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Editor

Ward Hellstrom

Managing Editor

Louise R. Hellstrom

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Cover: "First Appearance of Mr. Samuel Weller," etching by
"Phiz" for *Pickwick Papers*, 1836

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Dante Gabriel Rossetti: The Moment of the Picture

Kelsey Thornton

To talk about the relationship of Rossetti's poetry to painting is not to relate particular poems to particular paintings. This of course can be done. In William Michael's edition of his brother's work, there is a section of poems on pictures, and a section of sonnets and verses for Rossetti's own paintings. The first group — of sonnets for pictures — includes poems on works by Leonardo, Giorgione, Mantegna, Ingres, Memmlinck, Burne-Jones, Michelangelo and Botticelli (a characteristically 1870s list). The type can be illustrated with the sonnet on Leonardo's "Our Lady of the Rocks." Although it describes a picture, Rossetti is interested in the emotion aroused by the picture rather than its pictorial detail, and his twin themes of Life and Death (as usual with capital letters) are mixed with his religious sense.

One can find the same thing in sonnets and verses for his own works, with his concentration on the moment, on the climactic point in some event or, more typically, on some particular relationship. Both "Found" and "The Day-Dream" show this well. But one does not need the pictures to relate these poems readily to works of art, either real or imaginary (since Rossetti did not always make pictures to fit with pictorial poems nor poems to fit with poetic pictures).

I said, however, that the relationship is not primarily of particular poems to particular paintings; rather it is Rossetti's pictorial method, the quality of his vision: on the one hand the materializing genius, the ability to focus thought by giving it a tangible form, and on the other hand the spiritualizing of the solid moment, the ability to reveal behind and in the tangible a spiritual and eternal truth. Pater, in a splendid essay of 1883, clearly places this undissociated sensibility:

... the church of the Middle Age by its aesthetic worship, its sacramentalism, its real faith in the resurrection of the flesh, had set itself against that Manichaeian opposition of spirit and matter, and its results in men's way of taking life; and in this Dante is the central representative of its spirit. To him, in the vehement and impassioned heat of his conceptions, the material and the spiritual are fused and blent: if the spiritual attains the definite visibility of a crystal, what is material loses its earthiness and impurity. And here again, by force of instinct, Rossetti is one with him. His chosen type of beauty is one,

Whose speech Truth knows not from her thought,

Nor Love her body from her soul.

Like Dante, he knows no region of spirit which shall not be sensuous also, or material.¹

Pater is right to see Rossetti in this tradition, and we can see an intermediate stage in the Metaphysical poets, epitomized in John Donne, whose "The Second Anni-

versarie" describes how Elizabeth Drury's

pure and eloquent blood
Spoke in her cheekes, and so distinctly wrought,
That one might almost say, her body thought.²

There is no better place to begin looking at Rossetti's place in this tradition than his assertion that "A Sonnet is a moment's monument." He obviously draws on the traditional strength of the sonnet in finding tokens for states of mind; but two central points need to be made about Rossetti's sonnet: first that abstracts are immediately made into concrete things (a sonnet *is* a monument, *is* a coin); second, that time becomes a timeless moment:

A Sonnet is a moment's monument, -
Memorial from the Soul's eternity
To one dead deathless hour.

This sense of the timeless moment is central to nineteenth-century poetry, particularly (as is well-known) in Browning, but equally so in Rossetti, who is willing to make permanent "Writing on the Sand." The timeless moment is central too in nineteenth-century religion, where incarnation of the eternal within time is a fundamental issue (particularly one might note the importance for Hopkins); and it is central to Victorian painting, where all content is focussed on one time, one place, one moment from which other meanings are taken by elaborate parallelisms. It is this search for the timeless moment which lies behind Victorian painting's love of the theatrical moment, the arranged concentration on the tangible pose in a noiseless, windless, almost airless stillness.

Rossetti, who united nineteenth-century poetry and painting, together with a deep religious sense, represents the climax of this highly pictorial theory of poetry; and three elements of Rossetti's work illustrate perfectly how the theory affects his poetry: first the moment, second its tangibility, and third the silence (the pictorial silence one might say) in which the moment becomes tangible.

The moment. "The Woodspurge," probably Rossetti's most widely popular poem after "The Blessed Damozel," obviously contains the other elements (the silence, and the concentration on detail — the specific "ten weeds"), but most important is its creation of a moment out of all others on which to concentrate, a moment which becomes important for memory not because of its greatness, but because of its clarity. Like Pater, Rossetti values the moment for its own sake, "for that moment only," making no explicit point about its value. The forces that shape life ("the wind's will" directs him in "The Woodspurge") are

1. Walter Pater, *Appreciations* (London: MacMillan, 1901), pp. 212-3.

2. Lines 244-6. See John Donne, *The Epithalamions Anniversaries and Epicedes*, ed. W. Milgate, (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978),

p. 48 and pp. 164-5; see also Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), p. 131.

inexplicable, but the clear vision of the viewer invests them with significance. In "Barren Spring" Spring is like a girl "balanced in the wind" but the moment of the poet's view blights each flower with his winter vision:

Behold, this crocus is a withering flame;
This snowdrop, snow; this apple-blossom's part
To breed the fruit that breeds the serpent's art.
Nay, for these Spring-flowers, turn thy face from them,
Nor stay till on the year's last lily-stem
The white cup shrivels round the golden heart.³

One could, of course, select almost any of the "House of Life" sonnets to illustrate the selection of a moment, but perhaps most fascinating is "The Landmark," where, to use T. S. Eliot's words, the poet "redeems the unread vision in the higher dream," locating the point of significance in his journey by learning to *read* the landscape:

Was *that* the landmark? What, – the foolish well
Whose wave, low down, I did not stoop to drink,
But sat and flung the pebbles from its brink
In sport to send its imaged skies pell-mell,
(And mine own image, had I noted well!) –
Was that my point of turning? – I had thought
The stations of my course should rise unsought,
As altar-stone or ensigned citadel.

But lo! the path is missed, I must go back,
And thirst to drink when next I reach the spring
Which once I stained, which since may have grown black.
Yet though no light be left nor bird now sing
As here I turn, I'll thank God, hastening,
That the same goal is still on the same track.⁴

The moment is not simply a turning point on a journey towards a goal, but may also be, like Eliot's, a "point of intersection of the timeless with time," the way from this world to the next, to conquer death and time, those two enemies who haunted Rossetti. This feeling of the timeless moment reaches its climax in "Sudden Light," which hints at the possibility of an infinite moment:

I have been here before,
But when or how I cannot tell:
I know the grass beyond the door,
The sweet keen smell,
The sighing sound, the lights around the shore.⁵

Tangibility. The examples quoted so far help to indicate the direction of Rossetti's poems towards the tangible. Thomas Maitland's (Robert Buchanan's) attack on "The Fleshly School of Poetry," with its accusation that Rossetti was binding himself "to extol fleshliness as the distinct and supreme end of poetic and pictorial art,"⁶ stung Rossetti because it was so nearly right, only the

moral slur being misplaced. Pater knew that, "For Rossetti, as for Dante, without question on his part, the first condition of the poetic way of seeing and presenting things is particularisation."⁷ Rossetti's tangibility is a method of realizing to the mind, not a denial of spirituality.

In "The Portrait," Rossetti's arrogant possession at the end of the sonnet is based on the tangible creation of a picture of his beloved, so that (like a Galatea in reverse) she is gathered "into the artifice of eternity:"

O Lord of all compassionate control,
O Love! let this my lady's picture glow
Under my hand to praise her name, and show
Even of her inner self the perfect whole:

Lo! it is done. Above the enthroning throat
The mouth's mould testifies of voice and kiss,
The shadowed eyes remember and foresee.
Her face is made her shrine. Let all men note
That in all years (O Love, thy gift is this!)
They that would look on her must come to me.⁸

And there she is, the Rossetti woman, the enthroning throat, the shadowed eyes, fleshly, but the flesh not distinct from her soul.

He uses tokens, tangible things, in his exploration of his own guilt and sense of unfulfilment. "Lost Days" for example animates abstractions in a highly realized way, not so much thinking about them as making something out of them and then looking at it:

The lost days of my life until to-day,
What were they, could I see them on the street
Lie as they fell? Would they be ears of wheat
Sown once for food but trodden into clay?
Or golden coins squandered and still to pay?
Or drops of blood dabbling the guilty feet?⁹

and so on, making observation into thought, making sight into vision, through tangibility.

Silence. The condition which is necessary for the tangible moment to reach into its eternal dimension is not the Browningsque event leading towards an infinite moment, but a condition of stillness and "visible silence," the moment of pictorial vision, the voluble silence of pictorial space. The silence is that of the stillness of a picture where people stop: the wind drops, the leaves are still, and if there is any suggestion of movement, it is to intensify the sense of stillness. So in "Silent Noon" the silence is visible, the picture full of color rather than action; the dragonfly does not fly but hangs, and the paradoxes can be reconciled, the hour which shall pass shall be deathless, the hourglass measure time in stillness, the inarticulate silence shall sing:

3. *The House of Life*, sonnet 83.

4. *Ibid*, sonnet 67.

5. *Collected Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London: Ellis, 1888), vol. 1, p. 295.

6. "The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr. D. G. Rossetti," *Contemporary Review*, October 1871, p. 335.

7. *Appreciations*, p. 208.

8. *The House of Life*, sonnet 10.

9. *Ibid*, sonnet 86.

Your hands lie open in the long fresh grass, —
 The finger-points look through like rosy blooms:
 Your eyes smile peace. The pasture gleams and glooms
 'Neath billowing skies that scatter and amass.
 All round our nest, far as the eye can pass,
 Are golden kingcup-fields with silver edge
 Where the cow-parsley skirts the hawthorn-hedge.
 'Tis visible silence, still as the hour-glass.

Deep in the sun-searched growths the dragon-fly
 Hangs like a blue thread loosened from the sky: —
 So this wing'd hour is dropt to us from above.
 Oh! clasp we to our hearts for deathless dower,
 This close-companioned inarticulate hour
 When twofold silence was the song of love.¹⁰

This same ability to create silence when something shall pass from time to the timeless is also at the root of "My Sister's Sleep," where the family wait below as the sister dies in the room above. The realization of the moment of death is not in strong action or extravagant emotion, but in

Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Caught Between Two Centuries

Miriam Fuchs

An awareness of a particularly striking correspondence in Rossetti's work can increase our appreciation of the man responsible for creating the PreRaphaelite Brotherhood. The sonnets of *The House of Life* tend to be densely packed with figurative language, and the paintings of the late 1850s tend to be crowded with objects, details, and patterns. Critics may view these qualities as flaws, but, if so, they are important flaws that suggest Rossetti's instincts were beyond his ability to give them specific form. He was not just a late Romantic or even a later medievalist, preoccupied with various blessed damozels. The "women and flowers" side of Rossetti, as William Bell Scott called it, reflects the past and is obvious. The side that looks to the future is more subtle. Rossetti was no Picasso, and comparing his achievements to Pound's or Eliot's would be inappropriate, but knowingly or unknowingly Rossetti's sensibility was moving toward modernism. Twentieth-century authors and artists con-

restraint, understatement, in silence. As with Donne, whose "A Valediction: forbidding Mourning" begins with the simile "As virtuous men pass mildly away," so Rossetti moves between the physical world and the metaphorical meaning as if there were not "A breach, but an expansion." The picture and the poem are for Rossetti parts of the same continuum.

His vision depends, then, on the intersection of time (the moment) and place (tangibility) rendered through the "visible silence" of art, a formula which is a basis for both poetry and painting. This common root explains his easy movement between the two arts and perhaps suggests something of the difference between Rossetti and many other Victorian artists who like Millais were perhaps finer draughtsmen, but remained in the mundane sphere. The moment of the picture is in the end not a restricting but a releasing one.

University of Newcastle Upon Tyne

sciously burst through their traditions to use myth, psychology, non-literal and non-linear modes to vitalize their works. Rossetti never went this far, but his attempts to push against the limitations of his art reveal that he was caught between the nineteenth century and the stirrings of modernism.

The highly charged, compact sonnets of *The House of Life* have always presented problems for readers who attempt a full explication. "Stillborn Love" and "Transfigured Life," for example, are heavy with figurative language that bridges the earthly to the heavenly and the abstract to the concrete.¹ Critics have noted that sonnets such as "Supreme Surrender," "Cloud and Wind," "From Dawn to Noon," "Bridal Birth," and "The Vase of Life" contain so many dichotomies that careful readers are compelled to search behind the elliptical surface for an internal logic.² Sometimes they find it, yet other times Rossetti's progression of thought is unclear.

The dense language of some of the sonnets can be compared to the crowded surfaces of Rossetti's watercolors of the late 1850s. Even a cursory study of *The Tune of the Seven Towers*, *Sir Galahad at the Ruined Chapel*, *Before the Battle*, and *The Wedding of St. George and the Princess Sabra* reveals flat planes and sharply juxtaposed forms.³ Patterns are enclosed by firm lines in disregard of

10. *Ibid*, sonnet 19.

1. Quotations from Rossetti's sonnets are taken from *Rossetti's Poems*, Oswald Doughty, ed. (New York: Dutton, 1968).
 2. Robert M. Cooper, *Lost On Both Sides* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio Univ. Press, 1970); Robert D. Johnston, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (New York: Twayne, 1969); Richard L. Stein, *The Ritual of Interpretation: The Fine Arts As Literature In Ruskin, Rossetti, and Pater*

(Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1975). Stein's excellent discussion of Rossetti's work points out how figurative language and compactness create difficulties for the reader. He also explores ways in which Rossetti's verse exhibits modern and Impressionist tendencies, using Turner as an example.

3. Virginia Surtees, *Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882): A Catalogue Raisonee* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971). These watercolors are only one stage of Rossetti's visual art, yet they are also the most interesting. His oil paintings that follow, often of Jane Morris or Fanny Cornforth, are lavish, calculated to appeal to purchasers. They do not show Rossetti striving toward formal innovation as do the watercolors.

traditional perspective. Like readers of the poetry, viewers of the watercolors search for the logic behind the elaborate surface, often concluding that conventions of space have been ignored.

In both mediums, then, Rossetti pushes his material to the surface. The figurative level in the sonnets can be disturbingly immediate, making it difficult for one particular thought to dominate. Bringing the figurative forward in a poem is analogous to moving the background forward in a painting. Distant objects appear enlarged or distorted. Without clear recession, there is no spatial hierarchy. Elements converge on a single plane, causing equalization. Walter Pater, who admired Rossetti's verse, pointed out how easily this equalization could become a problem. In writing about *The House of Life*, Pater cited Rossetti's reliance on figurative devices, primarily personification. This technique allows a poet to expand allusively on his main idea, but it must be used skillfully. Pater felt that Rossetti's personifications were overpowering because of "a forced and almost grotesque materialising of abstractions."⁴ He summed up the effect of Rossetti's indulgence by declaring personifications to be creatures apt to destroy their creator: "[They took] hold upon [Rossetti] with the force of a Frankenstein, when once they have taken life from him."⁵

"Stillborn Love" illustrates how bringing the figurative to the surface creates a crowded poetic line. The lovers' union is characterized as a single "hour" that has not yet occurred and may never come to pass — in other words, might be stillborn:

The hour which might have been yet might not be,
Which man's and woman's heart conceived and bore
Yet whereof life was barren, — on what shore
Bides it the breaking of Time's weary sea?

Since these lines suggest both physical and spiritual conception, it is not surprising that the unborn "hour" acquires human traits:

Bondchild of all consummate joys set free,
It somewhere sighs and serves, and mute before
The house of Love, hears through the echoing door
His hours elect in choral consonancy.

Although the "bondchild" (the "hour," the lovers' union) has not been born, it sighs and serves. This is the degree of poetic anthropomorphism that Pater compared to a Frankenstein. The personification seems too concrete, especially for the delicate, tentative opening line. In the sestet, the "hour" is no longer stillborn; the lovers' spirits and bodies are "wedded souls now hand in hand/Together tread at last the immortal strand/With eyes where burning memory lights love home?" Rossetti often wrote of transcendent union, but in this instance the spiritual and phy-

sical are only juxtaposed, not united. The final line of the sestet makes the two levels even more disjunct. The personification, the "child," leaps into a material existence by jumping out at the lovers to declare: "'I am your child: O parents, ye have come!'" This speech, uttered from what began thirteen lines earlier as an unborn hour, creates a startling immediacy. Since most of the sonnet subtly explores the uncertainty between potential and fulfillment, this leap into actuality is unsettling.

Bringing the figurative forward in "Transfigured Life" creates a similar effect, though not so stark. The sonnet describes the relationship between a work of art and its creator's emotions. Specifically, a "song" derives from "the singer's Joy and Pain," but the emotions are absorbed into the art. The octet concentrates on the figurative level as Rossetti uses a child as a means of comparison. The mother's and father's features are visible in their child, but in time those features will blend and change into "a separate man's or woman's countenance." Just as the child in the octet transfigures qualities of its parents,

So in the Song, the singer's Joy and Pain,
Its very parents, evermore expand
To bid the passion's fullgrown birth remain,
By art's transfiguring essence subtly spanned;
And from that song-cloud shaped as a man's hand
There comes the sound as of abundant rain.

Why does Rossetti introduce an additional figurative level in the above sestet? Why does he start with the parent/child relation, move to the emotion/song relation, and finally end with the cloud/rain relation? Because the "song-cloud" is compared to a hand, Rossetti may have wanted the art of writing to be even more explicit, but including so much in a single sonnet, especially in the last two lines, is not without its price. Instead of being suggestive, the closing sound of rain is literal and immediate, overpowering all that precedes it. The rain is not absorbed into the overall structure.

The effect on the reader of a sonnet such as this is likely to be uncertainty or disorientation. Additional readings are necessary in a search for clues to the weather metaphor, for transitions, for formal logic. For comprehensive treatments of Rossetti's sonnet sequence readers should consult full length studies of his poetry.⁶ Juxtaposed images and tight, elliptical poetic lines are difficult and complex to analyze; my purpose here is to indicate a tendency towards compactness in the sonnets, because it appears in corresponding form in the paintings.

The watercolors of the late 1850s exhibit a similar equalization of elements. They lack what Ortega y Gasset calls a "luminous hero," a central figure created by a vanishing point that establishes an optical hierarchy.⁷ The most obvious aspect of a luminous hero is centrality,

4. Walter Pater, *Appreciations: With An Essay on Style* (New York: Macmillan, 1900), p. 217.

5. Pater, p. 217.

6. See, for example M. L. Megroz, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Painter Poet of Heaven and Earth* (London: Faber, 1928) and Oswald

Doughty, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1949) as well as the books listed above.

