

The Victorian Newsletter

Editor

Ward Hellstrom

Managing Editor

Louise R. Hellstrom

Number 67

Contents

Spring 1985

Page

Aubrey Beardsley Counts the Ways * by Linda Gertner Zatlín	1	20	"When Critics Disagree" by Kerry Powell
Domesticating the Brutal Passion in Nineteenth-Century Fiction * by Harriet Farwell Adams	7	21	Physical Opposition in <i>Barnaby Rudge</i> by Brian Rosenberg
Tennyson's Courtship of Sorrow * by Sylvia Manning	10	23	Herbert Spencer and the Study of Laughter by Michael S. Kearns
"Love in a Life": The Case of Nietzsche and Lou Salomé * by William Beatty Warner	14	26	Robert Browning and <i>Aurora Leigh</i> by George M. Ridenour
Wilde's Closet Self: A Solo at One Remove by Nathan Cervo	17	32	Books Received

* Paper read at English X, MLA, Washington, D.C., December 1984.

Cover: Aubrey Beardsley's "A Cul-de-Lampe."

The VICTORIAN NEWSLETTER is sponsored for the Victorian Group of Modern Language Association by the Western Kentucky University and is published twice annually. Editorial and business communications should be addressed to Ward Hellstrom, FAC 200, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY 42101. Please use *MLA Handbook*, 2nd Ed. for form of typescript. Manuscripts cannot be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Subscription rates in the United States are \$5.00 for one year and \$9.00 for two years; foreign rates, including Canada, are \$6.00 per year. Checks should be made payable to *The Victorian Newsletter*.

Aubrey Beardsley Counts the Ways

Linda Gertner Zatlin

During the nineteenth century, Mrs. Grundy was apparently effective in banishing from mainstream art and literature deliberate references to sexual love. Excluding pornography, between *Tom Jones* (1749) and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), between the eighteenth-century prints of Hogarth, Gillray, and Rowlandson, and the *fin de siècle* work of Aubrey Beardsley, we rarely find explicit erotic references. I include in the erotic the bawdy tradition, lewd and often witty references to sex, firmly established in English literature by Chaucer and richly augmented by later writers and artists. If Beardsley uncluttered Victorian graphics through his use of simplified forms, firmly drawn spare lines, and large areas of massed blacks and whites, he also mocked English prudishness by using sexual references to force viewers publicly to recognize the private, the erotic moment.

Beardsley was subject to the 1857 censorship law, however. To mock prudishness meant to sneak erotic details past the censors. Beardsley ingeniously disguised the erotic elements in his pictures, as his well-known drawings for Oscar Wilde's *Salome* illustrate. In "Enter Herodias" (fig. 1), Beardsley draped the grotesque figure's obviously aroused member, but he only loosely disguised – as a pair of antique prickets – two of the candlesticks (Reade 337). In "The Stomach Dance" (fig. 2), the dwarf's aroused member appears to be part of the decoration of his elaborate costume (Melville 271). In "A Platonic Lament" (fig. 3), the dwarf's left arm – when the eye follows the line of the flowing sleeve cuff – aids in supporting the bed. His right hand is hidden; the suggestion being that he masturbates. The inclusion of such elements led Beardsley's biographer to recount that *Salome* had "more 'erotic' details than had ever been seen before in a book openly published and distributed in England" (Weintraub 75). And this was after the editor suppressed two drawings: the first version of "The Toilet of Salome" (fig. 4) because the young boy is masturbating, as the angle of his spine phrenologically attests, and "Salome on Settle, or Maitresse d'Orchestre" (fig. 5) because her baton might be construed as a dildo (Reade 337).

Beardsley caused his editors to be alert, if indulgent with the leering sexuality of dwarves. But he disturbed some of his contemporaries. An early commentator believed that the artist rioted in "eroticism," showed sex "to be his god" and the

"leering features of libidinous ecstasies . . . his Muse" (Macfall 50, 96). Not a model of reticence himself, Frank Harris was shocked by Beardsley's overt depiction of genitalia: "'Looking a mere boy, Beardsley would point to this scabrous detail and that: 'I see nothing wrong with this drawing, do you?'" as if pudenda were (merely) ears to be studied'" (Weintraub 72).

Another type of erotic reference Beardsley used was the visual English bawdy tradition, as practiced by Hogarth, Gillray, and Rowlandson.¹ These printmakers packed their satires with an accepted iconography by which eighteenth-century viewers could "read" each picture (Paulson 2: 57-110). For them, muffs, hats, drums, and candlesticks were only a few emblems of female genitalia, while drumsticks, candles, arrows, horns, and dogs represented male virility. Monkeys and lap dogs were male surrogates. Cupids carrying lighted torches, pairs of animals billing and cooing, and grinning priapic statues – all indicated the advent of sexual relations.² The very density and variety of allusions fasten the eye and make the sexual message inescapable, as in Gillray's "Harmony before Matrimony" (fig. 6). Prints such as this were publicly available.³

Beardsley could not be as bawdy as Rowlandson, but he incorporated into his work the iconography. Thus, as we have seen, he used dwarves to strike his sexual theme bawdily, or a refined version of Rowlandson's monkey (fig. 7) to suggest elegantly that the sensual young woman is about to be led by the male into a world heretofore closed to her (fig. 8). In pictures for public distribution, suggestiveness was the only mode in which Beardsley was free to work, given the censorship law. Perhaps only a viewer familiar with Rowlandson's work would readily comprehend the sexual significance of the dog running between the legs of Beardsley's "Atalanta in Calydon, with the Hound" (fig. 9), who strides clutching her bow, an equally phallic referent (Farmer and Henley 2: 301, 5: 288).

At the end of his life, transmitter and transmuted of the Western erotic tradition, Beardsley apparently became dissatisfied with the ability of pictures alone to convey his message. Consequently, in 1896 he turned to writing. The critic Arthur Symons believed Beardsley was "anxious to excel" (Weintraub 164) as a writer. Indeed, many of his drawings, with their literary references, point to a creator widely read in the Greek, Latin, French, and English classics. He left only the fragment

drawing my attention to Farmer and Henley.

1. Brian Reade and others point out Beardsley's debt to artists as various as Mantegna, the Venetian artist Longhi, Burne-Jones, William Morris, and Felicien Rops, his Belgian contemporary and a talented erotic artist. Art historians also acknowledge Beardsley's adaptation of the structural disbalance of Japanese woodblock prints as well as the influence of erotic Greek art on ancient vases which Beardsley studied at the British Museum (Reade 360). In addition to ignoring the bawdy tradition, no one has discussed the influence on Beardsley's art of the finely wrought Japanese erotic prints, of which he was said to have the finest collection in London (Meier-Grafe 252).
2. In a covert manner, this tradition was carried into the nineteenth century, as can be seen in *The Pearl; A Journal of Facetiae and Voluptuous Reading* and J. S. Farmer and W. E. Henley, *Slang and its Analogues*. I am indebted to Bill Burgan for his gracious assistance, including

3. During the eighteenth century, prints were sold by subscription, advertised in newspapers. Copies often hung in printmakers' shop windows (Paulson 1: 280-289).

Although Hogarth used this iconography, he was not intentionally bawdy. In Hogarth's extant work, Paulson cites only one indecent detail (1: 230). Draper Hill describes Gillray as a prolific political satirist, whose works are the forerunner of the newspaper cartoon (6, 20). Gillray used bawdy iconography to make his political points. Thomas Rowlandson's bawdy satiric watercolors and etchings employ the same iconography. His pornographic drawings accompanied by explanatory verses, issued singly in 1810, were collected and published as *Pretty Little Games* in 1872 by J. C. Hotten (von Meier 18).



FIGURE 1

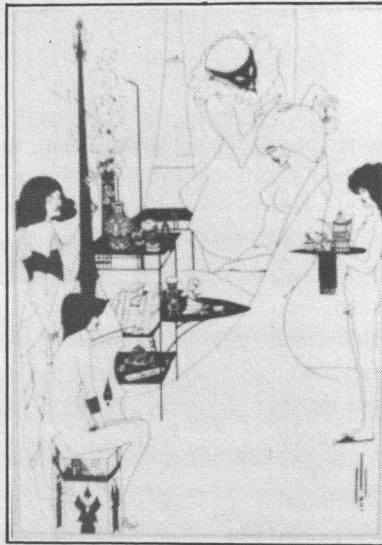


FIGURE 4



FIGURE 7



FIGURE 2



FIGURE 5



FIGURE 8

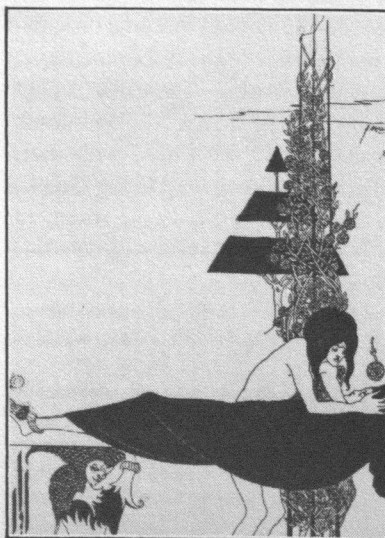


FIGURE 3



FIGURE 6

Figs. 1-5, 9-14 courtesy Alan Lease. Figs. 6 and 7 courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum; Fig. 8 courtesy of the Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

of an erotic novel, *Venus and Tannhauser*, and two poems, assuredly not enough for us to judge more than nascent literary ability.⁴ But, unlike the dreary copulation scenes which form the bulk of Victorian pornography, Beardsley depicts all varieties of what he termed the "amorous passion" (*Venus and Tannhauser* 20) with dreamy lightheartedness and equality between the sexes. These works suggest that, had he lived, Beardsley would have continued to blend the verbal and the visual in order to expound upon a major theme: the necessity for sexual education and sexual exploration.

I want to focus on his two poems because, unlike *Venus and Tannhauser*, they were not privately published. "The Three Musicians" and "The Ballad of a Barber" appeared in *The Savoy*, a magazine read by the middle class. In these poems and their accompanying pictures, Beardsley engaged the eighteenth-century visual bawdy tradition, Victorian flower symbolism, and Victorian slang. That these poems and pictures were neither suppressed nor the object of retribution indicates the thoroughness with which, by the mid-nineties, much of the middle-class had lost touch with the bawdy traditions indigenous to their country.

Printed in the first issue of *The Savoy*, "The Three Musicians" appears merely to be a frivolous poem about a morning stroll in a French wood, taken by a "Polish pianist," a "soprano," and a "slim, gracious boy" (lines 16, 6, 11). The three amuse themselves by picking ripe corn as well as by singing Gluck's melodies and the horn motif which Wagner assigned to Siegfried. Then they separate. While the Polish pianist imagines himself a band leader, the soprano and the boy escape the midday heat "amid the dusky summer trees" (34).

Reading the last two lines, "The tweeded [English] tourist gives a furious glance,/Red as his guide-book grows, moves on, and offers up a prayer for France" (39-40), one becomes forcibly aware that something in addition to an innocent stroll has ensued. A closer examination reveals discrepancies between the musicians and their actions as well as between the apparent content of the poem and its last two lines. These discrepancies force the reader to seek an additional, perhaps the only, reading of the poem: with the keynote of "Siegfried's horn" (24), the motif which "accompanies his constant search for a companion [and] for new aspects of his identity" (Di Gaetani 356), the three musicians make the kind of music which celebrates Chaucer's "olde daunce" of sex.

The pianist is initially described as having an "iron wrist . . . And fingers that can trill on sixths and fill beginners with despair" (18, 20). His "iron wrist" and skilled fingers ostensibly refer to his ability and endurance at the piano, for to "trill on sixths" calls for the constant engagement of the thumb, the second, and the last two fingers. This activity places enormous strain simultaneously on the wrist, on the weakest fingers – the fourth and fifth – and on the third, which must be continu-

ously extended but not used. A pianist ordinarily trills on thirds, which engages the thumb, the second, and the third fingers.⁵

If Beardsley refers to Paderewski, a nineteenth-century virtuoso pianist, who arranged the music of his countryman Chopin, trilling on sixths indeed may be read as an allusion to his skill. But both pianists had dark rather than "shocks and shoals of yellow hair" (19). Moreover, when the pianist in the poem "lags behind" (26) the others, he "picks out an imaginary band,/ Enchanted that for once his men obey his beat and understand" (29-30). Neither Chopin nor Paderewski aspired to become band leaders (Sadie 14: 73-74, 4: 292-307).

I suggest that Beardsley's reference is to an imaginary pianist whose "iron wrist" and "fingers" engage in the five-fingered exercise of masturbation. Only one wrist is "iron." The "fingers that can trill on sixths" could refer to his five fingers plus the digit on which he performs. In addition, the men in the band are divided into three sections: "strings and wood and wind" (28). Although during the nineteenth century the terms *band* and *orchestra* were often used interchangeably, a band has no string section, and Beardsley knew music too well to err (Ross 11). The men of the band who "obey his beat and understand," refer to the male genitalia, perceived in slang as tripartite, which obey his direction and become aroused (Rudigoz 381; Farmer and Henley 5: 288, 289).⁶ Moreover, the pianist conducts his band not with a sturdy baton, which he might not readily possess, nor with a serviceable twig, but with the most fragile of flowers, the poppy. The Victorian love of flower symbolism provides assistance here: in Richard Payne Knight's *The Symbolical Language of Ancient Art and Mythology* (1818), expanded in 1876, the poppy means an "aphrodisiac" (45).⁷ The pianist's "iron wrist" and skilled "fingers" in concert with the "poppy" suggest a sexual reading of this section.

In contrast, Beardsley's use of slang in his description of the "soprano" and the "boy" leaves little doubt as to their activities. The "slim, gracious boy" is one of the musicians, but the poet does not divulge his musical talent. Instead, the talent of the "boy" – Victorian slang for the male member (Rudigoz 426) – seems to lie in the Chaucerian bawdy tradition. Walking beside the soprano, he "hastens to mend her tresses' fall,/And dies her favour to enjoy" (12-13). In Victorian slang, hair meant pubic hair, and dying the *petit mort* of orgasm (Farmer and Henley 3: 246; Rudigoz 208, 285; *The Pearl* 32). In such a reading, the lines suggest his desire to stroke her genital hair and possess her sexually.

Beardsley's initial description of the soprano plants immediate clues for reading this poem on a sexual level. She is "lightly frocked" (6), suggesting the summer heat and her sexual availability, a note strengthened as we proceed. Her frock is made of "muslin" (7), a term for a prostitute (Farmer and Henley 7: 77). Her stockings are "gaily clocked" (8), clocks since *Tristram Shandy* a term for vagina (Farmer and Henley

4. More than one version of *Venus and Tannhauser* exists, a bowdlerized version published in *The Savoy* and several privately printed versions of the uncut work. The most accurate of these was edited by Robert Oresko in 1974.

5. I am grateful to Beverly Beren for explaining the difficulty of trilling on sixths.

6. A solid portion of terms in Farmer and Henley are equivalents for sexual

activity and genitalia. In addition to the words I cite are others, equally colorful and synonymous. For male genitalia, for example, Rudigoz quotes the "rule of three." Farmer and Henley include the "best leg of three" and "middle leg."

7. In contrast to the "symbolic" meaning, standard Victorian flower dictionaries, such as Osgood's *The Poetry of Flowers and Flowers of Poetry*, attribute to the poppy the "consolation of sleep" (262).

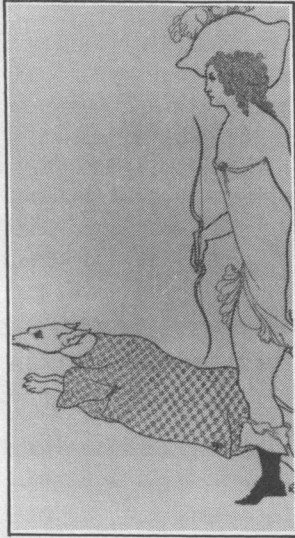


FIGURE 9



FIGURE 10

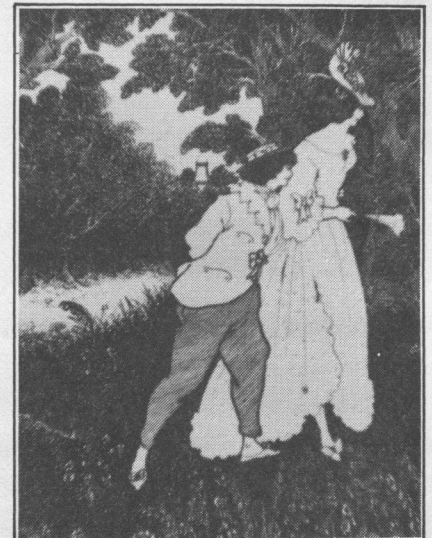


FIGURE 11



FIGURE 12



FIGURE 13

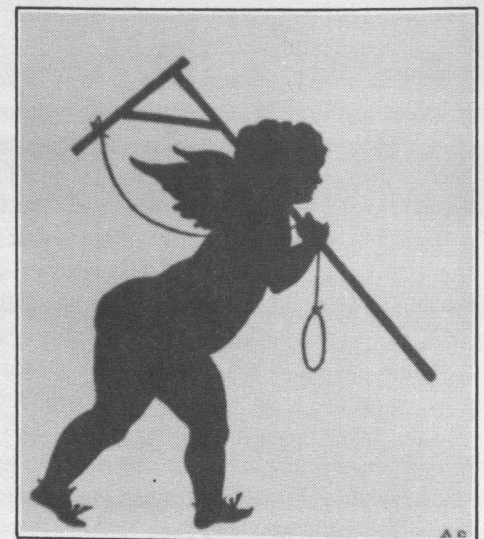


FIGURE 14

4: 337; Rudigoz 463-73).⁸ Her “plump arms and elbows [are] tipped with rose” (9), perhaps the blush of her skin caused by the summer sun, but also the color and the flower traditionally emblematic of the sexually knowledgeable woman. Moreover, a “petticoat” (10) is another term for prostitute, and a “thing” (10) is synonymous with the male member (Farmer and Henley

7: 79, 5: 290).

Her actions reinforce the sexual references. The soprano is not a prostitute, but in the penultimate stanza she invites the boy’s advance.⁹ She “reclines . . . fans herself, half shuts her eyes, and smoothes the frock about her knees” (31, 35). The boy comprehends her invitation, for in a moment “The gracious

8. Volume 1 of a 1771 illustrated edition of *Tristram Shandy* has a picture of a clock with male genitalia as hands. A Victorian bawdy song, “Master’s Humphrey’s Clock” details the way “women unto clocks great resemblance bear” (*Flash Chaunter*, n. p.). Both books are in the British Library.

9. To his mother Beardsley wrote that the “heroine” of the poem was the German pianist Sophie Menter (Maas et al 127). It may be that she communicated sexual freedom, for George Bernard Shaw confessed “to a weakness, not altogether musical, for Madame Sophie Menter: ‘There is an enormous exhilaration and sense of enlarged life and freedom communicated to me by her . . . I expand in the reflection of her magnificent strength, her suppleness, her swiftness, her inexhaustible, indefatigable energy’ ” (Weintraub 165).

More probably, Beardsley, who delighted in being witty, punned on her last name. Menter lends itself to the type of sexual innuendo which permeates the poem and, at the same time, allows the reader who is

aware that she was the prototype to see her as mentor to the “slim, gracious boy.” A final innuendo arises from a definition in Farmer’s *Vocabula Amatoria: A French-English Glossary of Words, Phrases and Allusions* in which the English for “faire de Sophie” is given as “to get the flavour” of copulation (126). Beardsley’s knowledge of the French language, French erotica, and his association with Leonard Smithers, publisher of erotica and of Beardsley’s work from mid-1895 until the artist’s death, reinforce my belief that Beardsley was playing with her name.

Weintraub terms this poem “only faintly naughty” (165) for Beardsley, but exposing the slang meaning of the artist’s words allows for a graphically indecent reading. With his delight in disguise, as witnessed by those drawings in which genitalia appear as decorations or are otherwise suggested, Beardsley must have laughed privately when this poem was published.

boy is at her feet,/And weighs his courage with his chance" (36-37). His "courage," slang for sexual excitement (Rudigoz 230), is equal to the moment. He embraces the soprano sexually, the result of which is his orgasm, signalled by the verb *melt* (Farmer and Henley 4: 300): "His fears soon melt in noonday heat" (38). It is the scene of these lines which cause the English tourist's "furious glance" and blush.

