vivien," the wily Vivien exercises the potent charm by waving her hands over the sleeping Merlin, thus imprisoning him in a state of self-indulgent

passivity. Similarly, at the end of "Guinevere," Arthur signals his forgiveness of the prostrate, penitent Queen through a benedictory wave of his hands which, in effect, releases her from her state of sin.<sup>21</sup>

But Tennyson also makes clear that Merlin's surrender of his wisdom in the face of his spiritual malaise and physical need is an aesthetic act.<sup>22</sup> Vivien's "sweet rhyme" about the need for absolute faith in love is specifically identified with the charm of woven paces which undermines the individual's social utility. Merlin comments:

But, Vivien, when you sang me that sweet rhyme,  
I felt as though you knew this cursed charm,  
Were proving it on me, and that I lay  
And felt them slowly ebbing, name and fame. (11.432-435)

The "cursed charm" of which Merlin alone has knowledge was designed to isolate a beautiful woman for the exclusive use and enjoyment of her husband; thus, it is associated with an obsessive devotion to physical beauty and the severing of the bond between the individual and the community. The lure of Vivien's song then is the lure of a sensually pleasing art which, like the charm, captures its listener in a "hollow tower" (perhaps an image of the purely physical body). In yielding to Vivien, Merlin surrenders to this kind of art; yet ironically he is *already* the master of such an artistry since he is sole possessor of the charm before he reveals it to Vivien. In a sense, Merlin is destroyed by an aspect of his own artistry—perhaps its "fleshly" side which offers a tempting alternative to the grim rigors of prophetic art—and Vivien may be, as some critics have argued, a projection of a part of Merlin's own aesthetic temperament.

Seen in the context of Tennyson's poetic endeavors in the 1850's, "Merlin and Vivien" takes on a special significance. In the political poems of 1852 and in *Maud*, Tennyson employed a prophetic persona who denounced evils, prophesied social disaster, and often urged violent action to avert social catastrophe. The anonymity of the political verse shielded Tennyson from attack, but *Maud* drew fire—and even parody—for its social vision.<sup>23</sup> Merlin's outburst on the costs of Fame and on the conse-

quences of trying to give men "greater wits" rings with the bitterness of personal experience:

Use gave me Fame at first, and Fame again  
Increasing gave me use. Lo, there my boon!  
What other? for men sought to prove me vile,  
Because I fain had given them greater wits:  
Sweet were the days when I was all unknown,  
But when my name was lifted up, the storm  
Broke on the mountain and I cared not for it. (11.491-501)

Jerome Buckley reads this passage as proof that Tennyson had established "an identity of sorts with the disillusioned Merlin."<sup>24</sup> If the political verse and *Maud* represent the public path that the prophet might take, "Merlin and Vivien" considers another course of action possible in the face of the horrifying vision of the collapse of society. Merlin, made melancholy by the imminent disaster he foresees, surrenders his will, abdicates his social conscience, and turns inward. The mad speaker of *Maud* and the "Mage of Arthur's court" enact two sides of the same conflict: one shuns society, plunges into the "abysmal deeps" of personality, but eventually embraces his social calling—potentially suicidal action; the other flees society, surrenders his public personality, and sinks into a limbo of passivity akin to death. In either case, self-destruction seems to follow from prophetic vision.

If the Merlin of 1856 represents the prophetic personality doomed by its own sensibility, the Merlin of the 1869 *Idylls* is a slightly different character—or at least a character who is viewed from a different angle. In "The Holy Grail," for example, we are given another account of Merlin's "loss of himself." Recalling the inception of the Grail quest, Percivale tells of Merlin's creation, which was partly responsible for the Grail mania:

In our great hall there stood a vacant chair,  
Fashioned by Merlin ere he past away,  
And carven with strange figures; and in and out  
The figures, like a serpent, ran a scroll  
Of letters in a tongue no man could read.  
And Merlin called it "The Siege perilous,"  
Perilous for good and ill; "for there," he said,  
"No man could sit but he should lose himself:"  
And once by misadventure Merlin sat  
In his own chair, and so was lost; but he,  
Galahad, when he heard of Merlin's doom,  
Cried, "If I lose myself, I save myself!" (11.167-78)

Malory's Merlin fashions the chair but is not destroyed by it; Tennyson's Merlin is here trapped by the precise skills

that make him a wizard. Two sets of facts confirm an aesthetic reading of this narrative of Merlin's "fall." First, the "Siege perilous" with its "scroll of letters in a tongue no man can read" resembles in its inscrutability and potential hazardousness the magician's book in "Merlin and Vivien," which is written in a language no man can read (even Merlin can decipher only the marginalia). In addition, the chair, the product of Merlin's ingenuity and special skill, is the agent of his "fall" just as the charm, of which he as a "Mage" alone has knowledge, is the ostensible cause of his "loss of himself." Both the charm and the chair symbolize the esoteric, even lethal, knowledge that the prophet-bard possesses. Algernon Herbert's *Britannia After the Romans* (1836), which Tennyson owned, explicitly connects the "Siege perilous" with the arcane knowledge to which the Druids had access: the seat, he claims, "signifies to us the private belief of the Druidists in a code of astronomy different from that which they published, but one of which they deemed the establishment essential to the secure enthronization of Apollon Belenus."<sup>25</sup>

The literature about the Druids also connects the "chair" of the ancient bard with the public recognition of his professional status. Davies quotes a poem by Philip Brydydd (1200-1250) which alludes to this "chair of the Presidency": "The chair of the great Maelgwn was publicly prepared for Bards; and not to poetasters was it given in compliment: and if, at this day they were to aspire to that chair, they would be proved, by truth and privilege, to be what they really are: the grave Druids of Britain would be there."<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, according to Davies, an obscure, mystical poem by Taliesin called "The Chair of Taliesin" lists in a veiled form the apparatus needed to celebrate the rites of the goddess Ceridwen. Thus, the "chair" of the ancient bard suggests both his unique position in society and the private knowledge that comes with that status.

But how do these facts influence our reading of Percivale's narrative or how do they alter our retrospective interpretation of Merlin's character as presented in "Merlin and Vivien"? In "The Holy Grail" Merlin seems to "fall" because he willingly immerses himself too completely in his private vision, becomes enraptured by his own artifact. Such a fall is, of course, in keeping with the insistence in this idyll on the dangers of private vision, especially when chosen at the expense of public service.

20. John Reed, *Perception and Design in Tennyson's "Idylls of the King"* (Athens, Ohio: Univ. of Ohio Press, 1969), p. 54, sees Merlin as a type of the intellect deprived of intuition and faith and reads the idyll as an allegory: "the besieged intellect is undone by a traitorous will that longs for the peace that surrender will bring."

21. John Rosenberg, *The Fall of Camelot: A Study of Tennyson's "Idylls of the King"* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1973), p. 138, points to the parallelism of gesture as part of a larger pattern of correlations and transformations of phrases, characters, and actions in the *Idylls*.

22. Lawrence Poston III, "The Two Provinces of Tennyson's *Idylls*," *Criticism*, 9 (1965), 377-78 argues that Merlin's surrender is a withdrawal into a Palace of Art, an "entrapment by his own desire for beauty." I would add to this that Merlin's desire for beauty emerges under the pressure of the special vision given to the *vates*.

23. Edgar F. Shannon, *Tennyson and the Reviewers: A Study of His Reputation and of the Influence of the Critics on His Poetry, 1827-51* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1952), p. 401, points out that Tennyson's war philosophy, which drew the most hostile criticism from the reviewers of *Maud*, was most often regarded as "the poet's own philosophy." According to Shannon, the poem received more unfavorable than favorable reviews. *The Christian Remembrancer*, for example, queried: "What poem . . . was ever received with a louder outcry than 'Maud'—with such regret, despair, even contempt?" (April 1856). For parodies of the social philosophy of *Maud*, see *Punch*, August 18, 1855 and November 3, 1855.

24. Jerome H. Buckley, *Tennyson: The Growth of a Poet* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), p. 162.

25. Algernon Herbert, *Britannia After the Romans* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1836), p. 94. Herbert believes that the Druidic bards were actually priests who preserved in a Christian age "the errors, superstitions, and vile practices" of the pagans (xliv). He argues that Taliesin's poem "The Throne or Royal Chair" is a veiled account of Arthur's initiation into pagan mysteries.

26. Davies, p. 21. A book that Tennyson might have known, *Barddas* by John Williams ab Ithel (London: Longman, 1862), lxxi, offers a slightly different, but nonetheless congruent, explanation of "the chair": the Round Table was "an arrangement of the arts, sciences, usages, and privileges of the Bards and men of vocal song." Thus it was the "chair" of the two Merddins, Taliesin, St. Mabon, and others.