7. Jose Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968), p. 110.

which causes it to remain apart from (though in formal relation to) other objects. In watercolors such as *The Tune of the Seven Towers*, *Before the Battle*, and *Sir Galahad at the Ruined Chapel*, foregrounds blend with backgrounds. An optical hierarchy depends on recession, and in these works recession is superseded by overlapping or juxtaposed areas. Although there are central figures, they do not illuminate a spatial sequence. Painted according to formula, the figures lack individuality; sculptured faces, long noses, and angular chins are everywhere. In *The Tune of the Seven Towers*, for example, the faces are interchangeable (Fig. 1).



FIGURE 1. *The Tune of the Seven Towers*. (1857) Watercolor, Tate Gallery, London.

Equalization caused by spatial ambiguity and standardized human figures helps make color the outstanding quality of these works. Details of what would ordinarily be blurred are clear and brilliant. Instead of having just one "luminous" section, each painting is like a jewel with an omnipresent glow. The heightened details even lend a tactile quality to the objects, yet the final effect is a lack of clarity. In *Sir Galahad at the Ruined Chapel* an interior is hard to distinguish from an exterior (Fig. 2). In *The Tune of the Seven Towers* a human figure momentarily looks like a portrait. In *Before the Battle* the outdoor landscape is, in fact, a hanging tapestry (Fig. 3). This evidence of Rossetti's preoccupation with visual and tactile surfaces is analogous to his concern with tight poetic lines. In both cases, inner structure is subordinate to outer complexity.

Similar characteristics are found in *The Tune of the Seven Towers*. No clear vanishing point establishes a visual sequence, and very little is blurred to indicate distance. If the male and female are "luminous heroes," then they are confusing ones. Without foreshortening, the expanse of his legs is too broad and his shoulder too large. Physical space seems more adequately organized by the staff that rests diagonally across the picture than by the figures. All objects appear behind the staff — until the



FIGURE 2. *Sir Galahad at the Ruined Chapel*. (1859) Watercolor, Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery.



FIGURE 3. *Before the Battle*. (1858) Watercolor, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

viewer's eye follows the staff to the banner hanging from the top. First the banner seems in the immediate fore-

ground; then its fringes falling between the man's legs push the banner back. A third glance displaces the banner to the distant background; a fourth glance blends the banner into the wooden framework of the bed. Thus, spatial relations do not stay put. The window behind the standing woman gives a faint suggestion of depth but it dissolves into the pattern of the wall. The coiled design of the floor mitigates against any recession. The back portion of the room, consisting of horizontal and vertical panels, converges to the same plane as the wall with the small opening. Sections in every part of this painting seem to blend, depending on which area the viewer examines.



FIGURE 4. *The Wedding of Saint George and the Princess Sabra*. (1857) Watercolor, Tate Gallery, London.

These same qualities occur in *The Wedding of St. George and the Princess Sabra*, where there are even fewer vestiges of recession (Fig. 4). The composition consists of what look like superimposed rectangles. One rectangle is bordered on top by St. George's knees; a second bordered by his shoulder; a third by the saints' heads; a fourth by the back wall. Thus, objects appear above and below but not in front of or behind one another. Which figures are inside and which are outside? If the two attending angels are indoors, where is the edifice between them? If they are outdoors, then St. George and the princess must be indoors, but how can the horizontal hedge of foliage be inside? How can two figures sit in a chair that lacks dimensions? Since its decorative pattern obliterates the boundary between front and side, the chair is drained of volume. An early sketch of this watercolor shows a man and woman resting on a chair that does indeed have three dimensions. Rossetti purposely flattened the depth by lavishing detail on the surface.

Despite the overpowering horizontal lines, St. George and his princess could have acquired a coherent centrality by their actions. The narrative aspects could have subordinated the symbolic and decorative. However, the action of the princess — cutting a lock of hair — hardly seems the point. Her frozen movement is one of the very last details a viewer notices, and the princess herself appears to slip behind the massive frame of St. George. Like the other watercolors of this period, *St. George and the Princess Sabra* is remarkable for its fine detail and color, but not for visual coherence.

The puzzling qualities of these works should make us wonder how the PreRaphaelite insistence on "truth to nature" led to such stylized, decorative art. Rossetti felt that the formula used since the Renaissance for creating depth and distance was restricting. Thus, he tried to avoid the fixed horizontal and the vanishing point because they schematized pictorial elements until there was, as Marshall McLuhan described it: "A piazza for everything and everything in its piazza."⁸ Rossetti looked instead to fourteenth-century Italian painters such as Duccio and Cimabue and fifteenth-century Flemish painters such as Van Eyck, and Rogier Van Der Weyden. (Rossetti and Hunt admired these works when they visited Paris, Brussels, Bruges, and Ghent in 1849.)⁹ The Flemish artists in particular painted faithfully even the smallest objects just as they existed, but not as those objects could be seen from a fixed position on space. The view from one pair of mortal eyes is limited, but the Flemish Masters rendered what they knew existed as opposed to what they could actually see. Thus, visual/tactile exaggeration, disjunctive planes, meticulous details, and lack of recession were not just decorative. They were a means of presenting visually a belief shared by the community. Each separate object was a divine miracle, and each symbol had spiritual significance. Visual discrepancy was a way for the painter to suggest God's omnipresence. The purpose of "pure" visual accuracy was to communicate a profound religious message.

In contrast, Rossetti's works seem private and sometimes obscure. His art was not a direct tribute to God; Rossetti's life was far too secular for that, and religious symbols, especially in his paintings, were difficult to decipher. Disjunctive elements and exaggerated details did not reflect an overwhelming sense of the divine but were instead built on Rossetti's original purpose of visual accuracy and truthfulness to nature. As long as vision remained his goal, Rossetti would always distort it by trying to capture all of it. He needed new principles of organization, but his talent led to quick, startling images and insights, not to methodically presented concepts. Rossetti was caught within traditional patterns of perception and form, yet there is another way to look at his work, and this way reveals a subtle link to the future.

In "The Dehumanization of Art," Ortega y Gasset explains metaphor, the traditional device of poets, as a

8. Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium is the Message* (New York: Bantam, 1967), p. 53.

9. John Nicoll, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (New York: Macmillan, 1975), p. 51.

bridge to the modern sensibility:

All our other faculties keep us within the realm of the real, of what is already there. The most we can do is to combine things or to break them up. The metaphor alone furnishes an escape; between real things, it lets emerge imaginary reefs, a crop of floating islands.¹⁰

Metaphor provides a high degree of "escape" since its link to the real is always implicit, and all figurative language helps dissolve literal and visual solidity. Viewed this way, Rossetti's habit to use various figurative or imaginary elements – without necessarily returning to his literal starting point – acquires an interesting logic. He was pushing his work out of "the [traditional] realm of the real" and setting it afloat among those "imaginary reefs." Thus, Rossetti was approaching more fluid modes of organization without realizing it. Continuing to depart from visual and literal reality could have been a crucial step in reaching other non-literal schemes – myth, memory, dream, fantasy, alternation of past and present, simultaneity of times. Any of these would have afforded greater freedom, but Rossetti never consciously left behind his allegiance to the visual, and in this respect he was strictly a nineteenth-century artist. His methods may suggest a struggle toward innovation, but it would require Eliot, Pound, Joyce, Cezanne, Gris, and Picasso to build on the discoveries of science and physics; it would take a few more decades for visual reality to look trivial, even

archaic, regardless of how it was organized.

Rossetti pushed against traditional forms almost as often as he used them. His sonnets are ready to burst from complicated imagery and syntax. His watercolors are surprisingly small considering how much Rossetti managed to fit in them. *The Tune of the Seven Towers* is approximately 12 by 14 inches; *The Wedding of St. George* is 13½ by 13½; *Sir Galahad at the Ruined Chapel* is 11½ by 13½. Rossetti often used small and restricting forms, but they did not help him to make a final break the way Japanese drama and literature helped Pound and African art helped Picasso. Like theirs, his aesthetic sensibility inclined toward new ways of perceiving and organizing, but Rossetti could not refine his instincts to develop new forms. He did not consistently fuse the literal and the figurative in his sonnets, nor did he leave behind the literal. And he did not dissolve his solid planes and patterns into the conceptual realm the way the Cubists did. *The Four Quartets*, the *Cantos*, and Picasso's cubist canvases and collages are controlled by larger and more profound methods than Rossetti ever imagined. Rossetti may not have recognized that time, history, a single event, or a single object could be rendered according to how the mind perceives, collects, and recollects, but his moving in this direction, however fitfully, reveals him as a poet and painter in transition, caught between two centuries.

Elizabeth Seton College

Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Pull of Silence

Hartley S. Spatt

One of the things which sets Rossetti apart from most artists is his insistence that he could be both poet and painter – that, as William Morris put it, he could "compose an epic poem while weaving tapestry." Given a spur to his imagination like the story of Mary Magdalene, for example, Rossetti could compose a sonnet dramatizing the dialogue between Mary and her late lover, or draw a picture embodying Mary's rejection of her former world in favor of Simon the Pharisee and his guest, Jesus (Fig. 1). By choosing two different moments for the setting of poem and picture respectively, Rossetti can depict a Mary Magdalene who is both passionately involved with her earthly lover, yet raptly intent on arriving at her heavenly beloved. As Susan Bandelin has aptly put it, "the combined drawing and poem intensify the temporal tension" of the scene.¹ The result is something quite unlike conventional Victorian narrative art, as comparison of Mary's awakening with a similar moment reveals. During the same years

when Rossetti was working on his Mary Magdalene works, Holman Hunt was painting his famous portrait of "The Awakening/Awakened Conscience." In this latter work, Hunt has created a heavily narrative context within which his model's coming to awareness of her fallen status may be suitably conveyed: the paintings on the wall, the cat stalking the canary, the title of the song being played on the new rosewood piano all contribute to the viewer's construction of a "triple-decker novel" in his head. In Rossetti's drawing, on the other hand, aside from a few emblematic lilies and sunflowers there is nothing (save the composition itself) to enforce the spectator's readiness to narratize.

It is for this reason that Rossetti demands the freedom to employ both visual and verbal means in creating his dramatic images; by juxtaposing the two forms of perception he hopes to transcend what Pater calls "the momentary conjunction" and gain a new perspective fusing visual and

10. Ortega y Gasset, p. 33.

1. "Allegorizing on One's Own Hook": Works before 1863," in *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Double Work of Art*, ed. M. W. Ainsworth (New Haven: Yale U. Art Gallery, 1976), p. 47.

verbal, permanence and flux. Though ultimately Rossetti concedes that the painter cannot fuse image with narration, remains "shut about with his own frozen breath" ("Not as These"), the attempt provokes some of his most image-laden poems. Conversely, through his poetry Rossetti discovers the lure of silence, that "magic stillness" that is the truest "song of love"; and in his late paintings he embodies a quietude he can never quite achieve in verse.



FIG. 1. "Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee" (1858); pen and ink, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

A simple example may clarify this central dilemma of Rossetti's aesthetic. In 1872 Rossetti painted a picture entitled "Veronica Veronese," (Fig. 2) in which a Renaissance musician finds her inspiration in both nature and art, imaged in the bird behind her and the fondled violin strings in front of her. Frederick Leyland liked the painting (or Alexa Wilding, the model) so much that he commissioned a companion piece, which Rossetti completed in 1877 as "A Sea-Spell" (Fig. 3). The work was begun as a vision of the "damsel with a dulcimer" in "Kubla Khan," but Rossetti had to change when it became clear that Alexa would never pass for an "Abyssiaian maid." The painting instead depicts the model reversed in space from her former pose, fingering a lute instead of a violin, listening to a sea-gull instead of a song-bird while seated under an apple-tree, not within a Quattrocento interior. In an earlier sketch the siren was even to be bare-breasted, to complete the contrast with "Veronica Veronese," but Leyland's conventionality denied Rossetti this final con-



FIG. 2. "Veronica Veronese" (1872); oil, Delaware Art Museum.

trast of dress. The pictures must have looked smashing on either side of Leyland's mantel. A greater difference than all of these, however, is the verbal accompaniment. For the earlier work Rossetti (or Swinburne) had cobbled up a pastiche of Renaissance prose purporting to be one of



FIG. 3. "A Sea-Spell" (1877); oil, Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge Mass.

“The Letters of Girolamo Ridolfi”; for “A Sea-Spell” Rossetti creates a brilliant sonnet:

Her lute hangs shadowed in the apple-tree,
While flashing fingers weave the sweet-strung spell
Between its chords; and as the wild notes swell,
The sea-bird for those branches leaves the sea.
But to what sound her listening ear stoops she?
What netherworld gulf-whispers doth she hear,
In answering echoes from what planisphere,
Along the wind, along the estuary?

She sinks into her spell: and when full soon
Her lips move and she soars into her song,
What creatures of the midmost main shall throng
In furrowed surf-clouds to the summoning rune:
Till he, the fated mariner, hears her cry,
And up her rock, bare-breasted, comes to die?

What Rossetti seems to have done is take the imaged moment of his picture and incorporated it into a series of visions, a narrative context. The siren weaves her spell, then falls entranced by the “answering echoes” – it is this moment, centered on hearing rather than on vision, which the painting has captured; then she sings a second time, drawing other creatures and, for a climax, the dying breath of her “fated mariner.” In a movement towards extending the limits of the senses, not just of time, the siren’s fingers have begun “flashing,” her spell has become “sweet,” her notes have turned “wild.” Only in the open vowels and sibilant consonants of the sonnet do we hear a hint of the siren’s true essence, her song. Rossetti has put out of his mind the usual assumption that a visual image is something to be judged through visual analysis; instead he asserts, through his creation of multiple, divergent realms of existence for the siren, that his images are merely provisional. Any given image is merely one of a series, one concrete embodiment of an infinite range of images existing in potential; by joining poetic picture with pictorial poem, the fullness of that range can be suggested, or at least evoked.

Many of Rossetti’s works focus on the paradoxes that arise from such a redefinition of the art-work as “frozen breath” that somehow speaks. Even in “A Sea-Spell” one might well ask why the siren, who is after all defined by her song, is silent at the crucial instant Rossetti chooses to illustrate. “Full soon/Her lips [will] move,” he asserts; but in paint, the true “moment’s monument,” that future can never be reached. Another well-known composition, “The Question,” likewise implies a verbal confrontation; but for Rossetti what marks the Sphinx is not her riddle but her “visible silence,” reducing the hero’s question to the image of a searching stare. In “The Annunciation” (or “Ecce Ancilla Domini!”) the observer cannot hear Gabriel’s words; he cannot even see his face. The viewer must intuit both sight and speech from Mary’s transfixed reaction.

Rossetti’s versions of “Hamlet and Ophelia” sum up this fascination with silent speech. Writing to George Eliot in 1870, Rossetti claimed that he had “meant to make Hamlet ramping about and talking wildly.”² Yet the actual drawing of 1858 (Fig. 4) to which Rossetti was referring

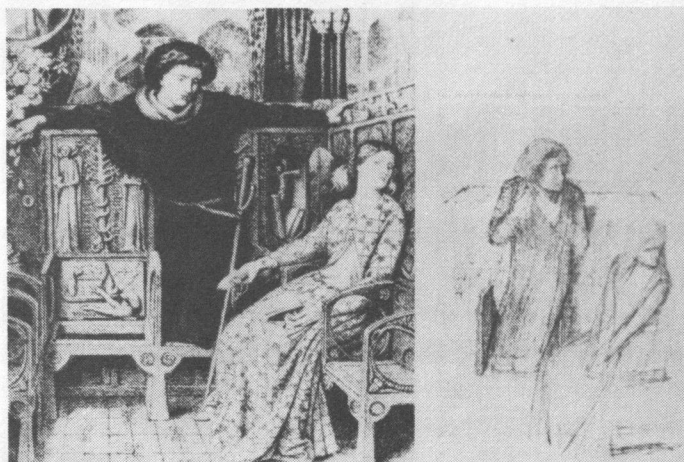


FIG. 4. “Hamlet and Ophelia” (1858); pen and ink, British Museum.

shows Hamlet crucified on the settles, not wild or violent at all; it is not even clear that he is speaking. Precisely because the moment is so “frozen,” the barely suppressed emotions are powerfully evoked; the viewer sees Hamlet, remembers his words to Ophelia, and creates a reading of the text which will allow such a fruitful pause. Rossetti’s success is even clearer if his later version of the same scene (Fig. 5) is contrasted with it. Here Hamlet has been released from his agony: his mouth is clearly open, his hands have grasped Ophelia’s tightly; but the power of the previous moment has been dissipated, as if opening the composition to movement and speech has destroyed its “monumentality.” Part of the problem is an aesthetic one: tensed jaw muscles and distorted lips do not make for conventional beauty, as Lessing noted at the beginning of the century. Much of the alienness of Blake’s images of gods and demons lies in his refusal to abide by such standards; in a work like “Visions of the Daughters of Albion” half the figures are open-mouthed. But in this Rossetti could not follow Blake; though he seems to seek out moments of dramatic confrontation or expected speech, he prefers to execute those moments through indirection. He insists on entitling his picture of the Sphinx “The Question,” but he centers the composition on the hero’s gaze; he returns at least three times to the meeting between Dante and Beatrice, but never allows her to open her mouth in speech; “Love’s Greeting,” it appears, is necessarily a silent kiss. Finally, Rossetti adopts a line from Browning’s *Pippa Passes* and paints “‘Hist!’ said Kate the Queen”; it is a scene filled with song and speech, in which everyone but the Queen seems to be deep in words, while she sits “quietly . . . contemplative” at the vacant center of the picture.

2. Letter of 18 February 1870, quoted in V. Surtees, *The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (2 vols. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), I, 61.



FIG. 5. "Hamlet and Ophelia" (1866); watercolor, Privately held.

The prime example in this vein, though, is "Cassandra," (Fig. 6) whose very fame revolves around her gift of prophetic speech; she does speak in one of two sonnets Rossetti wrote about her. The other sonnet, which sets the stage for Cassandra's rhetoric, is the one Rossetti chose to visualize. "All . . . mock thy woe," that sonnet states, save Hector, who cannot bear to listen: "Cassandra's words beat heavily/Like crows above his crest, and at his ear/Ring hollow in the shield that shall not save." It is a brilliant image, which Rossetti attempted to transfer to vision in a sketch of Hector, horrified. But rather than continue with a simple echo of a moment already



FIG. 6. "Cassandra" (1861); pen and ink, British Museum, and Study (Ibid.).

embodied, hence already passed, Rossetti changed horror to anger, mockery to concern: in the finished drawing Hector's finger points rigidly toward his withdrawing foot instead of recoiling to his cheek, and only Paris sees anything worth mocking in the scene. Like the image of the doomed mariner in "A Sea-Spell," employing all his strength and determination to complete his "fated" mission, this echoic image of Hector fulfills the narrative demands of the subject as well as the synchronic demands of the scene by damping the sonnet's "beating . . . ringing" words into the silence of a stare. The images of poem and picture are autonomous, linked only by the reader/viewer's common effort to create a narrative context which can subsume both. Words, whether uttered by poet or prophetess, cannot control vision; they cannot even control themselves.

