Victorian and Modern English Literature: A Reader

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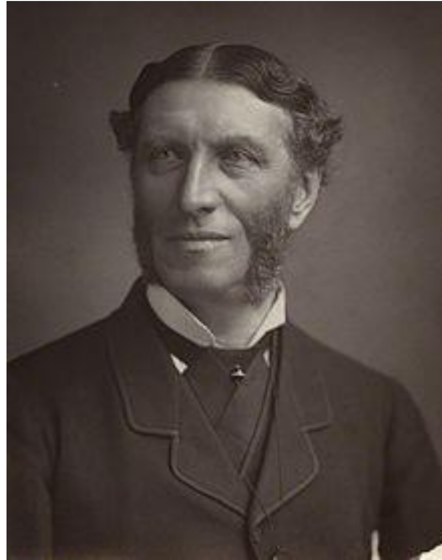
NINETEENTH CENTURY ENGLISH POETRY

MATTHEW ARNOLD



Matthew Arnold (1822 – 1888) was an author of poetry and essays on cultural, social, and literary criticism. He was also a university lecturer and a school inspector.

Matthew Arnold was a son of famous Dr. Thomas Arnold, the headmaster of Rugby School, one of the first free grammar schools for boys in Great Britain. His brother Tom was also a literary professor, while his brother William was a novelist. One of his prominent neighbours in the Lake District was William Wordsworth. This prolific surrounding early influenced Mathew Arnold's interests and the choice of career. Thus, as a very young man he already received prizes for his poetry and essays.

He graduated in 1844 with a honours degree in Literae Humaniores from Balliol College, Oxford, and soon after was employed as a teacher, first at Rugby and then in Oxford, where later on, in 1857, he also was appointed Professor of Poetry. In 1851 he took over the position of Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools. In this role he frequently travelled, not only across Great Britain, but he also got acquainted with higher education in other European developed countries. He was receptive of examples of good practice that he wanted to apply to English school system, whose development he certainly significantly helped.

These travels certainly helped him develop a more objective and critical view of English society, situation at academia, and literary trends, which he published in essayistic form. From his books of essays, we select: *Essays in Criticism* (1865, 1888), *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), and *Friendship's Garland* (1871). Arnold’s prose work is now a lot more appreciated at academia than his poetry and it is said to have significantly influenced later poets and critics,

such as Thomas Sterns Eliot and David Herbert Lawrence. In the first place, he seriously stood against British isolationism and alleged self-sufficiency in education, culture, and criticism. Having witnessed the developments of the industrial era and the appearance of a new bourgeois society, he argued against philistinism and urged that culture "consists in becoming something, rather than in having something" (*Culture and Anarchy*). When it comes to contemporary poetry, Arnold saw it largely vague, prone to idealistic escapes, which he considered unaccommodating the basic needs of the modern soul which finds itself "wandering between the two worlds, the one dead, / The other powerless to be born" ("Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse"), i.e. the old world in which one could found refuge in a religious dogma, and the new world of science that interrogates the very basis of one's society, as well as each of its institutions, but still could not secure the grasp over mind and spirit of the age. These two presences in contemporary society Arnold sees as "two ignorant armies," ("Dover Beach") the one of the spiritual tendency and the other of the material one, "clashing at night," without being able to see, i.e. to know each other, and develop a dialogue. To help a sensitive soul find its way out of the modern situation, which "immense, moving confused spectacle, which, while it perpetually excites our comprehension, it perpetually baffles our comprehension," ("The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," in *Essays in Criticism*), Arnold advises his contemporary authors to revive the great and universal topics that can be found in the literature of the past.

Positioning Arnold as a poet frequently after his great contemporaries Alfred Tennyson and Robert Browning, might have been influenced by Arnold himself. He is often quoted to have said (in a letter to his mother written in 1869) that his poems are reflective of the present consciousness, yet that he had "less poetical sentiment than Tennyson and less intellectual vigour and abundance than Browning; yet because I have perhaps more of a fusion of the two than either of them, and have more regularly applied that fusion to the main line of modern development, I am likely enough to have my turn as they have had theirs."

Although Arnold criticized the Romantic vagaries in the poetry of his contemporaries and of the authors preceding them, he himself could not avoid Romantic heritage. However, when the Romantic poet would use a natural phenomenon to assume a search for a transcendent truth, Arnold, as prone to realistic deliverance, remains in the given set of circumstances, although still symbolic and not of a lesser purpose, which he exposes through a simpler choice of vocabulary, line, and syntax.

From Arnold's published poetry, we selected: *The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems* (1849, which contains his poem "Forsaken Merman"), *Empedocles on Etna and Other Poems* (1852, which contains "Tristan and Isolda"), *Poems* (1853, containing "Sohrab and Rustum"), and *New Poems* (1867, containing "Rugby Chapel," "Heine's Grave," and "Dover Beach").

SELECTED CRITICISM

Peter Melville Logan, "On Culture: Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, 1869," in *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*. Ed. Dino Franco Felluga. Extension of *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*. http://www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=peter-logan-on-culture-matthew-arnolds-culture-and-anarchy-1869 [MArch 30, 2019].

Abstract

Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* spells out one of two major theories of culture to emerge around 1870. His theory defines culture in idealist terms, as something to strive for, and in this it helped to shape twentieth-century thinking about the value of the humanities in higher education. Arnold's ideas were closely related to those of Edward B. Tylor, who proposed the descriptive theory of culture adopted by the emerging discipline of anthropology at about the same time.

In *Culture and Anarchy*, Matthew Arnold (1822-88) articulated a theory of culture that continues to influence thinking about the value of the humanities in higher education. He defined *culture* in idealist terms, as something to strive for, and in this respect his theory differs from its anthropological counterpart. Anthropology views culture not as something to be acquired but rather as "a whole way of life," something we already have. This second usage was also a Victorian invention, spelled out around the same time in Edward B. Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871). (See Peter Melville Logan, "On Culture: Edward B. Tylor's *Primitive Culture*, 1871.") The simultaneous appearance of the two new theories of culture suggests an overlapping interest in responding to one and the same problem. Each redefines *culture* from a term limited to individuals to one that encompasses society as a whole. In doing so, each has difficulty actually defining *culture*, while being considerably better at explaining what is not culture. For Arnold, the opposite of culture was "doing as one likes," his term for individuals who act out of self-interest, without regard for the greater good. He did not see this as a choice so much as the consequence of an inability to imagine a world beyond one's limited, subjective perspective. In this sense, "doing as one likes" closely resembles the problem Tylor identified among "primitives," who displayed the same incapacity. Notwithstanding the evident difference between Arnold's treatise on Victorian Britain and Tylor's on human prehistory, both works focus on the problem of overcoming a narrow subjectivism and learning to comprehend the social body as a whole. The two are thus more alike than not, representing different approaches to the same problem, rather than two unrelated uses of the terms *culture* (see Stocking).

Later uses of Arnold's ideas by educators, scholars, and even politicians tend to obscure the deeper connection between the two theories. Arnold's culture is idealist; it represents something to be strived for, and this makes it prone to claims

of elitism. His concept is sometimes used to equate culture with the mastery of a body of exemplary materials, such as a set of "Great Books." In this view, Arnoldian culture is ultimately something available primarily to the educated fortunate few while inaccessible to many.

It did not start out that way. *Culture and Anarchy* was original in contesting precisely this elitist view of culture as connoisseurship, or an appreciation of the fine arts. This was the current sense of the word when Arnold began writing. The word *culture* originated in the world of farming, as a term for tending crops or animals, which is where we get the word *agriculture* (Williams 87-93). From this, it developed a metaphorical meaning in the eighteenth century for culturing the mind, rather than crops. And in this latter sense it became associated by the early nineteenth century with a knowledge of Greek, Latin, and the fine arts. Because these were standard elements of a gentleman's education, the acquisition of culture was a sign of one's elite status.

Arnold objects to this narrow definition of *culture*, calling it a combination of "vanity and ignorance," and attacking its acolytes as people who value culture solely as a form of "class distinction," a "badge" that separates them "from other people who have not got it" (*Culture* 90). Instead, he argues, culture is a combination of broad intellectual interests with the goal of social improvement. "There is a view in which all the love of our neighbor, the impulses towards action, help, and beneficence, the desire for removing human error, clearing human confusion, and diminishing human misery, the noble aspiration to leave the world better and happier than we found it,—motives eminently such as are called social,—come in as part of the grounds of culture, and the main and pre-eminent part" (91). Culture combines this commitment to "the moral and social passion for doing good" with the ideal of scientific objectivity, "the sheer desire to see things as they are" (91). Rather than a means to differentiate the elite from the mass, Arnoldian culture assumes the elite and the mass have a shared humanity. This was a novel use of the term at the time and was seen then as the most striking aspect of his new idea, as his well known critic, Frederic Harrison, recognized in his satire on Arnold's ideas, "Culture: A Dialogue" (1867).

Both personal and social factors contributed to Arnold's redefinition. He was the son of a famous educator, Thomas Arnold (1795-1842), who insisted that, whatever goals one pursued in life, they had to be socially useful. It was not enough, in other words, to pursue one's interests for selfish reasons alone. As a dedicated poet in his early adulthood, Arnold grappled with the problem of reconciling his love of fine art with the need for social utility, a topic that formed the mainstay of his written correspondence with his closest friend, the poet Arthur Hugh Clough (1819-61). In this regard, Arnold was representative of an era in which many artists questioned the relevance of art to society, even as Victorian Britain underwent a radical social transformation, leaving behind its agricultural past in the wake of the new industrial economy. In the middle decades of the century, Britain was particularly turbulent, famously unsettled by the inhumanity of early industrialism and the demands of a vocal working-class for political representation. In one of the most well known incidents, on 23 July 1866, a large crowd gathered at Hyde Park in London to hear speakers on voting rights. They

were confronted by police when the government declared the meeting an illegal assembly. Soldiers were called out when 200,000 people entered the park anyway, knocking down fences meant to keep them out. The incident precipitated Arnold's thinking, and its violence represents the "Anarchy" in *Culture and Anarchy*. While staunchly opposing violence, he nevertheless understood the need for social change. As one of his biographers notes, Arnold's job as a School's Inspector exposed him "to more working-class children than any other poet who has ever lived" (Honan 218-19). The injection of social change into his new theory was the formula he sought to combine his own love of fine art with social utility.

His ideas were predicated as a solution to the problem represented by the Hyde Park Incident, which he believed demonstrated the need for greater social unity to counter the danger of a divided society. He described Britain as suffering from the conflicting interests of three different classes of people, and he gave each a new name meant to describe its predominant trait. The land-owning aristocracy are "Barbarians," referencing their medieval origin as warriors in ironic contrast to their modern indulgence in a life of privileged ease. The commercial and industrial middle class of manufacturers, artisans, shopkeepers, and bankers are "Philistines," a term that ever since has described a combination of materialism with a disdain for art and the intellect. Poorly-paid laborers, agricultural tenants, scavengers, and the unemployed are the "Populace." This last was by far the largest of the three classes. To Arnold, its discontent represented the greatest threat of all to British social stability, and he used the Hyde Park incident to illustrate this. But the central problem was that all three groups viewed the world differently because the perception of each was limited to its own self interest. Barbarians want higher prices for the grain that grows on their land to increase their wealth. But the Populace want lower prices for the loaf of bread made from that grain. And the Philistine factory owners fear having to increase wages to workers who could no longer afford a loaf of bread. This historical conflict was enshrined in the political fight over Britain's "Corn Laws," marked by massive demonstrations until their repeal in 1846, and it serves as one example of Arnold's analysis of Britain's central problem: none of the three classes understood or acknowledged the needs of the others. Without that mutuality, society was hopelessly locked in civil conflict.

He called this class-bound perspective the "ordinary self," while its opposite was the "best self," a transcendent perspective that recognizes the needs of others and puts the greater good ahead of class interest or personal gain. As he explained, "in each class there are born a certain number of natures with a curiosity about their best self, with a bent for seeing things as they are, for disentangling themselves from machinery, for simply concerning themselves with reason and the will of God, and doing their best to make these prevail; —for the pursuit, in a word, of perfection" (144). The best self exemplified his cultural ideal because it reflects the same "moral and social passion for doing good" that distinguished his theory of culture from others. Furthermore, individuals who are dominated by the best self, he says, belong to no class, since the best self "always tends to take them out of their class," regardless of their actual social position (146). Neither Barbarian, nor Philistine, nor Populace, such people were "aliens," as he called them. Where did their detachment come from? The "number of those who will succeed in developing

this happy instinct will be greater or smaller, in proportion both to the force of the original instinct within them, and to the hindrance or encouragement which it meets with from without" (146). Many are born with this propensity, but education and other forms of social acceptance are needed to bring it out. Increasing the number of aliens in society was a central concern of *Culture and Anarchy*, which also argued that the State should restructure education with this goal in mind. Arnold's use of aliens entailed a paradox: while defining them as the essential agents of social reform, he also insisted that they were "out of their class." Since society is defined by the three classes, aliens are not "in" society so much as outside it, and yet these outsiders were the lynchpin of reforming the society to which they do not belong.

If class conflicts divided society in the present, they were not the only cause of civil fractures. Changes in social values over time divided it as well, and these contributed to the present state of anarchy. Arnold described social history as alternating between two poles, epitomized by the two cultures of Western classical antiquity as Victorians understood them. In Rome, an interest in efficiency, practicality, and orthodoxy dominated, and thus the Romans were brilliant builders and had a disciplined military. In classical Greece, innovation and interests in creativity and beauty predominated, and so Greek sculpture and philosophy were their primary strengths. Calling the former "Hebraism" (he associated Roman discipline with Jewish dietary prescriptions) and the latter "Hellenism," Arnold insisted that both were needed, and that when society was dominated by one or the other, the job of culture was to advocate for balance. "The governing idea of Hellenism is *spontaneity of consciousness*; that of Hebraism, *strictness of conscience*," he explained, referencing creativity on the one hand and discipline on the other (165). And he argued, "between these two points of influence moves our world. At one time it feels more powerfully the attraction of one of them, at another time of the other; and it ought to be, though it never is, evenly and happily balanced between them" (163-64). At present, he argued, Britain is predominantly Hebraic, meaning that it values business and practicality more than art or beauty; similarly, he thought people adhered to social conventions and religious laws rather than valuing spontaneity and novelty. Historically, this pattern began in the period following the Renaissance, he claimed, when Britain was dominated by the Puritans, and their values continued to define British society in the nineteenth century. Culture thus should promote an interest in art and beauty as a response to this imbalance, which he called a "contravention of the natural order" (175). Society needs a strong dose of Hellenism, and so Arnoldian culture favored originality in thought, creativity in art, and experimentation in science, all without regard for practical outcomes.

Arnold particularly attacked conventionality and mindless conformity, whether it stemmed from religion or politics. Instead of thinking for themselves, people accept everything they are told as if it were infallibly good, without considering it further. The belief in Britain's industrial might, for example, is too often seen as proof of Britain's greatness, and people stop asking whether or not this industrial might has led to a better life for the British people as a whole. Such beliefs he insisted are "machinery," tools to accomplish a goal, but too often people confuse the means with the end. "Faith in machinery is, I said, our besetting danger;

often in machinery most absurdly disproportioned to the end which this machinery, if it is to do any good at all, is to serve; but always in machinery, as if it has a value in and for itself" (96). Free trade, for example, was thought to be a means to a better economic life, but when it is treated as a sacred cow, people fail to ask the most basic questions: since free trade has not led to a better life for those starving in London's East End, why should we continue to insist upon free trade as if it were a magical solution to Britain's problems? And without asking such questions, no one would consider ways to modify free trade to gain the desired end of an improved economic life. The idea of free trade was machinery, but machinery that is fetishized when people think of it as intrinsically valuable, a goal unto itself, rather than a means to an end. Examples of machinery included an uncritical faith in the value of population growth, or industrial production, or railroads, or the accumulation of wealth, or even individual liberty. People idolized the concept of democracy, he claimed, forgetting that it was a means to social justice, and what we care about is social justice, not the idol of democracy itself.

Culture's solution to these problems is "turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits" (233). Intellectual free play is culture's central value. Without caring about personal gain or how something might benefit one's social class, the best self views existing problems in a disinterested fashion, setting aside all self interest to arrive at new ideas for old problems (see Anderson). The alien's ability to think beyond the ordinary self illustrates this intellectual freedom, and it represents the antidote to the Puritan's insistence on orthodox conformity. "The Puritan's great danger," noted Arnold, is that he thinks he already knows the rule, and so knows all he needs, and "then remains satisfied with a very crude conception of what this rule really is and what it tells him, thinks he has now knowledge and henceforth needs only to act, and, in this dangerous state of assurance and self-satisfaction, proceeds to give full swing to a number of the instincts of his ordinary self" (180). There are no pre-packaged solutions in this theory of culture, no given rules, and indeed such unreflective adherence to conventional ideas is antithetical to the very idea of culture, as Arnold defined it. At the same time, of course, nonconformity by itself was not a cultural value; such a claim would simply repeat the pattern of valuing the machinery while forgetting the goal of intellectual free play.

As we can question the idea that aliens are truly outside their society, so we should question whether free thought as such is ultimately possible. Can thought exist, like aliens, free of all social influence? Arnold's theory of free play not only raised the issue, it also illustrated exactly why it is so difficult to assert such independence. More than anything else, his theory of free play resembled the laissez faire ideology of free trade (see Logan 54-61). This of course was the same marketplace ideology *Culture and Anarchy* identified as the source of Britain's social problems. In his classic theory of the marketplace, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), Adam Smith argued famously that commodities compete with one another in the open market, and so long as there are no artificial constrains on that market—such as monopolies and tariffs—the market value for a commodity will closely resemble its "natural" value. This logic reappeared in Arnold's insistence upon the free play of ideas competing with one another, except that Arnold's was a

marketplace of ideas rather than commodities. Conventional wisdom and dogmatism were essentially monopolies in intellectual form that must be eliminated so that ideas can freely circulate to find their natural value in this marketplace of ideas. Paradoxically, Arnold's concept of intellectual free play replicated the logic of Adam Smith's political economy. His solution to the social problems created by commercial free trade was the same free trade in another form, that of an intellectual laissez faire promoting the free exchange of ideas. As a result, Arnold's interest in free play was itself an example of how ideas can be unconsciously shaped by the values of the society in which an author lives. In this sense, Arnold was ultimately a product of his time and his own class, even in asserting the premise of freedom from the contamination of social influence.

In one of Arnold's most important poems, "Empedocles on Etna" (1852), he raised the question of whether or not intellectual free play was actually possible, given all of the unrecognized social prejudices and emotional responses most people experience. When the philosopher Empedocles asks whether or not he has been a "slave of thought," rather than free as he imagined, his answer is ambivalent: "Who can say," he asks, admitting, "I cannot" (1.2.391-95). He then cites as reasons his own emotionalism and conflicts with others. However, he takes consolation in knowing that he has tried: "But I have not grown easy in these bonds— / But I have not denied what bonds these were" (1.2.397-98). The philosopher knows that he is not intellectually free, but he does not confuse the goal of freedom with its absolute realization. This self-awareness lies at the heart of Arnold's theory of culture. He knows that he does not know. This is a more honest intellectual position than the claim of the Puritan conformist, who thinks that he knows the answer, once and for all, and need think no further about the problem. As Arnold claims in *Culture and Anarchy*, culture is a process, "Not a having and a resting, but a growing and a becoming," and so one is never completely free nor successful in acquiring culture but rather always unfinished, to one degree or another, and thus still enmeshed in the social, still to some extent a "slave of thought" (94). In such a predicament, one must continue pursuing intellectual freedom while simultaneously realizing that one never actually has it.

This self-awareness matters because it illustrates how far contemporary beliefs about Arnold's theory of culture have strayed from his original insistence that culture hinges on the willingness to question everything, "to try the very ground on which we appear to stand" (181). Today, Arnold's complex theory of culture is often reduced to the sound bite of his famous phrase, "the best that is known and thought in the world," as if culture itself were contained in a set of specific books ("Function" 283). In fact, that phrase comes from his definition of criticism, not of culture, and it described an ongoing process of evaluation. The best was something yet to be determined, not something already known. Otherwise, there would be no reason for the practice of criticism to exist. Nor would there be a need for the complex combination of intellectual pursuit with "the moral and social passion for doing good" that ultimately lay at the heart of his theory of culture.

That broader interest in understanding the social body as a whole links Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* with Tylor's *Primitive Culture*, and, though both

works presented different solutions, they nonetheless identified an inability to grasp that whole as the essential problem any theory of culture has to address.

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SELECTED POETRY

Dover Beach

The sea is calm tonight.
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits; on the French coast the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!
Only, from the long line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-blanched land,
Listen! you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,

With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Ægean, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth’s shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Rugby Chapel

Coldly, sadly descends
The autumn-evening. The field
Strewn with its dank yellow drifts
Of wither'd leaves, and the elms,
Fade into dimness apace,
Silent;—hardly a shout
From a few boys late at their play!
The lights come out in the street,
In the school-room windows;—but cold,
Solemn, unlighted, austere,
Through the gathering darkness, arise
The chapel-walls, in whose bound
Thou, my father! art laid.

There thou dost lie, in the gloom

Of the autumn evening. But *ah!*
That word, gloom, to my mind
Brings thee back, in the light
Of thy radiant vigour, again;
In the gloom of November we pass'd
Days not dark at thy side;
Seasons impair'd not the ray
Of thy buoyant cheerfulness clear.
Such thou wast! and I stand
In the autumn evening, and think
Of bygone autumns with thee.

Fifteen years have gone round
Since thou arosest to tread,
In the summer-morning, the road
Of death, at a call unforeseen,
Sudden. For fifteen years,
We who till then in thy shade
Rested as under the boughs
Of a mighty oak, have endured
Sunshine and rain as we might,
Bare, unshaded, alone,
Lacking the shelter of thee.

O strong soul, by what shore
Tarriest thou now? For that force,
Surely, has not been left vain!
Somewhere, surely afar,
In the sounding labour-house vast
Of being, is practised that strength,
Zealous, beneficent, firm!

Yes, in some far-shining sphere,
Conscious or not of the past,
Still thou performest the word
Of the Spirit in whom thou dost live—
Prompt, unwearied, as here!
Still thou upraisest with zeal
The humble good from the ground,
Sternly repressest the bad!
Still, like a trumpet, dost rouse
Those who with half-open eyes
Tread the border-land dim
'Twixt vice and virtue; reviv'st,
Succourest!—this was thy work,
This was thy life upon earth.

What is the course of the life
Of mortal men on the earth?—
Most men eddy about
Here and there—eat and drink,
Chatter and love and hate,
Gather and squander, are raised
Aloft, are hurl'd in the dust,
Striving blindly, achieving
Nothing; and then they die—
Perish;—and no one asks
Who or what they have been,
More than he asks what waves,
In the moonlit solitudes mild
Of the midmost Ocean, have swell'd,
Foam'd for a moment, and gone.

And there are some, whom a thirst
Ardent, unquenchable, fires,
Not with the crowd to be spent,
Not without aim to go round
In an eddy of purposeless dust,
Effort unmeaning and vain.
Ah yes! some of us strive
Not without action to die
Fruitless, but something to snatch
From dull oblivion, nor all
Glut the devouring grave!
We, we have chosen our path—
Path to a clear-purposed goal,
Path of advance!—but it leads
A long, steep journey, through sunk
Gorges, o'er mountains in snow.
Cheerful, with friends, we set forth—
Then on the height, comes the storm.
Thunder crashes from rock
To rock, the cataracts reply,
Lightnings dazzle our eyes.
Roaring torrents have breach'd
The track, the stream-bed descends
In the place where the wayfarer once
Planted his footstep—the spray
Boils o'er its borders! aloft
The unseen snow-beds dislodge
Their hanging ruin; alas,
Havoc is made in our train!

Friends, who set forth at our side,
Falter, are lost in the storm.
We, we only are left!
With frowning foreheads, with lips
Sternly compress'd, we strain on,
On—and at nightfall at last
Come to the end of our way,
To the lonely inn 'mid the rocks;
Where the gaunt and taciturn host
Stands on the threshold, the wind
Shaking his thin white hairs—
Holds his lantern to scan
Our storm-beat figures, and asks:
Whom in our party we bring?
Whom we have left in the snow?
Sadly we answer: We bring
Only ourselves! we lost
Sight of the rest in the storm.
Hardly ourselves we fought through,
Stripp'd, without friends, as we are.
Friends, companions, and train,
The avalanche swept from our side.

But thou woulds't not *alone*
Be saved, my father! *alone*
Conquer and come to thy goal,
Leaving the rest in the wild.
We were weary, and we
Fearful, and we in our march
Fain to drop down and to die.
Still thou turnedst, and still
Beckonedst the trembler, and still
Gavest the weary thy hand.

If, in the paths of the world,
Stones might have wounded thy feet,
Toil or dejection have tried
Thy spirit, of that we saw
Nothing—to us thou wage still
Cheerful, and helpful, and firm!
Therefore to thee it was given
Many to save with thyself;
And, at the end of thy day,
O faithful shepherd! to come,
Bringing thy sheep in thy hand.

And through thee I believe
In the noble and great who are gone;
Pure souls honour'd and blest
By former ages, who else—
Such, so soulless, so poor,
Is the race of men whom I see—
Seem'd but a dream of the heart,
Seem'd but a cry of desire.
Yes! I believe that there lived
Others like thee in the past,
Not like the men of the crowd
Who all round me to-day
Bluster or cringe, and make life
Hideous, and arid, and vile;
But souls temper'd with fire,
Fervent, heroic, and good,
Helpers and friends of mankind.
Servants of God!—or sons
Shall I not call you? Because
Not as servants ye knew
Your Father's innermost mind,
His, who unwillingly sees
One of his little ones lost—
Yours is the praise, if mankind
Hath not as yet in its march
Fainted, and fallen, and died!

See! In the rocks of the world
Marches the host of mankind,
A feeble, wavering line.
Where are they tending?—A God
Marshall'd them, gave them their goal.
Ah, but the way is so long!
Years they have been in the wild!
Sore thirst plagues them, the rocks
Rising all round, overawe;
Factions divide them, their host
Threatens to break, to dissolve.
—Ah, keep, keep them combined!
Else, of the myriads who fill
That army, not one shall arrive;
Sole they shall stray; in the rocks
Stagger for ever in vain,
Die one by one in the waste.

Then, in such hour of need

Of your fainting, dispirited race,
Ye, like angels, appear,
Radiant with ardour divine!
Beacons of hope, ye appear!
Languor is not in your heart,
Weakness is not in your word,
Weariness not on your brow.
Ye alight in our van! at your voice,
Panic, despair, flee away.
Ye move through the ranks, recall
The stragglers, refresh the outworn,
Praise, re-inspire the brave!
Order, courage, return.
Eyes rekindling, and prayers,
Follow your steps as ye go.
Ye fill up the gaps in our files,
Strengthen the wavering line,
Stablish, continue our march,
On, to the bound of the waste,
On, to the City of God.

The Forsaken Merman

Come, dear children, let us away;
Down and away below!
Now my brothers call from the bay,
Now the great winds shoreward blow,
Now the salt tides seaward flow;
Now the wild white horses play,
Champ and chafe and toss in the spray.
Children dear, let us away!
This way, this way!

Call her once before you go—
Call once yet!
In a voice that she will know:
"Margaret! Margaret!"
Children's voices should be dear
(Call once more) to a mother's ear;

Children's voices, wild with pain—
Surely she will come again!
Call her once and come away;
This way, this way!
"Mother dear, we cannot stay!
The wild white horses foam and fret."

Margaret! Margaret!

Come, dear children, come away down;
Call no more!
One last look at the white-wall'd town
And the little grey church on the windy shore,
Then come down!
She will not come though you call all day;
Come away, come away!

Children dear, was it yesterday
We heard the sweet bells over the bay?
In the caverns where we lay,
Through the surf and through the swell,
The far-off sound of a silver bell?
Sand-strewn caverns, cool and deep,
Where the winds are all asleep;
Where the spent lights quiver and gleam,
Where the salt weed sways in the stream,
Where the sea-beasts, ranged all round,
Feed in the ooze of their pasture-ground;
Where the sea-snakes coil and twine,
Dry their mail and bask in the brine;
Where great whales come sailing by,
Sail and sail, with unshut eye,
Round the world for ever and aye?
When did music come this way?
Children dear, was it yesterday?

Children dear, was it yesterday
(Call yet once) that she went away?
Once she sate with you and me,
On a red gold throne in the heart of the sea,
And the youngest sate on her knee.
She comb'd its bright hair, and she tended it well,
When down swung the sound of a far-off bell.
She sigh'd, she look'd up through the clear green sea;
She said: "I must go, to my kinsfolk pray
In the little grey church on the shore to-day.
'T will be Easter-time in the world—ah me!
And I lose my poor soul, Merman! here with thee."
I said: "Go up, dear heart, through the waves;
Say thy prayer, and come back to the kind sea-caves!"
She smiled, she went up through the surf in the bay.
Children dear, was it yesterday?

Children dear, were we long alone?
"The sea grows stormy, the little ones moan;
Long prayers," I said, "in the world they say;
Come!" I said; and we rose through the surf in the bay.
We went up the beach, by the sandy down
Where the sea-stocks bloom, to the white-wall'd town;
Through the narrow paved streets, where all was still,
To the little grey church on the windy hill.
From the church came a murmur of folk at their prayers,
But we stood without in the cold blowing airs.
We climb'd on the graves, on the stones worn with rains,
And we gazed up the aisle through the small leaded panes.
She sate by the pillar; we saw her clear:
"Margaret, hist! come quick, we are here!
Dear heart," I said, "we are long alone;
The sea grows stormy, the little ones moan."
But, ah, she gave me never a look,
For her eyes were seal'd to the holy book!
Loud prays the priest; shut stands the door.
Come away, children, call no more!
Come away, come down, call no more!

Down, down, down!
Down to the depths of the sea!
She sits at her wheel in the humming town,
Singing most joyfully.
Hark what she sings: "O joy, O joy,
For the humming street, and the child with its toy!
For the priest, and the bell, and the holy well;
For the wheel where I spun,
And the blessed light of the sun!"
And so she sings her fill,
Singing most joyfully,
Till the spindle drops from her hand,
And the whizzing wheel stands still.
She steals to the window, and looks at the sand,
And over the sand at the sea;
And her eyes are set in a stare;
And anon there breaks a sigh,
And anon there drops a tear,
From a sorrow-clouded eye,
And a heart sorrow-laden,
A long, long sigh;
For the cold strange eyes of a little Mermaiden
And the gleam of her golden hair.

Come away, away children
Come children, come down!
The hoarse wind blows coldly;
Lights shine in the town.
She will start from her slumber
When gusts shake the door;
She will hear the winds howling,
Will hear the waves roar.
We shall see, while above us
The waves roar and whirl,
A ceiling of amber,
A pavement of pearl.
Singing: "Here came a mortal,
But faithless was she!
And alone dwell for ever
The kings of the sea."

But, children, at midnight,
When soft the winds blow,
When clear falls the moonlight,
When spring-tides are low;
When sweet airs come seaward
From heaths starr'd with broom,
And high rocks throw mildly
On the blanch'd sands a gloom;
Up the still, glistening beaches,
Up the creeks we will hie,
Over banks of bright seaweed
The ebb-tide leaves dry.
We will gaze, from the sand-hills,
At the white, sleeping town;
At the church on the hill-side—
And then come back down.
Singing: "There dwells a loved one,
But cruel is she!
She left lonely for ever
The kings of the sea."

Cadmus and Harmonia

Far, far from here,
The Adriatic breaks in a warm bay
Among the green Illyrian hills; and there
The sunshine in the happy glens is fair,
And by the sea, and in the brakes.
The grass is cool, the sea-side air

Buoyant and fresh, the mountain flowers
More virginal and sweet than ours.

And there, they say, two bright and aged snakes,
Who once were Cadmus and Harmonia,
Bask in the glens or on the warm sea-shore,
In breathless quiet, after all their ills;
Nor do they see their country, nor the place
Where the Sphinx lived among the frowning hills,
Nor the unhappy palace of their race,
Nor Thebes, nor the Ismenus, any more.

There those two live, far in the Illyrian brakes!
They had stay'd long enough to see,
In Thebes, the billow of calamity
Over their own dear children roll'd,
Curse upon curse, pang upon pang,
For years, they sitting helpless in their home,
A grey old man and woman; yet of old
The Gods had to their marriage come,
And at the banquet all the Muses sang.

Therefore they did not end their days
In sight of blood, but were rapt, far away,
To where the west-wind plays,
And murmurs of the Adriatic come
To those untrodden mountain-lawns; and there
Placed safely in changed forms, the pair
Wholly forgot their first sad life, and home,
And all that Theban woe, and stray
For ever through the glens, placid and dumb.

Sohrab and Rustum

An Episode

AND the first grey of morning fill'd the east,
And the fog rose out of the Oxus stream.
But all the Tartar camp along the stream
Was hush'd, and still the men were plunged in sleep;
Sohrab alone, he slept not; all night long
He had lain wakeful, tossing on his bed;
But when the grey dawn stole into his tent,
He rose, and clad himself, and girt his sword,
And took his horseman's cloak, and left his tent,

And went abroad into the cold wet fog,
Through the dim camp to Peran-Wisa's tent.

Through the black Tartar tents he pass'd, which stood
Clustering like bee-hives on the low flat strand
Of Oxus, where the summer-floods o'erflow
When the sun melts the snows in high Pamere;
Through the black tents he pass'd, o'er that low strand,
And to a hillock came, a little back
From the stream's brink—the spot where first a boat,
Crossing the stream in summer, scrapes the land.
The men of former times had crown'd the top
With a clay fort; but that was fall'n, and now
The Tartars built there Peran-Wisa's tent,
A dome of laths, and o'er it felts were spread.
And Sohrab came there, and went in, and stood
Upon the thick piled carpets in the tent,
And found the old man sleeping on his bed
Of rugs and felts, and near him lay his arms.
And Peran-Wisa heard him, though the step
Was dull'd; for he slept light, an old man's sleep;
And he rose quickly on one arm, and said:—

"Who art thou? for it is not yet clear dawn.
Speak! is there news, or any night alarm?"

But Sohrab came to the bedside, and said:—
"Thou know'st me, Peran-Wisa! it is I.
The sun is not yet risen, and the foe
Sleep; but I sleep not; all night long I lie
Tossing and wakeful, and I come to thee.
For so did King Afrasiab bid me seek
Thy counsel, and to heed thee as thy son,
In Samarcand, before the army march'd;
And I will tell thee what my heart desires.
Thou know'st if, since from Ader-baijan first
I came among the Tartars and bore arms,
I have still served Afrasiab well, and shown,
At my boy's years, the courage of a man.
This too thou know'st, that while I still bear on
The conquering Tartar ensigns through the world,
And beat the Persians back on every field,
I seek one man, one man, and one alone—
Rustum, my father; who I hoped should greet,
Should one day greet, upon some well-fought field,
His not unworthy, not inglorious son.

So I long hoped, but him I never find.
Come then, hear now, and grant me what I ask.
Let the two armies rest to-day; but I
Will challenge forth the bravest Persian lords
To meet me, man to man; if I prevail,
Rustum will surely hear it; if I fall—
Old man, the dead need no one, claim no kin.
Dim is the rumour of a common fight,
Where host meets host, and many names are sunk;
But of a single combat fame speaks clear."

He spoke; and Peran-Wisa took the hand
Of the young man in his, and sigh'd, and said:—

"O Sohrab, an unquiet heart is thine!
Canst thou not rest among the Tartar chiefs,
And share the battle's common chance with us
Who love thee, but must press for ever first,
In single fight incurring single risk,
To find a father thou hast never seen?
That were far best, my son, to stay with us
Unmurmuring; in our tents, while it is war,
And when 'tis truce, then in Afrasiab's towns.
But, if this one desire indeed rules all,
To seek out Rustum—seek him not through fight!
Seek him in peace, and carry to his arms,
O Sohrab, carry an unwounded son!
But far hence seek him, for he is not here.
For now it is not as when I was young,
When Rustum was in front of every fray;
But now he keeps apart, and sits at home,
In Seistan, with Zal, his father old.
Whether that his own mighty strength at last
Feels the abhorr'd approaches of old age,
Or in some quarrel with the Persian King.
There go!—Thou wilt not? Yet my heart forebodes
Danger or death awaits thee on this field.
Fain would I know thee safe and well, though lost
To us; fain therefore send thee hence, in peace
To seek thy father, not seek single fights
In vain;—but who can keep the lion's cub
From ravening, and who govern Rustum's son?
Go, I will grant thee what thy heart desires."

So said he, and dropp'd Sohrab's hand, and left
His bed, and the warm rugs whereon he lay;

And o'er his chilly limbs his woollen coat
He pass'd, and tied his sandals on his feet,
And threw a white cloak round him, and he took
In his right hand a ruler's staff, no sword;
And on his head he set his sheep-skin cap,
Black, glossy, curl'd, the fleece of Kara-Kul;
And raised the curtain of his tent, and call'd
His herald to his side, and went abroad.

The sun by this had risen, and clear'd the fog
From the broad Oxus and the glittering sands.
And from their tents the Tartar horsemen filed
Into the open plain; so Haman bade—
Haman, who next to Peran-Wisa ruled
The host, and still was in his lusty prime.
From their black tents, long files of horse, they stream'd;
As when some grey November morn the files,
In marching order spread, of long-neck'd cranes
Stream over Casbin and the southern slopes
Of Elburz, from the Aralian estuaries,
Or some frore Caspian reed-bed, southward bound
For the warm Persian sea-board—so they stream'd.
The Tartars of the Oxus, the King's guard,
First, with black sheep-skin caps and with long spears;
Large men, large steeds; who from Bokhara come
And Khiva, and ferment the milk of mares.
Next, the more temperate Toorkmuns of the south,
The Tukas, and the lances of Salore,
And those from Attruck and the Caspian sands;
Light men and on light steeds, who only drink
The acrid milk of camels, and their wells.
And then a swarm of wandering horse, who came
From far, and a more doubtful service own'd;
The Tartars of Ferghana, from the banks
Of the Jaxartes, men with scanty beards
And close-set skull-caps; and those wilder hordes
Who roam o'er Kipchak and the northern waste,
Kalmucks and unkempt Kuzzaks, tribes who stray
Nearest the Pole, and wandering Kirghizzes,
Who come on shaggy ponies from Pamere;
These all filed out from camp into the plain.
And on the other side the Persians form'd;—
First a light cloud of horse, Tartars they seem'd,
The Ilyats of Khorassan, and behind,
The royal troops of Persia, horse and foot,
Marshall'd battalions bright in burnish'd steel.

But Peran-Wisa with his herald came,
Threading the Tartar squadrons to the front,
And with his staff kept back the foremost ranks.
And when Ferood, who led the Persians, saw
That Peran-Wisa kept the Tartars back,
He took his spear, and to the front he came,
And check'd his ranks, and fix'd them where they stood.
And the old Tartar came upon the sand
Betwixt the silent hosts, and spake, and said:—

"Ferood, and ye, Persians and Tartars, hear!
Let there be truce between the hosts to-day.
But choose a champion from the Persian lords
To fight our champion Sohrab, man to man."

As, in the country, on a morn in June,
When the dew glistens on the pearled ears,
A shiver runs through the deep corn for joy—
So, when they heard what Peran-Wisa said,
A thrill through all the Tartar squadrons ran
Of pride and hope for Sohrab, whom they loved.

But as a troop of pedlars, from Cabool,
Cross underneath the Indian Caucasus,
That vast sky-neighbouring mountain of milk snow;
Crossing so high, that, as they mount, they pass
Long flocks of travelling birds dead on the snow,
Choked by the air, and scarce can they themselves
Slake their parch'd throats with sugar'd mulberries—
In single file they move, and stop their breath,
For fear they should dislodge the o'erhanging snows—
So the pale Persians held their breath with fear.

And to Ferood his brother chiefs came up
To counsel; Gudurz and Zoarrah came,
And Feraburz, who ruled the Persian host
Second, and was the uncle of the King;
These came and counsell'd, and then Gudurz said:—

"Ferood, shame bids us take their challenge up,
Yet champion have we none to match this youth.
He has the wild stag's foot, the lion's heart.
But Rustum came last night; aloof he sits
And sullen, and has pitch'd his tents apart.
Him will I seek, and carry to his ear
The Tartar challenge, and this young man's name.

Haply he will forget his wrath, and fight.
Stand forth the while, and take their challenge up."

So spake he; and Ferood stood forth and cried:—
"Old man, be it agreed as thou hast said!
Let Sohrab arm, and we will find a man."

He spake: and Peran-Wisa turn'd, and strode
Back through the opening squadrons to his tent.
But through the anxious Persians Gudurz ran,
And cross'd the camp which lay behind, and reach'd,
Out on the sands beyond it, Rustum's tents.
Of scarlet cloth they were, and glittering gay,
Just pitch'd; the high pavilion in the midst
Was Rustum's, and his men lay camp'd around.
And Gudurz enter'd Rustum's tent, and found
Rustum; his morning meal was done, but still
The table stood before him, charged with food—
A side of roasted sheep, and cakes of bread,
And dark green melons; and there Rustum sate
Listless, and held a falcon on his wrist,
And play'd with it; but Gudurz came and stood
Before him; and he look'd, and saw him stand,
And with a cry sprang up and dropp'd the bird,
And greeted Gudurz with both hands, and said:—

"Welcome! these eyes could see no better sight.
What news? but sit down first, and eat and drink."

But Gudurz stood in the tent-door, and said:—
"Not now! a time will come to eat and drink,
But not to-day; to-day has other needs.
The armies are drawn out, and stand at gaze;
For from the Tartars is a challenge brought
To pick a champion from the Persian lords
To fight their champion—and thou know'st his name—
Sohrab men call him, but his birth is hid.
O Rustum, like thy might is this young man's!
He has the wild stag's foot, the lion's heart;
And he is young, and Iran's chiefs are old,
Or else too weak; and all eyes turn to thee.
Come down and help us, Rustum, or we lose!"

He spoke; but Rustum answer'd with a smile:—
"Go to! if Iran's chiefs are old, then I
Am older; if the young are weak, the King

Errs strangely; for the King, for Kai Khosroo,
Himself is young, and honours younger men,
And lets the aged moulder to their graves.
Rustum he loves no more, but loves the young—
The young may rise at Sohrab's vaunts, not I.
For what care I, though all speak Sohrab's fame?
For would that I myself had such a son,
And not that one slight helpless girl I have—
A son so famed, so brave, to send to war,
And I to tarry with the snow-hair'd Zal,
My father, whom the robber Afghans vex,
And clip his borders short, and drive his herds,
And he has none to guard his weak old age.
There would I go, and hang my armour up,
And with my great name fence that weak old man,
And spend the goodly treasures I have got,
And rest my age, and hear of Sohrab's fame,
And leave to death the hosts of thankless kings,
And with these slaughterous hands draw sword no more."

He spoke, and smiled; and Gudurz made reply:—
"What then, O Rustum, will men say to this,
When Sohrab dares our bravest forth, and seeks
Thee most of all, and thou, whom most he seeks,
Hidest thy face? Take heed lest men should say:
Like some old miser, Rustum hoards his fame,
And shuns to peril it with younger men."

And, greatly moved, then Rustum made reply:—
"O Gudurz, wherefore dost thou say such words?
Thou knowest better words than this to say.
What is one more, one less, obscure or famed,
Valiant or craven, young or old, to me?
Are not they mortal, am not I myself?
But who for men of nought would do great deeds?
Come, thou shalt see how Rustum hoards his fame!
But I will fight unknown, and in plain arms;
Let not men say of Rustum, he was match'd
In single fight with any mortal man."

He spoke, and frown'd; and Gudurz turn'd, and ran
Back quickly through the camp in fear and joy—
Fear at his wrath, but joy that Rustum came.
But Rustum strode to his tent-door, and call'd
His followers in, and bade them bring his arms,
And clad himself in steel; the arms he chose

Were plain, and on his shield was no device,
Only his helm was rich, inlaid with gold,
And, from the fluted spine atop, a plume
Of horsehair waved, a scarlet horsehair plume.
So arm'd, he issued forth; and Ruksh, his horse,
Follow'd him like a faithful hound at heel—
Ruksh, whose renown was noised through all the earth,
The horse, whom Rustum on a foray once
Did in Bokhara by the river find
A colt beneath its dam, and drove him home,
And rear'd him; a bright bay, with lofty crest,
Dight with a saddle-cloth of broider'd green
Crusted with gold, and on the ground were work'd
All beasts of chase, all beasts which hunters know.
So follow'd, Rustum left his tents, and cross'd
The camp, and to the Persian host appear'd.
And all the Persians knew him, and with shouts
Hail'd; but the Tartars knew not who he was.
And dear as the wet diver to the eyes
Of his pale wife who waits and weeps on shore,
By sandy Bahrein, in the Persian Gulf,
Plunging all day in the blue waves, at night,
Having made up his tale of precious pearls,
Rejoins her in their hut upon the sands—
So dear to the pale Persians Rustum came.

And Rustum to the Persian front advanced,
And Sohrab arm'd in Haman's tent, and came.
And as afield the reapers cut a swath
Down through the middle of a rich man's corn,
And on each side are squares of standing corn,
And in the midst a stubble, short and bare—
So on each side were squares of men, with spears
Bristling, and in the midst, the open sand.
And Rustum came upon the sand, and cast
His eyes toward the Tartar tents, and saw
Sohrab come forth, and eyed him as he came.

As some rich woman, on a winter's morn,
Eyes through her silken curtains the poor drudge
Who with numb blacken'd fingers makes her fire—
At cock-crow, on a starlit winter's morn,
When the frost flowers the whiten'd window-panes—
And wonders how she lives, and what the thoughts
Of that poor drudge may be; so Rustum eyed
The unknown adventurous youth, who from afar

Came seeking Rustum, and defying forth
All the most valiant chiefs; long he perused
His spirited air, and wonder'd who he was.
For very young he seem'd, tenderly rear'd;
Like some young cypress, tall, and dark, and straight,
Which in a queen's secluded garden throws
Its slight dark shadow on the moonlit turf,
By midnight, to a bubbling fountain's sound—
So slender Sohrab seem'd, so softly rear'd.
And a deep pity enter'd Rustum's soul
As he beheld him coming; and he stood,
And beckon'd to him with his hand, and said:—

"O thou young man, the air of Heaven is soft,
And warm, and pleasant; but the grave is cold!
Heaven's air is better than the cold dead grave.
Behold me! I am vast, and clad in iron,
And tried; and I have stood on many a field
Of blood, and I have fought with many a foe—
Never was that field lost, or that foe saved.
O Sohrab, wherefore wilt thou rush on death?
Be govern'd! quit the Tartar host, and come
To Iran, and be as my son to me,
And fight beneath my banner till I die!
There are no youths in Iran brave as thou."

So he spake, mildly; Sohrab heard his voice,
The mighty voice of Rustum, and he saw
His giant figure planted on the sand,
Sole, like some single tower, which a chief
Hath builded on the waste in former years
Against the robbers; and he saw that head,
Streak'd with its first grey hairs;—hope filled his soul,
And he ran forward and embraced his knees,
And clasp'd his hand within his own, and said:—

"O, by thy father's head! by thine own soul!
Art thou not Rustum? speak! art thou not he?"

But Rustum eyed askance the kneeling youth,
And turn'd away, and spake to his own soul:—

"Ah me, I muse what this young fox may mean!
False, wily, boastful, are these Tartar boys.
For if I now confess this thing he asks,
And hide it not, but say: *Rustum is here!*

He will not yield indeed, nor quit our foes,
But he will find some pretext not to fight,
And praise my fame, and proffer courteous gifts,
A belt or sword perhaps, and go his way.
And on a feast-tide, in Afrasiab's hall,
In Samarcand, he will arise and cry:
'I challenged once, when the two armies camp'd
Beside the Oxus, all the Persian lords
To cope with me in single fight; but they
Shrank, only Rustum dared; then he and I
Changed gifts, and went on equal terms away.'
So will he speak, perhaps, while men applaud;
Then were the chiefs of Iran shamed through me."

And then he turn'd, and sternly spake aloud:—
"Rise! wherefore dost thou vainly question thus
Of Rustum? I am here, whom thou hast call'd
By challenge forth; make good thy vaunt, or yield!
Is it with Rustum only thou wouldst fight?
Rash boy, men look on Rustum's face and flee!
For well I know, that did great Rustum stand
Before thy face this day, and were reveal'd,
There would be then no talk of fighting more.
But being what I am, I tell thee this—
Do thou record it in thine inmost soul:
Either thou shalt renounce thy vaunt and yield,
Or else thy bones shall strew this sand, till winds
Bleach them, or Oxus with his summer-floods,
Oxus in summer wash them all away."

He spoke; and Sohrab answer'd, on his feet:—
"Art thou so fierce? Thou wilt not fright me so!
I am no girl, to be made pale by words.
Yet this thou hast said well, did Rustum stand
Here on this field, there were no fighting then.
But Rustum is far hence, and we stand here.
Begin! thou art more vast, more dread than I,
And thou art proved, I know, and I am young—
But yet success sways with the breath of Heaven.
And though thou thinkest that thou knowest sure
Thy victory, yet thou canst not surely know.
For we are all, like swimmers in the sea,
Poised on the top of a huge wave of fate,
Which hangs uncertain to which side to fall.
And whether it will heave us up to land,
Or whether it will roll us out to sea,

Back out to sea, to the deep waves of death,
We know not, and no search will make us know;
Only the event will teach us in its hour."