Beardsley's pictures for the poem offer additional assistance. His original drawing shows the "charming cantatrice" (31) reclining on the grass with her frock smoothed decorously about her knees (fig. 10). But her dress is out of proportion. It covers knees spread wide apart to admit the "gracious boy," positioned between her legs. This drawing, indicating the beginning of a sexual embrace, was suppressed by the publisher of *The Savoy*. The published picture shows the couple strolling off the path into the wood, side by side, directed by the soprano who points the way with her fan, an emblem of the female pudendum (*The Pearl* 627; fig. 11). Rather than the billowing and easily pushed aside skirt of the suppressed drawing, the soprano wears one which fits more closely but which is slit up the front to her pubis.

The picture is innocent of grinning satyrs and Beardsley's other sexual emblems. The tailpiece, however, is packed with emblems in the eighteenth-century manner (fig. 12). A winged cupid with an erection gazes seductively from beneath his hat. The haycock and the scythe represent the male genitalia, as do the rolled sheet, music, horn, and the drumstick (Rudigoz 145, 100; Farmer and Henley 4: 351, 5: 288).¹⁰ The drum is emblematic of the female pudendum (Farmer and Henley 4: 340).

The poppies; tulips, which represent a "declaration of love" (Osgood 261); lilies of the valley, "the return of happiness" (264); ivy, symbol of Bacchus (Knight 124), iconographically underscore the picture's sexual message. The birds in flight at the top center are quite possibly Beardsley's allusion to winged penises, present in erotic art from ancient Greek culture through the popular French erotica of his own time.¹¹ They fly directly toward the center of the drawing and assist the viewer to see that the foliage shapes the picture into a V, its center hollowed out and about to be pierced by the line of birds. The shape of the tailpiece provides an allusive punning coda in its tracing of the pubic hair line. No matter which way one turns the picture, Beardsley's message is sexual play.

His longer, seventeen stanza "The Ballad of a Barber" has been read as the tale of a skilled barber, Carrousel, who supposedly murders a king's thirteen-year-old daughter, ostensibly because he fails to coif her hair. Carrousel's talent makes him the court hairdresser: "The King, the Queen, and all the Court,/ To no one else would trust their hair" (5-6). Carrousel is also in fashion with "reigning belles" and "beaux" (7, 12). A man of "splendid skill" (20), Carrousel remains modest. He expends equal care "on problems simple or complex" (30), whether the customer is male or female, for "nobody has seen him show/A

preference for either sex" (31-32).

These eight stanzas which explain Carrousel's "splendid skill" also build the barber's sexual prowess. He "cares" for the "reigning belles'" hair. The "beaux" flock "about his doorway" like "bees about a bright bouquet" (12, 11), possibly to make an appointment, to meet belles whose hair has just been coiffed, or to see the barber, who may be bisexual. The last interpretation is supported by the facts that bees, symbol of male genitalia, represent Venus, who is "double-sexed" (Knight 54, 149, 159) and the "Meridian Street" (10), on which Carrousel works, signifies the genitalia of both sexes (Rudigoz 502). The title with its pun on tale indicates Carrousel's amorousness (Farmer and Henley 7: 58-9), and the first stanza relates Carrousel's ability in terms of slang words for coition: "cut. . . coif . . . shave" (Farmer and Henley 3:207; Rudigoz 187, 321, 635, 205, 255). Finally, the barber's name means a "joust," another term for intercourse (Farmer and Henley 6: 25), also signified by his profession (Rudigoz 321; Farmer and Henley 3: 207).¹²

The summer day on which Carrousel coifs the thirteen year old princess's hair, he apparently loses his skill. As he curls, then straightens her locks and his "irons scorch her frock" (47), we understand that "his fingers los[e] their cunning" (49) because Carrousel becomes sexually aroused. As he "stumble[s]" and "fumble[s]" (48, 54), rhyming metaphors for coition (Rudigoz 296, 313), his sight dims. Carrousel becomes frustratingly impotent: "feeble as a pointless jest" (56).

Carrousel's apparent remedy is to use cologne as if it were smelling salts: "He snatched a bottle of Cologne,/ And broke the neck between his hands" (57-58). But this act, performed "as if he was alone" (59), makes Carrousel "mighty as a king's commands" (60). In other words, he masturbates himself to renewed virility. The phrase "to break the neck of" meant "to perform more than half the act" (Farmer and Henley 6: 25),¹³ which aids in explaining Carrousel's final actions:

The Princess gave a little scream,
Carrousel's cut was sharp and deep;
He left her softly as a dream
That leaves a sleeper to his sleep.

He left the room on pointed feet;
Smiling that things had gone so well. (61-66)

If the poem is read solely as Carrousel's actual murder of the princess, there is no transition between the barber's smelling cologne and her "little scream," nor clear meaning. If the princess were murdered, her scream would not be "little." Carrousel's cut is "sharp," slang for an erection (Rudigoz 202). Thus, his "cut" is not a stroke of physical murder, but one which cuts her virginity. That she is quiet when Carrousel leaves implies her exhaustion after sexual initiation.

Beardsley apparently preferred a dual reading of the last two

10. For the emblem of a roll of paper, see Gillray's "Presentation of the Mahometan Credentials."

11. Michael Grant, Pierre F. H. d'Hancarville, and Le Poitvein include winged penises, and the Kinsey Institute has more than a few nineteenth-century pictures which include this emblem.

12. *The Century Cyclopaedia of Names* defines a carrousel as a tilting match (220); the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites a tilting match and a joust (2: 127).

13. *The Pearl* gives a variation which brings the phrase unambiguously into the sexual sphere (77).

stanzas.¹⁴ Were the princess dead, Carrousel might leave her "softly," and he might not be hasty in his leave-taking. Allowing the reader to wonder if Carrousel is a murderer, Beardsley plays up the imagery of "dream" and "sleep," which refer to an awakening in this world or the next. Carrousel's leaving "the room on pointed feet," extends the imagery of sleep and his goatish sexuality, providing the ambiguous conclusion: Carrousel is either escaping the scene of his crime or leaving his lover undisturbed.

As with "The Three Musicians," the accompanying pictures further support the poem's sexual meaning. The drawing of Carrousel coiffing the princess shows the two anticipating the barber's "cut" (fig. 13). A man of about forty, Carrousel looks jaded. He faces the viewer with half shut eyes and a determined jut to his chin. The princess smiles smugly. With her left hand, fingers spaced in Beardsley's familiar tripartite arrangement (which suggests the male genitalia), she toys with the ruffles of her peignoir. With fingers similarly spaced, her right hand reaches for the broad ribbon streaming from the bow which closes the peignoir. "To handle the ribbons" meant "to direct" (Farmer and Henley 3: 259).¹⁵ And it does appear that she will direct Carrousel's attention to her body, the "something" which will "dim" his sight. Accompanying sexual emblems – a candlestick, scissors, candleabra, a box of jewels, a lock on the window fastening, the line of birds flying toward the lock, a vase with tight rosebuds as well as fully blown blooms – assist in revealing the poem's covert meaning. The statue of the Madonna and Child on the bureau has protected the princess until this summer day, when sexual desire overpowers Carrousel and her.

The tailpiece similarly reinforces the poem's sexual content (fig. 14). Suggesting the love can kill (both the princess's virginity and Carrousel), a winged cupid carries a gallows. The rope extends over his shoulder. The noose hangs open, angled precisely so that, were the cupid's member depicted and aroused, it would point through the noose.¹⁶ The tailpiece thus implies Carrousel's act with the princess.

From this brief examination of Beardsley's work, it becomes evident that he did not "debauch sex" (Macfall 50). Instead, he was an artist in favor of healthy, if bawdy, sexuality, sexual education, and sexual exploration. Most cultures seize upon sexual differences to drive a wedge between the male and the female, as did – perhaps unconsciously – the Victorian culture. Beardsley seized upon these differences to bring the sexes together. In so doing, he helped to reorient the thrust of English art and literature.

Works Cited

- Beardsley, Aubrey. "The Ballard of a Barber." *The Savoy* 3 (July 1896): 90-93.
- _____. *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*. Ed. Henry Maas, J. L. Duncan, and W. G. Goode. Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1970.
- _____. "The Three Musicians." *The Savoy* 1 (Jan. 1896): 64-66.
- _____. *The Story of Venus and Tannhauser, or "Under the Hill."* Ed. Robert Oresko. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974.
- _____. "Under the Hill." *The Savoy* 1 (Jan. 1896): 151-170; 2 (April 1896): 187-197.
- De Gaetani, John Louis. *Penetrating Wagner's "Ring": An Anthology*. Rutherford, N. J.: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1978.
- Farmer, John Stephen and W. E. Henley, eds. *Slang and its Analogues Past and Present; A Dictionary, Historical and Comparative, of the Heterodox Speech of all Classes of Society for more than Three Hundred Years, with Synonyms in English, French, German, Italian, etc.* 7 vols. 1896. New York: Kraus, 1965.
- Farmer, John Stephen, ed. *Vocabula Amatoria; a French-English Glossary of Words, Phrases, and Allusions*. 1896. Secaucus, N. J.: Univ. Books, 1966.
- Flash Chaunter, The; A Slashing, Dashing, Friskey and Delicious Collection of Gentleman's Songs, now Singing at Offley's, Cider Cellars, Coal Hole, etc.* London: William West, c. 1865.
- Gillray, James. *Works*. Ed. Thomas Wright and R. H. Evans. 1851. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968.
- Grant, Michael. *Erotic Art in Pompeii: The Secret Collection of the National Museum of Naples*. London: Octopus, 1975.
- Hancarville, Pierre F. H. d'. *Monumens du culte secret des dames Romaines*. Capri: Chez Sabellus, 1784.
- Hill, Draper. *Fashionable Contrasts: Caricatures by James Gillray*. London: Phaidon, 1966.
- Knight, Richard Payne. *The Symbolical Language of Ancient Art and Mythology; An Inquiry*. 1818. New York: Bouton, 1876.
- Le Poittevin. *Diableries Erotiques*. Ed. Roland Villeneuve. Paris: Éditions du Manoir, 1971.
- Macfall, Haldane. *Aubrey Beardsley: The Clown, the Harlequin, the Pierrot of the Age*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1927.
- Meier-Grafe, Julius. *Modern Art; Being a Contribution to a New System of Aesthetics*. Trans. Florence Simmonds and George W. Chrystal. London: William Heinemann, 1908.
- Osgood, Frances S., ed. *The Poetry of Flowers and Flowers of Poetry*. New York: Derby and Jackson, 1859.
- Paulson, Ronald. *Hogarth: His Life, Art, and Times*. 2 vols. New Haven: Yale UP, 1971.
- Pearl, The; a Journal of Facetiae and Voluptuous Reading*. 1879-1900. New York: Grove Press, 1968.
- Reade, Brian. *Aubrey Beardsley*. New York: Viking Press, 1967.
- Ross, Robert. *Aubrey Beardsley*. London: John Lane, 1921.
- Rudigoz, Claude. *Systematique genetique de la metaphore sexuelle*. Lille: Univ. de Lille 3, Atelier Reproduction des Theses, 1978.
- Sadie, Stanley, ed. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. London: Macmillan, 1980.
- Sterne, Lawrence. *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent.* 4 vols. Amsterdam: Printed for P. van Slaukenberg, 1771.
- von Meier, Kurt., ed. *The Forbidden Erotica of Thomas Rowlandson*. Los Angeles: The Hogarth Guild, 1970.
- Weintraub, Stanley. *Aubrey Beardsley: Imp of the Perverse*. Univ. Park, PA: Pennsylvania UP, 1976.

Morehouse College

14. Beardsley's preference for ambiguity can be supported by his removal of a line which made it appear that Carrousel had left in the princess's room something which could convict him (Maas et al 136-137). In addition, Beardsley declared he thought the published poem "rather interesting" (Maas et al 122) – an indication of its double and ambiguous conclusion?

15. "Ribbons" was a term for reins. Under their entry for "ride," Farmer and Henley cite "to play with the reins" as French slang for "to copulate" (6: 25).

16. Grant includes figures from Pompeii in the shape of a male member with a ring above the head. The Kinsey Institute has at least one eighteenth-century illustration by the Frenchman, Antoine Borel (1743-1810), for Charles Borde's *Parapilla* (1782), depicting the worship of a priapic statue directly above which hangs a circular garland of flowers. Felicien Rops, whose work Beardsley knew, used the same motif in "The Erotic Painter" (Cabinet des Estampes, Bibliotheque Nationale). Others who used this motif were d'Hancarville and Le Poittevin.

Domesticating the Brutal Passion in Nineteenth-Century Fiction

Harriet Farwell Adams

The statistics on the numbers of women who died in childbirth in the nineteenth century, the numbers who died young of causes related to having borne children, the numbers of miscarriages, still-births, or children who died in infancy, childhood, or adolescence, give insight into the seriousness with which thinking women have to have regarded marriage. The women who watched by their children's deathbeds, or lay on their own knowing they were leaving young children motherless, the deep depressions which so commonly followed marriage especially for middle-class and intellectual women, the desperate letters written to Annie Besant or Margaret Sanger, remind us of the helplessness of women without birth control. We have only to add to these well-known facts the almost certainty that a married woman would find it impossible to carry on her work, to perceive that women novelists must have viewed the tying of the Sacred Knot, followed by the inevitable Blessed Event, with rather complex personal ambivalence. Like Queen Victoria when she sent the Princess Royal into marriage at the age of seventeen – "After all," she wrote, "it is like taking a poor Lamb to be sacrificed" (Longford, 150) – they may not have committed their heroines to marriage with feelings of unmixed joy. But the novel moves as inexorably towards marriage or death as a young woman's life does, leaving the novelist with a dilemma a little like the situation Jane Eyre archly describes to put off the queries of the gypsy – Mr. Rochester in disguise – about the state of her heart:

"What tale do you like best to hear?"

"Oh, I have not much choice! They generally run on the same theme – courtship, and promise to end in the same catastrophe – marriage."

"And do you like that monotonous theme?"

"Positively, I don't care about it: it is nothing to me." (19:228)

The catastrophe of marriage, or the other catastrophe of no marriage, does not preclude interest in the courtship. The prospect may, however, have a significant effect on the woman novelist's treatment of love and sex.

Ellen Moers has suggested that only a woman could have written with such extraordinary anxiety about childbirth as Mary Shelley did in *Frankenstein*. She describes briefly the experiences of death in childbirth (beginning with Mary Shelley's own mother, having her), suicides because of pregnancy, childbirth out-of-wedlock, death of infants, closely succeeding pregnancies, seduction, and guilt, already associated for Mary Shelley with childbirth when she wrote that novel at the age of nineteen. These experiences were admittedly more frightful than the usual; but it would be hard to believe that even Jane Austen, whose lovers never touch except to be handed in or out of a carriage, helped over a stile, or offered an arm to lean on during a walk, did not have her own doubts and fears about the ends to which love must lead. We know from her letters that she feared both the psychological and physical dangers of marriage for her niece. The dislike of children reflected in her novels must certainly have had some bearing on her steadfast

refusal to give her couples children when she parceled out the lands and titles, livings and incomes at the ends of her novels.

A rare insight into her feelings on this topic is revealed in a passage in *Persuasion*, the last and in many ways most relaxed and generous of her novels. Anne Elliot, the heroine, is kneeling by the sofa of an ailing nephew, partly to conceal her painful agitation at being left practically alone with her former lover Wentworth, when:

The younger boy, a remarkable stout, forward child, of two years old, . . . made his determined appearance among them, and went straight to the sofa to see what was going on. . . .

He began to fasten himself upon her, as she knelt, in such a way that, busy as she was about Charles, she could not shake him off. She spoke to him – ordered, entreated, and insisted in vain. Once she did contrive to push him away, but the boy had the greater pleasure in getting upon her back again directly.

Words do not deter this monster;

In another moment, however, she found herself in the state of being released from him; someone was taking him from her, though he had bent down her head so much that his little sturdy hands were unfastened from around her neck, and he was resolutely borne away before she knew that Captain Wentworth had done it.

(1,9:78)

This burden is recognizable as an incubus, that male demon which attaches itself to a sleeping woman; and so combines in the person of the child the horror both of sexual intercourse and of childbirth. The fact that the lover releases Anne from both points to an impossible fantasy, a contradiction underlying all Jane Austen's fiction, which she avoids by her quick exits after marriage, and which is undoubtedly partly responsible for the irony with which she treats love, as well as the "regulated hatred" so often mentioned and so little analyzed. This uncharacteristically psychological passage suggests that regulated hatred might be another face of regulated passion, regulated from a genuine terror of its consequences. Even those reprobrates who elope, Lydia Bennett and Maria Rushworth, are spared the punishment of children, though elopement is clearly a kind of metonymy for pregnancy out-of-wedlock, serious enough that "Mr. Rushworth had no difficulty in procuring a divorce" (*MP*, ch. 48). The grievous mistake of Mrs. Price in *Mansfield Park*, who had so many children and so little money, is never repeated in the next generation. Instead, the imagined life of the heroine stops with marriage as the stamp of finality in her search for power. It would be difficult to argue that there are no signs of denial in this pattern.

In the next generation of novelists, Charlotte Brontë's associations with marriage, childbirth, child-rearing, and therefore by extension sexual love, were particularly terrifying, and her longing for and fear of sexual passion particularly intense. She was nine when she took over the responsibility of bringing up her three younger siblings after the deaths of her mother and her two older sisters. By the time she was thirty-three, she had

suffered within nine months the deaths of all three of her remaining siblings, who in many respects had stood in the relation of children to her. A few weeks after Anne's death she wrote,

It is over. Branwell – Emily – Anne are gone like dreams – gone as Maria and Elizabeth went twenty years ago. One by one I have watched them fall asleep on my arm – and closed their glazed eyes – I have seen them buried one by one – and – thus far – God has upheld me. (Gerin 384)

Throughout the lonely years of her thirties she remained both terrified and fascinated by marriage. When she finally did marry, she became pregnant within six months, and died soon after from what has recently been diagnosed as *hyperemesis gravidarum*, a disorder of excessive nausea and in her case consequent starvation in early pregnancy.

Certainly the marriage that ends *Jane Eyre* is heavily protected against happiness. The dreams of children which Jane associates with coming calamity may, like the scene in *Persuasion*, shed light on the unconscious source of Charlotte Brontë's anxiety. She dreams them twice two nights before the first marriage ceremony. In the first, she tells Rochester,

I was following the windings of an unknown road: total obscurity environed me; rain pelted me; I was burdened with the charge of a little child. . . too young and feeble to walk, and which shivered in my cold arms, and wailed piteously in my ear. I thought, sir, that you were on the road a long way before me; and I strained every nerve to overtake you, and made effort on effort to utter your name and entreat you to stop – but my movements were fettered, and my voice still died away inarticulate; while you, I felt, withdrew farther and farther every moment. (25:309)

In the second dream, she is stumbling and wandering in the ruins of Thornfield Hall:

Wrapped in a shawl, I still carried the unknown little child: I might not lay it down anywhere, however tired were my arms – however much its weight impeded my progress, I must retain it. . . . The child clung round my neck in terror, and almost strangled me: at last I gained the summit. . . . I sat down on the narrow ledge; I hushed the scared infant in my lap: you turned an angle of the road: I bent forward to take a last look; the wall crumbled; I was shaken; the child rolled from my knees. I lost my balance, fell, and woke. (25:310)

While they apparently portend the apparition of Bertha, who comes to tear with awful significance the wedding veil, the dreams in fact express elaborate anxiety about marriage. In them, as in Anne Elliot's experience with her nephew, the child is a strangling burden Jane "might not lay down," impeding not only movement but speech. But the child who violates and oppresses Anne Elliot makes an even more terrible claim on *Jane Eyre* by exerting a mysterious demand for her care and responsibility that she can neither refuse nor meet. The child rolling at last from her knees is no release; it is the climax of the horror, which ends the dream. Furthermore the lover, rather than saving her from the child, is lost through it; she cannot keep up with him, or even make herself heard. And yet, it is clear, it is because of him that she carries this child.

The despair culminates in that phrase, "My voice still died away inarticulate": Charlotte Brontë well knew, by the time she came to write *Jane Eyre*, what the care of children cost in terms of art.

When Jane and Rochester do marry, their children come out of nowhere as emblems of completion, a tenuous gesture towards the optimism required at the end of a novel, not as the result of sex, like Adele. In *Villette*, so much closer to Charlotte Brontë's own story, we find a strange stasis in an engagement that is consummated by neither marriage, sex, nor happiness. Lucy Snowe is above all things an artist though that fact has been carefully obscured by Charlotte Brontë. Her cool control is an artistic production which conceals, reveals, protects and gives form to the wild Deity within her, "Imagination":

Divine, compassionate, succourable influence! When I bend the knee to other than God, it shall be at thy white and winged feet Temples have been reared to the Sun – altars dedicated to the Moon. Oh, greater glory! . . . Sovereign complete!