In "Merlin and Vivien," on the other hand, the means of Merlin's "fall" is the charm while the motive seems to be the need for rest and solace in the face of despair. "The Holy Grail" omits the psychological motivation ("misadventure" is the only cause that Percivale mentions) but clearly identifies Merlin's own artistry as the means of his downfall. In some sense, the later idyll simplifies the task of interpreting Merlin's actions by confirming what is only intimated in "Merlin and Vivien": the bard becomes his own victim when he surrenders totally to the imperatives of his special vision, when he plunges completely into what Tennyson calls "spiritual imagination" (Ricks, p. 1666n.). The effect of Merlin's creation on Galahad and the rest of the Round Table is, then, instructive. When he sits in Merlin's chair, Galahad "loses himself": that is, he casts aside his social self, his personality, to find his spiritual identity through a private quest. By his example, the less worthy knights also seek personal spiritual exaltation and thus precipitate the decline of Arthur's realm; Merlin's loss of himself is but the first domino. Arthur in his speech to Galahad at the idyll's end points to the ultimately private nature of the vision of "fiery prophet in old times,/And all the sacred madness of the bard" (11.872-73). As Arthur knows, the experience of a transcendent reality can be only partially and unsatisfactorily communicated within the limitations of the "framework" and the "chord" of the individual. "Divine madness" then, though it may be glorious, is socially disruptive and personally isolating.

Tennyson's analysis in 1869 of the perils facing the bardic personality is accompanied—paradoxically—by elaborate descriptions of the kind of art that Merlin created. It seems that the bardic artist, though he may destroy himself and though his art may have dangerous social implications, can also fashion works that lead to spiritual exaltation: his creations are perilous both for "good and ill." In the art he produces for Arthur's great hall, Merlin combines the characteristics of both the true pagan bard and the Christian moral artist. Merlin has chronicled the history of his realm in twelve great windows that recount Arthur's battles. This realistic, historical art exists in time and thus can render only that which has taken place in time, past and present events. The future, the final Western-most window, is blank; only when that future becomes the present can its

design be blazoned. In the sculptures he creates, however, Merlin is clearly a moral teacher who renders the ideal as the actual. The four zones of allegorical sculpture in the hall reify the ideal spiritual progress of Arthur's realm and depict the as-yet-to-be-accomplished perfection of man:

And four great zones of sculpture, set betwixt,  
With many a mystic symbol, gird the hall:  
And in the lowest beasts are slaying men,  
And in the second men are slaying beasts,  
And on the third are warriors, perfect men,  
And on the fourth are men with growing wings. (11.232-237)

This creation enshrines the unrealized goal toward which the society and its individual members are striving; a goal, moreover, which is accessible only to the Arthurs and the Galahads of the kingdom.

This presentation of a Janus-faced Merlin who is a traditional pagan bard and a latter-day Christian prophet can be traced to Tennyson's reading of W.D. Nash's *Merlin the Enchanter, Merlin the Bard* (1865), which was given to James Knowles by Nash and to Tennyson by Knowles sometime after their 1866 meeting. Nash, who stresses Merlin's centrality in the Arthurian legend, also identifies him as a symbol of the intellect; Tennyson in his later allegorical comments on his *Idylls* similarly characterized Merlin as one of those "among the highest intellects" (Ricks, p. 1595n.). Nash points to a dual tradition in the legends about Merlin: one group of stories depict him as "a magician possessed of supernatural powers, if not given to diabolic arts."<sup>27</sup> Although Tennyson was clearly aware of this tradition even in "Merlin and Vivien," he did not depict Merlin primarily as a wily wizard. The wording of the description in that idyll is indicative: "people called him Wizard" (1.186, italics mine). On the other hand, as Nash observes, Welsh legends "ignore the magic and represent the enchanter as a pious Christian." In fact, he continues, the French Arthurian scholar Villemarqué argues that Merlin was really an historical personage, an architect, a mathematician, a bard in the tradition of the Druids, and a Christian clergyman at the court of the king Aurelius Ambrosius. Villemarqué claims that "if any one in the British isles has represented in Christian times the *vates* of the olden time, if any one has enjoyed their privileges, known their secrets, preserved their traditions, led their mysterious life,—if any one can give an idea of these en-

thusiasts, at once pontiffs, sages, astrologers, magicians, poets and natural musicians, it is incontestably the bard of Ambrosius Aurelianus."<sup>28</sup>

Whereas "Merlin and Vivien" concentrates on the destructive side of Merlin's artistry, "The Holy Grail" shows that, while Merlin's art can be socially disruptive, it also can offer men spiritual consolation and hope in the face of the hardships of life. Crowning the allegorical carvings in Arthur's hall is another of Merlin's creations:

And over all one statue in the mould  
Of Arthur, made by Merlin, with a crown  
And peaked wings pointed to the Northern Star.  
. . . and the crown  
And both the wings are made of gold, and flame  
At sunrise till the people in far fields,  
Wasted so often by the heathen hordes,  
Behold it crying, "We have still a King." (11.234-245)

Here the statue testifies to the permanence of Arthur's ideal and keeps alive the hope represented in the sculpture that men can rise above the beasts, the "heathen hordes," and "grow wings." As a Christian bard, Merlin creates art that affirms the reality of a spiritual ideal.

The idylls written between 1869 and 1872 show Tennyson's growing preoccupation with Merlin as a Christian sage, as the religious mentor of the populace. In "The Coming of Arthur" (1869) and "Gareth and Lynette" (1869-72), where he makes his final appearance, Merlin is not so much the architect or the sculptor that he had been earlier but the poet, the maker of riddles which tease their hearers into a new kind of knowledge. Merlin's verses in these idylls take the form of the "tribanan" or triplet of the ancient Welsh bard, particularly as these were explained by Davies. These poems, in which each of the three lines presents a discrete thought, were used by the Druids as teaching devices to inculcate moral precepts in their hearers. Beginning with a seemingly trivial remark, the triplets move on to a further reflection, and conclude with a pertinent observation about morals or manners. Thus, according to Davies, they are designed as pedagogical tools to move the primitive mind from the "page of nature" to the "page of wisdom."<sup>29</sup> Like the sculpture in Arthur's hall, these triplets lead the mind from empirical observations of life or history to a recognition of a larger and more complex pattern of meaning in the universe than can be deduced from individual experience. For example, when Bellicent demands to know the "truth" about Arthur's

birth in "The Coming of Arthur," Merlin answers her with the elliptical triplets:

Rain, rain, and sun! a rainbow in the sky!  
A young man will be wiser by and by;  
An old man's wits may wander ere he die.  
Rain, rain, and sun! a rainbow on the lea!  
And truth is this to me, and that to thee;  
And truth clothed or naked let it be.  
Rain, sun, and rain! and the free blossom blows:  
Sun, rain, and sun! and where is he who knows?  
From the great deep to the great deep he goes. (11.402-414)

These lines offer in veiled form an indirect prophecy of the course of Arthur's kingdom and the pattern of all life. The first line of the riddle presents a progressive view of natural phenomena—and, by extension, of history—similar to that implied by Merlin's sculpture in which men rise above beasts and eventually above the earth itself. The second line of that same stanza, however, qualifies such optimism: young men may grow wiser but they will eventually return to a child-like state in old age. Progress is, at best, cyclic. The second stanza addresses the issue of perception from another angle. The same set of phenomena, "rain, rain, and sun," that produce the rainbow in the sky in stanza one here yield a different result, "the rainbow on the lea." Cause and effect are as problematic as the progressive view of history; there is not a unique correlation between stimulus and response. Truth, as Merlin says, "is this to me, and that to thee" not because it is relative but because the human capacity to perceive truth is restricted by the individual's mental "framework and chord."<sup>30</sup> The final stanza offers a cyclic view of nature and of human life within which there is both variation (as stanzas two and three reveal, the cycle itself can take at least two different forms) and mystery (who is the "he" who knows? what is "the great deep"?) Because the riddle does not provide easily understood answers to her question, Bellicent is angered by Merlin's response. But Merlin, like an oracle, uses riddles to suggest verities that are difficult for the human mind to grasp; his perplexing and elusive utterances force the individual hearer to evolve the truth of them for himself.

Despite her anger at Merlin's indirection, Bellicent herself affirms the value of an elliptical art which engages the imagination while offering tantalizing glimpses of a reality beyond human experience:

. . . so great bards of him will sing  
Hereafter; and dark sayings from of old

regulated by its own laws, in effect an 'evasion' of material reality, and yet it also requires 'relation': the awareness of an aesthetic order within the work and a definable relationship between the work and the reality it portrays," p. 281.