He spoke, and Rustum answer'd not, but hurl'd
His spear; down from the shoulder, down it came,
As on some partridge in the corn a hawk,
That long has tower'd in the airy clouds,
Drops like a plummet; Sohrab saw it come,
And sprang aside, quick as a flash; the spear
Hiss'd, and went quivering down into the sand,
Which it sent flying wide;—then Sohrab threw
In turn, and full struck Rustum's shield; sharp rang,
The iron plates rang sharp, but turn'd the spear.
And Rustum seized his club, which none but he
Could wield; an unlopp'd trunk it was, and huge,
Still rough—like those which men in treeless plains
To build them boats fish from the flooded rivers,
Hyphasis or Hydaspes, when, high up
By their dark springs, the wind in winter-time
Hath made in Himalayan forests wrack,
And strewn the channels with torn boughs—so huge
The club which Rustum lifted now, and struck
One stroke; but again Sohrab sprang aside,
Lithe as the glancing snake, and the club came
Thundering to earth, and leapt from Rustum's hand.
And Rustum follow'd his own blow, and fell
To his knees, and with his fingers clutch'd the sand;
And now might Sohrab have unsheathed his sword,
And pierced the mighty Rustum while he lay
Dizzy, and on his knees, and choked with sand;
But he look'd on, and smiled, nor bared his sword,
But courteously drew back, and spoke, and said:—

"Thou strik'st too hard! that club of thine will float
Upon the summer-floods, and not my bones.
But rise, and be not wroth! not wroth am I;
No, when I see thee, wrath forsakes my soul.
Thou say'st, thou art not Rustum; be it so!
Who art thou then, that canst so touch my soul?
Boy as I am, I have seen battles too—
Have waded foremost in their bloody waves,
And heard their hollow roar of dying men;
But never was my heart thus touch'd before.
Are they from Heaven, these softenings of the heart?
O thou old warrior, let us yield to Heaven!

Come, plant we here in earth our angry spears,
And make a truce, and sit upon this sand,
And pledge each other in red wine, like friends,
And thou shalt talk to me of Rustum's deeds.
There are enough foes in the Persian host,
Whom I may meet, and strike, and feel no pang;
Champions enough Afrasiab has, whom thou
Mayst fight; fight *them*, when they confront thy spear!
But oh, let there be peace 'twixt thee and me!"

He ceased, but while he spake, Rustum had risen,
And stood erect, trembling with rage; his club
He left to lie, but had regain'd his spear,
Whose fiery point now in his mail'd right-hand
Blazed bright and baleful, like that autumn-star,
The baleful sign of fevers; dust had soil'd
His stately crest, and dimm'd his glittering arms.
His breast heaved, his lips foam'd, and twice his voice
Was choked with rage; at last these words broke way:—

"Girl! nimble with thy feet, not with thy hands!
Curl'd minion, dancer, coiner of sweet words!
Fight, let me hear thy hateful voice no more!
Thou art not in Afrasiab's gardens now
With Tartar girls, with whom thou art wont to dance;
But on the Oxus-sands, and in the dance
Of battle, and with me, who make no play
Of war; I fight it out, and hand to hand.
Speak not to me of truce, and pledge, and wine!
Remember all thy valour; try thy feints
And cunning! all the pity I had is gone;
Because thou hast shamed me before both the hosts
With thy light skipping tricks, and thy girl's wiles."

He spoke, and Sohrab kindled at his taunts,
And he too drew his sword; at once they rush'd
Together, as two eagles on one prey
Come rushing down together from the clouds,
One from the east, one from the west; their shields
Dash'd with a clang together, and a din
Rose, such as that the sinewy woodcutters
Make often in the forest's heart at morn,
Of hewing axes, crashing trees—such blows
Rustum and Sohrab on each other hail'd.
And you would say that sun and stars took part
In that unnatural conflict; for a cloud

Grew suddenly in Heaven, and dark'd the sun
Over the fighters' heads; and a wind rose
Under their feet, and moaning swept the plain,
And in a sandy whirlwind wrapp'd the pair.
In gloom they twain were wrapp'd, and they alone;
For both the on-looking hosts on either hand
Stood in broad daylight, and the sky was pure,
And the sun sparkled on the Oxus stream.
But in the gloom they fought, with bloodshot eyes
And labouring breath; first Rustum struck the shield
Which Sohrab held stiff out; the steel-spiked spear
Rent the tough plates, but fail'd to reach the skin,
And Rustum pluck'd it back with angry groan.
Then Sohrab with his sword smote Rustum's helm,
Nor clove its steel quite through; but all the crest
He shore away, and that proud horsehair plume,
Never till now defiled, sank to the dust;
And Rustum bow'd his head; but then the gloom
Grew blacker, thunder rumbled in the air,
And lightnings rent the cloud; and Ruksh, the horse,
Who stood at hand, utter'd a dreadful cry;—
No horse's cry was that, most like the roar
Of some pain'd desert-lion, who all day
Hath trail'd the hunter's javelin in his side,
And comes at night to die upon the sand.
The two hosts heard that cry, and quaked for fear,
And Oxus curdled as it cross'd his stream.
But Sohrab heard, and quail'd not, but rush'd on,
And struck again; and again Rustum bow'd
His head; but this time all the blade, like glass,
Sprang in a thousand shivers on the helm,
And in the hand the hilt remain'd alone.
Then Rustum raised his head; his dreadful eyes
Glared, and he shook on high his menacing spear,
And shouted: *Rustum!*—Sohrab heard that shout,
And shrank amazed; back he recoil'd one step,
And scann'd with blinking eyes the advancing form,
And then he stood bewilder'd; and he dropp'd
His covering shield, and the spear pierced his side.
He reel'd, and staggering back, sank to the ground;
And then the gloom dispersed, and the wind fell,
And the bright sun broke forth, and melted all
The cloud; and the two armies saw the pair—
Saw Rustum standing, safe upon his feet,
And Sohrab, wounded, on the bloody sand.

Then, with a bitter smile, Rustum began:—
"Sohrab, thou thoughtest in thy mind to kill
A Persian lord this day, and strip his corpse,
And bear thy trophies to Afrasiab's tent.
Or else that the great Rustum would come down
Himself to fight, and that thy wiles would move
His heart to take a gift, and let thee go.
And then that all the Tartar host would praise
Thy courage or thy craft, and spread thy fame,
To glad thy father in his weak old age.
Fool, thou art slain, and by an unknown man!
Dearer to the red jackals shalt thou be
Than to thy friends, and to thy father old."

And, with a fearless mien, Sohrab replied:—
"Unknown thou art; yet thy fierce vaunt is vain.
Thou dost not slay me, proud and boastful man!
No! Rustum slays me, and this filial heart.
For were I match'd with ten such men as thee,
And I were that which till to-day I was,
They should be lying here, I standing there.
But that belovéd name unnerved my arm—
That name, and something, I confess, in thee,
Which troubles all my heart, and made my shield
Fall; and thy spear transfix'd an unarm'd foe.
And now thou boastest, and insult'st my fate.
But hear thou this, fierce man, tremble to hear:
The mighty Rustum shall avenge my death!
My father, whom I seek through all the world,
He shall avenge my death, and punish thee!"

As when some hunter in the spring hath found
A breeding eagle sitting on her nest,
Upon the craggy isle of a hill-lake,
And pierced her with an arrow as she rose,
And follow'd her to find her where she fell
Far off;—anon her mate comes winging back
From hunting, and a great way off descries
His huddling young left sole; at that, he checks
His pinion, and with short uneasy sweeps
Circles above his eyry, with loud screams
Chiding his mate back to her nest; but she
Lies dying, with the arrow in her side,
In some far stony gorge out of his ken,
A heap of fluttering feathers—never more
Shall the lake glass her, flying over it;

Never the black and dripping precipices
Echo her stormy scream as she sails by—
As that poor bird flies home, nor knows his loss,
So Rustum knew not his own loss, but stood
Over his dying son, and knew him not.

But, with a cold, incredulous voice, he said:—
"What prate is this of fathers and revenge?
The mighty Rustum never had a son."

And, with a failing voice, Sohrab replied:—
"Ah yes, he had! and that lost son am I.
Surely the news will one day reach his ear,
Reach Rustum, where he sits, and tarries long,
Somewhere, I know not where, but far from here;
And pierce him like a stab, and make him leap
To arms, and cry for vengeance upon thee.
Fierce man, bethink thee, for an only son!
What will that grief, what will that vengeance be?
Oh, could I live, till I that grief had seen!
Yet him I pity not so much, but her,
My mother, who in Ader-baijan dwells
With that old king, her father, who grows grey
With age, and rules over the valiant Koords.
Her most I pity, who no more will see
Sohrab returning from the Tartar camp,
With spoils and honour, when the war is done.
But a dark rumour will be bruited up,
From tribe to tribe, until it reach her ear;
And then will that defenceless woman learn
That Sohrab will rejoice her sight no more,
But that in battle with a nameless foe,
By the far-distant Oxus, he is slain."

He spoke; and as he ceased, he wept aloud,
Thinking of her he left, and his own death.
He spoke; but Rustum listen'd, plunged in thought.
Nor did he yet believe it was his son
Who spoke, although he call'd back names he knew;
For he had had sure tidings that the babe,
Which was in Ader-baijan born to him,
Had been a puny girl, no boy at all—
So that sad mother sent him word, for fear
Rustum should seek the boy, to train in arms.
And so he deem'd that either Sohrab took,
By a false boast, the style of Rustum's son;

Or that men gave it him, to swell his fame.
So deem'd he; yet he listen'd, plunged in thought
And his soul set to grief, as the vast tide
Of the bright rocking Ocean sets to shore
At the full moon; tears gather'd in his eyes;
For he remember'd his own early youth,
And all its bounding rapture; as, at dawn,
The shepherd from his mountain-lodge descries
A far, bright city, smitten by the sun,
Through many rolling clouds—so Rustum saw
His youth; saw Sohrab's mother, in her bloom;
And that old king, her father, who loved well
His wandering guest, and gave him his fair child
With joy; and all the pleasant life they led,
They three, in that long-distant summer-time—
The castle, and the dewy woods, and hunt
And hound, and morn on those delightful hills
In Ader-baijan. And he saw that Youth,
Of age and looks to be his own dear son,
Piteous and lovely, lying on the sand,
Like some rich hyacinth which by the scythe
Of an unskilful gardener has been cut,
Mowing the garden grass-plots near its bed,
And lies, a fragrant tower of purple bloom,
On the mown, dying grass—so Sohrab lay,
Lovely in death, upon the common sand.
And Rustum gazed on him with grief, and said:—

"O Sohrab, thou indeed art such a son
Whom Rustum, wert thou his, might well have loved!
Yet here thou errest, Sohrab, or else men
Have told thee false—thou art not Rustum's son.
For Rustum had no son; one child he had—
But one—a girl; who with her mother now
Plies some light female task, nor dreams of us—
Of us she dreams not, nor of wounds, nor war."

But Sohrab answer'd him in wrath: for now
The anguish of the deep-fix'd spear grew fierce,
And he desired to draw forth the steel,
And let the blood flow free, and so to die—
But first he would convince his stubborn foe;
And, rising sternly on one arm, he said:—

"Man, who art thou who dost deny my words?
Truth sits upon the lips of dying men,

And falsehood, while I lived, was far from mine.
I tell thee, prick'd upon this arm I bear
That seal which Rustum to my mother gave,
That she might prick it on the babe she bore."

He spoke; and all the blood left Rustum's cheeks,
And his knees totter'd, and he smote his hand
Against his breast, his heavy mailed hand,
That the hard iron corslet clank'd aloud;
And to his heart he press'd the other hand,
And in a hollow voice he spake, and said:—

"Sohrab, that were a proof which could not lie!
If thou show this, then art thou Rustum's son."

Then, with weak hasty fingers, Sohrab loosed
His belt, and near the shoulder bared his arm,
And show'd a sign in faint vermilion points
Prick'd; as a cunning workman, in Pekin,
Pricks with vermilion some clear porcelain vase,
An emperor's gift—at early morn he paints,
And all day long, and, when night comes, the lamp
Lights up his studious forehead and thin hands—
So delicately prick'd the sign appear'd
On Sohrab's arm, the sign of Rustum's seal.
It was that griffin, which of old rear'd Zal,
Rustum's great father, whom they left to die,
A helpless babe, among the mountain-rocks;
Him that kind creature found, and rear'd, and loved—
Then Rustum took it for his glorious sign.
And Sohrab bared that image on his arm,
And himself scann'd it long with mournful eyes,
And then he touch'd it with his hand and said:—

"How say'st thou? Is that sign the proper sign
Of Rustum's son, or of some other man's?"

He spoke; but Rustum gazed, and gazed, and stood
Speechless; and then he utter'd one sharp cry:
O boy—thy father!—and his voice choked there.
And then a dark cloud pass'd before his eyes,
And his head swam, and he sank down to earth.
But Sohrab crawl'd to where he lay, and cast
His arms about his neck, and kiss'd his lips,
And with fond faltering fingers stroked his cheeks,
Trying to call him back to life; and life

Came back to Rustum, and he oped his eyes,
And they stood wide with horror; and he seized
In both his hands the dust which lay around,
And threw it on his head, and smirch'd his hair,—
His hair, and face, and beard, and glittering arms;
And strong convulsive groanings shook his breast,
And his sobs choked him; and he clutch'd his sword,
To draw it, and for ever let life out.
But Sohrab saw his thoughts, and held his hands
And with a soothing voice he spake, and said:—

"Father, forbear! for I but meet to-day
The doom which at my birth was written down
In Heaven, and thou art Heaven's unconscious hand.
Surely my heart cried out that it was thou,
When first I saw thee; and thy heart spoke too,
I know it! but fate trod those promptings down
Under its iron heel; fate, fate engaged
The strife, and hurl'd me on my father's spear.
But let us speak no more of this! I find
My father; let me feel that I have found!
Come, sit beside me on this sand, and take
My head betwixt thy hands, and kiss my cheeks,
And wash them with thy tears, and say: *My son!*
Quick! quick! for number'd are my sands of life,
And swift; for like the lightning to this field
I came, and like the wind I go away—
Sudden, and swift, and like a passing wind.
But it was writ in Heaven that this should be."

So said he, and his voice released the heart
Of Rustum, and his tears broke forth; he cast
His arms round his son's neck, and wept aloud,
And kiss'd him. And awe fell on both the hosts,
When they saw Rustum's grief; and Ruksh, the horse,
With his head bowing to the ground and mane
Sweeping the dust, came near, and in mute woe
First to the one then to the other moved
His head, as if enquiring what their grief
Might mean; and from his dark, compassionate eyes,
The big warm tears roll'd down, and caked the sand.
But Rustum chid him with stern voice, and said:—

"Ruksh, now thou grievest; but, O Ruksh, thy feet
Should first have rotted on their nimble joints,
Or ere they brought thy master to this field!"

But Sohrab look'd upon the horse and said;—
"Is this, then, Ruksh? How often, in past days
My mother told me of thee, thou brave steed,
My terrible father's terrible horse! and said,
That I should one day find thy lord and thee.
Come, let me lay my hand upon thy mane!
O Ruksh, thou art more fortunate than I;
For thou has gone where I shall never go,
And snuff'd the breezes of my father's home.
And thou hast trod the sands of Seistan,
And seen the River of Helmund, and the Lake
Of Zirrah; and the aged Zal himself
Has often stroked thy neck, and given thee food,
Corn in a golden platter soak'd with wine,
And said; *O Ruksh! bear Rustrum well!*—but I
Have never known my grandsire's furrow'd face,
Nor seen his lofty house in Seistan,
Nor slaked my thirst at the clear Helmund stream;
But lodged among my father's foes, and seen
Afrasiab's cities only, Samarcand,
Bokhara, and lone Khiva in the waste,
And the black Toorkmun tents; and only drunk
The desert rivers, Moorghab and Tejend,
Kohik, and where the Kalmuks feed their sheep,
The northern Sir; and this great Oxus stream,
The yellow Oxus, by whose brink I die."

Then, with a heavy groan, Rustum bewail'd:—
"Oh, that its waves were flowing over me!
Oh, that I saw its grains of yellow silt
Roll, tumbling in the current o'er my head!"

But, with a grave mild voice, Sohrab replied:—
"Desire not that, my father! thou must live.
For some are born to do great deeds, and live,
As some are born to be obscured, and die.
Do thou the deeds I die too young to do,
And reap a second glory in thine age;
Thou art my father, and thy gain is mine.
But come! thou seest this great host of men
Which follow me; I pray thee, slay not these!
Let me entreat for them; what have they done?
They follow'd me, my hope, my fame, my star.
Let them all cross the Oxus back in peace.
But me thou must bear hence, not send with them,

But carry me with thee to Seistan,
And place me on a bed, and mourn for me,
Thou, and the snow-hair'd Zal, and all thy friends.
And thou must lay me in that lovely earth,
And heap a stately mound above my bones,
And plant a far-seen pillar over all.
That so the passing horseman on the waste
May see my tomb a great way off, and cry:
Sohrab, the mighty Rustum's son, lies there,
Whom his great father did in ignorance kill!
And I be not forgotten in my grave."

And, with a mournful voice, Rustum replied:—
"Fear not! as thou hast said, Sohrab, my son,
So shall it be; for I will burn my tents,
And quit the host, and bear thee hence with me,
And carry thee away to Seistan,
And place thee on a bed, and mourn for thee,
With the snow-headed Zal, and all my friends.
And I will lay thee in the lovely earth,
And heap a stately mound above thy bones,
And plant a far-seen pillar over all,
And men shall not forget thee in thy grave.
And I will spare thy host; yea, let them go!
Let them all cross the Oxus back in peace!
What should I do with slaying any more?
For would that all whom I have ever slain
Might be once more alive; my bitterest foes,
And they who were call'd champions in their time,
And through whose death I won that fame I have—
And I were nothing but a common man,
A poor, mean soldier, and without renown,
So thou mightest live too, my son, my son!
Or rather would that I, even I myself,
Might now be lying on this bloody sand,
Near death, and by an ignorant stroke of thine,
Not thou of mine! and I might die, not thou;
And I, not thou, be borne to Seistan;
And Zal might weep above my grave, not thine;
And say: *O son, I weep thee not too sore,*
For willingly, I know, thou met'st thine end!
But now in blood and battles was my youth,
And full of blood and battles is my age,
And I shall never end this life of blood."

Then, at the point of death, Sohrab replied:—

"A life of blood indeed, thou dreadful man!
But thou shalt yet have peace; only not now,
Not yet! but thou shalt have it on that day,
When thou shalt sail in a high-masted ship,
Thou and the other peers of Kai Khosroo,
Returning home over the salt blue sea,
From laying thy dear master in his grave."

And Rustum gazed in Sohrab's face, and said:—
"Soon be that day, my son, and deep that sea!
Till then, if fate so wills, let me endure."

He spoke; and Sohrab smiled on him, and took
The spear, and drew it from his side, and eased
His wound's imperious anguish; but the blood
Came welling from the open gash, and life
Flow'd with the stream;—all down his cold white side
The crimson torrent ran, dim now and soil'd,
Like the soil'd tissue of white violets
Left, freshly gather'd, on their native bank,
By children whom their nurses call with haste
Indoors from the sun's eye; his head droop'd low,
His limbs grew slack; motionless, white, he lay—
White, with eyes closed; only when heavy gasps,
Deep heavy gasps quivering through all his frame,
Convulsed him back to life, he open'd them,
And fix'd them feebly on his father's face;
Till now all strength was ebb'd, and from his limbs
Unwillingly the spirit fled away,
Regretting the warm mansion which it left,
And youth, and bloom, and this delightful world.

So, on the bloody sand, Sohrab lay dead;
And the great Rustum drew his horseman's cloak
Down o'er his face, and sate by his dead son.
As those black granite pillars, once high-rear'd
By Jemshid in Persepolis, to bear
His house, now 'mid their broken flights of steps
Lie prone, enormous, down the mountain side—
So in the sand lay Rustum by his son.

And night came down over the solemn waste,
And the two gazing hosts, and that sole pair,
And darken'd all; and a cold fog, with night,
Crept from the Oxus. Soon a hum arose,
As of a great assembly loosed, and fires

Began to twinkle through the fog; for now
Both armies moved to camp, and took their meal;
The Persians took it on the open sands
Southward, the Tartars by the river marge;
And Rustum and his son were left alone.

But the majestic river floated on,
Out of the mist and hum of that low land,
Into the frosty starlight, and there moved,
Rejoicing, through the hush'd Chorasmian waste,
Under the solitary moon;—he flow'd
Right for the polar star, past Orgunjè,
Brimming, and bright, and large; then sands begin
To hem his watery march, and dam his streams,
And split his currents; that for many a league
The shorn and parcell'd Oxus strains along
Through beds of sand and matted rushy isles—
Oxus, forgetting the bright speed he had
In his high mountain-cradle in Pamere,
A foil'd circuitous wanderer—till at last
The long'd-for dash of waves is heard, and wide
His luminous home of waters opens, bright
And tranquil, from whose floor the new-bathed stars
Emerge, and shine upon the Aral Sea.

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON

Alfred Tennyson (1809–1892) remains one of the most popular British poets and the Poet Laureate of Great Britain and Ireland from 1850 to his death.

Opening their chapter on Tennyson's life and work, *Poetry Foundation* asserts:

> More than any other Victorian writer, Tennyson has seemed the embodiment of his age, both to his contemporaries and to modern readers. In his own day he was said to be—with Queen Victoria and Gladstone—one of the three most famous living persons, a reputation no other poet writing in English has ever had. As official poetic spokesman for the reign of Victoria, he felt called upon to celebrate a quickly changing industrial and mercantile world with which he felt little in common, for his deepest sympathies were called forth by an unaltered rural England; the conflict between what he thought of as his duty to society and his allegiance to the eternal beauty of nature seems peculiarly Victorian. Even his most severe critics have always recognized his lyric gift for sound and cadence, a gift probably unequaled in the history of English poetry, but one so absolute that

it has sometimes been mistaken for mere facility. (https://www.poetry-foundation.org/poets/alfred-tennyson, accessed on April 1, 2019)

Tennyson grew up by a melancholic father in Somersby rectory, whose dissatisfaction with life and, in particular, his family he tried to escape by misusing alcohol and drugs, and which quickly passed on almost all of his twelve children. Images of substance abuse, epilepsy attacks, mental breakdowns, asylum and prison confinements filled Tennyson's childhood and early youth and determined his own melancholy, reticence, severe self-criticism, and, inevitably, his thematic choices.

He could only relax for a while, when he enrolled Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1827, and joined a group of young men who called themselves the Apostles and would regularly meet for formal discussion of English literature, art in general, culture, and philosophy, and who, most importantly, supported Tennyson's writing. Here he also met Arthur Henry Hallam, who was also engaged to Tennyson's sister Emily, yet whose friendship and emotional support, made up, at the time, the loss he had brought from home. However, Tennyson's father died soon, leaving his in an impoverished situation. Tennyson and his two brothers had to leave college.

Tennyson lived modestly, earning very little from poetry to which, however, he was determined to devote his life. His 1832 collection entitled *Poems* demonstrated a serious improvement in style, yet an abundance of melancholy and images of seclusion that provoked negative criticism.

Another particular loss happened in autumn 1833, when Hallam suddenly died of apoplexy, in Vienna, when he was back from his *Grand Tour*. Disappearance of this significant identity pillar in the poet's life, shook Tennyson's unstable emotions. He is often quoted to have said: “I suffered what seemed to me to shatter all my life so that I desired to die rather than to live.” Although this experience inspired some of his best poems, such as “Ulysses,” Tennyson refused to publish his poetry for almost a decade. His son then said that Hallam's death “for a while blotted out all joy from his life and made him long for death.” Indeed, he started writing shorter poems about Hallam, whose titles clearly point to his emotional state, such as “Thoughts of a Suicide” and “The Two Voices.” These shorter works in the course of the following seventeen years took the form of one of the greatest Victorian poems, *In Memoriam* (1850), a long poem consisting of 3000 lines.

It was not before 1842 that the two volumes of *Poems* (1842) came out, containing his revised poems from 1832 and some new poems. They were accepted with a lot of enthusiasm and in 1845 he received a state pension, amounting to £200 a year, for his achievement in poetry. Now he was ready for a family life, and he went back to his long-abandoned relationship with Emily Sellwood, who he eventually married. Tennyson's popularity grew with the publication of *The Princess* in 1847, followed by *In Memoriam, Maud*, and *Idylls of the King* in 1859. In 1850, he replaced Wordsworth as poet laureate and introduced to the queen and Prince Albert, who admired Tennyson's poetry. Now he could easily move his family to a much large and more comfortable house on the Isle of Wight, where he

enjoyed spending days in silent strolls along the beach and uninterrupted writing. Because of his shyness, Tennyson rarely socialized and it took him a long time to accept the title of an English lord (in 1883). He also received honorary doctorates from the universities of Oxford and Edinburgh, while he declined one offered by Cambridge.

SELECTED CRITICISM

George Henry Blore, Victorian Worthies
https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/b/blore/george_henry/victorian-worthies/chapter8.html. Accessed April 3, 2019

TENNYSON
POET

The Victorians, as a whole, were a generation of fighters. They battled against Nature's forces, subduing floods and mountain barriers, pestilence and the worst extremes of heat and cold; they also went forth into the market-place and battled with their fellow men for laws, for tariffs, for empire. Their triumphs, like those of the Romans, are mostly to be seen in the practical sphere. But there were others of that day who chose the contemplative life of the recluse, and who yet, by high imaginings, contributed in no less degree to enrich the fame of their age; and among these the first name is that of Alfred Tennyson, the most representative of Victorian poets.

His early environment may be said to have marked him out for such a life. He was born in one of the remotest districts of a rural county. The village of Somersby lies in a hollow among the Lincolnshire wolds, twenty miles east of Lincoln, midway between the small towns of Spilsby, Horncastle, and Louth. There are no railways to disturb its peace; no high roads or broad rivers to bring trade to its doors. The 'cold rivulet' that rises just above the village flows down some twenty miles to lose itself in the sea near Skegness; in the valley the alders sigh and the aspens quiver, while around are rolling hills covered by long fields of corn broken by occasional spinneys. It is not a country to draw tourists for its own sake; but Tennyson knew, as few other poets know, the charm that human association lends to the simplest English landscape, and he cherished the memory of these scenes long after he had gone to live among the richer beauties of the south. From the garners of memory he drew the familiar features of this homely land showing that he had forgotten

No grey old grange, or lonely fold,
Or low morass and whispering reed,
Or simple stile from mead to mead,
Or sheepwalk up the winding wold.[23]

There are days when the wolds seem dreary and monotonous; but if change is wanted, a long walk or an easy drive will take us from Somersby, as it often took the Tennyson brothers, to the coast at Mablethorpe, where the long rollers of the

North Sea beat upon the sandhills that guard the flat stretches of the marshland. Here the poet as a child used to lie upon the beach, his imagination conjuring up Homeric pictures of the Grecian fleet besieging Troy; and if, on his last visit before leaving Lincolnshire, he found the spell broken, he could still describe vividly what he saw with the less fanciful vision of manhood.
Grey sandbanks, and pale sunsets, dreary wind,
Dim shores, dense rains, and heavy-clouded sea![24]

These wide expanses of sea, sand, and sky figure many times in his poetry and furnish a background for the more tragic scenes in the *Idylls of the King*.

Nor does the vicarage spoil the harmony of the scene, an old-fashioned low rambling house, to which a loftier hall adjoining, with its Gothic windows, lends a touch of distinction. The garden with one towering sycamore and the wych-elms, that threw long shadows on the lawn, opened on to the parson's field, where on summer mornings could be heard the sweep of the scythe in the dewy grass. Here Tennyson's father had been rector for some years when his fourth child Alfred was born in August 1809, the year which also saw the birth of Darwin and Gladstone. The family was a large one; there were eight sons and four daughters, the last of whom was still alive in 1916. Alfred's education was as irregular as a poet's could need to be, consisting of a few years' attendance at Louth Grammar School, where he suffered from the rod and other abuses of the past, and of a larger number spent in studying literature at home under his father's guidance. These left him a liberal amount of leisure which he devoted to reading at large and roaming the country-side. His father was a man of mental cultivation far beyond the average, well fitted to expand the mind of a boy of literary tastes and to lead him on at a pace suited to his abilities. He had suffered from disappointments which had thrown a shadow over his life, having been disinherited capriciously by his father, who was a wealthy man and a member of Parliament. The inheritance passed to the second brother, who took the name of Tennyson d'Eyncourt; and though the Rector resented the injustice of the act, he did not allow it to embitter the relations between his own children and their cousins. His character was of the stern, dominating order, and both his parishioners and his children stood in awe of him; but the gentle nature of their mother made amends. She is described by Edward FitzGerald, the poet's friend, as 'one of the most innocent and tender-hearted ladies I ever met, devoted to husband and children'. In her youth she had been a noted beauty, and in her old age was not too unworldly to remember that she had received twenty-five proposals of marriage. It was from her that the family derived their beauty of feature, while in their strength of intellect they resembled rather their father. One of Alfred's earliest literary passions was a love of Byron, and he remembered in after life how as a child he had carved on a rock the woful tidings that his hero was dead. In this period he was already writing poetry himself, though he did not publish his first volume till after he had gone up to Cambridge.

From this home life, filled with leisurely reading, rambling, and dreaming, he was sent in 1828 to join his brother Frederick at Trinity College, Cambridge, and he came into residence in February of that year. Cambridge has been called the poets' University. Here in early days came Spenser and Milton, Dryden and Gray; and —

in the generation preceding Tennyson — Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Byron had followed in their steps. However little we can trace directly the development of the poetic gift to local influence, at least we can say that Tennyson gained greatly by the time he spent within its walls. He came up an unknown man without family connexions to help him, and without the hall-mark of any famous school upon him. Shy and retiring by nature as he was, he might easily have failed to win his way to notice. But there was something in his appearance, in his manner, and in the personality that lay behind, which never failed to impress observers, and gradually he attached to himself the most brilliant undergraduates of his time and became a leader among them. Thackeray and FitzGerald were in residence; but it was not till later that he came to know them well, and we hear more of Spedding (the editor of Bacon), of Alford and Merivale (deans of Canterbury and Ely), of Trench (Archbishop of Dublin), of Lushington, who married one of his sisters, and of Arthur Hallam, who was engaged to another sister at the time of his early death. Hallam came from Eton, where his greatest friend had been W. E. Gladstone, and he had not been long at Cambridge before he was led by kindred tastes and kindred nature into close friendship with Tennyson. In the judgement of all who knew him, a career of the highest usefulness and distinction was assured to him. His intellectual force and his high aspirations would have shone in the public service; and at least they won him thus early the affection of the noblest among his compeers, and a fame that is almost unique in English literature.

Much has been written about the society which these young men formed and which they called 'the Apostles'. The name has been thought to suggest a certain complacency and mutual admiration. But enough letters and personal recollections of their talk have been preserved to show how simple and unaffected the members were in their intercourse with one another. They had their enthusiasms, but they had also their jests. Their humour was not perhaps the boisterous fun of William Morris and Rossetti, but it was lively and buoyant enough to banish all suspicion of priggishness. Just because their enthusiasm was for the best in literature and art, Tennyson was quickly at home among them. Already he had learnt at home to love Shakespeare and Milton, Coleridge and Keats, and no effort was required, in this circle of friends, to keep his reading upon this high level. *Lycidas* was always a special favourite of Tennyson's, and appreciation of it seemed to him a sure 'touchstone of poetic taste'. In conversation he did not tend to declaim or monopolize the talk. He was noted rather for short sayings and for criticisms tersely expressed. He had his moods, contemplative, genial or gay; but all his utterances were marked by independence of thought, and his silence could be richer than the speech of other men. But for display he had no liking. In fact, so reluctant was he to face an audience of strangers, that when in 1829 it was his duty to recite his prize poem in the senate-house, he obtained leave for Merivale to read it on his behalf. On the other hand, he was ready enough to impart to his real friends the poems that he wrote from time to time, and he would pass pleasant hours with them reciting old ballads and reading aloud the plays of Shakespeare. His sonorous voice, his imagination, and his feeling for all the niceties of rhythm made his reading unusually impressive, as we know from the testimony of many who heard him.

The course of his education is, in fact, more truly to be found in this free companionship than in the lecture room or the examination hall. His opinion of the teaching which he received from the Dons was formed and expressed in a sonnet of 1830, though he refrained from publishing it for half a century. He addresses them as 'you that do profess to teach and teach us nothing, feeding not the heart'— and complains of their indifference to the movements of their own age and to the needs of their pupils. For, despite the ferment which was spreading in the realms of theology, of politics, and of natural science, the Dons still taught their classics in the dry pedantic manner of the past, and refused to face the problems of the nineteenth century. For Tennyson, whose mind was already capacious and deep, these problems had a constant attraction, and he had to fall back upon solitary musings and on talks with Hallam and other friends. Partly perhaps because he missed the more rigorous training of the schools, we have to wait another ten years before we see marks of his deeper thinking in his work. He was but groping and feeling his way. In the 'Poems, chiefly Lyrical' which he produced in 1830, rich images abound, play of fancy and beauty of expression; but there are few signs of the power of thought which he was to show in later volumes.

After three years thus spent, by no means unfruitfully, though it was only by his prize poem of 'Timbuctoo' that he won public honours, he was called away from Cambridge by family troubles and returned to Somersby in February 1831. His father had broken down in health, and a month later he died, suddenly and peacefully, in his arm-chair. After the rector's death an arrangement was made that the family should continue to inhabit the Rectory; and Tennyson, who was now his mother's chief help and stay, settled down to a studious life at home, varied by occasional visits to London. The habit of seclusion was already forming. He was much given to solitary walking and to spending his evening in an attic reading by himself. But this was not due to moroseness or selfishness, as we can see from his intercourse with family and friends. He would willingly give hours to reading aloud to his mother, or sit listening happily while his sisters played music. From this time indeed he seems to have taken his father's place in the home; and with Hallam and other friends he continued on the same affectionate terms. He had not Dickens's buoyant temper and love of company, nor did he indulge in the splenetic outbursts of Carlyle. He could, when it was needed, find time to fulfil the humblest duties and then return with contentment to his solitude. But his thoughts seemed naturally to lift him above the level of others, and he was most truly himself when he was alone. Apart from his eyesight, which began to trouble him at this time, he was enjoying good health, which he maintained by a steady regime of physical exercise. His strength and his good looks were alike remarkable.[25] As his friend Brookfield laughingly said, 'It was not fair that he should be Hercules as well as Apollo'.

Another volume of verse appeared in 1832; and its appearance seems to have been due rather to the urgent persuasion of his friends than to his own eagerness to appear in print. Though J. S. Mill and a few other critics wrote with good judgement and praised the book, it met with a cold reception in most places, and the *Quarterly Review*, regardless of its blunder over Keats, spoke of it in most contemptuous terms. All can recognize to-day how unfair this was to the merits of a volume which contained the 'Lotos-Eaters', 'Oenone', and the 'Lady of Shalott'; but the effect of

the harsh verdict on the poet, always sensitive about the reception of his work, was unfortunate to a degree. For a time it seemed likely to chill his ardour and stifle his poetic gifts at the very age when they ought to be bearing fruit. He writes of himself at this time as 'moping like an owl in an ivy bush, or as that one sparrow which the Hebrew mentioneth as sitting on the house-top'; and, despite his friendship with Hallam, which was closer than ever since the latter's engagement to his sister Emily, he had thoughts of settling abroad in France or Italy, since he found, or fancied that he found, in England too unsympathetic an atmosphere.

Such a decision would have been disastrous. Residence abroad might suit the robust, many-sided genius of Robert Browning with his gift for interpreting the thoughts of other nations and other times; it would have been fatal to Tennyson, whose affections were rooted in his native soil, and who had a special call to speak to Englishmen of English scenes and English life.

The following year brought him a still severer shock in the loss of his beloved friend, Arthur Hallam, who was taken ill at Vienna and died there a few days later, to the deep sorrow of all who knew him. Many besides Tennyson have borne witness to his character and gifts; thanks to their tribute, and above all to the verses of *In Memoriam*, though his life was all too short to realize the promise of his youth, his name will be preserved. The gradual growth of Tennyson's elegy can be discerned from the letters of his friends, to whom from time to time he read some of the stanzas which he had completed. Even in the first winter after Hallam's death, he wrote a few lines in the manuscript book which he kept by him for the purpose during the next fifteen years, and which he was within an ace of losing in 1850, just when the poem was completed and ready for publication. As a statesman turns from his private sorrow to devote himself to a public cause, so the poet's instinct was to find comfort in the practice of his art. Under the stress of feelings aroused by this event and under the influence of a wider reading, his mind was maturing. We hear of a steady discipline of mental work, of hours given methodically to Italian and German, to theology and history, to chemistry, botany, and other branches of science. Above all, he pondered now, as he did later so constantly, on the mystery of death and life after death. Outwardly this seems the most uneventful period of his career; but, in their effect on his mind and work, these years were very far from being wasted. When next, in 1842, he emerges from seclusion to offer his verses to the public, he had enlarged the range of his subjects and deepened his powers of thought. We see less richness in the images, less freedom in the play of fancy, but there is a firmer grip of character, a surer handling of the problems affecting the life of man. Underground was flowing the hidden stream of *In Memoriam*, unknown save to the few; only in part were the fruits of this period to be seen in the two volumes containing 'English Idyls' and other new poems, along with a selection of earlier lyrics now revised and reprinted.

The distinctive quality of the book is given by the word Idyl, which was to be so closely connected with Tennyson's fame. Here he is working in a small compass, but he breaks fresh ground in describing scenes of English village life, and shows that he has used his gifts of observation to good purpose. Better than the slight sketches of character, of girls and their lovers, of farmers and their children, are the landscapes in which they are set; and many will remember the charming passages in

which he describes the morning songs of birds in a garden, or the twinkling of evening lights in the still waters of a harbour. More original and more full of lyrical fervour was ‘Locksley Hall’, where he expresses many thoughts that were stirring the younger spirits of his day. Perhaps the most perfect workmanship, in a volume where much calls for admiration, is to be found in ‘Ulysses’, which the poet’s friend Monckton Milnes gave to Sir Robert Peel to read, in order to convince him that Tennyson’s work merited official recognition. His treatment of the hero is as far from the classical spirit as anything which William Morris wrote. He preserves little of the directness or fierce temper of the early epic. Rather does his Ulysses think and speak like some bold adventurer of the Renaissance, with the combination of ardent curiosity and reflective thought which was the mark of that age. Even so Tennyson himself, as he passed from youth to middle life, and from that to old age, was ever trying to achieve one more ‘work of noble note’, and yearning

To follow knowledge like a sinking star
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

But between this and the production of his next volume comes the most unhappy period in the poet’s career, when his friends for a time despaired of his future and even of his life. At the marriage of his brother Charles in 1836, Tennyson had fallen in love with the bride’s sister, Emily Sellwood; and in the course of the next three or four years they became informally engaged to one another. But his prospects of earning enough money to support a wife seemed so remote that in 1840 her family insisted on breaking off the engagement, and the lovers ceased to write to one another. Even the volumes of 1842, while winning high favour with cultivated readers, and stirring enthusiasm at the Universities, failed to attract the larger public and to make a success in the market. So when he sustained a further blow in the loss of his small fortune owing to an unwise investment, his health gave way and he fell into a dark mood of hypochondria. His star seemed to be sinking, just as he was winning his way to fame. Thanks to medical attention, aided by his own natural strength and the affections of his friends, he was already rallying in 1845, when Peel conferred on him the timely honour of a pension; and he was able not only to continue working at *In Memoriam*, but also to produce in 1847 *The Princess*, which gives clear evidence of renewed cheerfulness and vigour. Dealing as it does, half humorously, with the question of woman’s education and her claim to a higher place in the scheme of life, it illustrates the interest which Tennyson, despite his seclusion, felt in social questions of the day. From this point of view it may be linked with *Locksley Hall* and *Maud*; but in *The Princess* the treatment is half humorous and the setting is more artificial. Tennyson’s lyrical power is seen at its best in the magical songs which occur in the course of the story or interposed between the different scenes. They have deservedly won a place in all anthologies. His facility in the handling of blank verse is also remarkable. Lovers of Milton may regret the massive grandeur of an earlier style; but, as in every art, so in poetry, we pay for advance in technical accomplishment, in suppleness and melodious phrasing, by the loss of other qualities which are difficult to recapture.

Meanwhile *In Memoriam* was approaching completion; and this the most central and characteristic of his poems illustrates, more truly than a narrative of outward events, the phases through which Tennyson had been passing. Desultory though the method of its production be, and loose 'the texture of its fabric', there is a certain sequence of thought running through the cantos. We see how from the first poignancy of grief, when he can only brood passively over his friend's death, he was led to questioning the basis of his faith, shaken as it was by the claims of physical science — how from those doubts of his own, he was led to think of the universal trouble of the world — how at length by throwing himself into the hopes and aspiration of humanity he attained to victory and was able to put away his personal grief, believing that his friend's soul was still working with him in the universe for the good of all. At intervals, during the three years mirrored in the poem, we get definite notes of time. We see how the poet is affected each year as the winter and the spring come round, and how the succeeding anniversaries of Hallam's death stir the old pain in varying degree. But we must not suppose that each section was composed at the time represented in this scheme. Seventeen years went to the perfecting of the work; it is impossible to tell when each canto was first outlined and how often it was re-written; and we must be content with general notions of its development. The poet's memory was fully charged. As he could recall so vividly the Lincolnshire landscape when he was living in the south, so he could portray the emotions of the past though he had entered on a new period of life fraught with a different spirit.

Thus many elements go to make up the whole, and readers of *In Memoriam* can choose what suits their mood. To some, who wish to compare the problems of different ages, chief interest will attach to that section where the active mind wakes up to the conflict between science and faith. It was a difficult age for poets and believers. The preceding generation had for a time been swept far from their bearings by the tornado of the French Revolution. Some of them found an early grave while still upholding the flag; others had won back to harbour when their youth was past and ended their days in calm — if not stagnant — waters. But the advance of scientific discoveries and the scientific spirit sapped the defences of faith in more methodical fashion, and Tennyson's mind was only too open to all the evidence of natural law and the stern lessons of the struggle for life. To understand the influence of Tennyson on his age it is necessary to inquire how he reconciled religion with science; but this is too large a subject for a biographical sketch, and valuable studies have been written which deal with it more or less fully, by Stopford Brooke[26] and many others.

To Queen Victoria, and to others who had been stricken in their home affections, the human interest outweighed all others; the sorrow of those who gave little thought to systems of philosophy or religion was instinctively comforted by the note of faith in a future life and by the haunting melodies in which it found expression.

Many were content to return again and again to those passages where the beauty of nature is depicted in stanzas of wonderful felicity. No such gift of observation had yet ministered to their delight. Readers of Mrs. Gaskell will be reminded of the old farmer in *Cranford* revelling in the new knowledge which he

has gained of the colour of ash-buds in March. So too we are taught to look afresh at larch woods in spring and beech woods in autumn, at the cedar in the garden and the yew tree in the churchyard. We are vividly conscious of the summer's breeze which tumbles the pears in the orchard, and the winter's storm when the leafless ribs of the wood clang and gride. As the perfect stanza lingers in our memory, our eyes are opened and we are taught to observe the marvels of nature for ourselves. Here, more than anywhere else, is he the true successor of Wordsworth, the Wordsworth of the daisy, the daffodil, and the lesser celandine, though following a method of his own — at once a disciple and a master.

But other influences than those of nature were coming into his life. In 1837 the Tennyson family had been compelled to leave Somersby; and the poet, recluse though he was, showed that he could rouse himself to meet a practical emergency with good sense. He took charge of all arrangements and transplanted his mother successively to new homes in Essex and Kent. This brought him nearer to London and enlarged considerably his circle of friends. The list of men of letters who welcomed him there is a long one, from Samuel Rogers to the Rossettis, and includes poets, novelists, historians, scholars, and scientists. The most interesting, to him and to us, was Carlyle, then living at Chelsea, who had published his *French Revolution* in 1837, and had thereby become notable among literary men. Carlyle's judgements on the poet and his poems have often been quoted. At first he was more than contemptuous over the latter, and exhorted Tennyson to leave verse and rhyme and apply himself to prose. But familiar converse, in which both men spoke their opinions without reserve, soon enlightened 'the sage', and he delighted in his new friend. Long after, in 1879, he confessed that 'Alfred always from the beginning took a grip at the right side of every question'. He could not fail to appreciate the man when he saw him in the flesh, and it is he who has left us the most striking picture of Tennyson's appearance in middle life. In 1842 he wrote to Emerson: 'Alfred is one of the few . . . figures who are and remain beautiful to me; — a true human soul . . . one of the finest-looking men in the world. A great shock of rough dusty-dark hair, bright-laughing hazel eyes, massive aquiline face, most massive yet most delicate, of sallow-brown complexion, almost Indian-looking; clothes cynically loose, free-and-easy; — smokes infinite tobacco. His voice is musical metallic — fit for loud laughter and piercing wail, and all that may lie between; speech and speculation free and plenteous: I do not meet, in these late decades, such company over a pipe!' Not only were pipes smoked at home, but walks were taken in the London streets at night, with much free converse, in which art both were masters, but of which Carlyle, no doubt, had the larger share. Tennyson was a master of the art of silence, which Carlyle could praise but never practice; but when he spoke his remarks rarely failed to strike the bell.

Another comrade worthy of special notice was FitzGerald, famous to-day as the translator of Omar Khayyam, and also as the man whom two great authors, Tennyson and Thackeray, named as their most cherished friend. He was living a hermit's life in Suffolk, dividing his day between his yacht, his garden, and his books; and writing, when he was in the humour, those gossipy letters which have placed him as a classic with Cowper and Lamb. From time to time he would come to London for a visit to a picture gallery or an evening with his friends; and for

many years he never failed to write once a year for news of the poet, whose books he might criticize capriciously, but whose image was always fresh in his affectionate heart. Of his old Cambridge circle Tennyson honoured, above all others, 'his domeship' James Spedding, of the massive rounded head, of the rare judgement in literature, of the unselfish and faithful discharge of all the duties which he could take upon himself. Great as was his edition of Bacon, he was by the common consent of his friends far greater than anything which he achieved, and his memory is most worthily preserved in the letters of Tennyson, and of others who knew him. In London he was present at gatherings where Landor and Leigh Hunt represented the elder generation of poets; but he was more familiar with his contemporaries Henry Taylor and Aubrey de Vere. It is the latter who gives us an interesting account of two meetings between Wordsworth and his successor in the Laureateship.[27] The occasions when Tennyson and Browning met one another and read their poetry aloud were also cherished in the memory of those friends who were fortunate enough to be present.[28]Differing as they did in temperament and in tastes, they were rivals in generosity to one another and indeed to all their brethren who wielded the pen of the writer. To meet such choice spirits Tennyson would leave for a while his precious solitude and his books. London could not be his home, but it became a place of pleasant meetings and of friendships in which he found inspiration and help.

Thus it was that Tennyson spent the quiet years of meditation and study before he achieved his full renown. This was no such sensational event as Byron's meteoric appearance in 1812; but one year, 1850, is a clear landmark in his career. This was the date of the publication of *In Memoriam* and of his appointment, on the death of Wordsworth, to the office of Poet Laureate. This year saw the end of his struggle with ill-fortune and the end of his long courtship. In June he was married, at Shiplake on the Thames, to Emily Sellwood. Henceforth his happiness was assured and he knew no more the restlessness and melancholy which had clouded his enjoyment of life. His course was clear, and for forty years his position was hardly questioned in all lands where the English tongue was spoken. Noble companies of worshippers might worthily swear allegiance to Thackeray and Browning; but by the voice of the people Dickens and Tennyson were enthroned supreme.

To deal with all the volumes of poetry that Tennyson published between 1850 and his death would be impossible within the limits of these pages. In some cases he reverted to themes which he had treated before and he preserved for many years the same skill in craftsmanship. But in *Maud*, in *The Idylls of the King*, and in the historical dramas, unquestionably, he broke new ground.

Partly on account of the scheme of the poem, partly for the views expressed on questions of the day, *Maud* provoked more hostile criticism than anything which he wrote; yet it seems to have been the poet's favourite work. The story of its composition is curious. It was suggested by a short lyric which Tennyson had printed privately in 1837 beginning with the words 'Oh, that 'twere possible after long grief'. His friend, Sir John Simeon, urged him to write a poem which would lead up to and explain it; and the poet, adopting the idea, used *Maud* as a vehicle for much which he was feeling in the disillusionment of middle life. The form of a

monodrama was unfamiliar to the public and has difficulties of its own. Tennyson has combined action, proceeding somewhat spasmodically, with a skilful study of character, showing us the exaggerated sensibility of a nature which under the successive influence of misanthropy, hope, love, and tragic disappointment, may easily pass beyond the border-land of insanity. In the scene where love is triumphant, Tennyson touches the highest point of lyrical passion; but there are jarring notes introduced in the satirical descriptions of Maud's brother and of the rival who aspires to her hand. And in the later cantos where, after the fatal quarrel, the hero is driven to moody thoughts and dark presages of woe, there are passages which seem to be charged with the doctrine that England was being corrupted by long peace and needed the purifying discipline of war. For this the poet was taken to task by his critics; and, though it is unfair in dramatic work to attribute to an author the words of his characters, Tennyson found it difficult to clear himself of suspicion, the more so that the Crimean War inspired at this time some of his most popular martial ballads and songs.

The Idylls of the King had a different fate and achieved instant popularity. The first four were published in 1859 and within a few months 10,000 copies were sold. Tennyson's original design, formed early in life, had been to build a single epic on the Arthurian theme, which seemed to him to give scope, like Virgil's *Aeneid*, for patriotic treatment. 'The greatest of all poetical subjects' he called it, and it haunted his mind perpetually. But if Virgil found such a task difficult nineteen hundred years before, it was doubly difficult for Tennyson to satisfy his generation, with scientific historians raking the ash heaps of the past, and pedants demanding local colour. In shaping his poem to meet the requirements of history he was in danger of losing that breadth of treatment which is essential for epic poetry. He fell back on the device of selecting episodes, each a complete picture in itself, and grouping them round a single hero. The story is placed in the twilight between the Roman withdrawal and the conquests of the Saxons, when the lamp of history was glimmering most faintly. In these troublous times a king is miraculously sent to be a bulwark to the people against the inroads of their foes. He founds an order of Knighthood bound by vows to fight for all just and noble causes, and upholds for a time victoriously the standard of chivalry within his realm, till through the entrance of sin and treachery the spell is broken and the heathen overrun the land. After his last battle, in the far west of our island, the king passes away to the supernatural world from which he came. This last episode had been handled many years before, and the 'Morte d'Arthur', which had appeared in the volume of 1842, was incorporated into the 'Passing of Arthur' to close the series of Idylls.