(21:308-9)

Well might we wonder how a votary of this "daughter of Heaven" is to be consigned to daily devotion to a husband, let alone tamed to the terrifying "charge of a little child" dreamt by Jane. Charlotte Brontë fully understood that the price to pay for happy love would be art. Yet love, cruelly, is what unlocks that divine power for Lucy Snowe, when she acts in the play for M. Paul, when she writes the suppressed letters to Dr. John, and when at last – hardest of all for her – she speaks, declaring her love to M. Paul:

I spoke. All escaped from my lips. I lacked not words now; fast I narrated; fluent I told my tale; it streamed on my tongue.

(41:591)

For Charlotte Brontë both love and art are urgently necessary; but love expressed through marriage and childbearing is fatal. Hence the ending of *Villette*; though we can assume that Lucy's passion for the lover who is paradoxically both possessed and gone, has led to the telling of this tale. It is profoundly moving that on the completion of this novel Charlotte Brontë chose for herself marriage over art, and that it did indeed lead swiftly to her death.

Of all English novelists to the time of Hardy, whom she greatly influenced in this respect, George Eliot endowed her heroines with the most frankly sensual passion and allowed that passion to work a great deal of trouble for them. Yet in the marriages that conclude the course of love for her heroines – though not for her other characters – are so comfortably exempt from sexual love for their husbands and apparently produce their children so neatly by parthenogenesis, that there seems to be as strong a dissociation in George Eliot's mind between sex and happy marriage, as there is association between sex, love, illegitimate children, and unhappy marriage.

George Eliot spent her adult life in full sexual intimacy with a man with whom she was very happy, but to whom she was not married. Yet her respect for marriage was so mysteriously great that she scrupulously imitated all the forms and signs of marriage, calling herself and Lewes "Husband" and "Wife,"

referring ostentatiously to their "marriage," and insisting from the first on being addressed as "Mrs. Lewes" – despite the universally-known fact that there was a true Mrs. Lewes living, mother of Lewes' three sons (who came in their teens to consider George Eliot their "Mutter"). However one looks at this, it is a case of ferocious avoidance. A document virtually unnoticed by her biographers, drawn up at her direction shortly after Lewes' death and brought to her in the seclusion of her mourning, legally changes her name to "Marian Evans Lewes." Evidently George Eliot cared very much about being a married woman. This explains her marriage to Johnny Cross, twenty years her junior, eighteen months after Lewes' death and seven months before her own. The exclusion and social isolation she imagined herself to suffer from the time of her return to England after her elopement until, in some quarters, her marriage to Cross at the age of sixty-one, seems to have left a residue of uncertainty that shows through all her fictional treatment of the relation between love, sex, and marriage.

As for children, long before her elopement with Lewes George Eliot had been appalled by the situation of her sister Chrissie, who, with six children, was unable to work when her husband went bankrupt; and at his death had to accept humiliating charity from her brother. Within a relatively short period not long thereafter, Chrissie lived through the deaths of four of her children, all under the age of sixteen. That George Eliot and Lewes practiced careful birth control is known from a letter to Barbara Bodichon written shortly after their elopement, unfortunately now destroyed. There can be no doubt that George Eliot had thought long and hard about the irreconcilability between having children and working well before she and Lewes eloped.

With the exception of *The Mill on the Floss*, whose heroine is drowned, however, George Eliot's novels end with the married scene, emblem of stability, permanent happiness, and the assurance that suffering and adversity are ultimately absorbed into solid social institutions. George Eliot cannot have believed this, any more than Charlotte Brontë did. The earliest example occurs in *Adam Bede*, where the irresistible attraction between Hetty Sorrel and Arthur Donnithorne leads inevitably to Hetty's seduction, pregnancy, and infanticide. This voluptuous attraction leaves no doubt about the power of the great blissful force of sex. Prim Adam, sexually so inexperienced that he cannot recognize Hetty's pregnancy but sees it instead as an increase in "womanliness," is equally seduced by her, by feelings so purely physical that they delude him entirely as to Hetty's character.

Yet the woman selected for marriage in this novel is the cool figure of Dinah, "as unconscious of her outward appearance as a little boy" (2:66-67). The domestic scene at the end which compensates for the emotional destruction wrought by sexual passion is conspicuously without it. Dinah is transformed from maid to matron by the standard weight-gain (Tolstoy resorted to this too, when he turned Natasha from the vibrant girl to the calm mother at the end of *War and Peace*). She has given up preaching and is accompanied by children produced without cross-fertilization: the little girl exactly like her mother and the little boy exactly like his father. The price for bringing this novel to a reassuring close is palpable artificiality, and as

complete a refusal to consider the final marriage in the same aesthetic terms as the rest of the novel as Jane Austen could have achieved.

In *Middlemarch*, instead of two heroines, one to love and one to marry, Dorothea Brooke is given two marriages. The opening of "Miss Brooke" takes pains to establish Dorothea's sensuous nature, despite her self-punishing Puritanism. Casaubon's horrible anticipation of the sexual pleasures of marriage to a young wife, his chilling expectation of leaving a "copy of himself" (he too believes in reproduction by cloning), his waking Dorothea in bed at night with the repelling word "Dearest," show that some ghastly sexual experience is at the root of Dorothea's sorrow and moral awakening in this marriage. It is therefore understandable that she should be attracted to Will Ladislaw. However, it is not so understandable that she should remain in complete ignorance, even after Casaubon's death, that her feelings for him are those of sexual passion. In the scene in which Will and Dorothea mutually acknowledge their love, their childlike qualities are emphasized – despite the fact that Dorothea is a widow and they are both in their twenties, and the sexual tension of the scene is transferred to a thunderstorm. They stand "with their hands clasped, like two children," and when "they turned their faces towards each other. . . they did not loose each other's hands" (83:593). Their kiss is the kiss of children, and Dorothea's declaration of her love is: "Oh, I cannot bear it – my heart will break. . . : I don't mind about poverty – I hate my wealth" (83:594).

Imagine Maggie and Stephen, lovers who really did have cause to divide them, speaking thus! No: Stephen involuntarily grabs Maggie's arm and devours it with kisses; they gaze long and dangerously into each other's eyes; they are mesmerized in each other's presence, drawn irresistibly to chase the same ball of yarn, to stroke the dog's ears at the same time; and in the rare moments when they are alone, are inarticulate, Stephen's words an incoherent "Dearest, dearest, dearest, dearest." George Eliot was ten years older when she wrote *Middlemarch*; can she have grown so much less daring?

I think this pre-adolescent behavior on the part of Dorothea and Will is due to the fact that George Eliot is about to marry them, whereas she was planning to drown Maggie. Irresistible attraction may draw Lydgate and Rosamond together in a destructive marriage; childhood friendship, that most sexless of ties, unites Mary Garth and Fred Vincy in a happy one; a mistaken sensual attraction draws Dorothea to Casaubon, and true physical attraction to Will while she is still Casaubon's wife; but to integrate Dorothea happily into society at the end, sexual passion must be denied. Vital sexual life was too dangerous to be imagined for a heroine married to the man she loved.

Marriage, seductive symbol of happiness as it was, posed dangers for the heroines that the authors had considered closely and rejected for themselves. Deeper perplexities underlay the evasions, contradictions, and denials implicit in the marriage-ending than ambivalence about how to close a novel, or what the public would think. The close of the fiction forced the resolution of very real and justifiable doubt about sex and about marriage, and therefore about love. The authors' lives proved well enough that this problem had no solution; in fiction the resolution had to be artificial. This forced compromise is what

confidently in lyric 38, these songs will be avowals "Not all ungrateful to [his] ear." Because the lyrics substantiate the love, they must continue indefinitely; because they originate from grief, they must also sustain or re-create grief to sustain themselves; and because their object thus becomes grief itself, these acts of love are sterile. Lyric 5 of the poem ("I sometimes hold it half a sin / To put in words the grief I feel") moves to words as widow's weeds ("In words, like weeds, I'll wrap me o'er"), which express grief but also mark the one who has been made barren. Other images of the widow, of the young girl who has lost her fiancé, of the bird whose brood has been stolen, similarly evoke the idea of sterility. Its language chimes through the poem: "wasted youth" (Prologue), "vacant chaff well meant for grain" (6), "Barren branches" (15), "Private sorrow's barren song" (21), "Fruitless fire" (54), "fruitless" prayer (56), "fruitless tear" (57), "Dwarf'd . . . growth of cold and night" (61), "Spring no more" (69), "sicken'd every living bloom" (72), "wither'd violet" (97), "barren faith" and "vacant yearning" (108).

Most strikingly, sterility is transformed from a negative to a positive state and in this mode is projected onto all of nature. The projective relationship is indicated in Nature's first appearance, in lyric 3, by the confusion in this lyric of the figures of Sorrow and Nature:

O Sorrow, cruel fellowship,
 O Priestess in the vaults of Death,
 O sweet and bitter in a breath,
 What whispers from thy lying lip?

'The stars,' she whispers, 'blindly run;
 A web is wov'n across the sky;
 From out waste places comes a cry,
 And murmurs from the dying sun:

'And all the phantom, Nature, stands –
 With all the music in her tone,
 A hollow echo of my own, –
 A hollow form with empty hands.'

That Nature is merely a phantom or echo of Sorrow doesn't make much sense except in the psycho-logic of mourning, in which we can take Nature as just such a projection. This relationship to the poet's self is suggested further when the word "phantom" appears again in lyric 108 to describe him chanting hymns of his "barren faith." Sorrow tells of "waste," "hollow," and "empty," all motifs of barrenness. By the middle of the poem, the projection is complete, and the barrenness consequent upon the death of Hallam plagues all creation. Now Nature speaks what Sorrow whispered earlier. In lyric 55, of fifty seeds but one is brought to bear, and the poet finds only

dust and chaff, not grain. By lyric 56, this barren female is covered in her blood and shrieking destruction of life and love at once ("Nature, red in tooth and claw / With ravine, shriek'd against his creed –").³

Except in the Blakean dream of lyric 69, it is not that the poem sees Nature as a perpetual winter or that it proclaims a cessation of generativity. Rather, it finds a notion of barrenness in futile generation, futile because subject to ultimate annihilation. It is not consolatory that the death of one lily is succeeded by the birth of another, because at some point the entire species will become extinct. Individual change is metonymic for generic instability. Nature can host (or hostess?) a metaphor for barrenness because the new geology has revealed discontinuities that have made it difficult to understand change as fluctuation within a larger stability – because her multiple births are seen merely to aggrandize the nullity at the end.⁴

Sorrow and Nature are female, now barren. The lost generative force, Hallam, is male. This alignment is tropic of course, but here its application makes the poet female: the widow, the abandoned bride, the inert matter awaiting insemination. The other major image of his self is the infant, also unformed, and without gender. The poet is explicitly male only in lyric 1, when he woos sorrow in lyric 59, and when he imagines himself freed of grief, "like an inconsiderate boy" (122). The poet as female is an image of sterility at its most acute, and his sterility corresponds to Nature's. Like Nature, he/she remains fecund, but the births are futile. He spawns these lyrics, acts become facts of love, but these poet's progeny can in turn lead only to more of themselves. The products of Nature, the individuals of a species, stand under the doom of a future destruction; the lyric products of the poet are doomed by the very past event that engendered them: their sterility derives from the past and stalemates the future. The poet's position is utterly futile, seemingly irredeemable; hence his grief takes an added poignancy, and the voice and femaleness of Nature become the more strident.⁵

The guilt that hangs over *In Memoriam* is not for the taboo of homosexuality, but for sterility. It is marked by the recurrence of sin and apology, a note struck in the Prologue, where the last three stanzas begin with "Forgive" and the syntactic parallelism states the relationship: "Forgive what seem'd my sin in me," "Forgive my grief for one removed," "Forgive these wild and wandering cries." The connection of the lyrics with sin is made again in lyric 5 ("I sometimes hold it half a sin"); the full complex of guilt returns more richly in lyric 7:

Dark house, by which once more I stand
 Here in the long unlovely street,
 Doors, where my heart was used to beat
 So quickly, waiting for a hand,

3. This argument is not to discount the cultural basis for Tennyson's distressed brooding upon scientific cruxes. It is rather to deal with the matter of Tennyson's having chosen to air these issues in the context of this poem.

4. Ward Hellstrom argues that for Tennyson the problem of change in the natural world was resolved in the Liberal Anglican conception of a larger permanence of God in the spiritual world, the two reconciled by the principle of accommodation (26-42). I am not convinced that Tennyson felt the doctrine as deeply as he understood it.

5. In lyric 109, Tennyson praises Hallam for androgyny: "And manhood fused with female grace / In such a sort, the child would twine / A trustful hand, unask'd, in thine." Other instances of Tennyson's praise of androgynous being, in man and Christ, are collected by John Killham (259-60). It is worth remarking that the poet's androgyny in *In Memoriam*, like the homosexuality of the primary love-relationship in this poem, is not a cause but an accident of sterility. Barrenness seems more readily expressed in female than male images.

A hand that can be clasp'd no more –
Behold me, for I cannot sleep,
And like a guilty thing I creep
At earliest morning to the door.

He is not here; but far away
The noise of life begins again,
And ghastly thro' the drizzling rain
On the bald street breaks the blank day.

The "guilty thing" of line 7 is the poet, who, rather than Hallam, paradoxically, is the ghost (*Hamlet's* "guilty thing"): he is only tenuously connected to life, which begins "far away." In another ironic allusion, "He is not here" (line 9) refers not as in the gospel to ascension,⁶ but to emptiness, uncompensated absence. In the penultimate line of the lyric, the projection of barren self onto Nature is repeated in miniature, from the ghost of "guilty thing" to "ghastly . . . breaks the blank day."

To stop loving is to stop feeling and to die. To cease grieving for love, then would be to die.⁷ The sorrows of death ensure life and the pleasures of life threaten death. So grief must be courted: it becomes the surrogate for love, racked by its sterility, the barren repetitiveness that is the essential condition of its being.

Fear of closure controls the shape of this poem, most obviously in its seventeen-year compositional history. The movements toward recovery followed by relapse into grief are psychologically persuasive, but they also constitute the fundamental movement of a poem that generically is meant to move towards closure and won't: the virtually inadvertent movements forward are checked, turned back to the center of grief. The poem is long because it cannot come to its end; it must remain in the middle, where the act of grieving, now the act of loving, continues. The elegy takes on the incremental form of the sonnet sequence. Even in its final arrangement, the poem markedly lacks the signs of structure that say, "Beginning, middle, end": there are 131 or 133 lyrics (depending on whether you count the unnumbered "Prologue" and "Epilogue"; 129 or 131 in the first edition), any way an odd and meaningless number; the Prologue is a summation or ending; the Epilogue celebrates beginning and is set off against the first lyric, which is fixated on ending. Though critics have worked hard to find order and progression in the sequence, a reading experience unaided by notation persistently seems recursive, linear but without direction. The first title – Tennyson's own – appears to hold on to inconclusiveness: *Fragments of an Elegy*, under which head the poem was privately printed in March, 1850, three months before its publication as *In Memoriam*, so titled by Emily Sellwood.⁸

The poem is caught in an endless linear perpetuation that is, paradoxically, a stasis. In lyric 121, the Hesper-Phosphor image locates release from this motion in circularity. Such release, which is release of love from mourning and resolution of the

paradox of living by death, is achieved only in the epithalamium that forms the so-called Epilogue. (Tennyson did not call it an epilogue; he left it unnumbered and untitled, different, emphatically at the end, but not tagged with the "afterword" sense of "epilogue." Some critics have tried to get rid of it altogether.) This release is anticipated in the advent of conventional natural imagery of a fructifying Spring, as early as lyrics 79, 83, 86 and 91, most powerfully in lyric 115:

Now fades the last long streak of snow,
Now burgeons every maze of quick
About the flowering squares, and thick
By ashen roots the violets blow.

Where now the seamew pipes, or dives
In yonder greening gleam, and fly
The happy birds, that change their sky
To build and brood; that live their lives

From land to land; and in my breast
Spring wakens to . . .

The "change" of the birds is benevolent, premonitory of generation. But the ambiguity of "brood" is picked up in the following lyric, 116, where the continuing insistence on "sweet April" is offset by a marked repetition of negatives and "regret" (" . . . regret . . .," "Not at all . . .," "Not all regret . . .," and "Yet less of sorrow" key the opening lines of each of the four stanzas; in the last, this note is emphasized in the third line, which begins "Less yearning . . .").

Yet the recession of a shrieking, bloody Nature is requisite to release and prepares for it. Another requisite is the separation of the poet's love from the lyrics as acts of love. Lyrics 73-75 deal, albeit by asserting that they will not, with Hallam's lost potential for fame, a conventional elegiac trope. Lyrics 76-77 then debunk the lyrics for their relative evanescence. At the end of 77, the poet nonetheless asserts their value as expressions of his love, and in 78, as we have seen, clings once more to his sorrow. In the climactic lyric 95, however, these poet's utterances are superseded, temporarily, by the "fall'n leaves," Hallam's letters, which kindle his spirit once more into life. The power of memory and the power of the words not of the living poet but of the dead beloved replace the lyrics as the medium of presence. In the final stanza, the Hesper-Phosphor metaphor is anticipated as "East and West, without a breath, / Mixt their dim lights, like life and death." Though this supersession is temporary, it is surrounded in lyrics 87 and 89 and 109-114 by the strongest bodying forth, or making present, of Hallam in the poem. The earlier lyrics could only create and re-create the love; here at last they reach the beloved. These lyrics are followed by the vernal flowering of lyric 115 described above, which leads in turn to the less satisfying and rather confused fusion of change, evolution, progress, and the

6. This probable allusion is noted by John D. Rosenberg, among others. It leads Hellstrom to rather different inferences.
7. A similar interpretation is offered by James Kissane, (85-109), and Henry Puckett, (97-124).
8. One could add here the observations of Christopher Ricks on the rhyme scheme: "On such a quest, to travel hopelessly is better than to arrive.

Hence the exquisite aptness of Tennyson's choice of stanza for *In Memoriam: abba*, which can 'circle moaning in the air,' returning to its setting out, and with fertile circularity staving off its deepest terror of arrival at desolation and indifference" (228). Also apt is Tennyson's odd remark to James Knowles about this poem, that the "general way of its being written was so queer . . . if there were a blank space I would put in a poem" (164-88).

certainly of communion with Hallam, that constitutes the reassurance of the last nine lyrics. But if these last lyrics intone a grand finale, the Epilogue returns to release of love from the fixation of mourning.

The epithalamium celebrates the marriage of Tennyson's sister Cecilia. The poet enters the cycle of life that she represents by assuming the role of her father:

For I that danced her on my knee,
That watch'd her on her nurse's arm,
That shielded all her life from harm
At last must part with her to thee;

He remembers her childhood and his adult role in relation to her; now he gives away the bride. Thus he has positioned himself as the man who has watched and protected her from babyhood to bridehood. After the ceremony and the festivities, his presence retires from the poem, appropriately, and is replaced by the Moon, which follows her from the halls to the bedchamber. Once before in this poem the moon entered a bedroom. In lyric 67, the moonlight fell across the poet's bed, and on Hallam's tomb. This union, however, was not fertile. The poet gained from it only relief from sleeplessness and a dim optimism, a glimmer "to the dawn." The glimmer was "like a ghost," not a living hope.⁹ Throughout the poem, day and light have been associated with love, night and darkness with absence and loss. But now, in the Epilogue, when moonlight embraces the marital chamber ("And touch[es] with shade the bridal doors, / With tender gloom the roof, the wall"), a child is conceived.

The wedding ceremony was rooted in the death that dominates the poem; the bride stood,

Now waiting to be made a wife,
Her feet, my darling, on the dead;
Their pensive tablets round her head,

but she is nonetheless that link between death and life, past and futurity, that is promised by the "living words of life / Breathed in her ear." The poet's daughter is truly fertile: unlike her siblings, his lyrics, she can create not merely more of herself, but an other, a male. The child that is born of her union is a later version of Hallam. In him, past and future are joined: the opposition of day and night, sun and moon, is dissolved as the Hesper-Phosphor metaphor becomes operative. The child is less the product of insemination than the new seminate force; he is male, he will "act and love." By his birth, he cancels the death of his forerunner, the death that both inspired the lyrics and made them at once futile and unendable. The Hesper-Phosphor image and the child's re-

lationship to Hallam both describe a circle. Circles generally are handy emblems of endless return, but now circularity brings release from the sterility of linear repetition.¹⁰ The Epilogue is declared an unnecessary lyric because the marriage itself is music, an act of love.

As the marriage and the child replace the lyrics as acts of love, closure becomes possible. This condition is apparently preceded by a change in the subject of the lyrics from the love of its object, Hallam, and, as I have pointed out, this change in turn seems at once enabled and epitomized by a temporary shift of focus from the poet's leaves, the acts of lyric expression, to Hallam's. The presence of the loved one obviates the role of the lyrics in affirming the continuity of love. Looking outward at last, the poem can complete the process of mourning, a process that means to relinquish sorrow. The final act of closure is publication, which still took Tennyson two motions: private printing, then publication. Curiously enough, in the same year, Tennyson married Emily Sellwood; she became Emily Tennyson; Emily Tennyson was to have married Arthur Hallam – and so life imitates art: released from sterile linearity, it describes a circle.