Such paradoxes consequent upon the attempt to transform speech into visible silence are not present solely in Rossetti's pictures; they are concerns apparent in Rossetti's poems from the very beginning of his career. At the start of "A Last Confession," the dying Lombard nationalist claims only that "What can be told I'll tell," warning his auditors that words will be inadequate to learn "all my thoughts." The most striking feature of "A Last Confession" is the way in which each revelation is conveyed after all — through a visual analogue: "Standing silent now at last, I looked/Into her scornful face. . . . I thought, if now she were to speak/I could not hear her." It is not lack of motion or lack of speech which has poisoned their relationship, but postures: "Her neck unbent not, neither did her eyes/Move." Because she prays before a foreign image, and because she laughs as the "brown-shouldered harlot" does and not the way "they laugh in Heaven," he has to kill her. Only as a memory can she merge in his memory with those things that constitute for him "the garden of God," take her place as the center of a succession of metaphors for which she is the common ground: "long golden hair" surmounted by something "like a ring of fire"; the set setting like "a spent taper"; haloes "quiver[ing] like forest leaves." "Her image" is "like folded lilies deepset in the stream . . . as if it strove to kiss itself . . . as when one stoops/Over wan water . . . the dimness of the cloud . . . as the tree's stem . . . hidden springs . . . as when a bird flies low." The very multiplicity of the images creates total ambiguity, where what the speaker has intended was clarity; metonymy invites us to perceive his beloved as something elemental (fire, water), a force of Nature (trees, flowers, birds), even as something akin to the Holy Ghost. Each reader, attempting to follow these twisted vines of imagery without hope of correction or congratulation, is met finally by "broken words," ends with "foolish tales." The Lombard does, one might assert, learn to speak and to comprehend at least his own voice during the course of his confession. But to what end? The speaker is dying, entering a silent realm where only laughter, and "shriekings," will break the stillness; his knowledge, no matter how hard-earned, will be rendered literally insignificant. Ultimately, the lesson one

gains from the Lombard's confession is a persuasion that all cries and all silence, all images and all actions, are essentially self-reflexive, significant only as an audience brings significance to them; language and vision alike have become suspect.

Such a deep-seated suspicion of verbal and visual signs can lead to a simultaneous imaging in words and pigments, in an effort to create images which are validated by their complements and can therefore be better trusted. Such was the case, for example, with J. M. W. Turner, who found himself compelled more and more to create verbal "Fallacies of Hope" to accompany his pictures, that were growing less and less representational at the same rate.³ For Rossetti, however, it leads mainly to a repeated reiteration of the artist's suspicion of both media. Jenny's soul, "like a rose shut in a book," may appear to the poet at first to be "pale as transparent psyche-wings"; but after he has been "looking long" at it, he is appalled to discover "[only] a cipher . . . is left." Far more frequently it is speech alone which bears the burden of suspicion, for speech unleashed seems capable of capturing thought itself. In "The Bride's Prelude," for instance, Aloyse confesses to her sister Amelotte not because she wills it but because "her thought, long stagnant, [was] stirred by speech. . . . The inward voice (past help obey'd) . . . urged her till the whole were said." To live with such autonomous passions is hard indeed, as Rose Mary complains: "Oh! the voice that cries in my soul!" Yet at times it is a pleasurable enslavement, as in "The Day of Love" (*House of Life* xvi) where "between our kisses we sit . . . / Speechless while things forgotten call to us." But the fear of this autonomy is clearest in Rossetti's later-suppressed query in "The Monochord" (*House of Life* lxxix): "Is it the moved air or the moving sound/That is Life's self and draws my life from me?" The lines derive, of course, from Coleridge's "Eolian Harp" (1795), but where the earlier poet can speak confidently of "the one Life within us and abroad" Rossetti seems to fear a dualistic opposition between "Life's self," located in air, or sound, or Prime Mover, and "me," locked within a purely receptive role. By 1881 he had changed the first line to refer only to "this sky's vast vault or ocean's sound," drawing to a conventionally religious conclusion the disturbance of the original: God has power to draw life from anyone, through His sublimity.

But what Rossetti's poetry demonstrates is that all things are capable of such power over the silent self. "The Blessed Damozel," for example, speaks in "the voice the stars had," which seems pleasant enough; but the earthly beloved hears the voice in a much less sanguine mood, "when those bells/*Possessed* the mid-day air" (emphasis added). In "The Stream's Secret" the lover almost yearns for a moment when he will be "*Subdued* by memory's circling strain,/The *wind-rapt* sound" (emphasis added). Even the Lombard attempts to excuse his act by asserting

a passivity he recants only reluctantly: "then *came* a fire . . . *she took* the knife." In the face of such universal autonomy, love and speech alike become passive, moving only as they are moved by the powerful forces outside of them: siren's spells, or words that are "of the silence" ("Ave").

So it is inevitable that silence itself draws Rossetti's verbal and visual arts to their focus (Fig. 7). "Speak," he



FIG. 7. "Silence" (1870); pencil, City of Manchester Art Gallery.

commands the stream in "The Stream's Secret," "for with the silence is no fear." If speech is possessive, perhaps demonic, silence is necessarily pure; in "The Portrait" Rossetti even asserts that he will one day "know the silence there for God!" The truest "song of love," he claims in "Silent Noon" (*House of Life* xix), is merely a "twofold silence"; even amid "Song and Music" Rossetti seeks a "pause," for "The soul may better understand . . . while the song withdraws." Truly, as he says about "The Card-Dealer," there is a boon in "magic stillness." Thus it is stillness and silence which inform Rossetti's late paintings, those hieratic transformations of Janey Morris; or perhaps, given Bernard Shaw's characterization of her as the silentest woman he had ever known, Janey's own silence transforms all of Rossetti's attempts to insinuate speech into her environment. Indeed, John D. Hunt has theorized that the vacant spaces which surround Rossetti's portrait of Janey are equivalents of poetic silences.⁴ More generally, if ecstasy is silent so is death; contemplation and remorse are equally still, notwithstanding the hidden tumults of the latter; love is vocal in its beginnings, but strives continually for a "silent song" (*House of Life* xi); reason itself relies on a vital absence to create a free field for imagination, "because strained thought demands/ Quiet before it understands" ("The Bride's Prelude").

The pull of silence seems to signal doom to poetry, as the corollary pull of narrative discourse seems to nullify the painting; yet in the interchange of speaking image and silent song seems to lie an escape from a Victorian dilemma. The more Victorian art approaches the real, the more the artist risks becoming directly identified with his work; it is precisely this tendency which most appalled

3. On the question of representation in Turner's paintings, see R. Paulson, "Turner's Graffiti: The Sun and Its Glosses," in *Images of Romanticism: Verbal and Visual Affinities*, ed. K. Kroeber and

W. Walling (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1978), pp. 167-88.
4. In a lecture at the Yale Center for British Art, 9 October 1976.

Buchanan. But as the artist evades this form of confession he approaches an equivalent fault, what Ruskin called the "refinements on the surface," the "false pleasure" of "extreme finish."⁵ Rossetti, as an artist of the beautiful, thus faces complementary charges of ornamentalism on the one side, and profound fleshliness on the other. Through his silent speech, however, Rossetti can assert the existential reality of his poetic and pictured subjects, while denying to them the illusion of autonomous power.

The Burden of Nineveh

Carl Woodring

Rossetti's adage that poetry is fundamental brainwork could not be better illustrated than from his poem "The Burden of Nineveh." Each stanza of the poem turns the screw tighter and breaks another bone in the limbs of empire. When he first published the poem in *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* for August 1856, Rossetti explained in part the punning title by quoting, in lieu of an epigraph, "'Burden. Heavy calamity; the chorus of a song.'—*Dictionary*." Each of the twenty-one stanzas (twenty in the final version) closes an otherwise varying refrain, or "chorus", with the name "Nineveh." The first words of Nahum in the Bible are "The burden of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite." Rossetti has a vision of his own.

Few names are more familiar in London in 1849-1856 than those of Nineveh, Babylon, and the discoverer of Nimrud, Austen Henry Layard. No image was more current than that of Nimrud's winged bull, which appeared in illustration and on the cover of Layard's *Nineveh and Its Remains*, 2 volumes 1849, and again in, and on the cover of, *A Popular Account of Discoveries at Nineveh*, the cheaper edition of 1851 referred to by chapter number in Rossetti's late note — and within the text of the original version:

And misses titter in their stays,
Just fresh from "Layard's Nineveh."

Reviews of Layard appeared in almost every journal.¹

The *Illustrated London News* followed the progress of the bull, with engravings of its reembarkation where the Euphrates debouches into the Persian Gulf (27 July 1850, p. 72) and its installation in the Museum (26 October 1850, p. 332). The early version of Rossetti's "Burden" is less kind than the *Illustrated News* concerning visitors to the bull. Besides the tittering misses who come to see its mas-

"Soon," says the Lombard, "I shall hear her laugh" — but not now; "Haply . . . 'He is at peace,' " says "Venus Verticordia" — but "her glance is still." So Rossetti remains, between the promise of speech and the pull of silence: simply reminding us, "All now is still" ("For 'Ruggiero and Angelica'").

SUNY, Maritime College

culinity, "cold-pinned clerks" come out of the fog on "yellow days"; small clergy will come peering in their usual way through the haze, sometimes with schoolchildren in tow; and art-students weary of copying antique statues and casts will chat about "the great R.A.'s" and the maligned P.R.B.'s in the shadowless vicinity of the bull. The Museum holds little or nothing for the mature artist.

The final version of the poem opens with a contrast between the beauty of the Elgin marbles from the Parthenon of thoughtful Greece —

Her art for ever in fresh wise
From hour to hour rejoicing me — (ll. 4-5)

which evokes the laudatory spirit of Keats's sonnet "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles" or of the later painting by Frederic Church (c. 1870, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City) — and the dark shadow of the "dead disbowelled mystery" on the gloomy London street outside the British Museum:

The kind of light shall on thee fall
Which London takes the day to be. (ll. 74-75)

These lines might be taken as a jolly laugh at London weather, somewhat as the earlier version has been regarded as lighter in tone than the later. It would be more accurate to say that the ferocity of the earlier version is somewhat masked in the later. Both versions refer repeatedly to the "dirt and din" and pollution of London. Coincidentally, the *Illustrated London News* (20 October 1850, p. 424), in the period when it was watching the bull, commented on the fragment brought from the Acropolis to England earlier than Lord Elgin's forays and now given by J. Smith Barry of Marbury Hall for its place in the north frieze (Figure 110 in Slab 36):

[the fragment now in place] may be easily distinguished by the striking contrast of colour. The recent acquisition has retained its freshness and purity of tint, and affords a serious proof of the injurious effect of our atmosphere upon these Phidian treasures since their deposit in the British Museum.

5. *Stones of Venice*, Conclusion, sections xxvii-xxix.

1. The review in *Fraser's*, Apr. 1849 (39:446-454), had quoted Layard on the discovery of the head (p. 449); *North British Review*, May 1849 (11:209-253), cited passages from Nahum and Zephaniah per-

tinued to Rossetti's poem and noted (also pertinent) that Jonah's tomb had been traditionally assigned to Nineveh (p. 210). For other reviews, William F. Poole's *Index to Periodical Literature* (sub "Layard" and "Nineveh") can be supplemented with the *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals*.

A portion nearly adjacent (from Slab 39) had been brought to England in 1744 and passed through the Dilettanti Society and the Royal Academy before joining the Elgin marbles in 1817. A slab of seven figures, detached by Count de Choiseul-Gouffier about 1788, had come to rest in the Louvre. Sculpture from the Acropolis had gone to Germany. Byron's poem "The Curse of Minerva" (1811) and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* Canto II (1812) had protested against Lord Elgin's barbaric plunder of "what Goth, and Turk, and Time hath spared." Rossetti's "Burden" protests against the pride by which an antique statue can be divided between one nation that hoards the trunk and another that displays the head. Indeed artists today share with Rossetti a lack of legal protection if a purchaser decides to cut a multiple portrait or subject painting into pieces as if it were a Jackson Pollock.

Such imperialism is a second kind of pollution, and there is a third. When the authorities get this bull inside, children can be brought from school to the Museum for one more lesson against Roman Catholics amidst the cries of No Popery renewed in 1850. "You have had read to you the pious tract," the schoolmaster will say – Rossetti says "that zealous tract: 'ROME – Babylon and Nineveh'" – now you see before you in this Babylonian bull the very emblem of the Vatican.

In the first-published version of "The Burden of Nineveh" the poet represented himself as enduring just once for no more than an hour the Babel of the museum before emerging to the equally dim, thick air outside. The poem then began, "I have no taste for polyglot." From the opening to the end of the poem, even in the final version, *polyglot* is a major theme. Engravings of about 1830 show the grand staircase of the Museum with stuffed giraffes at the top of the stairs.²

When Rossetti was growing up in London, the profile of Montagu House and the additions to it was polyglot enough, as one can see from engravings in T. H. Shepherd, *London and Its Environs* (1829, Plate 23) and Thornbury and Walford *Old and New London* (1830, IV, 493). He could have watched the great repetitious, imperial facade of Sir Robert Smirke paper over the polyglot behind it. *Illustrated London News* heralded the supposed completion 13 January 1844 (p. 28), but the closing of the Museum for further construction was an issue in 1850. Smirke's facade has some of the imperial symbolism of John Nash's Cumberland House at Regent's Park (1827).

Rossetti's poem looks back with Layard to the day when thousands of years of darkness and silence for the minotaur were ended by the alien surprises of light from above, English voices, and Christian hymns. Behind these stanzas lie Layard's simpler text and illustration, "The Discovery of the Great Head" (1849, p. 72). Layard tells how musicians were provided to keep the Arabs digging,

hoisting, and hauling. The poet's effort to reconstruct the ceremonies when the object was first dedicated involves the difficulty that he does not know how or how far the people of Nineveh worshipped the thing he addresses as "thou poor god" (lines 21-27, 71, 81-85). It must have been in some sense sacred, but in what sense?

It is certainly not sacred now. The chief function of a museum is to desacralize objects. Of the British Museum as an accumulator without sanctity, Rossetti writes:

Greece, Egypt, Rome, – did any god
Before whose feet men knelt unshod
Deem that in this unblest abode
Another scarce more unknown god
Should house with him, from Nineveh?³

Idols once accustomed to worshippers who "knelt unshod" are now thrown together in an unsanctified museum where visitors in hard-soled shoes, and hard of soul, stand and walk about. Of the Egyptian mummies that waited in the room above for the winged bull to be similarly cooped within "blank windows" that "blind the wall," one might well have been passed in an earlier age (lines 101-105, the 11th stanza) through Nineveh, where it would have been regarded as unsacred, desacralized, a relic of antiquity, even then in Nineveh as later in London.⁴

Recalling here Layard's account of objects that fell to pieces when exposed to air and dissolved before English eyes (1849, p. 116; 1851, p. 222), the poem notes that these also were consecrated objects, emblems of the Babylonian empire and its religion. Emblems, religion, and empire have all been swirled away by gusts of wind.

Other passages in Layard provoked what appear in Rossetti's poem to be direct responses and rejections. Layard waxed lyrical over the massive guardians of the gate, the winged bull and winged lion:

I used to contemplate for hours these mysterious emblems, and muse over their intent and history. What more noble forms could have ushered the people into the temple of their gods? What more sublime images could have been borrowed from nature, by men who sought, unaided by the light of revealed religion, to embody their conception of the wisdom, power and ubiquity of a Supreme Being? They could find no better type of intellect and knowledge than the head of the man; of strength, than the body of the lion; of ubiquity, than the wings of the bird.
(1851, p. 52)

Layard even provided temptations for the title of the poem, for contrasts between the darkness of the bull's tomb and events above ground, and for speculation on the fate of the bull in later ages:

As I watched the rafts, until they disappeared behind a project-

2. William Thornbury and Edward Walford, *Old and New London* (4 vols., 1830), IV, 492.
3. Lines 86-90. The "unknown god," deriving from Acts 17:23, may be a further insinuation in the poem that the Judeo-Christian God is not a known presence in London.

4. Rossetti had trouble with the wording of this passage; see *Family Letters*, ed. W. M. Rossetti (2 vols., Boston: 1895), II, 209-10; *Letters*, ed. Oswald Doughty and J. R. Wahl (5 vols., London: Clarendon Press, 1965-67), II, 725.

ing bank forming a distant reach of the river, I could not forbear musing upon the strange destiny of their burdens; which, after adorning the palaces of the Assyrian kings, the objects of the wonder, and may be the worship of thousands, had been buried unknown for centuries beneath a soil trodden by Persians under Cyrus, by Greeks under Alexander, and by Arabs under the first successors of their prophet. They were now to visit India, to cross the most distant seas of the southern hemisphere, and to be finally placed in a British Museum. Who can venture to foretell how their strange career will end?

(1851, p. 304)

In response, the poet awakens from meditation on the vanity and fall of Babylon to another vision – a vision different far from Layard's. After the fall of London, when ages have buried its rubble, archeologists from Australia may dig at this site and

hold us for some race
That walked not in Christ's lowly ways. (ll. 187-88)

Were the British, those archeologists will ask, polytheistic? Did they have cults of Isis, Hermes, and a heavy-footed bull? Were they polyglot? Did they speak English before Assyrian? With many of the poet's questions unanswered, the Australians will carry off this heavy bull and display it as a thing worshipped in London.

We see further into the puns of the title: The white man's burden, the burden of empire, is accurately described as a refrain, a cyclic repetition with small variation. In accumulating heavy artifacts like this bull, London has assumed the burden once borne by Nineveh: pride will suffer calamity. To the tract "Rome – Babylon and Nineveh" Rossetti has countered with "London – Babylon and Nineveh." The dimness of the shadow of the bull on London streets itself forecasts the fall.