With what admixture of allegory this story was set out it is hard to say — Tennyson himself could not in later years be induced to define his purpose — but it seems certain that many of the characters are intended to symbolize higher and lower qualities. According to some interpretations King Arthur stands for the power of conscience and Queen Guinevere for the heart. Galahad represents purity, Bors rough honesty, Percivale humility, and Merlin the power of the intellect, which is too easily beguiled by treachery. So the whole story is moralized by the entrance, through Guinevere and Lancelot, of sin; by the gradual fading, through the lightness

of one or the treachery of another, of the brightness of chivalry; and by the final ruin which shatters the fair ideal.

But there is no need to darken counsel by questions about history or allegory, if we wish, first and last, to enjoy poetry, for its own sake. Here, as in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, forth go noble knights with gentle maidens through the enchanted scenes of fairyland; for their order and its vows they are ready to dare all. Lawlessness is tamed and cruelty is punished, and no perilous quest presents itself but there is a champion ready to follow it to the end. And if severe critics tell us that they find no true gift of story-telling here, let us go for a verdict to the young. They may not be good judges of style, or safe interpreters of shades of thought, but they know when a story carries them away; and the *Idylls of the King*, like the Waverley Novels, have captured the heart of many a lover of literature who has not yet learnt to question his instinct or to weigh his treasures in the scales of criticism. And older readers may find themselves kindled to enthusiasm by reflective passages rich in high aspiration, or charmed by descriptions of nature as beautiful as anything which Tennyson wrote.

In the historical plays, which occupied a large part of his attention between 1874 and 1879, Tennyson undertook a yet harder task. He chose periods when national issues of high importance were at stake, such as the conflict between the Church and the Crown, between the domination of the priest and the claim of the individual to freedom of belief. He put aside all exuberance of fancy and diction as unsuited to tragedy; he handled his theme with dignity and at times with force, and attained a literary success to which Browning and other good judges bore testimony. Of Becket in particular he made a sympathetic figure, which, in the skilful hands of Henry Irving, won considerable favour upon the stage. But the times were out of joint for the poetic drama, and he had not the rich imagination of Shakespeare, nor the power to create living men and women who compel our hearts to pity, to horror, or to delight. For the absence of this no studious reading of history, no fine sentiment, no noble cadences, can make amends, and it seems doubtful whether future ages will regard the plays as anything but a literary curiosity.

On the other hand, nothing which he wrote has touched the human heart more genuinely than the poems of peasant life, some of them written in the broadest Lincolnshire dialect, which Tennyson produced during the years in which he was engaged on the Idylls and the plays. 'The Grandmother', 'The Northern Cobbler', and the two poems on the Lincolnshire farmers of following generations, were as popular as anything which the Victorian Age produced, and seem likely to keep their pre-eminence. The two latter illustrate, by their origin, Tennyson's power of seizing on a single impression, and building on it a work of creative genius. It was enough for him to hear the anecdote of the dying farmer's words, 'God A'mighty little knows what he's about in taking me! And Squire will be mad'; and he conceived the character of the man, and his absorption in the farm where he had lived and worked and around which he grouped his conceptions of religion and duty. The later type of farmer was evoked similarly by a quotation in the dialect of his county: 'When I canters my herse along the ramper, I 'ears "proputty, proputty, proputty"'; and again Tennyson achieved a triumph of characterization. It is here

perhaps that he comes nearest to the achievements of his great rival Browning in the field of dramatic lyrics.

Apart from the writing and publication of his poems, we cannot divide Tennyson's later life into definite sections. By 1850 his habits had been formed, his friendships established, his fame assured; such landmarks as are furnished by the birth of his children, by his journeyings abroad, by the homes in which he settled, point to no essential change in the current of his life. Of the perfect happiness which marriage brought to him, of the charm and dignity which enabled Mrs. Tennyson to hold her place worthily at his side, many witnesses have spoken. Two sons were born to him, one of whom died in 1886, while the other, named after his lost friend, lived to write the Memoir which will always be the chief authority for our knowledge of the man. His homes soon became household words — so great was the spell which Tennyson cast over the hearts of his readers. Farringford, at the western end of the Isle of Wight, was first tenanted by him in 1853, and was bought in 1856. Here the poet enjoyed perfect quiet, a genial climate and the proximity of the sea, for which his love never failed. It was a very different coast to the bleak sandhills and wide flats of Mablethorpe. Above Freshwater the noble line of the Downs rises and falls as it runs westward to the Needles, where it plunges abruptly into the sea; and here on the springy turf, a tall romantic figure in wide-brimmed hat and flowing cloak, the poet would often walk. But Farringford, lying low in the shelter of the hills, proved too hot in summer; Freshwater was discovered by tourists too often inquisitive about the great; and so, after ten or twelve years, he was searching for another home, some remoter fastness set on higher ground. This he discovered on the borders of Surrey and Sussex near Haslemere, where Black Down rises to a height of 900 feet above the sea and commands a wide prospect over the blue expanse of the weald. Here he found copses and commons haunted by the song of birds, here he raised plantations close at hand to shelter him from the rude northern winds, and here he built the stately house of Aldworth where, some thirty years later, he was to die.

To both houses came frequent guests. For, shy as he was of paying visits, he loved to see in his own house men and women who could talk to him as equals — nor was he always averse to those of reverent temper, so they were careful not to jar on his fastidious tastes. In some ways it was a pity that he did not come to closer quarters with the rougher forces that were fermenting in the industrial districts. It might have helped him to a better understanding of the classes that were pushing to the front, who were to influence so profoundly the England of the morrow. But the strain of kindly sympathy in Tennyson's nature can be seen at its best in his intercourse with cottagers, sailors, and other humble folk who lived near his doors. The stories which his son tells us show how the poet was able to obtain an insight into their minds and to write poems like 'The Grandmother' with artistic truth. And no visitor received a heartier welcome at Farringford than Garibaldi, who was at once peasant and sailor, and who remained so none the less when he had become a hero of European fame. To Englishmen of nearly every cultured profession Tennyson's hospitality was freely extended — we need only instance Professor Tyndall, Dean Bradley, James Anthony Froude, Aubrey de Vere, G. F. Watts, Henry Irving, Hubert Parry, Lord Dufferin, and that most constant of friends,

Benjamin Jowett, pre-eminent among the Oxford celebrities of the day. Among his immediate neighbours he conceived a peculiar affection for Sir John Simeon, whose death in 1870 called forth the stanzas 'In the Garden at Swainston'; and no one was more at home at Farringford than Julia Cameron, famous among early photographers, who has left us some of the best likenesses of the poet in middle and later life.

Tennyson was not familiar with foreign countries to the same degree as Browning, nor was he ever a great traveller. When he went abroad he needed the help of some loyal friend, like Francis Palgrave or Frederick Locker, to safeguard him against pitfalls, and to shield him from annoyance. When he was too old to stand the fatigue of railway journeys, he was willing to be taken for a cruise on a friend's yacht; and thus he visited many parts of Scotland and the harbours of Scandinavia. Amid new surroundings he was not always easy to please; bad food or smelly streets would call forth loud protests and upset him for a day; but his friends found it worth their while to risk some anxiety in order to enjoy his keen observation and the originality of his talk. Wherever he went he took with him his stored wisdom on Homer, Dante, and the 'Di maiores' of literature; and when Gladstone, too, happened to be one of the party on board ship, the talk must have been well worth hearing. As in his youth, so now, Tennyson's mind moved most naturally on a lofty plane and he was most at home with the great poets of the past; and with the exception of a few poems like 'All along the valley', where the torrents at Cauteretz reminded him of an early visit with Hallam to the Pyrenees, we can trace little evidence in his poetry of the journeys which he made. But we can see from his letters that he was kindled by the beauty of Italian cities and their treasures. In every picture-gallery which he visited he showed his preference for Titian and the rich colour of the Venetian painters. He refused to be bound by the conventional English taste for Alpine scenery, and broke out into abuse of the discoloured water in the Grindelwald glacier —'a filthy thing, and looking as if a thousand London seasons had passed over it'. In all places, among all people, he said what he thought and felt, with independence and conviction.

One incident connecting him with Italy is worthy of mention as showing that the poet, who 'from out the northern island' came at times to visit them, was known and esteemed by the people of Italy. When the Mantuans celebrated in 1885 the nineteenth centenary of the death of Virgil, the classic poet to whom Tennyson owed most, they asked him to write an ode, and nobly he rose to the occasion, attaining a felicity of phrase which is hardly excelled in the choicest lines of Virgil himself. But it is as the laureate of his own country that he is of primary interest, and it is time to inquire how he fulfilled the functions of his office, and how he rendered that office of value to the State.

When he was first appointed, Queen Victoria had let him know that he was to be excused from the obligation of writing complimentary verse to celebrate the doings of the court. Of his own accord he composed occasional odes for the marriages of her sons, and showed some of his practised skill in dignifying such themes; but it is not here that he found his work as laureate. He achieved greater success in the poems which he wrote to honour the exploits of our army and navy, in the past or the present. In his ballad of 'The Revenge', in his Balaclava poems, in

the 'Siege of Lucknow', he struck a heroic note which found a ready echo in the hearts of soldiers and sailors and those who love the services. Above all, in the great ode on the death of the Duke of Wellington he has stirred all the chords of national feeling as no other laureate before him, and has enriched our literature with a jewel which is beyond price.

The Arthurian epic failed to achieve its national aim, and the historical dramas, though inspired by great principles which have helped to shape our history, never touched those large circles to which as laureate he should appeal. Some might judge that his function was best fulfilled in the lyrics to be found scattered throughout his work which praise the slow, ordered progress of English liberties. Passages from *Maud* or *In Memoriam* will occur to many readers, still more the three lyrics generally printed together at the end of the 1842 poems, beginning with the well-known tines, 'Of old sat Freedom on the heights', 'Love thou thy land', and 'You ask me why though ill at ease'. Here we listen to the voice of English Liberalism uttered in very different tones from those of Byron and Shelley, expressing the mind of one who recoiled from French Revolutions and had little sympathy with their aims of universal equality. In this he represented very truly that Victorian movement which was guided by Cobden and Mill, by Peel and Gladstone, which conferred such practical benefits upon the England of their day; but it is hardly the temper that we expect of an ardent poet, at any rate in the days of his youth. The burning passion of Carlyle, Ruskin, or William Morris, however tempered by other feelings, called forth a heartier response in the breast of the toiling multitudes.

It may be that the claim of Tennyson to popular sovereignty will, in the end, rest chiefly on the pleasure which he gave to many thousands of his fellow-countrymen, a pleasure to be renewed and found again in English scenes, and in thoughts which coloured grey lives and warmed cold hearts, which shed the ray of faith on those who could accept no creeds and who yet yearned for some hope of an after-life to cheer their declining days. That he gave this pleasure is certain — to men and women of all classes from Samuel Bamford,[29] the Durham weaver, who saved his pence to buy the precious volumes of the 'thirties, to Queen Victoria on her throne, who in the reading of *In Memoriam* found one of her chief consolations in the hour of widowhood.

It was given to Tennyson to live a long life, and to know more joy than sorrow — to be gladdened by the homage of two hemispheres, to lament the loss of his old friends who went before him (Spedding in 1881, FitzGerald in 1883, Robert Browning in 1889), to write his most famous lyric 'Crossing the Bar' at the age of 80, and to be soothed and strengthened to the end by the presence of his wife. For some weeks in the autumn of 1892 he lay in growing weakness at Aldworth taking farewell of the sights and sounds that he had loved so long. To him now it had come to hear with dying ears 'the earliest pipe of half-awakened birds' and to see with dying eyes 'the casement slowly grow a glimmering square'. Early on October 5 he had an access of energy, and called to have the blinds drawn up —'I want', he said, 'to see the sky and the light'. The next day he died, and a week later a country wagon bore the coffin to Haslemere. Thence it passed to Westminster, where his

dust was to be laid beside that of Browning, among the great men who had gone before. In what mood he faced death we can learn from his own words:

Spirit, nearing yon dark portal at the limit of thy human state,
Fear not thou the hidden purpose of that Power which alone is great,
Nor the myriad world, His shadow, nor the silent Opener of the Gate![30]

End notes:
[23] *In Memoriam*, c.
[24] Lines written in 1837 and published in the *Manchester Athenæum Album*, 1850.
[25] The portrait of 1838 by Samuel Laurence, of which the original is at Aldworth, speaks for itself.
[26] *Tennyson*, by Stopford Brooke (Isbister, 1894).
[27] *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir*, by his son, vol. i, p. 209 (Macmillan & Co.).
[28] *Robert Browning*, by Edward Dowden, p. 173 (J. M. Dent & Co.).
[29] See *Memoir*, by Hallam, Lord Tennyson, vol. i, p. 283 (Macmillan).
[30] 'God and the Universe,' from *Death of Oenone*, &c. Macmillan, (1892.)

SELECTED POETRY

Crossing the Bar

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark;

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar.

Mariana

"Mariana in the Moated Grange"
(Shakespeare, Measure for Measure)

With blackest moss the flower-plots
Were thickly crusted, one and all:
The rusted nails fell from the knots
That held the pear to the gable-wall.
The broken sheds look'd sad and strange:
Unlifted was the clinking latch;
Weeded and worn the ancient thatch
Upon the lonely moated grange.
She only said, "My life is dreary,
He cometh not," she said;
She said, "I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!"

Her tears fell with the dews at even;
Her tears fell ere the dews were dried;
She could not look on the sweet heaven,
Either at morn or eventide.
After the flitting of the bats,
When thickest dark did trance the sky,
She drew her casement-curtain by,
And glanced athwart the glooming flats.
She only said, "The night is dreary,
He cometh not," she said;
She said, "I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!"

Upon the middle of the night,
Waking she heard the night-fowl crow:
The cock sung out an hour ere light:
From the dark fen the oxen's low
Came to her: without hope of change,
In sleep she seem'd to walk forlorn,
Till cold winds woke the gray-eyed morn
About the lonely moated grange.
She only said, "The day is dreary,
He cometh not," she said;
She said, "I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!"

About a stone-cast from the wall
A sluice with blacken'd waters slept,
And o'er it many, round and small,

The cluster'd marish-mosses crept.
Hard by a poplar shook alway,
All silver-green with gnarled bark:
For leagues no other tree did mark
The level waste, the rounding gray.
She only said, "My life is dreary,
He cometh not," she said;
She said "I am aweary, aweary
I would that I were dead!"

And ever when the moon was low,
And the shrill winds were up and away,
In the white curtain, to and fro,
She saw the gusty shadow sway.
But when the moon was very low
And wild winds bound within their cell,
The shadow of the poplar fell
Upon her bed, across her brow.
She only said, "The night is dreary,
He cometh not," she said;
She said "I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!"

All day within the dreamy house,
The doors upon their hinges creak'd;
The blue fly sung in the pane; the mouse
Behind the mouldering wainscot shriek'd,
Or from the crevice peer'd about.
Old faces glimmer'd thro' the doors
Old footsteps trod the upper floors,
Old voices called her from without.
She only said, "My life is dreary,
He cometh not," she said;
She said, "I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!"

The sparrow's chirrup on the roof,
The slow clock ticking, and the sound
Which to the wooing wind aloof
The poplar made, did all confound
Her sense; but most she loathed the hour
When the thick-moted sunbeam lay
Athwart the chambers, and the day
Was sloping toward his western bower.
Then said she, "I am very dreary,
He will not come," she said;

She wept, "I am aweary, aweary,
Oh God, that I were dead!"

The Lady of Shalott (1842)

Part I
On either side the river lie
Long fields of barley and of rye,
That clothe the wold and meet the sky;
And thro' the field the road runs by
    To many-tower'd Camelot;
And up and down the people go,
Gazing where the lilies blow
Round an island there below,
    The island of Shalott.

Willows whiten, aspens quiver,
Little breezes dusk and shiver
Thro' the wave that runs for ever
By the island in the river
    Flowing down to Camelot.
Four gray walls, and four gray towers,
Overlook a space of flowers,
And the silent isle imbowers
    The Lady of Shalott.

By the margin, willow veil'd,
Slide the heavy barges trail'd
By slow horses; and unhail'd
The shallop flitteth silken-sail'd
    Skimming down to Camelot:
But who hath seen her wave her hand?
Or at the casement seen her stand?
Or is she known in all the land,
    The Lady of Shalott?

Only reapers, reaping early
In among the bearded barley,
Hear a song that echoes cheerly
From the river winding clearly,
    Down to tower'd Camelot:
And by the moon the reaper weary,
Piling sheaves in uplands airy,
Listening, whispers " 'Tis the fairy
    Lady of Shalott."

Part II
There she weaves by night and day
A magic web with colours gay.
She has heard a whisper say,
A curse is on her if she stay
To look down to Camelot.
She knows not what the curse may be,
And so she weaveth steadily,
And little other care hath she,
The Lady of Shalott.

And moving thro' a mirror clear
That hangs before her all the year,
Shadows of the world appear.
There she sees the highway near
Winding down to Camelot:
There the river eddy whirls,
And there the surly village-churls,
And the red cloaks of market girls,
Pass onward from Shalott.

Sometimes a troop of damsels glad,
An abbot on an ambling pad,
Sometimes a curly shepherd-lad,
Or long-hair'd page in crimson clad,
Goes by to tower'd Camelot;
And sometimes thro' the mirror blue
The knights come riding two and two:
She hath no loyal knight and true,
The Lady of Shalott.

But in her web she still delights
To weave the mirror's magic sights,
For often thro' the silent nights
A funeral, with plumes and lights
And music, went to Camelot:
Or when the moon was overhead,
Came two young lovers lately wed:
"I am half sick of shadows," said
The Lady of Shalott.

Part III
A bow-shot from her bower-eaves,
He rode between the barley-sheaves,
The sun came dazzling thro' the leaves,

And flamed upon the brazen greaves
      Of bold Sir Lancelot.
A red-cross knight for ever kneel'd
To a lady in his shield,
That sparkled on the yellow field,
      Beside remote Shalott.

The gemmy bridle glitter'd free,
Like to some branch of stars we see
Hung in the golden Galaxy.
The bridle bells rang merrily
      As he rode down to Camelot:
And from his blazon'd baldric slung
A mighty silver bugle hung,
And as he rode his armour rung,
      Beside remote Shalott.

All in the blue unclouded weather
Thick-jewell'd shone the saddle-leather,
The helmet and the helmet-feather
Burn'd like one burning flame together,
      As he rode down to Camelot.
As often thro' the purple night,
Below the starry clusters bright,
Some bearded meteor, trailing light,
      Moves over still Shalott.

His broad clear brow in sunlight glow'd;
On burnish'd hooves his war-horse trode;
From underneath his helmet flow'd
His coal-black curls as on he rode,
      As he rode down to Camelot.
From the bank and from the river
He flash'd into the crystal mirror,
"Tirra lirra," by the river
      Sang Sir Lancelot.

She left the web, she left the loom,
She made three paces thro' the room,
She saw the water-lily bloom,
She saw the helmet and the plume,
      She look'd down to Camelot.
Out flew the web and floated wide;
The mirror crack'd from side to side;
"The curse is come upon me," cried
      The Lady of Shalott.

Part IV

In the stormy east-wind straining,
The pale yellow woods were waning,
The broad stream in his banks complaining,
Heavily the low sky raining
    Over tower'd Camelot;
Down she came and found a boat
Beneath a willow left afloat,
And round about the prow she wrote
    The Lady of Shalott.

And down the river's dim expanse
Like some bold seër in a trance,
Seeing all his own mischance—
With a glassy countenance
    Did she look to Camelot.
And at the closing of the day
She loosed the chain, and down she lay;
The broad stream bore her far away,
    The Lady of Shalott.

Lying, robed in snowy white
That loosely flew to left and right—
The leaves upon her falling light—
Thro' the noises of the night
    She floated down to Camelot:
And as the boat-head wound along
The willowy hills and fields among,
They heard her singing her last song,
    The Lady of Shalott.

Heard a carol, mournful, holy,
Chanted loudly, chanted lowly,
Till her blood was frozen slowly,
And her eyes were darken'd wholly,
    Turn'd to tower'd Camelot.
For ere she reach'd upon the tide
The first house by the water-side,
Singing in her song she died,
    The Lady of Shalott.

Under tower and balcony,
By garden-wall and gallery,
A gleaming shape she floated by,
Dead-pale between the houses high,

Silent into Camelot.
Out upon the wharfs they came,
Knight and burgher, lord and dame,
And round the prow they read her name,
The Lady of Shalott.

Who is this? and what is here?
And in the lighted palace near
Died the sound of royal cheer;
And they cross'd themselves for fear,
All the knights at Camelot:
But Lancelot mused a little space;
He said, "She has a lovely face;
God in his mercy lend her grace,
The Lady of Shalott."

Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal

Now sleeps the crimson petal, now the white;
Nor waves the cypress in the palace walk;
Nor winks the gold fin in the porphyry font.
The firefly wakens; waken thou with me.

Now droops the milk-white peacock like a ghost,
And like a ghost she glimmers on to me.

Now lies the Earth all Danaë to the stars,
And all thy heart lies open unto me.

Now slides the silent meteor on, and leaves
A shining furrow, as thy thoughts in me.

Now folds the lily all her sweetness up,
And slips into the bosom of the lake.
So fold thyself, my dearest, thou, and slip
Into my bosom and be lost in me.

Tears, Idle Tears

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy Autumn-fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.

Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail,
That brings our friends up from the underworld,
Sad as the last which reddens over one
That sinks with all we love below the verge;
So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.

Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns
The earliest pipe of half-awaken'd birds
To dying ears, when unto dying eyes
The casement slowly grows a glimmering square;
So sad, so strange, the days that are no more.

Dear as remember'd kisses after death,
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feign'd
On lips that are for others; deep as love,
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret;
O Death in Life, the days that are no more!

Ulysses

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.

I cannot rest from travel: I will drink
Life to the lees: All times I have enjoy'd
Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone, on shore, and when
Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vext the dim sea: I am become a name;
For always roaming with a hungry heart
Much have I seen and known; cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honour'd of them all;
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades
For ever and forever when I move.

How dull it is to pause, to make an end,

To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
As tho' to breathe were life! Life piled on life
Were all too little, and of one to me
Little remains: but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence, something more,
A bringer of new things; and vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.
This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle,—
Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil
This labour, by slow prudence to make mild
A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees
Subdue them to the useful and the good.
Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere
Of common duties, decent not to fail
In offices of tenderness, and pay
Meet adoration to my household gods,
When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.

There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail:
There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,
Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me—
That ever with a frolic welcome took
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
Free hearts, free foreheads—you and I are old;
Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;
Death closes all: but something ere the end,
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.

The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
'T is not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days

Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

Tithonus

The woods decay, the woods decay and fall,
The vapours weep their burthen to the ground,
Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath,
And after many a summer dies the swan.
Me only cruel immortality
Consumes: I wither slowly in thine arms,
Here at the quiet limit of the world,
A white-hair'd shadow roaming like a dream
The ever-silent spaces of the East,
Far-folded mists, and gleaming halls of morn.

Alas! for this gray shadow, once a man—
So glorious in his beauty and thy choice,
Who madest him thy chosen, that he seem'd
To his great heart none other than a God!
I ask'd thee, 'Give me immortality.'
Then didst thou grant mine asking with a smile,
Like wealthy men, who care not how they give.
But thy strong Hours indignant work'd their wills,
And beat me down and marr'd and wasted me,
And tho' they could not end me, left me maim'd
To dwell in presence of immortal youth,
Immortal age beside immortal youth,
And all I was, in ashes. Can thy love,
Thy beauty, make amends, tho' even now,
Close over us, the silver star, thy guide,
Shines in those tremulous eyes that fill with tears
To hear me? Let me go: take back thy gift:
Why should a man desire in any way
To vary from the kindly race of men
Or pass beyond the goal of ordinance
Where all should pause, as is most meet for all?

A soft air fans the cloud apart; there comes

A glimpse of that dark world where I was born.
Once more the old mysterious glimmer steals
From thy pure brows, and from thy shoulders pure,
And bosom beating with a heart renew'd.
Thy cheek begins to redden thro' the gloom,
Thy sweet eyes brighten slowly close to mine,
Ere yet they blind the stars, and the wild team
Which love thee, yearning for thy yoke, arise,
And shake the darkness from their loosen'd manes,
And beat the twilight into flakes of fire.

Lo! ever thus thou growest beautiful
In silence, then before thine answer given
Departest, and thy tears are on my cheek.

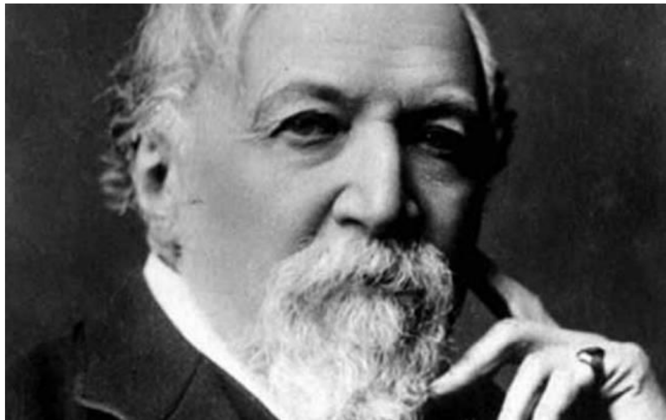
Why wilt thou ever scare me with thy tears,
And make me tremble lest a saying learnt,
In days far-off, on that dark earth, be true?
'The Gods themselves cannot recall their gifts.'

Ay me! ay me! with what another heart
In days far-off, and with what other eyes
I used to watch—if I be he that watch'd—
The lucid outline forming round thee; saw
The dim curls kindle into sunny rings;
Changed with thy mystic change, and felt my blood
Glow with the glow that slowly crimson'd all
Thy presence and thy portals, while I lay,
Mouth, forehead, eyelids, growing dewy-warm
With kisses balmier than half-opening buds
Of April, and could hear the lips that kiss'd
Whispering I knew not what of wild and sweet,
Like that strange song I heard Apollo sing,
While Ilion like a mist rose into towers.

Yet hold me not for ever in thine East:
How can my nature longer mix with thine?
Coldly thy rosy shadows bathe me, cold
Are all thy lights, and cold my wrinkled feet
Upon thy glimmering thresholds, when the steam
Floats up from those dim fields about the homes
Of happy men that have the power to die,
And grassy barrows of the happier dead.
Release me, and restore me to the ground;
Thou seëst all things, thou wilt see my grave:
Thou wilt renew thy beauty morn by morn;

I earth in earth forget these empty courts,
And thee returning on thy silver wheels.

ROBERT BROWNING



As a poet and a playwright, Robert Browning (1812-1889) was a master of dramatic monologue and irony. For his venture into realistic expression and his interest in a nuanced psychological characterization, he was largely misread by his contemporaries and did not gain acclaim until the late stage of his creative life. Today's criticism praises Browning as one of the best poets of the time. Thus, in his book *The Best Poems of the English Language: From Chaucer through Robert Frost* (2004), Harold Bloom states that "Browning is the most considerable poet in English since the major Romantics, surpassing his great contemporary rival Tennyson and the principal twentieth-century poets, including even Yeats, Hardy, and Wallace Stevens."

Browning grew up in London, in a family of a liberal-minded and well-standing bank clerk, who was also a book collector and who is said to have collected six thousand of rare books that his son eagerly read. His mother, being a musician herself, encouraged the son's interests in arts, including composing. He was mostly privately schooled and already at his fourteen he fluently spoke French, Italian, Greek, and Latin. Enjoying the comfort of his home, Browning dedicated his life to poetry and did not feel the pressure of pleasing the taste of general audience.

Another important early influence on Browning's writing was the Romantic poetry. Thus, following the example of Shelley, he also became an atheist and a liberal, who openly supported the rights of all the marginalized groups. However, Browning's, at the time, unique interest for psychological portrayal – he said: "My stress lies on the incidents in the development of a soul – little else is worth study." – could not be comfortably placed within Romantic idealism. It was already obvious in his early poem "Pauline, a Fragment of a Confession" (1833). Regardless of the real quality of the poem, its controversial reception speaks more clearly about the readers' expectations from poetry than about Browning as a poet. Then leading philosopher and political economist, John Stuart Mill assumed that the author (the poem was anonymously published) probably suffered from "intense and morbid self-consciousness." His following monodrama, *Paracelsus* (1835), about a Sixteenth-century Swiss alchemist in search for absolute knowledge, was more successful and was praised, among others, by Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Dickens. However, his *Sordello*, from 1840, which tells the story of a medieval Italian bard, confirmed his reputation of a mysterious poet. In an anonymous column titled "The Editor's Easy Chair", from *Harper's Magazine* in 1856, said:

> *Sordello* is one of the poems by Browning, which answers well to the definition of metaphysics – when the reader doesn't know what the writer means, and the writer doesn't know what he means himself, that is metaphysics. When Browning found that he had missed a figure in printing such an intelligible volume of verse, he is said to have said that he put forth by way of an experiment, having struck out every other line of it as it stood in the manuscript. This was a rather poor 'get off', but still it was better than nothing; and that is more than can be said of the poem.

With a lot more sympathy, American poet Richard Henry Stoddard, Browning's contemporary, still argued:

> Mr Browning has never been a popular poet, and never can be. Perhaps, he doesn't desire to be. [...] Mr. Browning's characters are possibilities, perhaps, but we have never met with them. We cannot follow them in their talk and their actions puzzle us. They are too subtle, too metaphysical, too remote, from mankind. It is wise for a poet to work "from within outward," but he should not work from so far within as never to come to the surface.

At this time, Browning came across a book of poetry by Elizabeth Barrett, then a very popular poet who even competed for the position of Poet Laureate. Browning wrote her a letter of sincere admiration, which started a long correspondence that lead to romantic love and marriage. However, her overbearing father was strongly against this marriage, not only because of his daughter's ill health – Elizabeth Barrett was an invalid, who suffered from bad lungs and spent days in her wheelchair while being on heavy narcotics – but also because he could not accept the idea that his daughter, coming from an old family of land aristocracy, would marry a simple bourgeois. Thus, the Brownings eloped to Italy and settled in

Florence. Their house Casa Guidi became then the centre of cultural life in the town, and now serves as a museum to their memory.

More importantly, Browning's talent flourished in Florence, as he found this cradle of Renaissance and European culture in general a very inspiring milieu. He said that Renaissance artists were “creators [who] were able to face life directly and record physical and emotional fact, when the picture replaced the ideogram, when spontaneity replaced academic timidity, when secularity replaced religiosity.” For Browning's poem “The Bishop Orders his Tomb at St. Praxed’s Church,” one of the leading aesthetes in the English-speaking world, John Ruskin said:

> I know no other piece of modern English, prose or poetry, in which there is so much told, as in these lines, of the Renaissance spirit – its worldliness, incongruity, pride, hypocrisy, ignorance itself, love of art, of luxury, and of a good Latin. It is nearly all that I said of the central renaissance in thirty pages of the “Stones of Venice” put into so many lines, Browning’s being also the antecedent work.

Browning's reputation today remains largely with his dramatic monologues, which represent an exceptional thematic and formal synchronization that captures a moment in, as he said, development of a soul. Their attendance to the point of view and their play of argument, irony, and drama, expressed through an almost vernacular syntax, made Oscar Wilde say:

> His work is marred by struggle, violence, and effort, and he passed not from emotion to form, but from thought to chaos. Still, he was great. He has been called a thinker, and was certainly a man who was always thinking, and always thinking aloud; but it was not thought that fascinated him, but rather the processes by which thought moves. It was the machine he loved, not what the machine makes. The method by which the fool arrives at his folly was so dear to him as the ultimate wisdom of the wise. So much, indeed, did the subtle mechanism of mind fascinate him that he despised language, or looked upon it as an incomplete instrument of expression […] Yes, Browning was great. And as what will he be remembered? As a poet? Ah, not as a poet! He will be remembered as a writer of fiction, as the most supreme writer of fiction.

From Browning's oeuvre we select: *Pauline: A Fragment of a Confession* (1833), *Paracelsus* (1835), *Bells and Pomegranates. No. I. Pippa Passes* (1841), *Bells and Pomegranates. No. III. Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), *Bells and Pomegranates. No. VII. Dramatic Romances & Lyrics* (1845), *Bells and Pomegranates. No. VIII. and Last. Luria; and A Soul's Tragedy* (1846), *Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day* (1887), *Men and Women* (1855), *Dramatis Personae* (1864), *The Ring and the Book* (1868-1869).

SELECTED CRITICISM

Aysha Bey, “Browning and the Dramatic Monologue”

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279533776_Robert_Browning_and_the_Dramatic_Monologue

The Victorian Age remains one of the most turbulent times in English history. The growth of industrialism and technology, the discoveries in the natural sciences and the subsequent crises in religion contributed to the sudden loosening of traditional values and faith. This same period saw, for the first time, a broadening of the electorate in the First and Second Reform Bills, which greatly expanded the English electorate. The break with the past accelerated by mid-century under the influence of geological, astronomical and other scientific investigations. The eons of time demonstrated by geology and the immensely vast universe demonstrated by physics significantly altered the perceptions of creation as depicted in the Biblical *Genesis*. Even before Charles Darwin’s Origin of Species in 1859, Victorians were inundated with scientific data that shook the foundations of their lives and beliefs. Darwin’s findings that placed humans squarely within the animal kingdom served simply as the “lightning rod” for the intense debates already raging about God, the special creation, and the teleological universe. Change came so quickly that Dr. Thomas Arnold remarked, “We have been living, as it were, the life of three hundred years in thirty” (Norton, Introduction to Victorian Age 1043). John Stuart Mill in The Spirit of the Age clearly recognized the break with the past:

> But mankind are now conscious of their new position. . . . [The] nineteenth century will be known to posterity as the era of one of the greatest revolutions of which history has preserved the remembrance, in the human mind, and in the whole constitution of human society. Even the religious world teems with new interpretations of the Prophecies, foreboding mighty changes near at hand. It is felt that men are henceforth to be held together by new ties, and separated by new barriers; for the ancient bonds will now no longer unite, nor the ancient boundaries confine. (3)

The early decades of the 1830s and 1840s highlighted these matters of “ancient bonds and boundaries” as artists struggled to find their place and function in the newly industrialized English society. In nineteenth-century England, concern for social obligations, civil responsibilities and familial duties dominated society; the praise of individuality common to the Byronic hero or the Shelleyan visionary all but disappeared. As Matthew Arnold notes, “Keats and Shelley were on a false track when they set themselves to reproduce the exuberance of expression, the charm, the richness of images, and the felicity, of the Elizabethan poets” (Letter to Clough, 564). As Arnold makes clear, the days of “exuberance” and “charm” have disappeared just as the absolute system of values that made them possible had disappeared. However, rather than retreating into isolated oblivion, the Victorian poets concentrate their energies upon the intricate relationships—personal, social, and spiritual—which make up the society.[1] The Victorian poets then translate these intricate relationships into an exploration of the fragile lines of communication

among persons and places in an attempt to repair the broken connections between man and his environment already noted by the Romantics.

The most dramatic influence upon the Victorian poets, however, rests in the rise of science and society's fascination with the facts of objective reality; therefore, a poet has the responsibility to inculcate facts into his poetry, even at its most lyrical. Robert Browning clearly responds to this change in interest: "For it is with this world, as starting point and basis alike, that we shall always have to concern ourselves: the world is not to be learned and thrown aside, but reverted to and relearned" ("Essay on Shelley" 337). Although Browning clearly respects Shelley's poetic vision, he also realizes that he cannot "dig where he stands" and explore the inner regions of his own soul while ignoring the "raw material" of people, places, and objects.

For Browning the poet's responsibility lies in his ability to "[intensify] the import of details and [round] the universal meaning" for those whose vision lacks the depth of insight granted to the poet. Browning insists that "Greatness in a work suggests an adequate instrumentality" ("Essay on Shelley," 338); there is moral purpose to the poet's creation, not just a display of power "for the display's sake, the love of riches, of distinction, of notoriety" ("Essay on Shelley," 338). With his sense of responsibility to his fellow beings, Browning re-fashions the dramatic monologue with its complex hermeneutics as the primary vehicle of cultural dialogue about the most controversial subjects of his time—religion, morality, sexuality, and science.

Recognizing the fragmentation already present in the individual self and the growing alienation of the mechanized society, Browning develops the dramatic monologue to attempt to bring back some of the lost unity of the human self by seeking "unrealized continuities among moments, places, persons, sexes, races, and classes" (Martin 27-28). In the dramatic monologue Browning focuses attention upon the fragile lines of communication and contradiction present in all communicative acts. He seeks to discover whether "networks of understanding and cooperation can be created or repaired" (Martin 28). Although the speaker directs his speech to a non-speaking listener, ultimately the speech is always directed outwards to the readers of other times and places.

In a letter to Elizabeth Barrett on August 10, 1845, Browning describes his intentions in the dramatic monologue:

> A Dramatic poet has to make you love or admire his men and women,--they must do and say all that you are to see and hear—really do it in your face, say it in your ears, and it is wholly for you, in your power, to name, characterize and so praise or blame, what is so said and done . . if you don't perceive of yourself, there is no standing by, for the Author, and telling you." (Letters I, 150).

Here Browning makes clear that it is the reader who makes the judgments about the fictional speaker without explicit direction from the poet. Most importantly, the Romantic link between the poet and the fictional speaker has been broken; the subjective speaker of the poem is not the lyrical voice of the poet. Although the

poet does not speak directly, the dramatic monologue retains some of the "lyrical intensity" of the traditional Romantic poets, yet these poems are not as subjective as Romantic poetry. In fact, the dramatic monologue with its aesthetic distancing of the poet may have been, in part, a reaction against the confessional style of the Romantic poetic tradition. Furthermore, the separation of poet and speaker permits the author a much wider latitude for discussion of controversial subjects than is available in any other poetic form.

This wider latitude permits the exploration of "extreme states of consciousness" that combines both a dramatic perspective and an objectivity that prevents extreme "introspection" so much a part of the Romantic tradition (Langbaum, "Dramatic Monologue" 36-37). Browning's dramatic monologues "delineate an inner landscape" but, simultaneously, add an objective view of what is present within the mind and soul of the fictional speaker ("Dramatic Monologue" 36). Certainly, Browning's view of these "extreme states" surprised and often shocked his contemporaries: "We detect a keen enjoyment of dirt as such, a poking of the nose into dunghills and the refuse of hospitals. . . accompanied by the peculiar grunt which expresses not only the pleasure experienced but also the nature of the experiencer" (qtd. in Langbaum, DM, 37). Although many were obviously surprised by Browning's presentation of "extreme states," this poetic representation is not surprising in an age fascinated with exploring "the nooks and crannies of individual life" (MacCallum 10). After all, it is this same age that witnesses the advent of psychology and psychiatry with Sigmund Freud. Browning simply fuses the Romantic interest in the inner state of mind with the Victorian obsession with science and objectivity to explore facets of human consciousness that lie outside the realm of the ordinary.

The dramatic monologue's primary advantage lies in its masking of the author through the subjective speaker. As Ralph W. Rader points out, the mask lyric "[resolves] the poet's sophisticated attempt to express, while at the same time objectifying and limiting, an aspect of his own subjective situation" (106). Because the poet's voice is "masked," he cannot be accused of making repugnant statements, hence in "Porphyria's Lover," the reader is drawn into the speaker's mind and even fascinated by the rationale of his madness. At no time does it occur to the reader's conscious mind that Browning is speaking (or even writing), yet there is an awareness that this text is a written poem, created by a specific individual. The merging of the poet and the speaker in the mind of the reader occurs without any conscious effort on the part of the reader. Rader explains this merging of duality: "this dual effect is based on our in-built capacity to empathize with the innerness of another person when we stand as the uninvolved external observer of his speech and bodily action, at the same time that we necessarily retain the anchoring perspective of our mind in our own body" (112-13). Characters in extreme positions (such as the Duke of Ferrara or Porphyria's lover) prevent the readers from applying their own standards of "normal" to the views being presented. As Robert Langbaum explains, "We understand the speaker of the dramatic monologue by sympathizing with him, and yet by remaining aware of the moral judgment we have suspended for the sake of understanding" (Experience 96). This feeling of sympathy permits the reader "the widest possible range of experience, while the critical reservation keeps

us aware of how far we are departing" (96).[2] The break with the speaker occurs only when the reader has reached a point of recognition of the speaker's moral reprehensibility. That judgment is based on the implication of the speaker's own monologue, not just upon the words themselves, as the reader historicizes the context of the speech. The reader's judgment is also aided by the distant setting of the dramatic monologue.

This distance of time and place also eases the reader's initial suspension of moral judgment about the speaker. Because of the distance, the reader brings to the poem radically different values, thereby creating a clash of values with the speaker. Yet the reader attempts to weigh these conflicting values and scrutinize the speaker's situation before making a conscious break with that speaker. There may even be an attempt to excuse the reprehensible actions of the speaker because the reader accepts (through "sympathy") the standards of the specific time and place evoked in the poem. For instance, when Browning first introduces the Duke of Ferrara in "My Last Duchess," the readers are placed in Renaissance Italy, a time and place of luxurious wealth, aesthetic pleasures and powerful nobles. Therefore, the Duke's nonchalant dismissal of the entire subject of his dead (and murdered) wife does not appear as shocking initially as it would have if Browning had set the poem in Renaissance England. Besides, Browning realizes that individuals find it far easier to judge "others" than to judge "themselves"; therefore, for the poet who desires that his readers evaluate moral stands and create new moral systems, it is imperative to provide aesthetic distancing that allows the reader to stand back and make pronouncements of right and wrong.

The effect of this localized setting contributes to the reader's ability to make those "proper' moral judgments about the speaker and his actions in the poem. The idea that morality may be relative and not absolute is a concept new to the Victorians. Prior to the upheavals in science and religion in the nineteenth-century, morality was based upon religion, then viewed as absolute in its strictures upon human conduct. However, with the new discoveries in natural science and geology, the absolutes of the providential, teleological universe were fast disappearing. In addition, the advent of railroads placed English men and women into contact with many different classes of individuals, and the rise of British colonialism put England into contact with a myriad of other cultures and religions. The Victorian hold on the foundation of morality shook as their world expanded into domains never possible before. The dramatic monologue fit perfectly into this new world of upheaval with its distancing in time and place. These distant settings help Browning to raise the issue of moral and cultural relativity within the human realm and to permit the Victorian society to contemplate such dramatic changes in their own world by viewing these changes first in another distant world.

Another important facet of the dramatic monologue is its concentration upon one individual character. Despite this focus, the poem does not complete a thorough study of that individual. Instead, the dramatic monologue focuses only upon one moment in time. Despite the constraint of time, the poet must provide some sort of key to the character so that the reader can appreciate, even sympathize, with the strange "other" being depicted. [3] (Insert Rader's discussion of "other" in modern sense). This development of reader sympathy lies at the heart of the

dramatic monologue. The dramatic monologue provides the scope (like a novel) for the exploration of individual character while it provides the dramatic touch of the individual speaker, the immediacy of "now" so essential to stage drama. As K.P. Saradhi points out, the dramatic monologue occurs in a "*specific action-context*" (327). This "action-context" involves the fictional subject in an "engagement with himself, or with other persons or circumstances" that produce "dynamic behavior" (327). This behavior, however, is "particularized" and "localized" so that the subject's peculiar, idiosyncratic traits are revealed to the reader. Even in "Johannes Agricola in Meditation," (where action is obviously limited), the reader is presented the peculiar vanity of Johannes: "I have God's warrant, could I blend/All hideous sins, as in a cup,/To drink the mingled venoms up;/Secure my nature will convert/The draught to blossoming gladness fast" (170:33-35). Johannes' security is obvious in this passage, and his setting in the distant past allows the readers to more clearly judge the speaker. Although Johannes is engaged primarily in dialogue with himself (and the silent auditor), the language is dynamic as he condemns all those who have done good works to attain salvation, while he, "lie[s] smiled on, full-fed" (41), looking down upon "hell's fierce bed" (43). Although the reader may be drawn into the pre-destination argument of Johannes, there is an inescapable moral judgment made against the speaker, whose vanity and pride dominate the poem. As Langbaum has demonstrated, in the dramatic monologue there is both "sympathy and judgment" on the part of the speaker. As the reader makes a critical judgment about Johannes, he also becomes aware of just how far both he and Johannes have departed from the accepted social and moral norms of society.

As Robert Langbaum points out, the dramatic monologue's treatment of a wide range of experiences corresponds to the Victorian penchant for scientific pursuit of knowledge. The reader's willingness to understand everything for its own sake, subject to specific time and place is the expression of "empiricism in literature" (Poetry of Experience 96). In the dramatic monologues, men and women are the subjects of investigation; the readers take into account as many facts as possible and make judgments about these individuals based upon specific historical, psychological, and personal facts available to them in the text or implied by the text. In applying a scientific attitude to the dramatic monologue, the reader makes judgment relative and limited in applicability to the case at hand. This relativity makes the dramatic monologue a particularly appropriate poetic form for the modern age. In modern society, values are always evolving; they are never final. Values are constantly checked against new facts and new situations in the same way that readers must constantly judge the monologue's characters based on particular facts and situations limited to their time and place. Browning's poetry is, thus, "a poetry of becoming rather than of being" (Langbaum, DM 42). His poetic ambiguity opens up the possibilities of meaning instead of forcing meaning upon the reader. For instance, when Browning was asked for information on the fate of the Duchess, he responded, "'Yes, I meant that the commands were that she be put to death.' And then, after a pause, he added, with a characteristic dash of expression, and as if the thought had just started up in his mind, 'Or he might have had her shut up in a convent'" (qtd. in Langbaum, DM 42). Browning is not being

deliberately obtuse; instead, he simply recognizes that final judgment is left to the reader.

The dramatic monologue's single speaker also permits the poet to explore the individual psyche while maintaining the dramatic touch of the individual speaker, the "I" of the poem. As M.W. MacCallum makes clear, "A certain dramatic understanding of the person speaking, which implies a certain dramatic sympathy with him is not only the essential condition, but the final cause of the whole species" (Warton Lecture 12). The speaker "states the case in his own way from his own point of view" (12). This "point of view" ranges from the insanity of Porphyria's lover to the ineffectual langour of Andrea del Sarto, yet both extremes fascinate the Victorians. As MacCallum points out, during the nineteenth-century, there was a great curiosity and desire to "explore not only the broad expanse but the unsuspected nooks and crannies of individual life" (MacCallum 10). The dramatic monologue provided the vehicle to explore not only human foibles like vanity and hypocrisy but also dangerous mental states like insanity, fanaticism, and even evil.

This Victorian fascination with character may be related to the loss of absolutes in religion and science. When the foundation of belief in Truth and moral absolutes began to disappear, determining right and wrong became far more problematic than before. Therefore, the Victorians had more interest in understanding individual motivation, even in those who appear strange and incomprehensible. The dramatic monologue also served as an important means to explore the expression of differing moral viewpoints. This attempt to understand or to justify the individual in the expression of his or her own moral viewpoint does not occur in stage drama. In the best dramas, the closing usually provides a balance, a restoration of harmony. However, in the dramatic monologue, there is no restoration, no unifying vision, only the speaker, justified in his time and place. Such individual justification suited the Victorian Age perfectly as it struggled with the loss of absolutes and tried to create a new value system without the benefit of the traditional cosmic harmonies once assumed to exist.

The dramatic monologue also has advantages in its presentation of the speaker and its treatment of the role of speech and poetic idiom. In his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth comments upon the problem of poetic speech: "I have proposed to myself to imitate, and, as far as is possible, to adopt the very language of men; . . . There will also be found in these volumes little of what is usually called poetic diction; I have taken as much pains to avoid it as others ordinarily take to produce it; this I have done. . . to bring my language near to the language of men" (244, Norton). In similar fashion, Browning uses the dramatic monologue to create a discourse in which the language of the subjective speaker is common to the particular time and place of the poem, while remaining fully comprehensible to the distant readers. Within the dramatic monologue, the subjective self directly speaks to the silent auditor; however, the language also fuses the speaker with the world outside himself—the readers in other distant times and places.

Language as both revealing and concealing constitutes a theme which Browning explores in depth throughout many of his poems and dramatic monologues. The presence of the dramatic and subjective self, present as the "I" in the dramatic monologue, presents a fascinating study of the modern concept of

speech act theory and its role in fictional discourse. Speech act theory recognizes an utterance as "an act performed by a speaker in a context with respect to an addressee" (Traugott & Pratt 229). There are two types of act distinguished: (1) a locutionary act and (2) an illocutionary act. The dramatic monologue concerns itself with the illocutionary act, "the attempt to accomplish some communicative purpose" (229). The three primary types of illocutionary acts contained in dramatic monologue are representative, expressive, and verdictive, each of which intends to affect the addresses' mental sets. Browning's genius in the dramatic monologue is his ability to combine the power of the direct utterance while still maintaining that power in fictional discourse.

An essential element of all illocutionary acts is appropriateness. For instance, differentiation among illocutionary acts rests upon the listener's (or in this case the reader's) understanding of the "appropriateness conditions" presented. In Browning's "My Last Duchess," the reader 'understands' the Duke's illocutionary acts as resting upon his power and authority so that when he says, "I gave commands;/Then all smiles stopped together" (194:45-46), the reader knows that the Duchess is dead. However, in reading "Andrea del Sarto" the reader is aware that Andrea's illocutionary acts are more pleading than directive or instructive: "But do not let us quarrel any more,/No, my Lucrezia; bear with me for once;/Sit down and all shall happen as you wish" (245:1-3). Readers understand the concept of appropriateness as the unspoken rules of language that are "in play" when people use language (Traugott & Pratt 232). These appropriateness conditions are complicated, however, in written communication and especially in fictional discourse. The dramatic monologue further complicates both the speech act and the written discourse by incorporating both in one poetic form—and then adding a silent interlocutor and a distant reader. The silent listener forces the speaker either to accede to the demands of appropriateness or to violate those standards. Meanwhile, the distant reader engages in interpretation, considering not only the speaker but also the silent listener and the author, creator of the entire fictional, written discourse.