27. W. D. Nash, *Merlin the Enchanter, Merlin the Bard*, in *Merlin, or the Early History of King Arthur*, The Early English Text Society (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Company, 1899; rpt. New York: Greenwood Publications, 1969), 1. It is impossible to reproduce here the debate that raged among the students of Arthurian tradition about three figures: Aurelius Ambrosius, a prophetic child and king; Merlin Emyrs, the enchanter and contemporary of Arthur; and Merlin Wyllt, Silvestris, or Caledonius, an

historical Welsh bard. At the heart of this controversy are these issues: was Merlin the enchanter an historical personage? was he a Christian or a pagan? was he in some sense confused with Aurelius Ambrosius or with Arthur? Davies tries to resolve these issues by arguing for the latter position. See also, Robert D. Hume and Toby Olshin, "Ambrosius in 'The Holy Grail': Source and Function," *N&Q*, 16 (1969), 208-09.

28. Quoted by Nash, viii.

29. Davies, pp. 75-77. See also J. M. Gray, who analyzes these triplets and discusses Davies' influence on Tennyson in *Man and Myth*.

30. Poston offers an important aesthetic reading of this riddle: "Art is a form of speaking by indirection. It creates an illusory world which is

Ranging and ringing through the minds of men,  
And echoed by old folk beside their fires  
For comfort after their wage-work is done,  
Speak of the king; and Merlin in our time  
Hath spoken also, not in jest. . . . (11.413-419)

Such "dark sayings" from the bard who sees beyond time empower their hearers to do the same. The verb tenses in this passage, as J. M. Gray has noted,<sup>31</sup> testify to Arthur's "time-transcending divinity." He will be sung about in the future, he has been in the past, and he is spoken of in the present. All of these temporal dimensions meet in the verb "speak" (1.418), which is the literary present tense referring to the continued existence of the "dark sayings from the old" but which also carries with it the implied "will" of the first part of the clause.

In "Gareth and Lynette," Merlin offers a similarly veiled riddling answer to the queries of Gareth, another seeker of literal truth. When the naive Gareth asks whether Camelot is real or visionary, Merlin "plays on him" by forcing him to question simple assumptions of what is "real." Merlin then characterizes Camelot in a paradoxical statement: it is "building still" (in progress), "built to music" (completed in the present as an aesthetic creation), "never built at all" (timeless, never to be completed in history), and thus "built for ever" (an enduring ideal). Like Bellicent, Gareth is angered at what he regards as Merlin's mockery and evasiveness; again Merlin uses a riddle to "teach" the uninitiated:

But the Seer replied,  
"Know ye not then the Riddling of the Bards?  
'Confusion, and illusion, and relation,  
Elusion, and occasion, and evasion' "? (11.279-282)

The words "confusion," "illusion," "elusion" suggest the unreliability of the surface of reality, the perils involved in perception of the truth. "Relation," "evasion," and "occasion" (in the sense of that which gives rise to something else) have to do with the problem of making connections, of establishing logical or causal relationships. Like the earlier "Rain, rain, and sun," this rhyme treats the difficulty of drawing conclusions about or of forming a pattern of meaning from the data of the senses.

In this unreliable world what, then, can be trusted? The words of the bard, particularly the bard who has made all the peaks of Camelot "spire to heaven" (glossed by Tennyson in his notes as "symbolizing the divine," (Ricks, p. 1492n). In the 1872 "The Last Tournament" (11.131-133) and an 1873 addition to "The Passing of Arthur," (11.444-445) Merlin's gnomic statement about Arthur, "from the great deep to the great deep he goes," acquires the status of eternal, indisputable truth. In the former case it flashes into Guinevere's mind as she watches the king depart and presages the action of the

next two idylls. In the latter instance, Merlin's words echo in Bedivere's mind as he watches the departure of the mortally wounded king. The riddle, suggestive of a cyclic process of departure and return, consoles the despondent Bedivere, who has just exclaimed "The King is gone"; moreover, it seems to catalyze him into action: he ascends the crag "even to the highest he could climb" in order to catch a further glimpse of Arthur. The words of the bard cannot "shake society" and change the course of history as they did in 1830, but they can at least offer consolation to the despairing individual and keep alive the hope that the future may bring with it a revivication of the ideal.

### III

In Tennyson's late poetry, the fiery prophet/bard has indisputably become the religious teacher. For instance, "The Dead Prophet" (1882-83), which may be a tribute to Carlyle (Ricks, p. 1322-23), uses an image similar to the one employed in the *Idylls*: the prophet's function is to lift men "out of the slime" and to show them that "souls have wings" (11.11-12). Tiresias, the prophet figure who had been on Tennyson's mind since 1833 (although the poem bearing his name was not published until 1885) resembles Merlin in possessing a future vision which brings pain and which isolates him from his fellow creatures. Like Merlin, Tiresias finds that he must pay a high price for his "gift"; as he explains to Menoeceus:

. . . upon me flashed  
The power of prophesying—but to me  
No power—so chained and coupled with the curse  
Of blindness and their unbelief, who heard  
And heard not, when I spake of famine, plague,  
Shrine-shattering earthquake, fire, flood, thunderbolt  
. . . .  
This power hath worked no good to aught that lives,  
And these blind hands were useless in their wars  
(11.55-60; 76-77)

Despite his sense of impotence and despite the fact that society rejects him, however, Tiresias does not, like Merlin, abandon his public role. Instead, he uses his privileged knowledge to teach Menoeceus his duty, thus effecting the salvation of Thebes. Similarly, the dying Merlin of "Merlin and the Gleam" (1889) addresses himself to a younger male who is capable of significant action; the young mariner is exhorted to take up the old visionary's quest and "follow the Gleam," or "the higher poetic imagination" (Ricks, p. 1413). Finally, "The Ancient Sage" (1889) engages in a dialogue with a despairing young lyricist whom he urges to "help thy fellow men," "curb the beast" in himself, and "look Higher" for the spiritual truth that transcends human understanding.

The prophet's sphere of influence has narrowed from the whole society to the individual and his message has become almost exclusively moral and spiritual as the "chair" of the bard has been replaced by the podium of the teacher.

This complex, highly literary and traditional figure of the prophet/bard bestrides fifty years of Tennyson's poetry like a colossus, expressing some of his most fundamental aesthetic concerns. That the character of Merlin as he evolves in the *Idylls* should embody various

stages of Tennyson's thought about the dangers of visionary art, the function of the contemporary artist, and the potency of his words is not surprising. After all, as Tennyson wrote in 1889:

I am Merlin,  
And I am dying,  
I am Merlin  
Who follow The Gleam.<sup>32</sup> ("Merlin and The Gleam," 11.7-10)

University of Hartford

## Thackeray's Journalism: Apprenticeship for Writer and Reader

Elizabeth Segel

Charlotte Bronte regarded Thackeray as "the first of the modern masters"<sup>1</sup>; G. H. Lewes asserted that ". . . England has at no time produced a writer of fiction with whom Thackeray may not stand in honourable comparison"<sup>2</sup>; Trollope believed *Henry Esmond* "the first and finest novel in the English language."<sup>3</sup> Thackeray's reputation declined sharply, however, after his death and remained relatively low until its steady climb in our own time back into the sunshine of critical esteem.

The general pattern is common enough, of course, and can be explained in part as the normal rejection by one generation of its parents' idols. But in Thackeray's case, both the decline and the return to critical favor were more abrupt and intense than usual. The phenomenon is not simply a matter of changing critical taste.

In the years between the publication of Trollope's critical biography (1879) and the appearance in the 1950's of major sympathetic studies of Thackeray by Gordon Ray and Geoffrey Tillotson,<sup>4</sup> numerous books about Thackeray focused on his attitudes, character, or alleged values, and were characterized by weak logic, bias, and vindictiveness.<sup>5</sup> Lionel Stevenson, writing in 1955, de-

finied the tone of Thackeray criticism up to that time and suggested the reason for it. The critics who have written on Thackeray, he said, ". . . have one characteristic in common: they are strongly subjective in their attitude toward Thackeray; and, with the exception of Gordon Ray in *The Buried Life*, they make little use of the technique of research. Thackeray was so much the most personal of all major novelists that he induces a similarly personal mood in his critics."<sup>6</sup> Many, many "studies" of Thackeray were simply distorted examinations of and attacks on Thackeray's temperament, attitudes, and personal relationships.

Thackeray's novels invite this sort of personal response in large part because of their most distinctive technical characteristic, Thackeray's invariable use of a narrative persona: a created, commenting voice, more or less distinct from the author's, which communicates the story to the reader. This device was extremely useful to Thackeray, but it is a device that carries the risk of confusion. That risk is the possibility that the reader will naively identify the actual person writing with the narrator created to relate the events of the story. I am convinced

31. Gray, p. 423.

32. I would like to thank the National Endowment for the Humanities for the Fellowship in Residence for College Teachers (1977-78) which supported this research and Prof. David De Laura for his encouragement and good counsel.