The poet's smile at Australian error fades as he surveys again the characteristics of this object: heavy wings unable to fly, eyes never looking to heaven, "Its planted feet which trust the sod." As Carlyle knew and said in no timid voice, the British worship Mammon, of which this made thing is a fitting emblem. The final question then is not whether this is a god for the British, but was it "Thine also, mighty Nineveh?" The worship of Mammon requires a museum for accumulating desacralized antiquity.

In fact Rossetti has had his final word earlier in the poem, in tracing the history of the bull after the same sun shone on Sardanapalus and on Job's gourd "That day whereof we keep record" (51). The same inspired record tells us also of those cities made of basalt, sardonyx, and porphyry, Sodom and Gomorrah; of Jonah, who encountered a salt lake of pride on his way to Nineveh with a prophecy for that wicked city; and of a day when "Pride's lord and Man's" said to Jesus, "Fall down and worship me" (121-35). When Jesus declined, was that not a rebuke to the Salt Pools of pride and to the bull buried beneath the sand? What empire has worshipped, then, is bull, Mammon, pride, and Satan. "The stanza on the vision of the temptation," wrote Swinburne in 1870, "has a glory on it as of Milton's work."⁵ With Swinburne's recognition of the vehemence here might be contrasted Megroz's comment on the poem as a whole that "the satire is slightly ironical."⁶ Rossetti links the carefully chosen Biblical scenes through the barrenness of a salt land, in accordance with a passage in Zephaniah three chapters after Nahum: God has cursed Moab and the children of Ammon to be as Sodom and Gomorrah: condemned to "the breeding of nettles, and salt-pits, and a perpetual desolation" (Neph. 2:9; cf. Judges 9:45). Salt, shadow, and scattering wind are emblems of pride in its fall.

Rossetti's Nahum asks of Nineveh: "Art thou better than populous Nō, that was situate among the rivers . . . ? . . . Ethiopia and Egypt were her strength, and it was infinite . . . Yet was she carried away, she went into captivity . . . Thy crowned are as the locusts, and thy captains as the great grasshoppers, which camp in the hedges in the cold day, but when the sun ariseth they flee away, and their place is not known where they are." (Nahum 3:8-17). That final *are* is supplied by the translators, and one could substitute *were*. What Nahum says of Nineveh, Rossetti says of London and its great tomb on Great Russell Street. The effect is similar to that of Byron on the dome of St. Paul's – "A huge, dun Cupola, like a foolscap crown / On a fool's head – and there is London Town!" – but Rossetti's playfulness has more acid in it.

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5. *Fortnightly Review*, May 1, 1870 (13:561); reprinted in Swinburne's *Essays and Studies* (5th ed., London: Chatto and Windus, 1901), p. 78. The bull, said Swinburne, is "no dead idol, but a living deity and very present strength" (p. 79).

6. R. L. Megroz, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Painter Poet of Heaven in Earth* (London: Faber, 1928), p. 308.

Parody and Homage: The Presence of Pater in *Dorian Gray*

Robert K. Martin

Artistic influence might often be called "the debt that will not speak its name." As Harold Bloom has reminded us, silence about the most important sources of a work of art may, paradoxically, serve almost as a confirmation of the importance of those sources. In other cases, an artist may follow quite closely on the heels of his aesthetic and intellectual mentors and yet, in Bloom's phrase, "swerve" at a crucial point away from the earlier artist. The "swerve" or "clinamen" is self-serving in the best sense; it is a necessary act of definition which enables the artist to establish at once his indebtedness, or filiation, and his independence, or self-paternity.¹

I propose that we examine the relationship between Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde in this light, in order to understand the complexity of Wilde's indebtedness to Pater and his simultaneous need to distance himself from the man whom he described during the first of his trials as "the only critic of the century whose opinion I set high."² *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is at once an homage to the author of *The Renaissance*, which Wilde spoke of as "my golden book,"³ echoing Pater's own description of the tale of Cupid and Psyche in *Marius the Epicurean*, and simultaneously a parody of Pater which draws specifically on what Wilde perceived as Pater's coy homosexuality.

The Picture of Dorian Gray has been considered, rightly, to be deeply indebted to Pater. In John Pick's words, it "is largely a novelized form of the 'Conclusion' to the *Renaissance* . . . Lord Henry Wotton . . . represents the very voice — and indeed not infrequently the very words of — the 'Conclusion' and through him Dorian identifies his own acts with the philosophy of life presented there."⁴ The verbal echoes are so striking that there can be no doubt that Wilde was thinking of Pater as he wrote his novel. But what was he thinking? Granted that he was to make use of Pater, what was that use to be?

On this question there are two widely accepted answers. The first of these holds that Wilde simply cribbed his book from Pater. According to this school of thought, Wilde was a second-rate thinker who seized upon the ideas of the Oxford don and used them as if they were his own. Wilde is thus the popularizer and vulgarizer of Pater.

The other school holds that Wilde misunderstood Pater.⁵ Those holding this position might agree that Wilde indeed vulgarized Pater, but they find in this vulgarization an act of misunderstanding and accidental distortion. Pater, they say, is far more subtle and intelligent than his crass admirer; what is more, he clearly argued for a life of passion, but only while urging on his readers to "be sure it is passion — that it does yield you this fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness"⁶ whereas Wilde appears to celebrate a promiscuous indulgence in the senses.

Since according to the first of these interpretations, Wilde is little more than a plagiarizing thief, and according to the second, little more than a fool, anyone who takes Wilde's work seriously must wonder if there is not a third possible answer — that Wilde deliberately parodied Pater in *Dorian Gray* in order to demonstrate his own distance from a total commitment to aesthetic or "epicurean" values. This point has been briefly suggested by Richard Ellmann, who has written, "Wilde seems to have intended . . . to offer (through the disastrous effects of Lord Henry's influence upon Dorian) a criticism of Pater."⁷ Ellmann's caution is unnecessary: Wilde's novel makes repeated use of Pater in a manner that should leave little doubt as to Wilde's ironic distance from his master.

Anyone who bears in mind the development of Wilde's career should find it difficult to imagine that Lord Henry functions, in any uncomplicated manner, as a spokesman for Wilde. Wilde's career underwent a significant alteration in the late 1880's, in part because of his recognition of his homosexuality (whether that recognition was sudden or gradual is still a matter of biographical debate). "The Happy Prince" is an important indication of Wilde's awareness of the way in which his homosexuality could function as a means to a deepening of his participation in humanity. Human love is placed above both aestheticism and utilitarianism, as a type of divine love.⁸ "The Portrait of Mr. W. H." is a work obviously indebted to Pater, but one which equally clearly offers a parody of Pater's method. In Wilde's story, works of art are used as a means to the discovery of personality, in the best Pater manner, but the portrait which is at its center is a fake. Do the

1. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973).
 2. H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Trials of Oscar Wilde*, (New York: Dover, 1973), p. 109.
 3. Wilde's remark was made to Yeats in 1888. He was probably echoing Pater's *Marius* consciously.
 4. John Pick, "Divergent Disciples of Walter Pater," *Thought*, XXIII (March 1948) 121. See also Christopher S. Nassar's comment that "the entire novel [*Dorian*] seems to be structured with Pater's book [*The Renaissance*] as its focal point" (*Into the Demon Universe: A Literary Exploration of Oscar Wilde* [New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1974], p. 39).
 5. A particularly simplistic version of this viewpoint is expressed by Martin Fido, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Sphere Books, 1976), p. 35.

6. Walter Pater, *The Renaissance*, introduction by Lawrence Evans (Chicago: Academy Press, 1977; reprint of Macmillan 1910 edition), p. 238.
 7. Richard Ellmann, "Overtures to Salome" in Ellmann, ed. *Oscar Wilde: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1969), p. 88. Ellman is both witty and helpful. Pater, he writes, "is enclosed (like an unhappy dryad caught in a tree trunk) in Lord Henry Wotton." He concludes that "In *Dorian Gray* the Pater side of Wilde's thought is routed, though not deprived of fascination," a very just assessment.
 8. See my essay, "Oscar Wilde and the Fairy Tale: 'The Happy Prince' as Self-Dramatization," *Studies in Short Fiction*, XVI (Winter 1979), 74-77.

characters, whose critical approach borrows from *The Renaissance*, deduce meaning from the artifact, or do they read back from their own lives into the works they purportedly read? By laying particular emphasis on the homosexual meaning of the sonnets, Wilde was engaging in a bit of fun at the expense of Pater, who hints repeatedly at the subject but always skirts it delicately.

Two major changes came about in Wilde's thinking in the years immediately preceding *Dorian Gray*: he came to a new understanding of the importance of personal love and increasingly defined that love in terms of sacrifice for the beloved, and he came to a new determination to speak and write openly of his own sexuality and to mock those who, like Pater, refused to express openly what was diffused fully throughout their works. These changes coincided with an artistic coming-of-age that produced an astonishing flurry of creativity. As Wilde became, in the years from 1888 to 1895, a major creative force producing works of lasting value in the theatre, fairy tale, novel, and essay, it became more and more important for him to establish his distance from his earliest mentors. Wilde's growing distance from Pater thus involved both a change of critical position and a need to assert his independence. By revealing the latent homosexuality of Pater's works, Wilde could simultaneously expose Pater and promote himself as the proper successor to Pater. In an act of what Harold Bloom might call "tessera" Wilde "misreads" Pater and then corrects him, offering his own work as the antithetical creation. *Dorian Gray* is an antithetical *Marius the Epicurean*, meant by Wilde as a way of reading, and then reducing, Pater.

The opening of Wilde's novel is the first indication of its ironic intent. The language of this section is a parody of Decadent style. The first paragraph is devoted entirely to the sense of smell, ranging from "the rich odour of roses" to "the heavy scent of the lilac" and "the more delicate perfume of the pink-flowering thorn."⁹ The second presents Lord Henry Wotton, looking like as "Odalisque": "From the corner of the divan of Persian saddlebags on which he was lying, smoking, as was his custom, innumerable cigarettes . . ." In the almost parenthetical "as was his custom" and the precious "innumerable" there can be little doubt as to Wilde's comic intent. Following this parodic opening, the passage shifts to what is apparently its principal subject: the imaginary flight of the birds on the window-curtains and the noise of the bees in their sexual quest ("circling with monotonous insistence round the dusty gilt horns of the straggling woodbine"). The references are to time and eternity, and to the timeless quality of art, and above all to the dominating

presence of sexual desire. The setting is thus an ironic representation of the novel's themes.

Lord Henry's words echo those of Pater in the "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance*: "You have only a few years in which to live really, perfectly, and fully . . . Live! Live the wonderful life that is in you! Let nothing be lost upon you. Be always searching for new sensations" (p. 22). Pater wrote, "we have an interval, and then our place knows us no more . . . our one chance lies in expanding that interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time" (p. 238).¹⁰ Wilde quickly signals how we are to take this imitation of Pater, for in his next paragraph Dorian drops a sprig of lilac and a bee scrambles over it. Then the bee moves on: "he saw it moving into the stained trumpet of a Tyrian convolvulus. The flower seemed to quiver, and then swayed gently to and fro" (p. 23). The bee's contact with the flower mimes human sexual intercourse and reminds us that Dorian is being penetrated, by Lord Henry's ideas, if not by his body. The abrupt sexuality is a deliberate undercutting of the previous passage, imitated from *The Renaissance*: for it makes Pater's message into a highly lascivious *carpe diem*. Wilde's use of the passage in this way would seem to suggest two things: first, that Wilde believed that Pater himself took "pulsations" to be at least partially sexual, so that Wilde is merely making explicit what Pater coyly left implicit, and, second, that, in Wilde's review, Pater's theory of the value of ever-increasing sensations as a response to human mortality could lead to a violation of essential human relationships. Thus *Dorian Gray* is both an exposure of the "secret" meaning of *The Renaissance*, and an illustration of its possible misapplication.

Lord Henry justifies his relationship to Dorian by a number of hardly concealed references to a homosexual tradition, similar to the references Pater makes in his criticism and his fiction. Thinking of the role of real objects in the development of ideal beauty, Lord Henry muses: "He remembered something like it in history. Was it not Plato, that artist in thought, who had first analyzed it? Was it not Buonarrotti who had carved it in the coloured marbles of a sonnet-sequence? But in our own century, it was strange" (p. 36). (Wilde was to repeat the argument at his trial, when he spoke of a love "such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy, and such as you find in the sonnets of Michelangelo and Shakespeare . . . It is in this century misunderstood, so much misunderstood that it may be described as the 'love that dare not speak its name,' and on account of it I am placed where I am now."¹¹) But in fact it is not Lord Henry who represents such love, as Dorian comes to recognize, but Basil:

9. Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. Isobel Murray (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974), p. [1]. Subsequent quotations are to this edition and are indicated in the text. Murray's introduction provides valuable information on Wilde's borrowings from Pater (pp. ix-xii). She is particularly convincing on the influence of *Gaston de Latour* (1888).

10. Nassar notes that Lord Henry uses the word "sensations" instead of the Paterian "impressions" (*Into the Demon Universe*, p. 41). It is interesting to note that both of these passages may lie behind

yet another version of this same "misprision," Strether's famous plea in Henry James's *The Ambassadors*: "Live all you can; it's a mistake not to. It doesn't so much matter what you do in particular, so long as you have your life. If you haven't had that, what have you had? This place and these impressions . . . have had their abundant message for me . . . Do what you like so long as you don't make my mistake. For it was a mistake. Live!" (London: Methuen, 1903), pp. 161-62.

11. Hyde, *The Trials*, p. 201.

The love that he bore him – for it was really love – had nothing in it that was not noble and intellectual. It was not that mere physical admiration of beauty that is born of the senses, and that dies when the senses tire. It was such love as Michael Angelo had known, and Montaigne, and Winckelmann, and Shakespeare himself.

(p. 119)

Lord Henry, as we have seen, responds to Dorian's physical beauty as a bee responds to a flower. For Basil Dorian represents something else, the integration of the physical and the spiritual: "he defines for me the lines of a fresh school, a school that is to have in it all the passion of the romantic spirit, all the perfection of the spirit that is Greek"¹² (p. 10). By choosing to portray Dorian in a realistic mode, however, Basil betrays this insight. All of the principal characters of the novel are destroyed, as Wilde explained, Dorian and Basil for undue reliance on the senses, Lord Henry for his futile attempt to remain a spectator. It is simply wrong to see Lord Henry as the hero of the novel, as Edouard Roditi has done; to do so is to make the novel into a Decadent tract instead of a subtly moral work.¹³

It is not only in his theorizing that Lord Henry imitates Pater, but also in his analysis of Dorian's development. Consider this passage: "How different he was now from the shy, frightened boy he had met in Basil Hallward's studio! His nature had developed like a flower, had borne blossoms of scarlet flame. Out of its secret hiding-place had crept his Soul, and Desire had come to meet it on the way" (pp. 54-55). These cynical words have their source in Pater's luminous description of Florian Deleal's first sight of the flowering hawthorn: "a plumage of tender, crimson fire out of the heart of the dry wood." The sight is perhaps "some periodic moment in the expansion of soul" which brings him to a realization of "passionateness": "A touch of regret or desire mingled all night with the remembered presence of the red flowers."¹⁴ Wilde again uses Lord Henry's allegiance to a Paterian sensuality as a way of reproaching Pater for an undue emphasis on physical sensation. While the accusation is not just when applied to Pater's work as a whole and the context in which Pater clearly wanted it understood, it was important for Wilde as a way of asserting his own distance. Surprisingly, *Dorian Gray* served for Wilde to express the dangers inherent in the submission to sensation and to dramatize the difference between two modes of homosexual love, the physical and carnal love of Lord Henry, and the integrated physical and spiritual love of Basil. His "immoral" novel is in fact a highly moral work which traces the destruction wrought by the failure to acknowledge the spiritual element in sexuality.

One of the most astonishing of Wilde's parodies of Pater

occurs in a speech of Basil's in which he laments his decision to attempt a realistic treatment of Dorian. He recounts the other works he has done: "I had drawn you as Paris in dainty armour, and as Adonis with huntsman's cloak and polished boat-spear. Crowned with heavy lotus-blossoms you had sat on the prow of Adrian's barge, gazing across the green turbid Nile. You had leant over the still pool of some Greek woodland, and seen in the water's silent silver the marvel of your own face" (p. 114). Dorian is the expression of all history, like Leonardo's Mona Lisa as described by Pater:

She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave; and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her; and trafficked for strange webs with eastern merchants: and, as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as Saint Anne, the mother of Mary. . .

(p. 125)

We might even go so far as to call him the Eternal Masculine. By shifting Pater's references from women to men, Wilde provides a reading of the passage, and of Pater's regard for Leonardo. (Dali carried the process a step further when he gave the Mona Lisa a moustache.)

Wilde's parodies of Pater tell us only part of the story, however. Like all parodies they are rooted in deep admiration. Their mocking is designed in part as a way of realizing, of accomplishing that which is judged incomplete. Above all, *Dorian Gray* is Wilde's tribute, although, as we have seen, a hedged one, to Pater's concept of the "plotless novel," the novel as portrait. The source of that form is of course Marius, whose life forms the center of his novel as Dorian does that of Wilde's. In both cases the novel abandons traditional plot structure and substitutes a concern with a growth in consciousness (and so to some extent both may be thought of as more or less direct progenitors of *The Ambassadors*, whose cry, "Live all you can. It's a mistake not to . . . Live!", as we have seen, echoes both the "Conclusion" and Lord Henry's words). *Dorian Gray* is the story of a soul, far more than the story of a man. Dorian does almost nothing – and in fact many readers, from Pater on, have complained of the melodramatic intrusions when he does indeed act – what he *sees* remains the center of the novel's concern. Here again a divergence from Pater is evident. Marius' growth appears to be limitless. Only death may bring an end to his expanding perceptions, and to his accompanying spiritual growth (and there are strong suggestions that even death cannot arrest the expansion of consciousness). Dorian's growth is false from the beginning, since he is the means to Lord Henry's pleasure and not an end in himself. His

12. Wilde is echoing here Pater's comment on Goethe in the Winckelmann essay, *Renaissance*, 226-27. The parallel is noted by Ernst Bendz, *The Influence of Pater and Matthew Arnold in the Prose Writings of Oscar Wilde* (1914; rpt. Darby, 1968), pp. 36-37.

13. On the "moral" of the novel and the destruction of the characters see Wilde's letter of 26 June 1890 to the *St. James's Gazette*, in *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Richard

Ellmann (New York: Random House, 1970), pp. 238-41. Roditi's view is expressed in his *Oscar Wilde* (New York: New Directions, 1947); the discussion of *Dorian Gray* is reprinted in Richard Ellmann, ed., *Oscar Wilde: A Collection of Critical Essays*, pp. 47-55.