Written discourse demands immediate clarification because there is no face-to-face dialogue taking place that can remedy misunderstandings. Readers cannot interrupt Bishop Blougram to ask him to clarify his ship metaphor, nor can the readers ask Browning to clarify Gigadibs' actions in Australia. Furthermore, the illocutionary acts in fictional discourse do not have to meet the same severe standards of appropriateness necessary in face-to-face dialogue. In fact, some linguists and literary critics believe that the customary appropriateness conditions are suspended in fictional speech, thus severing the connections between the words and the world. In the dramatic monologue, for instance, the duty to meet the appropriateness conditions rests upon the fictional speaker, not upon the author. Therefore, in "Porphyria's Lover" or in "My Last Duchess" the reader immediately attempts to set the poem in its appropriate context in order to infer meaning from the communicative acts of the speaker. This inference (in written text) involves the same procedures used in direct conversation. The first thing the reader does is to understand that there is a speaker, an "I", who is recounting an event or who is engaged in discourse within the text. The words, the tone, and the setting itself

direct the reader to determine what type of illocutionary act is taking place (representative, expressive, or verdictive). While engaged in this determination, the reader also holds the fictional character responsible for meeting the appropriateness conditions of his own speech. If these conditions are violated, the reader must then ask why the author has his speaker violate these conditions. However, when the speaker violates the appropriateness conditions of the speech act itself, the reader suddenly breaks with the speaker and applies critical judgment to the situation at hand. Thus, in "The Bishop orders His Tomb" the Bishop violates the appropriateness conditions generally associated with a deathbed scene. Instead of expressing his love for his family or his hopes for their future, the Bishop is vain and hypocritical, concerned with worldly possession even in death: "So, let the blue lump ["*lapis lazuli*/Big as a Jew's head cut off at the nape"] poise between my knees,/Like God the Father's globe on both his hands" (205: 47-48). Suddenly the reader becomes aware that the first line of this poem—"Vanity, saith the preacher, vanity!" applies not only to the Scriptural reference but also directly to the Bishop. This particular Bishop is going to his death without the spiritual peace generally considered "appropriate" to death; instead, he is going with regrets at leaving behind the worldly treasures and pleasures. After noting this violation of appropriateness, the reader then turns to consider why the poet, Browning, created such fictional discourse that does violate these appropriate conditions. At this point, in-depth interpretation begins for the reader, and the full significance of the dramatic monologue can be determined.

The significance and meaning of the dramatic monologue are aided by the placement of the poem in the distant past. However, the dramatic monologue itself appears to emerge without a distinct past. As Loy Martin points out, the dramatic monologue is "always a deictic gesture toward the fading and uncertain vistas of a linear dimension of time and speech" (25). For example, Browning's "Bishop Blougram's Apology" begins, "No more wine? Then we'll push back chairs and talk" (231:1). Clearly, two people are present, drinking wine; however, there is no established context or past to guide the reader into an analysis of the individuals or their roles in the poem. Similarly, "Fra Lippo Lippi" opens *in medias res* with Lippi's identification of himself to the guards who have seized him, "I am poor brother Lippo, by your leave!" (209:1). The reader, again, is thrust into the action before the creation of the context that will clarify the speaker's time and place. Despite the clearly localized time and place, the distant past of the speaker remains shadowy and unclear in most of Browning's dramatic monologues. It is the reader who must create the context of the poem and determine through time and place the appropriate moral judgment. In this treatment of the past, the dramatic monologue reflects the Victorian concern for the "runaway present" that seems to have cut English society from its own past traditions.

The runaway present is paralleled by the growing sense of the vastness of time and human insignificance within the immense universe. Walter Pater in The Renaissance writes: "That clear, perpetual outline of face and limb is but an image of ours. . . a design in a web, the actual threads of which pass out beyond it. This at least of flamelike our life has, that it is but the concurrence, renewed from moment to moment, of forces parting sooner or later on their ways" (1642-43, Norton).

Pater goes on to define time as "infinitely divisible," a "tremulous wisp constantly reforming itself on the stream, a relic more or less fleeting. It is with this movement, with the passage and dissolution of impressions, images, sensations, that analysis leaves off—that continual vanishing away, that strange, perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves" (Renaissance 1643). While the present always fades quickly, it is simultaneously cut off from the past. However, the dramatic monologue with its scenes often set in the distant past helps to reconnect the Victorian reader with the past which appears beyond the gulf of his ever-changing present. However, no reader can live in the past; therefore, the subjective speaker's "I" creates a sense of the immediate present for the reader, thus creating a reassuring connection of past and present for the reader.

The dramatic monologue's primary connections to modern literature lie in the hermeneutic relationships among poet, speaker, listener, and reader. The form itself "dramatises the hermeneutic problems in interpretation and communication (Armstrong 288). More important is the dramatic monologue's ability to represent four distinct hermeneutic relationships at the same time. As Isobel Armstrong makes clear, "The reader reads a text constructed out of a speaker interpreting himself to a listener interpreting him, but who is only to be inferred from the subject's speech" (288). The dramatic monologue also creates the immediacy of speech at the same time that it encourages analysis by the reader; as a result, there is an immediate question of exactly how meaning is constructed from the speaker's own words and the reader's own interpretation of them. The dramatic monologue calls into question the authority of the individual speaker, as in "Porphyria's Lover" when he announces, "at last I knew/Porphyria worshipped me" (170:32-33) and then proceeds to strangle her. The reader is forced to confront the unreliable (mad) narrator, but the reader's own interpretation is left to the individual in the same way that the silent listener never passes judgment on what is heard: "and yet God has not said a word" (170:60). Browning leaves to the reader the meaning of exactly what role God is expected to play in this poem. Is God absent? Is the word 'yet' significant, indicating that God has not "yet" punished the speaker. There is no closure; the text is open-ended with the mad speaker still dominating the text. With his unreliable narrators, Browning presents the modern view of the unreliability of human language as an index for truth.

The entire question of the unreliability of the narrator also relates to the role of the reader in creating the text. Wayne Booth points out that writers who demand reader construction of text are often called "obscure" or "difficult." Certainly, Browning has been subject to such criticism, even from his own wife, Elizabeth Barrett:

> And now when you come to print these fragments, would it not be well if you were to stoop to the vulgarism of prefixing some word of introduction, as other people do, you know, . . . a title. . . a name? You perplex your readers often by casting yourself on their intelligence in these things—and although it is true that readers in general are stupid and cant [sic] understand, it is still more true that they are lazy & wont [sic] understand and they dont [sic] catch your point of sight at first unless you think it

> worthwhile to push them by the shoulders & force them into the right place. (qtd. in Tucker 123).

In response to John Ruskin (who also found Browning's meanings obscure), however, Browning again reiterates the importance of the reader and his role in constructing meaning: "I cannot begin writing poetry till my imaginary reader has conceded licenses to me which you demur at altogether. I know that I don't make out my conceptions by my language, all poetry being a putting the infinite within the finite. You would have me paint it all plain out, which can't be, but by various artifices I try to make shift with touches and bits of outlines which succeed if they bear the conception from me to you." (qtd. in Wagner-Lawlor 293). The sheer difficulty of expressing the "infinite within the finite" creates for Browning a nearly insurmountable poetic difficulty, which is clearly expressed by his comments to Ruskin that all he can provide are the "touches and bits of outlines" to present his conception. Further complicating his process is the newness of individual, shifting meaning which often proved difficult for readers to understand and to accept.

Part of the perceived obscurity in Browning's poetry relates to the shift away from the relationship of the Romantic poet and his *persona* speaker to the separated Victorian poet and his dramatized speaker. For instance, when the speakers in both "Johannes Agricola" and "The Bishop Orders His Tomb" deliver their monologue through the written text, they "compromise the self [they] would justify" (Tucker 125). Language itself, especially the written text, demands context and historicity in order to be understood. In providing context, the speaker then opens himself to the listener's interpretation and, furthermore, loses his own subjective authority. As Tucker demonstrates, when the speaker of the Romantic lyric found himself in a horrific situation, the lyric poet generally "[found] ways to bail out of circumstances, or reconceive them, or else just lament them" (126). In the Victorian dramatic monologue, however, the "I" speaking is no longer the poet but a fictionalized narrative presence, who may or may not express the actual views of the author. The dramatic monologue then plays the subjective self against context in order to present irony and even discord to the silent audience and the distant readers, who bear the responsibility for determining meaning. Linda Shires explains that the dramatic monologue "relies on the double awareness that is a part of ironic distance. And it highlights . . . the dual claims of the self: objectivity and subjectivity, and the thresholds in between" (Introduction 99). These complex relationships at play in the dramatic monologue can produce confusion and obscurity for the readers as they try to sort out the speaker from the poet from the listener, whose silence is implicitly guiding the speaker's comments.

Besides the implicit direction provided by the speaker, there is also a sense of "collusion and collaboration" between the poet and the reader, provided by the presence of the unreliable narrator. The values implied by the distant author create a type of shared understanding between that author and his reader. Therefore, irony becomes a device for "excluding as well as for including" (Booth 304). Clearly, part of the pleasure of this secret communication between author and reader is derived from the sense that they both "know" something that the speaker does not—they share the values that the speaker lacks. There may be even more pleasure in

the reader's recognition that he understands something that others have probably missed in the poem; for this reason, few writers use simple irony because it is easily recognizable and limited in its final effects. More complex irony, however, can produce a profound effect upon the reader because in order to grasp the allusions, the reader has to apply his own emotions and intellect to the poem. By such endeavor, the reader is strongly engaged in the work, thus producing the more pronounced impact of the poem's meaning and significance.

In the dramatic monologue, Browning presents not only the unreliable narrator but also the unreliability of language as an expressive vehicle for "truth." Although the monologue's direct speech appears, at first, to be reliable, the speaker must still depend solely upon the "representation" of words. There is no direct action. When Porphyria's lover strangles her, the action is merely reported through the medium of words. The reader then relies solely upon the written text, representing the words of the speaker as recorded by the artist. Therefore, the account delivered in the text is twice-removed from the reader's apprehension. There is distance between speaker and reader and even more distance between the author and the reader. In his Theory of Fictions, Jeremy Bentham discusses the role of language: "Language represents that which is not an entity in the world" and is, therefore, "fiction" (qtd. in Armstrong 289).[5] Fiction itself is inherently unreliable as an indicator of truth. Therefore, in the dramatic monologue, the serious problem of the relationship of the sign and the signified is foregrounded. The sign is no longer stable for what which it signifies; therefore, meaning is no longer reliable and truth is no longer absolute.

As Wolfgang Iser demonstrates in The Act of Reading, the nineteenth-century's creation of the unreliable narrator "brings about a clash between the selected norms, the literary references, and the nature of their application, with the result that these norms are then transformed" (204-05). Through the "clash" of the speaker's norms with the reader's norms, Browning is able to create the environment in which a transformation of norms and values may be undertaken. This transformation is essential for the Victorians who must create a new value system and foundation for social and individual norms because of the loss of theological absolutes. The further division of the silent listener-reader perspectives also forces a transformation in the reader who then re-evaluates and reconsiders his own habitual perceptions. By such re-evaluation, the reader may also form new value judgments or create new criteria for making future judgments. Even if the reader fails to create new moral judgments, he is subjected to the speaker's own peculiar viewpoint, thereby creating an awareness in the reader of a different and perhaps just as viable viewpoint as his own.

Although the reader creates the meaning and significance of the text by comprehending the structure of the text, he "stands outside the text" (Iser 152). The reader then brings his own subjective experience to the reading of the text, but he must also be guided either implicitly or explicitly by the text itself. According to Iser, "only when the reader has been taken outside his own experience can his viewpoint be changed" (152). Therefore, meaning occurs only when "something *happens*" to the reader (152). However, the reader's viewpoint is also prearranged within the text itself so that the reader can both "assemble the meaning" and

"apprehend what he has assembled" (Iser 152). Obviously no author can assemble all the possible norms and values for every reader; therefore, the literature usually speaks to a particular historical public. Browning clearly represents the traditional Victorian value system through the presence of the silent auditor in the dramatic monologue. Although the auditor remains silent, the monologue of the speaker is inherently shaped by the presence of this listener, who embodies the values and norms of the Victorian society. In "Fra Lippo Lippi," Browning's silent listeners embody the traditional concept of the artist as isolated, subjective, creating works that "Make them [the people] forget there's such a thing as flesh" (212:182). The artist is to ignore the living world of 'objective' reality and create works of art that will help individuals to rise above the material world and help them to "ignore it all" (212:181). Through the words of "Fra Lippo Lippi," Browning presents his aesthetic principles which demand that the artist not ignore the material world but, instead, reshape it with his poetic insight: "The world's no blot for us,/Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good/To find its meaning is my meat and drink" (213:313-315). This new meaning and purpose for art is presented to the reader within the traditional context of the role of the artist and art, thereby creating a new experience for the reader. Thus, Browning demonstrates Iser's point that the reader's values cannot be transformed unless that reader is taken outside the realm of his own existence and confronted by a conflict of values. The readers then fix their attention not so much upon what the traditional values represent but "what their representation excludes, and so the aesthetic object—which is the whole spectrum of human nature—begins to arise out of what is adumbrated by the negated possibilities" (Iser 200). The reader understands that traditional aesthetic principles negate the material world and human experience, two facets of life (the "raw materials") which Browning believes must be represented in and transformed by art. These "transformations" in thinking occur, according to Iser, "whenever the norms are the foregrounded theme" (200). The brilliance of the dramatic monologue is its incorporation of the power of dramatic first-person speech with the more abstract lyrical poetic idiom. By combining these two forms, Browning can foreground the norms he wishes to transform and create a sensation of the "immediate now" for the reader.

Browning's silent auditors also serve to demonstrate how speech can be manipulated or abused, thereby making speech itself an unreliable indicator of truth (Mermin 64). For instance, in "Bishop Blougram's Apology," it is Gigadibs' silence that pushes the Bishop to advance his argument, step by step, countering the silent responses that are reported through the Bishop's direct speech: "You do despise me" (232:50); "No, friend, you do not beat me" (233:86); And now what are we?" (234:173). Obviously, Gigadbis has spoken at some time in the past (during the dinner or earlier), and the Bishop is guiding his speech in response to those previous remarks and in anticipation of continuing disagreement by Gigadibs. The rhetorical arguments replete with the simile of the human in the ship's "cabin of a life" (233:101) demonstrate the oratorical capacities of the Bishop and the manipulation of language common to persuasive argument. Whether such manipulation constitutes "truth," however, is a matter left to the reader. In fact, Blougram appears to disavow an absolute truth for all times and places.

Further complicating the monologue are the "pragmatics of silence" (Wagner-Lawlor 287). Silence is not merely the absence of speech; instead, it has tremendous communicative value. Silence has such varied values as awe, reverence, a consensus of viewpoint, or even passion too deep for words. In the dramatic monologue, however, the silence of the textual listener is most often that of intimidation, produced by the speaker. One of the most-often cited examples of this rhetorical intimidation is Browning's "My Last Duchess" with the overpowering Duke of Ferrara, whose total command of the scene never once weakens. As Wagner-Lawlor demonstrates, the listener's silence effectively feeds the "narcissistic self-delineation" of the speaker; however, this "textual listener" has not specifically chosen to be present to hear the dramatic monologue. Hr or she listens in "imposed silence" which Paolo Scarpi defines as occurring "when one of the two [speakers] recognizes the influence or supremacy of the other. . . *Choice* and *imposition* can express respectively assertion and recognition of leadership" (qtd. in Wagner-Lawlor 290). In the dramatic monologue, the silent audience offers no direct clue to the poem's reader about interpretation, agreement, or violent disagreement. Therefore, the readers must rely upon the speaker, thereby making themselves "complicitous. . . in his self-portraiture" (290). But when the speakers are obviously insane (Porphyria's Lover), egomaniacal (Johannes), or evil (Guido), the reader makes a definitive break with the silent listener. Ernest W.B. Hess-Luettich remarks on this shift in communication:

> As soon as the recipient also takes over the role of an observer of the whole process, for instance as critic, linguist, or psychologist, another metacommunicative level has to be taken into account. . . . This second communicative relationship is by no means a mere addendum, but structurally implied within the text itself. And the role of the audience is by no means only that of passive perceivers; perception is a very active interpreting process. (qtd. in Wagner-Lawlor 294)

The aggression, which silences the listener, does not silence the reader. In fact, the aggression may force the reader to make the break from the listener's status as a "complicitous" individual and to initiate a type of dialogue with the poem's speaker. "The fictional speaker thus produces a lack of consensus, and the author implicates this lack of consensus is part of what he is displaying, part of what he wants us to experience, evaluate, and interpret. (Pratt, qtd. in Wagner-Lawlor 294). Browning refuses to stand by and explicitly direct his reader, a point made clear in his remark that in his poems, "there is no standing by, for the Author, and telling you" (Letter to EBB, I, 150). Although Browning does not explicitly force the reader, it does not mean that the reader (like the silent listener) is unable to interpret and evaluate the speaker's actions.

Although the speaker completes his desired self-portraiture, the reader, unlike the silent listener, is able to interpret the speaker's portrait and actually complete the "real" portrait. The speaker quite literally through the medium of language has given himself away—to the reader who has been forced to construct meaning from the language provided. In Browning's monologue, the role of the

reader is, therefore, crucial. Browning himself describes his ideal reader: “It is certain. . . that a work like mine depends more immediately [than acted drama] on the intelligence and sympathy of the reader for its success—indeed were my scenes stars it must be his co-operating fancy which, supplying all chasms, shall connect the scattered lights into a constellation—a Lyre or a Crown” (Woolford 27). Clearly, Browning realizes that only the reader can apprehend the full meaning and significance of the dramatic monologue being read. The silence, which the reader at first may mistake for consensus and comes to realize his fear, forces the reader into a stance that Wolfgang Iser calls “constitutive activity” or interpretation. Ultimately, the reader’s interpretation is forced into conscious recognition by the silence of the listener who refuses to openly pass judgment on what is heard. Through Browning’s recognition of the interpretive role of the reader, he also endorses social interaction as essential in the creation of meaning and values within the larger society.

Browning’s greatest expression of his aesthetics, his principles of truth and knowledge lies in his verse narrative, The Ring and the Book. In this extensive narrative, Browning singularly displays the power of language—its power to persuade, to manipulate, and to tell the truth such as man knows it. In fact, in Book I, Browning presents the poetic relationships of knowledge, facts, and truth, using The Old Yellow Book as the ultimate source of the “crude facts” of the case of Guido, Pompilia, and Caponsacchi: “So, in this book lay absolutely truth,/Fanciless fact, the documents indeed,/Primary lawyer-pleadings for, against,/The aforesaid Five; real summed-up circumstances/Adduced in proof of these on either side” (Book I, 140-144). Repeatedly, Browning refers to these “facts” and the role they play in conjunction with his poetic insight and imagination. In so doing, Browning ingeniously played upon the public’s perception of truth, knowledge, facts, and poetry. He knew that his Victorian audience would perceive the facts as absolutely true simply because they are “facts” and, therefore, real. However, Browning also knew that that his audience would view his poetry as “make-believe” simply because it is the product of imagination or fancy. However, in a dramatic twist of irony, these “crude facts” are not as easily defined as “true”, even though they do appear objectively to be so. Browning makes his point abundantly clear: “Pages of proof this way, and that way. . . Thus wrangled, brangled, jangled they a month,/--Only on paper, pleadings all in print,/Nor ever was, except i’ the brains of men,/More noise by word of mouth than you hear now” (I: 236, 238-241). But a short time later, Browning returns to the “facts”: “This is the bookful: thus far take the truth,/The untempered gold, the fact untampered with” (I: 359-360). The observant reader cannot fail to notice that the facts have been any thing but “untampered with” in the wrangling of the lawyers and “pages of proof this way and that.” Ironically, Browning has seriously undercut the customary equation of fact with truth.

Browning then continues the discussion of his aesthetics in relation to fact and truth. Using the metaphor of the ring, Browning explains the way in which he has combined facts, “the untempered gold” with the alloy, his poetic imagination, to create the final poem, the actual ring. Just as gold mixes with an alloy to strengthen the ring, in the same way poetic imagination mixes with fact to create the poem:

"Lovers of dead truth, did ye fare the worse?/Lovers of live truth, found ye false my tale?" (I: 690-91). In perhaps his finest expression of "poetic truth," Browning writes:

> Well, now; there's nothing in nor out o' the world
> Good except truth: yet this, the something else,
> What's this then, which proves good yet seems untrue?
> This that I mixed with truth, motions of mine
> That quickened, made the inertness malleolable
> O' the gold was not mine,--what's your name for this?
> Are means to the end, themselves in part the end?
> Is fiction which makes fact alive, fact too?
> The somehow may be this how. (I: 692-700).

In anticipation of the modern studies of history and the multiple forms of narrative, Browning clearly presents the difficulties of separating truth from fiction and of determining absolute truth. As Browning continues to present differing perspectives in Books II through X, the reader is confounded by the contradictory interpretations of truth. Readers are forced to confront both the advantage and disadvantage of free speech: just as language presents the many sides of truth, it also represents the many sides of falsehood (Cook 3). It is up to the individual to listen to each argument and to judge truth from falsehood. The confusion may be great and the choice very difficult; however, life is the "difficult choice." Browning represents within the ring metaphor his belief that each individual's own viewpoint is like the segment of the ring first mentioned in Book I. Each version of individual truth is mixed with goldore and alloy; each element is needed to grasp the truth. Although it may be impossible for the finite individual to grasp infinite Truth, Browning clearly maintains that there is a knowable Truth. Human truth, however, remains always "plastic," changing shape with each individual perspective and experience.

Despite the seeming elusiveness of truth, Browning assigns to the character of Pope Innocent, the determination of "truth" and the attainment of human justice for the murderers of Pompilia and her parents. It is in the Pope's monologue that Browning most clearly presents his theory of truth as based upon deed and intention. He expresses full awareness of the obfuscating power of language and calls for "some acuter wit, fresh probing, sound/This multifarious mass of words and deeds" (X:260-61) to interpret and to judge. In an interesting anticipation of Jean Paul Sartre's espousal of "heroic choice," Browning reiterates the necessity of making a decision, the "difficult choice." Pope Innocent understands that he must see into the intention of the deed—"the seed of act"—which underlies all that has been done and said by everyone concerned. He must "review/Intent the little seeds of act, my tree,--/The thought, which clothed in deed" (X:278-280). As he studies the case, the Pope concludes that truth cannot be known by "these filthy rags of speech, this coil/Of statement, comment, query and response,/Tatters all too contaminate for use" (X:372-374). Although the spoken word has been abused and manipulated, "We men, in our degree, may know/There, simply, instantaneously, as

here/After long time and amid many lies,/Whatever we dare think we know indeed" (X:376-379). In deciding the fates of the accused murderers, the Pope relies upon the truth that cuts through the lies and makes a sham of all the words of pretense: "Life's business being just the terrible choice" (X:1232). Although the choice to condemn Guido and his accomplices to death is a terrible one, the Pope refuses the middle road of ambiguity that "stay[s]/Nowhere enough for being classed" (X:1217-18). Instead, he honors the mind of man as the determining factor of man's potential greatness: "Mind is not matter nor from matter, but/Above. . . Man's be the mind recognized at the height" (X:1348-1350). As man makes decisions and difficult choices, his moral sense grows and he creates a "fairer moral world than this he finds" (X:1409). However, when sin reigns instead of God, the virtuous are often destroyed. Pompilia's death is evidence of the reign of sin instituted by Guido, a reign that only the Pope can decide to bring to an end. The Pope, thus, cuts through the sham and facade of Guido and condemns him to death; he makes the difficult choice that each human must make within his own limited realm of finite knowledge. Despite human limitations, however, each individual must make choices. and it is only through these decisions made clear in human conduct that each person is known. Within the Pope's monologue, Browning presents the clearest statement of his poetics of truth, human integrity, and choice.

When Browning speaks again in *propria persona* in Book XII, he reiterates the failure of speech and defies closure: "Here were the end, had anything an end" (XII:1). Human speech fails to reveal character and/or truth: "This lesson that our human speech is nought,/Our human testimony false, our fame/And human estimation words and wind" (XII:834-836). Those facts praised so highly in Book I have taken on a very different look by the end of the poem. As Browning explains, it is the role of Art to present the truth that is primarily impossible to tell to man directly: "But Art—wherein man nowise speaks to men,/Only to mankind,--Art may tell a truth/Obliquely, do the thing shall breed the thought,/Nor wrong the thought missing the mediate word" (XII:854-857). Rather than confronting man with truth, Art provides truth "Beyond mere imagery on the wall" (XII:859) and moves "beyond the facts/Suffice the eye and save the soul beside" (XII:863). Through the gift of poetic insight, the poet can display the inner truth and meaning of the world for those less gifted; in so doing, the poet not only creates beauty but can also save the soul of his fellow beings. In The Book and The Ring, Browning the artist affirms the meaning and purpose of art in the human world and links this purpose to the divine and purposeful universe from which all Truth flows.

Content Notes:

1. Charles Darwin in his Origin of Species describes the "tangled bank," teeming with life and intricately connected:
"It is interesting to contemplate a tangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent upon each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws around us." (131, Norton Critical)The imagery of the "tangled bank" or the intricate web dominates much of Victorian fiction and provides a powerful metaphor that perfectly describes the Victorian concept of the inter-relationships and inter-connections among all life forms and especially among people in the English society.
2. Cynthia Scheinberg in her article "Recasting 'sympathy and judgment': Amy Levy, Women Poets, and the Victorian Dramatic Monologue." Victorian Poetry 35.2 (Summer 1997) is concerned about Robert Langbaum's concept of "sympathy" which she feels is based upon "some gendered assumptions about a reader's capacity to identify with poetic speech" (176). In her view, Langbaum misses the point that "a reader's capacity for sympathy is almost always linked to a reader's cultural, political, and gendered identity" (176). In Langbaum's analysis of Browning's "My Last Duchess," for instance, he universalizes reader-response to the Duke's "immense power and freedom" and claims that readers suspend their moral judgment in order to participate with the Duke in his exercise of this power. Scheinberg, however, points out that in interpreting the meaning of the dramatic monologue, which itself questions absolute or universal truth, it is ironic that Langbaum then creates a type of "universal reader" responding to the poem.
Scheinberg admits, however, that in 1957 when Langbaum created his text there was little to no available feminist criticism to provide an alternative view. Her identification of the reader's "cultural, political, and gendered identity" as fundamental in forming the level of response (Langbaum's sympathy or understanding) is important for the meaning and interpretation of the dramatic monologue.

Scheinberg also points out the very important matter of the dramatic monologue's position as the "other" Victorian poetic genre, a sort of less dominant genre, ranking well behind the novel and other poetic forms. Scheinberg hypothesizes when whenever discourse focuses upon the dramatic monologue's status as the "other" kind of genre, the "'Others' of our literary tradition (in this case, women), have been written out of the theory" (175-76). Although she focuses her attention in this article upon the female poet Amy Levy and the dramatic monologue itself, her hypothesis regarding the position of women as the "Other" is abundantly demonstrable by the publishing problems of women novelists (the Bronte sisters, George Eliot).
3. Ralph Rader in his article "Notes on Some Structural Varieties and Variations in Dramatic 'I' Poems and Their Theoretical Implications." Victorian Poetry 22.2 (Summer 1984) discusses the "other" as the speaker "projected as a person 'other' than the poet with a mental process cleanly separate form his" (104). Rader terms

the speaker as the 'other' with whom the reader attempts to create a "sympathetic understanding" (114). He notes that the poet creates characters in extreme situations so that the reader cannot easily assimilate the subject's views but must work at interpretation and understanding through the poet's implicit 'clues' to character within the written text of the poem.

4. Speech act theory was developed in the 1960s by British language philosophers, most especially J.L. Austin in his How to Do Things with Words and John R. Searle in Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language. A working classification of illocutionary acts includes representatives (acts that represent a state of affairs), expressives (acts that express the speaker's psychological attitude), verdictives (acts that deliver a finding as to value or fact), directives (acts which induce a person to do something), commissives (acts that commit a speaker to doing something), and declarations (acts that bring about the state of affairs to which they refer). The most important and frequently appearing illocutionary acts in dramatic monologue include the representatives, expressives, and verdictives. Speech act theory is complicated, however, in written, fictional discourse because the reader has a dual presence (the poet and the speaker) in mind (see the earlier discussion of Rader and the merging of duality in the reader's mind). Although the author is directly responsible for the fictional character's discourse, the speaker fulfills his own needs in discourse, while the author fulfills his own communicative purpose in creating the fictional work of art in a particular genre. Browning's genius is his ability to weave these hermeneutic relationships and, at times, even adversarial relationships into a unified whole.

5. Isobel Armstrong in Victorian Poetry cites the edited text of Jeremy Bentham's Theory of Fictions, edited by C.K. Ogden and published in London in 1932. In an enlightening discussion of the theory of fictions as a theory of language, she cites Bentham's work as a "justification for poetics" (150). Although Bentham is discussing "legal fictions," he actually develops and justifies an aesthetic theory. For instance, Bentham writes, "A fictitious entity is an entity to which, though by the grammatical form of the discourse employed in speaking of it, existence by ascribed, yet in truth and reality existence is not meant to be ascribed. Every noun-substantive which is not the name of a real entity, perceptible and inferential, is the name of a fictitious entity" (qtd. in Armstrong 504, n28). Yet Bentham goes on to argue that although these fictional entities are, in truth, 'nothingness', they must still be treated as real with 'real' existence in the world of objective reality: "They are essential to language and the process of conceptualisation" (Armstrong 150). As Armstrong points out, Bentham's theory has a distinct advantage for the artist in that it confirms "the necessity of fictions and places them as central to the process of thinking" (150). Not only are these fictions central in thought but they also "intervene substantively in the world and affect choices and actions however fictional they may be. They are as enabling as they are disreputable" (150).

Browning uses such a theory of fictions as his means to built the "imaginative construct" which can intervene in the real world and permit the dramatized speaker (and the poet) to escape the subjective and isolated 'self' of the first-person discourse. As Armstrong points out, moreover, this theory of fictions also provides Browning with the core of his own treatment of the 'truth' of fiction;

for instance, Browning repeatedly tests the issue of 'truth' in his dramatic monologues. Each individual retains only one aspect of the truth, and even that one aspect is open to interpretation, thus Browning's view is always presented with scepticism. Armstrong's analysis of Bentham's argument provides a profound in-depth study of poetics, aesthetics, and their role in the creation of mental constructs necessary not only in the world of poetry and fine arts but also in the ordinary life of each individual.

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SELECTED POETRY

Andrea del Sarto

But do not let us quarrel any more,
No, my Lucrezia; bear with me for once:
Sit down and all shall happen as you wish.
You turn your face, but does it bring your heart?
I'll work then for your friend's friend, never fear,
Treat his own subject after his own way,
Fix his own time, accept too his own price,
And shut the money into this small hand
When next it takes mine. Will it? tenderly?
Oh, I'll content him,—but to-morrow, Love!
I often am much wearier than you think,
This evening more than usual, and it seems
As if—forgive now—should you let me sit
Here by the window with your hand in mine
And look a half-hour forth on Fiesole,
Both of one mind, as married people use,
Quietly, quietly the evening through,
I might get up to-morrow to my work

Cheerful and fresh as ever. Let us try.
To-morrow, how you shall be glad for this!
Your soft hand is a woman of itself,
And mine the man's bared breast she curls inside.
Don't count the time lost, neither; you must serve
For each of the five pictures we require:
It saves a model. So! keep looking so—
My serpentining beauty, rounds on rounds!
—How could you ever prick those perfect ears,
Even to put the pearl there! oh, so sweet—
My face, my moon, my everybody's moon,
Which everybody looks on and calls his,
And, I suppose, is looked on by in turn,
While she looks—no one's: very dear, no less.
You smile? why, there's my picture ready made,
There's what we painters call our harmony!
A common greyness silvers everything,—
All in a twilight, you and I alike
—You, at the point of your first pride in me
(That's gone you know),—but I, at every point;
My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down
To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole.
There's the bell clinking from the chapel-top;
That length of convent-wall across the way
Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside;
The last monk leaves the garden; days decrease,
And autumn grows, autumn in everything.
Eh? the whole seems to fall into a shape
As if I saw alike my work and self
And all that I was born to be and do,
A twilight-piece. Love, we are in God's hand.
How strange now, looks the life he makes us lead;
So free we seem, so fettered fast we are!
I feel he laid the fetter: let it lie!
This chamber for example—turn your head—
All that's behind us! You don't understand
Nor care to understand about my art,
But you can hear at least when people speak:
And that cartoon, the second from the door
—It is the thing, Love! so such things should be—
Behold Madonna!—I am bold to say.
I can do with my pencil what I know,
What I see, what at bottom of my heart
I wish for, if I ever wish so deep—
Do easily, too—when I say, perfectly,
I do not boast, perhaps: yourself are judge,

Who listened to the Legate's talk last week,
And just as much they used to say in France.
At any rate 'tis easy, all of it!
No sketches first, no studies, that's long past:
I do what many dream of, all their lives,
—Dream? strive to do, and agonize to do,
And fail in doing. I could count twenty such
On twice your fingers, and not leave this town,
Who strive—you don't know how the others strive
To paint a little thing like that you smeared
Carelessly passing with your robes afloat,—
Yet do much less, so much less, Someone says,
(I know his name, no matter)—so much less!
Well, less is more, Lucrezia: I am judged.
There burns a truer light of God in them,
In their vexed beating stuffed and stopped-up brain,
Heart, or whate'er else, than goes on to prompt
This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand of mine.
Their works drop groundward, but themselves, I know,
Reach many a time a heaven that's shut to me,
Enter and take their place there sure enough,
Though they come back and cannot tell the world.
My works are nearer heaven, but I sit here.
The sudden blood of these men! at a word—
Praise them, it boils, or blame them, it boils too.
I, painting from myself and to myself,
Know what I do, am unmoved by men's blame
Or their praise either. Somebody remarks
Morello's outline there is wrongly traced,
His hue mistaken; what of that? or else,
Rightly traced and well ordered; what of that?
Speak as they please, what does the mountain care?
Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for? All is silver-grey,
Placid and perfect with my art: the worse!
I know both what I want and what might gain,
And yet how profitless to know, to sigh
"Had I been two, another and myself,
"Our head would have o'erlooked the world!" No doubt.
Yonder's a work now, of that famous youth
The Urbinate who died five years ago.
('Tis copied, George Vasari sent it me.)
Well, I can fancy how he did it all,
Pouring his soul, with kings and popes to see,
Reaching, that heaven might so replenish him,
Above and through his art—for it gives way;

That arm is wrongly put—and there again—
A fault to pardon in the drawing's lines,
Its body, so to speak: its soul is right,
He means right—that, a child may understand.
Still, what an arm! and I could alter it:
But all the play, the insight and the stretch—
(Out of me, out of me! And wherefore out?
Had you enjoined them on me, given me soul,
We might have risen to Rafael, I and you!
Nay, Love, you did give all I asked, I think—
More than I merit, yes, by many times.
But had you—oh, with the same perfect brow,
And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth,
And the low voice my soul hears, as a bird
The fowler's pipe, and follows to the snare —
Had you, with these the same, but brought a mind!
Some women do so. Had the mouth there urged
"God and the glory! never care for gain.
"The present by the future, what is that?
"Live for fame, side by side with Agnolo!
"Rafael is waiting: up to God, all three!"
I might have done it for you. So it seems:
Perhaps not. All is as God over-rules.
Beside, incentives come from the soul's self;
The rest avail not. Why do I need you?
What wife had Rafael, or has Agnolo?
In this world, who can do a thing, will not;
And who would do it, cannot, I perceive:
Yet the will's somewhat—somewhat, too, the power—
And thus we half-men struggle. At the end,
God, I conclude, compensates, punishes.
'Tis safer for me, if the award be strict,
That I am something underrated here,
Poor this long while, despised, to speak the truth.
I dared not, do you know, leave home all day,
For fear of chancing on the Paris lords.
The best is when they pass and look aside;
But they speak sometimes; I must bear it all.
Well may they speak! That Francis, that first time,
And that long festal year at Fontainebleau!
I surely then could sometimes leave the ground,
Put on the glory, Rafael's daily wear,
In that humane great monarch's golden look,—
One finger in his beard or twisted curl
Over his mouth's good mark that made the smile,
One arm about my shoulder, round my neck,

The jingle of his gold chain in my ear,
I painting proudly with his breath on me,
All his court round him, seeing with his eyes,
Such frank French eyes, and such a fire of souls
Profuse, my hand kept plying by those hearts,—
And, best of all, this, this, this face beyond,
This in the background, waiting on my work,
To crown the issue with a last reward!
A good time, was it not, my kingly days?
And had you not grown restless... but I know—
'Tis done and past: 'twas right, my instinct said:
Too live the life grew, golden and not grey,
And I'm the weak-eyed bat no sun should tempt
Out of the grange whose four walls make his world.
How could it end in any other way?
You called me, and I came home to your heart.
The triumph was—to reach and stay there; since
I reached it ere the triumph, what is lost?
Let my hands frame your face in your hair's gold,
You beautiful Lucrezia that are mine!
"Rafael did this, Andrea painted that;
"The Roman's is the better when you pray,
"But still the other's Virgin was his wife—"
Men will excuse me. I am glad to judge
Both pictures in your presence; clearer grows
My better fortune, I resolve to think.
For, do you know, Lucrezia, as God lives,
Said one day Agnolo, his very self,
To Rafael . . . I have known it all these years . . .
(When the young man was flaming out his thoughts
Upon a palace-wall for Rome to see,
Too lifted up in heart because of it)
"Friend, there's a certain sorry little scrub
"Goes up and down our Florence, none cares how,
"Who, were he set to plan and execute
"As you are, pricked on by your popes and kings,
"Would bring the sweat into that brow of yours!"
To Rafael's!—And indeed the arm is wrong.
I hardly dare . . . yet, only you to see,
Give the chalk here—quick, thus, the line should go!
Ay, but the soul! he's Rafael! rub it out!
Still, all I care for, if he spoke the truth,
(What he? why, who but Michel Agnolo?
Do you forget already words like those?)
If really there was such a chance, so lost,—
Is, whether you're—not grateful—but more pleased.

Well, let me think so. And you smile indeed!
This hour has been an hour! Another smile?
If you would sit thus by me every night
I should work better, do you comprehend?
I mean that I should earn more, give you more.
See, it is settled dusk now; there's a star;
Morello's gone, the watch-lights show the wall,
The cue-owls speak the name we call them by.
Come from the window, love,—come in, at last,
Inside the melancholy little house
We built to be so gay with. God is just.
King Francis may forgive me: oft at nights
When I look up from painting, eyes tired out,
The walls become illumined, brick from brick
Distinct, instead of mortar, fierce bright gold,
That gold of his I did cement them with!
Let us but love each other. Must you go?
That Cousin here again? he waits outside?
Must see you—you, and not with me? Those loans?
More gaming debts to pay? you smiled for that?
Well, let smiles buy me! have you more to spend?
While hand and eye and something of a heart
Are left me, work's my ware, and what's it worth?
I'll pay my fancy. Only let me sit
The grey remainder of the evening out,
Idle, you call it, and muse perfectly
How I could paint, were I but back in France,
One picture, just one more—the Virgin's face,
Not yours this time! I want you at my side
To hear them—that is, Michel Agnolo—
Judge all I do and tell you of its worth.
Will you? To-morrow, satisfy your friend.
I take the subjects for his corridor,
Finish the portrait out of hand—there, there,
And throw him in another thing or two
If he demurs; the whole should prove enough
To pay for this same Cousin's freak. Beside,
What's better and what's all I care about,
Get you the thirteen scudi for the ruff!
Love, does that please you? Ah, but what does he,
The Cousin! what does he to please you more?

I am grown peaceful as old age to-night.
I regret little, I would change still less.
Since there my past life lies, why alter it?
The very wrong to Francis!—it is true

I took his coin, was tempted and complied,
And built this house and sinned, and all is said.
My father and my mother died of want.
Well, had I riches of my own? you see
How one gets rich! Let each one bear his lot.
They were born poor, lived poor, and poor they died:
And I have laboured somewhat in my time
And not been paid profusely. Some good son
Paint my two hundred pictures—let him try!
No doubt, there's something strikes a balance. Yes,
You loved me quite enough. it seems to-night.
This must suffice me here. What would one have?
In heaven, perhaps, new chances, one more chance—
Four great walls in the New Jerusalem,
Meted on each side by the angel's reed,
For Leonard, Rafael, Agnolo and me
To cover—the three first without a wife,
While I have mine! So—still they overcome
Because there's still Lucrezia,—as I choose.

Again the Cousin's whistle! Go, my Love.

My Last Duchess

That’s my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now; Fra Pandolf’s hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will’t please you sit and look at her? I said
“Fra Pandolf” by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, ’twas not
Her husband’s presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess’ cheek; perhaps
Fra Pandolf chanced to say, “Her mantle laps
Over my lady’s wrist too much,” or “Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat.” Such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had

A heart—how shall I say?— too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace—all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men—good! but thanked
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—which I have not—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse—
E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretense
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

Porphyria's Lover

The rain set early in to-night,
    The sullen wind was soon awake,
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
    And did its worst to vex the lake:
    I listened with heart fit to break.
When glided in Porphyria; straight
    She shut the cold out and the storm,

And kneeled and made the cheerless grate
    Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;
    Which done, she rose, and from her form
Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,
    And laid her soiled gloves by, untied
Her hat and let the damp hair fall,
    And, last, she sat down by my side
    And called me. When no voice replied,
She put my arm about her waist,
    And made her smooth white shoulder bare,
And all her yellow hair displaced,
    And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,
    And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair,
Murmuring how she loved me — she
    Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,
To set its struggling passion free
    From pride, and vainer ties dissever,
    And give herself to me for ever.
But passion sometimes would prevail,
    Nor could to-night's gay feast restrain
A sudden thought of one so pale
    For love of her, and all in vain:
    So, she was come through wind and rain.
Be sure I looked up at her eyes
    Happy and proud; at last I knew
Porphyria worshipped me; surprise
    Made my heart swell, and still it grew
    While I debated what to do.
That moment she was mine, mine, fair,
    Perfectly pure and good: I found
A thing to do, and all her hair
    In one long yellow string I wound
    Three times her little throat around,
And strangled her. No pain felt she;
    I am quite sure she felt no pain.
As a shut bud that holds a bee,
    I warily oped her lids: again
    Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.
And I untightened next the tress
    About her neck; her cheek once more
Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:
    I propped her head up as before,
    Only, this time my shoulder bore
Her head, which droops upon it still:
    The smiling rosy little head,
So glad it has its utmost will,

That all it scorned at once is fled,
And I, its love, am gained instead!
Porphyria's love: she guessed not how
Her darling one wish would be heard.
And thus we sit together now,
And all night long we have not stirred,
And yet God has not said a word!

Meeting at Night

I

The grey sea and the long black land;
And the yellow half-moon large and low;
And the startled little waves that leap
In fiery ringlets from their sleep,
As I gain the cove with pushing prow,
And quench its speed i' the slushy sand.

II

Then a mile of warm sea-scented beach;
Three fields to cross till a farm appears;
A tap at the pane, the quick sharp scratch
And blue spurt of a lighted match,
And a voice less loud, thro' its joys and fears,
Than the two hearts beating each to each!

Parting at Morning

Round the cape of a sudden came the sea,
And the sun looked over the mountain's rim:
And straight was a path of gold for him,
And the need of a world of men for me.

Two in the Campagna

I

I wonder do you feel to-day
As I have felt since, hand in hand,
We sat down on the grass, to stray
In spirit better through the land,
This morn of Rome and May?

II
For me, I touched a thought, I know,
Has tantalized me many times,
(Like turns of thread the spiders throw
Mocking across our path) for rhymes
To catch at and let go.

III
Help me to hold it! First it left
The yellowing fennel, run to seed
There, branching from the brickwork's cleft,
Some old tomb's ruin: yonder weed
Took up the floating weft,

IV
Where one small orange cup amassed
Five beetles,—blind and green they grope
Among the honey-meal: and last,
Everywhere on the grassy slope
I traced it. Hold it fast!

V
The champaign with its endless fleece
Of feathery grasses everywhere!
Silence and passion, joy and peace,
An everlasting wash of air—
Rome's ghost since her decease.

VI
Such life here, through such lengths of hours,
Such miracles performed in play,
Such primal naked forms of flowers,
Such letting nature have her way
While heaven looks from its towers!

VII
How say you? Let us, O my dove,
Let us be unashamed of soul,
As earth lies bare to heaven above!
How is it under our control
To love or not to love?

VIII
I would that you were all to me,
You that are just so much, no more.

Nor yours nor mine, nor slave nor free!
Where does the fault lie? What the core
O' the wound, since wound must be?

IX

I would I could adopt your will,
See with your eyes, and set my heart
Beating by yours, and drink my fill
At your soul's springs,—your part my part
In life, for good and ill.

X

No. I yearn upward, touch you close,
Then stand away. I kiss your cheek,
Catch your soul's warmth,—I pluck the rose
And love it more than tongue can speak—
Then the good minute goes.

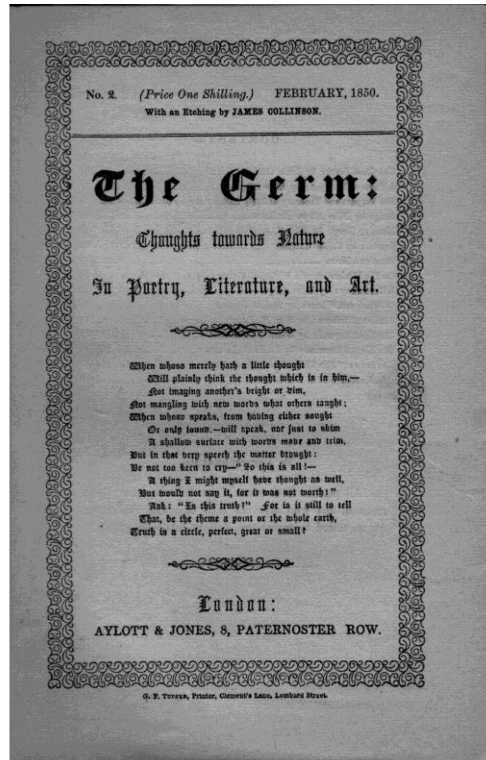
XI

Already how am I so far
Out of that minute? Must I go
Still like the thistle-ball, no bar,
Onward, whenever light winds blow,
Fixed by no friendly star?

XII

Just when I seemed about to learn!
Where is the thread now? Off again!
The old trick! Only I discern—
Infinite passion, and the pain
Of finite hearts that yearn.

PRE-RAPHAELITE BROTHERHOOD



No. 2. *(Price One Shilling.)* FEBRUARY, 1850.

With an Etching by JAMES COLLINSON.

The Germ:

Thoughts towards Nature

In Poetry, Literature, and Art.

When whoso merely hath a little thought
Will plainly think the thought which is in him,—
Not imaging another's bright or dim,
Not mangling with new words what others taught;
When whoso speaks, from having either sought
Or only found,—will speak, not just to skim
A shallow surface with words made and trim,
But in that very speech the matter brought:
Be not too keen to cry—"So this is all!—
A thing I might myself have thought as well,
But would not say it, for it was not worth!"
Ask: "Is this truth?" For is it still to tell
That, be the theme a point or the whole earth,
Truth is a circle, perfect, great or small?

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The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, or Pre-Raphaelites, was a group of young painters and poets. It was found in 1848 by three students at the Royal Academy of Art, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Homan Hunt, and John Everett Millais. They were soon joined by numerous other artists and art critics, including, most notably Rossetti's brother William Michael and his sister Christina, William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, and John William Waterhouse. The group originally met to argue against mannerism of art forms supported at the Academy, which saw its sole model at the Italian Renaissance, in the first place in the painting practiced by the late Renaissance artist, Raphael. Against Raphael's, and his followers', conventional poses, their narrow choice of form, and a reduction of colours to a dark palette, they juxtaposed Italian Cinquecento, with its freer expression and its intense bright colours. Hence their name.

To forward their reformative ideas, the brotherhood founded their journal whose full title was *The Germ: Thoughts towards Nature in Poetry, Literature, and Art*. The journal had only four issued in 1850 and closed because it was financially unsustainable. Yet, its historical importance lies in the fact that it expressed ideas that were a British answer to the French *l'art pour l'art* and the predecessor of

British aestheticism in literature. The journal was not consistent in its methodology and complied a variety of material, poems, art criticism, and reproductions of paintings, which would sometimes be only slightly supportive of the artists' poetics. However, theirs was not a strict doctrine and they would gladly accept every kind of expression that went beyond mechanical reproduction, against the ugliness of industrial civilisation, for the beauty of nature, and the mere beauty of form and art, against mannerism and for freedom and honesty in art and literature. William Michael Rossetti defined their four declarations:

1. to have genuine ideas to express;
2. to study Nature attentively, so as to know how to express them;
3. to sympathise with what is direct and serious and heartfelt in previous art, to the exclusion of what is conventional and self-parading and learned by rote; and
4. most indispensable of all, to produce thoroughly good pictures and statues.

The members of the brotherhood were inevitably influenced by Romanticism and one of their greatest tendencies was an escape from the uncomfortable Nineteenth-century materialistic surrounding to: medieval culture and its poetic and spiritual forms; nature, to which, following John Ruskin's advice in his essay *Modern Painters*, “they should go... in all singleness of heart, and walk with her laboriously and trustingly... rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing”; literary words of their predecessors, such Shakespeare's, Keats', Tennyson's; folklore of various regions; the naive religious expressions, such as was the early Catholicism; individual imaginative worlds abundant with beautiful and passionate bodies and faces that promote the freedom of physical love and the idea that it was a means of achieving a pure spiritual beauty, love, and knowledge. For all these, the Victorian hypocritical apprehension considered them dangerous, especially when they were directly associated with foreignness and Catholicism, as the Rossettis were. Their first exhibitions, at which all their paintings were signed only by the initials, “PRB,” provoked a large public controversy. *The Times* published in May 1851, the Academy's official standing point:

> We cannot censure at present as amply or as strongly as we desire to do, that strange disorder of the mind or the eyes which continues to rage with unabated absurdity among a class of juvenile artists who style themselves P.R.B., which being interpreted, means *Pre-Raphael-brethren*... The Council of the Academy, acting in a spirit of toleration and indulgence to young artists, have now allowed these extravagances to disgrace their walls... the public may fairly require that such offensive jests should not continue to be exposed... These young artists have unfortunately become notorious by addicting themselves to an antiquated style and an affected simplicity in Painting... To become great in art, it has been said that a painter must become as a little child... That morbid infatuation which sacrifices truth, beauty and genuine feeling to mere eccentricity deserves no quarter at the hands of the public.