At that awkward boundary between life and art, we may notice that my reading of *In Memoriam* has, like most others, located the climax in lyric 95 and also has not quite accounted for it: why did it happen when it did, why at all? The poem, I think, doesn't really tell us, thus, perhaps, allowing the multitudinous interpretations we turn upon it.

Works Cited

- Bloom, Harold. "Tennyson, Hallam, and Romantic Tradition." *The Ringers in the Tower*. Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971.
- Bruns, Gerald L. "'The Lesser Faith': Hope and Reversal in Tennyson's *In Memoriam*." *JEGP* 77 (1978): 247-64.
- Hellstrom, Ward. *On the Poems of Tennyson*. Gainesville: U of Florida P, 1972.
- Killham, John. *Tennyson and "The Princess": Reflections of an Age*. London: Athlone, 1958.
- Knowles, James. "Aspects of Tennyson, II." *Nineteenth Century* 33 (1893): 164-88.
- Kissane, James. "Tennyson: The Passion of the Past and the Curse of Time." *ELH* 32 (1965): 85-109.
- McSweeney, Kerry. *Tennyson and Swinburne as Romantic Naturalists*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1981.
- Pucket, Henry. "Subjunctive Imagination in *In Memoriam*." *VP* 12 (1974): 97-124.
- Ricks, Christopher. *Tennyson*. New York: MacMillan, 1972.
- Rosenberg, John D. "The Two Kingdoms of *In Memoriam*." *JEPG* 58 (1959): 228-40.
- Shatto, Susan and Marion Shaw, eds. *In Memoriam*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982.
- Shaw, W. David. "*In Memoriam* and the Rhetoric of Confession." *ELH* 38 (1971): 80-103.

University of Southern California

9. For a reading that makes this lyric much more optimistic, see McSweeney, (83-84).

10. A fuller understanding of the nature of this circularity will see it as linear, but linear in a positive sense. See Bruns: "For [Tennyson], the hidden form of time is its *linearity*: in its deepest recesses (in its sacred meaning) time is not repetition but emergence and development" (247-

64). Compare also Shaw, (80-103), who points out the circular form characteristic of confessionals, and McSweeney, (80-81): "Nature in *In Memoriam* has a linear, progressive direction, extending from the remote geological and zoological past . . . through the present to either a melioristic or catastrophic future. . . . Small-n nature, on the other hand, has a cyclical ebb-and-flow movement and is non-progressive."

“Love in a Life”: The Case of Nietzsche and Lou Salomé

William Beatty Warner

In reading the lives and writing of the men and women of the Victorian period, I think we have been too ready to divide that society into those Victorians whose idea of love carries the purity of its idealism to an abstract and impossible extreme, and those “Other Victorians” who simply reduce love to forbidden sex. The first group appear as great believers in the most metaphysically-charged versions of love, the second as the failed idealists-become-skeptics, who leave the marriage bed for adultery or the brothel. To the observer of this century, the first are simply too complete in their demands upon love; the second group, being perhaps too cynical for love, is hardly less “uptight” for all that. Such a polarization on the question of love seems to be *part* of Victorian reality. It helps explain why the same novel can contain a Becky Sharp and an Amelia Sedley, why the same period can accommodate *The Secret Life* and *The Sonnets from the Portuguese*. But this polarization fails to see the Victorians as experimenters in love, who, in both their writing and life, were engaged in a dialogue about the nature and possibilities of love. I will give an example of what I mean. If one reads the essays Henry James wrote in criticism of George Eliot’s representation of love in *Middlemarch*, one can see that *The Portrait of a Lady* is partly a rewriting of *Middlemarch*, so that the reader gets a more “modern” and realistic interpretation of love. Now marriage is no longer the “solution” to the love problem, but the beginning and ground of its most urgent problems. But since the question of love passes so readily between art and life, this debate is hardly abstract. It needs to be read in relation to the idealisms and compromises of George Eliot’s love for George Henry Lewes, James’s own complex decision not to marry, and the way James’s early rivalry in love for his cousin Minny Temple offers the biographical point of departure for both Isabel Archer and the Milly Teale of *The Wings of the Dove*. James’s art, no less than Eliot’s, is part of a lover’s discourse; but both are also part of a cultural dialogue about love.

All of this is a way of saying that artistic and philosophic investigations of love are not at an abstract remove from, they are always coextensive with, attempts at love within life. To show how this is so, I would like to sketch a love story of this period as it told itself through the lives and writing of two who contested and recomposed the Victorian conventions they lived, not in England but on the continent: the love between Nietzsche and Lou Salomé. I will pass over most of the details of this relationship as it unfolded in eight months between April and December of 1882: their meeting, their falling in love, the rivalry for Lou’s love that opens between Paul Rée and Nietzsche, the idyllic three weeks Lou spends at Nietzsche’s summer retreat in Tautenberg chaperoned by Nietzsche’s sister Elizabeth, and the breakup of the relationship. Since most of this love affair is quite conventional, I will focus upon two salient moments of this relationship, two actions and two events which allow me to gauge its distinctive and experimental character: the arrangement Salomé, Rée, and Nietzsche make to live together, and Lou Salomé’s indiscretion.

In Lucerne, on May 13, 1882, after a good many weeks of negotiations, Lou Salomé, Paul Rée, and Friedrich Nietzsche agreed to form a “holy trinity” to live and study together the following winter in Vienna. To commemorate the moment, Salomé prevailed upon Nietzsche and Rée to be photographed pulling a small cart, with her in the driver’s seat wielding a small whip. At the moment they assumed this playful pose, did the parties to this plan and this picture have an intuition of the pleasure and suffering this act would entail? The forging of this arrangement is an act which is opaque and symptomatic for the way it exceeds conscious intentions and projects these three into unforeseen relations. A collaborative act, it nonetheless expresses contradictory purposes and interpretations. Though Nietzsche and Rée had often projected forming a social and intellectual community outside marriage that would protect a personal independence Lou Salomé was no less determined to guard, none of the triad anticipated the bitter rivalry for her this photo predicts. The triangular arrangement for living is at once a parody of the marriage convention and a substitute for it. By blocking the need to think of marriage it seems to foreclose the very intimacy it also promotes.

Why did two mature men in their thirties and a young woman of twenty-one embark on this arrangement? For Lou Salomé the projected living arrangement expresses the tension between two currents of her life. On the one hand, it allows her to pursue a new more equal relationship with men by sharing a co-equal intellectual quest for Truth. On the other, it forges this independent relationship with men within a sexually and romantically charged scene of rivalry, where two men will vie for her attentions. I can demonstrate these conflicting currents of her motivation by describing how Salomé defends the living plan in a letter written to Gillot, her first love. Gillot was a married Lutheran minister and her confirmation teacher. When Salomé developed a strong passion for Gillot and he fell in love with her, Salomé’s mother devised a protracted tour of the continent to remove her from this awkward situation. When Salomé begins to urge the idea of what she called “the holy trinity” upon Rée, even before Nietzsche arrives in Rome to meet her, her mother has Gillot write her to discourage the idea. Gillot writes that he had conceived her travel and education as part of a “transition” to some more permanent condition (perhaps marriage? marriage to him?).

Salomé’s response is a kind of manifesto of her intention to win her own freedom by challenging Victorian convention: “Just what do you mean by ‘transition’? If some new ends for which one must surrender that which is most glorious on earth and hardest won, namely freedom, then may I stay stuck in transition forever, for that I will not give up. Surely no one could be happier than I am now, for the gay fresh holy war likely about to break out does not frighten me: quite the contrary, let it break. We shall see whether the so-called ‘inviolable bounds’ drawn by the world do not just about all prove to be innocuous chalk-lines.” There is a youthful zest and exuberance in the way Salomé here endorses an idea of life as a condition

of ongoing transition, and joins a "gay fresh holy war" against convention. To the Germans with whom she is now waging this war, this convention weighs much more heavily. Thus in this same letter to Gillot, there is a note of condescension in the way she describes her efforts to persuade Rée to embrace the idea of a trinity. She describes her assault on the "inviolable" bounds of convention as a scene of seduction: "[Rée] too is not completely won over yet, he is still somewhat perplexed, but in our walks by night between 12 and 2 in the Roman moonlight, when we emerge from the gatherings at Malwida von Meysenbug's, I put it to him with increasing success."¹ These walks shocked Malwida, and she cautioned against them. They cannot but help remind the modern reader of the scandal caused by Daisy Miller's indiscreet nighttime rendezvous under a moonlit sky at the Colosseum, or the much more thoughtful way Isabel Archer contemplated Gilbert Osmond's proposals in an Italian setting. Lou and Daisy and Isabel are all women who come from a less inhibited place, in possession of a beauty which is complicated with their independence of spirit; all three trigger a rivalry for their affections; and each is intent on finding a risky new way of living in a European world too much defined by strict convention.

Salomé sought to insure her independence of any one man, not by removing to a distance from all men, but by stationing herself between two men that loved her equally. Thus this very description of moonlit walks could not but have caused Gillot some difficult moments, at the same time that it challenged him to be clear about the proposal he may have hinted at. When Salomé visited Rée at his Prussian family estate in Stibbe, she kept a portrait of Gillot in "an ivory picture frame." When Salomé visits Nietzsche at Tautenberg in August, "the ivory picture frame" was again placed on her dressing table, but the image to be found within was of Rée. One should not be in too much of a rush to accuse Salomé of confusion or duplicity in her use of male rivalry. It is one way she works within Victorian constraints to win the freedom and equality she seeks. The arrangement allows her to fight a system which left her largely powerless to shape her own life. At one moment when her mother seemed a particularly intractable problem, Salomé writes to Rée, "It is unpleasant to be able to do nothing but plead in a matter so close to one's heart" (Binion 53).

In letters to his closest friends in June and July of 1882, Nietzsche expresses his joy with his new "find" Salomé, and justifies the projected living arrangement, in a particular way: living with her promises to bring about a new concordance between his life and thought, and this, in turn, will make possible the writing of *Zarathustra*. He expresses much the same idea, in a more indirect fashion, in a letter to her at the same period. This letter helps us to understand the meaning Nietzsche is giving to this new love. Nietzsche's letter to Salomé of July 3rd is organized around a series of explicit messages. He begins by expressing his joy and gratitude at the way an excess of gifts has coincided in their arrival this day: "Now the sky above me is bright! Yesterday at noon I felt as if it was my birthday. *You* sent your acceptance, the most lovely present that anyone could give me now; my sister sent cherries;

Teubner sent the first three page proofs of *The Gay Science*." Then Nietzsche salutes himself for the completion of an arduous phase of his philosophic project: "I had just finished the very last part of the manuscript and therewith the work of six years [1876-82], my entire *Freigeisterei*. O what years! What tortures of every kind, what solitudes and weariness with life! and against all that, as it were against death *and* life, I have brewed this medicine of mine, these thoughts with their small strip of *unclouded* sky overhead. O dear friend, whenever I think of it, I am thrilled and touched and do not know how I could have *succeeded* in doing it – I am filled with self-compassion and the sense of victory." This victory is so "complete," that even his "physical health has reappeared, I do not know where from, and everyone tells me that I am looking younger than ever." Finally he assures Salomé that his commitment to the living arrangement is complete, and he has no consideration for either his sister's plans or going South alone. After explicitly projecting his future toward her, he closes the letter expressing a blend of caution, trust, and confidence: "Heaven preserve me from doing foolish things – but from now on! – whenever you advise me, I shall be *well* advised and do not need to be afraid. . . . I want to be lonely no longer, but to learn again to be a human being. Ah, here I have practically everything to learn! Accept my thanks, dear friend. Everything will be well, as you have said. Very best wishes to our Rée!"

Behind its more explicit messages, Nietzsche's letter to Salomé carries a fictive design of more covert meaning which express the scope of Nietzsche's demands on her. In sending her "acceptance" of the proposal that she stay with Nietzsche in Tautenberg, she has given a gift (of herself) which has brought back his health, youth and vigor. In the long heroic self-description of his "triumph" in finishing his writings of the free spirit, Nietzsche transforms himself into the intrepid hero of romance: he has overcome "tortures," "solitudes," "weariness," and finally even "death." In this way, her gift is no longer freely given; it is a reward for Nietzsche's bravery. Lou Salomé is put in the position of the maiden who has offered herself to the conquering knight who has returned in triumph with the holy grail. Quite ironically, the letter's grandest compliment to her sagacity and independence subordinates her to Nietzsche's work: she is not to be Nietzsche's "student" but his "teacher." For though it had been an understood assumption of their relationship that Nietzsche was to function as her teacher, by giving her the role of the teacher, Nietzsche not only implies that he can be as receptive and compliant as a pupil; he invites her to subordinate her itinerary and interests to his needs for companionship and socialization. In this role, she is not to show the narcissism of the student, but the selfless generosity of a teacher (and woman).

Nietzsche's exuberant letters following the arrangement of the living plan all demonstrate the same idea: what can happen now between him and Salomé may be important personally, but it also is somehow fundamentally secondary. It is research, background work, a time out for pleasure, eating cherries, and learning to be "human" – all this on the way to the more important work that lies ahead, writing *Zarathustra*. But there

1. Quoted from Salomé's letter in Rudolph Binion in *Frau Lou: Nietzsche's Wayward Disciple*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1968), p. 50.

is something problematic about the very degree of confidence Nietzsche here expresses in the living arrangement. In separating himself from the accustomed support of his sister, and the blue skies of the south, Nietzsche strikes a note of caution. He is "united to Lou," "by a bond of firm friendship," "so far as anything of the sort can be firm on this earth"; and he surmounts his own self-caution – "heaven preserve me from doing foolish things" – with an enunciation of his faith that when she advises him, he will "be *well* advised." This expression of trust in her implies what he does not quite acknowledge: that by beginning this love, and this experiment with convention, Nietzsche is embarking upon dangerously uncharted seas.

The only serious threat to Nietzsche's relationship with Salomé, and their projected living plan, comes with the action/event which can be grouped under the rubric of "the quarrel." While at the Bayreuth festival, according to Elizabeth, Salomé criticized Nietzsche to his Wagnerite enemies and, flaunting the Lucerne photo, "told whoever would or wouldn't listen that Nietzsche and Rée wanted to study with her and would go with her anywhere *she* wanted" (Binion 74). Elizabeth's report of these events to Nietzsche, and the heated arguments between Elizabeth and Lou Salomé that follow, almost prevent Salomé's visit to Tautenberg, and lead Nietzsche to cancel the whole living arrangement more than once. The indiscretion and the quarrels show how a relationship aglow with convergent intentions becomes complex. They are the most telling index of her refusal to be coopted, in a passive and compliant manner, into the writing plans Nietzsche's letter of July 3rd has given such grandiose expression. The living arrangement has always been vulnerable to this kind of crisis. To develop a daring anti-traditional relationship like the trinity, it is essential to put out of play the prior claims of the society one inhabits, with its interests, laws, and morality. But, how does one exclude – one never can exclude – this social law from intruding into a privately contrived society imagined as a place where a select few can live freely, apart from convention's constraints? In this instance the social law comes to Nietzsche and Salomé in the form of a jealous sister. On the journey to Tautenberg, Salomé counters Elizabeth's comprehensive disapproval of her, by venting her anger at Nietzsche's vacillations. She seeks to disabuse Elizabeth of her ideal notions of Nietzsche's purity. Here is a small part of the exchange Elizabeth records in a letter to a friend. "Of the arrangement Lou says: 'Besides, were they to pursue any aims together, two weeks wouldn't go by before they were sleeping together, men all wanted only that, pooh to mental friendship! . . .' As I, now naturally beside myself, said that might well be the case with her Russians only she didn't know my pure-minded brother, she retorted full of scorn (word for word): 'Who first soiled our study plan with his low designs, who started up with mental friendship when he couldn't get me for something else, who first thought of concubinage – your brother! . . . Yes indeed your noble pure-minded brother first had the dirty design of a concubinage!'"

What does the quarrel evidence? First, and most blatantly, Salomé's desire for a sense of control. Thus the Lucerne photograph is now given a new meaning. Taken as a jest on a lark two months before, when shown at Bayreuth, coupled with a disclosure of the projected living scheme, it becomes a warrant

of Salomé's mastery. By insisting, quite accurately, that the men would follow her choice as to the site of their winter residence, Salomé found a way to make her mastery seem quite complete. But Salomé's casual disrespect for Nietzsche also indicates something else. Like the graduate student who seems ready to say almost any scathing thing about their professor, at Bayreuth and Jena, Salomé is protecting herself against an intellectual engulfment by Nietzsche at the very moment when she is opening herself up to his influence as part of her own intellectual project. When Nietzsche simply cancels their plans, she must have felt her actual powerlessness most acutely. How pleasant it must have been to have found in these vituperative scenes a way to express her anger with Nietzsche by making his devoted sister squirm.

Salomé's tirade brings to the fore what is contradictory and symptomatic about the whole living scheme, and subsists as a problem in Salomé's relationship with Nietzsche. When the plan for a trinity is formed, sex is quite explicitly left to one side. To conceive the "holy trinity" is for Salomé and Nietzsche and Rée a critique of the way marriage had turned relations between men and women into a crude material and sexual transaction. It is also an assertion of faith in a particular ideal: that men and women can know each other in and through a shared intellectual quest. This idealism is implicit in Salomé's judgment of Nietzsche for "soiling" the study plan with "low designs." But the "trinity" was from its beginning always flirting with becoming a "melange a trois" – and a pretty kinky one at that. Thus, even before Nietzsche meets Lou Salomé, a letter to Rée about the living plan assumes the arch and cavalier style of men sharing talk of the women they intend to share: "Greet the Russian girl for me, if that makes any sense: I am greedy for souls of that species. In fact, in view of what I mean to do these next ten years, I need them! Matrimony is quite another story. I could consent at most to a two-year marriage, and then only in view of what I mean to do these next ten years" (Binion 49). Here superiority to marriage is not ideal, but an effect of masculine license and licentiousness. Of course, Nietzsche's words strike a pose much more aesthetically controlled than the ardent passion he ends feeling for Salomé. Nonetheless, when Nietzsche's and Rée's feelings for her intensify, the term whose exclusion made the trinity thinkable – sex – returns. At Stibbe, Rée describes to Salomé this letter in which Nietzsche limits interest in her to a "two year marriage," and this becomes the "concubinage" with which Salomé shocks Elizabeth. From the beginning the trinity was fascinating – whether to the eager principals or the skeptical observers – for the way it triggered curiosity and suppositions. But when the officially-excluded term returns, sex appears as the ulterior motive which threatens to make the plans for study, and the whole intellectual life, a pretext and charade.

Space does not allow me a full description of the way this love becomes a crucial moment of collaboration in the separate intellectual careers of Lou Salomé and Nietzsche. For Salomé knowing Nietzsche helped advance her study of two subjects upon which she would write books: religion and Nietzsche's philosophy. The arrangement is also a first attempt at a compromise formation that seeks ways of living which the Victorian definition of women's place made appear incompatible: a social

relationship with men that would include intellectual equality, emotional intimacy, and personal independence. For Nietzsche, the experiences of 1882 compel a decisive shift in his thought. In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche's narrator overcomes obstacles by practicing a kind of aesthetic finesse of the negative. But the breakup of his relationship with Salomé, and the nasty mutual recriminations that follow, bring an unforeseen kind of negativity. It is an acute challenge to Nietzsche's brightly affirmed ethos for saying "yes" to life. As the locus of unexpected passion and conflict, Salomé becomes a figure in Nietzsche's life for the resistant "other," the contingent which traverses life, displacing it out of its intended directions. Nietzsche is shoved, quite rudely, toward a confrontation with the problem of the will. He wills to have Salomé, but she will not have him. He wants the self-composure which accompanies an affirming and unified will; instead, Nietzsche must try to swallow conflicting passions, many of which are quite galling. The experiences of the year, as they unfold around the axis of the passion for Lou Salomé, test, confound, and displace the philosophic postulates of *The Gay Science* which first seemed to give this love so much support. In the task which he takes up in the midst of his blackest feelings of loss – writing *Zarathustra* – Nietzsche fulfills, short-circuits and sometimes

even reverses the themes and positions of *The Gay Science*, as they are refracted and realigned around a quite new, and much more conflictual, concept of the will operating within interpretation. This way of placing love in relation to Nietzsche's intellectual work means that Salomé and the Salomé episode can be *neither* something uncalled for, completely exterior, and radically contingent in its happening, *nor* something choreographed by Nietzsche, a simple repetition of his desire. She is not even an "aporia" implied by Nietzsche's text. Rather this episode is *both* something which unfolds in a space invented for Lou Salomé by the text of *The Gay Science*, and, in this happening, something that exceeds or violates that place and space. And this helps explain why the Salomé episode must be thought of, not as a measured application of philosophical "theory," to living "practice," but as that which comes between *The Gay Science* and *Zarathustra*, not as a bridge, but as a fissure, a violent displacing, a challenge, a mockery and – even a joke. The fact of love, as traumatic experience, has interrupted the writing of philosophy, and then collaborated in its revision.