14. Walter Pater, "The Child in the House" [1878], in *Miscellaneous Studies*, 2nd edition (London: MacMillan, 1910), pp. 185-86.

curve of growth goes downward, not upward. His body and soul are split apart, and so his growth is an expansion of the ability to receive sensual pleasure without an accompanying increase in the ability for spiritual growth.

We recall that in Wilde's comment that *The Renaissance* was his "golden book" there was an echo of Pater's treatment of Marius' golden book, Apuleius' *Golden Ass*, and of Gaston de Latour's, Ronsard. Thus in the Dorian who is corrupted by a book there is something of Wilde's own self and his ambivalent response to his mentor. Wilde's use of the book is a deliberate inversion of Pater's motif: what was once a kind of epiphany leading the protagonist forward in a spiritual quest is now turned into a moment of poisoned perception, the kiss of the serpent.

Wilde's description of the celebrated "yellow book," Lord Henry's gift to Dorian, makes the relationship to Pater clear (although the book as described is an amalgam of both *Marius* and *A Rebours*, and later references would also make it appear that the book is in fact *The Renaissance*).

It was a novel without a plot, and with only one character, being, indeed, simply a psychological study of a certain young Parisian, who spent his life trying to realize in the nineteenth century all the passions and modes of thought that belonged to every century except his own, and to sum up, as it were, in himself the various moods through which the world-spirit had ever passed.
(p. 125)

Like Pater, or Huysmans, Wilde sought in *Dorian* to create a psychological novel, through the study of a single personality. Like Pater Wilde considered such a study as a "portrait." Other models for such a title existed, of course – including James's *Portrait of a Lady* – but it was Pater who had most recently transformed fictional structure by creating a novel around a single portrait. Wilde terms his work a "picture," but the point is the same: the novel exists to depict the character of the hero. The ambiguity of the title's reference emphasizes Wilde's own role as yet another double. Each picture is, as the novel informs us, only a mirror.

Like *Marius*, too, *Dorian Gray* is a novel written out of the dramatization of criticism. Both Pater and Wilde began as critics, and when they turned to fiction, they helped to transform the nature of the novel (and the short story) by using that form to present in a fuller form the

ideas already present in their critical works. All of Pater's subsequent work may be seen as an attempt to express more clearly, or more convincingly, the ideas of *The Renaissance*. In *Dorian Gray* Wilde also used his characters to represent critical points of view, even if, to some extent, all of the characters are self-portraits. Like Pater, he places his central character as a receiver of influences, one who learns from experience. The characters round him are ideas.

Wilde appears to have retained his interest in Pater even after his arrest. Among the books he arranged to receive in prison were *Greek Studies*, *Appreciations*, *Imaginary Portraits*, *Miscellaneous Essays*, and *Gaston de Latour*. (He had already received *Appreciations*, of course, and may have known other of the works as well.) But it is *Dorian Gray* which convincingly shows the deep influence of Pater on Wilde's ideas, characters, themes, form and language. And it is *Dorian Gray* which attempts to convert the covert homosexuality of Pater into a more openly expressed homosexuality while at the same time exploring the morality of beauty and passion. It is astonishing to recognize that Wilde's depiction of Dorian, corrupted by a book, will become a portrait of himself, destroyed by his vanity and his insistence on confronting conventional morality.

Although many readers have been quick to dismiss Wilde's novel as the frivolous product of a moment, recent study of the manuscript changes should indicate that it was a work to which Wilde devoted considerable attention. He himself wrote of it in a letter, "I think it will be ultimately recognized as a real work of art with a strong ethical lesson in it."¹⁵ The complexity of his response to Pater that can be traced in the text is another element in defense of the novel's seriousness as a work of art. And the most serious objection to its ethical quality is removed when one realizes that the "Preface" is but one of the novel's voices, by no means that of the author speaking *in propria persona*. Pater himself, in his review of *Dorian*, acknowledged that Wilde "may . . . have intended Lord Henry as a satiric sketch."¹⁶ The urgency of his insistence that Lord Henry did not represent a properly understood Epicureanism testifies to his recognition that Lord Henry in particular, and *Dorian Gray* in general, was at once a parody and a tribute.

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15. Letter from Oscar Wilde to Arthur Fish, quoted by H. Montgomery Hyde, *Oscar Wilde: A Biography* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1975), p. 119.

16. Walter Pater, "A Novel by Mr. Oscar Wilde" in Harold Bloom, ed. *Selected Writings of Walter Pater* (New York: New American Library, 1974), p. 264.

The Christening of the New Woman: May 1894

Ellen Jordan

The birth of the New Woman pre-dated her christening by a good many years, and the manner in which the name was finally settled on provides a fascinating insight into the way popular labels and catchwords emerge. As an ideal of womanhood, the New Woman was born in the 1880's, and it was the second generation of English feminists, those women who had profited from the educational and vocational opportunities won by the pioneer feminists of the sixties, who acted both as parents and midwives. It was they who endowed the New Woman with her hostility to men, her questioning of marriage, her determination to escape from the restrictions of home life, and her belief that education could make a woman capable of leading a financially self-sufficient, single, and yet fulfilling life. It was they, too, who acted as midwives, and brought their brain child into the public consciousness by writing about her in the serious periodicals and fiction of their day.

The bad fairy of the christening made its appearance in 1890, when the scoffing denigrators of the movement began suggesting in papers like *Punch* and *The Saturday Review* that the feminists' claim to enjoy the same opportunities as men included activities like cigar smoking, proposing marriage, haunting clubs, and outdoing men in all the popular sports of the day, thus endowing the New Woman with a set of characteristics which they considered both grotesque and exquisitely funny. Nevertheless, although she was a thoroughly familiar figure by 1893, it was not until May 1894 that the New Woman was finally named. Two novelists, the feminist Sarah Grand and the anti-feminist Ouida, acted as godmothers, while *Punch* played the role of officiating clergyman and performed the ceremony within its pages.

Probably the first indication that a new breed of feminist was in the process of being born came in 1883 with the publication, under the pseudonym Ralph Iron, of Olive Schreiner's novel, *The Story of an African Farm*. Although the book was not solely devoted to feminism, when the author did deal with the position of women she showed a truculence, a sense of grievance, and a tendency to regard women as the superiors of men which was a definite departure from the more restrained and moderate claims of older feminists like Emily Davies and Millicent Fawcett. Olive Schreiner's position was made even clearer in 1887 when *The Fortnightly Review* published three allegories ("Three Dreams in a Desert," 48, 128-203) in which she stressed the need for women to break free from the shackles of their traditional position and see their own need for self-fulfilment as more important than the duty of sacrificing themselves for their husbands and children. Olive Schreiner was soon joined by others, and, for the first time in England, leading feminists began to make

overt attacks on the institution of marriage. In 1888, Sarah Grand, a novelist taken very seriously in her day, had the heroine of her first novel, *Ideala*, ask, "If I signed a contract, and found out afterwards that those who induced me to become a party to it had kept me in ignorance of the most important clause in it, would you call that a moral contract?"¹ In the same year, Mona Caird, another feminist of the new kind, wrote that the restrictiveness of the current marriage tie destroyed the individuality of both partners, and made "the ideal marriage — that is, a union prompted by harmony of nature and by friendship — almost beyond the reach" of her generation.² Thus when Ibsen's *The Doll's House* was produced in June 1889, Nora's slamming the door on her husband was seen as representing women's repudiation of marriage.

In February 1890 Mona Caird published an even more fierce, and, in the event, notorious article, "The Morality of Marriage," in *The Fortnightly Review* (53, 310-330). This time she attacked the current institution for two reasons. She argued strongly that the burden of child-bearing and child rearing made a woman financially dependent on her husband, thus providing him with unlimited opportunities to be cruel, and she stressed again that the closeness of the tie was narrowing and reduced the individuality of both partners. She then suggested that greater freedom in the marriage contract would allow women to follow their own interests and develop their own personalities, and that this in turn would have a less stultifying effect on men. The article created enormous interest. *The Daily Telegraph* chose the subject for one of its reader-written symposia and what *The Saturday Review* (February, 1890, p. 195) called "Mrs. Caird's flatulent philosophy" received wide publicity. Feminism and the idea of marriage reform had become linked in the public mind.

It was in 1889, too, that the series of attacks on the new generation of feminists, using ridicule as a weapon rather than moral outrage, began. Women were now sneered at for aping the customs and habits, and even rivalling the physical strength, of men. In June 1889 *The Saturday Review* had an article called "Manly Women" complaining that women left all the household tasks to the servants to "go out shooting, hunting and betting with the men." *Punch*, which for the past few years had concentrated on laughing at women's fashions — leg o'mutton sleeves, insects in hats, daggers as hair ornaments and the like — began in May 1890 to use the physically strong, sport-playing woman as a subject for jokes, and the large du Maurier woman in the tailored suit out-walking, out-punting, and out-cycling the much more diminutive man became a recurrent theme in its pages.

Meanwhile the serious discussion of the position of

1. Quoted in Mona Caird, *The Morality of Marriage and Other Essays on the Status and Destiny of Women* (London: G. Redway, 1897),

p. 117.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 103, 105.

women continued. The year 1893 saw the publication of three significant works of fiction dealing with the position of women: Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins*, *Keynotes* by a woman using the pseudonym George Egerton, and *The Odd Women* by George Gissing; and 1894 was even more prolific, producing Mona Caird's *The Daughters of Danaus*, "Iota's" *The Yellow Aster*, Emma Frances Brook's *A Superfluous Woman*, George Egerton's *Discords*, and Sarah Grand's *Our Manifold Nature*. The first part of 1894 was also notable for controversy in *The Nineteenth Century* under the title "*The Revolt of the Daughters*." In the first article (33, 23-31), Blanch A. Crackanorpe argued that girls, like boys, should be allowed to make their own mistakes. "Why not," she wrote "allow the possibility that nice girls, well disposed girls, may also desire a mild sort of *wanderjahre* period, during which they, too, want not to break fences, but to get occasional glimpses of the landscape beyond the family domain? Blunders not a few they will make, but not of the kind that need to be counted with. The far-seeing mother will consent to sit a quiet and smiling spectator while her daughter ventures on small, or even comparatively big, social experiments" (p. 27). The editors evidently felt that the topic was one of considerable interest, since they printed four different articles on it in their March number³ and discussion obviously spread beyond *The Nineteenth Century's* readership, *Punch* having jokes about the *wanderjahre* on 10th February (p. 64) and 28th April (p. 194).

Yet although by 1893 the essential qualities of the new style feminist had become pretty thoroughly established — Bernard Shaw managed to encapsulate both the serious and the comic aspects in the two plays he wrote in that year,⁴ *The Philanderer* and *Mrs. Warren's Profession* — a name for the type was still missing. Mrs. Lynn Linton, who had successfully produced the label "the Girl of the Period" for the fast girl of the 1860's, had a try in 1891 with "the Wild Women,"⁵ but this time the label did not stick. In 1893 Pinero tried *The Amazons* as the title of a play and Gissing *The Odd Women* for a novel, but again neither seems to have struck exactly the right note. Then, in May 1894, the answer was found. In the first half of 1894 *The North American Review*, a journal which, though published in New York, seems to have shown a consistent interest in English affairs, published a series of articles by Sarah Grand on the current position of women. The first one, in the March 1894 issue, opened with an attack on what she called "the Bawling Brotherhood," and described it in the following terms:

[It] consists of two sorts of men. First of all is he who is satisfied with the cow-kind of woman as being most convenient; it is the threat of any strike among his domestic cattle for more consideration that irritates him into loud and angry protests.

The other sort of Bawling Brother is he who is under the influence of the scum of our sex, who knows nothing better than women of that class in and out of society, preys upon them or ruins himself for them, takes his whole tone from them, and judges us all by them. Both the cow-woman and the scum-woman are well within the range of the comprehension of the Bawling Brotherhood, but the new woman is a little above him, and he never even thought of looking up to where she has been sitting apart in silent contemplation all these years thinking and thinking, until at last she solved the problem and proclaimed for herself what was wrong with Home-is-the-Woman's Sphere, and prescribed the remedy. (pp. 270-1)

Yet although Sarah Grand used the phrase "the new woman," the capital letters marking it out as a label were missing. It was not she, but a novelist on the other side of the feminist fence who took the next step. The May issue of *The North American Review* contained not only another and even more severe attack on men by Sarah Grand, ("The Man of the Moment," CLVIII, 620-627), but a reply to her first article by the popular novelist Ouida. And it was Ouida who selected out the phrase "the New Woman" and supplied the all-important capital letters. Her article was called "The New Woman" and her reasons for so naming it were made clear in the opening paragraph:

It can scarcely be disputed, I think, that in the English language there are conspicuous at the present moment two words which designate two unmitigated bores: The Workingman and the Woman. The Workingman and the Woman, the New Woman, be it remembered, meet us at every page of literature written in the English tongue, and each is convinced that on its own especial W hangs the future of the world . . . Your contributor avers that the Cow-Woman and the Scum-Woman, man understands; but that the New Woman is above him. (p. 610)

Moreover, whenever she used the phrase, and she used it frequently, the all-important capital letters were present. It is obvious that another attempt to label the type was being made.

Alone, Ouida's article might not have aroused enough attention for the label to be taken up, but other circumstances helped to push it into prominence. Sarah Grand's second article attracted much more attention in England than her first. *The Observer* gave a brief resume of it on 13th May, and *The Pall Mall Gazette* attacked it at length on 16th May. But it was *Punch* which chose to link together the three things which made the "New Woman" label stick — the line of anti-feminist jokes it had been developing since 1890, the interest aroused by Sarah Grand's article, and the label "New Woman" suggested by Ouida. On 26th May 1894 the following appeared:

The New Woman

("OUIDA" says "the New Woman" is an unmitigated bore.

3. B. A. Crackanorpe, "The Revolt of the Daughters: I, A Last Word on the Revolt," 424-429; M. E. Haweis, "The Revolt of the Daughters: II, Daughters and Mothers," 430-436; Kathleen Cuffe, "A Reply from the Daughters, I," 437-442; Alys W. Pearsall Smith, "A Reply from the Daughters, II," 443-450.

4. Introduction to *Plays Unpleasant* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1946), p. xii.

5. In three articles in *The Nineteenth Century*, 30 (1891), 79-87, 596-605, & 31 (1892), 455-465.

6. "The New Aspect of the Woman Question," 158 (1894), 270-276.

"SARAH GRAND" declares that Man, morally, "is in his infancy" and that "now Woman holds out a strong hand to the Child-Man, and insists upon helping him" by "spanking proper principles into him in the nursery.")

There is a New Woman, and what do you think?
She lives upon nothing but Foolscap and Ink!
But though Foolscap and Ink are the whole of her diet,
This nagging New Woman can never be quiet! (p. 252)

This use of the word "new" was extremely popular in the early 1890s. As Shaw wrote in 1898, "We of course called everything advanced 'the New' at that time."⁷ In 1894 *Punch* had jokes about "the New Humour" (p. 114), "the New Journalism" (p. 73), "the New Art" (p. 368), while in August it published a poem, "The New Newness," which summed up the lot. Obviously attaching the label "New" to this type of woman fitted in very well with current fashions of speech. Moreover, the editors of *Punch* found this vein of humor highly successful, and by August 1894 it seems to have become editorial policy to make the subject its own. Between 18th August 1894 and 27th July 1895, there are only three issues without at least one New Woman joke in them.

How long it took for the phrase to catch on elsewhere is less easy to determine. Sarah Grand, in spite of her unwitting acting of the part of godmother to the New Woman, was still using the phrase "the modern girl" (without capitals) in her *North American* article with that title (158, 706-714) in June 1894. On the other hand, Sydney Grundy entitled a play *The New Women* in September 1894, and by 1896, at any rate, the label seems to have passed into general currency. *The Fortnightly Review* (65, 857-864) used it that year in its review of *Jude the Obscure*, and it also appeared in *The Saturday Review* in April (81, 932) and July (82, 43). Clearly it was a christening which "took."

Moreover it has held. The comedy figure of the educated, sport-playing, cigar-smoking, marriage-hating woman of the 1890s is still the New Woman for anyone writing today, and so is the heroine in all the more serious attempts by novelists to show the dilemmas of the educated women of the times — Hardy's Sue Bridehead, Gissing's "Odd Women," and Grant Allen's "woman who did," as well as the heroines of the forgotten novels of Sarah Grand, Mona Caird, Emma Brooks, and "Iota."⁸

Newcastle University

The Image of St. Theresa in *Middlemarch* and Positive Ethics

Franklin E. Court

The reference to St. Theresa in the Prelude to *Middlemarch* reflects George Eliot's continuing interest in the relationship between reality and metaphysical idealism, a relationship that is more clearly understood in the light of the influence on her work of nineteenth-century skeptical thought, particularly principles of ethics associated with Comtean Positivism.

My interpretation of the St. Theresa reference is posited on the belief that the Prelude is partly intended to be read ironically, that Eliot had her tongue in her cheek when she suggested that all those who care to know nothing less than "the history of man" surely have dwelt, however briefly, "on the life of Saint Theresa" and have smiled "at

the thought of the little girl walking forth one morning hand-in-hand with her still smaller brother, to go and seek martyrdom in the country of the Moors." The irony extends as well to her observation that the young Theresa, ignoring Romances of chivalry and social conquests, soared after "some illimitable satisfaction."¹ It is that need for some "illimitable satisfaction," that, as I read the Prelude, emphasizes the subtle discrepancy here between the words and what Eliot intended for the reader to grasp from those words. For George Eliot, especially by 1870, divinely inspired, supernatural promises of eternal rewards offered little of positive value in the context of immediate human needs.² Eliot was an avowed agnostic,

7. George Bernard Shaw, op. cit., p. ix. It is noteworthy that though Shaw uses the phrase in his introduction written in 1898, it does not occur in the plays which were composed in 1893.

8. For a recent discussion of these works, see A. R. Cunningham, "The 'New Woman' fiction of the 1890's," *Victorian Studies*, 18 (1973), 177-186.

1. *Middlemarch*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956), pp. 3-4. All subsequent references are to this edition and will appear parenthetically in the text.