SELECTED CRITICISM

Jerome McGann, "Introduction." In Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Collected Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Jerome McGann, New Haven & London: Yale Yale University Press, 2003, pp: xvii-xxviii.

THE LIFE

Dante Gabriel Rossetti was born in London on 12 May 1828 and died on Easter Day, 9 April 1882. He spent nearly his entire working life in the city of his birth. Indeed, he only left Great Britain three times, and in each case but the first quite briefly. Though his work is steeped in Italian traditions (both poetical and pictorial), Rossetti never visited Italy. He is first and always an English—more, a London—writer and artist.

His father was the celebrated (and controversial) Dante scholar and Italian political exile Gabriele Rossetti (1783–1854). His mother, Frances (1800–1886), much younger than her husband, was Anglo-Italian—Polidori on her father's side. (Her brother, Dr. John Polidori, was Byron's doctor and companion during the first part of his exile from England in 1816.) Rossetti had three siblings, two younger than himself. All were remarkable. His sister Christina (1830–1894) becameas distinguished a poet as her brother. His brother, William Michael (1829–1919), a writer himself, edited his brother's work after the latter's death and served as the first archivist and historian of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. His other sister, Maria Francesca (1827–1876), was the oldest sibling; she published a commentary on Dante and became an Anglican nun.

Rossetti's interests in writing and painting appeared early, encouraged by his immediate family life as well as by the literary interests of his grandfather Polidori. All four siblings were writing from a very early age, and drawings by Rossetti survive from the mid-1830s. He went to Sass's drawing school in 1841, and in 1845 moved to the Antique School of the Royal Academy. He did not work well under academic tutelage, however, and in 1848 he dropped away from school altogether.

The departure from school proved a crucial event in Rossetti's life. He initially apprenticed himself to Ford Madox Brown (1821–1893), whose work he had first seen and admired in 1844. At the 1848 Royal Academy Exhibition he saw William Holman Hunt's (1827–1910) *Eve of St. Agnes* and was so taken with it that he sought out the young painter. The two quickly became friends. Soon Rossetti moved in with Hunt and, under his friend's critical eye, tried to develop more disciplined work habits. It was under Hunt's supervision that Rossetti executed his first important painting, The Girlhood of Mary Virgin, begun in the summer of 1848. At the same time, he was working on or finishing a series of remarkable writings (among them, "The Blessed Damozel" and most of the translations that eventually appeared as the *Early Italian Poets* in 1861), which he shared with Hunt and his other new friends, including the young prodigy John Everett Millais (1829–1896). It was in this year that the core set of Rossetti's artistic and poetical

touchstones began to coalesce in a practical way. Thus, 1848 marks not only a European watershed, it is equally the year of Rossetti's emergence as a serious—indeed, an epochal—figure in British art and poetry.

In the same year, Rossetti's extraordinary range of talents and interests, combined with his energy and enthusiasm, made him the central figure in the formation of a group of writers and artists who were to name themselves the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB). Hunt's express hostility to academy art gave the movement its initial polemical and theoretical focus. He was particularly inspired by the first two volumes of Ruskin's *Modern Painters* (1843–1846) and introduced the others to Ruskin's ideas, which proved fruitful to so many in and associated with the Pre-Raphaelite movement and its aftermath. But it was Rossetti whose cultural vision and force of character magnetized the group, just as it was Rossetti's work which was to have the longest and most significant impact on poetry and the visual arts.

The movement's founding is customarily dated to an evening in October 1848, when Hunt, Millais, and Rossetti were studying Carlo Lasinio's engravings after the Campo Santo frescoes in Pisa. Their admiration for these pictures impelled them to form a group devoted to bringing about a revolution in artistic practice and cultural sensibilities. The three men soon gathered together a number of artists and writers who met monthly to discuss topics of mutual interest. They included Rossetti's brother, William Michael, the young sculptor Thomas Woolner (1825–1892), James Collinson (1825?–1881; a painter engaged to Rossetti's sister Christina), and F. G. Stephens (1828–1907), who would later become an influential art critic.

The PRB made its debut early in 1849 when Hunt and Millais put up works at the Royal Academy Exhibition and Rossetti at the Free Exhibition at Hyde Park Corner. Despite the "PRB" signatures on their works—the initials would soon become a focus of critical attack—their works were reasonably well received. In the fall of 1849 Hunt and Rossetti left for a brief trip to Belgium and Paris, where they studied and enthused over the works of various painters whom they regarded as their spiritual precursors. Upon their return, the group began to lay plans for publishing a journal that would carry the ideas of the PRB to a larger audience. This was the famous periodical The Germ (subtitled "Thoughts towards Nature in Poetry, Literature, and Art"). Begun early in 1850, it ran for only four issues. Despite its lack of initial success, however, the publication would prove an important venture.

In contrast to the response in 1849, the exhibition of the work of Rossetti and the other PRBs in 1850 produced a Wrestorm of hostile criticism. The event brought Ruskin to the defense of the young painters—a signal moment in their history. Ruskin defined the members of the PRB as "serious artists," and his authority in effect established the movement's cultural position. Rossetti and Ruskin became close friends for a time, but they grew apart when Rossetti grew tired of playing the role of Ruskin's pupil.

1850 brought another crucial change to Rossetti's life: He met the beautiful Elizabeth Siddal (1829–1862), the daughter of a cutler. He painted and drew "Lizzie"—as everyone knew her—obsessively. At first, it was the poverty of their

circumstances that prevented their marriage. Later in the 50s, though, other beautiful women began to invade Rossetti's imagination, including Fanny Cornforth (1835?–1905) and Jane Burden (1839–1914), who would eventually marry Rossetti's friend William Morris. Nonetheless, though their relationship grew increasingly troubled, Rossetti's devotion to Elizabeth never really failed, and they finally married in 1860. Two years later Elizabeth—whose health had been uncertain for a number of years—died of an overdose of laudanum.

Through the 1850s Rossetti worked mainly on his painting. The initial intense period of his imaginative writing all but ceased for a time after 1852. Rossetti poured himself into his art, where he seemed—by his own judgment—unable to express himself exactly as he wanted. He gave up oil painting for a time and turned to watercolor, the medium in which he would produce some of his greatest works.

In terms of his public career, the central event of this period was the so-called Jovial Campaign, Rossetti's 1857 commission to paint the walls of the Debating Hall of the Union Society in Oxford. As it turned out, Rossetti and his friends did execute the murals, but the work almost immediately faded and disappeared because the group of artists did not know how to prepare the walls properly for the paintings. Despite this disaster, the project attracted great attention to Rossetti and his friends—in this case, largely a new cast of friends including Edward Jones (later Burne-Jones) and William Morris. The Jovial Campaign ought to be seen as the culminant event in the years 1856–57, when Rossetti and the PRB finally gained a position of recognized cultural authority. Two other projects of these years were also important. In 1856 William Morris and his friends launched the Oxford and Cambridge Magazine. A sequel to the Germ, and in certain obvious ways a much superior production, it too perished after a short run—this time after a year. But the magazine brought Rossetti a new set of attachments that would prove fateful for all concerned. The other event was the publication of Moxon's illustrated edition of Tennyson's selected poetry, which appeared early in 1857. The book carried illustrations by various artists of the day. Rossetti's contributions, which illustrated "The Palace of Art" and several other poems, were stunning. His appearance in this book defined him as an artist of established position.

The death of Elizabeth early in 1862 put a (temporary) end to some elaborate publishing plans that Rossetti had set in train. In 1861 he assembled the poetical translations of medieval Italian poetry that he had been doing in the 1840s. He finished the work and brought out, at the end of the year, the important volume *The Early Italian Poets* (later revised and reissued in 1874 as *Dante and His Circle*). His plan was to publish an accompanying volume of original poetry to be called *Dante at Verona and Other Poems*. Though advertised as forthcoming in his book of translations, the volume was never issued. In one of the two most celebrated acts of his life, Rossetti buried the manuscript in the coffin with his wife. (The second was his recovery of the volume, in 1869, from Elizabeth's grave.) During the 1860s Rossetti wrote little poetry but returned to oils and produced a great deal of work as a painter. This was the period when his reputation as an artist grew and he began to command remarkable prices for his pictures. The Arthurian and Dantean subjects that had been his main preoccupation for several years were

now succeeded by a series of erotic female portraits. Fanny Cornforth was Rossetti's principal model for the earliest of these works, but later the face of Jane Morris dominated his pictures.

After the death of his wife he began to experience onsets of depression and hypochondria. He moved to 16 Cheyne Walk and after a few years began to close himself into its precincts. He slowly narrowed his social circle, stopped exhibiting, and began to take spirits and drugs. In 1867 his mental and physical condition deteriorated precipitously when he began to fear he would go blind. It was at this point that he began to take chloral, to which he became addicted. For the remainder of his life he would be surrounded by accumulating darknesses—guilts, depressions, illnesses—and he would gradually break with some of his closest and most loyal friends. But out of the nightmare world that gradually arose in the midst of his growing public success and suffocating middle class luxury, Rossetti created a series of literary and pictorial works of great power and significance.

In 1866 and 1867 he wrote two sonnets for recent pictures—the poems now known as "Soul's Beauty" and "Body's Beauty," which appeared in print in 1868, along with another sonnet for a picture, "Venus Verticordia." The poems restored him to a sense of the importance of his poetry, which he began to take up again in earnest. The activity stimulated his old desire to see his original writings in print. His eye problems further induced him to shift his principal creative activity from art to literature. Since much of this poetry had been buried with Elizabeth, and since Rossetti kept no copies of some of his most important works, the grisly scheme to exhume the volume was set in motion. In the end the book was recovered for Rossetti by some friends. In 1869 he began recopying and revising these older works and adding new poems to them. He had these works printed up in a series of proofs and so-called trial books marked "for private circulation," and eventually he gathered the lot together and published his 1870 volume, *Poems*.

The book was a stunning success. Its publication was also the occasion of one of the most famous literary controversies of the century when it was reviewed in 1871 by Robert Buchanan in the pseudonymous essay "The Fleshly School of Poetry—Mr. D. G. Rossetti" in the Contemporary Review. Buchanan's main charge, that Rossetti's volume was full of indecencies, started a furious series of further attacks, defenses, counterattacks, and general public clamour. Rossetti himself entered the fray with an essay of self-defense, "The Stealthy School of Criticism," which he published in the *Athenæum* in December. None of this did any serious damage to Rossetti's celebrity, and indeed Buchanan would, after Rossetti's death, all but recant his original position.

The 1870 poems had been put together, and many new ones written, after Rossetti had moved from London to Barbara Bodichon's country house, Scalands, near Robertsbridge, Hastings. He moved there in March 1870 to escape his claustrophobic London existence. Soon Jane and William Morris came to visit him, with Jane staying on for nearly the entire period of his sojourn, which ended on May 9. In those two months she would stamp his new book with her presence. From a biographical point of view, the volume is dominated by Rossetti's two great love obsessions—his old love, Elizabeth, now dead and enshrined to an imaginative

heaven; and the new love, Jane Morris, whose very earthly existence seemed to bring Rossetti back to life.

Between 1871 and 1874 the relationship between Rossetti and Jane Morris achieved an extreme intensity. Rossetti spent much of the time at the Morrises' house at Kelmscott, and much of that time William was not at home. The poetry Rossetti wrote largely focuses on his love for Jane Morris. But in the end the romantic idyll began to dissipate, and finally Jane left Kelmscott with her family in July 1874.

With that separation the final phase of Rossetti's life was inaugurated. It was a period during which Rossetti's eccentricities, manias, and hallucinations began to dominate his existence. Although he continued to paint, and in fact produced some astonishing works, he often seemed to be filling up—or out—his time. In 1880–81 he experienced a renewed burst of poetical work as he prepared to issue a new and augmented edition of his 1870 volume. This was to include a new version of his masterwork "The House of Life," now twice the size of the 1870 version. He also wrote some new, long ballads and returned to a number of important works written or begun earlier, like the impressive fragment "The Bride's Prelude." The body of work proved so large, in fact, that he eventually decided two volumes should be published. These were Ballads and Sonnets and the augmented "new edition" of *Poems*. Both appeared in 1881.

Rossetti's devoted brother William Michael called this last phase of Rossetti's life "the chloralized years." With his mind continually transacted by various guilts and regrets, Rossetti's health slowly deteriorated. After the last two volumes were published he made two vain efforts to restore his health. He went to the Lake District in the fall of 1881 and later, on his doctor's advice, went to stay with a friend at his country house in Birchington. There he died.

THE WORKS

The point of departure for reading Rossetti has to be Walter Pater's essay on the poetry, which he published in 1883 shortly after Rossetti's death. The strongest as well as the subtlest literary-critical intelligence of the period in England, Pater saw "poetic originality" as the defining quality of Rossetti's work. The writing features an "almost grotesque materialising of abstractions" and stylistic "particularisation."

Pater's essay explores the paradox of a writer seen as both limpid and obstruse. On one hand Rossetti covets a "transparency in language" devoted to "the imaginative creation of things that are ideal from their very birth." On the other he is "always personal and even recondite, in a certain sense learned and casuistical, sometimes complex or obscure."

Like Pope, when Rossetti came into his own as a writer he was quite young, in his teens; and although some of the work from his later years is arguably stronger or more profound, the prose and poetry composed between his fifteenth and twentieth years is already mature, and he is in full possession of his distinctive poetic resources. Coleridge, Keats, Tennyson, Poe, and Browning: these are the English-language writers who stand behind his work and lead him to that

"originality" Pater recognized. Almost equally important, of course, are the writers Rossetti himself named "Dante and his circle." Indeed, Dante is probably Rossetti's single most important precursor, partly because he supplied Rossetti with a powerful myth of the poet's life, and partly because, in seeking to reconstruct that myth through his translations, Rossetti was led to fashion an English style that has been materially marked by Italian linguistic and poetical resources.

Beatrice is gone up into high Heaven,
The kingdom where the angels are at peace
. . . .
Wonderfully out of the beautiful form
Soared her clear spirit
Who is she coming, whom all gaze upon
Who makes the air all tremulous with light,
And at whose side is Love himself? That none
Dare speak, but each man's sighs are infinite?

In the first two passages, which open the second and third stanzas of his translation of Dante's famous canzone "Gli occhi dolente," Rossetti fashions remarkable English equivalents for Dante's hendecasyllabic rhythms. The third passage is his translation of the opening of Cavalcanti's sonnet "Chi e questa che vien," and it nicely exhibits a number of stylistic features that Rossetti will later incorporate into his English verse. Notable are the synaesthesia, the sharp rendering of abstractions, the resort to sequences of brief words that subtly highlight key longer words ("coming," "tremulous," "himself," "inWnite"), the careful rhythmic arrangement of the latter, and finally, the slightly off rhymes. The rhyming sources of Italian will draw Rossetti to develop many unusual rhymes and rhyming rhythms, some of them shocking, even outrageous.

The combination of Rossetti's favorite English poets and his Italian verse inheritance lies behind that astonishing signature work of Rossetti's late teens, "The Blessed Damozel," with its paradoxical combinations—rhythmical as well as figurative.

It lies in Heaven, across the flood
Of ether, as a bridge.
Beneath, the tides of day and night
With flame and darkness ridge
The void, as low as where this earth
Spins like a fretful midge
. . . .
The sun was gone now; the curled moon
Was like a little feather
Fluttering far down the gulf; and now
She spoke through the still weather.
Her voice was like the voice the stars
Had when they sang together.

In this writing Rossetti is not just materializing spiritual realities and abstract ideas. He is rather literalizing that range of perceived and unperceived phenomena, turning it into a new kind of reality, purely linguistic. The effect inevitably recalls Coleridge's commentary on "Kubla Khan" as a vision in which "all the images rose up before [him] as things." Here we would be inclined to say "all the images and all the rhythms."

Rossetti's characteristic style is well suited to his most famous pair of subjects, Art and Love, where "matter and spirit . . . play inextricably into each other." Though Pater does not pursue that thought, both subjects are best taken up as activities, in performative and, finally, in interactive ways. The blending of the material and the spiritual, of soul and body, of idea and act, defines Rossetti's pictorial work as much as it does his verse. A pair of famous lines summarizes Rossetti's position: "Thy soul I know not from thy body, nor / Thee from myself, neither our love from God." Despite the resolute "Fleshliness" of the poetry, Pater astutely calls it "sacramental" because it displays this performative quality. Its extreme idealizations emerge in and through acts of writing, much as prayer represents an instantiated act of devotion.

One other general characteristic of Rossetti's work is important: his commitment to what he called "fundamental brainwork." Unlike his greatly gifted but undemonstrative sister, Dante Gabriel is driven by programmatic ideas and conceptual goals, as his contemporaries well knew. "Exhaustless invention" is how Ruskin described his pictorial work, which he learned to admire but came to deplore as it kept plunging through its Faustian pursuits. Rossetti holds our attention as we are held by the restless and brilliant Stephen Dedalus, who was—as Stephen tells Mr. Deasy in *Ulysses*—"A learner rather" than a teacher. So to read or look at Rossetti's work—actions required by both the texts and the pictures—is to enter a demanding intellectual space. Rossetti broke with Ruskin in the mid-1860s over a disagreement about how to manage the inheritance of Venetian art. But he remained to the end primarily Ruskinian (rather than Paterian) in treating art and writing more as a scene of intellectual action rather than reflection.

Rossetti began his career by catalyzing the formation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood through the force of his ideas and personality, which no one at the time—not even those who were teaching him how to paint, like Madox Brown and Holman Hunt—could stay or resist. *The Germ* was his brainchild, and he placed in its first number one of the signal aesthetic documents of the period, his artistic manifesto "Hand and Soul." Modest though it seems, "Hand and Soul" undertakes to overhaul the entire edifice of art history as it was formulated by Vasari and handed down to Rossetti's day and even to our own. The argument with Vasari concentrates on the idea—for Rossetti, the illusion—of progress in the arts. Primitive Italian art undergoes a revisionary reading in the history of Rossetti's narrator, Chiaro, who refuses the promise of the coming glories of the Renaissance. A modern incarnation of what Trotsky would later call "the privilege of historical backwardness," Chiaro represents an imaginative resource for the nineteenth century precisely because of his primitive aesthetic commitments—all those

stylistic features that would come to be judged crude and incompetent by later art historians, with their enlightened and progressivist myths of art.

Crucially important is the fact that Rossetti casts his argument in an imaginative rather than an expository form. His point is that the most incisive explanation of an artistic practice ought to be performative—as it is, for example, in Horace's *Ars Poetica*, in Pope, in Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, or in Wilde's dialogues. In this programmatic context three topics emerge as indispensable areas of critical attention. Each is closely related to the others. They are, first, Rossetti's theory and practice of translation; second, his exploration of the "double work of art"; and third, his remarkable understanding of what he called "an inner standing-point" as one of the "motive powers of art."

Rossetti set out his ideas about translation in the preface to his first published book, *The Early Italian Poets* (1861), where he calls it the "most direct form of commentary" and exegesis. It is thus paradigmatic of a performative act of literary criticism. Furthermore, the translator's obligation is to pursue "fidelity" rather than "literality" as his translational goal. So Rossetti's translations tend to be relatively free with respect to semantic literality and relatively strict with respect to metrical imitation. For Rossetti, a prose translation of poetry is no translation at all. A final "fidelity" is measured by this explicit rule: "a good poem shall not be turned into a bad one." The rule follows from Rossetti's basic thought that "the only true motive for putting poetry into a fresh language must be to endow a fresh nation, as far as possible, with one more possession of beauty."

Rossetti sees Dante's *La Vita Nuova* as a prophetic annunciation of these ideas, and when he translates that work as "The New Life" the translation incarnates the emergence of a new artistic life in the nineteenth century. Rossetti literally becomes "Dante Rossetti," the resurrected figure of the great Florentine and, as such, the living sign of the deathless character of art. This dynamic is what "Art for Art's sake" signifies for Rossetti. As Dante Alighieri's avatar, he is called to his comprehensive work of translation because, in his view, Dante's writings are the gravitational center of the literary rebirth that took place between the emergence of the Sicilian School and the appearance of Boccaccio and Petrarch.

But Rossetti's aesthetic program was not only a literary one. Perhaps his most important aesthetic contribution was that remarkable generic form known as "the double work of art." This form is an amalgam of literary and pictorial works on a single subject—two at a minimum, but the number of objects can be and often are multiple: for example, the various constellations of pictures and texts named "The Blessed Damozel," "Proserpina," " Fazio's Mistress," "La Bella Mano," and so forth. Rossetti's first important double work, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*, exhibits the form's typical dynamic structure. That is to say, Rossetti usually "doubles" a pictorial work with a text or a set of texts. The picture may be his own or someone else's. In 1849, for example, he wrote a series of outstanding poems, "Sonnets for Pictures," that responded to various paintings he saw on the trip he and Holman Hunt made to Belgium and Paris. The doubling may also proceed in the other direction, however, as when Rossetti "illustrates" his own texts or texts from Poe, Tennyson, or other writers. Rossetti's earliest double works are of this last kind and they clearly derive from the illustrated book tradition.

These double works are translational forms—"direct forms of commentary" and exegesis. The dialectic of the forms is once again performative rather than conceptual. One might judge from this process that Rossetti is pursuing an unmediated form of knowing, but the truth is otherwise. What the artist wants to avoid with these double works is precisely the transformation of artistic acts into ideated terms, as if thinking were an abstract process of reflection. For Rossetti, on the contrary, the practice of art is a practice of thought more penetrating than expository explanation. The Ideal forms of thinking are not abstract, they are enfleshed, aesthetic: total body experiences, as it were. Knowing by (re)doing.

This kind of imaginative work leads Rossetti to his theory of "the inner standing-point" as one of the "motive powers of art." The key text is Rossetti's discussion of his dramatic monologue "Jenny" in "The Stealthy School of Criticism," his 1871 critical response to Buchanan's attack on his poetry. Like Ruskin earlier, Buchanan was offended and troubled by "Jenny." The subject—prostitution—was problematic to a degree, but worse was the way Rossetti's poem draws a close relation between prostitution and the practice of art. Would "a treatment from without"—for instance, a prose essay on the subject—have been preferable? Rossetti says no. The more difficult the material, the more one needs an imaginative rather than an expository approach, for "the motive powers of art reverse the requirement of science, and demand first of all an inner standing point. The heart of such a mystery as this must be plucked from the very world in which it beats or bleeds."

Rossetti had introduced the theory of the inner standing-point some years before, in an unpublished note to his pastiche poem "Ave," one of his early "Songs of the Art Catholic." The idea of art at an inner standing-point is a clear theoretical reflection on the dramatic monologue, especially on Robert Browning's use of the form, which Rossetti much admired. Rossetti's thoughts on this genre, however, are quite different from Browning's—both in 1847–1848, when he wrote "Ave" and in 1859 and 1871, when his focus of attention was on "Jenny." Rossetti's 1871 comment is arguing that an inner standing-point is not simply a feature of a particular genre or poetic form, it is a foundational requirement of "art." Not just writing, not just poetry, but "art" in general.

It helps to reconsider briefly Rossetti's thinking in 1847–1848. Like those other two urban artists Poe and Baudelaire, Rossetti at the time was much involved with projects that cultivated escaping from the contemporary world. "Ave" and the "Songs of the Art Catholic" were magical texts written to open a passage whereby Rossetti could plunge into a lost land of his heart's desire. To manage this feat he elaborated various kinds of inner standing-point procedures. He composed pastiche works like "Ave" and "Mary's Girlhood," quasi-pastiche works like "The Blessed Damozel," conjuring prose tales like "Hand and Soul" and "St. Agnes of Intercession," and the ventriloquizing translations from Dante and other early Italian poets. In none of these cases did the crucial move abstract Rossetti away from his texts, which was Browning's object and great achievement. Rather, it drew Rossetti into his own poem's dramatic action. "Ave" is a special kind of dramatic monologue where an inner standing-point is constructed and then occupied simultaneously by the writing/composing Victorian poet, Rossetti, and his

imaginary Catholic antitype from the fourteenth century. Rossetti's innovation on Browning was to reintroduce the action of the subjective artist (and poet) into the critical space of the work.

When a poetics of the inner standing-point is undertaken in a poem of contemporary life, such as "Jenny," the results are very different from those gained when Rossetti wrote "Ave." The world of "Jenny" is no lost spiritual dreamland, it is an all-too-present nightmare. Readers to this day argue about whether the "young and thoughtful man of the world" (as Rossetti called him) is offered for our judgment or our sympathy, and about Rossetti's relation to his imaginative figure. But the poem incarnates a structure of doubtfulness by troubling every effort to reach a normative or stable judgment on the characters or the situation. Biographically inflected readings of the poem—and they are common—underscore this difficulty. The more explicit of these readings range between praise for Rossetti's enlightened or brave undertaking in the poem to sharp criticism of his sexist and pornographic illusions.

Rossetti's theory of the inner standing-point involves a major rewriting of the sympathetic contract poetry and art make with both their subjects and their readers. Romantic sympathy in its most authoritative cultural form displays—as Keats famously put the matter—"the holiness of the heart's affections." In this view, because the artist is imagined to have clearest access to that holy place, the artistic act becomes a moral and spiritual standard. Arnold would authorize this set of attitudes when he argued that poetry would replace religion for persons living in the modern world. His sonnet "Shakespeare" represents this set of ideas about the transcendental status of poetry:

Other abide our question. Thou art free.
We ask and ask, thou smilest and art still,
Outtopping knowledge.

That is the romance—really, the romanticism—of an art conceived as some still point of a turning world. Rossetti's aesthetic move called such a view into radical question. Or perhaps one should say, Rossetti exposed the bad faith on which it had come to rest, for the authority of Arnold's sonnet is pure illusion, as Arnold himself showed in other of his poems, especially a devastating work like "The Buried Life." In Rossetti's story "Hand and Soul" the exposure comes when Chiaro, Rossetti's surrogate, poses this question for himself and his art: "May one be a devil without knowing it?" If the heart and its affections are that problematic, the ground of sympathy will only be gained through what Tennyson called, in one of his wittiest and wickedest moments, "honest doubt." So in reading "Jenny" we want to see that the poet sympathizes with his bohemian artist-hero precisely in that young man's contradictions. Furthermore, when Rossetti takes up his subject at an inner standing-point, the move puts the reader in an equivalently equivocal position. The poem's sympathetic contract, written in ambivalent characters, must be entered on those uncertain terms. In this idea of art, the only understanding of value is a questionable understanding, the only feelings to be trusted are doubtful and

uncertain. To enter the poem is to enter a space for studying problems, of which the reader's problems with the poem's moral import are among the most pertinent.

Not without cause, then, do readers follow Ruskin and Buchanan in recoiling from the poem. Its space is treacherous, as we see with special clarity in the marvelous line "Ah Jenny, yes, we know your dreams." Readers will scarcely miss the folly exposed here in the young man's facile judgment, and if we also see Rossetti reflected in the poem—as we often do—we may be led to rethink that line, as if it might also have said: "Ah Rossetti, yes, we know your dreams." But Rossetti is not alone engulfed in this cunning text. That first-person plural pronoun snares the reader as well. If Jenny has dreams, readers make representations of those dreams. What "we" in fact know are nothing more than representations of representations.

Although criticism and critics regularly covet definitive judgment and understanding, Rossetti's poetic method undermines that obscure object of desire. A poem like "Jenny" is a dangerous critical mirror that turns the readers' eyes back on themselves. So Rossetti is a difficult writer for several related reasons. Like Baudelaire and Swinburne, Rossetti is a learned poet who covets a highly finished surface. That surface is a careful and self-conscious structure of nuanced language games—ambiguous and aquarian pronouns, strange words that seem more physical than cognitive, wordplays that are less puns than elusively suggestive and "worked" language, as when he torques the word "draw" to such splendid effect at various times and places. This kind of writing typically spins out texts that can snare the reader with the sense that they have entered some kind of labyrinth. (The title of one of Rossetti's most important poems, "Troy Town," is an old colloquial expression meaning a maze.) But unlike Baudelaire and Swinburne, Rossetti is a more guarded and secretive writer, as if he knows how much of the reader's fear and hypocrisy he shares. The inner standing-point controls Rossetti's work even at the level of its style. He is incapable of writing poems like "Les Litanies de Satan" or "L'Aube Spirituelle," "Anactoria" or "The Leper."

But when we read Rossetti we really must not think of them, for Rossetti has his music too. "Recondite . . . casuistical . . . obscure": Pater's shrewd terms define a poet whose access to psychic recesses is acute precisely because he writes about them from an inner standing-point and because he is so assiduous in his explorations. Rossetti's obsessive corrections and revisions carry him into deep waters, nor does it matter if his brainwork continues to mask or to unmask his process of thought. Either way we get uncommon revelations, for the writing is, in the end, a reciprocal play of both.

SELECTED POETRY by Dante Gabriel Rossetti

The Blessed Damozel

THE blessed damozel leaned out
From the gold bar of Heaven;
Her eyes were deeper than the depth
Of waters stilled at even;
She had three lilies in her hand,
And the stars in her hair were seven.

Her robe, ungirt from clasp to hem,
No wrought flowers did adorn,
But a white rose of Mary's gift,
For service meetly worn;
Her hair that lay along her back
Was yellow like ripe corn.

Herseemed she scarce had been a day
One of God's choristers;
The wonder was not yet quite gone
From that still look of hers;
Albeit, to them she left, her day
Had counted as ten years.

(To one, it is ten years of years.
. . . Yet now, and in this place,
Surely she leaned o'er me — her hair
Fell all about my face. . . .
Nothing: the autumn-fall of leaves.
The whole year sets apace.)

It was the rampart of God's house
That she was standing on;
By God built over the sheer depth
The which is Space begun;
So high, that looking downward thence
She scarce could see the sun.

It lies in Heaven, across the flood
Of ether, as a bridge.
Beneath, the tides of day and night
With flame and darkness ridge
The void, as low as where this earth

Spins like a fretful midge.

Around her, lovers, newly met
'Mid deathless love's acclaims,
Spoke evermore among themselves
Their heart-remembered names;
And the souls mounting up to God
Went by her like thin flames.

And still she bowed herself and stooped
Out of the circling charm;
Until her bosom must have made
The bar she leaned on warm,
And the lilies lay as if asleep
Along her bended arm.

From the fixed place of Heaven she saw
Time like a pulse shake fierce
Through all the worlds. Her gaze still strove
Within the gulf to pierce
Its path; and now she spoke as when
The stars sang in their spheres.

The sun was gone now; the curled moon
Was like a little feather
Fluttering far down the gulf; and now
She spoke through the still weather.
Her voice was like the voice of the stars
Had when they sang together.

(Ah sweet! Even now, in that bird's song,
Strove not her accents there,
Fain to be hearkened? When those bells
Possessed the mid-day air,
Strove not her steps to reach my side
Down all the echoing stair?)

'I wish that he were come to me,
For he will come,' she said.
'Have I not preyed in Heaven? -- on earth,
Lord, Lord, has he not pray'd?
Are not two prayers a perfect strength?
And shall I feel afraid?

'When round his head the aureole clings,
And he is clothed in white,

I'll take his hand and go with him
    To the deep wells of light;
As unto a stream we will step down,
    And bathe there in God's sight.

'We two will stand beside that shrine,
    Occult, withheld, untrod,
Whose lamps are stirred continually
    With prayer sent up to God;
And see our old prayers, granted, melt
    Each like a little cloud.

'We two will lie i' the shadow of
    That living mystic tree
Within whose secret growth the Dove
    Is sometimes felt to be,
While every leaf that His plumes touch
    Saith His Name audibly.

'And I myself will teach to him,
    I myself, lying so,
The songs I sing here; which his voice
    Shall pause in, hushed and slow,
And find some knowledge at each pause,
    Or some new thing to know.'

(Alas! We two, we two, thou say'st!
    Yea, one wast thou with me
That once of old. But shall God lift
    To endless unity
The soul whose likeness with thy soul
    Was but its love for thee?)

'We two,' she said, 'will seek the groves
    Where the lady Mary is,
With her five handmaidens, whose names
    Are five sweet symphonies,
Cecily, Gertrude, Magdalen,
    Margaret and Rosalys.

'Circlewise sit they, with bound locks
    And foreheads garlanded;
Into the fine cloth white like flame
    Weaving the golden thread,
To fashion the birth-robes for them
    Who are just born, being dead.

'He shall fear, haply, and be dumb:
Then will I lay my cheek
To his, and tell about our love,
Not once abashed or weak:
And the dear Mother will approve
My pride, and let me speak.

'Herself shall bring us, hand in hand,
To him round whom all souls
Kneel, the clear-ranged unnumbered heads
Bowed with their aureoles:
And angels meeting us shall sing
To their citherns and citoles.

'There will I ask of Christ the Lord
Thus much for him and me: —
Only to live as once on earth
With Love, — only to be,
As then awhile, for ever now
Together, I and he.'

She gazed and listened and then said,
Less sad of speech than mild, —
'All this is when he comes.' She ceased.
The light thrilled towards her, fill'd
With angels in strong level flight.
Her eyes prayed, and she smil'd.

(I saw her smile.) But soon their path
Was vague in distant spheres:
And then she cast her arms along
The golden barriers,
And laid her face between her hands,
And wept. (I heard her tears.)

Jenny

"Vengeance of Jenny's case! Fie on her! Never name her, child!"—Mrs. Quickly

Lazy laughing languid Jenny,
Fond of a kiss and fond of a guinea,
Whose head upon my knee to-night
Rests for a while, as if grown light
With all our dances and the sound

To which the wild tunes spun you round:
Fair Jenny mine, the thoughtless queen
Of kisses which the blush between
Could hardly make much daintier;
Whose eyes are as blue skies, whose hair
Is countless gold incomparable:
Fresh flower, scarce touched with signs that tell
Of Love's exuberant hotbed:—Nay,
Poor flower left torn since yesterday
Until to-morrow leave you bare;
Poor handful of bright spring-water
Flung in the whirlpool's shrieking face;
Poor shameful Jenny, full of grace
Thus with your head upon my knee;—
Whose person or whose purse may be
The lodestar of your reverie?

This room of yours, my Jenny, looks
A change from mine so full of books,
Whose serried ranks hold fast, forsooth,
So many captive hours of youth,—
The hours they thieve from day and night
To make one's cherished work come right,
And leave it wrong for all their theft,
Even as to-night my work has left:
Until I vowed that since my brain
And eyes of dancing seemed so fain,
My feet should have some dancing too:—
And thus it was I met with you.
Well, I suppose 'twas hard to part,
For here I am. And now, sweetheart,
You seem too tired to get to bed.

It was a careless life I led
When rooms like this were scarce so strange
Not long ago. What breeds the change,—
The many aims or the few years?
Because to-night it all appears
Something I do not know again.

The cloud's not danced out of my brain,—
The cloud that made it turn and swim
While hour by hour the books grew dim.
Why, Jenny, as I watch you there,—
For all your wealth of loosened hair,
Your silk ungirdled and unlac'd

And warm sweets open to the waist,
All golden in the lamplight's gleam,—
You know not what a book you seem,
Half-read by lightning in a dream!
How should you know, my Jenny? Nay,
And I should be ashamed to say:—
Poor beauty, so well worth a kiss!
But while my thought runs on like this
With wasteful whims more than enough,
I wonder what you're thinking of.

If of myself you think at all,
What is the thought?—conjectural
On sorry matters best unsolved?—
Or inly is each grace revolved
To fit me with a lure?—or (sad
To think!) perhaps you're merely glad
That I'm not drunk or ruffianly
And let you rest upon my knee.

For sometimes, were the truth confess'd,
You're thankful for a little rest,—
Glad from the crush to rest within,
From the heart-sickness and the din
Where envy's voice at virtue's pitch
Mocks you because your gown is rich;
And from the pale girl's dumb rebuke,
Whose ill-clad grace and toil-worn look
Proclaim the strength that keeps her weak,
And other nights than yours bespeak;
And from the wise unchildish elf,
To schoolmate lesser than himself
Pointing you out, what thing you are:—
Yes, from the daily jeer and jar,
From shame and shame's outbraving too,
Is rest not sometimes sweet to you?—
But most from the hatefulness of man
Who spares not to end what he began,
Whose acts are ill and his speech ill,
Who, having used you at his will,
Thrusts you aside, as when I dine
I serve the dishes and the wine.

Well, handsome Jenny mine, sit up:
I've filled our glasses, let us sup,
And do not let me think of you,

Lest shame of yours suffice for two.
What, still so tired? Well, well then, keep
Your head there, so you do not sleep;
But that the weariness may pass
And leave you merry, take this glass.
Ah! lazy lily hand, more bless'd
If ne'er in rings it had been dress'd
Nor ever by a glove conceal'd!

Behold the lilies of the field,
They toil not neither do they spin;
(So doth the ancient text begin,—
Not of such rest as one of these
Can share.) Another rest and ease.
Along each summer-sated path
From its new lord the garden hath,
Than that whose spring in blessings ran
Which praised the bounteous husbandman,
Ere yet, in days of hankering breath,
The lilies sickened unto death.

What, Jenny, are your lilies dead?
Aye, and the snow-white leaves are spread
Like winter on the garden-bed.
But you had roses left in May,—
They were not gone too. Jenny, nay,
But must your roses die, and those
Their purfled buds that should unclose?
Even so; the leaves are curled apart,
Still red as from the broken heart,
And here's the naked stem of thorns.

Nay, nay mere words. Here nothing warns
As yet of winter. Sickness here
Or want alone could waken fear,—
Nothing but passion wrings a tear.
Except when there may rise unsought
Haply at times a passing thought
Of the old days which seem to be
Much older than any history
That is written in any book;
When she would lie in fields and look
Along the ground through the blown grass,
And wonder where the city was,
Far out of sight, whose broil and bale
They told her then for a child's tale.

Jenny, you know the city now,
A child can tell the tale there, how
Some things which are not yet enroll'd
In market-lists are bought and sold
Even till the early Sunday light,
When Saturday night is market-night
Everywhere, be it dry or wet,
And market-night in the Haymarket.
Our learned London children know,
Poor Jenny, all your pride and woe;
Have seen your lifted silken skirt
Advertise dainties through the dirt;
Have seen your coach-wheels splash rebuke
On virtue; and have learned your look
When, wealth and health slipped past, you stare
Along the streets alone, and there,
Round the long park, across the bridge,
The cold lamps at the pavement's edge
Wind on together and apart,
A fiery serpent for your heart.

Let the thoughts pass, an empty cloud!
Suppose I were to think aloud,—
What if to her all this were said?
Why, as a volume seldom read
Being opened halfway shuts again,
So might the pages of her brain
Be parted at such words, and thence
Close back upon the dusty sense.
For is there hue or shape defin'd
In Jenny's desecrated mind,
Where all contagious currents meet,
A Lethe of the middle street?
Nay, it reflects not any face,
Nor sound is in its sluggish pace,
But as they coil those eddies clot,
And night and day remembers not.

Why, Jenny, you're asleep at last!—
Asleep, poor Jenny, hard and fast,—
So young and soft and tired; so fair,
With chin thus nestled in your hair,
Mouth quiet, eyelids almost blue
As if some sky of dreams shone through!

Just as another woman sleeps!
Enough to throw one's thoughts in heaps
Of doubt and horror,—what to say
Or think,—this awful secret sway,
The potter's power over the clay!
Of the same lump (it has been said)
For honour and dishonour made,
Two sister vessels. Here is one.

My cousin Nell is fond of fun,
And fond of dress, and change, and praise,
So mere a woman in her ways:
And if her sweet eyes rich in youth
Are like her lips that tell the truth,
My cousin Nell is fond of love.
And she's the girl I'm proudest of.
Who does not prize her, guard her well?
The love of change, in cousin Nell,
Shall find the best and hold it dear:
The unconquered mirth turn quieter
Not through her own, through others' woe:
The conscious pride of beauty glow
Beside another's pride in her,
One little part of all they share.
For Love himself shall ripen these
In a kind of soil to just increase
Through years of fertilizing peace.

Of the same lump (as it is said)
For honour and dishonour made,
Two sister vessels. Here is one.

It makes a goblin of the sun.

So pure,—so fall'n! How dare to think
Of the first common kindred link?
Yet, Jenny, till the world shall burn
It seems that all things take their turn;
And who shall say but this fair tree
May need, in changes that may be,
Your children's children's charity?
Scorned then, no doubt, as you are scorn'd!
Shall no man hold his pride forewarn'd
Till in the end, the Day of Days,
At Judgement, one of his own race,
As frail and lost as you, shall rise,—

His daughter, with his mother's eyes?

How Jenny's clock ticks on the shelf!
Might not the dial scorn itself
That has such hours to register?
Yet as to me, even so to her
Are golden sun and silver moon,
In daily largesse of earth's boon,
Counted for life-coins to one tune.
And if, as blindfold fates are toss'd,
Through some one man this life be lost,
Shall soul not somehow pray for soul?

Fair shines the gilded aureole
In which our highest painters place
Some living woman's simple face.
And the stilled features thus descried
As Jenny's long throat droops aside,—
The shadows where the cheeks are thin,
And pure wide curve from ear to chin,—
Whit Raffael's, Leonardo's hand
To show them to men's souls, might stand,
Whole ages long, the whole world through,
For preachings of what God can do.
What has man done here? How atone,
Great God, for this which man has done?
And for the body and soul which by
Man's pitiless doom must now comply
With lifelong hell, what lullaby
Of sweet forgetful second birth
Remains? All dark. No sign on earth
What measure of God's rest endows
The many mansions of his house.

If but a woman's heart might see
Such erring heart unerringly
For once! But that can never be.

Like a rose shut in a book
In which pure women may not look,
For its base pages claim control
To crush the flower within the soul;
Where through each dead rose-leaf that clings,
Pale as transparent psyche-wings,
To the vile text, are traced such things
As might make lady's cheek indeed

More than a living rose to read;
So nought save foolish foulness may
Watch with hard eyes the sure decay;
And so the life-blood of this rose,
Puddled with shameful knowledge, flows
Through leaves no chaste hand may unclose:
Yet still it keeps such faded show
Of when ’twas gathered long ago,
That the crushed petals’ lovely grain,
The sweetness of the sanguine stain,
Seen of a woman’s eyes, must make
Her pitiful heart, so prone to ache,
Love roses better for its sake:—
Only that this can never be:—
Even so unto her sex is she.

Yet, Jenny, looking long at you,
The woman almost fades from view.
A cipher of man’s changeless sum
Of lust, past, present, and to come,
Is left. A riddle that one shrinks
To challenge from the scornful sphinx.

Like a toad within a stone
Seated while Time crumbles on;
Which sits there since the earth was curs’d
For Man’s transgression at the first;
Which, living through all centuries,
Not once has seen the sun arise;
Whose life, to its cold circle charmed,
The earth’s whole summers have not warmed;
Which always—whitherso the stone
Be flung—sits there, deaf, blind, alone;—
Aye, and shall not be driven out
Till that which shuts him round about
Break at the very Master’s stroke,
And the dust thereof vanish as smoke,
And the seed of Man vanish as dust:—
Even so within this world is Lust.

Come, come, what use in thoughts like this?
Poor little Jenny, good to kiss,—
You’d not believe by what strange roads
Thought travels, when your beauty goads
A man to-night to think of toads!
Jenny, wake up. . . . Why, there’s the dawn!

And there's an early waggon drawn
To market, and some sheep that jog
Bleating before a barking dog;
And the old streets come peering through
Another night that London knew;
And all as ghostlike as the lamps.

So on the wings of day decamps
My last night's frolic. Glooms begin
To shiver off as lights creep in
Past the gauze curtains half drawn-to,
And the lamp's doubled shade grows blue,—
Your lamp, my Jenny, kept alight,
Like a wise virgin's, all one night!
And in the alcove coolly spread
Glimmers with dawn your empty bed;
And yonder your fair face I see
Reflected lying on my knee,
Where teems with first foreshadowings
Your pier-glass scrawled with diamond rings:
And on your bosom all night worn
Yesterday's rose now droops forlorn,
But dies not yet this summer morn.

And now without, as if some word
Had called upon them that they heard,
The London sparrows far and nigh
Clamour together suddenly;
And Jenny's cage-bird grown awake
Here in their song his part must take,
Because here too the day doth break.

And somehow in myself the dawn
Among stirred clouds and veils withdrawn
Strikes greyly on her. Let her sleep.
But will it wake her if I heap
These cushions thus beneath her head
Where my knee was? No,—there's your bed,
My Jenny, while you dream. And there
I lay among your golden hair
Perhaps the subject of your dreams,
These golden coins.
For still one deems
That Jenny's flattering sleep confers
New magic on the magic purse,—

Grim web, how clogged with shrivelled flies!
Between the threads fine fumes arise
And shape their pictures in the brain.
There roll no streets in glare and rain,
Nor flagrant man-swine whets his tusk;
But delicately sighs in musk
The homage of the dim boudoir;
Or like a palpitating star
Thrilled into song, the opera-night
Breathes faint in the quick pulse of light;
Or at the carriage-window shine
Rich wares for choice; or, free to dine,
Whirls through its hour of health (divine
For her) the concourse of the Park.
And though in the discounted dark
Her functions there and here are one,
Beneath the lamps and in the sun
There reigns at least the acknowledged belle
Apparelled beyond parallel.
Ah Jenny, yes, we know your dreams.

For even the Paphian Venus seems,
A goddess o'er the realms of love,
When silver-shrined in shadowy grove:
Aye, or let offerings nicely placed
But hide Priapus to the waist,
And whoso looks on him shall see
An eligible deity.

Why, Jenny, waking here alone
May help you to remember one,
Though all the memory's long outworn
Of many a double-pillowed morn.
I think I see you when you wake,
And rub your eyes for me, and shake
My gold, in rising, from your hair,
A Danaë for a moment there.

Jenny, my love rang true! for still
Love at first sight is vague, until
That tinkling makes him audible.

And must I mock you to the last,
Ashamed of my own shame,—aghast
Because some thoughts not born amiss
Rose at a poor fair face like this?

Well, of such thoughts so much I know:
In my life, as in hers, they show,
By a far gleam which I may near,
A dark path I can strive to clear.

Only one kiss. Good-bye, my dear.

My Sister's Sleep

She fell asleep on Christmas Eve:
At length the long-ungranted shade
Of weary eyelids overweigh'd
The pain nought else might yet relieve.

Our mother, who had lean'd all day
Over the bed from chime to chime,
Then rais'd herself for the first time,
And as she sat her down, did pray.

Her little work-table was spread
With work to finish. For the glare
Made by her candle, she had care
To work some distance from the bed.

Without, there was a cold moon up,
Of winter radiance sheer and thin;
The hollow halo it was in
Was like an icy crystal cup.

Through the small room, with subtle sound
Of flame, by vents the fireshine drove
And redden'd. In its dim alcove
The mirror shed a clearness round.

I had been sitting up some nights,
And my tired mind felt weak and blank;
Like a sharp strengthening wine it drank
The stillness and the broken lights.

Twelve struck. That sound, by dwindling years
Heard in each hour, crept off; and then
The ruffled silence spread again,
Like water that a pebble stirs.

Our mother rose from where she sat:
Her needles, as she laid them down,
Met lightly, and her silken gown
Settled: no other noise than that.

"Glory unto the Newly Born!"
So, as said angels, she did say;
Because we were in Christmas Day,
Though it would still be long till morn.

Just then in the room over us
There was a pushing back of chairs,
As some who had sat unawares
So late, now heard the hour, and rose.

With anxious softly-stepping haste
Our mother went where Margaret lay,
Fearing the sounds o'erhead—should they
Have broken her long watch'd-for rest!

She stoop'd an instant, calm, and turn'd;
But suddenly turn'd back again;
And all her features seem'd in pain
With woe, and her eyes gaz'd and yearn'd.

For my part, I but hid my face,
And held my breath, and spoke no word:
There was none spoken; but I heard
The silence for a little space.

Our mother bow'd herself and wept:
And both my arms fell, and I said,
"God knows I knew that she was dead."
And there, all white, my sister slept.

Then kneeling, upon Christmas morn
A little after twelve o'clock
We said, ere the first quarter struck,
"Christ's blessing on the newly born!"

Sister Helen

"Why did you melt your waxen man
Sister Helen?

To-day is the third since you began."
"The time was long, yet the time ran,
Little brother."
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,
Three days to-day, between Hell and Heaven!)*

"But if you have done your work aright,
Sister Helen,
You'll let me play, for you said I might."
"Be very still in your play to-night,
Little brother."
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,
Third night, to-night, between Hell and Heaven!)*

"You said it must melt ere vesper-bell,
Sister Helen;
If now it be molten, all is well."
"Even so,—nay, peace! you cannot tell,
Little brother."
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,
O what is this, between Hell and Heaven?)*

"Oh the waxen knave was plump to-day,
Sister Helen;
How like dead folk he has dropp'd away!"
"Nay now, of the dead what can you say,
Little brother?"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,
What of the dead, between Hell and Heaven?)*

"See, see, the sunken pile of wood,
Sister Helen,
Shines through the thinn'd wax red as blood!"
"Nay now, when look'd you yet on blood,
Little brother?"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,
How pale she is, between Hell and Heaven!)*

"Now close your eyes, for they're sick and sore,
Sister Helen,
And I'll play without the gallery door."
"Aye, let me rest,—I'll lie on the floor,
Little brother."
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,
What rest to-night, between Hell and Heaven?)*

"Here high up in the balcony,
Sister Helen,
The moon flies face to face with me."
"Aye, look and say whatever you see,
Little brother."
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
What sight to-night, between Hell and Heaven?)

"Outside it's merry in the wind's wake,
Sister Helen;
In the shaken trees the chill stars shake."
"Hush, heard you a horse-tread as you spake,
Little brother?"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
What sound to-night, between Hell and Heaven?)

"I hear a horse-tread, and I see,
Sister Helen,
Three horsemen that ride terribly."
"Little brother, whence come the three,
Little brother?"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
Whence should they come, between Hell and Heaven?)

"They come by the hill-verge from Boyne Bar,
Sister Helen,
And one draws nigh, but two are afar."
"Look, look, do you know them who they are,
Little brother?"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
Who should they be, between Hell and Heaven?)

"Oh, it's Keith of Eastholm rides so fast,
Sister Helen,
For I know the white mane on the blast."
"The hour has come, has come at last,
Little brother!"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
Her hour at last, between Hell and Heaven!)