1. *The Shakespeare Head Brontë, The Life and Letters* (1932), ii, 244. Reprinted in *Thackeray: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Geoffrey Tillotson and Donald Hawes (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1968), p. 52.  
2. In a review article, *Leader*, 1 (December, 1850), 929. Reprinted in *Thackeray: The Critical Heritage*, p. 105.  
3. *Cornhill Magazine*, 9 (February 1864), 134-7. Reprinted in *Thackeray: The Critical Heritage*, p. 327.

4. *Thackeray: The Uses of Adversity 1811-1846* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1955); *Thackeray: The Age of Wisdom. 1847-1863* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1958); *Thackeray the Novelist* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1954).

5. A noted example of such books is J.Y.T. Grieg's *Thackeray: A Reconsideration* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1950), which focusses its attack on Thackeray's lack of a "well-integrated personality" and the fact that he "allowed his private life to dictate to him when he wrote fiction" (p. 6).

6. Review of *Thackeray the Novelist*, by Geoffrey Tillotson, *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 10 (June 1955), 80.

that the first readers of *Vanity Fair* and the subsequent novels did not fall into this confusion because they were familiar with the clear-cut narrative personas which Thackeray had been using in his numerous periodical sketches, reviews, and short fiction for a decade before *Vanity Fair* appeared in 1847. The striking revival of Thackeray's reputation in the last twenty years, on the other hand, does not stem from a rediscovery of Thackeray's early journalism, which truthfully speaking does not warrant resurrection, but on greatly increased critical interest in and sensitivity to the complexities of the narrative persona convention.<sup>7</sup>

Thackeray began using the device of a narrative persona very early in his journalistic career, experimented extensively with its potential, then used it in one form or another in every novel he wrote. Thackeray's career as a free-lance writer was launched in 1837 with the collapse of the radical newspaper, *The Constitutional and Public Ledger*, which employed him as Paris correspondent. *Fraser's Magazine* was the most dependable market for his work in the next seven years, and most members of the gallery of Thackeray's narrative personas originated in its pages. After contributing to *Fraser's* one review and a ballad, Thackeray hit upon the idea of using a narrative persona to invigorate a typical book review assignment (November 1837). The faults of the book, a pompous guide to high-society etiquette called *My Book; or, The Anatomy of Conduct* by John Henry Skelton, were perfectly exposed by having the critique of its contents originate with the arrogant but common-sense footman Yellowplush. The newly created character scored a hit with the public and so was used for several more comic pieces in subsequent issues—another review and several narratives involving “behind-the-scenes” glimpses of the aristocracy in its dingier moments. Thackeray's second narrative persona in the pages of *Fraser's* also was created to enliven a routine assignment, when Thackeray was asked to report on the Royal Academy art exhibition of 1838. The sentimental struggling artist, Michael Angelo Titmarsh, became from this time on Thackeray's means of leavening with humor the occasionally tedious task that faced him as *Fraser's* critic of the visual arts. Titmarsh became such a favorite with readers and with Thackeray himself that he was before long the most hard-worked of Thackeray's narrator figures. Besides the regular reviews of major London and Paris art exhibitions, Mr. Titmarsh's name appeared on the title-pages of

the following works, in and out of *Fraser's*: the *Paris Sketch-Book*, *Comic Tales and Sketches*, *The Second Funeral of Napoleon*, the *Fraser's* essays “Memorials of Gourmandising,” “Men and Pictures,” and “Men and Coats,” *The History of Samuel Titmarsh and the Great Hoggarty Diamond*, the *Irish Sketch Book*, *Titmarsh's Carmen Lillense*, *Little Travels and Road-Side Sketches*, *Legend of the Rhine*, *Notes of a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo* and *Mrs. Perkin's Ball*, to list only the most prominent pieces. Thackeray even began consistently to refer to himself as Titmarsh in personal notes and the like, as in this letter written on his second trip to Ireland: “It is a curious fact that both Boz and Titmarsh reached Liverpool the same day [June 29, 1842; Thackeray on the way to Ireland, Dickens returning from New York]: but the journals have not taken notice of the arrival of the latter. Gross jealousy!”<sup>8</sup>

Other personas adopted by Thackeray in his *Fraser's* contributions were Ikey Solomons, Esq., junior, for the novel *Catherine*, Sam Titmarsh, who narrates his own story in “. . . The Great Hoggarty Diamond” (Michael Angelo Titmarsh, Sam's cousin, acts as editor and illustrator of this narrative), George Savage Fitzboodle, the non-literary author of the many pieces in the three series *Confessions*, *Professions*, and *Men's Wives*, as well as the alleged but undeveloped narrator of Barry Lyndon's adventures in their original version. Barry Lyndon, the actual narrative persona in that book, also was a *Fraser's* figure, for the book was first published in that magazine. In these same “*Fraser's* years” (1837-1844) Thackeray devised the masks of Major Goliah Gahagan, Bob Stubb, Barber Cox, and Lancelot Wagstaff, Esq., for use in other publications. In 1844 Thackeray left *Fraser's* for a more lucrative staff position on the new comic periodical *Punch*. Harold Strong Gulliver presents a formidable catalog of thirty Thackeray pseudonyms which appeared within *Punch's* covers. Some were used merely for brief filler paragraphs but virtually all were developed as narrative personas as well as pseudonyms.<sup>9</sup>

In creating this extensive gallery of pseudonymous narrative personas, Thackeray was following the common journalistic practice of the day, which was probably fostered originally by the strong tradition of anonymity in newspaper and magazine contributions. Anonymity served several purposes in this undisciplined adolescence of journalism. Protection from libel suits was doubtless a primary consideration. Furthermore, journalism was

generally looked down on as a degrading, blackguardly pursuit; not for years to come would its practitioners be considered fully respectable members of society. The men who wrote for the periodical press would have lost rather than gained reputation by appearing in print without protective disguise. Thackeray himself pointed out another consideration: it would do a writer more harm than good to sign his name to such hurried, common productions of the overworked pen.<sup>10</sup> Another benefit suggested by Thackeray in the same essay was no doubt substantial—that of protecting the author's privacy at a time when the conditions of publication tended to encourage an intimacy between author and public.

Given this tradition, an author writing as a humorist might well depart from the common practice of publishing articles unsigned or merely initialled (Thackeray's political columns for the *Constitutional* were signed T. T.), and instead append to a comic piece a clearly fictitious comical name. This could lead naturally to expanding the name of the fictitious author-narrator into a comic character developed within the piece itself—a comic narrative persona. (Obviously, the process could start at the other end with the creation of this comic narrator, whose name is then affixed to the sketch. This was no doubt the genesis of Charles James Yellowplush, a persona created by Thackeray specifically as a source of humor and of useful critical perspective.)

Once used, these characters were resurrected time after time, if successful in amusing readers and editors, simply to cash in on that success; in this way some personas appeared regularly for a time as part of a series, the backbone of these comic magazines, while others that didn't catch on made but one brief appearance. The recurring characters in a continuing series enabled an author to tie together sketches or essays on widely diverse subjects and gave the readers the special pleasure of renewed acquaintance and intimacy that comes with familiarity. Even a successful persona would, of course, be dropped in time so as not to become tiresome and to make way for a new figure that might capture the public's notice and fancy. Editors were firm believers in frequent change of series and hence of personas, according to Saintsbury,<sup>11</sup> a fact that makes the longevity of Titmarsh the more remarkable.

These were the pragmatic motives, rooted in the commercial enterprise of mid-nineteenth-century journalism, that dictated Thackeray's nearly invariable use of narrative personas in his writing for the periodical press. The device proved so particularly useful and congenial to

Thackeray's artistic goals, however, that, after he had refined an essentially crude narrative technique into a precise and efficient tool, he carried it over from slapdash journalism to his major novels where he gave it a central role.

Wayne Booth has pointed out in his seminal study of fictional rhetoric that a narrative persona may coincide more or less with the implied author of the work or “may be separated from him by large ironies.”<sup>12</sup> A failure to observe this distinction accounts for the great bulk of wrong-headed criticism of Thackeray's novels. Where the gulf between implied author and narrative persona is too vast to be overlooked, as in *Barry Lyndon*, narrated by an eighteenth-century Irish rogue, the values espoused by the work have never been badly misinterpreted (though many readers have objected to the unpleasant world revealed in Barry's totally amoral “code of a gentleman”). Where the mask more closely resembles the middle-aged English journalist-novelist, however, as in the shadowy figure of *Vanity Fair's* showman or in Pendennis, narrator of *The Newcomes* and *Philip*, the characteristic bugaboo of Thackeray's readers crops up—the tendency to simply miss the presence of the persona or mask and to attribute both commentary and its implied values directly to Thackeray the author. Lambert Ennis typified this error when he wrote: “He was either his own narrator, as in *Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis*, or was using as mouthpiece a character whose attitudes were so like his own that the digressions are not incongruous.”<sup>13</sup> Such an error is usually followed and hence compounded by an attack on Thackeray the author for shallowness, ambivalence, or similar vices detected in the persona's view of life.