2. In a letter to Charles Bray, 15 November 1857, she wrote: "My own experience and development deepen every day my conviction that our moral progress may be measured by the degree in which we sympathize with individual suffering and individual joy. The fact that in the scheme of things we see a constant and tremendous sacrifice of individuals is, it seems to me, only one of the many proofs that urge upon us our total inability to find in our natures a key to the Divine mystery. I could more readily turn Christian, and worship Jesus again, than embrace a Theism which professes to explain the proceedings of God." See *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon Haight (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1954-55), II, 403.

opposed in principle to those who believed that the measure of one's morality is based on a system of divine rewards and punishments, a system that she refers to in *Middlemarch* as the "bridle of religion" which "all men needed" but which was, "properly speaking," mainly "the dread of a Hereafter" (p. 14). Of the Roman Catholic Church, in particular, she wrote in 1860, "I have faith in the working-out of higher possibilities than the Catholic or any other church has presented. . . . The highest 'calling and election' is to do without opium and live through all our pain with conscious, clear-eyed endurance."³

Given this attitude toward the Catholic Church, or Christianity generally, why, of all the female divines in Catholic hagiography did she choose St. Theresa of Avila, a sixteenth century mystic, no less, for the central metaphorical position in the Prelude? Two reasons come immediately to mind. First, at that period in her life, she simply may have been infatuated with the life of Theresa. She was admittedly interested in Spanish history and literature, noting that fact in an 1867 letter to John Blackwood, written while she and G. H. Lewes were traveling in Spain. And Lewes recounts in his journal for January 30th 1867 that she stopped in a shop in Saragossa primarily to ask for a copy of the *Vida de Santa Teresa*.⁴ In 1880 she asked William Blackwood to send a postcard to Dr. Ferdinand Wortham in Heidelberg, the editor of *Das Staat-sarchiv*, informing him that the original life of St. Theresa was probably to be found in Germany, as in England, in second hand book shops.⁵ The "original" life that she urged him to shop the second hand stores to find was undoubtedly St. Theresa's autobiography. The autobiography was also, more than likely, the book that she was looking for in Saragossa in 1867, just three years before she started work on the "Miss Brooke" section that was to form the early chapters of *Middlemarch*.

A second possibility is that Eliot chose the St. Theresa figure for the Prelude in order to suggest elements of mystical dedication and excess that later would be linked with Dorothea. Mysticism is, after all, what Theresa of Avila has been most widely celebrated for over the years. But the argument for mystical qualities in the character of Dorothea is wisely resisted. Gordon Haight's judgment on the matter is basically correct: the comparison to St. Theresa is directly related to Dorothea's wish to perform more practically as a reformer of a religious order. But his conclusion is accurate only in the sense that she is pri-

marily motivated by what appears to be an excess of religious missionary zeal.⁶ A closer look at the actual reforms for which Theresa was responsible and the effect that they had on the order she founded, suggests another more extended possibility for the link between St. Theresa and Dorothea Brooke.

St. Theresa was the founder of the Discalced Carmelites. Contrary to Haight's judgment, the reforms she instituted, though practical in the sense that they were intended as revisionary correctives of the older Carmelite order's religious practicum, were hardly, if at all, actually "practical" in nature. In fact, her reforms were intended to eliminate the earlier, more worldly, socially directed life of the order in favor of asceticism. Theresa cloistered the Carmelites. When she began the great sixteenth-century reform, she looked intentionally to the model of the holy hermits of the thirteenth century from whom the original order traced its beginnings. The old eremitical ideal upon which this new order was founded was based on the concept of the need to create and maintain through life an atmosphere of unquestioning obedience and perpetual dedication to prayer and meditation.⁷ Eliot must have known enough about Theresa's life and her religious reforms to realize that the Discalced Carmelite order that Theresa established in the 16th century was one of the most intensely restrictive, cloistered, and contemplative orders of all the religious orders for women.

It was also, as Eliot surely realized, a life style that could exert an irresistible appeal in the mind of a naive young devotee convinced of her own blessedness and desirous of sainthood, a young innocent intent on sacrificing herself to some great, divinely conceived, "illimitable" ideal or cause. Even better than the life itself, of course, would be being able to institute a reform that would promote the way of blessedness and sainthood for others.⁸ The ideal is particularly applicable to the one that Dorothea Brooke conceives for herself in the early chapters of *Middlemarch*. Eliot clearly intends for the reader to look with suspicion and a certain degree of amusement on the motives for this modern day Theresa's "vocation," just as she had done earlier in 1859 with the character of Dinah Morris in *Adam Bede*, another innocent, dedicated to an ethereal, "other-worldly" religiosity.

Extensive demonstrations of commitment to attitudes

3. See *Letters*, III, 366. On the subject of the religious ceremonies of Holy Week that she and Lewes observed in 1860 at St. Peter's in Rome (including a blessing by the Pope), she wrote to Mrs. Congreve that they were "a melancholy, hollow business, and we regret bitterly that the Holy Week has taken up our time from better things," adding the rather sarcastic aside, "I have a cold and headache this morning, and in other ways am not conscious of improvement from the Pope's blessing. I may comfort myself with thinking that the King of Sardinia is none the worse for the Pope's curse" (*Letters*, III, 288). At times, however, she seems to have found Catholic ritual aesthetically pleasing. See *Letters*, II, 451-52).

4. See *Letters*, IV, 341, fn. 5, 347.

5. See *Letters*, III, 253.

6. Gordon S. Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography* (New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), p. 564.

7. *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1967), III, 122; E. Allison Peers, *St. Theresa of Jesus and Other Essays and Addresses* (London: Faber and Faber, 1953), pp. 31-33.

8. Robert F. Damm's argument that Dorothea transcends the narrow view of sainthood that initially characterizes her is essentially in agreement with my thesis in this paper. Damm fails to take into consideration the extent to which the St. Theresa image foreshadows the character development of young Dorothea and the extent to which Positivism forms the backdrop against which Dorothea's development should be viewed. See "Sainthood and Dorothea Brooke," *Victorian Newsletter*, No. 35 (Spring 1969), pp. 18-22.

of rapturous consciousness and self sacrificing, metaphysical idealism outside the sphere of immediate experience and human sympathy regularly elicited from Eliot charges of egoism. This is not to suggest that she intended her references to St. Theresa to be understood necessarily as criticism of Theresa or her nuns. There is insufficient evidence to support that conclusion. But I am convinced that she did intend for the link between Dorothea's "nun-like" religious commitment and her overpowering obsession with herself – in all things – albeit her blessedness, to be clearly understood. In her famous 1857 essay on Edward Young, as essay that betrays the influence on her thought of both Comte and Feuerbach, Eliot records some of her most biting satirical comments on the dangers of egoism existing concurrently with excessive concerns for blessedness and a self-serving deference to rules and theories.

Eliot claims that Young's religious devoutness was a case of "egoism turned heavenward." His poetry exemplified the "mistake which substitutes interested obedience for sympathetic emotion, and baptizes egoism as religion." She accuses him of being out of touch with the realities and needs of ordinary people. He "sees Religion coming down from the skies, with this world in her left hand and the other world in her right: but we never find him dwelling on virtue or religion as it really exists – in the emotions of a man dressed in an ordinary coat, and seated by his fireside of an evening, with his hand resting on the head of his little daughter . . . in all the sublime self-renunciation and sweet charities which are found in the details of ordinary life." To be actively involved in the well-being, the joys and sorrows of mankind, she adds, has "no more direct dependence on the belief in a future state than the interchange of gases in the lungs on the plurality of worlds." On the matter of submissive surrender to religious theories and codes of conduct, she writes, "it is only where moral emotion is comparatively weak that the contemplation of a rule or theory habitually mingles with its action; and in accordance with this, we think experience, both in literature and life, has shown that the minds which are predominantly didactic, are deficient in sympathetic emotion."⁹

"Sympathy" is a key word in Eliot's philosophical lexicon. To possess sympathy means to have the ability to extend the feelings until they embrace the needs, the joys, the sorrows, of mankind. Practicing sympathy with mankind subsequently enables the individual to subdue the self-serving ego. One's intelligence is freed from the preoccupation with self and is receptive to the knowledge and

needs of the social organism, the realities of ordinary people. Isolated, the egoistic individual is only an abstraction; to be "real" one must learn to live in others. The logic, of course, is the logic of nineteenth-century religious skepticism; it is also, more specifically, the logic of Comtean Positivism, the Religion of Humanity.¹⁰

Viewing Dorothea and the image of St. Theresa in the Prelude against a background of Positivist ethics enables the reader to appreciate better the subtleties of the ironic handling of the St. Theresa figure and young Dorothea's character.

The Positivists rejected supernatural belief. They argued that Christianity and other metaphysical philosophies operated from the faulty major premise that the nature of reality transcends experience. In contrast, Positivism reinforced Mill's assertion that all knowledge of the external world is relative, that things can only be known as they appear to human consciousness and that the modes of consciousness are not divinely implanted or divinely revealed but are totally the products of experience and acquired knowledge. Metaphysical idealism tends to confuse the subjective with the objective. Consequently, there can be no clear distinction between the self and what exists beyond the self; the danger, according to the Positivists, is that the world becomes an extension of the ego. It follows then that the egoistical approach to the external world in its most extreme metaphysical form is found in religious sensibilities where, as Eliot observes in the essay on Young, morality exhibits itself not in "direct sympathetic feeling and action," but in the "recognition of a rule." Action and moral emotion are weakened by the habitual contemplation of rules and theories that are simply abstractions – illusions. The illusion is the direct result of one's egoistic insistence on giving his own highly subjective conception of himself distinct shape. Once convinced of the actuality of the illusion, it is an easy matter for a person to recreate himself, to be reborn, in his own egoistically conceived image of himself. According to Positivism, true morality necessitates, first, working for the public good, for the welfare of others. To renounce that responsibility, that duty, in order to follow divine guides or metaphysical ideals, particularly if the immediate objective is to ensure one's blessedness or saintliness, is to negate moral responsibility, to be insensible to human needs. "The test of a higher religion might be," Eliot wrote to Sarah Hennell in 1869, "that it should enable the believer to do without the consolations which his egoism would demand," the consolations being divine rewards and the possibility of saintliness.¹¹ In other

9. *Essays and Leaves from a Note Book* (New York: AMS Press, 1970), pp. 33, 50-51, 54-55, 60. The essay was originally published in *Westminster Review* in January 1857.

10. For more on George Eliot's interest in Positivism, see T. R. Wright, "George Eliot and Positivism: A Reassessment," *Modern Language Review*, 76 (April 1981), 257-72; Rosemary D. Ashton, "The Intellectual 'Medium' of *Middlemarch*," *Review of English Studies*, 30 (1979), 154-68; J. B. Bullen, "George Eliot's *Romola* as a Positivist Allegory," *Review of English Studies*, 26 (1975), 425-35; William Baker, "The Kabbalah, Mordecai and George

Eliot's Religion of Humanity," *Yearbook of English Studies*, 3 (1973), 216-21; James Scott, "George Eliot, Positivism and the Social Vision of *Middlemarch*," *Victorian Studies*, 16 (1972), 59-76; and Alice Kaminsky, "George Eliot, George Henry Lewes, and the Novel," *PMLA*, 70 (1955), 997-1013. See also, Bernard J. Paris, *Experiments in Life: George Eliot's Quest for Values* (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1965); W. M. Simon, *European Positivism in the Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1963); and Martha S. Vogeler, "George Eliot and the Positivists," *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 35 (1980), 406-31.

words, according to the logic of Positivism, theological faith and metaphysical inclinations tend to encourage egoism. It is a lesson that one does not find stated quite as explicitly in Hennell, Strauss, Feuerbach, Mill or Spinoza, all of whom influenced Eliot's thoughts on religion after she renounced her Methodism.

What I am suggesting here is that the reference to St. Theresa in the Prelude has little to do specifically with Theresa's mysticism. Instead, she represents the extreme attraction that a life dedicated to metaphysical, other-worldly pursuits and self-mortifying, life-denying ideals can have on a young woman intent on realizing her own blessedness. From the outset of Book I, Dorothea Brooke is depicted as a pious young woman who longs to dedicate herself to something divine, to some pursuit of blessedness or some epic spiritual cause that will fulfill her self-conceived vision of herself. She is self-centered and insincere. To paraphrase Eliot on Edward Young, the God of Dorothea in the early chapters of the novel, like the God of Young, is simple Dorothea Brooke "writ large."¹² Her self-deprivation is indicative of what her sister, Celia, discerns as Dorothea's "strong assumption of superiority" (p. 9). When Celia remarks to Casaubon that Dorothea "likes giving up," Dorothea responds with the dramatically ironic observation, "if that were true, Celia, my giving up would be self-indulgence, not self-mortification" — which, of course, it clearly is (pp. 13-14). Consider the issue of the cottages: Dorothea mistakenly thinks that she has the "good of all" in mind in her efforts to build the cottages. But she never gets beyond the planning stage. At one point, she decides to abandon her plans for the cottages because Sir James is pressing his suit and it offends her sensibility. She abandons a course of action that, if realized, could actually have benefited the poor. Celia responds to Dorothea's decision by observing, "poor Dodo . . . it is very hard: it is your favourite *fad* to draw plans" (p. 27). To which Dorothea, rather than admitting that her motives for the cottages were self-serving, "accuses" instead "the intolerable narrowness and the purblind conscience of the society around her" (p. 27). As Eliot notes in the essay on Young, it is only where moral emotion is comparatively weak in the first place that the contemplation of theories habitually mingles with the desire for action, to the detriment of the realization of that action more often than not. Dorothea's self-aggrandizing dream of the cottages goes unrealized, but it makes little difference to her, for by that time she has another illusion to which to devote herself — Casaubon, the divine mummy.

To Dorothea, Casaubon is a man capable of understanding "the higher inward life," and one with whom, she believes, "there could be some spiritual communion" (p. 16). "The union which attracted her," Eliot notes, "was one that would deliver her from her girlish subjection to her own ignorance, and give her the freedom of voluntary submission to a guide who would take her along

the grandest path" (p. 21), a guide who was preparing no less than the key to all mythologies. With Casaubon, Dorothea reveals openly her girlish, childlike need to be led, to find the grand cause to which to dedicate herself, to follow obediently the ethereal guide, the illusory rule that will guarantee blessedness. She has the naive desire to throw herself "at Mr. Casaubon's feet," and to kiss "his unfashionable shoeties as if he were a Protestant Pope" (p. 37). She dedicates herself to the illusion of Casaubon as her divine superior; she is his suppliant, his devotee, obedient and humbly submissive. She wants to be his "nun." For Dorothea, the coming marriage, according to Mrs. Cadwallader, "is as good as going to a nunnery" (p. 43). But, like the matter of the cottages, Casaubon is, actually, an extension of Dorothea's self-centered ego. When she looks deep into "the ungauged reservoir of Mr. Casaubon's mind," she sees "reflected there in vague labyrinthine extension every quality she herself brought" (p. 17). "He thinks with me," said Dorothea to herself, "or rather, he thinks a whole world of which my thought is but a poor two-penny mirror. And his feelings too, his whole experience — what a lake compared with my little pools!" (p. 18).

Dorothea's egoism, as Felicia Bonaparte noted, is not the simple egoism of self-interest or self-gratification.¹³ It is not the egoism of Rosamund Vincy or Hetty Sorrel, for instance, among others. It is an egoism spun out of illusory religious conceptions of the world, a passion for martyrdom, for religious service and self-mortification. It is a type of self-indulgent involvement with religion similar to that which blinds Dinah Morris to the real needs of humanity. Dorothea never does become a modern day St. Theresa. She fails, not only because history is against her, but also because her "vocation" from the outset is insincere. Her early inclinations are all metaphysical; but by the end of the novel, she has become an empiricist. Her enlightenment comes about mainly as the result of her dissatisfaction with an unsatisfactory marriage. She learns what is needed, the lesson of necessity, the need "to live for others," the lesson of Comte and Spinoza. She learns as well the lesson of religious humanism, that man must discover in himself sources of the divine.

My argument in this paper is that devotion to rules as a guide to morality, devotion to an ascetic existence, to metaphysical ideals, and to the passion for martyrdom and self-mortification — all suggested in the Prelude by the image of St. Theresa as the founder and reformer of not just any religious order but of the strictly disciplined, cloistered Discalced Carmelites, should make it easier for the reader to grasp the ironic subtleties of young Dorothea's childlike ego. If the image fails, it fails because the reader is not familiar enough with the particulars of Theresa of Avila's life. I am convinced that Eliot anticipated that problem, and that she was toying with her readers in the Prelude, prodding them to look into the life of the great Renaissance reformer. After all, her mock-

11. *Letters*, V, 69.

12. *Essays and Leaves from a Note Book*, p. 58.

13. *Will and Destiny: Morality and Tragedy in George Eliot's Novels* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1975), p. 91.

ingly serious advice to her readers is that anyone interested in knowing the whole history of man should investigate the life of St. Theresa of Avila.

Though Dorothea does not become a modern St. Theresa, she does manage to see beyond the image of herself in all things as the novel progresses. She subdues her egoism and embraces her duty to humanity. She learns "to live in others." Her sainthood, if it can be called that, is humanistic — secular and earthbound. After the death of Casaubon, she develops a genuine feeling for others. As David Daiches observes, she begins to look out of windows rather than into mirrors.¹⁴ She also works for social and political reform through her efforts to aid Will Ladislaw in his work. "Many who knew her," Eliot writes, "thought it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another, and be only known in a certain circle as a wife and mother. But no one stated exactly what else that was in her power she ought rather to have done" (p. 611). Her self sacrifice is authentic. In a sense, she has recast her religious sensibility in the direction of the ethics if not the liturgy of Comte's Religion of Humanity, a system of religious ethics dedicated to the triumph of social feeling over self love, to human needs rather than divine lights.¹⁵ Dorothea's is a Positivist ethical stance at the end of the novel. And George Eliot, though not a Positivist herself by any means, nevertheless, in her own religious yearning, reflects her sympathies with Positivist ethics in *Middlemarch*. Unlike the George Eliot that Peter Dale envisions in *Daniel Deronda*, the George Eliot of *Middlemarch* gives no indication that her belief in the power of consciousness is eroding.¹⁶ She remains firm in her belief that the human consciousness, the power of sympathy, can move society toward the realization of a complete altruistic unity. The process may be slow, but the dream is tenable. In the final paragraphs of the novel, she optimistically observes that "we insignificant people with our daily words and acts are preparing the lives of many Dorotheas, some of which may present a far sadder sacrifice than that of the Dorothea whose story we know," adding

that the effect of Dorothea's "being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: *for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs*" (italics mine, p. 613). As Dale suggests, Eliot must have read Herbert Spencer's *Study of Sociology*, but not until 1872, after *Middlemarch* was completed.¹⁷

As T. R. Wright recently argued, the community of Middlemarch was hardly ready for Comte's new religion.¹⁸ But it did have its Madonna. The authority and prestige of Positivism, according to Comte, would be upheld by the influence of women capable of understanding and feeling love, the power of great affection.¹⁹ It is love that Dorothea finally comes to understand in her relationship with Will, a giving and unselfish love. Although the raised consciousness of the 1980's finds it hard to accept, the fact remains that it is as wife and mother, as Eliot points out, that Dorothea finally contributes her share to humanity. The Positivists had a special place in their "sociolatry" for the worship of the Madonna. But the Positivist Madonna, it is well to remember, was a domestic goddess, a housewife with a child in her arms. Lydgate fails as a Comtean altruistic physician, as those who argue against elements of Positivism in the novel are fond of pointing out; but Dorothea stands at the end as a testament to the belief, a fundamental Positivist belief, in the ethical superiority of women who have the capacity to consecrate their rational and imaginative faculties to the service of feeling rather than blessedness. In spite of those critics who remain skeptical about the extent of Positivist ore that can be mined from the Eliot canon, the Eliot novels, including *Middlemarch*, though hardly Positivist tracts, nevertheless, do tend to give us some interesting insights when read in the light of Positivist ethics.²⁰

Northern Illinois University

14. *George Eliot: Middlemarch* (London: E. Arnold, 1963), p. 23.
 15. Most of the information on Comte's Religion of Humanity for this paper is drawn from Comte's *The Catechism of Positive Religion*, tr. by Richard Congreve (London: Trubner, 1883); and *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, tr. by Harriet Martineau (New York: C. Blanchard, 1855).
 16. See "Symbolic Representation and The Means of Revolution in *Daniel Deronda*," *Victorian Newsletter*, No. 58 (Spring 1981), pp.