"He has made a sign and called Halloo!
Sister Helen,
And he says that he would speak with you."
"Oh tell him I fear the frozen dew,
Little brother."
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*

Why laughs she thus, between Hell and Heaven?)

"The wind is loud, but I hear him cry,
Sister Helen,
That Keith of Ewern's like to die."
"And he and thou, and thou and I,
Little brother."
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
And they and we, between Hell and Heaven!)

"Three days ago, on his marriage-morn,
Sister Helen,
He sicken'd, and lies since then forlorn."
"For bridegroom's side is the bride a thorn,
Little brother?"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
Cold bridal cheer, between Hell and Heaven!)

"Three days and nights he has lain abed,
Sister Helen,
And he prays in torment to be dead."
"The thing may chance, if he have pray'd,
Little brother!"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
If he have pray'd, between Hell and Heaven!)

"But he has not ceas'd to cry to-day,
Sister Helen,
That you should take your curse away."
"*My* prayer was heard,—he need but pray,
Little brother!"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
Shall God not hear, between Hell and Heaven?)

"But he says, till you take back your ban,
Sister Helen,
His soul would pass, yet never can."
"Nay then, shall I slay a living man,
Little brother?"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
A living soul, between Hell and Heaven!)

"But he calls for ever on your name,
Sister Helen,
And says that he melts before a flame."
"My heart for his pleasure far'd the same,

Little brother."
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
Fire at the heart, between Hell and Heaven!)

"Here's Keith of Westholm riding fast,
Sister Helen,
For I know the white plume on the blast."
"The hour, the sweet hour I forecast,
Little brother!"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
Is the hour sweet, between Hell and Heaven?)

"He stops to speak, and he stills his horse,
Sister Helen;
But his words are drown'd in the wind's course."
"Nay hear, nay hear, you must hear perforce,
Little brother!"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
What word now heard, between Hell and Heaven?)

"Oh he says that Keith of Ewern's cry,
Sister Helen,
Is ever to see you ere he die."
"In all that his soul sees, there am I
Little brother!"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
The soul's one sight, between Hell and Heaven!)

"He sends a ring and a broken coin,
Sister Helen,
And bids you mind the banks of Boyne."
"What else he broke will he ever join,
Little brother?"
(O Mother, Mary Mother,
No, never join'd, between Hell and Heaven!)

"He yields you these and craves full fain,
Sister Helen,
You pardon him in his mortal pain."
"What else he took will he give again,
Little brother?"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
Not twice to give, between Hell and Heaven!)

"He calls your name in an agony,
Sister Helen,

That even dead Love must weep to see."
"Hate, born of Love, is blind as he,
Little brother!"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
Love turn'd to hate, between Hell and Heaven!)

"Oh it's Keith of Keith now that rides fast,
Sister Helen,
For I know the white hair on the blast."
"The short short hour will soon be past,
Little brother!"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
Will soon be past, between Hell and Heaven!)

"He looks at me and he tries to speak,
Sister Helen,
But oh! his voice is sad and weak!"
"What here should the mighty Baron seek,
Little brother?"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
Is this the end, between Hell and Heaven?)

"Oh his son still cries, if you forgive,
Sister Helen,
The body dies but the soul shall live."
"Fire shall forgive me as I forgive,
Little brother!"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
As she forgives, between Hell and Heaven!)

"Oh he prays you, as his heart would rive,
Sister Helen,
To save his dear son's soul alive."
"Fire cannot slay it, it shall thrive,
Little brother!"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
Alas, alas, between Hell and Heaven!)

"He cries to you, kneeling in the road,
Sister Helen,
To go with him for the love of God!"
"The way is long to his son's abode,
Little brother."
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
The way is long, between Hell and Heaven!)

"A lady's here, by a dark steed brought,
Sister Helen,
So darkly clad, I saw her not."
"See her now or never see aught,
Little brother!"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
What more to see, between Hell and Heaven?)

"Her hood falls back, and the moon shines fair,
Sister Helen,
On the Lady of Ewern's golden hair."
"Blest hour of my power and her despair,
Little brother!"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
Hour blest and bann'd, between Hell and Heaven!)

"Pale, pale her cheeks, that in pride did glow,
Sister Helen,
'Neath the bridal-wreath three days ago."
"One morn for pride and three days for woe,
Little brother!"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
Three days, three nights, between Hell and Heaven!)

"Her clasp'd hands stretch from her bending head,
Sister Helen;
With the loud wind's wail her sobs are wed."
"What wedding-strains hath her bridal-bed,
Little brother?"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
What strain but death's, between Hell and Heaven?)

"She may not speak, she sinks in a swoon,
Sister Helen,—
She lifts her lips and gasps on the moon."
"Oh! might I but hear her soul's blithe tune,
Little brother!"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
Her woe's dumb cry, between Hell and Heaven!)

"They've caught her to Westholm's saddle-bow,
Sister Helen,
And her moonlit hair gleams white in its flow."
"Let it turn whiter than winter snow,
Little brother!"
(O Mother, Mary Mother,

Woe-wither'd gold, between Hell and Heaven!)

"O Sister Helen, you heard the bell,
Sister Helen!
More loud than the vesper-chime it fell."
"No vesper-chime, but a dying knell,
Little brother!"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
His dying knell, between Hell and Heaven!)

"Alas! but I fear the heavy sound,
Sister Helen;
Is it in the sky or in the ground?"
"Say, have they turn'd their horses round,
Little brother?"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
What would she more, between Hell and Heaven?)

"They have rais'd the old man from his knee,
Sister Helen,
And they ride in silence hastily."
"More fast the naked soul doth flee,
Little brother!"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
The naked soul, between Hell and Heaven!)

"Flank to flank are the three steeds gone,
Sister Helen,
But the lady's dark steed goes alone."
"And lonely her bridegroom's soul hath flown,
Little brother."
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
The lonely ghost, between Hell and Heaven!)

"Oh the wind is sad in the iron chill,
Sister Helen,
And weary sad they look by the hill."
"But he and I are sadder still,
Little brother!"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
Most sad of all, between Hell and Heaven!)

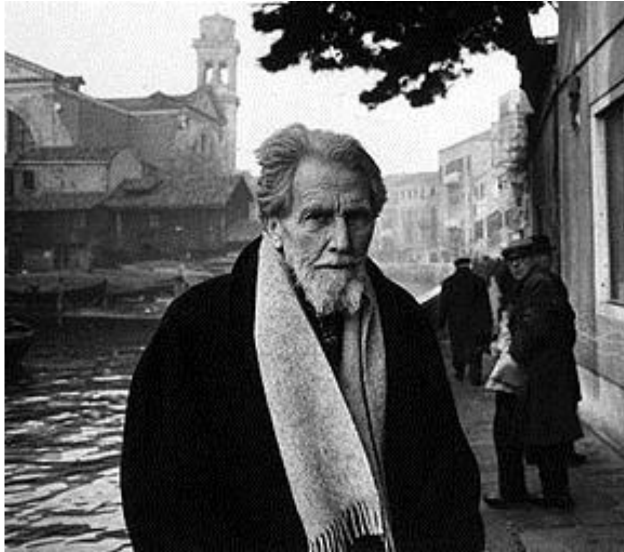
"See, see, the wax has dropp'd from its place,
Sister Helen,
And the flames are winning up apace!"
"Yet here they burn but for a space,

Little brother! "
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
Here for a space, between Hell and Heaven!)

"Ah! what white thing at the door has cross'd,
Sister Helen?
Ah! what is this that sighs in the frost?"
"A soul that's lost as mine is lost,
Little brother!"
(*O Mother, Mary Mother,*
Lost, lost, all lost, between Hell and Heaven!)

TWENTIETH CENTURY ENGLISH POETRY

IMAGIST POETRY



Imagism as a literary movement, or a school of poetry, appeared in the early Twentieth century in both Europe and America. It was mainly organized as a reaction to Georgian poetry, its late Romantic vagaries in style and topic. Instead they insisted that language should be economical and precise, arranged around particular images reflective of a complex set of thought and circumstances, while the verse should be free, natural as breath, rather than, as they said, following the rhythm of a metronome. As the times have dramatically changed for the poets of this generation, no traditional poetic form could any longer feel comfortable and poetry could no longer "soothe" and "please," which are the words used by the World War I poet Charles Sorley when he referred to some contemporary poetry. To be able to go beyond the Victorian heritage of poetry, Imagists looked back at some past authors, such as Classicist and classical, the old Greek, but also at geographical distant regions and their traditions, as were tanka and haiku poetry, which served as an excellent model for the compressed expression that they wanted.

Most notable Imagist poets were Ezra Pound, Thomas Ernest Hulme, Hilda Doolittle (who styled herself as H.D.), Richard Aldington, Amy Lowell, Ford Madox Ford, William Carlos Williams, Frank Stuart Flint, while in Imagist publications we will also come across the names of other prominent authors of the time, such as James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence.

The Roman version of the term *Imagistes* was first used as a descriptive concept by Ezra Pound in the 1912 issue of the *Poetry* journal which featured some poems by H.D. and R. Aldington. The journal continued publishing Imagist poems. In its 1913 March issue, Pound published his essay on the Imagist poetics and its belief in the resonance of an image, titling it "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste," which Flint summarized as:

1. Direct treatment of the "thing", whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of the metronome.

After this, Pound collected Imagist poems in an anthology titled *Des Imagistes*, published in 1914. In the following three years, despite the dark background involving the war and the financial crisis, Amy Lowell published three anthologies titled *Some Imagist Poets*. With the third publication, in 1917 the movement officially ended. However, regardless of its short duration, the Imagist poetics made a significant influence on Anglo-American modernist literature, the clarity of its imagery and its succinct verbalization.

SELECTED CRITICISM

T. E. Hulme, "Romanticism and Classicism"

https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69477/romanticism-and-classicism

I want to maintain that after a hundred years of romanticism, we are in for a classical revival, and that the particular weapon of this new classical spirit, when it works in verse, will be fancy. And in this I imply the superiority of fancy—not superior generally or absolutely, for that would be obvious nonsense, but superior in the sense that we use the word good in empirical ethics—good for something, superior for something. I shall have to prove then two things, first that a classical revival is coming, and, secondly, for its particular purposes, fancy will be superior to imagination.

So banal have the terms Imagination and Fancy become that we imagine they must have always been in the language. (2) Their history as two differing terms in the vocabulary of criticism is comparatively short. Originally, of course, they both mean the same thing; they first began to be differentiated by the German writers on aesthetics in the eighteenth century.

I know that in using the words 'classic' and 'romantic' I am doing a dangerous thing. They represent five or six different kinds of antitheses, and while I may be using them in one sense you may be interpreting them in another. In this present connection I am using them in a perfectly precise and limited sense. I ought really to have coined a couple of new words, but I prefer to use the ones I have used, as I then conform to the practice of the group of polemical writers who make most use of them at the present day, and have almost succeeded in making them political catchwords. I mean Maurras, Lasserre and all the group connected with L'Action Française. (3)

At the present time this is the particular group with which the distinction is most vital. Because it has become a party symbol. If you asked a man of a certain set whether he preferred the classics or the romantics, you could deduce from that what his politics were.

The best way of gliding into a proper definition of my terms would be to start with a set of people who are prepared to fight about it—for in them you will have no vagueness. (Other people take the infamous attitude of the person with catholic tastes who says he likes both.)

About a year ago, a man whose name I think was Fauchois gave a lecture at the Odéon on Racine, in the course of which he made some disparaging remarks about his dullness, lack of invention and the rest of it. This caused an immediate riot: fights took place all over the house; several people were arrested and imprisoned, and the rest of the series of lectures took place with hundreds of gendarmes and detectives scattered all over the place. These people interrupted because the classical ideal is a living thing to them and Racine is the great classic. That is what I call a real vital interest in literature. They regard romanticism as an awful disease from which France had just recovered.

The thing is complicated in their case by the fact that it was romanticism that made the revolution. They hate the revolution, so they hate romanticism.

I make no apology for dragging in politics here; romanticism both in England and France is associated with certain political views, and it is in taking a concrete example of the working out of a principle in action that you can get its best definition.

What was the positive principle behind all the other principles of '89? I am talking here of the revolution in as far as it was an idea; I leave out material causes—they only produce the forces. The barriers which could easily have resisted or guided these forces had been previously rotted away by ideas. This always seems to be the case in successful changes; the privileged class is beaten only when it has lost faith in itself, when it has itself been penetrated with the ideas which are working against it.

It was not the rights of man—that was a good solid practical war-cry. The thing which created enthusiasm, which made the revolution practically a new religion, was something more positive than that. People of all classes, people who stood to lose by it, were in a positive ferment about the idea of liberty. There must have been some idea which enabled them to think that something positive could come out of so essentially negative a thing. There was, and here I get my definition of romanticism. They had been taught by Rousseau that man was by nature good, that it was only bad laws and customs that had suppressed him. Remove all these and the infinite possibilities of man would have a chance. This is what made them think that something positive could come out of disorder, this is what created the religious enthusiasm. Here is the root of all romanticism: that man, the individual, is an infinite reservoir of possibilities; and if you can so rearrange society by the destruction of oppressive order then these possibilities will have a chance and you will get Progress.

One can define the classical quite clearly as the exact opposite to this. Man is an extraordinarily fixed and limited animal whose nature is absolutely constant. It is only by tradition and organisation that anything decent can be got out of him.

This view was a little shaken at the time of Darwin. You remember his particular hypothesis, that new species came into existence by the cumulative effect of small variations—this seems to admit the possibility of future progress. But at the

present day the contrary hypothesis makes headway in the shape of De Vries's mutation theory, that each new species comes into existence, not gradually by the accumulation of small steps, but suddenly in a jump, a kind of sport, and that once in existence it remains absolutely fixed. This enables me to keep the classical view with an appearance of scientific backing.

Put shortly, these are the two views, then. One, that man is intrinsically good, spoilt by circumstance; and the other that he is intrinsically limited, but disciplined by order and tradition to something fairly decent. To the one party man's nature is like a well, to the other like a bucket. The view which regards man as a well, a reservoir full of possibilities, I call the romantic; the one which regards him as a very finite and fixed creature, I call the classical.

One may note here that the Church has always taken the classical view since the defeat of the Pelagian heresy and the adoption of the sane classical dogma of original sin.

It would be a mistake to identify the classical view with that of materialism. On the contrary it is absolutely identical with the normal religious attitude. I should put it in this way: That part of the fixed nature of man is the belief in the Deity. This should be as fixed and true for every man as belief in the existence of matter and in the objective world. It is parallel to appetite, the instinct of sex, and all the other fixed qualities. Now at certain times, by the use of either force or rhetoric, these instincts have been suppressed—in Florence under Savonarola, in Geneva under Calvin, and here under the Roundheads. The inevitable result of such a process is that the repressed instinct bursts out in some abnormal direction. So with religion. By the perverted rhetoric of Rationalism, your natural instincts are suppressed and you are converted into an agnostic. Just as in the case of the other instincts, Nature has her revenge. The instincts that find their right and proper outlet in religion must come out in some other way. You don't believe in a God, so you begin to believe that man is a god. You don't believe in Heaven, so you begin to believe in a heaven on earth. In other words, you get romanticism.

The concepts that are right and proper in their own sphere are spread over, and so mess up, falsify and blur the clear outlines of human experience. It is like pouring a pot of treacle over the dinner table. Romanticism then, and this is the best definition I can give of it, is spilt religion.

I must now shirk the difficulty of saying exactly what I mean by romantic and classical in verse. I can only say that it means the result of these two attitudes towards the cosmos, towards man, in so far as it gets reflected in verse. The romantic, because he thinks man infinite, must always be talking about the infinite; and as there is always the bitter contrast between what you think you ought to be able to do and what man actually can, it always tends, in its later stages at any rate, to be gloomy. I really can't go any further than to say it is the reflection of these two temperaments, and point out examples of the different spirits. On the one hand I would take such diverse people as Horace, most of the Elizabethans and the writers of the Augustan age, and on the other side Lamartine, Hugo, parts of Keats, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Swinburne.

I know quite well that when people think of classical and romantic in verse, the contrast at once comes into their mind between, say, Racine and Shakespeare. I

don't mean this; the dividing line that I intend is here misplaced a little from the true middle. That Racine is on the extreme classical side I agree, but if you call Shakespeare romantic, you are using a different definition to the one I give. You are thinking of the difference between classic and romantic as being merely one between restraint and exuberance. I should say with Nietzsche that there are two kinds of classicism, the static and the dynamic. Shakespeare is the classic of motion.

What I mean by classical in verse, then, is this. That even in the most imaginative flights there is always a holding back, a reservation. The classical poet never forgets this finiteness, this limit of man. He remembers always that he is mixed up with earth. He may jump, but he always returns back; he never flies away into the circumambient gas.

You might say if you wished that the whole of the romantic attitude seems to crystallise in verse round metaphors of flight. Hugo is always flying, flying over abysses, flying up into the eternal gases. The word infinite in every other line.

In the classical attitude you never seem to swing right along to the infinite nothing. If you say an extravagant thing which does exceed the limits inside which you know man to be fastened, yet there is always conveyed in some way at the end an impression of yourself standing outside it, and not quite believing it, or consciously putting it forward as a flourish. You never go blindly into an atmosphere more than the truth, an atmosphere too rarefied for man to breathe for long. You are always faithful to the conception of a limit. It is a question of pitch; in romantic verse you move at a certain pitch of rhetoric which you know, man being what he is, to be a little high-falutin. The kind of thing you get in Hugo or Swinburne. In the coming classical reaction that will feel just wrong. For an example of the opposite thing, a verse written in the proper classical spirit, I can take the song from *Cymbeline* beginning with 'Fear no more the heat of the sun'. I am just using this as a parable. I don't quite mean what I say here. Take the last two lines:

> 'Golden lads and girls all must,
> Like chimney sweepers come to dust.' (4)

Now, no romantic would have ever written that. Indeed, so ingrained in romanticism, so objectionable is this to it, that people have asserted that these were not part of the original song.

Apart from the pun, the thing that I think quite classical is the word lad. Your modern romantic could never write that. He would have to write golden youth, and take up the thing at least a couple of notes in pitch.

I want now to give the reasons which make me think that we are nearing the end of the romantic movement.

The first lies in the nature of any convention or tradition in art. A particular convention or attitude in art has a strict analogy to the phenomena of organic life. It grows old and decays. It has a definite period of life and must die. All the possible tunes get played on it and then it is exhausted; moreover its best period is its youngest. Take the case of the extraordinary efflorescence of verse in the Elizabethan period. All kinds of reasons have been given for this—the discovery of

the new world and all the rest of it. There is a much simpler one. A new medium had been given them to play with—namely, black verse. It was new and so it was easy to play new tunes on it.

The same law holds in other arts. All the masters of painting are born into the world at a time when the particular tradition from which they start is imperfect. The Florentine tradition was just short of full ripeness when Raphael came to Florence, the Bellinesque was still young when Titian was born in Venice. Landscape was still a toy or an appanage of figure-painting when Turner and Constable arose to reveal its independent power. When Turner and Constable had done with landscape they left little or nothing for their successors to do on the same lines. Each field of artistic activity is exhausted by the first great artist who gathers a full harvest from it.

This period of exhaustion seems to me to have been reached in romanticism. We shall not get any new efflorescence of verse until we get a new technique, a new convention, to turn ourselves loose in.

Objection might be taken to this. It might be said that a century as an organic unity doesn't exist, that I am being deluded by a wrong metaphor, that I am treating a collection of literary people as if they were an organism or state department. Whatever we may be in other things, an objector might urge, in literature in as far as we are anything at all—in as far as we are worth considering—we are individuals, we are persons, and as distinct persons we cannot be subordinated to any general treatment. At any period at any time, an individual poet may be a classic or a romantic just as he feels like it. You at any particular moment may think that you can stand outside a movement. You may think that as an individual you observe both the classic and the romantic spirit and decide from a purely detached point of view that one is superior to the other.

The answer to this is that no one, in a matter of judgment of beauty, can take a detached standpoint in this way. Just as physically you are not born that abstract entity, man, but the child of particular parents, so you are in matters of literary judgment. Your opinion is almost entirely of the literary history that came just before you, and you are governed by that whatever you may think. Take Spinoza's example of a stone falling to the ground. If it had a conscious mind it would, he said, think it was going to the ground because it wanted to. So you with your pretended free judgment about what is and what is not beautiful. The amount of freedom in man is much exaggerated. That we are free on certain rare occasions, both my religion and the views I get from metaphysics convince me. But many acts which we habitually label free are in reality automatic. It is quite possible for a man to write a book almost automatically. I have read several such products. Some observations were recorded more than twenty years ago by Robertson on reflex speech, and he found that in certain cases of dementia, where the people were quite unconscious so far as the exercise of reasoning went, that very intelligent answers were given to a succession of questions on politics and such matters. The meaning of these questions could not possibly have been understood. Language here acted after the manner of a reflex. So that certain extremely complex mechanisms, subtle enough to imitate beauty, can work by themselves—I certainly think that this is the case with judgments about beauty.

I can put the same thing in slightly different form. Here is a question of a conflict of two attitudes, as it might be of two techniques. The critic, while he has to admit that changes from one to the other occur, persists in regarding them as mere variations to a certain fixed normal, just as a pendulum might swing. I admit the analogy of the pendulum as far as movement, but I deny the further consequence of the analogy, the existence of the point of rest, the normal point.

When I say that I dislike the romantics, I dissociate two things: the part of them in which they resemble all the great poets, and the part in which they differ and which gives them their character as romantics. It is this minor element which constitutes the particular note of a century, and which, while it excites contemporaries, annoys the next generation. It was precisely that quality in Pope which pleased his friends, which we detest. Now, anyone just before the romantics who felt that, could have predicted that a change was coming. It seems to me that we stand just in the same position now. I think that there is an increasing proportion of people who simply can't stand Swinburne.

When I say that there will be another classical revival I don't necessarily anticipate a return to Pope. I say merely that now is the time for such a revival. Given people of the necessary capacity, it may be a vital thing; without them we may get a formalism something like Pope. When it does come we may not even recognise it as classical. Although it will be classical it will be different because it has passed through a romantic period. To take a parallel example: I remember being very surprised, after seeing the Post Impressionists, to find in Maurice Denis's account of the matter that they consider themselves classical in the sense that they were trying to impose the same order on the mere flux of new material provided by the impressionist movement, that existed in the more limited materials of the painting before.

There is something now to be cleared away before I get on with my argument, which is that while romanticism is dead in reality, yet the critical attitude appropriate to it still continues to exist. To make this a littler clearer: For every kind of verse, there is a corresponding receptive attitude. In a romantic period we demand from verse certain qualities. In a classical period we demand others. At the present time I should say that this receptive attitude has outlasted the thing from which it was formed. But while the romantic tradition has run dry, yet the critical attitude of mind, which demands romantic qualities from verse, still survives. So that if good classical verse were to be written tomorrow very few people would be able to stand it.

I object even to the best of the romantics. I object still more to the receptive attitude. I object to the sloppiness which doesn't consider that a poem is a poem unless it is moaning or whining about something or other. I always think in this connection of the last line of a poem of John Webster's which ends with a request I cordially endorse:

> 'End your moan and come away.' (5)

The thing has got so bad now that a poem which is all dry and hard, a properly classical poem, would not be considered poetry at all. How many people

now can lay their hands on their hearts and say they like either Horace or Pope? They feel a kind of chill when they read them.

The dry hardness which you get in the classics is absolutely repugnant to them. Poetry that isn't damp isn't poetry at all. They cannot see that accurate description is a legitimate object of verse. Verse to them always means a bringing in of some of the emotions that are grouped round the word infinite.

The essence of poetry to most people is that it must lead them to a beyond of some kind. Verse strictly confined to the earthly and the definite (Keats is full of it) might seem to them to be excellent writing, excellent craftsmanship, but not poetry. So much has romanticism debauched us, that, without some form of vagueness, we deny the highest.

In the classic it is always the light of ordinary day, never the light that never was on land or sea. It is always perfectly human and never exaggerated: man is always man and never a god.

But the awful result of romanticism is that, accustomed to this strange light, you can never live without it. Its effect on you is that of a drug.

There is a general tendency to think that verse means little else than the expression of unsatisfied emotion. People say: 'But how can you have verse without sentiment?' You see what it is: the prospect alarms them. A classical revival to them would mean the prospect of an arid desert and the death of poetry as they understand it, and could only come to fill the gap caused by that death. Exactly why this dry classical spirit should have a positive and legitimate necessity to express itself in poetry is utterly inconceivable to them. What this positive need is, I shall show later. It follows from the fact that there is another quality, not the emotion produced, which is at the root of excellence in verse. Before I get to this I am concerned with a negative thing, a theoretical point, a prejudice that stands in the way and is really at the bottom of this reluctance to understand classical verse.

It is an objection which ultimately I believe comes from a bad metaphysic of art. You are unable to admit the existence of beauty without the infinite being in some way or another dragged in.

I may quote for purposes of argument, as a typical example of this kind of attitude made vocal, the famous chapters in Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, Vol. II, on the imagination. I must say here, parenthetically, that I use this word without prejudice to the other discussion with which I shall end the paper. I only use the word here because it is Ruskin's word. All that I am concerned with just now is the attitude behind it, which I take to be the romantic.

Imagination cannot but be serious; she sees too far, too darkly, too solemnly, too earnestly, ever to smile. There is something in the heart of everything, if we can reach it, that we shall not be inclined to laugh at . . . Those who have so pierced and seen the melancholy deeps of things, are filled with intense passion and gentleness of sympathy. (Part III, Chap. III, § 9)

There is in every word set down by the imaginative mind an awful undercurrent of meaning, and evidence and shadow upon it of the deep places out of which it has come. It is often obscure, often half-told; for he who wrote it, in his clear seeing of the things beneath, may have been impatient of detailed interpretations; for if we choose to dwell upon it and trace it, it will lead us always

securely back to that metropolis of the soul's dominion from which we may follow out all the ways and tracks to its farthest coasts. (Part III, Chap. III, § 5) (6)

Really in all these matters the act of judgment is an instinct, an absolutely unstateable thing akin to the art of the tea taster. But you must talk, and the only language you can use in this matter is that of analogy. I have no material clay to mould to the given shape; the only thing which one has for the purpose, and which acts as a substitute for it, a kind of mental clay, are certain metaphors modified into theories of aesthetic and rhetoric. A combination of these, while it cannot state the essentially unstateable intuition, can yet give you a sufficient analogy to enable you to see what it was and to recognise it on condition that you yourself have been in a similar state. Now these phrases of Ruskin's convey quite clearly to me his taste in the matter.

I see quite clearly that he thinks the best verse must be serious. That is a natural attitude for a man in the romantic period. But he is not content with saying that he prefers this kind of verse. He wants to deduce his opinion like his master, Coleridge, from some fixed principle which can be found by metaphysic.

Here is the last refuge of this romantic attitude. It proves itself to be not an attitude but a deduction from a fixed principle of the cosmos.

One of the main reasons for the existence of philosophy is not that it enables you to find truth (it can never do that) but that it does provide you a refuge for definitions. The usual idea of the thing is that it provides you with a fixed basis from which you can deduce the things you want in esthetics. The process is the exact contrary. You start in the confusion of the fighting line, you retire from that just a little to the rear to recover, to get your weapons right. Quite plainly, without metaphor this—it provides you with an elaborate and precise language in which you really can explain definitely what you mean, but what you want to say is decided by other things. The ultimate reality is the hurly-burly, the struggle; the metaphysics is an adjunct to clear-headedness in it.

To get back to Ruskin and his objection to all that is not serious. It seems to me that involved in this is a bad metaphysical aesthetic. You have the metaphysic which in defining beauty or the nature of art always drags in the infinite. Particularly in Germany, the land where theories of aesthetics were first created, the romantic aesthetes collated all beauty to an impression of the infinite involved in the identification of our being in absolute spirit. In the least element of beauty we have a total intuition of the whole world. Every artist is a kind of pantheist.

Now it is quite obvious to anyone who holds this kind of theory that any poetry which confines itself to the finite can never be of the highest kind. It seems a contradiction in terms to them. And as in metaphysics you get the last refuge of a prejudice, so it is now necessary for me to refute this.

Here follows a tedious piece of dialectic, but it is necessary for my purpose. I must avoid two pitfalls in discussing the idea of beauty. On the one hand there is the old classical view which is supposed to define it as lying in conformity to certain standard fixed forms; and on the other hand there is the romantic view which drags in the infinite. I have got to find a metaphysic between these two which will enable me to hold consistently that a neo-classic verse of the type I have indicated

involves no contradiction in terms. It is essential to prove that beauty may be in small, dry things.

The great aim is accurate, precise and definite description. The first thing is to recognise how extraordinarily difficult this is. It is no mere matter of carefulness; you have to use language, and language is by its very nature a communal thing; that is, it expresses never the exact thing but a compromise—that which is common to you, me and everybody. But each man sees a little differently, and to get out clearly and exactly what he does see, he must have a terrific struggle with language, whether it be with words or the technique of other arts. Language has its own special nature, its own conventions and communal ideas. It is only by a concentrated effort of the mind that you can hold it fixed to your own purpose. I always think that the fundamental process at the back of all the arts might be represented by the following metaphor. You know what I call architect's curves—flat pieces of wood with all different kinds of curvature. By a suitable selection from these you can draw approximately any curve you like. The artist I take to be the man who simply can't bear the idea of that 'approximately.' He will get the exact curve of what he sees whether it be an object or an idea in the mind. I shall here have to change my metaphor a little to get the process in his mind. Suppose that instead of your curved pieces of wood you have a springy piece of steel of the same types of curvature as the wood. Now the state of tension or concentration of mind, if he is doing anything really good in this struggle against the ingrained habit of the technique, may be represented by a man employing all his fingers to bend the steel out of its own curve and into the exact curve which you want. Something different to what it would assume naturally.

There are then two things to distinguish, first the particular faculty of mind to see things as they really are, and apart from the conventional ways in which you have been trained to see them. This is itself rare enough in all consciousness. Second, the concentrated state of mind, the grip over oneself which is necessary in the actual expression of what one sees. To prevent one falling into the conventional curves of ingrained technique, to hold on through infinite detail and trouble to the exact curve you want. Wherever you get this sincerity, you get the fundamental quality of good art without dragging in infinite or serious.

I can now get at that positive fundamental quality of verse which constitutes excellence, which has nothing to do with infinity, with mystery or with emotions.

This is the point I aim at, then, in my argument. I prophesy that a period of dry, hard, classical verse is coming. I have met the preliminary objection founded on the bad romantic aesthetic that is such verse, from which the infinite is excluded, you cannot have the essence of poetry at all.

After attempting to sketch out what this positive quality is, I cannot get on to the end of my paper in this way: That where you get this quality exhibited in the realm of the emotions you get imagination, and that where you get this quality exhibited in the contemplation of finite things you get fancy.

In prose as in algebra concrete things are embodied in signs or counters which are moved about according to rules, without being visualised at all in the process. There are in prose certain type situations and arrangements of words, which move as automatically into certain other arrangements as do functions in

algebra. One only changes the X's and the Y's back into physical things at the end of the process. Poetry, in one aspect at any rate, may be considered as an effort to avoid this characteristic of prose. It is not a counter language, but a visual concrete one. It is a compromise for a language of intuition which would hand over sensations bodily. It always endeavours to arrest you, and to make you continuously see a physical thing, to prevent you gliding through an abstract process. It chooses fresh epithets and fresh metaphors, not so much because they are new, and we are tired of the old, but because the old cease to convey a physical thing and become abstract counters. A poet says a ship 'coursed the seas' to get a physical image, instead of the counter word 'sailed'. Visual meanings can only be transferred by the new bowl of metaphor; prose is an old pot that lets them leak out. Images in verse are not mere decoration, but the very essence of an intuitive language. Verse is a pedestrian taking you over the ground, prose—a train which delivers you at a destination.

I can now get on to a discussion of two words often used in this connection, 'fresh' and 'unexpected'. You praise a thing for being 'fresh'. I understand what you mean, but the word besides conveying the truth conveys a secondary something which is certainly false. When you say a poem or drawing is fresh, and so good, the impression is somehow conveyed that the essential element of goodness is freshness, that it is good because it is fresh. Now this is certainly wrong, there is nothing particularly desirable about freshness *per se*. Works of art aren't eggs. Rather the contrary. It is simply an unfortunate necessity due to the nature of the language and technique that the only way the element which does constitute goodness, the only way in which its presence can be detected externally, is by freshness. Freshness convinces you, you feel at once that the artist was in an actual physical state. You feel that for a minute. Real communication is so very rare, for plain speech is unconvincing. It is in this rare fact of communication that you get the root of aesthetic pleasure.

I shall maintain that wherever you get an extraordinary interest in a thing, a great zest in its contemplation which carries on the contemplator to accurate description in the sense of the word accurate I have just analysed, there you have sufficient justification for poetry. It must be an intense zest which heightens a thing out of the level of prose. I am using contemplation here just in the same way that Plato used it, only applied to a different subject; it is a detached interest. 'The object of aesthetic contemplation is something framed apart by itself and regarded without memory or expectation, simply as being itself, as end not means, as individual not universal.'

To take a concrete example. I am taking an extreme case. If you are walking behind a woman in the street, you notice the curious way in which the skirt rebounds from her heels. If that peculiar kind of motion becomes of such interest to you that you will search about until you can get the exact epithet which hits it off, there you have a properly aesthetic emotion. But it is the zest with which you look at the thing which decides you to make the effort. In this sense the feeling that was in Herrick's mind when he wrote 'the tempestuous petticoat' was exactly the same as that which in bigger and vaguer matters makes the best romantic verse. It doesn't matter an atom that the emotion produced is not of dignified vagueness, but on the

contrary amusing; the point is that exactly the same activity is at work as in the highest verse. That is the avoidance of conventional language in order to get the exact curve of the thing.

I have still to show that in the verse which is to come, fancy will be the necessary weapon of the classical school. The positive quality I have talked about can be manifested in ballad verse by extreme directness and simplicity, such as you get in 'On Fair Kirkconnel Lea'. But the particular verse we are going to get will be cheerful, dry and sophisticated, and here the necessary weapon of the positive quality must be fancy.

Subject doesn't matter; the quality in it is the same as you get in the more romantic people.

It isn't the scale or kind of emotion produced that decides, but this one fact: Is there any real zest in it? Did the poet have an actually realised visual object before him in which he delighted? It doesn't matter if it were a lady's shoe or the starry heavens.

Fancy is not mere decoration added on to plain speech. Plain speech is essentially inaccurate. It is only by new metaphors, that is, by fancy, that it can be made precise.

When the analogy has not enough connection with the thing described to be quite parallel with it, where it overlays the thing it described and there is a certain excess, there you have the play of fancy—that I grant is inferior to imagination.

But where the analogy is every bit of it necessary for accurate description in the sense of the word accurate I have previously described, and your only objection to this kind of fancy is that it is not serious in the effect it produces, then I think the objection to be entirely invalid. If it is sincere in the accurate sense, when the whole of the analogy is necessary to get out the exact curve of the feeling or thing you want to express—there you seem to me to have the highest verse, even though the subject be trivial and the emotions of the infinite far away.

It is very difficult to use any terminology at all for this kind of thing. For whatever word you use is at once sentimentalised. Take Coleridge's word 'vital'. It is used loosely by all kinds of people who talk about art, to mean something vaguely and mysteriously significant. In fact, vital and mechanical is to them exactly the same antithesis as between good and bad.

Nothing of the kind; Coleridge uses it in a perfectly definite and what I call dry sense. It is just this: A mechanical complexity is the sum of its parts. Put them side by side and you get the whole. Now vital or organic is merely a convenient metaphor for a complexity of a different kind, that in which the parts cannot be said to be elements as each one is modified by the other's presence, and each one to a certain extent is the whole. The leg of a chair by itself is still a leg. My leg by itself wouldn't be.

Now the characteristic of the intellect is that it can only represent complexities of the mechanical kind. It can only make diagrams, and diagrams are essentially things whose parts are separate one from another. The intellect always analyses—when there is a synthesis it is baffled. That is why the artist's work seems mysterious. The intellect can't represent it. This is a necessary consequence of the

particular nature of the intellect and the purposes for which it is formed. It doesn't mean that your synthesis is ineffable, simply that it can't be definitely stated.

Now this is all worked out in Bergson, the central feature of his whole philosophy. It is all based on the clear conception of these vital complexities which he calls 'intensive' as opposed to the other kind which he calls 'extensive', and the recognition of the fact that the intellect can only deal with the extensive multiplicity. To deal with the intensive you must use intuition.

Now, as I said before, Ruskin was perfectly aware of all this, but he had no such metaphysical background which would enable him to state definitely what he meant. The result is that he has to flounder about in a series of metaphors. A powerfully imaginative mind seizes and combines at the same instant all the important ideas of its poem or picture, and while it works with one of them, it is at the same instant working with and modifying all in their relation to it and never losing sight of their bearings on each other—as the motion of a snake's body goes through all parts at once and its volition acts at the same instant in coils which go contrary ways.

A romantic movement must have an end of the very nature of the thing. It may be deplored, but it can't be helped—wonder must cease to be wonder.

I guard myself here from all the consequences of the analogy, but it expresses at any rate the inevitableness of the process. A literature of wonder must have an end as inevitably as a strange land loses its strangeness when one lives in it. Think of the lost ecstasy of the Elizabethans. 'Oh my America, my new found land,' (8) think of what it meant to them and of what it means to us. Wonder can only be the attitude of a man passing from one stage to another, it can never be a permanently fixed thing.

Notes**:**

1. One of Hulme's most anthologised pieces, this was probably prepared as a lecture and written around 1911 or early 1912. It is dateable from the reference to René Fauchois's lectures on Racine, which took place in Paris in autumn 1910.

2. The distinction between Imagination and Fancy was made by Coleridge in *Biographia Litteraria* (1817).

3. Charles Maurras (1868-1952) and Pierre Lasserre (1867-1930) were leading figures in the French reactionary political movement l'Action française, founded in the wake of the Dreyfus case. Lasserre's influential *Le Romantisme française*appeared in 1907, and deeply impressed Hulme, who refers to it on numerous occasions. Lasserre contends that Rousseau and Romanticism were responsible for the intellectual and political decadence of the late nineteenth century, and advocates, as Hulme was to do, a 'Classical' antidote. Hulme met Lasserre in 1911, and gives an account of their meeting in *The New Age* of 9 November 1911 ('Mr Balfour, Bergson and Politics'), during which Lasserre 'endeavoured to prove to me that Bergsonism was nothing but the last disguise of romanticism'.

4. Hulme misquotes Shakespeare, and the lines should read 'Golden lads and girls all must, / As chimney-sweepers, come to dust' (*Cymbeline*, 4.2.263).

5. Hulme is misquoting Bosola's song in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, IV, 2. The line should read: 'End your groan and come away.'
6. John Ruskin (1819-1900), the Victorian art and social critic, published *Modern Painters* from 1843 to 1860.
7. Robert Herrick (1591-1674); the phrase is from his poem 'Delight in Disorder'.
8. John Donne, 'Elegie: To his Mistris Going to Bed'.

Ezra Paund, "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste"

https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/articles/58900/a-few-donts-by-an-imagiste

An "Image" is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. I use the term "complex" rather in the technical sense employed by the newer psychologists, such as Hart, though we might not agree absolutely in our application.

It is the presentation of such a "complex" instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art.

It is better to present one Image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous works.

All this, however, some may consider open to debate. The immediate necessity is to tabulate A LIST OF DON'TS for those beginning to write verses. But I can not put all of them into Mosaic negative.

To begin with, consider the three rules recorded by Mr. Flint, not as dogma—never consider anything as dogma—but as the result of long contemplation, which, even if it is some one else's contemplation, may be worth consideration.

Pay no attention to the criticism of men who have never themselves written a notable work. Consider the discrepancies between the actual writing of the Greek poets and dramatists, and the theories of the Graeco-Roman grammarians, concocted to explain their metres.

Language

Use no superfluous word, no adjective, which does not reveal something.

Don't use such an expression as "dim lands *of peace*." It dulls the image. It mixes an abstraction with the concrete. It comes from the writer's not realizing that the natural object is always the *adequate* symbol.

Go in fear of abstractions. Don't retell in mediocre verse what has already been done in good prose. Don't think any intelligent person is going to be deceived

when you try to shirk all the difficulties of the unspeakably difficult art of good prose by chopping your composition into line lengths.

What the expert is tired of today the public will be tired of tomorrow.

Don't imagine that the art of poetry is any simpler than the art of music, or that you can please the expert before you have spent at least as much effort on the art of verse as the average piano teacher spends on the art of music.

Be influenced by as many great artists as you can, but have the decency either to acknowledge the debt outright, or to try to conceal it.

Don't allow "influence" to mean merely that you mop up the particular decorative vocabulary of some one or two poets whom you happen to admire. A Turkish war correspondent was recently caught red-handed babbling in his dispatches of "dove-gray" hills, or else it was "pearl-pale," I can not remember.

Use either no ornament or good ornament.

Rhythm and Rhyme

Let the candidate fill his mind with the finest cadences he can discover, preferably in a foreign language so that the meaning of the words may be less likely to divert his attention from the movement; e.g., Saxon charms, Hebridean Folk Songs, the verse of Dante, and the lyrics of Shakespeare—if he can dissociate the vocabulary from the cadence. Let him dissect the lyrics of Goethe coldly into their component sound values, syllables long and short, stressed and unstressed, into vowels and consonants.

It is not necessary that a poem should rely on its music, but if it does rely on its music that music must be such as will delight the expert.

Let the neophyte know assonance and alliteration, rhyme immediate and delayed, simple and polyphonic, as a musician would expect to know harmony and counter-point and all the minutiae of his craft. No time is too great to give to these matters or to any one of them, even if the artist seldom have need of them.

Don't imagine that a thing will "go" in verse just because it's too dull to go in prose.

Don't be "viewy"—leave that to the writers of pretty little philosophic essays. Don't be descriptive; remember that the painter can describe a landscape much better than you can, and that he has to know a deal more about it.

When Shakespeare talks of the "Dawn in russet mantle clad" he presents something which the painter does not present. There is in this line of his nothing that one can call description; he presents.

Consider the way of the scientists rather than the way of an advertising agent for a new soap.

The scientist does not expect to be acclaimed as a great scientist until he has *discovered* something. He begins by learning what has been discovered already. He goes from that point onward. He does not bank on being a charming fellow personally. He does not expect his friends to applaud the results of his freshman class work. Freshmen in poetry are unfortunately not confined to a definite and recognizable class room. They are "all over the shop." Is it any wonder "the public is indifferent to poetry?"

Don’t chop your stuff into separate *iambs*. Don’t make each line stop dead at the end, and then begin every next line with a heave. Let the beginning of the next line catch the rise of the rhythm wave, unless you want a definite longish pause.

In short, behave as a musician, a good musician, when dealing with that phase of your art which has exact parallels in music. The same laws govern, and you are bound by no others.

Naturally, your rhythmic structure should not destroy the shape of your words, or their natural sound, or their meaning. It is improbable that, at the start, you will be able to get a rhythm-structure strong enough to affect them very much, though you may fall a victim to all sorts of false stopping due to line ends and caesurae.

The musician can rely on pitch and the volume of the orchestra. You can not. The term harmony is misapplied to poetry; it refers to simultaneous sounds of different pitch. There is, however, in the best verse a sort of residue of sound which remains in the ear of the hearer and acts more or less as an organ-base. A rhyme must have in it some slight element of surprise if it is to give pleasure; it need not be bizarre or curious, but it must be well used if used at all.

Vide further Vildrac and Duhamel’s notes on rhyme in “*Technique Poetique*.”

That part of your poetry which strikes upon the imaginative *eye* of the reader will lose nothing by translation into a foreign tongue; that which appeals to the ear can reach only those who take it in the original.

Consider the definiteness of Dante’s presentation, as compared with Milton’s rhetoric. Read as much of Wordsworth as does not seem too unutterably dull.

If you want the gist of the matter go to Sappho, Catullus, Villon, Heine when he is in the vein, Gautier when he is not too frigid; or, if you have not the tongues, seek out the leisurely Chaucer. Good prose will do you no harm, and there is good discipline to be had by trying to write it.

Translation is likewise good training, if you find that your original matter “wobbles” when you try to rewrite it. The meaning of the poem to be translated can not “wobble.”

If you are using a symmetrical form, don’t put in what you want to say and then fill up the remaining vacuums with slush.

Don’t mess up the perception of one sense by trying to define it in terms of another. This is usually only the result of being too lazy to find the exact word. To this clause there are possibly exceptions.

The first three simple proscriptions[*] will throw out nine-tenths of all the bad poetry now accepted as standard and classic; and will prevent you from many a crime of production. “...*Mais d’abord il faut etre un poete*,” as MM. Duhamel and Vildrac have said at the end of their little book, “*Notes sur la Technique Poetique*”; but in an American one takes that at least for granted, otherwise why does one get born upon that august continent!

[*]Noted by Mr. Flint.

From Amy Lowell, *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry*
(New York: Macmillan Company, 1917)

http://www.english.illinois.edu/Maps/poets/g_l/amylowell/imagism.htm

We are now to deal with the work of the small group of poets known as Imagists. Later, I shall explain just what are the tenets of the Imagist School, but before beginning on the work of the two poets whose names stand at the head of this chapter, it is proper to state that they only represent a fraction of the Imagist group. Of course, any one who writes poetry from the same point of view might be said to write Imagistic verse, to be an Imagist, in short; but, in speaking of the Imagists as a group, I shall confine myself to those six poets whose work has appeared in the successive volumes of the annual anthology, "Some Imagist Poets." These poets are exactly divided in nationality, three being American, three English. The English members of the Imagist group are Richard Aldington, F. S. Flint, and D. H. Lawrence, and I regret that this book, being confined to American poets, leaves me no opportunity to discuss the work of these Englishmen. The three American Imagists are the lady who writes under the pseudonym of "H.D.," John Gould Fletcher, and myself. In this chapter, therefore, I shall consider only the work of "H.D." and John Gould Fletcher.

However individual the work of the six Imagist poets is (and any one of who has read their anthology cannot fail to have observed it), the poems of "H.D." and Mr. Fletcher are enough in themselves to show the tendencies and aims of the group.

I suppose few literary movements have been so little understood as Imagism. Only a short time ago, in the "Yale Review," Professor John Erskine confessed that he had no clear idea of what was Imagist verse and what was not, and in unconscious proof of his ignorance, spoke of Robert Frost and Edgar Lee Masters as Imagists.

To call a certain kind of writing "a school," and give it a name, is merely a convenient method of designating it when we wish to speak of it. We have adopted the same method in regard to distinguishing persons. We say John Smith and James Brown, because it is simpler than to say: six feet tall, blue eyes, straight nose—or the reverse of these attributes. Imagist verse is verse which is written in conformity with certain tenets voluntarily adopted by the poets as being those by which they consider the best poetry to be produced. They may be right or they may be wrong, but it is their belief.

Imagism, then, is a particular school, springing up within a larger, more comprehensive movement, the New Movement with which this whole book has had to do [*Tendencies in Modern American Poetry*]. This movement has yet received no convenient designation. We, who are of it, naturally have not the proper perspective to see it in all its historical significance. But we can safely claim it to be a "renaissance,' a re-birth of the spirit of truth and beauty. It means a re-discovery of beauty in our modern world, and the originality and honesty to affirm that beauty in whatever manner is native to the poet.

I have shown Edwin Arlington Robinson and Robert Frost as the pioneers of the renaissance; I have shown Edgar Lee Masters and Carl Sandburg plunging forward in quest of change and freedom, hurling themselves against the harshness and materialism of existing conditions, shouting their beliefs, sometimes raucously, but always honestly and with abounding courage. Now, I am to show a condition, not changing, but changed. These poets not only express themselves differently, they see life and the universe from a different standpoint.

It is not over; the movement is yet in its infancy. Other poets will come and, perchance, perfect where these men have given the tools. Other writers, forgetting the stormy times in which this movement had its birth, will inherit in plentitude and calm that for which they have fought. Then our native flowers will bloom into a great garden, to be again conventionalized to a pleasance of stone statues and mathematical parterres awaiting a new change which shall displace it. This is the perpetually recurring history of literature, and of the world.

I have chosen the Imagists as representing the third stage of the present movement advisedly, for only in them do I see that complete alteration of point of view necessary to this third stage. An alteration, let me add, due solely to the beliefs -moral, religious, and artistic -inherent in the characters of these poets. Honest difference of opinion leads to honestly different work, and this must not be confused with the absurd outpourings of those gadflies of the arts who imitate the manners of others without an inkling of their souls; nor with those nefarious persons who endeavour to keep themselves before the public by means of a more or less clever charlatanism.

The spoken word, even the written word, is often misunderstood. I do not wish to be construed as stating that poets in the third stage are better, as poets, than those in the other two. Fundamental beliefs change art, but do not, necessarily, either improve or injure it. Great poetry has been written at every stage of the world's history, but Homer did not write like Dante, nor Dante like Shakespeare, nor Shakespeare like Edgar Allan Poe. So, in literary criticism, one may assign a poet his place in a general movement without any attempt to appraise his individual merit by so doing.

Before taking up the work of "H.D." and John Gould Fletcher in detail, I think it would be well to consider, for a moment, what Imagism is, and for what those poets who style themselves " Imagists" stand.

In the preface to the anthology, "Some Imagist Poets," [1916] there is set down a brief list of tenets to which the poets contributing to it mutually agreed. I do not mean that they pledged themselves as to a creed. I mean that they all found themselves in accord upon these simple rules.

I propose to take up these rules presently, one by one, and explain them in detail, but I will first set them down in order:

1. To use the language of common speech, but to employ always the exact word, not the nearly-exact, nor the merely decorative word.
2. To create new rhythms -as the expression of new moods -- and not to copy old rhythms, which merely echo old moods. We do not insist upon "free-verse" as the only method of writing poetry. We fight for it as for a principle of liberty. We

believe that the individuality of a poet may often be better expressed in free-verse than in conventional forms. In poetry a new cadence means a new idea.
3. To allow absolute freedom in the choice of subject. It is not good art to write badly of aeroplanes and automobiles, nor is it necessarily bad art to write well about the past. We believe passionately in the artistic value of modem life, but we wish to point out that there is nothing so uninspiring nor so old-fashioned as an aeroplane of the year 19 11.
4. To present an image (hence the name: "Imagist"). We are not a school of painters, but we believe that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous. It is for this reason that we oppose the cosmic poet, who seems to us to shirk the real difficulties of his art.
5. To produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite.
6. Finally, most of us believe that concentration is of the very essence of poetry.