The perspective on the narrative—ironic, humorous or whatever—that can be contributed by the use of a persona whose perception and values are different from those of the implied author is clearly not achieved if the reader takes the persona's perceptions and values as the author's. Thackeray's contemporaries were much keener at spotting the persona-author distinction in his novels than later readers because they were acquainted with Thackeray's voluminous journalism of the ten years preceding the publication of *Vanity Fair* and consequently were accustomed to finding in his writing narrators who clearly were not Thackeray.

Because nearly all of this journalism was published under various pseudonyms, it has been assumed that for Thackeray's contemporaries, *Vanity Fair* “blazed like a

7. A first-rate example of this critical interest and sensitivity appears in Juliet McMaster's preface to *Thackeray: The Major Novels*: “It is my own contention that Thackeray is a consummate artist very much in control of what he is doing, whose major novels are works of thematic coherence and aesthetic integrity; and that he is also a highly sophisticated ironist, exploiting to the full the potential of the various personae he adopts, and introducing ambiguity deliberately,

to sharpen our moral perception and to evoke the complexity of experience itself” (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1971), p. vii.

8. *The Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray*, ed. Gordon N. Ray (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1945), II, 60.

9. *Thackeray's Literary Apprenticeship* (Valdosta, Ga.: 1934), p. 157.

10. The Proser—VII. “On the Press and the Public,” *Punch*, 19 (Aug. 3, 1850), 59ff.

11. *A Consideration of Thackeray* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1931), p. 128.

12. *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 73.

13. *Thackeray: The Sentimental Cynic* (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1950), p. 109.

meteor sweeping unexpectedly across the sky."<sup>14</sup> heralding the arrival on the scene of a new writer. But there is good evidence that the identity of Michael Angelo Titmarsh and many other Thackerayan personas was no secret. In January, 1846, for instance, *Fraser's Magazine* reviewed one of Thackeray's books of travel sketches, *Notes of a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo*, which had been published under the pseudonym of "Mr. M. A. Titmarsh" (pp. 85-87). The reviewer asks the question: "But who is Titmarsh?" and then passes on reports that Titmarsh is Major Goliah Gahagan, according to a Bengal veteran; that he is, on the contrary, the Honorable Augustus Fitzboodle, last seen at Stutgard [sic]; that the gatekeeper of the Fleet asserts him to be Barry Lyndon, Esq.; there are in fact rumors that he is a footman-author, and *Punch's* "Fat Contributor." Indeed, continues the reviewer, "Have not we met this literary malefactor before, even under his present disguise?" and he identifies as Titmarsh's work *The Paris Sketch Book* and *The Irish Sketch Book*. Here, then, one year previous to the appearance of *Vanity Fair's* initial number, was assembled for the reader a veritable bibliography of the works of William Makepeace Thackeray, and if the name at the head of the list reads Titmarsh, not Thackeray, the result is the same, given the identification of the two shortly thereafter in the advertisements for *Vanity Fair's* monthly parts. "NEW WORK BY MICHAEL ANGELO TITMARSH / VANITY FAIR / BY WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY" ran the announcement in *Punch* (November 28, 1846).

Indeed, given *Punch's* weekly circulation at this time of at least 30,000<sup>15</sup> copies, as compared to sales of 7,000 copies of *Vanity Fair* in monthly parts plus 1,500 copies of the complete novel in the early months, it seems highly likely that the great majority of *Vanity Fair's* first readers were readers of *Punch* as well, and therefore well acquainted with the conventions of Thackeray's work.

Several of the initial reviewers of *Vanity Fair* referred to Thackeray's reputation as an acknowledged fact. For example, R.S. Rintoul opened his review in the *Spectator* by noting that "the novel is distinguished by the more remarkable qualities which have created the reputation of the author . . ."<sup>16</sup> Even in America, a critic writing in 1848 used the names Thackeray and Titmarsh interchangeably in a review of *Vanity Fair* which discussed the early periodical pieces at some length: "Thackeray

has his points of contact, also, with another great humorous writer, Washington Irving. Very gracefully and prettily does Mr. Titmarsh write at times; there is many a little bit, here and there, in the *Journey from Cornhill to Cairo*, that would not disgrace Geoffrey Crayon in his best mood."<sup>17</sup> The *Knickerbocker Magazine's* September 1848 review of *Vanity Fair* characterized that book as "the best we have seen from his [Thackeray's] pen,"<sup>18</sup> clearly revealing an acquaintance with his earlier work.

Michael Angelo Titmarsh, Yellowplush the footman, and a host of others, were, then, well-known comic creations of the author who could hardly be taken as his direct spokesman. As a result, *Vanity Fair's* first readers were not disposed to take as Thackeray's own every opinion and sentiment of its diffident narrator, intentionally created subject to the delusions and vanities of the great fair.

A prime example of the misconceptions about Thackeray's fiction that arose after his death is provided by those who have sternly accused Thackeray of being one of the vulgar creatures he delighted in anatomizing—a snob, the accusation stemming perhaps from an overliteral reading of the subtitle of the *Punch* series, *The Snobs of England*: "By One of Themselves," but nourished chiefly by attitudes detected in the commentary of Mr. Snob, the narrative persona of the work. Yet Gordon Ray demonstrates convincingly that "not until the contemporary context of the Snob papers had been effectively lost did critics of Thackeray begin to find in them evidence that their author was in any reprehensible sense a snob himself."<sup>19</sup> That is, not until after Thackeray's death did readers overlook the pervasive irony of that work and mistakenly identify Mr. Snob's attitudes with those of his creator. It becomes clear that the debt of the major novels to the earlier journalism in this central device of narrative persona lies not only in Thackeray's developing mastery through practice but also in his first readers' developing expectations and sophistication.

People continued to read Thackeray's novels after his death, of course, but very little of his earlier journalism survived the occasion of its original publication. As a result, Thackeray's accomplishments could not be justly estimated by subsequent generations until nearly a century later when narrative critical theory caught up with Thackeray's practice.

The notable exception to the decades of predominantly

unsympathetic criticism of Thackeray is Saintsbury's monumental work, the critical introductions to the volumes of the 1908 Oxford Edition of Thackeray's *Works*, and it is an exception that does indeed prove the rule and bolster the argument. The reason for this is that Saintsbury was, by all indications, more intimately familiar with every bit of Thackeray's writing than any other critic in the last century. Thackeray's works, Saintsbury tells us in the preface to the collection of his introductions that was issued in 1931, "had been for nearly forty years, more frequently in his hands, and more constantly in the head and heart of the student [Saintsbury] than any other in prose . . ."<sup>20</sup> Later he mentions that he has read *Cox's Dairy*, which he would not call one of Thackeray's best or even second best works, "at least a score of times."<sup>21</sup> And of the *Irish Sketch Book* he writes, ". . . there is hardly a book of Thackeray's that I have read oftener."<sup>22</sup> It is no accident then that Saintsbury's criticism includes many insights into the nature of Thackeray's narrative personas, which Saintsbury calls *eidola*. How many volumes of wrongheaded criticism

would we have been spared had subsequent critics taken this observation by Saintsbury to heart: "Indeed, the people who go wrong trying to identify certain of Thackeray's characters stock and block with real persons, might take a lesson from these various *eidola*. They always have something Thackerayan; they never by any chance contain anything like the whole Thackeray."<sup>23</sup>

Saintsbury was ahead of the crowd in his intelligent, unreserved appreciation of Thackeray's fiction. The biographical and critical work of Gordon Ray and Geoffrey Tillotson in the fifties which established the facts of Thackeray's life and career and insisted on the difference between Thackeray and his created voices, plus the developing critical interest and sophistication in dealing with the subtleties of the authorial persona have made available again to the rest of us the awareness necessary to read Thackeray intelligently.