25-30.

17. "Symbolic Representation. . .," p. 29, fn. 13.
 18. See "George Eliot and Positivism: A Reassessment," p. 268.
 19. For more on Comte's worship of women, see Basil Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies: Coleridge to Matthew Arnold* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 198f.
 20. See Martha S. Vogeler, "George Eliot and the Positivists," pp. 406-31.

The Disappearance of Tragedy in Meredith's "Modern Love"

Hans Ostrom

Critics have struggled with George Meredith's "Modern Love" on virtually every front: besides being explicated as a whole work and through considerations of individual sonnets, it has been variously discussed as fiction, as a sonnet sequence that turns the tradition of the sonnet sequence inside out, as a "game of sentiment," and as a "humanistic document."¹ The very terminology of this last reading suggests at least the possibility of a useful comparison to the work of Matthew Arnold, especially to "Dover Beach": the anxiety detectible in the famous entreaty, "Ah, love, let us be true/ To one another!" poignantly anticipates the failure of Meredith's lovers to be true to one another. The focus here, however, will not be on the failure of love, *per se*, in "Modern Love," but will instead be on the failure of the poem to produce a fully tragic response to the "problem of love" — a response that both the poem and its critics show Meredith attempting to render. Definitions of tragedy are of course almost as numerous as individual works purporting to be tragedies, but by "the failure of a tragic response" I mean a failure on the part of Meredith's speaker to proceed from simple bitterness and blaming to a more profound insight into the cause of disintegrated love. The speaker rationalizes, rather than understands, his predicament; indeed, the moment of understanding toward which the poem appears to develop never materializes: the speaker's emotional response is never equal to the gravity of the failed marriage. My purpose here is to explore the nature and the possible causes of this shortcoming.

By way of discussing the issue of tragedy in the poem, I want also to pursue the comparison to Arnold and to examine the place of "Modern Love" in a Victorian context — its relationship to the works of Carlyle, Clough, Hopkins, and Mill. For I think the incompleteness of tragedy in Meredith's long poem is importantly related to the crises of meaning that lie at the heart of much of the poetry and prose written by Arnold and these others.

In reading "Modern Love" as a poem that chronicles a challenge to meaning-in-the-world (similar to the crises Carlyle and Mill describe, respectively, in *Sartor Resartus* and *Autobiography*) and as a poem that contains an anxiety like that which runs through the writings of both Clough and Arnold, one runs the risk of making the poem simply a recapitulation of Meredith's own notorious marriage to Mary Peacock. The poem should of course be read as an artistic whole distinct from Meredith's life. Allowing it this integrity, however, does not make it any

less a poem of failed marriage, a poem of a failed Victorian marriage, and a poem concerned with the loss of permanence in human existence. Both the title and the form that Meredith gives the poem, after all, indicate that he himself considers nineteenth-century love in comparison (or in contrast) to the Renaissance and as love importantly affected by the place in history it occupies. That is, even before we step beyond the title into the work-proper, we should suspect strongly that something about the age itself has caused "the problem" of the poem. Consequently, associating "Modern Love" with actual crises of consciousness experienced by Mill and Carlyle, as well as with the anxious poems of Arnold and Clough, does not narrow the reading of the poem by locking it to the circumstances of Meredith's life, but serves instead to expand the reading by connecting it to the issues central to other Victorian minds.

Certainly, the simple failure of marriage that the poem details does not constitute a failure to perceive meaning generally in the world. That sense of crisis, however, is provided by the absence of resolution in the poem; the failure of marriage, and of Marriage, as structures that can provide permanence, is not compensated for by an episode or moment of tragic understanding. Graham Hough has argued that we should regard three of the later sonnets (XLIII, XLVII, and XLIX) — in contrast to the earlier portions of the poem — "no longer as poignant or pathetic, but as tragic."² But even as these sonnets approach tragedy, certain aspects of them obstruct a tragic resolution.

A close reading of XLIII, for example, reveals a bitterness and a confusion of imagery very similar to the beginning of "Modern Love." The opening lines of the sonnet serve as an epitaph to the love that the narrator and his wife have lost:

Mark where the pressing wind shoots javelin-like
Its skeleton shadow on broad-backed waves!
Here is a fitting spot to dig Love's grave;
Here where the ponderous breakers plunge and strike,
And dart their hissing tongues high up the sand.³
(ll. 1-5)

Here the ocean imagery calls to mind the familiar ocean imagery of "Dover Beach." But aside from that fortunate echo, problems with the imagery exist that render the tragic awareness of the speaker unconvincing. Some of

1. Dorothy M. Mermin, "Poetry as Fiction: Meredith's *Modern Love*," *English Literary History* 43 (1976), 100-119; Cynthia Grant Tucker, "Meredith's Broken Laurel: *Modern Love* and the Renaissance Sonnet Tradition," *Victorian Poetry* 10 (1972), 351-365; Arline Golden, "The Game of Sentiment": Tradition and Innovation in Meredith's *Modern Love*," *English Literary History* 40 (1973), 264-284; Arthur L. Simpson, Jr., "Meredith's Pessimistic Humanism: A New Reading of *Modern Love*," *Modern Philology*

67 (1970), 341-356. Subsequent references to Mermin and Tucker will be to the respective articles noted here and will be cited in the text.

2. *Selected Poems of George Meredith*, ed. with intro. by Graham Hough (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962), p. 10.

3. *Selected Poems*, p. 43. Subsequent references to "Modern Love" will be to this edition and will be cited within the text.

the problems spring directly from Meredith's own flawed writing and not from the speaker's consciousness; the mixed and confused imagery of these five lines is characteristic of him.⁴ While each particular image is striking, the accumulation of several deadens the impact: we have a *pressing wind* that *shoots its skeleton shadow* like a *javelin* on a *broad-backed wave*, and it is there that *Love's grave* shall be dug. The situation is extremely difficult to sort out visually, and the rhetoric of the sonnet consequently suffers.

While the difficulty and confusion of imagery in the first lines must be ascribed to poet rather than to speaker, the imagery of the next two lines reveals much more about the speaker Meredith has created, and is more pertinent to assessing Hough's argument. The snake imagery ("hissing tongues"), for example, looks back to the snake metaphors used in the first sonnets of the poem, where tormented imagery generally dominates, and where the whole environment has been poisoned, it seems, by adultery and failed love. The glance backward that these lines occasion, and the general tone of bitterness that can be detected here, create a suspicion that the speaker's attitude toward the events has not changed significantly in the time contained by some forty sonnets. The remainder of the sonnet reinforces this suspicion, for although the ceremony of tragedy is in evidence, the substance is not. Consider the last five lines:

'Tis morning: but no morning can restore
 What we have forfeited. I see no sin:
 The wrong is mixed. In tragic life, God wot,
 No villain need be! Passions spin the plot:
 We are betrayed by what is false within.

(ll. 12-16)

The speaker here announces that he views the predicament as tragic, but the announcement comes at the end of a sonnet that has done little to convince us of a tragic understanding on his part. The last three lines ring platitudinous and rationalized because the rest of the sonnet has essentially only proclaimed that the sea is a fitting place for burying dead love. Why is the sea appropriate? Simply because the speaker has made it so. As in the earlier parts of the poem, the speaker's poisoned consciousness has transformed the environment into a hostile presence. Where Arnold, like Clough, Hopkins, and Hardy, engages the qualities of force and danger that the ocean naturally holds for most of us, Meredith's speaker imposes a tortured imagery to such an extent that the mental picture becomes almost surreal, but accidentally so. Thus the sea takes on the qualities of a serpent. The transformation having been achieved, the speaker proclaims the landscape to be a fitting place of burial, and then by sheer force of will wrenches the sonnet around to embrace the "laws" of tragedy: passions rule, no one really is to blame, we are "betrayed by what is false within." The contrast between

the growing bitterness of the first half of the sonnet and the abrupt shift to philosophizing is too sharp to make the philosophy seem genuinely felt. The speaker appears inclined to move in the direction of tragedy, in the direction of a more profound confrontation with the crisis; but he is capable of tragic articulation only in a mechanical way, in a forced linking of unresolved confusion and bitterness with time-worn generalizations about "the tragic human condition."

Sonnet XLVII comes much closer to presenting us with a genuinely felt version of the experience that XLIII mechanically imposes upon the marriage. Here the language is more direct, figures of speech are more controlled, and the imagery is spare but compelling:

We saw the swallows gathering in the sky,
 And in the osier-isle we heard them noise.
 We had not to look back on summer joys,
 Or forward to a summer of bright dye:
 But in the largeness of the evening earth
 Our spirits grew as we went side by side.
 The hour became her husband and my bride.
 Love, that had robbed us so, thus blessed our dearth!
 The pilgrims of the year waxed very loud
 In multitudinous chatterings, as the flood
 Full brown came from the West, and like pale blood
 Expanded to the upper crimson cloud.
 Love, that had robbed us of immortal things,
 This little moment gave,
 Where I have seen across the twilight wave
 The swan sail with her young beneath her wings.

The sonnet deserves to be quoted in full here simply because it is more cohesive and more subtly developed than most of the other sonnets. Perhaps only the awkward use of "noise" as a verb intrudes upon the presentation. Where the will of the narrator forces itself upon the landscape of XLIII, the landscape and episode of XLVII maintain their integrity much more strongly. Consequently, the action depicted in this sonnet strikes one as more authentic — much less artificial, at any rate, than the "hissing waves" of the ocean that is to serve as Love's grave. Granted, the speaker emphatically places the episode in his own scheme of time: the brief summer episode is centered between a lost past and a bleak future ("We had not to look back on summer joys, / Or forward to a summer of bright dye . . ."). But even this arrangement seems to spring from the situation itself, rather than being imposed upon it.

Perhaps what appeals most about this sonnet to both the characters within it and the reader outside it is the unself-consciousness with which the husband and wife respond to the landscape and the birds. For a moment, they are joyful simply because they feel themselves to be naturally a part of a larger whole:

4. John Lucas, "Meredith as Poet," *Meredith Now: Some Critical Essays*, ed. Ian Fletcher (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), pp. 14-134. Lucas observes, "In an age of careful craftsmen Mere-

dith stands out as extraordinarily slipshod, not so much by design as through indifference" (p. 14). Lucas goes on to discuss Meredith's flawed use of rhyme, imagery, and logic.

But in the largeness of the evening earth
Our spirits grew as we went side by side.
The hour became her husband and my bride.
(ll. 5-7)

So convincing to the speaker is this moment of restoration that he chooses to speak about himself and his wife in the third person, as if their marriage were again whole and they existed not separately, but again conjoined in the traditional relationship of husband and wife.

The sunset and evening flight of swallows, however, charge the episode with mutability as well as with largeness and wholeness, and the narrator is brought around finally to a memory of the swan's flight, which suggests, if delicately, that this moment of wholeness is in fact a kind of swan song, and that husband and wife must return to the ruins of their marriage. It is precisely this understated treatment of that realization, along with the sense that it develops believably from the episode, which takes this sonnet nearer than any other in "Modern Love" to genuinely felt tragedy. The swallow-imagery and the tenuous balance between momentary wholeness and impending darkness give the husband's concluding thought a concreteness and an authority that the convoluted imagery and rationale of other sonnets fail to provide. The sonnet ends just as the speaker confronts the tragic paradox of this evening walk that has at once restored their love and focused its dissolution. In its imagery, balance, and understatement, sonnet XLVII calls to mind Keats' "Ode to Autumn," with its imagery of "gathering swallows" and its theme of ripeness. Indeed, it is the double significance of ripeness that makes Meredith's sonnet succeed. The fullness and the growth of spirit that the speaker and his wife feel signify both wholeness and decay, just as any state of ripeness is at once a state of completion and a state of impending disintegration. The landscape and emotion of this sonnet evoke a sense of tragedy; unfortunately, the achievement of XLVII gets undermined by the three sonnets that follow it, one of which (XLIX) Hough views as a tragic sonnet also.

Ironically enough, what blocks the tragic development of the three concluding sonnets is the immense will the speaker and narrator gather to try to come to terms with what has taken place. Their desire to understand seems to prohibit their understanding. As is the case generally with the whole of "Modern Love," this willpower results not in comprehension, but in resistance; it results in an imposing of preconceived notions: the speaker will not relinquish himself, in the way Oedipus or Lear or most traditional tragic figures do, in order to achieve that blinding glimpse of the "secret cause of human suffering" — to use Stephen Dedalus's terms — which constitutes at least one type of tragic understanding.

Sonnet XLVIII, the last sonnet spoken by the husband, demonstrates this force of will. The sonnet details how the wife, upon hearing of her husband's mistress, becomes jealous, but expresses that jealousy by breaking "the mesh" in order that the husband "might seek that other

like a bird." As the husband sees it, their honest speech has led not to reconciliation, but instead to an even wider rift, and all because of his wife's feminine instability. Thus, the sonnet begins:

Their sense is with their senses all mixed in,
Destroyed by subtleties these women are!
More brain, O Lord, more brain! or we shall mar
Utterly this fair garden we might win.
(ll. 1-4)

The sexism, condescension, and the implied stereo-typing of the wife as an Eve figure in the fourth line all clearly demonstrate that the speaker not only has lost the hard-won understanding of sonnet XLVII, but that he has fallen back on the most mechanically formulaic way of perceiving the troubled marriage; the problem, as he states it here, no longer exists in the marriage, but rather in his wife's femininity, in the fact that she is acting "like a woman." Meredith's Blood and Brain philosophy (passion vs. reason), central to his novel *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1859), is in evidence here, but baldly and bitterly so, lacking the humor and subtlety with which Meredith renders it in the novel. Here it delivers the whole burden of blame on the woman. Instead of experiencing the ultimate honesty of tragic awareness, the speaker here retreats even from the honesty he has shared with his wife, simply because it has brought not a sudden restoration of their marriage, but rather some complex emotions in his wife — a mix of emotions he chooses to see as bothersome subtleties. It is as if she does not have the prerogative to be jealous or confused, as he has been throughout the poem.

The last two sonnets, spoken by the narrator who begins and ends the poem, achieve little that changes this last image of the husband. Sonnet XLIX depicts the wife's suicide, which frankly seems more of a fulfillment of the husband's wishes than an episode of tragic violence; and although the last line informs us, "Lethe had passed those lips, and he knew all," it is difficult for one to say precisely what the husband does in fact know about his wife or, more importantly, what really motivated her self-destruction.

In sonnet L, similarly, the narrator is quite frank about the lack of understanding in the tale of this husband and wife. He observes,

Their hearts held cravings for the buried day.
Then each applied to each that fatal knife,
Deep questioning, which probes to endless dole.
Ah, what a dusty answer gets the soul
When hot for certainties in this our life!—
(ll. 8-12)

The suspicion articulated here that self-examination and honesty create a "fatal knife," and that "deep questioning" leads nowhere, expresses well the lack of resolution that one senses throughout the poem but particularly in its conclusion, where we (and perhaps Meredith, too) would have it achieve tragedy. The images of the last four lines

confirm both this need for tragedy, for the resolution it can bring, and its absence in the poem:

In tragic hints here see what evermore
 Moves dark as yonder midnight ocean's force,
 Thundering like ramping hosts of warrior horse,
 To throw that faint thin line upon the shore.

(ll. 13-16)

The echoes of "Dover Beach" here are again remarkable; it is as if the chaos, mindlessness, and power of the nighttime ocean constituted an irresistible image for Victorian poets such as Arnold and Meredith — and even Clough ("Qua Cursum Ventus") and Hopkins ("The Wreck of the Deutschland") — who wanted to express the danger and inscrutability of an age for which meaning was becoming increasingly tentative: a "faint thin line upon the shore." The final sonnet of "Modern Love," as a kind of "Dover Beach Fourteen Years Later," is indeed bleak.

For all its bleakness, however, "Modern Love" can muster only "tragic hints." There is no tragic moment in the poem, although sonnet XLVII comes close to such a moment. For all its sorrow and violence, the poem fails to compel in a tragic way. The problem is not that one expects the husband or the narrator suddenly to envision a solution to Victorian anxiety. Rather, the problem is that the husband refuses to recognize that his emotional and rational investment in his marriage and in the institution of marriage, as ways of guaranteeing permanence, have been excessive; he fails to come to terms with his vanity. Oedipus and Lear realize, devastatingly so, that their notions of strength are false and hubristic. But in "Modern Love," the devastation is everywhere but in the husband's consciousness; his wife is dead, the marriage ruined long before, but he remains too sane, coolly fixing blame on feminine weakness, on too much Blood, on the moody nature of Love itself. One would have him "broken," perhaps, so that the rhetoric of the poem might thereby break into the tragic design toward which it seems to develop. In that way, both the speaker and the reader might be profoundly moved by the events of the poem.