There is nothing new under the sun, even the word, "renaissance," means a re-birth not a new birth, and of this the Imagists were well aware. This short creed was preceded by the following paragraph:

> These principles are not new; they have fallen into desuetude. They are the essentials of all great poetry, indeed of all great literature.

It is not primarily on account of their forms, as is commonly supposed, that the Imagist poets represent a changed point of view; it is because of their reactions toward the world in which they live.

Now let us examine these tenets and see just what they mean, for I have observed that their very succinctness has often occasioned misunderstanding.

The first one is: "To use the language of common speech, but to employ always the *exact* word, not the nearly-exact, nor the merely decorative word."

The language of common speech means a diction which carefully excludes inversions, and the *cliches* of the old poetic jargon. As to inversions, we only need to remember Matthew Arnold's famous parody on this evil practice in his essay, "On Translating Homer":

Yourself, how do you do,
Very well, you I thank.

But, until very recently, it persisted in our poetry. One of the tenets in which all the poets of the present movement, Imagists and others, are agreed, however, is this abhorrence of the inversion.

"Cliche"' is a French word and means "stamped," as a coin, for instance. In other words, it is something in common use, and not peculiar to the author. Old, faded expressions like "battlemented clouds," and "mountainous seas," are *cliches.* Excellent the first time, but so worn by use as to convey no very distinct impression to the reader. As an example of the old poetic jargon, take such a passage as this:

To ope my eyes
Upon the Ethiope splendour
Of the spangled night.

It will at once be admitted that this is hardly the language of common speech. Common speech does not exclude imaginative language nor metaphor but it must be original and natural to the poet himself, not culled from older books of verse.

The *exact* word has been much misunderstood. it means the *exact* word which conveys the writer's impression to the reader. Critics conceive a thing to be so and so and no other way. To the poet, the thing is as it appears in relation to the whole. For instance, he might say:

Great heaps of shiny glass
Pricked out of the stubble
By a full, high moon.

This does not mean that the stones are really of glass, but that they so appear in the bright moonlight. It is the *exact* word to describe the effect. In short, the exactness is determined by the content. The habit of choosing a word as unlike the object as possible, much in vogue among the would-bemodern poets, is silly, and defeats its own object. One example of this kind which was brought to my attention some time ago was "a mauve wind." That is just nonsense. It is not *exact* in any sense, it connotes nothing. "Black wind," "white wind," "pale wind," all these are colours and therefore do not exactly describe any wind, but they do describe certain windy effects. "Mauve wind," on the other hand, is merely a straining after novelty, unguided by common-sense or a feeling for fitness.

So much for the first Imagist tenet. The second: "To create new rhythms-as the expression of new moods-and not to copy old rhythms which merely echo old moods. . . cadence means a new idea."

This, of course, refers to the modern practice of writing largely in the free forms. It is true that modern subjects, modern habits of mind, seem to find more satisfactory expression in *vers libre* and "polyphonic prose" than in metrical verse. It is also true that "a new cadence means a new idea." Not, as has been stated by hostile critics, that the cadence engenders the idea; quite the contrary, it means that the idea clothes itself naturally in an appropriate novelty of rhythm. Very slight and subtle it may be, but adequate. The Imagist poets " do not insist upon free-verse as the only method of writing poetry." In fact, the group are somewhat divided in their practice here.

This brings us to the third tenet: "To allow absolute freedom in the choice of subject." Again, over this passage, misunderstandings have arisen. "How can the choice of subject be absolutely unrestricted?"—horrified critics have asked. The only reply to such a question is that one had supposed One were speaking to people of common-sense and intelligence. To make this passage intelligible to any others, it would be necessary to add "within the bounds of good taste." Of course, what one person might consider good taste another might think the reverse of it; all that the passage intends to imply is that this group restricts itself to no particular kind of subject matter. Old, new, actual, literary, anything which excites the creative faculty in the individual poet, is permissible; they are equally Imagists and poets if they

write about ancient Greece, or about a cluster of chimney-stacks seen out of the window.

Number four says: "To present an image (hence the name 'Imagist'). We are not a school of painters, but we believe that poetry should render particulars exactly, and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous."

This paragraph has caused a great deal of confusion. It has been construed to mean that Imagist poetry is chiefly concerned with the presentation of pictures. Why this should have come about, considering that the words, "we are not a school of painters," were intended to offset any such idea, I do not know. The truth is that "Imagism," "Imagist," refers more to the manner of presentation than to the thing presented. It is a kind of technique rather than a choice of subject. "Imagism" simply means -- to quote from the second anthology," Some Imagist Poets, 1916" "a clear presentation of whatever the author wishes to convey. Now he may wish to convey a mood of indecision, in which case the poem should be indecisive; he may wish to bring before his reader the constantly shifting and changing lights over a landscape, or the varying attitudes of mind of a person under strong emotion, then his poem must shift and change to present this clearly." Imagism is presentation, not representation. For instance, Imagists do not speak of the sea as the "rolling wave" or the "vasty deep," high-sounding, artificial generalities which convey no exact impression; instead, let us compare these two stanzas in a poem of Mr. Fletcher's called "The Calm":

At noon I shall see waves flashing,
White power of spray.
The steamers, stately,
Kick up white puffs of spray behind them.
The boiling wake
Merges in the blue-black mirror of the sea.

That is an exact image; but here is another from "Tide of Storms," in which the exactness of the image is augmented by powerful imaginative connotations:

Crooked, crawling tide with long wet fingers
Clutching at the gritty beach in the roar and spurt of spray,
Tide of gales, drunken tide, lava-burst of breakers,
Black ships plunge upon you from sea to sea away.

This vivid "presentation of whatever the author wishes to convey " is closely allied to the next tenet of the Imagist manifesto, which is: "To produce poetry which is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite." It must be kept in mind that this does not refer to subject but to the rendering of subject. I might borrow a metaphor from another art and call it "faithfulness to the architectural line." Ornament may be employed, so long as it follows the structural bases of the poem. But poetical jig-saw work is summarily condemned. That is why, although so much Imagist poetry is metaphorical, similes are sparingly used. Imagists fear the blurred effect of a too constant change of picture in the same poem.

The last rule is very simple, it is that "concentration is of the very essence of poetry." A rule, indeed, as old as art itself, and yet so often lost sight of that it can hardly be too often affirmed. How many works of art are ruined by a too great discursiveness! To remain concentrated on the subject, and to know when to stop, are two cardinal rules in the writing of poetry.

We see therefore that these canons boil down into something like the following succinct statements: Simplicity and directness of speech; subtlety and beauty of rhythms; individualistic freedom of idea; clearness and vividness of presentation; and 'concentration. Not new principles, by any means, as the writers of the preface admit, but "fallen into desuetude."

One characteristic of Imagist verse which was not mentioned in this preface, is: Suggestion -- the implying of something rather than the stating of it, implying it perhaps under a metaphor, perhaps in an even less obvious way.

This poem of Mr. Fletcher's is an excellent example of Imagist suggestion:

THE WELL
The well is not used now
Its waters are tainted.
I remember there was once a man went down
To clean it.
He found it very cold and deep,
With a queer niche in one of its sides,
From which he hauled forth buckets of bricks and dirt.

The picture as given is quite clear and vivid. But the picture we see is not the poem, the real poem lies beyond, is only suggested.

Of the poets we have been considering in these essays, Mr. Robinson is most nearly allied to the Imagists in the use of suggestion; but the technique he employs is quite unlike theirs. In Mr. Sandburg's "Limited," which I quoted in the last chapter, suggestion again is the poem, and his treatment of it there is almost Imagistic.

It must not be forgotten that however many rules and tenets we may analyze, such mechanical labour can never give the touchstone to style. That must lie in a sense which is beyond reason. As Matthew Arnold said of the grand style, "one must feel it." It is possible to determine the work of different painters by their brush strokes, but such knowledge is for the expert alone, and then only for purposes of authenticity. The layman who had no way of telling the work of Titian from that of Watteau by any other method than that of brush strokes, would make a poor connoisseur.

I could go minutely into the work of these poets and show how each differs from the other -- the varying modes of expression, the individual ways of using words, the changing progression of the phrases, the subtle originality of rhythms -- but any one who could intelligently follow such an analysis would have no difficulty in determining Imagist work *per se;* and those who could not tell it at a glance, would find such hair-splitting dissection totally incomprehensible.

A few broad lines, then, shall serve us here, and I trust that, before I have finished, the reader will be incapable of making the blunder of that recent critic, who placed Mr. Frost and Mr. Masters in the Imagist group.

I have shown certain aspects of the Imagist idiom, but we must not lose sight of the fact that all these barriers are arbitrary, and fade somewhat into each other. Much of this idiom is applicable to the other poets whom we have been considering, as well; some of it is peculiar to the Imagists. But it is principally in their manner of dealing with the idiom that we shall find the difference to lie. Let me insist once more that Imagism is only one section of a larger movement to which the six poets of these essays all belong (pp. 235-249).

SELECTED POETRY

Above the Dock, T. E. Hulme

Above the quiet dock in mid night,
Tangled in the tall mast's corded height,
Hangs the moon. What seemed so far away
Is but a child's balloon, forgotten after play.

Autumn, by T. E. Hulme

A touch of cold in the Autumn night—
I walked abroad,
And saw the ruddy moon lean over a hedge
Like a red-faced farmer.
I did not stop to speak, but nodded,
And round about were the wistful stars
With white faces like town children.

The Embankment, by T. E. Hulme

(The fantasia of a fallen gentleman on a cold, bitter night.)

Once, in finesse of fiddles found I ecstasy,
In the flash of gold heels on the hard pavement.
Now see I
That warmth's the very stuff of poesy.
Oh, God, make small
The old star-eaten blanket of the sky,
That I may fold it round me and in comfort lie.

In a Station of the Metro, by Ezra Pound

The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
Petals on a wet, black bough.

The Choice, by Ezra Pound

It is true that you say the gods are more use to you than fairies,
But for all that I have seen you on a high, white, noble horse,
Like some strange queen in a story.

It is odd that you should be covered with long robes and trailing tendrils and flowers;
It is odd that you should be changing your face and resembling some other woman to plague me;
It is odd that you should be hiding yourself in the cloud of beautiful women, who do not concern me.

And I, who follow every seed-leaf upon the wind!
They will say that I deserve this.

April, by Ezra Pound

Three spirits came to me
And drew me apart
To where the olive boughs
Lay stripped upon the ground:
Pale carnage beneath bright mist.

A Pact, by Ezra Pound

I make a pact with you, Walt Whitman -
I have detested you long enough.
I come to you as a grown child
Who has had a pig-headed father;
I am old enough now to make friends.
It was you that broke the new wood,
Now is a time for carving.
We have one sap and one root -
Let there be commerce between us.

Hermes of the Ways, by H. D.

I

The hard sand breaks,
And the grains of it
Are clear as wine.
Far off over the leagues of it,
The wind,
Playing on the wide shore,
Piles little ridges,
And the great waves
Break over it.
But more than the many-foamed ways
Of the sea,
I know him
Of the triple path-ways,
Hermes,
Who awaiteth.
Dubious,
Facing three ways,
Welcoming wayfarers,
He whom the sea-orchard
Shelters from the west,
From the east
Weathers sea-wind;
Fronts the great dunes.
Wind rushes
Over the dunes,
And the coarse, salt-crusted grass
Answers.
Heu,
It whips round my ankles!

II

Small is
This white stream,
Flowing below ground
From the poplar-shaded hill,
But the water is sweet.
Apples on the small trees
Are hard,
Too small,
Too late ripened

By a desperate sun
That struggles through sea-mist.
The boughs of the trees
Are twisted
By many bafflings;
Twisted are
The small-leafed boughs.
But the shadow of them
Is not the shadow of the mast head
Nor of the torn sails.
Hermes, Hermes,
The great sea foamed,
Gnashed its teeth about me;
But you have waited,
Where sea-grass tangles with
Shore-grass.

The Pool, by H.D.

Are you alive?
I touch you.
You quiver like a sea-fish.
I cover you with my net.
What are you - banded one?

The Mysteries Remain, by H.D.

The mysteries remain,
I keep the same
cycle of seed-time
and of sun and rain;
Demeter in the grass,
I multiply,
renew and bless
Bacchus in the vine;
I hold the law,
I keep the mysteries true,
the first of these
to name the living, dead;
I am the wine and bread.
I keep the law,
I hold the mysteries true,
I am the vine,

the branches, you
and you.

Childhood, by Richard Aldington

I

The bitterness. the misery, the wretchedness of childhood
Put me out of love with God.
I can't believe in God's goodness;
I can believe
In many avenging gods.
Most of all I believe
In gods of bitter dullness,
Cruel local gods
Who scared my childhood.

II

I've seen people put
A chrysalis in a match-box,
"To see," they told me, "what sort of moth would come."
But when it broke its shell
It slipped and stumbled and fell about its prison
And tried to climb to the light
For space to dry its wings.

That's how I was.
Somebody found my chrysalis
And shut it in a match-box.
My shrivelled wings were beaten,
Shed their colours in dusty scales
Before the box was opened
For the moth to fly.

III

I hate that town;
I hate the town I lived in when I was little;
I hate to think of it.
There wre always clouds, smoke, rain
In that dingly little valley.
It rained; it always rained.
I think I never saw the sun until I was nine --
And then it was too late;

Everything's too late after the first seven years.

The long street we lived in
Was duller than a drain
And nearly as dingy.
There were the big College
And the pseudo-Gothic town-hall.
There were the sordid provincial shops --
The grocer's, and the shops for women,
The shop where I bought transfers,
And the piano and gramaphone shop
Where I used to stand
Staring at the huge shiny pianos and at the pictures
Of a white dog looking into a gramaphone.

How dull and greasy and grey and sordid it was!
On wet days -- it was always wet --
I used to kneel on a chair
And look at it from the window.

The dirty yellow trams
Dragged noisily along
With a clatter of wheels and bells
And a humming of wires overhead.
They threw up the filthy rain-water from the hollow lines
And then the water ran back
Full of brownish foam bubbles.

There was nothing else to see --
It was all so dull --
Except a few grey legs under shiny black umbrellas
Running along the grey shiny pavements;
Sometimes there was a waggon
Whose horses made a strange loud hollow sound
With their hoofs
Through the silent rain.

And there was a grey museum
Full of dead birds and dead insects and dead animals
And a few relics of the Romans -- dead also.
There was a sea-front,
A long asphalt walk with a bleak road beside it,
Three piers, a row of houses,
And a salt dirty smell from the little harbour.

I was like a moth --

Like one of those grey Emperor moths
Which flutter through the vines at Capri.
And that damned little town was my match-box,
Against whose sides I beat and beat
Until my wings were torn and faded, and dingy
As that damned little town.

IV

At school it was just as dull as that dull High Street.
The front was dull;
The High Street and the other street were dull --
And there was a public park, I remember,
And that was damned dull, too,
With its beds of geraniums no one was allowed to pick,
And its clipped lawns you weren't allowed to walk on,
And the gold-fish pond you mustn't paddle in,
And the gate made out of a whale's jaw-bones,
And the swings, which were for "Board-School children,"
And its gravel paths.

And on Sundays they rang the bells,
From Baptist and Evangelical and Catholic churches.
They had a Salvation Army.
I was taken to a High Church;
The parson's name was Mowbray,
"Which is a good name but he thinks too much of it --"
That's what I heard people say.

I took a little black book
To that cold, grey, damp, smelling church,
And I had to sit on a hard bench,
Wriggle off it to kneel down when they sang psalms
And wriggle off it to kneel down when they prayed,
And then there was nothing to do
Except to play trains with the hymn-books.

There was nothing to see,
Nothing to do,
Nothing to play with,
Except that in an empty room upstairs
There was a large tin box
Containing reproductions of the Magna Charta,
Of the Declaration of Independence
And of a letter from Raleigh after the Armada.
There were also several packets of stamps,

Yellow and blue Guatemala parrots,
Blue stags and red baboons and birds from Sarawak,
Indians and Men-of-war
From the United States,
And the green and red portraits
Of King Francobello
Of Italy.

V

I don't believe in God.
I do believe in avenging gods
Who plague us for sins we never sinned
But who avenge us.

That's why I'll never have a child,
Never shut up a chrysalis in a match-box
For the moth to spoil and crush its brght colours,
Beating its wings against the dingy prison-wall.

Patterns, by Amy Lowell

I walk down the garden paths,
And all the daffodils
Are blowing, and the bright blue squills.
I walk down the patterned garden paths
In my stiff, brocaded gown.
With my powdered hair and jewelled fan,
I too am a rare
Pattern. As I wander down
The garden paths.

My dress is richly figured,
And the train
Makes a pink and silver stain
On the gravel, and the thrift
Of the borders.
Just a plate of current fashion,
Tripping by in high-heeled, ribboned shoes.
Not a softness anywhere about me,
Only whale-bone and brocade.
And I sink on a seat in the shade
Of a lime tree. For my passion
Wars against the stiff brocade.
The daffodils and squills

Flutter in the breeze
As they please.
And I weep;
For the lime tree is in blossom
And one small flower has dropped upon my bosom.

And the splashing of waterdrops
In the marble fountain
Comes down the garden paths.
The dripping never stops.
Underneath my stiffened gown
Is the softness of a woman bathing in a marble basin,
A basin in the midst of hedges grown
So thick, she cannot see her lover hiding,
But she guesses he is near,
And the sliding of the water
Seems the stroking of a dear
Hand upon her.
What is Summer in a fine brocaded gown!
I should like to see it lying in a heap upon the ground.
All the pink and silver crumpled up on the ground.

I would be the pink and silver as I ran along the paths,
And he would stumble after,
Bewildered by my laughter.
I should see the sun flashing from his sword-hilt and the buckles on his shoes.
I would choose
To lead him in a maze along the patterned paths,
A bright and laughing maze for my heavy-booted lover,
Till he caught me in the shade,
And the buttons of his waistcoat bruised my body as he clasped me,
Aching, melting, unafraid.
With the shadows of the leaves and the sundrops,
And the plopping of the waterdrops,
All about us in the open afternoon
I am very like to swoon
With the weight of this brocade,
For the sun sifts through the shade.

Underneath the fallen blossom
In my bosom,
Is a letter I have hid.
It was brought to me this morning by a rider from the Duke.
“Madam, we regret to inform you that Lord Hartwell
Died in action Thursday sen’night.”
As I read it in the white, morning sunlight,

The letters squirmed like snakes.
"Any answer, Madam," said my footman.
"No," l told him.
"See that the messenger takes some refreshment.
No, no answer."
And I walked into the garden,
Up and down the patterned paths,
In my stiff, correct brocade.
The blue and yellow flowers stood up proudly in the sun,
Each one.
I stood upright too,
Held rigid to the pattern
By the stiffness of my gown.
Up and down I walked,
Up and down.

In a month he would have been my husband.
In a month, here, underneath this lime,
We would have broke the pattern;
He for me, and I for him,
He as Colonel, I as Lady,
On this shady seat.
He had a whim
That sunlight carried blessing.
And I answered, "It shall be as you have said."
Now he is dead.

In Summer and in Winter I shall walk
Up and down
The patterned garden paths
In my stiff, brocaded gown.
The squills and daffodils
Will give place to pillared roses, and to asters, and to snow.
I shall go
Up and down,
In my gown.
Gorgeously arrayed,
Boned and stayed.
And the softness of my body will be guarded from embrace
By each button, hook, and lace.
For the man who should loose me is dead,
Fighting with the Duke in Flanders,
In a pattern called a war.
Christ! What are patterns for?

The Pond, by Amy Lowell

Cold, wet leaves
Floating on moss-coloured water,
And the croaking of frogs-
Cracked bell-notes in the twilight.

THE POETRY OF THE GREAT WAR

When the war – which was at the time called “the war to end all the wars” – started, no one really expected the proportions it would get, the duration it might

have, or its consequences. Great Britain had recently fought some wars, but they were far from its borders (such as the Boer War in South Africa), so that hundreds of thousands of mobilized youth could understand fighting only in the frame of the nationalistic and paternalistic Victorian discourse and through the images of courageous and unbeatable army of the greatest imperial power in the world. These expectations were supported by the propaganda developed by the newly formed Parliamentary Recruiting Committee that promoted participation in the war with an idea that it meant a fight against evil itself, that it was an obligation of people to fight for British honour, its rich British heritage and glorious past, and that it would further job opportunities.

A number of poets, such as Rupert Brooke, accepted this appeal and wrote poetry in celebration of the war. However, the reality at the front, miles and miles of muddy trenches, contaminated with rats and lice, miles and miles of barbed wire, the constant exposure to aggression, introduction of new military devices (such as tank, poison gas, Zeppelin airplanes), the figures of dead and physically and emotionally wounded, both soldiers and civilians, son revealed the dark side of the culture that boasted Christian love, humanism, and democracy.

No one could more poignantly express this disappointment and the futility of war than artists. Having witnessed the bombing of London, in his novel *Kangaroo* (1923), D. H. Lawrence wrote:

> It was in 1915 the old world ended. In the winter 1915-1916 the spirit of the old London collapsed; the city, in some way, perished, perished from from being a part of the world, and became a vortex of broken passions, lusts, hopes, fears, and horrors. The integrity of London collapsed, and the genuine debasement began, the unspeakable baseness of the press and the public voice, the reign of that bloated ignominy, *John Bull*.

In trenches, however, appeared a poetry that assumed that its *raison d'être* was to fight the misleading propaganda and show the truth of the war, as well as all the other wars. They felt cheated by the politicians, so that to them the nation was splitting into “us,” the young, hungry, cold, and constantly frightened soldiers, and “them,” i.e. the nation at home which could not have envisioned the real horrors of the war. This is especially evident in frequent employment of juxtapositions (as in Siegfried Sassoon’s poetry). For the same reason, they often felt sympathy for the enemy soldier on the other side of the wire who would probably not fight if he had been given a chance to choose. One of the major poets of the time, Wilfred Owen wrote in the introduction to his poems which he never saw published:

> This book is not about heroes. English Poetry is not yet fit to speak of them. Nor is it about deeds, or lands, nor anything about glory, honour, might, majesty, dominion, or power, except War. Above all I am not concerned with Poetry. My subject is War, and the pity of War.

The poetry created from the experience of the war, therefore, presents the writing persona as deeply imbued with the experience, so much that the poetic voice

appears impersonal. To transmit the experience, the language could no longer be velvety and rhythmic, but had to be simple and direct, the imagery focused on suffering, with the exclusion of prolonged metaphors and a melodic rhyme. The syntax is brought to vernacular and substandard speech is often engaged as to enliven the image of the unprivileged boys who were sent to the war. The abrupt rupture in the approach to the reality is, for example, evident in Wilfred Owen's employment of half rhymes and para rhymes.

The poets who served or volunteered in the war include, in alphabetic order: Richard Aldington, Laurence Binyon, Edmund Blunden, Vera Mary Brittain, Rupert Brooke, Margaret Postgate Cole, May Wedderburn Cannan, Ford Madox Ford, Wilfrid Wilson Gibson, Robert Graves, Julian Grenfell, Ivor Gurney, Robert Nichols, Wilfred Owen, Herbert Read, Edgell Rickword, Isaac Rosenberg, Siegfried Sassoon, May Sinclair, Charles Sorley, Edward Thomas, and Arthur Graeme West. Most celebrated, however, have been Owen, Sassoon, and Sorley who wrote primarily anti-war verses.

SELECTED CRITICISM

From Robert C. Evans, *Perspectives on World War I Poetry*, London: Bloomsbury, 2014, pp: 159-184.

Evans discusses Wilfred Owen's poems "Anthem for doomed youth," "Dulce et Decorum Est," "Futility," and "Strange meeting" from the perspective of various schools of literary criticism.

Anthem for Doomed Youth

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.
No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells, [5]
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,—
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.
What candles may be held to speed them all?
Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes [10]
Shall shine the holy glimmers of good-byes.
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

PLATO believed that poets should support self-sacrifice in the interests of the greater good. He might therefore be troubled by this poem if he felt (a big "if") that it would subvert a worthy cause. Plato believed that a virtuous death, even of a son or brother, was not terrible and should not be lamented if the cause was just. A nation's defenders (he felt) should scorn fear of death (p. 50). They should obey their commanders and be courageous and endure (p. 53). Heroes should be depicted as better than ordinary people; they should not be shown suffering; they should face calamity with patience. Soldiers fighting for a good cause, Plato felt, should not pity themselves or make others sorrow (p. 74). A virtuous government was justified in lying if doing so promoted the public good (p. 51). For all these reasons, Plato might conceivably have wished that Owen's poem had never been written or published.

A TRADITIONAL HISTORICAL critic might be interested in the manuscripts of this poem. These suggest the stages of composition and thus throw light on the phrasing Owen ultimately chose. Particularly interesting are the various versions of line 5. In one manuscript, that line reads as follows: "Of choristers and holy music, none." In another version it reads "No wreaths for you, nor balms, nor mellow choirs." In yet another version it is "No chants for you, nor balms, nor wreaths, nor bells," and in another it is "No chants for them, nor wreaths, nor asphodels" (Stallworthy, pp. 217–20). Finally Owen seems to have chosen "No mockeries," although in at least one manuscript "No mockeries" almost looks as if it could read "No mock cries," which would fit better with the earlier drafts and would also make more sense in context (Stallworthy, p. 221). In any case, one key job of the traditional historical critic is to investigate a text's various manuscript versions (if they survive) and try to determine which is the best "final" text. Recently this impulse has been criticized, and, in the case of Shakespeare especially, there is a growing willingness to publish multiple versions and let readers decide which text they prefer. This willingness is far more typical of the so-called new historicism than of traditional historical criticism.

FORMALIST critics might also be interested in this poem's various drafts, but they would be much less concerned than traditional historical critics with establishing a "final" text reflecting Owen's ultimate intentions. Instead, they would be interested in how the various versions help illuminate the phrasing of whichever version a formalist might choose to analyze. For example, one draft presents this version of line 1: "What minute bells for these who die so fast?" A formalist might argue that the phrase "die so fast" seems much less effective (because much less vivid and suggestive) than "die as cattle," and that "minute bells" is much less immediately clear than "passing-bells." The phrase "die as cattle" implies humans being butchered as if they were "mere" animals. Various other drafts of this line use the phrase "die in herds," which is also arguably much less precise and vivid than "die as cattle." One draft uses the words "dumb-dying cattle." Various drafts, instead of using "these who die," use "you who die," phrasing that implies much more immediacy and involvement between the speaker and the soldiers he describes. A formalist, concerned with the poem's beauty and artistic success, might even argue that "you" would have been a better choice than "these," although a formalist would definitely be interested in hearing any arguments in favor of the

phrase Owen finally chose. Similarly, one version of line 2 mentioned the "monstrous anger of our guns," but then Owen considered changing "monstrous" to "solemn." Ultimately he reverted to "monstrous"—a much more effective word (a formalist might contend) than "solemn" and also more appropriate to the rest of the poem.

MARXIST critics might be interested in the phrase "die as cattle" for significantly different reasons than formalists. They might argue that the phrase symbolizes the ways most people, in capitalist societies, are treated as animals and as expendable commodities. Marxists might also suggest that this poem highlights the stark contrasts between the empty formalities of meaningless religious observances and the real brutalities of war. The poem suggests that religion provides no real help in preventing or coping with war, and thus it is not surprising that the speaker never appeals to God for strength. The poem can in fact be read as an implied satire on the hollowness of religious explanations and consolations. From this perspective, the word "mockeries" (5) makes perfect sense. An early draft used the phrase "priest words," suggesting empty clichés. Perhaps Owen finally changed that phrasing to avoid seeming too offensive, especially since the church was still a powerful force in his society. Nevertheless, in line 11, the word "holy" may imply, from a Marxist perspective, that loving relations between people, rather than old tired rituals, are the true sources of genuine holiness if anything is. Owen's poem would ideally help break readers' addiction to the opiate of religion.

POSTMODERNIST critics, skeptical of grand explanations of practically anything, might argue that this poem's first line juxtaposes attempted meaning and lack of meaning, implied significance and genuine insignificance. The phrase "passingbells" implies an attempt to impose some kind of religious significance on death, but the dead here die simply like cattle. Religion cannot make sense of deaths so senseless, and the poem can be read as an implied rejection of religion, which is perhaps the grandest of all grand narratives—the one that tries literally to explain everything . This poem displays the exhaustion, pessimism, and disillusionment that have sometimes been associated with postmodernism, as well as the skepticism about ideas of progress also often linked with that term (Ward, p. 10). This poem can also be seen as an example of a postmodern mixture and blending of literary genres: a realistic war poem undercuts or complicates a conventional elegy. Rather than merely reflecting "reality" (one function of literature according to some traditional theories), this poem instead helps influence and determine how "reality" is experienced. The common distinction between "real" and "imagined" thus becomes fluid and unstable, and the poem amounts to a small, modest, local narrative implicitly challenging or contradicting large, holistic explanations. The poem may imply absence of meaning; at the very least it seems to imply skepticism toward old ways of explaining life—ways that now seem exhausted and literally meaningless.

[...]

Futility

Move him into the sun—

Gently its touch awoke him once,
At home, whispering of fields half-sown.
Always it woke him, even in France,
Until this morning and this snow. [5]
If anything might rouse him now
The kind old sun will know.
Think how it wakes the seeds—
Woke once the clays of a cold star.
Are limbs, so dear-achieved, are sides [10]
Full-nerved, still warm, too hard to stir?
Was it for this the clay grew tall?
—O what made fatuous sunbeams toil
To break earth's sleep at all?

HORACE, who emphasized simplicity, unity, and appropriate and consistent phrasing, might greatly admire this poem. Its language, after all, is extremely lucid and accessible, and its imagery is highly coherent, especially in the way both stanzas emphasize the basic idea of the sun promoting life. The mere fact that the two stanzas are the same length also contributes to the work's unity, as does the repetition of such ideas as sleep, awakening, growth, and the seasons. Yet the second stanza offers a more cosmic perspective than the first and thus is not merely repetitive. It explicitly raises questions and provokes thought, while the first stanza had been almost fanciful in its focus on practical behavior. "For me," Horace wrote, "the ideal of poetic style is to mould familiar material with such skill that anyone might hope to achieve the same feat. And yet so firmly would the material be ordered and interconnected (and such is the beauty that one may draw out in that way from the familiar) that he would work and sweat in vain to rival it" (p. 55). Surely Horace would admire the seemingly simple but actually difficult achievement of this brief but splendid poem.

ARCHETYPAL critics, who stress the thoughts and feelings most humans share, might note how this poem both reflects and appeals to deep-seated human desires for life, love, and gentleness, as well as for work that is not onerous and for a close, nurturing relationship with the environment. The young man's early tasks involved close cooperation with nature: he tilled fields and thus promoted the kind of life and growth that have now, for him, suddenly ended. No reference appears to any hunting or killing on his part, but now he has, in a sense, been himself hunted down and killed. In a sense, he lived, in his youth, the kind of existence many people yearn for—the kind enshrined in the myth of the Garden of Eden, where people supposedly flourished in harmony with nature, working but not really painfully laboring, growing but not really growing old in all the worst senses. In his youth, the young man lived an ideal, idyllic, pastoral life, and the sun was associated with warmth, light, and life. Its "touch" and "whispering" (2–3) seemed gentle and tender, almost as the tone of the speaker here is also gentle and tender. The sun was almost the youth's parent or grandparent: it was both old and kind. Indeed, myth critics are especially interested in any tendency to treat matter as if it were alive and human, as the sun is treated here. The animistic, anthropomorphic

impulses—the impulses to perceive everything as if it were alive and full of personality—are two of the most ancient of all instincts, and both instincts seem relevant here. When the youth was young(er), he lived the kind of life nearly any human would enjoy. The poem thus appeals to some of our deepest archetypal yearnings, even as it arouses some of our deepest archetypal fears. These include, most obviously, the fear not of death but of death that seems sudden and premature. And they also include the fear that life may have no meaning, that the universe may have no purpose, and that any pleasure we experience may only be temporary and ultimately futile.

STRUCTURALIST critics, who look for the ways humans impose meaning on existence by interpreting it in terms of binary opposites, might point out that this poem brims with such contrasts. It emphasizes such ideas and imagery as sun, warmth, light, spring, fields, crops, youth, growth, awakening, being awake, morning, home, a pleasant past, seeds, creation, meaningful work, movement, and activity, and all these items are associated with such ideals as life, gentleness, love, and certainty. But all these traits are meaningful mainly through their contrasts with a whole list of opposites, including darkness, cold, snow, inanimate clay, distance from home, sleep, lack of movement, and passivity, which are all associated with death, indifference, and uncertainty. Each pattern of ideas and images is part of a larger structure of opposed ideas and images, and it is this overall structure that makes the poem coherent and meaningful. The poem exemplifies the innate human tendency to see nearly everything in terms of opposites that help define and clarify one another.

DECONSTRUCTIVE critics are interested in the ways all kinds of writing—including literary works—are almost inevitably full of irresolvable paradoxes and contradictions that undermine the neat, coherent structures that structuralist critics look for (and usually find). In this poem, for instance, a youth is dead (itself a paradoxical situation in some respects), but the dead youth was also a trained killer. He seems a victim of war because he has died young, but he was inevitably also, as a soldier, a victimizer who would readily have killed enemy soldiers just as young as he. Yet both he and those enemy soldiers can themselves be seen as victims of the political and military systems that sent them into battle against each other. In all these ways, then, and in typical deconstructive fashion, what might have seemed neat, clear opposites collapse into messy, irreducible complexities. Any attempt to impose coherent order or find simple meanings is itself a kind of futility. Another example of this kind of complexity (a complexity that will seem frustrating only to those looking for easy explanations) involves the poem's tone. On the one hand this work can be seen as realistic and anti-Romantic: its second stanza, in particular, undercuts sentimental ideas about particular human lives and about human life in general. In a sense, then, the poem is "always already" deconstructed (to use a favorite deconstructive term and idea): its final lines imply that it is pointless to look for meaning in a meaningless universe, yet the poem does just that, and part of its meaning is precisely its final suggestion that no meanings exist. In its tone and imagery the poem is both Romantic and anti-Romantic, both idealistic and realistic, both gently nostalgic and deeply skeptical.

ECOCRITICS, with their focus on relations between humans and nature, would clearly be interested in this poem, in which such relations play such an obviously central role. The opening lines (especially 2–4) emphasize a close, symbiotic relationship between the youth and his environment. Farming often symbolizes cooperation between humans and the earth, and when the youth was younger and helped raise crops, he was (in almost every sense of the word) at "home." His relations with nature caused no pain or suffering but in fact just the opposite: significantly, he is presented as someone who helped plant crops rather than as someone who shot game, butchered cattle, or slaughtered pigs. His relations with nature were peaceful; only his relations with other humans were violent. The "kind old sun" (7) seems a nurturing, benevolent influence, not only on the now-dead youth but also on the entire planet. Indeed, the poem ultimately implies that life has existed for eons and that the natural system grew up and endured long before humans appeared. No God is mentioned or even implied; instead, the poem suggests a naturalistic (rather than supernatural) explanation of life on earth. No otherworldly heaven is imagined as an answer or alternative to death: nature and people, it would seem, are all that exist. Humans may long for close, almost affectionate links with nature, and nature, imagined in fancifully anthropomorphic terms, may sometimes seem to answer that longing. But humans often destroy each other, and nature, as beautiful and beneficent as it often appears, may have no larger purpose or meaning at all. In some ways, in fact, the poem can be read as profoundly androcentric: it is as if (the final lines seem to suggest) life on earth might just as well never have happened if humans die and if human life makes no ultimate sense. For an ecocritic, such a suggestion would seem profoundly egotistical and therefore typically human.

Strange Meeting

It seemed that out of the battle I escaped
Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped
Through granites which Titanic wars had groined.
Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,
Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred. [5]
Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared
With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,
Lifting distressful hands as if to bless.
And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall—
By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell. [10]
With a thousand pains that vision's face was grained;
Yet no blood reached there from the upper ground,
And no guns thumped, or down the flues made moan.
"Strange friend," I said, "Here is no cause to mourn."
"None," said that other, "save the undone years, [15]
The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,

Was my life also; I went hunting wild
After the wildest beauty in the world,
Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair,
But mocks the steady running of the hour, [20]
And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here.
For by my glee might many men have laughed,
And of my weeping something had been left,
Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,
The pity of war, the pity war distilled. [25]
Now men will go content with what we spoiled,
Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled.
They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress,
None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress.
Courage was mine, and I had mystery; [30]
Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery:
To miss the march of this retreating world
Into vain citadels that are not walled.
Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot-wheels
I would go up and wash them from sweet wells, [35]
Even with truths that lie too deep for taint.
I would have poured my spirit without stint
But not through wounds; not on the cess of war.
Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were.
I am the enemy you killed, my friend. [40]
I knew you in this dark; for so you frowned
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.
I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.
Let us sleep now . . ."

A reader influenced by ARISTOTLE's ideas about literature might variously admire this poem. Although Aristotle focused most attention on tragic drama, his comments on that genre imply the traits he would value in literature in general. These traits (also prized by latter-day formalists) would involve complex unity. Thus, a particular kind of story-line or "plot" would dictate the use of characters appropriate to that plot, thought appropriate to those characters, and phrasing appropriate to that kind of thought. All a work's elements, in other words, would unite to produce an appropriate effect. The ideal work would have a beginning, middle, and end (all clearly connected) and would seem appropriate in length to the plot (seeming neither too long nor too short).

Owen's "Strange Meeting" satisfies all these general Aristotelian criteria, but it also exemplifies some of the philosopher's specific ideas about tragedies. Thus, the poem's characters seem to be basically good men; the plot is serious and complete; and the emotions the poem arouses include pity and fear—pity for the soldiers described and fear that their suffering is not peculiar only to them. When the slain soldier suddenly realizes that he is addressing the man who slew him, the poem also combines reversal and recognition. This kind of combination, Aristotle felt, was not only appropriate to tragedy but also epitomized the kind of careful

union of design and surprise typical of a work of carefully crafted art. What seems at first unexpected should, in retrospect, have been well prepared. Yet Owen's poem also seems "tragic" in several other senses, particularly since it presents a basically good man who seems to have done something bad through a mistake or flaw. A horrific deed has been done in a kind of ignorance. Aristotle does say that if "an enemy kills an enemy, there is nothing to excite pity either in the act or in the intention—except so far as the suffering itself is pitiful" (p. 27). Yet in Owen's poem the killing does seem tragic because we sense that these two men had much in common and could easily have been close comrades under other circumstances. As the German soldier puts it, "I am the enemy you killed, my friend" (40). Surely Aristotle would regard that line as particularly tragic.

READER-RESPONSE critics could easily imagine a wide variety of possible reactions to this poem. Soldiers, for example, especially members of the infantry, would obviously be ideal readers of this work. They might "relate" to it in ways that many civilians might not, but some civilians might also be ideal readers, especially if they were curious about experiences distant from their own. Anyone who had ever been in a tragic situation would probably find this poem moving, and anyone familiar with being underground (such as a miner) would also probably respond to this work in distinctive ways. In short, the poem might provoke distinctive reactions by almost any imaginable reader or groups of readers. For a reader-response critic, the experience of reading the work would differ according to the readers involved, producing, in a sense, a different work for any and all persons who happened to read it, including the same person at different times and under different circumstances. Yet some reader-response critics might contend that the poem implies various kinds of "ideal" readers (readers especially well equipped to perceive and appreciate this text's special features). Thus readers familiar with the "Inferno" section of Dante's Divine Comedy would probably be ideal readers of "Strange Meeting," partly because both works describe troubling encounters in hell. Similarly, readers who remembered other literary works that Owen echoes might also be ideally positioned to recognize his poem's methods and achievement. Readers who valued creative writing as much as Owen and the two characters in his poem would be ideal readers of this work, and perhaps ultimately the truly ideal reader of this work or any other might be the work's own author. Thus "Strange Meeting" might imply an ideal reader capable of appreciating unusual sound effects, and also a reader tolerant of romanticism but also distrustful of anything too unrealistic. Finally, an ideal reader of this poem would almost certainly be a reader who could imagine how an "enemy" might also be a friend.

STRUCTURALIST critics are interested in the structures people impose on reality. These structures, which help us make sense of experience, typically consist of interconnected contrasts—contrasts that help reinforce one another to produce an overarching structure. This structure may or may not exist in reality, but it definitely exists in the mind of the person using it to perceive reality. Thus, in the following list derived from a reading of "Strange Meeting," each term on the left of the slash mark contrasts with each term on the right of the slash mark, and all the terms on the left reinforce one another, just as all the terms on the right do the same: peace/ war; escape/imprisonment; rest/battle; safety/danger; underground/aboveground;

being asleep/being awake; knowledge/mystery; earth/hell; comfort/pain; friend/stranger; silence/noise; satisfaction/ mourning; hope/hopelessness; life/death; beauty/ugliness; happiness/grief; beauty that is eternal/beauty that changes or decays; eternity/time; laughter/weeping; truth/lies; truth told/truth untold; pity/hatred of war; contentment/discontent; friendliness/anger; human/animal; individuality/regimentation; progress/regression; courage/weakness; wisdom/foolishness; being clean/being covered with blood; water/blood; being pure/being tainted; cleanliness/filth or pollution; friend/enemy; giving life/killing. Some of these oppositions are obvious; some are only implied; and, in some cases, one term in an opposition is obvious while the contrasting term is implied. Taken all together, however, they help constitute the poem's underlying structure and the way the poem structures the experiences it describes. This is how human minds make sense of reality: by structuring it in terms of oppositions and by matching those oppositions to produce a larger, comprehensive pattern of linked contrasts.

DECONSTRUCTIVE critics would look for ways the tidy patterns found (or projected) by structuralists and other kinds of critics begin to unravel as soon as they are examined closely. The opening lines of "Strange Meeting," for instance, can already be read in deconstructive fashion. Thus the word "seemed" ("It seemed that out of battle I escaped") already implies that there may indeed be no escape from battle—that the escape with which the poem begins is only a false escape. Indeed, the word "seems" in a sense deconstructs the entire poem: how, after all, can this poem in any sense be "real" if its apparently living speaker turns out to be dead? Is the poem then simply the report of a dream? Dreams are almost by definition deconstructive because almost nothing is stable, dependable, or predictable in a dream. Does this mean, however, that dreams are nothing but figments of the imagination and are therefore untrustworthy and lacking in truth? Or are dreams in fact (as various psychologists have suggested) in some ways more truthful, more revealing, more valuable than consciously formed (and often consciously censured) ideas? Almost from its first word, then, "Strange Meeting" can appear ambiguous, ambivalent, and indecipherable. The poem is, of course, open to interpretation, but any interpretation is also open to interpretation, and any interpretation of any interpretation is similarly open to interpretation, and so on. There is (in a variation of a famous phrase by Jacques Derrida) nothing outside interpretation.

For deconstructive critics, clear distinctions collapse under the slightest bit of interpretive pressure. In "Strange Meeting," for instance, war and peace are hard to keep separate, as are life and death, friend and enemy, safety and danger, earth and hell, and the speaker and the man he meets. In this poem, physical descent results in a kind of moral and spiritual ascent, and escape from pain results in pain of a different sort. The poem in some ways seems clearly a piece of fiction, but in other ways it may be more truthful and valuable than what seems a piece of truthful narration, such as a newspaper report about the battle the poem seems to describe. The newspaper report may convey objective "facts" (numbers of men wounded, numbers of men killed, amount of territory taken or lost), but in some ways an inventive poem such as this may convey truths of a different sort, although even their status as "truth" in any simple, stable sense is open to question. For

deconstructive critics, everything is finally open to question; there is no end of questions and questionings.

DIALOGICAL critics listen for different kinds of voices within literary works, including voices both literal (such as characters' voices) and figurative (as in allusions, sources, and tones, including overtones and undertones). "Strange Meeting" is dialogical in a very obvious sense, since one character speaks to another and the second character responds at length. Yet, because both characters are clearly fictional, this poem in another way merely dramatizes a kind of dialogue going on inside the poet's own mind. But the poem also tries to engage its readers in a dialogue: it tries to elicit our responses and may even provoke dialogues between and among readers, as in classroom discussion, on the internet, or in the pages of scholarly journals. Even in simply writing the poem, Owen was engaged in a kind of dialogue with his own mind: various manuscripts by Owen similar to this poem exist, in different versions, with various alterations, so that the very creation of this work, like the creation of most works, involved a kind of back-and forth between the writer and himself.

"Strange Meeting" is, however, dialogical in other ways as well. As the notes in Jon Stallworthy's edition of Owen's poems demonstrate, this work is a tissue of allusions to other writings, including texts by Percy Shelley, Harold Munro, John Keats, Oscar Wilde, Henri Barbusse, Owen himself, and the translation of Dante's Inferno by Henry Cary, which may also have influenced the passage from Keats echoed by Owen. Stallworthy even hears an echo in line 28 of the Bible's reference to Saul and Jonathan as "swifter than eagles" (p. 127). Whether this proposed allusion is convincing will be up to each reader to decide, and in fact a formalist might argue that allusions are mainly important insofar as they help call attention, through comparison and contrast, to what the poet actually got on paper. Yet critics of many types are likely to concede that allusions to the Bible are often especially important since the Bible was, for centuries, the one text most readers could be expected to know, so that biblical echoes were the ones most likely to be heard and recognized. Owen's first readers may or may not have recognized allusions to relatively unknown writers such as Harold Munro, but allusions to the Bible and other canonical texts were much more likely to have been perceived as part of a "dialogue" in which Owen's poem participated.

SELECTED POETRY

The Dead, by Rupert Brooke

Blow out, you bugles, over the rich Dead!
    There's none of these so lonely and poor of old,
    But, dying, has made us rarer gifts than gold.
These laid the world away; poured out the red
Sweet wine of youth; gave up the years to be
    Of work and joy, and that unhoped serene,
    That men call age; and those who would have been,
Their sons, they gave, their immortality.

Blow, bugles, blow! They brought us, for our dearth,
    Holiness, lacked so long, and Love, and Pain,
Honour has come back, as a king, to earth,
    And paid his subjects with a royal wage;
And Nobleness walks in our ways again;
    And we have come into our heritage.

The Soldier, by Rupert Brooke

If I should die, think only this of me:
    That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
    In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
    Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam;
A body of England's, breathing English air,
    Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
    A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
        Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
    And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
        In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

Dulce et Decorum Est, by Wilfred Owen

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs,
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of gas-shells dropping softly behind.

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime.—
Dim through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est*
Pro patria mori.

Exposure, by Wilfred Owen

Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that knive us . . .
Wearied we keep awake because the night is silent . . .
Low drooping flares confuse our memory of the salient . . .
Worried by silence, sentries whisper, curious, nervous,
    But nothing happens.

Watching, we hear the mad gusts tugging on the wire,
Like twitching agonies of men among its brambles.
Northward, incessantly, the flickering gunnery rumbles,
Far off, like a dull rumour of some other war.
    What are we doing here?

The poignant misery of dawn begins to grow . . .
We only know war lasts, rain soaks, and clouds sag stormy.
Dawn massing in the east her melancholy army
Attacks once more in ranks on shivering ranks of grey,
    But nothing happens.

Sudden successive flights of bullets streak the silence.
Less deadly than the air that shudders black with snow,
With sidelong flowing flakes that flock, pause, and renew,
We watch them wandering up and down the wind's nonchalance,
    But nothing happens.

Pale flakes with fingering stealth come feeling for our faces—
We cringe in holes, back on forgotten dreams, and stare, snow-dazed,
Deep into grassier ditches. So we drowse, sun-dozed,
Littered with blossoms trickling where the blackbird fusses.
    —Is it that we are dying?

Slowly our ghosts drag home: glimpsing the sunk fires, glozed
With crusted dark-red jewels; crickets jingle there;
For hours the innocent mice rejoice: the house is theirs;
Shutters and doors, all closed: on us the doors are closed,—
    We turn back to our dying.

Since we believe not otherwise can kind fires burn;
Now ever suns smile true on child, or field, or fruit.
For God's invincible spring our love is made afraid;
Therefore, not loath, we lie out here; therefore were born,
    For love of God seems dying.

Tonight, this frost will fasten on this mud and us,
Shrivelling many hands, and puckering foreheads crisp.
The burying-party, picks and shovels in shaking grasp,
Pause over half-known faces. All their eyes are ice,
    But nothing happens.

Insensibility, by Wilfred Owen

I

Happy are men who yet before they are killed
Can let their veins run cold.
Whom no compassion fleers
Or makes their feet
Sore on the alleys cobbled with their brothers.
The front line withers.
But they are troops who fade, not flowers,
For poets' tearful fooling:
Men, gaps for filling:
Losses, who might have fought
Longer; but no one bothers.

II

And some cease feeling
Even themselves or for themselves.
Dullness best solves
The tease and doubt of shelling,
And Chance's strange arithmetic
Comes simpler than the reckoning of their shilling.
They keep no check on armies' decimation.

III

Happy are these who lose imagination:
They have enough to carry with ammunition.
Their spirit drags no pack.
Their old wounds, save with cold, can not more ache.
Having seen all things red,
Their eyes are rid
Of the hurt of the colour of blood for ever.
And terror's first constriction over,
Their hearts remain small-drawn.
Their senses in some scorching cautery of battle
Now long since ironed,
Can laugh among the dying, unconcerned.

IV

Happy the soldier home, with not a notion
How somewhere, every dawn, some men attack,
And many sighs are drained.
Happy the lad whose mind was never trained:
His days are worth forgetting more than not.
He sings along the march
Which we march taciturn, because of dusk,
The long, forlorn, relentless trend
From larger day to huger night.

V

We wise, who with a thought besmirch
Blood over all our soul,
How should we see our task
But through his blunt and lashless eyes?
Alive, he is not vital overmuch;
Dying, not mortal overmuch;
Nor sad, nor proud,
Nor curious at all.
He cannot tell
Old men's placidity from his.