University of Pittsburgh

## Ruskin's Changing Evaluation of Poetic Vision

Helen Pike Bauer

In *Modern Painters* III and *The Stones of Venice* Ruskin examines the Medieval and Renaissance frames of mind and some works of art they produced. He discusses frequently, as illustration, the poetry of Dante and Milton. His praise, especially of Dante, is almost total. "I think that the central man of all the world," he writes in 1853 in *The Stones of Venice* III, "as representing in perfect balance the imaginative, moral, and intellectual faculties, all at their highest, is Dante."<sup>1</sup> In *The Stones of Venice* II he had written, "every line of the *Paradise* is full of the most exquisite and spiritual expressions of Christian truth; and that poem is only less read than the "Inferno," because it requires far greater attention, and perhaps, for its full enjoyment, a holier heart" (X, 379-80). His appreciation of Milton is more qualified, and the references to him *Modern Painters* III and *The Stones of Venice* tend to be unflattering comparisons to Dante. Still, Ruskin's admiration of Milton is strong. During the time he was composing *The Stones of Venice*

he was steadily reading Milton and writes to his father frequently of his conclusions. He writes on 23 April 1852, for example, comparing Milton to Dante and Shakespeare, "I think in the setting forth of a sublime vision by the best possible words and metaphors, Milton beats them both" (X, 307-08n.). And Ruskin argues in the writings of the mid 1850's that Dante and Milton have given us a daring and valuable insight into both the nature of last things and the kind of life necessary for man to live in order to achieve Christian salvation.

And yet, from the 1860's to the end of his life Ruskin's remarks on these poets reveal a changed opinion of their work and of what readers can learn from it. Their scenes of eternal beatitude and punishment become to Ruskin "idle imaginations," "vague and visionary" (XVII, 209). Ruskin no longer seeks out the images Milton and Dante give us of the supernatural; he comes to believe we cannot trust such expressions. All we can cling to are those poets' conclusions about the conduct of our daily life.

14. Harold Strong Gulliver, *Thackeray's Literary Apprenticeship*, p. 89.

15. M. H. Spielmann, *The History of "Punch"*, (London: Cassell and Co., Ltd., 1895), p. 49.

16. 21 (22 July 1848), 709. Reprinted in *Thackeray: The Critical Heritage*, p. 58.

17. [Charles Astor Bristed], *American Review*, 9 (October 1848),

421-431. Reprinted in *Thackeray: The Critical Heritage*, p. 58. Geoffrey Crayon was a persona used by Irving.

18. (September 1848). Quoted by Richard Clark Tobias in "American Criticism of Thackeray 1848-1855," *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 8 (June 1953), 54.

19. *Thackeray: The Uses of Adversity* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1955), p. 376.

20. Reprinted as *A Consideration of Thackeray* (London: Oxford University Press, 1931).

21. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73

1. *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols. (London: George Allen, 1903-12), XI, 187. Subsequent references to this edition are given in the text.

In order to account for this change in Ruskin's response to this poetry one must first locate the power he originally found in it. On what basis, according to Ruskin, do Dante and Milton erect their visionary structures? Do Ruskin's opinions about this foundation change? Why, if his trust in these visions diminishes, does his faith in the moral wisdom of these poets remain strong?<sup>2</sup>

One might be tempted at first to attribute this change simply to Ruskin's declining faith in the Evangelical Christianity of his youth, crystallized in his "unconversion" at Turin in 1858. But his loss of faith in the content of poetic visions is more complex than a simple identification of the poet and his work with religious prophecy would suggest. Moreover Ruskin's changing evaluation of poetic vision has strong consequences for his attitude towards the symbolic imagination in general.

To understand Ruskin's concept of the visionary imagination one must clarify its relationship to the artistic imagination as a whole. The creative imagination, as the artist ordinarily employs it, is anchored in external reality. In *Modern Painters* II Ruskin develops what he considers the three modes of imaginative activity. The artist, he believes, discovers rather than creates meaning. In the presence of the outside world, natural, human or divine, the poet penetrates to the spiritual truth of what he sees. And in his work of art, he gives substance to his insight, either directly, by arranging what he observes, or obliquely, inventing images to embody his meanings. Ruskin calls the poetic faculty that intuits meaning the penetrative imagination and tells us that it "never stops at crusts or ashes, or outward images of any kind; it ploughs them all aside, and plunges into the very central fiery heart" (IV, 250). He contrasts here the spiritual or emotional truth the poet desires with the transitory manifestation that truth may take in the world. Such embodiments must often be destroyed in order to find the reality that lies within. And the associative and contemplative imaginations, as Ruskin distinguishes them, forge the created images and metaphors that give body to the central thought.

And yet, in *Modern Painters* III and *The Stones of Venice*, Ruskin speaks of another order of poets, those who do not construct but receive their images. In *Modern Painters* III he outlines the "true ideal" as it exists in art. One branch of that idealism is the "naturalist." It is the "central and highest branch of ideal art which concerns itself simply with things as they ARE, and accepts, in all of

them, alike the evil and the good" (V, 111). The idealism, Ruskin argues, is in the artist's arrangement of what he sees. But as he develops his thoughts about such art, Ruskin's most frequent literary examples are from Dante and Homer; these are poets whose strength is not simply in their fidelity to fact, and to subsume them under the naturalist ideal is to raise problems about how we are to receive their work. Ruskin continues, "all the great men see what they paint before they paint it,—see it in a perfectly passive manner,—cannot help seeing it if they would; whether in their mind's eye, or in bodily fact, does not matter . . . they not daring, under the might of its presence, to alter one jot or tittle of it as they write it down or paint it down; it being to them in its own kind and degree always a true vision or Apocalypse, and invariably accompanied in their hearts by a feeling correspondent to the words,—'Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are'" (V, 114). This injunction and Ruskin's subsequent discussion in this chapter emphasize the artist's verisimilitude rather than arrangement. Moreover, the emotional tenor of the description, Ruskin's reference to the Bible, his borrowing of sacred language to describe this creative process, his use as examples of poets whom we would categorize as mythic or allegorical, all point to the naturalist ideal as including an order of art with more profound sources and implications than might first be apparent. These visionary poets believe fully in what they describe; yet what they describe is not accessible to the ordinary sight of man.

In a later chapter of this volume Ruskin contrasts Milton's hell with Dante's and complains that "all is wild and fenceless with Milton. . . . But Dante's Inferno is accurately separated into circles drawn with well-pointed compasses" (p. 270). "It does not follow, because Milton did not map out his Inferno as Dante did, that he could not have done so if he had chosen; only, it was the easier and less imaginative process to leave it vague than to define it. Imagination is always the seeing and asserting faculty" (p. 271). And, Ruskin writes elsewhere in the volume, "the great men have no choice in the matter; they do not know or care whether the things they describe are vulgarities or not. They saw them; they are the facts of the case. If they had merely composed what they describe, they would have had it at their will to refuse this circumstance or add that. But they did not compose it. It came to them ready fashioned" (p. 115).

One must question the nature of this vision, its source and matter. Where are the paradise and hell that Dante and Milton see? Ruskin writes at one point as if it were all an amalgamation of memories. In a discussion of Turnerian topography, he states that the painter's composition was "universally an arrangement of remembrances, summoned just as they were wanted, and set each in its fittest place." Turner's vision was "composed primarily of the strong memory of the place itself which he had to draw; and secondarily, of memories of other places . . . associated, in a harmonious and helpful way, with the new central thought" (VI, 41). And Ruskin extends this process of composition to include poets as well. "With all those whom I have carefully studied (Dante, Scott, Turner, Tintoret) it seems to me to hold absolutely; their imagination consisting, not in a voluntary production of new images, but an involuntary remembrance, exactly at the right moment, of something they had actually seen" (p. 42).

This passage may illuminate Ruskin's thoughts on the matter, but it is not his final, nor his fullest or most representative statement. Memory may help provide some matter for poetry, but the visions of Dante and Milton are integrally tied to their meaning. Ruskin admits that the principle upon which such memories are associated is "utterly inexplicable" (VI, 41), but his assertion that mysteriously fused memories become the content of poetic vision cannot stand as satisfactory. He elsewhere points out repeatedly that poetic visions approach a higher truth than is readily available to most men. Dante's apocalyptic visions have an authority that his mere memories of Florence, however associated, could never give.

One other point Ruskin makes in this passage should be noted. The visionary imagination consists he tells us, "not in a voluntary production of new images, but an involuntary remembrance." The language reminds one of *Modern Painters* III where scenes pass before poets "whether they will or no"; "the great men have no choice in the matter." In addition to treating the vision as memory, Ruskin occasionally writes of it almost as literally inspired, breathed into the poet from outside.<sup>3</sup>

In surveying Ruskin's writings on voluntariness and consciousness in these visions that partake so fully of the unconscious, one should first recall how much Ruskin stresses the artist's control in the ordinary workings of the imagination. In *Modern Painters* II he organizes his

theory of the imagination as an attempt to discover the faculty that directs the fusing of ideas in creativity. The artist might not always be aware of the reasons for his strategic choices in fashioning a work, but he retains complex controls over that work. His desire to capture his intuition determines the choices he will make in his attempt to embody it. All art, Ruskin stresses continually in his writings, partakes of the unconscious. "From a bee to Paul Veronese," he writes in *Modern Painters* III, "all master-workers work with this awful, this inspired unconsciousness" (V, 122). But ordinarily the unconscious directs the conscious in making choices while creating. The very execution of a work moreover can alter the artist's sense of what he wishes to convey.<sup>4</sup> In that special instance, however, of visionary art there seems no choice. All is present to the artist before such discrimination can operate.