In her biography of Mary Peacock, *The True History of the First Mrs. Meredith and Other Lesser Lives* (New York: Knopf, 1972), Diane Johnson indirectly speaks to this issue of failed tragedy in "Modern Love." Like the husband, Meredith himself was quite capable of emotion, but curiously incapable of finally coming to terms with it:

... When he does [hear of Mary Meredith's death] he will be sad, he will be more than sensitive. He will never be free of her. In later years the memory will become so burdensome that he will strike out. "She was mad," he will say, and, "she was nine years older than I" (though she was but six and a half). Surlily, he will refuse to discuss her at all . . .

(p. 9)

The response described here is remarkably similar to the husband's bitter cry for "More brain!" in sonnet XLVIII. The crucial point to be made, however, is not simply that Meredith may have been too close to his subject to master

it, but rather that the act of will that prevents him from coming to terms with his own lost marriage and which seals off the husband of "Modern Love" from tragic consciousness has its roots in the nineteenth-century concept of marriage. For as Johnson says later in the book,

Marriage was holy. Love was altered by it, for the Victorian, from something a bit nasty to something pure and wonderful. The Victorian anticipated in the state of Holy Matrimony the most serious emotional experience of his life — quite a different attitude from that of casual eighteenth-century people, with their arrangements, contracts, practicalities. Ah, sacred love.

Adultery was therefore a nearly unspeakable crime, regarded with almost Biblical ferocity. Indeed it was inextricably involved with a Victorian vision of apocalypse. Tennyson's ideal society of the round table, in *Idylls of the King*, was utterly wrecked by adultery, which was the Laureate's serious prediction about his own society too.

(p. 113)

Johnson's observations certainly help explain the size of Meredith's emotional investment, and of his character's, in marriage as an institution of meaning and order. Her comparison of nineteenth-century ideas of marriage to the casual eighteenth-century attitudes toward it, epitomized by Hogarth's *Marriage a la Mode*, provides an even wider context for evaluating the status of marriage in "Modern Love." It is difficult not to recognize that as belief in religion, in the classical tradition, and in a resilient social order began to weaken, the struggle for meaning would naturally begin to encroach also upon battlements closer, literally, to home. One might even posit a kind of tradeoff within the culture, whereby marriage was made to accept much more than its share of responsibility for providing permanence and certainty, simply because religion and the humanist heritage and the English social order itself were faltering in that regard. "It was an age that assumed a standard of moral perfection that under the right circumstances could in fact be achieved in this world," Johnson observes. "There was little indulgence for folly; a severe but rather optimistic view of human nature" (p. 46). Marriage, then, was made to bear a terrible burden, and it *could* bear that burden in nearly ideal circumstances — just as James Mill's Utilitarian education could produce astounding results in pupils who had the astounding intelligence of his son John.

The extraordinary resistance to relinquishing his will that the husband of "Modern Love" demonstrates, then, results not only from an inwardly directed desire to preserve pride and integrity, but also from a desire to fix relentlessly on something exterior to the "deep questioning" self. The double cruelty that results from this desire, however, is that the system fixed upon to escape solipsism can actually succeed: it can, for an extraordinary price, rescue the individual from solipsism, from existence in a world without meaning. Thus Carlyle can seize upon a doctrine of work and production as an alternative both to the Center of Indifference (*Sartor Resartus*) and to the

individual's quest to be happy, a quest he viewed as self-indulgent and typically Romantic. Similarly, Arnold can fall back upon touchstones of humanism to establish values, and Clough can envision a kind of natural religion to replace Anglicanism, which he had rejected.

The problem with these strategies, of course, is that their proponents come to prefer "system" to "truth," to put the matter in Edmund Burke's terms; the system begins to lose connection with reality or at best comes to represent an elaborate sublimation of the original anxiety. Carlyle's compulsiveness about work, Arnold's reduction of literary tradition to excerpts, and Clough's strained optimism ("say not the struggle naught availeth") all betray an ultimate failure beneath a superficial evasion of solipsism. In "Modern Love," this preference for system over reality is manifested early in the poem, even before the husband imposes his notions of Blood and Brain and feminine weakness upon the situation. In XVII, for instance, both husband and wife not only agree to keep up the facade of a happy marriage, but they come to enjoy it for a time:

At dinner, she is hostess, I am host
It is in truth a most contagious game:
HIDING THE SKELETON, shall be its name
Fast, sweet, and golden, shows the marriage knot.
Dear guests, you now have seen Love's corpse-light shine.
(ll. 1, 6-7, 15-16)

This sonnet, Dorothy Mermin writes, "has the characteristics of a true game: it is highly conventional, the players are having fun, they disinterestedly admire each other's skill, the excitement of the play carries them buoyantly on . . ." (p. 104). As far as the game or "system" goes in XVII, the players still have a clear sense of reality; indeed the impact of the sonnet depends in large measure on the controlled contrast of appearance and reality. Still, here the attractiveness of a system that can displace the meaningless marriage anticipates the husband's mechanical efforts at tragic insight and his condemnation of feminine weakness, both of which derive from a kind of system he rushes to adopt in place of marriage.

To some extent, Meredith himself recognizes the inadequacy of system, and he puts that recognition to good use, not only in a sonnet such as XVII, but in the grand scheme of "Modern Love." Inadequacy of literary system is, after all, at the bottom of the immense irony of writing about failed love in a Renaissance poetic form that conventionally exalted love. But even beyond that fundamental irony, Meredith carries the discrepancy between convention and reality through to the harshest aspects of the poem. As Cynthia Tucker has observed, the particular conventional motifs of the sonnet tradition become actual qualities of mind — as if a mask one was used to wearing to charm friends suddenly became a real face. Tucker comments that "neither the woman's coldness and cruelty, the inevitable sonnet-lady's epithets, nor the husband's distraction, sleeplessness, and want-of-voice, the traditional symptoms of true courtly love, are pre-

served as mere literary devices but emerge here as psychological realities . . ." (p. 354).

While Meredith's acceptance of literary convention as something to be manipulated and altered by artists down through the years occasions aesthetic success in "Modern Love," his refusal to accept marriage as a convention, or at least his having placed such extraordinary demands upon it, results in the poem's falling short of the tragic appeal to which it seems to aspire. The husband in the poem, and perhaps Meredith too, certainly accept a failed marriage, but both choose categorically to place the blame on the couple's (and chiefly the woman's) failure to measure up to the demands, severe demands, of marriage, rather than on the failure of marriage to measure up to the demands of two individuals in a society, or at least in a situation, in which the adequacy of marriage could no longer be taken for granted.

Neither Meredith, the husband in his poem, nor the tragic resolution emerge whole from the struggle with the disappearance of permanence. They are not alone in their being damaged by this struggle, of course; indeed, of the Victorians briefly discussed here, only Mill and Hopkins are able to pass through paralyzing doubt to resolution. Hopkins manages it first by accepting the existence of God (whereas Clough, for example, cannot), and then by accepting danger, inscrutability, and mutability in the universe as being of God and therefore ultimately praiseworthy. Mill, on the other hand, in the famous episode of doubt in his *Autobiography*, manages a convincing resolution in a purely personal way — first by frankly admitting to being mechanical in the face of doubt, and then by preferring Blood to Brain, in a sense: by simply allowing himself to be moved by Marmontel's "Memoires."

Keeping Johnson's remarks in mind, one can see that the way Meredith deals with marriage in "Modern Love" places him among Victorian artists and thinkers trying to shore up social structures and conventions, or their own private systems, as the possibility of absolute meaning was being deeply questioned. Similarly, and perhaps less obviously, in the incomplete tragic resolution of the response to failed marriage in "Modern Love," one can see how aesthetic performance and the struggle for meaning clash — just as they clash in Arnold's decision to exclude *Empedocles on Etna* from his *Poems* (1853), feeling the poem was too self-indulgent; or in the compulsive prose style of Carlyle; or in John Ruskin's elaborate, almost over-organized structuring of *Modern Painters*. Many of such individual aesthetic decisions and mannerisms are individual and personal; but to a great extent they are related and are thus "Victorian," in the same way that the problem of love in "Modern Love" is significantly modern and historically grounded. The disappearance of tragedy in the poem clearly issues from Meredith's own marriage and from his own artistic sensibility. But it is perhaps even more interesting when we recognize that the flawed resolution of the poem springs as well from cultural crises that are identifiably Victorian.

Books Received

- Ebbatson, Roger. *The Evolutionary Self: Hardy, Forster, Lawrence*. Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble; Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982. Pp. [xxii] + 119. \$24.50. Written in an abstract, unfocused prose.
- Fitch, Raymond E. *The Poison Sky: Myth and Apocalypse in Ruskin*. Athens, OH and London: Ohio Univ. Press, 1982. Pp. [xii] + 722, 27 illus. \$35.00. Considers "the major works in order of their composition to show the evolution of Ruskin's interest in and use of myth and to place this subject in the broadening context of his thought" (pp. 46-47). The dominant "mythic or archetypal themes are . . . the Organic Model (Purity), the Fall, and the Hero-Serpent Conflict" (p. 49). In his "effort of integration [Ruskin] is aided not only by organicism as root metaphor but by archetypal symbols, myths, and the poetics of apocalypse" (pp. 54-55). "In the end, his was a apocalypse of disintegration signaled by a poison sky" (p. 53). A wide-ranging, informed and nicely written book.
- Garrett, William. *Charles Wentworth Dilke*. Boston: Twayne, 1983. Pp. [xii] + 266. \$17.95. A clearly written biography of the friend of Keats and his circle and editor of the *Athenaeum*. A 21 pp. annotated "selected" bibliography.
- Makers of Nineteenth Century Culture 1800-1914*. Ed. Justin Wintle. London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982. Pp. [xxiv] + 709. \$37.50. 188 contributors provide 493 biographical sketches of 497 makers of 19th century culture. Absent are those — Kipling, T. E. and D. H. Lawrence, e.g. — already included in *Makers of Modern Culture* (1981). An extremely useful, useable, and readable reference, carefully cross-indexed by name and subject. Includes individuals from many countries and a wide variety of disciplines.
- Markel, Michael H. *Hillarie Belloc*. Boston: Twayne, 1982. [viii] + 175. \$15.95. The standard kind of Twayne series biography.
- Overton, Bill. *The Unofficial Trollope*. Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble; Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982. Pp. xii + 212. \$24.50. Attempts to reconcile the official Trollope — the "writer's ordinary thinking," "what he could formulate and discuss" — with the unofficial — "a level of awareness implied in the novels," what Trollope could imagine (p. 2). Such a reconciliation requires a recognition of the dissociation between Trollope's fiction on the one hand and his commentary on that fiction and his "official" beliefs expressed elsewhere.
- Perspectives on Nineteenth-Century Heroism: Essays from the 1981 Conference of the Southeastern Nineteenth-Century Studies Association*. Ed. Sara M. Putzell and David C. Leonard. Madrid: Studia Humanitatis, 1982. Pp. xvi + 169. 12 essays from a variety of disciplinary perspectives.
- Silver, Carole. *The Romance of William Morris*. Athens, OH: Ohio Univ. Press, 1982. Pp. xviii + 233. \$20.95.
- Slinn, E. Warwick. *Browning and the Fictions of Identity*. Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1982. Pp. [xii] + 173. \$27.50. Argues that "through the dramatisation of continually various conceptual forms, acts of consciousness, Browning's creativity explores the possibilities and limits of a humanly shaped realism. In other words, he dramatises an ambiguous experience which relies on assumptions about a common phenomenal world and at the same time challenges those assumptions; he affirms a reality and yet embodies it in a formulation which is a demonstrable contrivance" (p. 5).
- Smith, Walter E. *Charles Dickens in the Original Cloth: A Bibliographical Catalogue of the First Appearance of His Writings in Book Form in England with Facsimiles of the Bindings and Title Pages; Part I, The Novels with "Sketches by Boz"*. Los Angeles: Heritage Book Shop, 1982. Pp. [xx] + 120. \$30.00. The first of two volumes, the second a catalogue of the minor works to be published in Jan. 1983. A handsome book.
- Stevenson, Catherine Barnes. *Victorian Women Travel Writers in Africa*. Boston: Twayne 1982. Pp. [x] + 184. \$17.95. A clearly-written account of the motives for travel, the form and substance of travel literature, of Victorian women. The bulk of the book is devoted to the lives and works of two women — Florence Douglas Dixie (1857-1905) and Mary Henrietta Kingsley (1862-1900).
- Surtees, R. S. *Mr. Sponge's Sporting Tour*. Ed. Virginia Blain. Victorian Texts VI, St. Lucia and N.Y.: Univ. of Queensland Press, 1982. Pp. [xxviii] + 483. \$15.95 paper. Using the 1853 edition as copy text, the editor includes all woodcuts from 1853 and reproduces photographically in black and white the original color plates by John Leech. There are 58 pp. of notes and a glossary.
- Tennyson: *Interviews and Recollections*. Ed. Norman Page. Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1983. Pp. xvi + 202. \$26.50. A collection of some 45 entries, all published elsewhere. A third are from the *Memoir, Tennyson and His Friends, or William Allingham: A Diary*.
- The Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin*. Ed. George Allan Cate. Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1982. Pp. [xvi] + 251. \$28.50. Correspondence from March 1851 to Dec. 1879, includes 39 letters from Carlyle to Ruskin, 115 from Ruskin to Carlyle, 45 ancillary letters for a total of 199. Of the 154 Carlyle-Ruskin letters, 80 have not been previously published; of the 45 ancillary letters, 34 are previously unpublished. This careful edition includes an engaging 57 pp. introduction. The book is printed beautifully.

Thesing, William B. *The London Muse: Victorian Poetic Responses to the City*. Athens, GA: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1982. Pp. xviii + 230. \$20.00. Chapters are devoted to Romantic versions of the City (Blake, Wordsworth and Tennyson); Realism vs. Escapism, 1850-1870 (Clough, Alex. Smith, Arnold, W. M. Sidney, Walker, Robert Buchanan); the Urban Volcano (Hopkins, Patmore, Roden Noel, Morris, James Thomson); the Poetry of the Nineties (Locker-Lampson, Dobson, Binyon, Wilde, Symons, Henley, Davidson); and an epilogue (D. H. Lawrence and T. S. Eliot).

Trollope Centenary Essays. Ed. John Halperin. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982. Pp. [xvi] + 191. \$20.00. Major Trollope scholars treat his classicism, his idea of the gentleman, his dialogue, his methods of revision, his *Autobiography*; there are also essays on Trollope as traveller, Trollope and Ireland, Trollope and country estates and Trollope as a person.

Vaughan, William. *German Romantic Painting*. New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1982. Pp. 260. \$16.95 paper. This is a paper reprint of the 1980 hard cover edition.

Watson, J. R. ed. *Everyman's Book of Victorian Verse*. London, Melbourne, Toronto: J. M. Dent, 1982. Pp. [xxiv] + 373. \$19.50. A very curious collection of what the editor describes as "the most interesting poems written during the reign of Queen Victoria" (p. xi). There are only 4 complete poems by Tennyson, including "The Poet's Song" and "The Revenge." There are 9 poems by Browning, but also 9 by the sisters Brontë and 9 by William Barnes. There are poems by Digby Mackworth Dolben, Joseph Skipsey, and Philip Bourke Marston. The editor's "return to [his] first loves" (p. xxii), the poems of *Palgrave's Golden Treasury*, apparently accounts for this anachronistic anthology, which won't be every man's cup of tea.

Coming in

The Victorian Newsletter

Susan R. Cohen, "Avoiding the High Prophetic Strain: De Quincey's Mail-Coach and *Felix Holt*"

Timothy Peltason, "Supposed Confessions, Uttered Thoughts: The First-Person Singular in Tennyson's Poetry"

George M. Ridenour, "Swinburne in Hellas: 'A Nympholept' "

Susan Schoenbauer Thurin, "To Be Brought Up 'By Hand' "

Carol A. Senf, "*Bleak House*: Dickens, Esther, and the Androgynous Mind"

Victorian Group News

ANNOUNCEMENTS

As part of the commemorative events marking the 150th anniversary of the Oxford Movement a major conference is to be held at Keble College, Oxford, from July 11th to 15th, 1983. The aim of the conference will be to reconsider some of the major themes of the Oxford Movement, both historically and in terms of contemporary theology, and thereby contribute to the renewal of Anglican theology. For further information, contact The Revd. Dr. Geoffrey Rowell, Oxford Movement Conference, Keble College, Oxford, OX1 3PG, England.

The Victorian Committee of the CUNY Doctoral Program in English and the Browning Institute will sponsor a conference on Italy and the Victorian Imagination on Friday, April 15, 1983 at the CUNY Graduate Center, 33 West 42 Street, New York, N.Y.

A prize of \$250 will be awarded by the Dickens Society at its annual meeting in December for the best, first article-length publication on Dickens (i.e. more than five printed pages in length), appearing between June 1982 and June 1983. (Article-length chapters on Dickens from books – either wholly devoted to Dickens or concerned with a wider subject – may be submitted.) The award is intended to encourage young scholars, but those who have published previously on subjects other than Dickens are also eligible. Entries (three copies or offprints) should be sent as soon as possible but no later than 31 August 1983 to Sylvia Manning, Secretary-Treasurer, The Dickens Society, Department of English, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA 90089-0354.

The tenth annual Carolinas Symposium on British Studies will be held at Clemson University on October 15-16, 1983. The Symposium seeks to promote research, dialogue, and scholarship in an interdisciplinary forum for scholars in the Southeastern United States. The program committee invites proposals for individual papers, panel discussions, and full sessions in all aspects of British Studies. Proposals should be sent by April 15, 1983, to Professor Charles R. Young, Department of History, Duke University, Durham, N.C. 27706. One portion of the program will consist of both undergraduate and graduate student papers with a prize in each category. Papers or requests for full information about this competition should be sent to Professor Jeanie Watson, Department of History, Marshall University, Huntington, W.V. 25701.

Beginning this year subscribers to *Victorian Newsletter* should receive subscription-free the quarterly *Litir Newsletter of Victorian Studies*. Victorian scholars as well as publishers and organizations concerned with the Victorian period are requested to send to LITIR information on projects, books, articles, seminars, conferences, programmes, or courses – anything that might be of interest to fellow scholars. Inquiries to Brahma Chaudhuri, Editor, LITIR Database, c/o Department of English, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6G 2E5.

A special issue of *The John Donne Journal* will be devoted to "The Metaphysical Poets in The Nineteenth Century." Submissions due January 15, 1984, in duplicate to Antony H. Harrison, English Department, P. O. Box 5308, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, N.C. 27650.

Back issues of *VNL*, at a cost of \$4.00 per copy, are available in limited quantities for the following numbers: 38, 41, 45, 47, 49, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62.