State University of New York at Buffalo

Wilde's Closet Self: A Solo at One Remove

Nathan Cervo

Stimulating and charming in a number of ways, Kerry Powell's "The Mesmerizing of Dorian Gray" does Oscar Wilde's novel a grave injustice by attempting to subsume it under the heading of mesmeric literature. In order to do so, Powell enlarges the genre to include Madame Blavatsky's theosophy and the "Hindoo" tenet of metempsychosis. This latter he somewhat untowardly divests of its karmic necessity and makes a matter of dominant will:

It is this transmigration of the spirit – a transcendence of bodily self – which primarily inspires Lord Henry's wish to dominate Dorian Gray. To influence him, Wotton says, would be "to project one's soul into some gracious form, and let it tarry there for a moment" (12).

Arguing that the mesmeric books which came to Wilde for review at *The Woman's World* "carried on a tradition which had been shaped by Hoffman, Hawthorne, Gautier, and others among the birghtest in Oscar Wilde's own constellation of literary heroes" (10), Powell does not significantly differentiate among them, nor, indeed, among works by any single author; for example, such wilful metempsychosis as he proposes reduces Aminadab to soullessness in Hawthorne's "The Birthmark,"¹ is called "the Unpardonable Sin" in "Ethan Brand," and is clearly devilish in "Young Goodman Brown," where

the main character is vanquished both by his own evil velleity and the answering infernal power wielded over him by the serpentine "twisted staff" of "the elder person" whom he meets in the woods.

Powell's theory of the wilful invasion of one personality by another is not without erotic connotations since natural coitus is intended to infuse personality (personhood); yet he rather naively reads "imponderable fluid" (13) denotatively and relates it only to animal magnetism. Wilde himself describes the fluid as "subtle." If we take the fluid to be a metaphor for Lord Henry's desire to procreate, or multiply, himself by filling Dorian with himself, by making him something more than a dupe, a persona-clone, we come closer to the underlying central image of the book. The "twisted staff" of this "elder person" consists of worldly wisdom, cynicism, and malice; the "power" it confers is damnable sterility.

Powell, however, takes pains to dismiss as inconsequential certain stock Mephistophelean features with which Wilde furnishes Lord "Harry"; for example, his pointed beard. It is crucial to Powell's mesmeric thesis that we think of Lord Henry as nothing more than a suave and fastidious avatar of Giuseppe Balsamo, the notorious Cagliostro. The novel, he would persuade us, is not about good and evil but theosophical musical chairs, "flitting personalities, to-day one person, to-morrow

1. The usurpation of one soul by another (really a "spirit") is not theosophy. See my essay 19-21.

another" (Madame Blavatsky, in Powell, 13), curiously harnessed in non-"Hindoo"² fashion to the agency of a dominant will. Obviously, this sort of reading à la Svengali trivializes Wilde's purpose and achievement.

In the figure of Dorian Gray Wilde created the epitome of what I shall call Aestheticized Man; and he drew not only from Flaubert's archetypal paradigm of Good "shadowed" by Evil (*La Tentation De Saint Antoine*, 1874), but from Charles Maturing, John Ruskin, William Gladstone, the Pre-Raphaelites,³ and Walter Pater in order to contextualize his subject dialectically, to play Lord Henry's devil-may-care paganism off against the Christian conviction that, although one's sins be as scarlet, repentance makes salvation possible. In lieu of sin, Powell contents himself with spectral emanations and assorted discharges of psychic energy. Indeed, one is not certain whether Powell can distinguish between sin and turpitude, since he erroneously offers "No one ever became evil overnight"⁴ as the meaning of Juvenal's "*Nemo repente fuit turpissimus*." Such quantum leaps as this one from turpitude to evil may be explained by theosophy but certainly not by good Latin.

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, as the novel's epigraph makes clear, Wilde writes as a traditional dualist: the soul is sent into the Infinite, not into another soul. Further, although Dorian has a body, mind qua attenuated corporeal reflex is not what is at stake. Neither Anima Mundi nor *tabula rasa*, Dorian's soul is placed in the gravest danger. Outwardly beautiful to men's eyes, like the New Testament whited sepulchre, Dorian perceives that his soul is quite literally full of corruption and dead men's bones. He is, in a way, the very opposite of Victor Hugo's noble grotesque, Quasimodo.

Appearance is not always reality, and stepping among men by light of day or gas jet Dorian displays perennial youth and handsomeness; but his soul, mirrored by the monstrous portrait locked away, decays as to the sound of hideous music.⁵ As Powell astutely points out:

Instead of giving Lord Henry Wotton the portentously luminous eyes of most fictional mesmerists, Wilde . . . bestows on him an "absolutely fascinating" musical voice which exercises an irresistible attraction on Dorian Gray (12).

Lord Henry's title is meant by Wilde to bifurcate hermeneutically; that is, at one and the same time to denote the literal ("surface") and what lies beyond the literal ("symbol"). Literally, he is a peer of the realm; symbolically, a kind of Lord of Misrule. What Wilde combines in the interplay between "Lord" and "Dorian" must have been common knowledge among Oxford Classical Greek scholars, of whom Wilde him-

self had been one. The title "*anax andron*" had been used as an epithet for Agamemnon in Homer. It meant "Lord of Men." The title disappears with Homer, because of social and political upheaval. Gladstone writes in *Juventus Mundi: The Gods and Men of the Heroic Age*:

In soft music [Homer] sings out the heroic age of heroes: and after him, as Hesiod tells us, a ruder and darker age is sung in with a wilder music. The traditions, and the families, of the older time are submerged by the flood of Dorian conquest (172).

The "Dorian conquest" replaces "the heroic age of heroes." Lord Henry replaces Agamemnon as "*anax andron*." For Aestheticized Man, there are no "traditions," just a sensate continuum. The ideal of receptivity intensifies to exquisite passivity. Like the devil, whom he symbolizes, Lord Henry is Lord of This World, a demonic parody of "*anax andron*."

The wholly latent, amorphous potency of Aestheticized Man, the "wilder music" for which he becomes the passive conveyor, is suggested by Ruskin's distinction between Apollo's lute and Marsyas' double-flute. The former "is not so much the instrument producing sound, as its measurer and divider by length or tension of string into given notes" (270). It is meant to be accompanied by the voice; indeed, it is when Apollo adds his voice to the lute that he defeats Marsyas in their musician's contest. According to Ruskin, "all the limiting or restraining modes of music belong to the Muses; but the passionate music is wind music, as in the Doric flute" (270). With "Doric," we are back to the "Dorian" motif treated above by Gladstone. What I am suggesting is that Dorian Gray served as a "flute" for Lord Henry. To be sure, as Powell points out, "Merely talking to Dorian becomes, for him, 'like playing upon an exquisite violin' " (11). The image conjures up the stock figure of the Demon Violinist, but beyond this it points to the "wilder music" or the "Dorian conquest." Given the delicacy of his invention, Wilde could hardly have described Lord Henry's "flattery" (Latin *flatus*, "wind") of Dorian as "playing upon an exquisite flute." This would have been redundant, tactlessly much too obvious. The "violin," derived no doubt from Hoffman, also serves to upgrade the sphere of spiritual action from a pagan ambience (Pan, Marsyas) to a Christian (Devil). Ruskin goes on:

Then, when this inspired music becomes degraded in its passion, it sinks into the pipe of Pan, and the double pipe of Marsyas, and is then rejected by Athena. The myth which presents her doing so is that she invented the double pipe from hearing the hiss of the Gorgonian serpents; but when she played upon it, chancing to see her face reflected in the water, she saw that it was distorted, where-

long become coextensive with our total world, and music alone, therefore, can take us right out of this world, break up the steely tyranny of light, and let us fondly imagine that we are on the verge of reaching the soul's final secret" (2:8). Wilde's paradoxical chiasmus is brilliant. The light-world reveals a Dorian utterly different from the Dorian ("the soul's final secret") that is the product of Lord Henry's "musical" art, the closet self which Dorian contemplates in secret, in "darkness" as it were. Ironically, *this* "auditory" monster "visualized" *in petto* is the "beauty" precipitated by Lord Henry/Pater's spell on Aestheticized Man, in this case "La Gioconda"/Dorian: "It is beauty wrought from within upon the flesh, the deposit cell by cell, of strange thoughts and fantastic reveries and exquisite passions."

2. Powell 13. "Hindoo" was applied by early critics to Tennyson, likened to Vishnu for his many "impersonations," and to his "mad," "filthy ascetic," the "Hindoo yogi," St. Simeon Stylites.
3. Pre-Raphaelite "surface" is always "symbol."
4. Powell's, or Hawthorne's (it is not clear whose), translation ignores the superlative force of "*-issimus*," rather wantonly renders "*repente*" ("suddenly, unexpectedly") "overnight," and invests *turpis* ("ugly, unsightly, unseemly, foul, filthy, nasty, base, infamous," and the like) with a metaphysical aura entirely lacking in the Latin meaning of the word.
5. Oswald Spengler writes: "In precisely this resides the ineffable charm and the very real power of emancipation that music possesses for us men. For music is the only art whose means lie outside the light-world that has so

upon she threw down the flute, which Marsyas found. Then, the strife of Apollo and Marsyas represents the enduring contest between music in which the words and thought lead, and the lyre measures or melodizes them . . . and music in which the words are lost, and the wind or impulse leads, — generally, therefore, between intellectual, and brutal, or meaningless music. Therefore, when Apollo prevails, he flays Marsyas, taking the limit and external bond of his shape from him, which is death, without touching the mere muscular strength; yet shameful and dreadful in dissolution (270).

This, when read with an *eruditus oculus*, is the plot of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in a nutshell. The distorting influence of Lord Henry is “the hiss of the Gorgonian serpents” which Dorian (Athena) imitates until he sees his “face” (monstrous disintegration of his soul) “reflected in the water” (mirrored by the portrait). He then throws the flute (Lord Henry’s “Dorian,” “wilder music”) away. His regenerate self (Apollo) flays the old self (Marsyas). He immediately bifurcates into “surface” and “symbol.” Which is the real Dorian Gray? The beautiful youth in the portrait or the obscene hulk on the floor? Both are. The symbiotic transformation is simultaneous; but the body is riddled with its burden of enormous guilt. It remains in this world, as a casualty. The soul, however, blooms in the realm of an art not of the natural order: the domain of grace, built on the foundation of the words of the Redeemer, the true “*anax andron*.” Thus Dorian (Athena) is resolved instantaneously into the object of grace and its shadow. The shadow is the corporeal disfigurement lying on the floor; the redeemed soul is now enshrined in the portrait. Apollo (divine measure, justice augmented by mercy) prevails when Dorian repents. The old self falls away like a cocoon. Thus Wilde goes Robert Louis Stevenson one better; his protagonist is transformed by repentance and grace, not a chemical potion. He is tellingly moral and spiritual in his Christian version of the “double-pipe” personality of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886).

It is probable that Wilde borrowed the device of the preternatural portrait from Charles Maturin’s *Melmoth* (1820):

. . . he held up the dim light, and looked around him with a mixture of terror and curiosity. There was a great deal of decayed and useless lumber, such as might be supposed to be heaped up in a miser’s closet; but John’s eyes were in a moment, and as if by magic, rivetted on a portrait that hung on the wall . . . It represented a man of middle age. There was nothing remarkable in the costume, or in the countenance, but the eyes, John felt, were such as one feels they wish they had never seen, and feels they can never forget (13).

The portrait bears the date “anno 1646.” John learns from his horrified uncle that the subject of the painting is still alive, over two hundred years old, and not “a year older” in appearance than the portrait shows him. But just as *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is not a mesmeric novel, neither is it a Gothic one. Wilde does not wish to raise gooseflesh; he intends to reveal and instruct. Graphically, powerfully, dramatically, unforgettably, he focuses attention on the psychological fact that each of us has a closet self. If we have abdicated our intelligence

and traditions, if the closet self is, in effect, the mimetic accretion of the Zeitgeist, the prismatic effigy of Pater’s “pulsations,” then in our teeming yet bereft persons Aristotle’s *phronimos*, the “judicious man,” succumbs to the blind blandishments of Aestheticized Man.

That Wilde had Pater in mind when writing *Dorian Gray* is clear. According to the Oxford don, “All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music” (“The School of Giorgione” 106). Of da Vinci’s La Gioconda (Mona Lisa), he wrote: “That there is much of mere portraiture in the picture is attested by the legend that by artificial means, the presence of mimes and flute-players, that subtle expression was protracted in her face.” (The parallel with Dorian Gray is obvious.) He saw in “that subtle expression,” and rhapsodized upon, “the return of the Pagan world, the sins of the Borgias.” Contemplating the wilful projection of his own personality upon the canvas, he then identified an abiding metempsychotic kaleidoscopic (prismatic point-of-view) consciousness as Modernism: “the fancy of a perpetual life, sweeping together ten thousand experiences is an old one; . . . the symbol of the modern idea.” Powell recognizes Pater’s presence in the novel: “Finally the hero becomes, through Lord Henry’s influence, so multiform a personality that all of history seems to have been ‘merely the record of his own life’ ” (“Leonardo da Vinci” 12-13).

Wilde studied under Pater at Oxford. He not only knew his theories but affected to adopt them. He understood that they unleashed upon the world a will wholly alien to the “heroic traditions,” a naked will, posing as refined sensibility, determined to unsettle, invade, and absorb whatever and whomever it pleased; a will, unscrupulous and subtle, prepared to vampirize even the vampire itself (“Leonardo da Vinci” 13).⁶ Of himself, Wilde knew that if he remained the unregenerate creature of Pater’s “musicality,” he would be lost. He had to put off the “elder person” in order to be free, just as the repentant Dorian had to stab to the heart the “surfaced” monster he had become under the “flattery” of Lord Henry. In the final analysis, far from being a mesmeric novel patterned after cheap thrillers, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a spiritual autobiography.

Works Cited

- Cervo, Nathan. “The Birthmark.” *The Explicator* 42:4 (1984): 19-21.
- Gladstone, William Ewart. *Juventus Mundi: The Gods and Men of the Heroic Age*. London: Macmillan, 1869.
- Maturin, Charles. *Melmoth*. With Intro by William Axton. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1961.
- Pater, Walter. “Leonardo da Vinci.” First published in the *Fortnightly Review*, Nov. 1869, and later published as the first essay in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873).
- . “The School of Giorgione.” *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*. Ed. Donald L. Hill. Los Angeles: U of California P, 1980.
- Powell, Kerry. “The Mesmerizing of Dorian Gray.” *Victorian Newsletter* 65 (1984): 10-15.
- Ruskin, John. “Athena Chalinitis.” *Queen of the Air in Sesame and Lilies, etc.* New York: American Publishers Assoc., n.d.
- Spengler, Oswald. “Origin and Landscape.” In *The Decline of the West*. Trans. Charles Francis Atkinson. 2 vols. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926-28.

Franklin Pierce College

6. Of La Gioconda: “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.”

“When Critics Disagree”

Kerry Powell

I cannot agree with Nathan Cervo that it is a “grave injustice” to discover in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* the formulaic excitements of popular Victorian tales of mesmerism. Oscar Wilde, strangely enough, achieved his best work when he stooped to mine the worn-out veins of popular literature. If this was a fault, perhaps Mr. Cervo should blame Wilde more than the critic who observes it. But *is* it a fault? Is *The Importance of Being Earnest*, for example, really a lesser play because it enlists the used-up characters, incidents, and even expressions of that most banal of literary species – the Victorian farce?

It is no more unjust to see *Dorian Gray* as a mesmeric thriller than it is to recognize *Earnest* as a farce, except that the sub-literary origin is more craftily disguised in the novel than the play. Although the word “mesmerism” is never mentioned in *Dorian Gray*, Wilde builds his novel to an extraordinary degree with materials from the largely forgotten inventory of popular Victorian hypnotic fiction. One character succumbs to the “influence” of another (Dorian is “like one under a spell,” Wilde writes) and consequently behaves in a fashion out of tune with his “real” nature. Much of the mesmeric paraphernalia of such stories is subtly introduced – including manipulation of an occult fluid by the “mesmerist,” the mysterious motions of his hands, his captivating voice, and the projection of his soul into the suddenly vacant identity of the medium. Exotic drugs, “Hindoo” backgrounds, and motifs of rapid aging, eternal youth, and double identity are recurring features of the mesmeric tales Wilde read and sometimes praised. *Dorian Gray*, furthermore, snaps the “spell” as many hypnotic stories do – with the shattering of crystal or glass in the last chapter. Yet the blatantly mesmeric components of *Dorian Gray* are so delicately modulated that they cast an air of the strange and wonderful over the narrative without pushing it to the clumsy melodrama and sensationalism which mar tales like *The Vasty Deep*, *Helen Davenant*, and *The Princess Daphne*. Wilde did not want to write a potboiler, but neither did he aspire to the condition of Henry James, who wrote fiction, Wilde complained in “The Decay of Lying,” as if it were a “painful duty.”

Mr. Cervo is right, therefore, in arguing that *Dorian Gray* is too great a novel to be contained by the boundaries of popular mesmeric fiction. The novel’s distinction arises rather from surpassing the hypnotic genre which partly inspired it, just as the achievement of *Earnest* is best measured by the extent to which it transcends Victorian farce rather than imitates it. Indeed the point I sought chiefly to make in my article was not that *Dorian Gray* was a mesmeric tale, but that it was that and much more. Nor can I disagree with Mr. Cervo that the novel is a “spiritual autobiography” – it is an argument I have made myself.¹ Others have submitted convincing evidence that *Dorian Gray* is in some sense a reformulation of Wilde’s own earlier work and that it is connected to Gothic and “decadent” traditions in fiction.² Above all, in my opinion, Wilde’s novel is an astonishing compendium of another and largely subliterary type of fiction – the multiplying novels and stories about magic pictures, whose numbers swelled to tidal proportions by the late 1800’s.³ In his offhanded statement that it is “probable” Wilde borrowed the portrait motif from *Melmoth the Wanderer*, Mr. Cervo sidesteps the facts and radically oversimplifies the complex and transformative use Wilde makes of the literary past.

I also am skeptical of Mr. Cervo’s argument that *Dorian Gray* is really Wilde’s effort to “instruct” his readers in “repentance.” An artist who professes “no ethical sympathies” and says “all art is quite useless,” as Wilde does in the preface to *Dorian Gray*, is unlikely to spend his time composing Christian parables. But disputes of this kind probably would have amused Wilde, confirming his own high opinion of his talents. “When critics disagree,” he says in the preface, “the artist is in accord with himself.”

I agree, however, that *Dorian Gray* is not merely another mesmeric tale. Like its hero, Wilde’s novel has more than one paltry personality. But in my article for *Victorian Newsletter* I could concern myself with only one – believing, like George Eliot, “that all the light I can command must be concentrated on this particular web, and not dispersed over that tempting range of relevancies called the universe.”

Miami University

1. I refer to my article “Oscar Wilde ‘Acting,’” *Dalhousie Review*, 58 (1978), 104-15. Its conclusions are quite different from those of Mr. Cervo, however.
2. Especially useful are Isobel Murray’s “Some Elements in the Composition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*,” *Durham University Journal*, 33 (1971), 1-13; her introduction to the novel in the 1974 Oxford University Press edition; and Donald L. Lawler and Charles E. Knott’s “The Context of

Invention: Suggested Origins of *Dorian Gray*,” *Modern Philology*, 73 (1976), 389-98.

3. This connection is argued in my articles “Tom, Dick, and Dorian Gray: Magic-Picture Mania in Late Victorian Fiction,” *Philological Quarterly*, 62 (1983), 147-70, and “Hawthorne, Arlo Bates, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*,” in *Papers on Language & Literature*, 16 (1980), 403-16.

Physical Opposition in *Barnaby Rudge*

Brian Rosenberg

Barnaby Rudge is a novel dominated on a number of levels by violent opposition and contradiction. And, as Steven Marcus observes, virtually every opposition and contradiction in *Rudge* is left finally "without resolution" (175): perhaps more than in any other Dickens novel, and certainly more than in any other before *Little Dorrit*, we are left with a world whose antagonistic forces have been quieted but not reconciled. The "Riots of 'Eighty'" are quelled, forcefully, but the imbalances responsible for them remain embedded in the organization of society; fathers cease to trouble sons, but only through the oblivion of madness or death. Clearly the implication is that certain kinds of social and personal conflict are inevitable and irreconcilable, ending periodically not with agreement but with the triumph, destruction, or utter exhaustion of one or the other antagonist.