The artist to whom portions of an entire work, spirit and flesh, come with the compulsion of a vision might indeed seem at first to be a mere vehicle for a higher voice or spirit, a *vates*. And in some of Ruskin's writings on the subject, the quality of the artist's control is left ambiguous. In passages mentioned above, for example, using such words as "involuntary," Ruskin seems to imply an absence of artistic control or responsibility. And one is tempted to think, because of Ruskin's frequent alliance of poet with prophet, that the ambiguity is deliberate. Especially in reading Ruskin on these poets whose work displays images of the supernatural, one is led to assume that Ruskin's use of "prophetic" might indeed indicate a belief that such poets spoke literally the voice of God.<sup>5</sup> One should first, however, survey briefly Ruskin's ordinary use of the word. Its meaning often changes according to its context. In discussing his theory of the penetrative imagination, for example, he often describes its movement as prophetic, indicating simply that the imagination intuits a meaning that binds and orders the subsidiary meanings in a work of art. (IV, 225; 234) In *Fiction, Fair and Foul* Ruskin calls Scott a prophetic poet because he can foresee the consequences to nature if men proceed in treating her heedlessly. (XXXIV, 305)

But Ruskin can use "prophetic" in more stringent ways. Most often when he concentrates a discussion on the prophetic powers of a particular poet he implies that the poet provides about the nature of reality a moral insight beyond the common wisdom of men. In this sense Dante and Milton speak an inspired truth, but it is a truth

2. Ruskin's response to literature, in general, has been treated by A. H. R. Ball in his introduction to *Ruskin as Literary Critic* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1928). Ball does not deal specifically, however, with Ruskin's writings on visionary poetry. Harold Bloom's "Introduction" to his edition of *The Literary Criticism of John Ruskin* (New York: Anchor Books, 1965) considers Ruskin as an

allegorical critic but concentrates on his relationship to the Romantics. The fullest discussion of Ruskin's critical theories is by George P. Landow in *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971); Landow argues that Ruskin's theories of allegorical art derive from the religious sources in which he was schooled early in life.

3. See, for example, VI, 38.

4. Surveying his writings on copying the paintings of others can provide numerous examples of how Ruskin learns as he paints. See especially the discussions in *Fors Clavigera* and *Praeterita* of Ruskin's work in Pisa, Lucca, Turin and Assisi.

5. Landow, for example, argues that Ruskin "takes quite seriously and quite literally the idea that to imagine deeply is to prophesy, and

that to be an artist and poet is to be a prophet; and he can do this because his theory of the allegorical imagination derives from a theological tradition which holds that such a mode is necessary to accommodate divine truths to the human condition" (p. 373). Drawing upon the tradition of the prophetic inspiration of holy men, Landow writes as if, to Ruskin, the artist's major task is to capture in symbols that which he cannot completely understand.

that they meet by preparing themselves in thought and act. It is a truth that they actively seek. Their own wisdom enables them to see it, just as our moral immaturity prevents us from the same leap. Ruskin does not argue that the imagery Dante and Milton use to convey their understanding is inspired; the structure, characters, metaphors of their literary works are not revealed by God. God is most apparent in artistic embodiments, according to Ruskin, in Turner's paintings. (III, 611-12) But it is nature Turner captures imperfectly on canvas, the physical extension of God's attributes, according to Ruskin's theory of typical beauty. Poetry is not that. One can rephrase the problem: who gives us the image of heaven in Dante's poetry; who gives us the moral conclusions about life?

In *Modern Painters* III Ruskin approaches directly the matter of artistic responsibility for visionary art. Paraphrasing his audience's implied question, he asks, "if then your great central idealist is to show all truth . . . receiving it in this passive way, what becomes of all your principles of selection . . . ?" He answers, "why, the choice, as well as the vision, is *manifested* to Homer. The vision comes to him in its chosen order. Chosen *for* him, not *by* him, but yet full of visible and exquisite choice, just as a sweet and perfect dream will come to a sweet and perfect person, so that, in some sense, they may be said to have chosen their dream, or composed it; and yet they could not help dreaming it so, and in no otherwise" (V, 118). Ruskin's use of the dream analogy is helpful. To the artist, the vision seems involuntary. It comes to him as an inescapable series of images of human life. But the vision depends upon his peculiar configuration of talents, on his personality. It is chosen for him the way his talent is chosen for him, inexplicably. Yet the uniqueness of the vision depends on the uniqueness of the personality. Here Ruskin is dealing with as subtle a control of the vision as possible. It is controlled the way we control our characters, just as our dreams can be influenced to some degree by the way we consciously try to develop and modify our personalities. The artist does maintain a control, though he may not be aware of it, for it is not so much revealed by his choice in directing his vision as it is by his responsibility for the kind of vision he receives.

There have been few such artists in the history of literature. They are those who most closely come to a comprehension, almost divine in its intensity and truth, of human life. Such an artist penetrates to the meaning of situations, but carries his insights, understandings, with him, learning, growing, and nourishing these pieces of knowledge about the world until he builds, unconsciously, an immense fund of understanding. His accumulated insights, slowly developed, organized, modified, and given body by his storehouse of images

come back as profound visions of the world to be captured in poetry. The vision may demand effort to be recreated entirely in poetry; so Ruskin considers Milton less imaginative a poet than Dante because he does not push through to the purely visual dimension of his meaning. But once the core of the vision is seen, it overcomes the poet; he is held by it. Unlike poets who work according to the regular processes of the imagination, these visionary artists give us an art whose embodiment is inescapable and has the same immediacy, reality and power as its meaning. Because so much of this kind of art derives directly from the unconscious, its structure may spread out seemingly beyond the poet's control; he can only tell what he saw.

It is important to stress that Ruskin sees the artist's vision as inherently dependent upon his own nature, upon his character, his intellectual and emotional insight and his accumulated images. For as Ruskin grows older this aesthetic theory causes him to lament. In the writings of the 1850's Ruskin stresses the wholeness and power of these visions, the integral relationship between the artist's moral insight and his images, the ways such images can both entrance us with their beauty and lead us to an understanding of their moral source. As he grows older and his own beliefs about the soul of man and the power of sin darken, however, as his public writings become less a celebration of God and nature as they are captured in art and more a confrontation with the brutality he finds in the world around him, Ruskin's attitude towards this visionary poetry changes; he no longer admits its integrity. Because one can document Ruskin's rejection during his middle years of the doctrine of an afterlife one might be led to assume that this loss of faith causes his rejection of the images of eternity Dante and Milton give. And to some extent this is true. But Ruskin later regained a belief in eternal life, altered in content though it was from his early faith, and this did not noticeably affect his understanding of visionary poetry. Moreover, these visions were always to Ruskin dependent upon the artist. It is the artist he begins to question. Ruskin's darkening view of man alters his trust in apocalyptic presentations.

One can no longer believe that what the visionary poet tells us is unaffected by pride or ignorance or motive. In *Munera Pulveris* Ruskin declares that Homer and Dante and Milton, those writers he had most often mentioned as visionaries, "have permitted themselves, though full of all nobleness and wisdom, to coin idle imaginations of the mysteries of eternity, and guide the faiths of the families of the earth by the courses of their own vague and visionary arts: while the indisputable truths of human life and duty, respecting which they all have but one voice, lie hidden behind these veils of phantasy, unsought, and often unsuspected" (XVII, 209). And he speaks

throughout this volume of these and all writers as if they were not only fully but consciously responsible for their images, and as if the greatest value of the *Iliad* and the *Commedia* were the insights they give into what Homer and Dante could teach about human life.

And in a lecture delivered in 1868, "The Mystery of Life and Its Arts," Ruskin implies unequivocally that literature depends fully on its writer; any inspired speaking forth must find its sources within. But some writers will not even search within. And we cannot be sure how much to trust the vision; perhaps it is only a plaything, and the artist is contenting himself with fictions he knows to be false.

Milton's account of the most important event in his whole system of the universe, the fall of the angels, is evidently unbelievable to himself. . . . The rest of his poem is a picturesque drama, in which every artifice of invention is visibly and consciously employed; not a single fact being, for an instant, conceived as tenable by any living faith. Dante's conception is far more intense, and, by himself, for the time, not to be escaped from; it is indeed a vision, but a vision only . . . and the destinies of the Christian Church, under their most sacred symbols, become literally subordinate to the praise, and are only to be understood by the aid, of one dear Florentine maiden.