Nowhere is the inevitability of conflict made more apparent than in the novel's physical descriptions of character. As a rule, the way Dickens sees his characters is largely determined by the meaning he imagines them to hold; hence the physical descriptions in, say, *Pickwick Papers* are more straightforward and humorous than those in *Oliver Twist* because the world in *Rudge* is everywhere divided into opposing and irreconcilable forces, the contrasting and conflicting aspects of appearance are given special emphasis. Repeatedly we are reminded, in great detail, of the lack of resemblance between one character and another, of the degree to which one character is another's physical opposite, even of the ways a character's appearance seems somehow to contradict itself. The inevitability of conflict becomes, in effect, a fact of physical life, and total reconciliation a physical impossibility.

Characters in *Barnaby Rudge*, more than those in any other Dickens novel, tend to be described in opposed pairs, as if any given set of physical characteristics automatically elicits a contradictory set. Occasionally this pairing is relatively simple, as when Emma Haredale and Dolly Varden are introduced in a kind of counterpoint, with Emma "so fair, and Dolly so rosy, and Emma so delicately shaped, and Dolly so plump . . ." (20)¹ More typical, however, is the complex and elaborate pairing of Gabriel Varden and the elder Barnaby Rudge:

Perhaps two men more powerfully contrasted never opposed each other face to face. The ruddy features of the locksmith so set off and heightened the excessive paleness of the man on horseback, that he looked like a bloodless ghost, while the moisture, which hard riding had brought out upon his skin, hung there in dark and heavy drops, like dews of agony and death. The countenance of the old locksmith lighted up with the smile of one expecting to detect in this unpromising stranger some latent roguery of eye or lip, which should reveal a familiar person in that arch disguise, and spoil his jest. The face of the other, sullen and fierce, but shrinking too, was that of a man who stood at bay; while his firmly closed jaws, his puckered mouth, and more than all a certain stealthy motion of the hand within his breast, seemed to announce a desperate purpose very foreign to acting, or child's play (2).

A number of the novel's dominant themes and activities figure in this early moment of physical confrontation, a moment later repeated with some variation at least a half-dozen times. Varden and Rudge are not merely different but are, the narrator suggests, the most thoroughly "contrasted" and "opposed" figures conceivable. When Varden's attempt to understand the stranger, to achieve some kind of minor conciliation, is thwarted and finally abandoned, the two can do no more than "regar[d] each other for some time, in silence" (2). At the same time, however, they are joined unknowingly by their analogous relations in the past with Mary Rudge – are at once irrevocably opposed and intimately connected. This is of course precisely the situation of the many fathers and sons in the novel and of the entire, divided English nation as Dickens perceived it.

Similar moments of physical confrontation subsequently occur many times and usually involve characters who are, like Varden and Rudge, both overtly dissimilar and analogically or thematically joined. Geoffrey Haredale and John Chester, old rivals and disapproving fathers, are physically "as unlike and far removed from each other as two men could well be" (12) – almost exactly the comment made about Varden and Rudge – and are contrasted at length in the state-room of the Maypole. Chester is later contrasted with Hugh (23), his son, and Hugh with the rebels John Grueby (35) and Ned Dennis (76). Even mad Barnaby is contrasted briefly with his mother (5). The fact that characters in *Barnaby Rudge* are so often staring critically at one another – recall John Willet "staring" at Rudge "in a particularly awkward and disconcerted manner" (1), Varden and Rudge "face to face" (2), Haredale and Chester "face to face" (12), Barnaby and Varden "peering close" into each other's eyes (6), Hugh and Sim eyeing one another over (31), and so on – only reinforces our sense of a human world in which contrast and separation are the dominant physical principles. Characters stare at one another, become visual antagonists, because each discovers in the other something different, unfamiliar, or threatening.

When characters in *Rudge* are not staring at one another they are very often staring into mirrors: Sim Tappertit, John Chester, Dolly Varden, Emma Haredale, Hugh, Barnaby Rudge, and John Willet are all described – sometimes repeatedly – as examining or resembling reflections in a looking-glass, and seven of the novel's illustrations picture mirrors at six different locations. "Five hundred flickering fires" are "reflected" in the pots and pans and polished furniture of the Maypole Inn itself (33). Of course the fondness of Sim, Chester, and Dolly for mirrors is a sign of egotism or vanity, but, more generally, the mirror is an appropriate emblem in a novel obsessed with varieties of opposition. One sees in a mirror both an equal and an opposite, both a replica and a reversal of oneself; a single image is multiplied into two images confronting and, inevitably, staring directly at one another. The sense of simultaneous opposition and identification experienced when looking into a mirror parallels the situation of characters struggl-

1. Direct quotations are followed by a chapter number in parentheses.

ing against relatives or countrymen or friends, that is, the situation of most of the characters in the novel.

Explicit physical comparison, the symbolic activities of staring and of gazing into a mirror, and the theme of simultaneous opposition and identification all come together in the twenty-third chapter of *Barnaby Rudge*, when Hugh confronts John Chester in his Temple apartments. Chester "survey[s]" Hugh "from tip to toe," Hugh "eye[s]" Chester sulkily – again, mutual staring – and the two are contrasted in detail as Chester sits before his glass:

[Hugh's] own rough speech, contrasted with the soft persuasive accents of the other; his rude bearing, and Mr. Chester's polished manner; the disorder and negligence of his ragged dress, and the elegant attire he saw before him; with all the unaccustomed luxuries and comforts of the room, and the silence that gave him leisure to observe these things, and feel how ill at ease they made him . . . , quelled Hugh completely. He moved by little and little nearer to Mr. Chester's chair, . . . glancing over his shoulder at the reflection of his face in the glass, as if seeking some kind of encouragement in its expression . . . (23).

This may be the novel's ultimate blending of contrasts and similarities. Hugh, making what Dickens calls a "rough attempt at conciliation" (23), is gazing at a man who is physically his antithesis, yet who is also his father, his creator; Chester is gazing at his own reflection, that is, at himself reversed; Hugh, near the end of the paragraph, is also gazing at Chester's reflection, that is, at the opposite of his opposite. Perhaps this is a subtle suggestion that in gazing at Chester Hugh is unknowingly gazing at an image of himself, that the differences between the two are not so absolute as they appear to be. In any case, it would be difficult for the unresolved contradictions of *Rudge* to be more perfectly embodied.

Unresolved contradictions and a sense of ongoing opposition,

finally, are built even into the prose Dickens uses to describe the appearance of individual characters. Dickens' descriptive prose tends, more than is sometimes imagined, to emphasize the contradictions and uncertainties inherent in human appearance, and in *Barnaby Rudge* this tendency is especially pronounced. The conjunction "but" figures prominently in virtually every extended description of appearance in the novel, along with the related conjunctions "though," "although," "however," and "yet," and ordinarily introduces a physical detail that modifies, qualifies, or seriously undermines a detail presented earlier.² Typically we find a fairly direct descriptive statement – "The gravity of [Gordon's] dress, together with a certain lankness of cheek and stiffness of deportment, added nearly ten years to his age" – followed by some kind of reversal or qualification – "but his figure was that of one not yet past thirty" (35). Gashford is "smooth and humble, but very sly and slinking" (35), Edward Chester "strongly made," "though somewhat slight" (1), the elder Rudge "fierce, but shrinking" (2), Barnaby "strong," "though rather spare" (3), John Chester "past the prime of life, yet upright" (10): such back and forth movement, from detail to counter-detail, is incessant. Even the apprehension of the empirically verifiable world leads not to absolutes or certainties but to yet another series of unresolved contrasts and contradictions. The condition Dickens detects in all forms of political, social, and familial intercourse, he detects as well in the individual human figure: in this most oppositional of all novels, characters cannot even avoid opposing themselves.

Works Cited

- Dickens, Charles. *Barnaby Rudge*. Baltimore: Penguin Books, n.d.
Marcus, Steven. *Dickens: From Pickwick to Dombey*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965.

Allegheny College

2. Eleven of the twelve extended physical descriptions in the novel include "but" or a similar conjunction; this ratio is well above the average for Dickens.

Herbert Spencer and the Study of Laughter

Michael S. Kearns

In his article of 1860 entitled "The Physiology of Laughter," Herbert Spencer explains how a "sense of the incongruous" results in that contraction of particular muscles called "laughter." Although the "excess-energy" theory he propounded has since been discounted, Spencer's article remains of interest when compared with both earlier and contemporary explanations of laughter, because it represents an extreme physiological approach to psycho-physical phenomena,¹ and it represents as well an unusual solution to the problem of dualism, the interaction of immaterial thoughts with the material body.

Spencer begins with a simple question: "Why do we smile when a child puts on a man's hat?" (452). "The usual reply," he says condescendingly, "is that laughter results from a perception of incongruity"; he goes on to suggest that this reply is no explanation, and of course he is right that a strictly psychological approach will not account for the physiological phenomenon. However, Spencer is not, as he implies, the first person to notice this problem of explanation. James Beattie's 1764 "Essay on Laughter and Ludicrous Composition," for one, in attempting to identify "what is peculiar to those things which provoke laughter; – or, rather, which raise in the mind that pleasing sentiment or emotion whereof laughter is the external sign," notes that the apparent cause is indeed incongruity.² However, Beattie goes on to point out that incongruity is a function of custom and education and is limited by fear, disgust, breeding, and the like. Moreover, the wit of the moderns is more copious and more refined than that of the ancients, because the moderns have a more extensive knowledge – a greater fund from which to create incongruities. Beattie, that is, stresses the total human context in which the complex phenomenon of laughter takes place; he does not see incongruity as a sufficient explanation in itself.

According to Spencer, the approach through incongruities misses "the real problem," which he identifies thus: "Why, when greatly delighted, or impressed with certain unexpected contrasts of ideas, should there be a contraction of particular facial muscles and particular muscles of the chest and abdomen?" (452-3). The tone of Spencer's article suggests that this is a new question, but the fact is that David Hartley's *Observations on Man* (1749) presents a physiological explanation based on a theory of vibrations, and this explanation is as coherent as that of Spencer. Beginning with examples to show that "vibrations run freely along the Surfaces of uniform Membranes," Hartley points out that children can be made to laugh by slight impressions on the chest.³ The reason? "These Impressions have a direct Influence upon the Muscles concerned in Laughter." Yet Hartley, like Beattie, also sees laughter as a learned activity. Children develop the power to laugh by laughing; they are especially stimulated to it by seeing others laugh. The initial stimulus always comes from surprise; hence as children learn more, they laugh less at some things (physical surprise, for instance) and more at other things (puns and jing-

les). Hartley does not try to relate all of these phenomena to vibrations; despite his desire to construct a Newtonian mechanics of the mind, in the later sections of his *Observations* he relies much more on social, developmental, and comparative observations than on physiological analyses.

The flaw in Hartley's system is that his physiology is completely speculative; in 1749 there was no evidence for vibrations along nerves. In contrast, by 1860 there was plenty of evidence for the existence of currents of nervous energy similar to electrical currents. Although no scientist or psychologist would risk the charge of materialism by asserting an equivalence between these currents and the human mind, it was generally agreed that, in the words of Alexander Bain, "no currents, no mind."⁴ That is, while mind is not equivalent to currents, it does seem to depend for its operation on phenomena in the physical world. As explained by Spencer, the interactions between mind, nerves, and muscles are identical to those in any other fluid system, with pressures and flow rates determined by the size and the number of available channels. The system is more complex than Hartley's, but it is no less speculative than his theory of vibrations.

The final sentence of Spencer's article most clearly sounds the theme of the whole: "We should probably learn much if in every case we asked – Where is all the nervous energy gone?" (466). The general principle with which he answers the question is that "Nervous excitation always *tends* to beget muscular motion; and when it rises to a certain intensity always does beget it"; that is, "the nervous system in general discharges itself on the muscular system in general: either with or without the guidance of the will" (453-4). Not only muscles but also viscera and other portions of the nerve-muscle system can receive a discharge from an excited portion of the system; nervous discharges from one part of the nervous system to another constitute consciousness (455). It is also important that a state of nervous tension seldom if ever "expends itself in one direction only" (456). As an example, Spencer notes that "an agreeable state of feeling produced, say by praise, is not wholly used up in arousing the succeeding phase of the feeling and the new ideas appropriate to it; but a certain portion overflows into the visceral nervous system, increasing the action of the heart and facilitating digestion." Furthermore, if some channels are closed, the discharge must be stronger along the others, and if one direction is determined as preferred by the existing conditions, the discharge along the others will be weaker. Spencer supports his explanation by appealing to well-known facts of everyday life. For instance, "the suppression of external signs of feeling, makes feeling more intense," while intense mental action destroys appetite and arrests digestion (456-7). This kind of explanation Spencer several times calls "a priori inference, with illustrations from facts."

With the explanatory apparatus of nerve-force, channels, and preferred directions, Spencer can answer his opening ques-

1. A good survey article is Keith-Spiegel.

2. I draw from p. 590 and from all of his second chapter on incongruity.

3. I draw from the first few pages of this work, and from pp. 129, 252, 437-41.

4. See the first few pages of Bain's *Mental Science*.

tion: Why are certain muscles involved in laughter? The explanation is that "an overflow of nerve-force undirected by any motive, will manifestly take first the most habitual routes; and if these do not suffice, will next overflow into the less habitual ones" (458-9). The muscles around the mouth are most frequently stimulated by moderate flows of mental energy, and as they are small they are also relatively easily stimulated; hence these are the "first to contract under pleasurable emotion" (459). If the nervous energy is so great that these muscles cannot drain it off, the respiratory muscles will next be stimulated, being "more constantly implicated than any others in those various acts which our feelings impel us to"; if the flow of energy is greater still, the upper limbs will be called into play, and finally the head will be thrown back and the spine bent inwards (459-60).

Now, this explanation applies to laughter caused by acute pain or pleasure, but what about that stimulated by the perception of incongruity, as for instance "the mirth which ensues when the short silence between the *andante* and *allegro* in one of Beethoven's symphonies, is broken by a loud sneeze" (460). The answer would be that the *andante* has produced in the audience "a large mass of emotion . . . or, to speak in physiological language, a large portion of the nervous system was in a state of tension" (461-2). This energy would have been carried off fully by the ideas and feelings excited by the *allegro*. But the interruption, the sneeze, checks the flow of energy, closing "the channels along which the discharge was about to take place." The new channels opened by the idea of the sneeze are small – after all, it is an insignificant event and cannot trigger ideas that are as "numerous and massive" as those stimulated by the *andante*. The nerve-force must be discharged somewhere, and of course it takes the easiest, most habitual routes, first stimulating the muscles around the mouth, then those of the respiratory system, and so on. There is one qualification: when "the totally unlike state of consciousness suddenly produced, is not inferior in mass to the preceding one, the conditions to laughter are not fulfilled. . . . laughter naturally results only when consciousness is unawares transferred from great things to small – only when there is what we may call a *descending incongruity*" (463).

Spencer sees the nervous system as a physical system governed by the laws of mechanics. It is a system of matter in motion, as his repeated use of the terms *mass* and *massive* indicates. Nerve force is an incompressible fluid that flows along the path of least resistance, and it stimulates and is stimulated by ideas that can be assigned a certain mass. Nowhere in this article does Spencer seem to be using these physical terms as analogies or metaphors; rather, they actually constitute his theory. A comparison may clarify this point. William Hazlitt, like Spencer, speaks in terms of *channels* and *pressures* (3-6). "The essence of the laughable then is the incongruous . . . or the jostling of one feeling against another," Hazlitt writes. Laughter results from a *discontinuity* in sensation. But this description is implicitly metaphorical, unlike Spencer's. Hazlitt makes no attempt to relate the phenomenon

to a theory of physiology; he drops the terms *channel* and *pressure* as soon as they have served their illustrative function. His goal is to survey the types of wit and to explain why, for instance, "we laugh at that in others which is a serious matter to ourselves." The mechanical terminology helps him to get to that point but does not shape his answer.

Now, given the advances made in the study of the nervous system during the first half of the nineteenth century, we might expect Spencer's contemporaries to be closer to his position, but this is not the case. In his *Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, first published in 1872, Charles Darwin quotes Spencer's key statement about the flow of nervous energy and its relation to laughter, but he is more interested in describing the phenomena of laughter: which muscles are involved, why the eyes "sparkle," how the gradations of laughter are related to one another (13-15, 200-212). He follows the same line of thought as does Hartley in accounting for the laughter of children but goes much farther by considering just how the facial muscles gradually develop distinguishable patterns (laughing as distinct from crying) and how this set of habits has probably been developed over many generations. Darwin's study of laughter grows out of his basic inquiry, to determine to what extent "particular movements of the features and gestures are really expressive of certain states of the mind," and his methods are remarkably inductive in comparison to Spencer's "a priori inference, with illustrations from facts." For example, whereas Spencer draws on folk wisdom relating laughter and digestion, Darwin uses photographs to test people's ability to distinguish true emotive expressions from those created in the face by electrically stimulating certain muscles. Considering Alexander Bain's importance in grounding British psychology on physiology, we might expect his approach, at least, to parallel Spencer's. In fact, however, Bain's discussion of laughter has more in common with Beattie's and Hazlitt's than with Spencer's. When historians of psychology identify Bain as one of the parents of physiological psychology, they may be forgetting that the bulk of his major two-volume treatise, *The Senses and the Intellect and Emotions and the Will*, is organized according to the groupings of mental faculties standard since at least the eighteenth century. Most of the physiology is in the first fifty pages of the first volume. By the time Bain discusses the emotion of laughter, he has become strictly a taxonomist of the varieties of laughter in society.⁵ He classes laughter with the aesthetic emotions, which are to be distinguished from emotions associated with the Useful. The two causes of laughter are physical (for example, tickling) and mental; the mental cause is "the Degradation of some person or interest possessing dignity, in circumstances that excite no other strong emotion." Furthermore, "Laughter is connected with an outburst of the sense of Power or superiority, and also with a sudden Release from a state of constraint." Bain uses such words as *outburst* and *release* and speaks of the emotions being released to "flow in their own congenial channel," but his language does not constitute a physiological theory of laughter. In this respect at least, Bain is clearly a

5. *Emotions and the Will* (257-61). I quote from the third edition, the one most readily available; Bain did not change his ideas about laughter significantly from 1859, when the first edition of *Emotions* was published.

psychologist, however taxonomical.

Even "nerve-force," the key constituent of Spencer's explanation, was not regarded by his contemporaries as a known component of the real world. George Henry Lewes writes that although the concept of "Nerve Force" has replaced the old hypothesis of "Animal Spirits," and although there is good evidence in favor of the belief that nerve force is similar to, if not identical to, electricity, the old hypothesis provided a fair explanation of many observed facts, as did the subsequent hypotheses of Nervous Fluid and Nerve Electricity (189-91). Now, Lewes is every bit as devoted to the physiology as Spencer, yet he calls the nerve-force concept a hypothesis and places it in the context of earlier hypotheses. He is much more tentative in his assertions than Spencer, who writes that although it cannot be known "how the excitement of certain nerve-centres should generate feeling," it is "quite possible for us to know by observation what are the successive forms which this mystery may take" (455). Spencer indicates that by knowing these forms we have arrived at significant knowledge about what is actually happening within the human frame; Lewes would object that on the contrary, we are still no closer to explaining what laughter is beyond a contraction of certain muscles.

By concentrating strictly on the physiology of laughter, Spencer makes the study of laughter a hypothetical hydrostatics. That this was not regarded as a profitable direction for research can be seen by the unwillingness of his contemporaries to take it up. Their unwillingness may have been due to another factor as well. A key point in Spencer's theory is that a quantity of feeling can actually take one of three directions: it can stimulate the viscera, the muscles, or a train of ideas. Another example may help illustrate just how radical this concept is. Spencer extends his discussion to explain why nervousness in a recitation situation often disables the speaker, who may have learned the lesson perfectly: "The repetition of a lesson . . . implies the flow of a very moderate amount of nervous excitement through a comparatively narrow channel," whereas there is a "large quantity of emotion" caused by nervousness. The result is that the flow of this large quantity arouses "ideas foreign to the train of thought to be pursued" and hence blocks it from consciousness (465). However, this excess energy can be "drawn off" by fidgeting: "by allowing it an exit through the motor nerves into the muscular system, the pressure is diminished, and irrelevant ideas are less likely to intrude on consciousness" (466).

Implicit in this discussion is the complete disavowal of the mind/matter separation that had dominated psychology and philosophy since the time of Descartes. If the nervous energy can as easily generate a train of ideas as it can a muscle spasm, it must partake of both realms, which is to say that the dualistic position is incorrect. Spencer's contemporaries were well aware of the problems inherent in a dualistic assumption; most tried to solve the problems by asserting a not very credible parallelism of mind and body. They could not break away from the dualist position, because to do so was to invite the charge of materialism. Hartley was excoriated for half a century after his

son brought out a new edition of the *Observations*, an edition that restored the theory of vibrations which Priestley had left out of his abridged version of 1775, the edition by which Hartley was primarily known until 1801.⁶ In the representative words of *The British Encyclopaedia* (1809), the "clog upon . . . the adoption of [Hartley's] grand system of association" is his theory of vibrations in the nerves, a theory unacceptable because it led inevitably to a materialistic view of the mind, hence of the soul (par. 11). If the mind and muscles were equally susceptible to stimulation by nervous excitement, as Spencer believed, and especially if the direction that energy took seemed not to be determined by any act of will but only by a system of hydrostatic relationships, there was no room left in the mind for a divine, that is, immaterial, component. Spencer's suggestion could not be followed up, however powerful an explanation it might have been, because it implicitly removed the last trace of divinity from the human being. Laughter no longer revealed "the pure benevolence of heaven," in the words of Thomas Brown (59). It was simply another mechanistic response of a physiological system that had no place for either the divine or the quintessentially human.

In the larger picture of the development of psychology during the second half of the nineteenth century, "The Physiology of Laughter" should be regarded as marking the most radically mechanistic position that could be taken with respect to mental phenomena. It accurately represents Spencer's desire to explain the mind as a physical system, his belief that the mind is shaped by and is not a shaper of the external world, and his tendency to regard common knowledge or folk wisdom as valid data. In the words of Daniel N. Robinson, Spencer's is a "not-so-dated theory of mental function: the sensory fibers project to specific regions of the brain; repeated stimulation *somehow* results in a greater facility of neural transmission; chemically, prior experiences are stored within the cerebral hemispheres" (328-29). Robinson is translating Spencer's doctrine into twentieth-century physio-psychological terminology; an equally important descendant is the terminology of "psychic energy" given such prominence by Freud.

Nevertheless, to historians the article may finally be as important for what it lacks as for what it contains: there is no mention of the evolutionary perspective on mind that was to stand as Spencer's principle contribution to psychology (Boring 242, Kennedy 47). The article helps us identify what was the key issue for Spencer in 1860 – how to explain observable behavior in terms of environmental stimuli acting through a system of mental laws not just analogous to but identical to Newtonian mechanics. The extreme mechanistic position represented by "The Physiology of Laughter" was an interesting curiosity to Spencer's contemporaries. It was not until a decade later, when he more thoroughly linked this position with the evolutionary perspective in the revised version of his *Principles of Psychology*, that the mental hydrostatics of "The Physiology of Laughter" and other earlier writings attained more credibility. That attainment was more the result of the association with the powerful and relatively acceptable theory of evolution than a result of an increasing tolerance for a strictly mechanistic

6. See Brett (436). Despite its age, Brett's *History* is still one of the best sources on pre-experimental psychology.

view of mind with no place for the ineffable, no place for Soul or Will.

Works Cited

- Bain, Alexander. *Emotions and the Will*. 3rd ed. London: Longmans, 1888.
———. *Mental Science*. 1868. New York: Arno Press, 1973.
Beattie, James. "Essay on Laughter and Ludicrous Composition." 1764. Collected in his *Essays*. Edinburgh: William Creech, 1776. 583-705.
Boring, Edwin G. *A History of Experimental Psychology*. New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1950.
Brett, George Sidney. *A History of Psychology*. Abridged R. S. Peters. Rev. ed. 1962. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1974.
The British Encyclopaedia. Ed. William Nicholson. London: Longman, Hurst, 1809. (The work contains no page numbers.)
Brown, Thomas. *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind*. Edinburgh: W and C Tait, 1820.

- Darwin, Charles. *Expression of the Emotions*. 1872. New York: D. Appleton, 1886.
Hartley, David. *Observations on Man*. 1749. New York: Garland, 1971.
Hazlitt, William. *Lectures on the English Comic Writers*. 1819. 3rd. ed. London: John Templeman, 1841. 3-6.
Keith-Spiegel, Patricia. "Early Conceptions of Humor: Varieties and Issues." *The Psychology of Humor*. Eds. Jeffrey H. Goldstein and Paul E. McGhee. New York: Academic Press, 1972. 3-39.
Kennedy, James G. *Herbert Spencer*. Boston: Twayne, 1978.
Lewes, George Henry. *The Physical Basis of the Mind*. Boston: Osgood, 1877.
Robinson, Daniel N. *An Intellectual History of Psychology*. New York: MacMillan, 1976.
Spencer, Herbert. "The Physiology of Laughter." *MacMillan's Magazine*, March 1860. *The Works of Herbert Spencer*. Osnabrück: Otto Zeller, 1966. Vol. 14. 452-66.

Ohio Wesleyan University

Robert Browning and *Aurora Leigh*

George M. Ridenour

When Robert Browning consecrated *The Ring and the Book* to his Lyric Love, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who had died some years before, he emphasized the continuing role of this nearly divine being in his work (I, 1391-1416).¹ Inhabitant as she is of the "realms of help," to which she has returned after her redemptive sojourn on "the darkling earth," he requests her aid and benediction, "some interchange of grace" to bless and, as we say, inspire his song. He invokes her presence in the "very thought" of his longest and most important single work, which, continuing his adaptation of the Communion Service, he returns to her in thankful oblation. This is what he means by interchange of grace, that grace has been communicated to him, and he gratefully returns it fruits, specifically *The Ring and the Book*.

But this is in a way a curious act of piety. In a well-known letter, Browning assured Julia Wedgwood, who had objected at length to the emphasis on evil in the work, especially to the total depravity of Guido, that "my wife would have subscribed to every one of your bad opinions of the book: she never took the least interest in the story, so much as to wish to inspect the papers" (154). While this stops well short of the horrified revulsion sometimes conjured up by biographers,² and it is true that the mitigating monologues of Pompilia and the Pope had not yet appeared, it still raises questions of why, under the circumstances, Browning thought *The Ring and the Book* a suitable offering to his wife's spirit. The fact that the depiction of the central character of Pompilia is clearly influenced by

his memory of her hardly seems adequate. One might be inclined, then, to seek out other, and perhaps more palpable, traces of Elizabeth Barrett Browning in the poem, traces calculated perhaps to make the work acceptable to her.

The most obvious possibility, since Browning always insisted on the superiority of his wife's poetry to his own, would be the presence in some way of poems of hers.³ And already it is possible to become fairly specific. A.K. Cook, in his *Commentary*, finds a number of such references in *The Ring and the Book*, but nearly half of these come from a single one of Mrs. Browning's poems, *Aurora Leigh*. This is not surprising when one reflects that *Aurora Leigh* plays a role in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's works comparable to that of *The Ring and the Book* in her husband's. She called it a "novel-poem," and described it in the Dedication as "the most mature of my works, and the one into which my highest convictions upon Life and Art have entered." But while Cook's suggestions of specific influence are interesting and worth thinking about, they seem fairly superficial, not to take us into the work in the way one would expect if the assumption of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's active role in the poem is a sound one. As it happens, there is substantial evidence that *Aurora Leigh* is indeed a force at the very heart of the poem.

Before this can be adequately considered, however, it is helpful to glance at the converse of the proposition. To Mrs. Browning, it was her husband who was the unquestionably great poet, and the presence of poems of his in *Aurora Leigh*

1. *The Ring and the Book* will be cited from the Dowden edition. Other poems by Robert Browning are cited from the Jack edition.
2. E.g., William Irvine and Park Honan (409). Such delicacy could seem strange anyway from so enthusiastic a lover of violent French novels. She once entertained Mary Russell Mitford with the description of a work "which begins with a violation and a murder, and ends consistently with a murder and a violation, — the hero who is the agent of this 'just proportion' being shut up at last and starved in a premature coffin, after having his eyelids neatly sowed up by the fair fingers of his lady love." And when she adds: "The smell of all this sulphur has scarcely passed

out of my nostrils! The devils smell so — be sure," she sounds like a nearly ideal reader for *The Ring and the Book* (*Elizabeth Barrett to Miss Mitford* 147-48). (Browning's friends generally showed little interest in the story.)

3. Christopher Ricks has called attention to the fact that when the poet's Lyric Love is referred to as "human at the red-ripe of the heart" (I, 1396) he is returning the compliment of her reference in "Lady Geraldine's Courtship" to his work "which, if cut deep down the middle./ Shows a heart within blood-tinctured, of a veined humanity" (st. 41, 3-4). (*The Brownings: Letters and Poetry* 6).

has always been recognized, though it is not always appreciated how central this influence may be. There are echoes of "Fra Lippo Lippi" in the comments on painting in Book I (esp. 1097-99), and Pippa is paraphrased in the discussion of aesthetic principles in VII, 809-10. But the importance of both of these references is in the support they give to the emphasis on the presence of the eternal in the temporal that is the main general point in common between *Aurora Leigh* and *The Ring and the Book*. And it is worth noticing that Elizabeth Barrett Browning is closer to her husband in her treatment of this subject than she is to Carlyle, whose influence on the poem is clear and has been often pointed out.

Carlyle, in "The Hero as Poet," which strongly influenced both of the Brownings, and which Robert Browning seems to have heard when it was delivered as a lecture (*New Letters of Robert Browning* 19n), presents an eloquent and surprisingly coherent view of poets as, in the words of Aurora Leigh, "the only truth-tellers now left to God,/ The only speakers of essential truth" (I, 859-60). Or as she puts it later: "Art's the witness of what Is/ Behind this show" (VII, 834-35). The image of the "witness" is the poet's biblical contribution, but the doctrine is Carlyle's in its teaching that art is what Ernesto Sábato, working like Carlyle in the tradition of German Romantic thought, usefully calls "ontophany," a showing forth of being (180). But Aurora is closer to Lippo Lippi when she stresses that the ultimate is not merely to be perceived behind the contingent, but in and through it, that appearance is necessary to the manifestation of being and is the necessary means of approach to it. This is the rationalization of the artist who, like Lippo Lippi, gives full expression to nature in order to communicate spirit:

Without the spiritual, observe,
The natural's impossible – no form
No motion: without sensuous, spiritual
Is inappreciable, – no beauty or power:
And in this twofold sphere the twofold man
(For still the artist is intensely a man)
Holds firmly by the natural, to reach
The spiritual beyond it, – fixes still
The type with mortal vision, to pierce through,
With eyes immortal, to the antitype
Some call the ideal, – better called the real,
And certain to be called so presently
When things shall have their names.

(VII, 773-85)

This is the program, of course, that, with important differences, informs both *Aurora Leigh* and *The Ring and the Book*.

A theological grounding for the view of art as ontophany is presented by Aurora in Book III, at a point when she is still trapped in her own self-righteousness *vis-à-vis* her suitor Romney Leigh and his designs for the salvation of humanity through social organization:

What, if even God
Were chiefly God by living out Himself

To an individualism of the Infinite,
Eterne, intense, profuse, – still throwing up
The golden spray of multitudinous worlds
In measure to the proclive weight and rush
Of His inner nature, – the spontaneous love
Still proof and outflow of spontaneous life?

(III, 750-57)

This could easily be taken to reflect the well-known vision of spiritual evolution that plays so important a role in the resolution of Robert Browning's *Paracelsus* (V, 642-777).⁴ Both are nineteenth-century versions of a basically neo-platonic cosmology, and the more orthodox neo-platonism of Aurora's vision, as compared to that of Paracelsus, is significant. For while Paracelsus speaks of "one everlasting bliss/ From whom all being emanates, all power/ Proceeds" (V, 644-46), and goes on in lines pulsating with excitement to a vision of a "perfected" humanity that moves eternally onward toward God, Aurora's vision is at this point essentially static, like that of Plotinus himself. Noticing this prepares us for the kind of change the poet is preparing for both Romney and Aurora at the close of the work. For as this is a view toward which Paracelsus has had to struggle through the course of his poem, the protagonists of *Aurora Leigh* too must overcome their tendency to force reality impatiently to conform to their own programs, social or artistic, and obey what Aurora will call "the old law of development" (IX, 878). In so echoing Paracelsus' "progress is/ The law of life" (V, 742-43), she confirms the change in herself marked by her earlier expression of the principle:

Flower from root,
And spiritual from natural, grade by grade
Is all our life.

(IX, 649-51)

And so both Aurora and Romney are redeemed to a version of spiritual evolution (less ambitious, indeed, than that of Paracelsus) leading to the prophecy of a rather limited apocalypse, in which "new dynasties of the race of men" will create "New churches, new æconomies, new laws" (IX, 945, 947). While this sounds more like "Locksley Hall" than *Paracelsus*, it is the latter that provides the paradigm.

But however we may feel about an *Aurora Leigh* that reads like a domesticated *Paracelsus*, evidence relates *Aurora Leigh* intimately to *The Ring and the Book*. The importance of this connection is suggested by the fact that *Aurora Leigh* tends to be present precisely at vital points of the three most important monologues, those of Caponsacchi, Pompilia, and the Pope. Most notably, the presentation of the central figure of Pompilia by all three speakers is rooted in *Aurora Leigh*. For Robert Browning, indeed, the revelatory force of the immediate understanding he claimed to have had of the "truth" of the documents, found in Florence in 1860, which provide the basis for *The Ring and the Book* was at least partly the result of his earlier experience of his wife's poem of 1857. This can be documented in some detail.

In the first place, the action and significance of *The Ring*

4. Elizabeth Barrett had been much impressed by *Paracelsus* when she read it in 1836 (Miller 10, n. 3).

and the Book itself is grounded in a moment of blinding revelation, what Caponsacchi calls "the revelation of Pompilia" (VI, 1866), that is no more a conventional presentation of "love at first sight" than Catherine Earnshaw's "I am Heathcliff" can be reduced to the traditional hyperbole of love which it clearly echoes. There is the same literalness in both cases. Here a life is literally transformed by an authentic conversion experience:⁵

By the invasion I lay passive to,
In rushed new things, the old were rapt away. (947-48)

The very immolation made the bliss. (953)

Into new state, under new rule
I knew myself was passing swift and sure. (964-65)

These and other passages of the sort must be "heard," and not everyone hears what they read, but once heard the tone is unforgettable. There is a sharp intensity of rapture which, combined with imagery of total transformation conceived in religious terms, I have found suggested in only one relevant passage of English verse, the lines that describe Aurora's father's first sight, in Florence, of her mother. We are told that he

Was flooded with a passion unaware,
His whole provisioned and complacent past
Drowned out from him that moment. (I, 68-70)

She was one of a group of young women moving in procession to the church, where they would "eat the bishop's wafer" (85). This then is developed to depict an experience of personal transformation, in terms of a very Protestant interpretation of sacrament.⁶

A face flashed like a cymbal on his face
And shook with silent clangour brain and heart,
Transfiguring him to music. Thus, even thus,
He too received his sacramental gift
With eucharistic meanings; for he loved. (87-91)

While this in itself would suggest a genetic relation between the two poems, there are a number of specific connections whose cumulative effect can hardly be questioned.

Since it has long been a commonplace that Browning's presentation of Pompilia involves recollections of his wife, it is useful to begin by noticing how Aurora Leigh, who is her creator's principal representative in the work, anticipates Pompilia. That she does so at all may seem surprising when we recall how very active Aurora is in the pursuit of her goals,

while Pompilia is largely (though far from wholly) an image of suffering virtue. But the connection is made through an image specifically associating the "souls" of the two. Romney Leigh, who has always loved Aurora, speaks of how she "from her crystal soul/ Had shown me something which a man calls light" (VIII, 1212-13). In the same way, Caponsacchi pays tribute to the "crystalline soul" (VI, 993) of the Pompilia who is regularly associated with the dawn because of her illumination of his inner darkness (e.g., 1137-46, 1518-20).

More surprising yet may be the fact that there is evidence connecting the very upper-middle-class Elizabeth Barrett Browning herself with her poem's secondary heroine, the abused proletarian Marian Erle. This is seen when Aurora describes Marian's physical appearance. Neither her complexion nor the color of her hair is to the point, but when she is described as having

Too much hair perhaps
(I'll name a fault here) for so small a head,
Which seemed to droop on that side and on this,
As a full-blown rose uneasy with its weight,

(III, 815-18)

one recalls irresistibly both pictures and descriptions of Mrs. Browning herself, especially if one adds the detail that "somewhat large/ The mouth was" (821-22).⁷ This was hardly a connection that Robert Browning was likely to miss, and, coming at the beginning of the treatment of Marian Erle in the poem, could easily have inclined him to connect his wife, however implausibly otherwise, with this particular character in her poem.

Connections between Pompilia and Marian Erle, furthermore, are sufficiently detailed that they must be among the characteristics of *Aurora Leigh* that most influenced Browning's understanding of the materials that are the basis of *The Ring and the Book*. They are of a sort that make it hard to believe that Pompilia would exist in quite the way she does without the example of Mrs. Browning's depiction of Marian Erle.⁸

Speaking generally, they are both persons who rise out of a background of profound squalor to manifest extraordinary qualities of virtue. Pompilia is the bought child of a prostitute (and so is probably the closest English standards could have allowed to the holy prostitute of *Crime and Punishment*, published two years before *The Ring and the Book*), and Marian the daughter of an alcoholic itinerant laborer who beat his wife, whose mother had tried to sell her to the squire, and who will later be raped and left with an illegitimate child. Their backgrounds

5. *The Ring and the Book*, like *Idylls of the King*, operates in terms of the classic Protestant doctrine of "salvation by faith alone." In both works, characters are judged in terms of their response to a central "numinous" character, Pompilia or Arthur. This is fundamental to the shared anti-Catholicism of the two works and, in the case of the *Idylls*, to the special pressure on the "infidelity" of Guinevere, who has so pivotal a position in a social order whose sole bond is its sustaining faith in and toward the King. (The two Victorian "epics" carry on a tradition of Protestant epic represented earlier by *Paradise Regained*, Blake's *Milton*, and Southey's *Thalaba the Destroyer*. Wordsworth's "White Doe of Rylstone" is a related work.)

6. A specifically Protestant communion service is referred to at III, 1113-14

and VII, 875-76.

7. These characteristics are very clear in both of the likenesses of Elizabeth Barrett Browning reproduced in Irvine and Honan (n. 3) between pp. 300 and 301.

8. Robert Browning's friend and biographer Mrs. Sutherland Orr suggested something of this when she associated Pompilia's "sudden rapturous sense of maternity" (in VII, 1222-39) with "Mrs. Browning's personal utterances, and some notable passages in . . . *Aurora Leigh*" (271-72). The principal reference would be to the description of Marian Erle with her infant son in VI, 599-611. More recently, Nina Auerbach has compared Pompilia with Marian Erle, though she does not suggest a genetic relationship (156-57).

are essential to their roles in the two poems. Aurora remarks that on seeing Marian for the first time, in a squalid part of London, she was struck by the "ineffable face" of "this daughter of the people," and adds

Such soft flowers
From such rough roots? (III, 806-7)

This seems to have exfoliated into the Pope's luxuriant metaphor describing Pompilia as

this mere chance-sown, cleft-nursed seed
That sprang up by the wayside 'neath the foot
Of the enemy, (X, 1040-42)

which, grown to a flower, turns heliotropically to the divine sun, and is praised as "My flower,/ My rose, I gather for the breast of God" (1044-46).

This is the Marian Erle who makes her final appearance, Pompilia-like,

still and pallid as a saint,
Dilated, like a saint in ecstasy,
As if the floating moonshine interposed
Betwixt her foot and the earth, and raised her up
To float upon it, (IX, 187-91)

which sounds like recollection of a particular painting of a levitating saint, though the detail of the moonlight underfoot could suggest a "naturalized" version of the iconography of the Immaculate Conception.

This would anticipate Caponsacchi's comparison of Pompilia to a painting of "Our Lady of all the Sorrows" (VI, 707), as well as his frequent more general association of her with the Virgin, and at least implicitly with Christ. Correspondingly, and rather startlingly, we learn that Marian Erle spoke

As one who had authority to speak,
And not as Marian. (IX, 250-51)

Since this has to recall Matthew's remark at the end of his account of the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus "taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt. 7:29; also Mark 1:22), it seems a conspicuously bold stroke for a pious poet who had been criticized simply for using the name of God too freely in her earlier poems.