I tell you truly . . . it seems daily more amazing to me that men such as these should dare to play with the most precious truths . . . by which the whole human race listening to them could be informed, or deceived . . . they do but play upon sweetly modulated pipes . . . and fill the openings of eternity . . . with idle puppets of their scholastic imagination. (XVIII, 157-58)

Ruskin's long need for truth in art becomes almost paramount, and the demand that writers lead him to truth begins to usurp his aesthetic appreciation. Aesthetic contemplation no longer seems a path to understanding. His dismissal of the visionary mode, "a vision only," and of the symbolic function of Milton's images indicate that Ruskin's declining faith in the artistic embodiments of Milton and Dante signify a decline of faith in the power of symbolic understanding. A more direct, autonomous knowledge is called for. Toward the very end of his life, this demand for the consciously moral voice of the poet,

for unadorned truth, without exaggeration or invention, culminates in Ruskin's telling his readers that he had always chosen Byron above all others for his master. Byron tells the truth as he knows it and it is a serviceable truth.

It was of no use for Homer to tell me that Pelion was put on the top of Ossa. I knew perfectly well it wouldn't go on the top of Ossa. . . . Nay, the whole world, as it was described to me either by poetry or theology, was every hour becoming more and more shadowy and impossible. . . . I felt already, with fatal and increasing sadness, that there was no clear utterance about any of them—that there were for *me* neither Goddess guides nor prophetic teachers. . . .

But here at last I had found a man [Byron] who spoke only of what he had seen, and known; and spoke without exaggeration, without mystery, without enmity, and without mercy. "That is so;—make what you will of it!" (XXXV, 148-49)

To the end of his life Ruskin loved Homer and especially Dante, but he increasingly emphasized that the power of Dante's poetry comes from its delicate dramatization of human conduct and its considered conclusions about human morality. Dante is revered because he is the strongest, the most tender, the wisest of men. And his understanding has been formed by his experience and virtue. Ruskin writes in December 1876, "eye hath not seen or ear heard them," the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God has revealed them to *us*,—to Carpaccio, and Angelico, and Dante, and Giotto, and Filippo Lippi, and Sandro Botticelli, and to me, and to every child that has been taught to know its Father in heaven,—by the Spirit; because we have minded, or do mind, the things of the Spirit in some measure, and in such measure have entered into our rest" (XXVIII, 763). Our experience of virtue in this world, not our imaginative flights, Ruskin comes to believe, is our surest, truest taste of heaven. Such was the belief that altered subtly but profoundly the nature of his response to the visionary poetry he always loved.

Larchmont, New York



## Books Received

Brontë, Charlotte. *The Secret and Lily Hart*, transcribed and ed. Wm. Holtz. Columbia, Mo. and London: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1979. Pp. 95. \$5.95 paper. Two tales written by Charlotte Brontë when she was seventeen, a transcription of the MS now in the Elmer Ellis Library, University of Missouri—Columbia. The edition includes a facsimile text and a 15 page afterward.

Colby, Robt. A. *Thackeray's Canvass of Humanity: An Author and His Public*. Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1979. Pp. xiv + 485. \$25.00. An examination of the ways in which Thackeray affected and was affected by his public. His apprenticeship and the major works are analyzed.

Crump, R. W., ed. *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti: A Variorum Edition*, Vol. I. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State Univ. Press. Pp. xx + 332. \$20.00. Includes *The Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862) and *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* (1866), as well as poems added to *The Goblin Market* and *The Prince's Progress* in 1875. The first of a projected three volumes.

Garrett, Peter K. *The Victorian Multiplot Novel: Studies in Dialogical Form*. New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1980. Pp. x + 227. \$17.50. Garrett proposes that "by considering dialogical form as an unstable tension between determinate patterns and focusing on concrete fictional elements, we can explore the problems of meaning each novel develops without turning them into illustrations of universal philosophical themes." He examines novels by Dickens, Thackeray, Eliot and Trollope.

Harden, Edgar F. *The Emergence of Thackeray's Serial Fiction*. Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1979. Pp. xii + 385. \$25.00. Harden defends Thackeray against charges of haste and carelessness by examining changes in MSS available and/or occasionally page proofs of Thackeray's fiction. Novels analyzed include *Vanity Fair*, first four numbers; *The Newcomes* and *The Virginians*, random numbers; and all of *Lovel the Widower* and *The Adventures of Philip*.

Pattison, Robert. *Tennyson and Tradition*. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard Univ. Press, 1979. Pp. 178. \$14.00. Pattison traces the idyll as a traditional form and then shows how Tennyson borrowed and modified it to suit his own ends.

He convincingly argues that "the history of [Tennyson's] manipulation of form is the history of his mind."

Pratt, John Clark and Victor A. Neufeldt, eds. *George Eliot's "Middlemarch" Notebooks: A Transcription*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1979. Pp. lii + 305. \$27.50. "A record of her literary and historical research from 1868 to 1871," this transcription completes the work begun by Jerome Beaty, "Middlemarch" from Notebook to Novel (1960) and Anna Theresa Kitchel, ed. *Quarry for Middlemarch* (1950). Includes a 39 page introduction and 110 pages of notes. The notebooks transcribed are in the Folger Library and the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library.

Sussman, Herbert L. *Fact into Figure: Typology in Carlyle, Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*. Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1979. Pp. xx + 158. \$11.00. "Like Carlyle and Ruskin, the Brothers sought to reconcile through their art the fading belief in the sacramental quality of the natural world and in the providential nature of history with the powerful new attitudes generated by a wholly materialistic science and an avowedly scientific history. . . . [T]he Brotherhood, deeply influenced by Carlyle and Ruskin, employed a symbolic realism that sees fact as spiritually radiant and assumes that only through detailed representation of this natural and historical fact can the phenomenal be seen as figuring the transcendent."

Van Thal, Herbert. *Eliza Lynn Linton: The Girl of the Period*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1979. Pp. x + 245. \$25.00. Not a critical biography, Van Thal's book is heavily dependent on the 1901 Layard biography, *Mrs. Lynn Linton Her Life Letters and Opinions* and Linton's autobiographical novel, *The Autobiography of Christopher Kirkland*. There appears to be little new here.

Williams, Sidney Herbert and Falconer Madan, eds. *The Lewis Carroll Handbook*, rev and aug. Roger Lancelyn Green 1962, rev. further Denis Crutch [Hamden, Conn.]: Dawson-Archon Books, 1979. Pp. xx + 340. \$37.50. This is the second revision of the original *A Handbook of the Literature of the Reverend C. L. Dodgson*. Crutch has corrected and updated all articles and added new ones—"pieces by Dodgson freshly brought to light, manuscripts and proofs of works unpublished at the author's death, and books and periodical contributions published since 1960."

## Victorian Group News

### DICKENS SOCIETY ANNUAL AWARD

A prize of \$250 will be awarded by the Dickens Society at its annual meeting at the MLA Convention in December for the best first essay on Dickens published between 30 June 1979 and 30 June 1980. The award is intended to encourage young scholars, but those who have published previously on other subjects are also eligible. Entries (three copies or offprints) should be sent as soon as possible but no later than 30 July 1980 to Deborah A. Thomas, Department of English, University College, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J. 08903.

### NORTH AMERICAN UNION LIST OF VICTORIAN PERIODICALS

Professor Richard Fulton of Washington State University is coordinating the compilation of a union list of Victorian periodicals available in North American research libraries. People interested in helping with the project—specifically, people willing to compile a list of Victorian periodicals held by a particular library—should contact Professor Fulton at the Department of English, Washington State University, Pullman, WA 99164. A handbook for compilers is presently being written and should be available in May, 1980.

### LEWIS CARROLL ANNIVERSARY

To celebrate the 150th anniversary of C. L. Dodgson's birth (January 27, 182), Edward Guiliano is editing an anthology of new essays. Submissions on any aspect of Carroll's life or work are welcome. Essays should be between ten and forty typewritten pages and may contain illustrations. Queries and submissions should be sent to Edward Guiliano, 41 Jane Street 4D, New York, NY 10014.

### NOTICE

Regrettably, printing costs, mailing costs, and the costs of supplies have made it necessary to raise the subscription rate of *The Victorian Newsletter* for the first time since 1963. The new rates are \$5.00 for one year and \$9.00 for two years U.S.; foreign subscriptions, including Canada, are \$6.00 per year.

Back issues of VNL, at a cost of \$3.00 per copy, are available in limited quantities for the following numbers: 38, 41, 45, 47, 48, 49, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55 and 56.