While there is a comparable religious imagery in Marian Erle's addressing Romney Leigh as "my angel" (IX, 281) and in her later reference to "Angelic Romney" (IX, 369), which clearly anticipates Pompilia's more systematic characterization of Caponsacchi as "my angel" (VII, 1587) and "the angel" (1617),⁹ the final description of Marian herself is more striking. We hear of

her great
Drowned eyes, and dripping cheeks, *and strange sweet smile.*
(IX, 293-94; my emphasis)

Browning was sufficiently impressed by the phrase in italics (which does remind us of pictures and descriptions of his wife) that he puts versions of it twice into the mouth of Caponsacchi. We are told that, at their first encounter, Pompilia "smiled the beautiful sad *strange sweet smile*" (VI, 408; my emphasis), and that when he was haunted by her image that night and the following day, what he recalled was "the beautiful sad strange smile" (VI, 432).

That there are significant connections between *Aurora Leigh* and *The Ring and the Book* seems beyond question, but it remains to consider more fully what this might mean with regard to the latter. This might be broached by reflecting on the most remarkable of Browning's specific echoes of his wife's poem in *The Ring and the Book*. The Pope's reference in the course of his monologue to "the central truth" (X, 1633) has seemed important enough to serve as the title of a study of Browning's poetry (Whitla), but neither the author of that study nor anyone else that I have noticed remarks that the expression comes from *Aurora Leigh*.

It arises in the course of Aurora's discussion of what could be called "the providence of reading." Aurora has found herself at liberty in her father's very miscellaneous library, and given herself to every book she read. This selflessness, she believes, is necessary for getting "the right good from a book" (I, 709). Some sixty-one lines (730-91), however, are given to a serious discussion of the dangers of such reading. Since "the world of books is still the world" (748), it is subject to the same ambiguities as the rest of human experience. It is impossible to judge, on purely aesthetic grounds, whether a work is true or false, and many "true" works are so badly written that they lead in effect to falsehoods (750-91). But she concludes that precisely *because* "The world of books is still the world" (792), the same providence must govern both, and she believes that in her gravest spiritual danger

God saved me; and, being dashed
From error on to error, every turn
Still brought me nearer to the central truth. (798-800)

In Aurora's analysis, the providential result of the clash of viewpoints encountered in wide and indiscriminate reading is that these viewpoints cancel each other out and throw one perforce upon "a noble trust/ And use of your own instinct" (805-06). "Instinct" here is equated with "pure reason" (Coleridge's "reason"), as opposed to the "bare inference" (Coleridge's "understanding") provided by human opinion (807), and instinct is a "still ray" (810) leading to God.

While none of this could have been news to Robert Browning, it anticipates in a sufficiently specific way the context of the expression "central truth" in *The Ring and the Book* that that context is worth recalling.

The Pope, developing the train of thought started by his reading of conflicting reports on the crime on which he is obliged to rule,¹⁰ has begun by reflecting on the conflicting

9. Marian anticipates two of Pompilia's terms for Caponsacchi (and her tone when speaking of him) when she apostrophizes Romney Leigh as "O, my star,/ My saint, my soul! for surely you're my soul/ Through whom God touched me!" (IV, 970-72). For Caponsacchi as star, VII,

1448-50; as saint, VII, 1485.

10. In the eighth line of his monologue the Pope cites the same biblical verse that forms the first line of *Aurora Leigh*.

judgments on a single historical figure as reported in a history of the papacy, coming to the famous conclusion, always recognized as central to the work, that

Truth, nowhere, lies yet everywhere in these –
Not absolutely in a portion, yet
Evolvable from the whole: evolved at last
Painfully, held tenaciously by me. (X, 228-31)

This leads to a meditation focussing ever more on the centrality of “faith, the pearl” (1436), and to the profession that in spite of the many obstacles to faith, considered in the abstract, he has an experiential certainty of “The central truth, Power, Wisdom, Goodness, – God” (1633).

Both *Aurora Leigh* and the Pope find themselves appealing ultimately to a supra-rational apprehension of reality (“instinct,” “faith”) in a context focussed on the expression “the central truth.” In Mrs. Browning’s “novel-poem” this works itself out novelistically, in a continuous and developed plot, as *Aurora* struggles to define herself, both in herself and in relation to other people, especially Romney Leigh. But in *The Ring and the Book* the only at all comparable struggle is the really very different one within Caponsacchi as he tries to come to terms with what was for him an instantaneous revelation of the true structure of the universe, as communicated to him by Pompilia. So while *Aurora Leigh* is a clear presence in *The Ring and the Book*, it can be used only selectively. Certain aspects have been singled out for reworking.

It has already been noticed that one of the things the two works have in common is a shared relation to the view of the poet as seer presented influentially by Carlyle. Mrs. Browning, as we have seen, paraphrases this view in *Aurora Leigh*, and her husband presupposes a form of it in *The Ring and the Book*. In the case of *Aurora Leigh*, the truth revealed by the poet would be the truthfulness of its depiction of society and the witness it offers to the divine guidance of human affairs. In *The Ring and the Book*, the poet enacts, in the first Book of the poem, his own perception of the truth of the case found in the volume of conflicting documents. For while “paper second followed paper first,/ Thus did the two join issue – nay, the four,/ Each pleader having an adjunct” (I, 198-200) in a manner recalling the themes of the fugue in his own “Master Hughes of Saxe-Gotha,” the result is much less problematic than in the earlier poem. In this case the issues, in their human embodiments, sort themselves out quickly and unequivocally, the absolute evil of Guido confronting the absolute good of Pompilia. The point is the blinding clarity with which, against the murkiest of backgrounds, this opposition is perceived. The “fancy” of which the poet speaks as his own contribution to the “fact” of the truth so perceived is essentially his ability to visualize the action in imagination and to dramatize it in verse, as the subsequent discussion makes clear. A manifestation of good and evil in absolute confrontation is what the poet sees and dramatizes. Confrontation of good and evil of this sort, when it occurs in literature, we may call “melodramatic,” especially if we dislike it, and it is useful to think of both *Aurora*

Leigh and *The Ring and the Book* in terms of this principal imaginative mode of the nineteenth century.

The element of melodrama in *Aurora Leigh* is centered precisely on the character of Marian Erle, which has been found to be basic to Browning’s conception of Pompilia. She is the major beneficiary of that “heightened and symbolical significance” found in the handling of the characters of the poem by Virginia Woolf, who describes them as “snipped off and summed up with something of the exaggeration of a caricaturist” (182-92, 191). For with all the squalor of her surroundings and the sufferings she is subjected to, Marian Erle is invincibly virtuous and, as we have seen, she is ultimately granted a kind of beatification. Evil, typified in the monstrous lady Waldemar, is doomed from the start, and it is just this polarization of good and evil, presented unequivocally and extravagantly, in a kind of caricature, that we think of as melodramatic.

Melodrama, as we know, presents “a manichaeistic struggle of good and evil, a world where what one lives for and by is seen in terms of, and as determined by, the most fundamental psychic relations and cosmic ethical forces” (Brooks 12-13). “Within an apparent context of ‘realism’ and the ordinary,” a melodrama presents “a heightened and hyperbolic drama, making reference to pure and polar concepts of darkness and light, salvation and damnation” (Brooks ix). Melodrama is therefore an intensely moral form that “strives to find, to articulate, to demonstrate, to ‘prove’ the existence of a moral universe which, though put into question, masked by villainy and perversions of judgment, does exist and can be made to assert its presence and its categorical force among men” (Brooks 20).

All of these elements are found in the story of the preternaturally pure Marian Erle, grounded as it is in a harshly unsentimental depiction of poverty in nineteenth-century England, and whose triumph is only muted by the fact that she is after all only secondary heroine of the work and must defer in this regard to *Aurora Leigh*. But the description also applies to Pompilia who, an unchallenged heroine, defeats the forces of evil as manifested in a Guido, who is characteristically seen lurking, sulking, hissing, howling, spitting between his teeth, and showing other unmistakable signs of the stage villain.¹¹

The forces of good in the story of Marian Erle are represented by Marian herself and by Romney Leigh, but in melodrama “virtue is almost inevitably presented by a young heroine” (Brooks 32), and it is she who is regularly exposed to the forces of darkness and is granted the gift of melodramatic perception. So that it is she who flees from the mother who had betrayed her “As if I had caught sight of the fire of hell/ Through some wild gap” (III, 1196-97). And it is she who speaks of the “guide” provided by Lady Waldemar:

With what a Devil’s daughter I went forth
Along the swine’s road, down the precipice,
In such a curl of hell-foam caught and choked,
No shriek of soul in anguish could pierce through
To fetch some help. They say there’s help in heaven
For all such cries. But if one cries from hell . . .
What then? – the heavens are deaf upon that side.¹²

(VI, 1175-81)

11. *The Ring and the Book* shows a world populated by “God’s puppets” as much as does *Pippa Passes* (Int., 1. 194).

12. She even anticipates something of the violence of Caponsacchi’s final apostrophe to Guido (VI, 1944-49) in VI, 1145-49.

But however forcefully this is put, and however conscious we are of the appalling experiences that have elicited it, there is, I think, a stronger sense of the metaphoric, of the use of a figure of speech in these utterances than when Caponsacchi, at the beginning of his monologue, speaks of things disguising themselves "In this sudden smoke from hell" (VI, 2). Here, while the smoke is obviously metaphoric, the hell is not wholly so. And this is even truer of later use of the language of heaven and hell, God and Devil in the poem. *The Ring and the Book*, in its dramatically central monologues, is filled with a sense, as the Pope puts it, of

Power in the air for evil as for good,
 Promptings from heaven and hell, as if the stars
 Fought in their courses for a fate to be, (X, 660-62)

leading to anticipations of "how Christ prevailed/ And Satan fell like lightning" (670-71) – the Christian melodrama, that is, in its full apocalyptic form.¹³

For good or ill, then, *The Ring and the Book* is more consequentially melodramatic than *Aurora Leigh*, with its significantly different focus. Browning has indeed drawn on material provided by his wife's poem in "processing" the materials of his documents; but he has selected and intensified the element of melodrama in a way that would be wholly unsuitable for *Aurora Leigh*. In doing so, in adopting with the utmost seriousness the "manichaeic" program of popular melodrama, he has presented a particularly full expression of an important aspect of that conception of the poem as ontophany that the two poems share. That the truth perceived in the mass of conflicting documents that provides the basis for the poem presented itself in this absolute form was no doubt owing in part to his recollections of his wife's poem,¹⁴ as well as of herself. Even the main non-melodramatic element in the work, the sense that a new age is dawning that will be (however difficult, in this case) on the whole superior to what had gone before, is shared, as we have seen, with *Aurora Leigh*, as well as with his own *Paracelsus*.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's major poem, then, has helped shape a vision of the moral structure of the universe which she would certainly have approved, however little interest she had shown during her life in the story on which the poem is based. *The Ring and the Book* reveals that interchange of grace petitioned for in the invocation of the poet to his Lyric Love, and is a wholly suitable offering to her.

Works Cited

- Auerbach, Nina. *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982.
- Brooks, Peter. *The Melodramatic Imagination*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1976.
- Browning, Elizabeth Barrett. *Aurora Leigh*. Ed. Cora Kaplan. London: The Women's Press, 1978.
- _____. *Elizabeth Barrett to Miss Mitford*. Ed. Betty Miller. London: John Murray, 1954.
- Browning, Robert. *Browning: Poetical Works 1833-1844*. Ed. Ian Jack. London: Oxford UP, 1970.
- _____. *New Letters of Robert Browning*. Ed. William Clyde DeVane and Kenneth Leslie Knickerbocker. New Haven: Yale UP, 1950.
- _____. *The Ring and the Book*. Ed. Edward Dowden. London: Oxford UP, 1912.
- The Brownings: Letters and Poetry*. Ed. Christopher Ricks. New York: Doubleday, 1970.
- Cook, A. K. *A Commentary upon Browning's "The Ring and the Book."* London: Oxford UP, 1920.
- Irvine, William and Park Honan. *The Book, the Ring, and the Poet: A Biography of Robert Browning*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974.
- Orr, Mrs. Sutherland. *Life and Letters of Robert Browning*. New rev. ed. in part rewritten by Frederic G. Kenyon. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1908.
- Robert Browning and Julia Wedgewood: A Broken Friendship as Revealed in their Letters*. Ed. Richard Curle. New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1937.
- Sábato, Ernesto. *Abaddón el exterminador*. Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1981.
- Whitla, William. *The Central Truth: The Incarnation in Robert Browning's Poetry*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1963.
- Woolf, Virginia. "Aurora Leigh." In *The Second Common Reader*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanich, 1960.

Hunter College of the
 City University of New York

Coming in The Victorian Newsletter

- Harriet Farwell Adams "Prelude and Finale to *Middlemarch*"
- Margaret M. Berg "*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*: Anne Brontë's *Jane Eyre*"
- Ross Borden "Pater's Temporizing: The 'Conclusion' to *The Renaissance*"
- Charisse Gendron "*Eothen* Again"
- Suzanne Rahn "The Sources of Ruskin's *Golden River*"
- Elizabeth Wheeler "Great Burke and Poor Boswell: Carlyle and the Historian's Task"

13. He is of course very wrong when he goes on to predict that "No bard [will] describe in verse" (X, 670) the real issues manifested by the murder case.

14. As well as to Shelley's highly "melodramatic" *Cenci* (Brooks 107), whose strong anti-patriarchal emphasis is also present, though less sweepingly, in *The Ring and the Book*. Robert Browning's two great loves, Shelley and his wife, come together in the poem.

Books Received

- Buckler, William E. *Man and His Myths: Tennyson's "Idylls of the King" in Critical Context*. New York and London: New York Univ. Press, 1984. Pp. xiii + 360. \$42.50. A volume divided into four parts: "A Critical Orientation," which establishes the perspective of the book; "A Critical Reading," which gives Buckler's reading; "A Critical Profile: . . . 1953-1981," which provides selected commentary from 39 critics; and "Five Essays in Redirection," by Buckler.
- A *Carlyle Reader: Selections from the Writings of Thomas Carlyle*. Ed. G. B. Tennyson. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984. Pp. xlvi + 497. \$44.50 cloth, \$9.95 paper. Some selections from his journal; 5 essays; all of *Sartor*; selections from *The French Revolution*, from *Heroes and Hero-worship*, from *Past and Present*, from *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, from the *Life of Sterling*, from the *History of Frederick the Great*, from *The Early Kings of Norway*, from *Reminiscences*; and selected letters. First published by Random House, 1969.
- Dorn, Karen. *Players and Painted Stage: The Theatre of W.B. Yeats*. Sussex: Harvester Press; Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble, 1984. Pp. xiv + 143. \$24.95. An examination of Yeats's contributions to modern theatre, primarily twentieth-century rather than Victorian.
- Frank, Lawrence. *Charles Dickens and the Romantic Self*. Lincoln and London: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1984. Pp. 283. \$23.95. A psychoanalytic approach to the late novels – from *Dombey* to *Drood*: "Dickens and Freud write within the context of a romantic tradition that informs the assumptions by which Dickens imagines the careers of his characters and by which Freud attempts to understand the dilemmas of his patients" (p. 6). Nicely written.
- Heininger, Mary Lynn Stevens et al. *A Century of Childhood 1820-1920*. Rochester, N.Y.: The Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum, 1984. Pp. [xii] + 142. \$9.95 (\$2.00 handling), paper. Both a catalog of the exhibit, which will run through 1985, and a series of essays: "Children, Childhood, and Change in America, 1820-1920," "Cradle to Crib: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Children's Furniture," "The Schooling of American Childhood: The Emergence of Learning Communities," "The Caddie Woodlawn Syndrome: American Childhood in the Nineteenth Century," "Scientific Thought and the Nature of Children in America, 1820-1920." Obviously concentrates on American rather than English experience, but cross cultural influences should make these studies of an emerging field interesting to students of English Victorian culture.
- Hollington, Michael. *Dickens and the Grotesque*. London & Sydney: Croom Helm; Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1984. Pp. [viii] + 261. \$27.50. "In an attempt to suggest the range and prominence of a 'rhetoric of the grotesque' [Hollington] has something to say about all the major works and several of the minor ones" (p. [v]).
- Maynard, John. *Charlotte Brontë and Sexuality*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984. Pp. x + 262. \$29.95. Maynard argues that Brontë "creates a full discourse on sexuality; indeed, she offers the fullest and most sophisticated discussion of sexual issues of any major Victorian writer before Hardy" and claims "that Brontë realizes, in her artistic vision, most of the major assumptions of the sexual revolution of Havelock Ellis, Freud, and their successors" (p. viii).
- Morton, Peter. *The Vital Science: Biology and the Literary Imagination, 1860-1900*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984. Pp. [xi] + 257. \$29.95. Morton argues "that in late-Victorian Britain a group of novelists and essayists (not poets . . .) thoroughly searched among the data of the life sciences and found there material peculiarly susceptible to imaginative transformation . . . [He goes on to] expand, define and illustrate this claim by looking . . . at certain biological 'unit ideas' . . . which in [the] span of forty years were of extreme interest to the theoretical scientist and man of letters alike" (p. 6).
- Plays by Dion Boucicault*. Ed. Peter Thomson. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984. Pp. [xi] + 238. \$44.50 cloth, \$15.95 paper. Plays included are: *Used Up*, *Old Heads and Young Hearts*, *Jessie Brown*, *The Octoroon*, and *The Shaughraun*.
- Orel, Harold. *Victorian Literary Critics*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984. Pp. ix + 243. \$25.00. The critics are: George Henry Lewes, Walter Bagehot, Richard Holt Hutton, Leslie Stephen, Andrew Lang, George Saintsbury and Edmund Gosse. Orel reviews "sufficient biographical data to enable a reader to see how and in what respects a life experience leads to a literary concern; the most important publications. . .; an evaluation of the major features of his opinions on books and the literary life; and a consideration of the viability of some of his writings for the late twentieth century" (p. 2).
- Sexuality and Victorian Literature*. Ed. Don Richard Cox. Tennessee Studies in Literature 27. Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1984. Pp. x + 268. \$21.95 cloth, \$10.95 paper. 15 essays on a variety of figures and genres.
- Smith, Peter. *Public and Private Value: Studies in the Nineteenth Century Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984. Pp. ix + 244. \$29.95. The novels treated are: *Little Dorrit*, *L'Education sentimentale*, *Bouvard et Pecuchet*, *The Princess Casamassima*, *The Ambassadors*, and *Nostramo*.
- Turner, Frank M. *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain*. New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1984. Pp. [xvii] + 461. \$14.95 paper. A paper edition of the 1981 cloth edition (\$35.00) noticed in *Victorian Newsletter*, Spring 1981.
- Watt, George. *The Fallen Woman in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel*. London: Croom Helm; Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble, 1984. Pp. 231. \$27.50. A study of eight fallen women: Nancy, Ruth, Carry Brattle and Kate O'Hara, Mercy Merrick, Ida Starr, Tess, and Ethel Waters.
- Woodfield, James. *English Theatre in Transition 1881-1914*. London: Croom Helm; Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble, 1984. Pp. 213. \$27.50.

Victorian Group News

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The next Victorians Institute Meeting will be held at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. on October 4th and 5th, 1985. The conference topic will be "The Uses of the Past in Victorian Culture." Papers should be submitted to the 1985 conference chairman, John Pfordresher, at the Department of English, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. 20057. The deadline for submissions is June 1st of 1985.

The Carolinas Symposium on British Studies will be held at East Tennessee State University on October 12 and 13, 1985. The Symposium provides an annual forum for the delivery of scholarly presentations and the exchange of ideas relating to all aspects of British studies, including literature, history, art, music, and architecture. The program committee invites proposals for individual papers, full sessions, and panel discussions. A \$100 prize will be awarded for the best paper from among those read at the Symposium and submitted to the evaluation committee by the following May. Proposals should be sent by April 15, 1985 to James H. McGavran, Jr., English Department, UNCC, Charlotte, NC 28223.

The annual International Brontë Scholars' Conference will be held at the University of Leeds 23 July to 3 August 1985. For information contact Director of Continuing Education, Department of Adult & Continuing Education, The University, Leeds, LS2 9JT, UK.

The *Victorians Institute Journal*, which publishes critical essays on Victorian literature, art, and history, will add a new section of some 35 pp. per issue which will provide a forum for scholars working on Victorian texts – 1) previously unpublished materials (literary texts, letters, journal entries, etc.) transcribed and edited; 2) articles about previously published texts describing unrecorded variant readings in MSS, later authorial emendations, marginalia, etc.; 3) articles describing on-going work on long Victorian texts; 4) articles republishing Victorian texts now hard to obtain, edited and annotated.

The *Texts Supplement* will first appear in Issue #14 in 1986. Immediate submissions to Associate Editor, John Pfordresher, English Dept., Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. 20057.

NOTICE

The number on your address label is the number of the last issue covered by your subscription. Renewals should be made at the rate of \$5/yr or \$9/2 yr – \$6 Foreign and Canada.

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, 63, 64, 65, 66.