VI

But cursed are dullards whom no cannon stuns,
That they should be as stones.
Wretched are they, and mean
With paucity that never was simplicity.
By choice they made themselves immune
To pity and whatever moans in man
Before the last sea and the hapless stars;
Whatever mourns when many leave these shores;
Whatever shares
The eternal reciprocity of tears.

The Letter, by Wilfred Owen

With B.E.F. June 10. Dear Wife,
(Oh blast this pencil. 'Ere, Bill, lend's a knife.)
I'm in the pink at present, dear.
I think the war will end this year.
We don't see much of them square-'eaded 'Uns.
We're out of harm's way, not bad fed.
I'm longing for a taste of your old buns.
(Say, Jimmie, spare's a bite of bread.)
There don't seem much to say just now.
(Yer what? Then don't, yer ruddy cow!
And give us back me cigarette!)
I'll soon be 'ome. You mustn't fret.
My feet's improvin', as I told you of.
We're out in rest now. Never fear.
(VRACH! By crumbs, but that was near.)
Mother might spare you half a sov.
Kiss Nell and Bert. When me and you---
(Eh? What the 'ell! Stand to? Stand to!
Jim, give's a hand with pack on, lad.
Guh! Christ! I'm hit. Take 'old. Aye, bad.
No, damn your iodine. Jim? 'Ere!
Write my old girl, Jim, there's a dear.)

Blighters, by Siegfried Sassoon

The House is crammed: tier beyond tier they grin
And cackle at the Show, while prancing ranks
Of harlots shrill the chorus, drunk with din;
“We’re sure the Kaiser loves the dear old Tanks!”

I’d like to see a Tank come down the stalls,
Lurching to rag-time tunes, or “Home, sweet Home,”
And there'd be no more jokes in Music-halls
To mock the riddled corpses round Bapaume.

The General, by Siegfried Sassoon

"Good-morning, good-morning!" the General said
When we met him last week on our way to the line.
Now the soldiers he smiled at are most of 'em dead,
And we're cursing his staff for incompetent swine.
"He's a cheery old card," grunted Harry to Jack
As they slogged up to Arras with rifle and pack.

But he did for them both by his plan of attack.

They, by Siegfried Sassoon

The Bishop tells us: 'When the boys come back
'They will not be the same; for they'll have fought
'In a just cause: they lead the last attack
'On Anti-Christ; their comrades' blood has bought
'New right to breed an honourable race,
'They have challenged Death and dared him face to face.'

'We're none of us the same!' the boys reply.
'For George lost both his legs; and Bill's stone blind;
'Poor Jim's shot through the lungs and like to die;
'And Bert's gone syphilitic: you'll not find
'A chap who's served that hasn't found some change.
' And the Bishop said: 'The ways of God are strange!'

The Hero, by Siegfried Sasson

'Jack fell as he'd have wished,' the mother said,
And folded up the letter that she'd read.
'The Colonel writes so nicely.' Something broke
In the tired voice that quavered to a choke.
She half looked up. 'We mothers are so proud
Of our dead soldiers.' Then her face was bowed.

Quietly the Brother Officer went out.
He'd told the poor old dear some gallant lies
That she would nourish all her days, no doubt
For while he coughed and mumbled, her weak eyes
Had shone with gentle triumph, brimmed with joy,
Because he'd been so brave, her glorious boy.

He thought how 'Jack', cold-footed, useless swine,
Had panicked down the trench that night the mine
Went up at Wicked Corner; how he'd tried
To get sent home, and how, at last, he died,
Blown to small bits. And no one seemed to care
Except that lonely woman with white hair.

Does it Matter? by Siegfried Sassoon

Does it matter?—losing your legs?...
For people will always be kind,
And you need not show that you mind
When the others come in after hunting
To gobble their muffins and eggs.
Does it matter?—losing your sight?
There's such splendid work for the blind;
And people will always be kind,
As you sit on the terrace remembering
And turning your face to the light.
Do they matter?—those dreams from the pit?
You can drink and forget and be glad,
And people won't say that you're mad;
For they'll know you've fought for your country
And no one will worry a bit.

When You See Millions of the Mouthless Dead, by Charles Hamilton Sorley

When you see millions of the mouthless dead
Across your dreams in pale battalions go,
Say not soft things as other men have said,
That you'll remember. For you need not so.
Give them not praise. For, deaf, how should they know
It is not curses heaped on each gashed head?
Nor tears. Their blind eyes see not your tears flow.
Nor honour. It is easy to be dead.
Say only this, “They are dead.” Then add thereto,
“Yet many a better one has died before.”
Then, scanning all the o'ercrowded mass, should you
Perceive one face that you loved heretofore,
It is a spook. None wears the face you knew.
Great death has made all his for evermore.

The Happy Warrior, by Herbert Read

His wild heart beats with painful sobs,
His strain'd hands clench an ice-cold rifle,
His aching jaws grip a hot parch'd tongue,
His wide eyes search unconsciously.

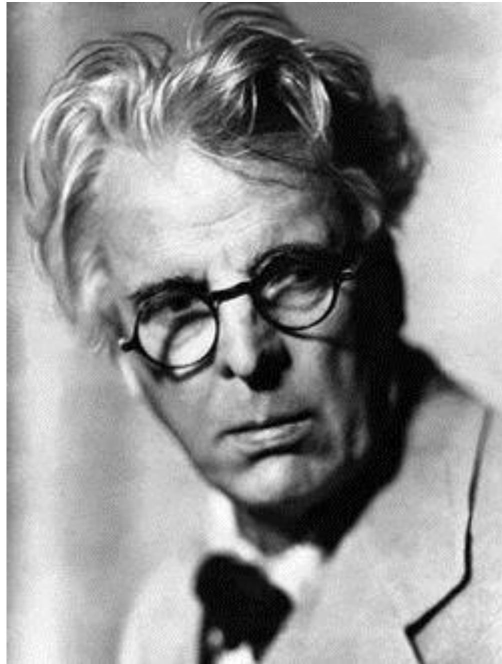
He cannot shriek.

Bloody saliva
Dribbles down his shapeless jacket.

I saw him stab
And stab again
A well-killed Boche.

This is the happy warrior,
This is he…

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS



Opening his chapter on Yeats's biography, in his book *William Butler Yeats: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, David A. Ross says:

> In his restless greatness, W. B. Yeats had many guises: Sligo fledgling wonder-struck by the local fairy lore, boyish dreamer playing at being Byron's Manfred and Shelley 's wandering poet, schoolboy Theosophist, acolyte of William Morris, celebrant and would-be lover of "the loveliest woman born / Out of the mouth of Plenty's horn," initiate of secret societies and seeker of ghosts, exegete of William Blake, collector of folklore and evangel of the Irish Renaissance, political activist and contrarian nationalist, plumed aesthete, symbolist and Parisian cultural tourist, fumbling Lothario, London man of letters, Dublin theatrical impresario, aristocrat in search of a lineage, proto-modernist (later arch-modernist), tower-ensconced mage, student of philosophy and geometer of reality, senator, European lion and Nobel laureate, neo-Georgian sage, "last romantic," fascist fellow-traveler, "wild old wicked man," . . . and, finally, denizen of the "rag-and-bone shop of the heart." (3)

Indeed, William Butler Yeats (1865 – 1939) was one of the most important figures in the literature of the Twentieth century. He is especially deserving for the

establishment of Irish literary scene, being the *spiritus movens* of the Irish Literary Revival (along with John Millington Synge, Sean O'Casey, and Padraig, Padraic, Colum), as well as a co-founder of one of the most important theatres in the history of theatre, the Abbey Theatre.

Yeats was born in the Dublin suburb Sandymount, but grew up mostly in the little county of Sligo, with his mother's family, the Pollexfens. The Pollexfens were talented storytellers and in their house the young poet heard a lot of Irish legends and folk tales about mysterious and supernatural beings which he was mesmerized with. The very town, situated by the sea cliffs, with its charming little port that welcomed strange ships and many little boats, and its forbidding surrounding hills, remained an inspiration for Yeats throughout his career. From his father's side, Yeats also inherited an important artistic line. His father John Butler Yeats was a painter and passed this interest on his children. Yet, he never achieved much of a popularity as he was a simple man who would rather enjoy small things in life, such as a good conversation over dinner. Although he was born a Protestant, belonging to the Anglo-Irish minority, he considered himself Irish nationalist. Thus, he witnessed a profound change in the Irish society that came with the expansion of Catholicism and strengthening of Irish national identity. This made the third important influence on the development of Yeats's interests and the formation of his artistic sensibility.

In 1885 Yeats met John O'Leary, one of the most passionate Irish revolutionaries of the time, who even spent twenty years in prison for his radical opposition. O'Leary strongly supported Yeats to continue writing poems and plays with Irish topics. Believing that "[t]here should be pride in that national heritage that should lead to a new flowering of art and national life," and that Ireland has a specific §gift of vision," Yeats also started collecting Irish legends and ballads and publishing them in anthologies, becoming thus an authority in the field.

Yeats's early poetry, such as published in his *The Wanderings of Oisin and Other Poems* (1889), was heavily influenced by Romanticism and was characterized as conventional, as were most of the poems authored by the members of the Fleet Street's Rhymer's Club, which Yeats belonged to. Those were mostly love and narrative poems, ornate and full of beautiful forms and faces as we have encountered in Pre-Raphaelites, but which, at the same time, represent both themselves and some large, immaterial phenomena. However, the spirit of Irish folklore was present in Yeats's poetry even in these early years and many of Irish legends and heroes are featured in these verses (such as the already mentioned Oisin). Yeats's early interest in folklore and mysticism lead him to further involvement in spiritualism and occultism, as well as the study of astronomy, Hinduism, and hermeticism. He became a member of the Theosophical Society, founded by Madame Blavatsky, and he participated in its numerous séances. Moreover, hoping to become a magus himself, and, thus, able to see beyond the mere material vision, Yeats also joined a more obscure club that practiced ritual magic, called the Golden Dawn.

In 1889 Yeats met Maud Gonne, a passionate Irish nationalist. He became infatuated with her already when he first saw her talking to his father in their garden, with a blossoming apple tree in the background (therefore the apple

blossom appears in his poem “The Song of Wandering Aengus”). He often compared Gonne with the most beautiful women in history and mythology, such as Leda and her daughter Helen, and asked if “there was another Troy for her to burn” (in the poem “No Second Try”). Yeats devoted so much of his poems to Gonne that in his *The Picture of Dorian Grey* Oscar Wilde ridiculed the poets who allowed their broken heart to run through several editions. Yet, Yeats reluctantly supported Gonne's patriotic activism, which may be the reason why Gonne rejected his proposal of marriage four times. Instead, she married (rather unhappily) Major John MacBride, who Yeats described as “drunken vainglorious lout” in his “Easter 1916.” When MacBride was executed for his participation in the Easter Rising, and Gonne refused Yeats's proposal again, Yeats became interested in her daughter Iseult. But was also rejected.

Another important moment in Yeats's life was his friendship with Lady Augusta Gregory, who wholeheartedly and also financially supported his investments in strengthening Irish literary scene and the foundation of the Abbey Theatre, as well as offered him to stay at her Coole Park estate in Galway (that inspired, among other things, his poem “The Wild Swans at Coole”) whenever he needed seclusion from his daily engagements so that he can write. On one occasion Yeats said that Lady Gregory's role in his life was that of a “mother, friend, sister and brother.”

Yeats soon became a president of the newly formed Irish National Theatre for which he wrote his nationalistic play *The Countess Kathleen* (1892, dedicated to Maud Gonne). After offering her soul to the devil in order to feed her people, the countess is not punished by eternal damnation in Hell, but – because her wish was not of a selfish nature – regarded by an afterlife in Heaven. The play was harshly criticized by the Catholics, while all the students from Dublin University (except James Joyce) signed a petition against the staging of the play.

In 1909 started Yeats's collaboration with Ezra Pound, who actually came to London to meet Yeats as the only living poet worth of study and then served for some time as Yeats's secretary. Pound significantly influenced developments in Yeats's poetry, especially by introducing Yeats to Japanese Noh plays.

In 1917 Yeats married Georgie Hyde-Lees, who he called George. The marriage was a relief from his earlier love struggles and the couple had two children, Anne and Michael. They also experimented with spiritualism and automatic writing, which gradually produced a complex metaphysical essay on esoteric philosophy titled *A Vision* (1925). Here Yeats formulated his idea of history, as reflected in his poem “The Second Coming.” He believed that civilisations developed in *gyres,* i.e. in centrifugal movements, tending away from the centre for two thousand years and then dissolving. Disintegration of one brings to the birth of a new civilisational cycle.

In 1919 Yeats bought a deserted Norman tower Ballylee, Thoor Ballylee, in Galway near Coole Park. He started spending summers there and turned it into his lonely palace of art. New mature poetry appeared in this period of his life, such as evident in the collection *The Tower* (1928). This new phase reflects his departure from earlier elaborated style, poetic diction, melodic rhythms, symbolism, and Victorian prosody. His language became direct and plain, more conversational than

a matter of craftsmanship advocated by the Rhymer's Club. He asserted that a modern poet should behave as the old bards did, who were always clear and precise, and never only suggestive in their expression. Yeats believed that there are two kinds of art, one that is mimetic and factual and the other that is subjective and enlightening. The first is a mirror and the other functions as a lamp. The mirror of the art, however, should not only reflect but also kindle images so far unseen, yet still abiding in ordinary language. Those images are

> more real than we ourselves… The artists are, I believe, about to take upon their shoulders the burden that have fallen from the shoulders of priests, and to lead us back upon our journey by filling our thoughts with the essence of things, and not with things…I discern great sanity in the [ancient] Greek attitude. They never chattered about senses... But they saw that the sea was for the swimmer, and the sand for the feet of the runner.... We have forgotten ... that the Earth is the mother of us all. As a consequence our Art is of the Moon and plays with shadows, while Greek art is of the Sun and deals directly with things.

During the Irish civil war (June 1922 – May 1923), Yeats sided with the new Irish government. In 1922 he was appointed to the first Irish Senate. Now he saw himself as the "sixty-year-old smiling public man," the image we find in "Among School Children."

In December 1923, Yeats was the first Irish author to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, "for his always inspired poetry, which in a highly artistic form gives expression to the spirit of a whole nation." In 1924 he addressed the Royal Academy of Sweden not as an individual but as a representative of Irish nation, culture, and literature in particular.

Suffering from weak lungs, Yeats spent years travelling around Italy, France, Switzerland, Algiers, Majorca, and back to Dublin looking for the climate that would best fit his health. Yet, he never stopped creating. When he was already very weak, he wrote: "It seems to me that I have found what I wanted. When I try to put all into a phrase I say, 'Man can embody truth but he cannot know it.'" He died at the Hôtel Idéal Séjour, in Menton, France. It is recorded that he asked Georgie to bury him "up there [at Roquebrune] and then in a year's time when the newspapers have forgotten me, dig me up and plant me in Sligo'." Indeed, he was exhumed only after World War II, in 1946. His tomb under Ben Bulben in Sligo carries one of his last poems:

Cast a cold Eye
On Life, on Death.
Horseman, pass by!

SELECTED CRITICISM

Wit Pietrzak, "We Never Come to Thoughts. They Come to Us": *The Tower* and the Paradox of Modernism," in *Myth, Language and Tradition: A Study of Yeats, Stevens and Eliot, in the Context of Heidegger's Search for Being*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2011, pp. 61-74.

Yeats does not achieve the completeness of his vision of myth until *The Tower*. One of his most popular volumes which is "often read within the context of British high modernism" (Doggett 2006, 69) ushers in some of his most astonishingly beautiful and intricately spun poems. Rainer Emig claims that the textuality of the poems in *The Tower* brings Yeats close to the modernist poetics (1995, 44) and suggests that the typical features of the volume are its modernist eclecticism and "a complete integration of reality into the imagination" (*ibid*., 58). The second characteristic pertains to the present analysis in a number of ways. Firstly, it links Yeats's turn of "The Wild Swans at Coole," which has been analysed here with reference to Bachelard, to the poetics of myth and modernism exemplified in *The Tower*. Secondly, the fusion postulated by Emig falls back on Heidegger's philosophy of the work of art inasmuch as it brings to the fore the notion of the search for the Being that absconds within art. To explore the issues further, it is essential to focus the analysis on the volume whose poems deal with the concept of myth in a most complete as well as accomplished way. It is in "Sailing to Byzantium," the lyric which opens *The Tower*, that the hermeneutic understanding of myth which was elaborated in the opening chapter of this part is fully asserted.

"Sailing to Byzantium" introduces the main theme of *The Tower* that will be developed throughout the volume. Recently George Bornstein has restated the position of the poem in relation to the other lyrics. His observations also usher in Heideggerian undertones and set the present analysis of the lyric in motion. The opening poem "Sailing to Byzantium" provided a typical Yeatsian beginning for a volume by presenting a desire to fly from nature to artifice, an aspiration that the remainder of the volume critiques vigorously. Whether we take Byzantium as representing the afterlife, art, historical Unity of Culture, personal Unity of Being, or any other ideal, the volume argues that the way to get there is through immersion in experience rather than rejection of it (2006, 73).

Bornstein notices that the poem's emphasis is laid on the actual experience and that it sets out to demonstrate that poetry must be rooted in experience in order to aspire to what Yeats called Unity of Being and Unity of Culture. In the lyric Yeats also creates what will be considered the basic framework for the understanding of myth in modernism. C. K. Stead, for different reasons than in the present analysis, identifies the lyric as a successor to "Easter 1916;" he claims that both poems represent "The movement […] from the temporal to the timeless [with] the intermediate position of Yeats's persona in that movement" (1998, 35). Stead observes that the poems are predicated on a dichotomy. In asserting his position, he

follows the premise of a reading which has been prevalent in the preponderance of the criticism of "Sailing to Byzantium." G. S. Fraser already in 1960 states in no uncertain terms that "the poem is about the tension in Yeats's mind between the ideas of the One and the Many, the Eternal and the Temporal, the Permanent and the Mutable, Wisdom and Action, considered as polar opposites" (1960, 254). However, he is quick to notice that such a position on the lyric can only lead to an ineluctable reductionism in reading (*ibid*, 255). What he proposes in lieu of pursuing the binary reading of the poem is "to remember that the constant tug, inside Yeats, is in two directions" (*ibid*, 256). The two-direction reading is perhaps the most lucid explication of the poem to date:

> Towards the idea of a state of being transcending life, often imagined as a kind of artificial paradise which we create for ourselves, after death, out of the images of the beautiful things we have admired here; and again towards actual physical life at all levels, the level even of "a blind man battering blind men." (*ibid*, 256)

The first presumption goes in line with the earliest readings of the poem which appeared only after Yeats's demise. In 1939 Cleanth Brooks, developing a point made earlier by R. P. Blackmur, was first to argue that the poem "is a symbol for the heaven of man's imagination" (1965, 177). Later F. A. C. Wilson altered Brooks's perception of the heaven of man's imagination to maintain that "Byzantium is the Platonic heaven, pure intellect, where the opposites are reconciled" (1958, 231). Yet the firstreading of "Sailing to Byzantium" has recently been revealed as wanting by Mathew Gibson who claims that the sages in Byzantium only offer an escape if the poem be read as an attempt at reaching a transcendental paradise (2000, 51). Therefore it seems more rewarding to focus on the second interpretative path that is proffered by C. K. Stead.

Granted that the poem is seen as directed at the actual life, the idea of a binary opposition has to be referred to. Based on the essentially inevitable antithesis of fleshly and intellectual worlds, the poem sounds not so distant an echo to Heidegger's vision of the role of the poets in the modern world in that the realm of "Those dying generations" that are consumed by elapsing time is closely associated with his notion of "poets in a destitute time." In the essay "What Are Poets For?" Heidegger in mystic terms characteristic of his writings on Hölderlin explicates that cryptic phrasing. "Poets in a destitute time" must especially gather in poetry the nature of poetry. Where that happens we may assume poets to exist who are on the way to the destiny of the world's age. We others must learn to listen to what these poets say – assuming that, in regard to the time that conceals Being because it shelters it, we do not deceive ourselves through reckoning time merely in terms of that which is by dissecting that which is (1971, 94 emphasis in original).

He adds that "To be a poet in the destitute time means: to attend, singing, to the trace of the fugitive gods" (*ibid*, 94). Therefore the poets in a destitute time take as their task the singing of the fugitive gods in their constant rush through time. Highly metaphorical though Heidegger may sound at times, it is possible to see his point in relation to the postulates from "The Origin of the Work of Art." Janusz

Mizera notices that the fugitive gods wait to be revealed in their unconcealedness in the same way as Being remains hidden as it tries to manifest itself (2006, 22). Taking that comment a step further, it becomes clear that attending to the fugitive gods can easily be linked to de Man's concept of the Being that absconds along the axis of time. Therefore what the nature of poetry to Heidegger is shows itself as the pursuit of the truth of the Being that absconds by means of the unconcealment of Being in its timeliness that has as its objective the shadowing of Being. In still other terms, whilst the time sets up the earth, the poet sets forth the world in his poetry, hence the destitute time as a moment in history when Being has been consigned to oblivion. This is not to say that the analysis must be undertaken outside the passage of time, as it would be preposterously unfeasible, but rather that within the continuous flow of time only the poet's song can guarantee the apprehension of Being. Heidegger realises that only in time as the perpetual present can Being be claimed. It is the foremost quality of the poem that, holding inside the conflict between the earth and the world, it retains the capacity for the revelation of Being. The binary opposition of the fleshly and the intellectual worlds approximates to Heidegger's notion of the strife between the world and the earth. To see the process of emerging of Being in "Sailing to Byzantium" as explained by the German philosopher, it becomes crucial to inspect the way the speaker attains his final transformation at the end of the poem.

In the first two stanzas the speaker, led to the moment in his life when he no longer seems to fit his environment which blossoms out, cherishes the world of intellect over that of the "passing generations." Since "That is no country for old men," he has "sailed the seas and come / To the holy city of Byzantium." The decrepitude of the body, "slow decay of blood" and being "but a paltry thing, / A tattered coat upon a stick" are inextricably linked to the increased power of imagination, as the soul sings louder "For every tatter in its mortal dress." Now that the passion deserts the flesh, it is "studying / Monuments of [the intellect's] own magnificence" that the poet chooses and the deeper he sinks in his dotage the greater his intellect's magnificence seems to become. After the time has withered the speaker, he realises that the true being can only be found in the monuments of intellect not in the world as it stands before his eyes. The first two stanzas provide a basis for approaching Heidegger's polar frame of the conflict between the earth and the world in that the earth sets up the inevitable temporality which conceals the world set forth solely in the intellect. Therefore the destitute time reveals itself to be the forgetting of Being in the constant flow of time; as a result the poet needs to gather the nature of poetry in his work, for it allows Being to shine forth. The lyric of "the poet in a destitute time" stages *physis* in which *aletheia* occurs.

If in the poem *aletheia* unearths the truth of the Being that absconds, the poem's language attains the role of "the receptacle of true Being" (Emig 1995, 227); it is within the poem's language that the truth manifests itself but, it must be remembered, this manifestation necessitates, calls for in the same breath, the submergence of this truth in the process of the twofold movement of the earth and the world. Thus the poem performs the unconcealment as as it closes inside itself what it unconceals. As such the poem itself becomes an artefact which holds inside the truth of Being similarly to Heidegger's Greek temple. This role of the poem

closely resembles Yeats's idea of the Unity of Being. The historical Byzantium, as described in *A Vision*, is the city of the perfect unity between the artist and artificer. Yeats writes that: "In early Byzantium, maybe never before or since in recorded history, religious, aesthetic and practical life were one, that architect and artificers … spoke to the multitude and the few alike" (1969, 279). Curtis Bradford in a studious analysis of the poem's development cites Yeats's prose version of what was later to become "Sailing to Byzantium:"

> Describe Byzantium as it is in the system towards the end of the first Christian millennium. (The worn ascetics on the walls contrasted with their [?] splendour. A walking mummy. A spiritual refinement and perfection amid a rigid world. A sigh of wind – autumn leaves in the streets. The divine born amidst the natural decay.) (1963, 95)

The spiritual perfection that is born in the natural decay again brings to mind Heidegger's description of the destitute time when the men have forgotten Being and philosophers have steered off the analytical path that aimed at apprehending it. Thus the rigid thingly reality forms the earth which is set up so as to shroud the world wherein Being reclines whereas the spiritual refinement, assumingly, coming from the study of the monuments of the intellect, can reveal the divine element. The mummy metaphor also evokes the logic of the Greek temple in the sense that it contains inside the splendour of the spiritual refinement of a demigod pharaoh even though it is bound in "the mummy cloth" on the outside; by means of the hiding, it promises the divine inside. Yet the art of Byzantium with which Yeats had his first contact in 1907, when together with Lady Gregory and her son they toured Northern Italy, is not quite the one he describes in *A Vision* or in the poem, for the one to which the speaker of the poem travels is "an imagined land where Unity of Being has permeated an entire culture" (*ibid*, 94).

The concept of the Unity of Being invokes Heidegger's Greek culture which existed in full presence of Being. As in Yeats's Unity of Being, the apprehension of Being in Heidegger is assumed to be the result of mixing of the world, representing the intellectual or artistic pole, with the earth, standing for the temporal being-towards-death which is taken into consideration in Being and Time. However, the fact that this juncture needs to take place before the Unity of Being can be achieved, although it does follow directly from Yeats's writings, does not become transparent until the very end of the lyric.

In the third part of "Sailing to Byzantium" the speaker evokes the image of the holy fire which constitutes a marked correlative to Heidegger's *physis*.

O sages standing in God's holy fire
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
And be the singing masters of my soul,
Consume my heart away; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is; and gather me

Into the artifice of eternity.

Yeats explains in "Per Amica Silentia Lunae" that "there are two realities, the terrestrial and the condition of fire […] in which all is music and rest" (1959, 357). Thus the condition of fire appears as the metaphoric representation of the Unity of Being. The fact that the sages in Byzantium stand in "God's holy fire" points to their origin in the Unity of Being. Their guidance can help the speaker not to "escape the antinomies of the fleshly and intellectual worlds" as Richard Ellmann suggests (1964, 165) but to reconcile them in a perfect unity. The holy fire resembles Heidegger's description of *physis* in *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*: "*Physis* is an emerging and rising, an opening that while rising, moves back into a going-outside and thus it (the opening) closes itself in what makes the presence present" (2000, 58 emphasis in original). The fire in Heidegger is *Lichtung*, the "depositing of truth" in the work of art. Mizera adds that *Lichtung* as hiding and unconcealing "lighting is the name of the truth understood as *aletheia*" (2006, 55 translation W.P.). Yeats's holy fire also seems to be the sphere in which Being is revealed even though it is withheld from the immediacy of its presence. It is Being that absconds in its full potential.

The dichotomy of flesh and intellect, or body and soul, to refer it to a similar binary that Yeats takes up elsewhere to denote the same pair of polar opposites, is further stressed in the succeeding lines of the third part. The heart, representative of the body, must be consumed, for it does not know what it is. That lack may be explicated by Heidegger's concept of the forgetting of Being which has befallen the Western philosophical thought. The body does not dwell in the presence of its Being; this "in the presence of" can only be attained once the dichotomy of flesh and intellect has been solved, which can be effected by contemplation of the monuments of unageing intellect within the sphere of the poem. As a result the presence of Being can be found in the Unity of Being that the poem adumbrates. As the artifice of eternity the speaker is turned into a temple-like image because he becomes that in which Heidegger's earth and world are gathered in their conflict. Therefore the nature of poetry is given as the theme of the lyric in line with Heidegger's notion of the role of the poet in a destitute time. When Yeats saw Byzantine art as "no less than a symbol for Art itself" (Gordon 1961, 85), he seems to have presumed an understanding of that capitalised art evocative of Heidegger's idea of art as the space wherein Being can be recollected. Wanda Krajewska anticipates a Heideggerian postulate within the lyric, calling the realm of Byzantium in the poem the world of "pure being" (1976, 153 translation W.P.). Even though she seems slightly peremptory, the validity of her observation is confirmed in a hermeneutical analysis of the poem, in which "Sailing to Byzantium" is revealed to aim at the creation of the Unity of Being in which all antinomies are resolved; once that has been achieved, the space of poetry is made conducive to the revelation of the truth of Being. It is in the artifice of eternity of the third stanza that the Unity of Being is asserted as the goal of the speaker.

The speaker asseverates in the fourth part that his desire is to reach the Unity of Being in his bird symbol. Yet there is a logical twist at the end of the poem which finally legitimises the present Heideggerian reading. The shedding of bodily

form is emphasised as the speaker's dearest wish and he chooses to be remade into "such a form as Grecian goldsmith's make / Of hammered gold and gold enamelling." The flesh and the "dying generations" appear to be discarded in favour of what Yeats calls in his BBC broadcast about the poem "the intellectual joy of eternity" (qtd. in Bradford1963, 95). It is in the last two lines that the temporal aspect reappears when the speaker, having assumed his transformation, expresses a wish "to sing / To lords and ladies of Byzantium / Of what is past, or passing, or to come." Thus the eternity is returned to the temporal world, since in achieving the Unity of Being neither the body nor the intellect may be lost. The setting forth of the world necessitates the setting up of the earth in which the former may be grounded. As has already been stated, Heidegger envisions the conflict between revealing and concealing of the world and the earth as the premise of the happening of the truth and neither can the earth be set up nor the world set forth unless they exist jointly in eternal strife which can unconceal Being.

In "Sailing to Byzantium" the instigation of the conflict between the world and the earth, implied through the irresolvable dichotomy of the body and intellect, sets in the search for the Being that absconds postulated in the last line of the lyric. "Once out of nature," the speaker gains the position of the intermediary between the sphere of divinity and the world of men, accepting the role that in his essays on Hölderlin Heidegger allots to the poet whom he locates between gods and men (2000, 48). In *The Romantic Image* Frank Kermode postulates the Unity of Being of Byzantium as being "all image and [having] no contrasts and no costs, inevitable concomitants of the apparition of absolute of being in the sphere of becoming" (2002, 107). Even though the dismissal of contrast seems to be slightly too off-hand, Kermode rightly credits the poem with being redolent with apparitions of being, which must be read in accordance with Heidegger's comprehension of the term, in the sphere of becoming. The pursuit of Being in the poem takes the form of a subjective interpretation of the thingly world. At the end of the poem there is no dogma or consoling faith but an assertion of a continuous interpretation of temporality, which is undertaken by the speaker.

A popular idea holds Yeats's writings and his hankering for the creation of a myth to be the expressions of his lifelong desire for order. R. P. Blacklmur is clear on the issue: "Yeats suffered from a predominant survival in him of the primitive intellect which insists on absolute order at the expanse of rational imagination" (1954, 123). However, as has been argued above order is not the focus of "Sailing to Byzantium," nor, indeed, is it the aim of Yeats's use of myth in his lyrics discussed earlier. The assertion in "Sailing to Byzantium" is not to bestow order on the chaos of the present world but rather to persist in the poetic apophantic effort.

Myth may thus be seen as poetic speech in which the search for Being inheres; mythical / poetic realm is primary over the thingly reality, for it possesses the capacity to recollect the Being that absconds. In this sense myth becomes a common ground that unites Heidegger's hermeneutical quest and Yeats's poetry in creating a textual sphere of modernist desire for truth. Myth is not an escapist tool, nor is it an ordering device as Eliot would have it, but a transposition of the thingly world onto the poetic level whose limits are delineated by the broadening horizons on the one hand, and the search for truth on the other. The truth of myth is not a

transcendental logos, for the division of logos and mythos has run for such a long time that the unity cannot be regained unless in the mythical realm or, to use Kenneth Burke's description of the essence of myth, in the narrative of the myth.

Perceiving myth as the sphere of an incessant pursuit of the Being that absconds turns modernism into a quest for the truth but on Heideggerian hermeneutical terms; such an understanding of myth allows to solve what Astradur Eysteinsson notices to have become one of the prime paradoxes of modernist art as well as criticism. He demonstrates that paradox by juxtaposing the prevalent theoretical approach to modernism with T. S. Eliot's views of his "Tradition and Individual Talent." On the one hand, it seems that modernism is built on highly subjectivist premises: by directing its attention toward individual or subjectivist experience, it elevates the ego in proportion to a diminishing awareness of objective or coherent outside reality. It is customary to point to the preeminence of such subjectivist poetics of expressionist and surrealist literature, and more specifically in certain techniques, such as manipulation of "centres of consciousness" or the use of "stream of consciousness" in modern fiction. On the other hand, modernism is often held to draw its legitimacy primarily from writing based on highly anti-subjectivist or impersonal poetics. T. S. Eliot was one of the most adamant spokesman of a neoclassical reaction against romantic-personal poetry: "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion but, but an escape from an emotion; it is not an expression of personality, but an escape from personality" (1975, 27).

In response to Eysteinsson's avowal myth in the present understanding reveals its potential to solve the paradox insomuch as subjectivism and anti-subjectivism may stand to represent the demarcation line between language as a personal means of interpretation and language as defined by Saussurre's term *langue*. For that assumption not to appear tenuous, it is crucial that what has been termed personal language be understood in reference to Heidegger's postulate of the modern languages. He sees the idioms of modernity as essentially shading Being while the power to unveil the truth he invests in Greek (Heidegger 2000, 98). However, there remains a possibility of adapting the contemporary vernaculars to the needs of unearthing Being; this can be done through individual application of the words by the poet who moulds his personal language to suit his need of the unconcealment of Being. Myth is a subjectivist product of the poet's capacity for reshaping the non-subjectivist language. The compromise between the subjectivist and non-subjectivist uses of language need be transposed onto the general framework of modernism in order to approach Eysteinsson's paradox.

The subjectivism that is desired by some modernist artists and disavowed by others may be explicated by Heidegger's postulate that Western philosophy along with its languages have forgotten the question of Being. As a means of countering the deprecation of the question of Being Heidegger sets the notion of the destruction of metaphysics. Joseph Riddell calls that theory "uncovering deconstruction" (1979, 282), since it aims at an individual reinterpretation of the objective language itself in order to trace Being by means of, as well as within, this language. Myth resembles the uncovering deconstruction in the sense that it is also a revaluation of language (from *logos* – thingly reality to *mythos* – poetic reality),

and it aims at a particular excavating of Being from the abyss of the earth and grounding it in the world.

After "Sailing to Byzantium" the quest for Being that absconds is pursued in "Among School Children." The poem has developed, as Thomas Parkinson clearly showed, to become one of Yeats's masterpieces. In the present context the lyric forms a myth pattern that challenges the customary readings of the term. The poem starts in the exact moment when "Sailing to Byzantium" did; the speaker, already an aged man out of tune with the "passing generations," visits a school for girls. Parts one and two form a familiar dichotomy of the thingly world and mythical reality. In the second part, the speaker plunges into a vision.

I dream of a Ledean body, bent
Above a sinking fire, a tale that she
Told of a harsh reproof, or trivial tragedy.

At this point the world of reality, the school in Waterford, and the myth of Leda blend. From the very first stanza the lyric appears to fulfil the promise of "Sailing to Byzantium," since the speaker who has been turned (or "changed in his turn") into the golden bird so that he may sing "To lords and ladies of Byzantium / Of what is past, or passing, or to come" actually becomes incorporated into eternity of the mythical realm. The subsequent lines verify the continuous desire to be perched on a bough in Byzantium: "Told, and it seemed our two natures blent / Into a sphere." The thingly world and the sphere of vision intertwine in the speaker who becomes, as it were, a vessel of the visionary perception but never relinquishes his grip over the physical reality. Vereen Bell illuminatingly notices that "the decisive action [of 'Among School Children'] seems to be the rejection of the prevailing historical reality and the recovery through memory of the power of subjectivity" (2006, 123). The present historical moment is not altogether disposed of; it is rather reappropriated by the speaker from the level of myth. The scene depicted in the first stanza is returned to in the third part of the poem but already the world of dream and that of physical reality have interwoven and they seem to exist as a single sphere.

And thinking of that fit of grief or rage
I look upon one child or t'other there
And wonder if she stood so at that age –
For even daughters of the swan can share
Something of every paddler's heritage.

The girls from Waterford school merge with the image of Helen and, as a result, a question is posed as to their actual existence or to what degree each world can constitute itself without the other being a counterweight, or to fall back on Foster's phrasing: "is artistic absorption in the act of creation the reflection of the true reality?" (2003, 328). This query pesters Yeats throughout the lyric and rises to full prominence in the final rhetorical question of part eight. However, before the final couplet comes under focus, the image of Helen calls for explication. The mention of Ledean body of part two echoes the famous sonnet "Leda and the

Swan," wherein the actual mythical event is recounted. Geoffrey Hartmann weaves an especially interesting reading of the poem in that he proposes to view it as a negotiation between an image and a phantasm. He notices that the sonnet, aside from the title itself, provides no point of temporal reference and hence perpetuates a repetition of "The traditional theme […] that may never have been present:" Leda is not even named within the poem; and the strongest images in the poem are not images at all but periphrases, like "feathered glory" and "brute blood of the air." These non-naming figures have the structure of riddles as well as of descriptions. Even the images in lines 10 – 12 […] are a periphrastic riddle or charade for "The Destruction of Troy." (1980, 23)

Thus the poem expresses the ambiguity of whether it represents an image or, more likely as Hartmann suggests, "a phantasm." Nor does the appearance of Agamemnon dispose of the ambiguity, since the situating reference to "Agamemnon," the locking up of the action into the known if legendary context, is just that, a locking up; it does not resolve the indeterminacy; we continue to feel the imaginary within the reference myth, something that exceeds the latter like a riddle its solution, or periphrases and metaphor the undisplaced word (*ibid*, 24).

Thus Hartmann posits the lyric as pervaded with an inexplicable temporal ambiguity in that the poem resembles rather a phantasmagoria which plays itself out before his eyes than a sustained imaginary exploration of an ageold theme. Such a vision may, Hartmann argues, be put to a séance or a dream-induced vagary, hence the inherent equivocality. The questionable nature of the poem's phantasmagorial texture and its underlying questions "add up to a hermeneutic perplexity" (Hartmann 24 emphasis in original). Hartmann subsumes under his coinage the uncertainty regarding the poem's frame of reference as well as the final question of whether the image puts the reader in the presence of a forged or an authentic experience. Yet the question Hartmann is quick to recognise as an essential mistake about "the mode-of-being of poetry" (*ibid*, 25) which may be seen as manifested in the very event of poetry announcing its being. It is this event of poetry announcing its being that ushers in an important distinction in regard to poetic art; within a lyric a relation of the poetic realm and the phenomenal world is made into a dramatisation in which each sphere impinges on the other, thereby perpetuating a hermeneutical perplexity which offers itself up to the reader. Hartmann arrives at a similar conclusion: "Yeats sustains or fulfills a figure: myth is used to disclose history, and history […] the truth of myth. […] Even though the figures can be given their ancient names (Agamemnon, etc.) they stand in a complex contemporaneity to the poet" (*ibid*, 27). Thus the ever renewable influence of the myth on reality and the constant renegotiation of the truth of the myth in this reality propound the dramatic struggle of the two planes in what may be termed eternal present. Temporal ambiguity percolates "Leda and the Swan," instigating hermeneutic perplexity in order to bind the thingly and the mythical in a fluctuant sphere of the unconcealment of truth.

A similar ambiguity haunts "Among School Children" in that the poem also cannot distinguish between the image and a phantasmagoria; similarly to the use of Agamemnon in "Leda and the Swan," the school of Waterford, which was visited by Yeats and forms the starting premise of the whole lyric, cannot be seen as

ridding the poem of the image/phantasm ambiguity. In "Among School Children" it becomes clear that the world of the poetic reality and the thingly world have been interrelated to such an extent that it is no longer possible to tell them apart, hence hermeneutical perplexity of Hartmann's is diffused through this lyric, too. The poem reenacts the moment of the visit in the present tense ever anew; each time the poem is read the situation keeps recurring. The speaker does not know where his vision starts and where it ends once it has entered his mind in part two of the poem.

The intertwining of the spheres of imagination and perception, which lies at the basis of the image/phantasm ambiguity, correlate with Heidegger's distinction between the world and the earth, which has already paved way for seeing myth of modernism in the light of the search for the Being that absconds. In "Among School Children" whereas the world in Heideggerian sense is set up by the images of Leda and Helen that recur throughout the lyric, the earth "juts forth" in part one that is infused with mundane insipidity. In view of that observation, part four of the poem shows a perfect example of the conflict between of the world and the earth.

Her present image floats in to the mind –
Did quattrocento finger fashion it
Hollow of cheek as though it drank the wind
And took a mass of shadows for its meat?
And I though never of Ledean kind
Had pretty plumage once – enough of that,
Better to smile on all that smile, and show
There is a comfortable kind of old scarecrow.

As the speaker allows the vision to flow and becomes ever more engrossed in it, he is being led to realise tentatively that he might share something with the daughter of the god. He is thwarted in the midst of what may have turned out, were he to permit himself to finish, to be a revelation of his own nature or of his own being-in-the-world, to employ Heidegger's renowned notion. When the speaker ostensibly regains his common sense, when he rouses himself back to consciousness, he loses the thread that may have brought him to the centre of the labyrinth where the pursuit of the Being that absconds could end successfully. Thus the ever elusive truth of Being is enunciated in its full capacity. In lieu of the final apprehension of the truth, the speaker must content himself with an ironical smile of a public figure who seeks to find himself at home in the thingly reality. In the last part of the poem, the speaker regains the entrance to the intertwined realities of the world and the earth.

Labour is blossoming or dancing where
The body is not bruised to pleasure soul,
Nor beauty born out if its own despair,
Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.
O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer,
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,

How can we know the dancer from the dance?

The opening four-line sentence of the stanza makes it clear that labour may blossom provided the body and soul are united. Therefore the motif of the Unity of Being enunciated in "Sailing to Byzantium" is repeated and reasserted. The unity is further emphasised as the only source of successful labour in the following two lines. Beauty must not be born of its own despair nor wisdom of a strenuous effort. The third and fourth lines of part eight form links to the previously analysed poems; whilst "the terrible beauty" of "Easter 1916" is alluded to in the third line as the source of the Unity of Being, the wisdom that must be gained through experience, which was the theme of "Phases of the Moon," restates the importance of rooting poetry in the physical world.

The last four lines introduce an initially incongruous image of the chestnut-tree inasmuch as it appears that the speaker has once again returned to his intermittent visionary phase. It is when taken as a whole that the tree serves as a summarising image of the entire stanza. Bornstein notices that "the end of 'Among School Children' in the volume's middle uses the images of the rooted chestnut-tree and moving dancer to locate the achievement of personal unity in this life rather than in an allegedly superior realm" (2006, 73). Thus the theme of grounding the poem in the experience, or of locating Being in the struggle of the world and the earth, is taken up again. Anita Sokolsky maintains that the tree and the dancer are evocative of the same problem: "The dancing body is but another version of the spreading chestnut tree, as the tree extends itself through its components, so the dancer emerges through the dance" (1988, 77). In hermeneutical terms the similarity between the tree and the dancer asks the same question of whether it is possible to see the essence of an entity without consulting its physical aspect but solely on the basis of its transcendental quality; in other words, the speaker attempts to comprehend whether it is feasible to observe the *eidos* of the dance without the recourse to the dancer.

That rhetorical question at the end of the poem was famously analysed by Paul de Man who refers to the above query: "the [last] line is usually interpreted as stating, with the increased emphasis of a rhetorical device, the potential unity between form and experience, between creator and creation" (1982, 11). De Man's implication puts the problem which has been seen here in hermeneutical terms in a similar fashion, yet his focus is laid on the potentially deconstructive aspect of the question. He suggests reading the final question of the poem not figuratively as rhetorical but literally. De Man forms his central premise by asking: "since the two essentially different elements, sign and meaning, are so intricately intertwined in the imagined 'presence' that the poem addresses, how can we possibly make the distinctions that would shelter us from the error of identifying what cannot be identified?" (*ibid*, 11). Thus de Man draws attention to the fact that the final question of the poem need not be offering any presence in the sense of an adumbration of a solution but, rather, it realises the essential postponement of any presence. What the poem has implied throughout is that the vision is actually taking place before the reader's eyes as it has been argued above. However, the final line deconstructs the idea of a received presence, demonstrating that the presence of the

vision is only illusory. The poem admits of two readings, says de Man, on the one hand, there is the figurative one which strives towards a final unity; on the other, there is the literal one which impresses on the reader a feeling of ubiquitous divergence and being kept always already apart (*ibid*, 12). De Man summarises this dual analytical potential, saying that neither reading "can exist in the other's absence. There can be no dance without a dancer, no sign without a referent. On the other hand, the authority of the meaning engendered by the grammatical structure is fully obscured by the duplicity of a figure that cries out for the differentiation that it conceals" (*ibid*, 12). According to de Man, the poem may be best understood if both readings confront each other and the presence is constantly re-apprehended as it elides the final capture.

De Man's postulate provides an important point of reference for the present analysis of "Among School Children" in that his reading, as it deconstructs the concept of a unity, sheds some light on his earlier perception of the Being that absconds. As he proffers the necessity to acknowledge the reading towards a unity, de Man determinately disavows the possibility of reaching what Yeats would call the Unity of Being. Thus the truth of the Being that absconds, even though its primal being-there is affirmed, is assumed to be the unattainable unity. The existence of this truth needs to be taken for granted if the subversive potential of the literalness of the last line of the lyric is to manifest itself. The quest for the Being that absconds is perpetuated by the very fact that Being may never be apprehended.

Such a logic as demonstrated above befits "Among School Children," since in this manner the poem complements the final line of "Sailing to Byzantium" in a number of ways. Firstly, Yeats's notion of the Unity of Being invoked in the volume's opening lyric obtains an ultimate and truly Byzantine expression in the twin images of the chestnut-tree and the dancer whose movements denote such a perfection of life and trade that they stop being distinguishable from one another and melt into one sphere. Secondly, because the two images of perfection are framed into a question, the Unity of Being as synonymous to the truth of Being is revealed to be of elusive nature and can only be desired in the manner of the speaker of "Sailing to Byzantium." Thirdly and lastly, in the inevitably double reading of the final line of "Among School Children" the struggle of the world and the earth is demonstrated in its entirety. What in "Sailing to Byzantium" is only a peaceful wish to be incorporated into the primary poetic world, in "Among School Children" becomes a troublesome, multilevel effort of apprehending the Being that absconds in the perpetual conflict of the world and the earth.

The glimpses of the Being that absconds which are revealed in "Among School Children" show that in the mythical framework of the poem inheres the chance for locating Heideggerian *Dasein*. Furthermore, it may only be accomplished providing myth is seen as a subjective reworking of the essentially objective language and not as an ordering device. The paradox of modernism demonstrated by Eysteinsson can thus be solved by making a recourse to myth. In "Among School Children" the realm of myth is more readily seen as the space of play of the language. However, it needs stressing that play is here regarded as a positive term in the sense that it denotes the existence of truth which is always already being hidden as the earth sets itself up.

Myth has thus been explicated as a hermeneutical framework in which the search for the truth of the Being that absconds takes place. Myth diffuses, pushing its horizon ever further, and elevates itself on the ontic plane by virtue of Heidegger's postulate that it is poetry that is the primary reality. The purpose of myth is to reclaim truth and yet it is not a structure which imposes on the reality, for it constitutes a reality of its own but one inextricably linked with the thingly world. In Yeats it has been demonstrated that the final form of development of myth permits him to delimit the sphere in which he traces *Dasein*. The dialectical model of the struggle between the earth and the world reveals the possibility of solving the paradox of subjectivism and anti-subjectivism in modernist poetics.

Through opening of myth onto the play of the quest for the Being that absconds, it appears to be possible to locate an essentially interpretive drive prevalent in the poetics of modernism. Thus the stagnation of mythical criticism and especially of mythical criticism in reference to modernism might be broken; this stirring back to life seems to inhere in Heidegger's philosophy of "The Origin of the Work of Art." It must be stressed that in the present reading of Yeatsian myth, whilst the main tangential point with Heidegger is the dialecticism of the method employed by both, it is their implied desire for truth rooted in experience that expresses the greatest sense of mutual empathy.

Joseph Chiari provides an insightful remark as to the relation of the subjectivism and objectivism in modernist poetics: "If reality has neither meaning nor objective existence, or if it is described as being totally absurd, then the only reality which exists is that of man's subjectivity, in which the human person is reduced to a continuously changing flux which uses facts according to its purpose or project" (1970, 102 – 103). Chiari's assumption that an individual's being-towards-a-project forms the perception of a reality underlies the present study of myth. It is in the mythical realm chosen by modernists to lie at the basis of their poetics that the most sustained exposition of the subjective remaking of the objective reality takes place. If studies of myth in modernism to come are to rid themselves of the barrier of "Tradition and the Individual Talent" consciously and, similarly, if hermeneutical phenomenology is to develop as a method of critical enquiry, it is only auspicious to assert the underlying communion between the two conceptions. The broadening of the theoretical scope of myth so as to let it embrace the hermeneutical dialecticism of Heidegger as well as the present reconsideration of the role of Heidegger's thinking in the process of forming of one of the most indomitable poetic minds of modernism, that of Yeats, allows to observe the potential which hermeneutics holds for the investigations of modernist poetics. Now that general mythical hermeneutics has been delimited, attention must be paid to the particular artifices of eternity with which Yeats's poems are redolent.

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SELECTED POETRY

The Lake Isle of Innisfree

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

A Coat

I made my song a coat
Covered with embroideries
Out of old mythologies
From heel to throat;
But the fools caught it,
Wore it in the world's eyes
As though they'd wrought it.
Song, let them take it
For there's more enterprise
In walking naked.

Cuchulain's Fight With The Sea

A man came slowly from the setting sun,
To Emer, raddling raiment in her dun,
And said, "I am that swineherd whom you bid
Go watch the road between the wood and tide,
But now I have no need to watch it more."

Then Emer cast the web upon the floor,
And raising arms all raddled with the dye,
Parted her lips with a loud sudden cry.

That swineherd stared upon her face and said,
"No man alive, no man among the dead,
Has won the gold his cars of battle bring."

"But if your master comes home triumphing
Why must you blench and shake from foot to crown?"

Thereon he shook the more and cast him down
Upon the web-heaped floor, and cried his word:
"With him is one sweet-throated like a bird."

"You dare me to my face," and thereupon
She smote with raddled fist, and where her son
Herded the cattle came with stumbling feet,
And cried with angry voice, "It is not meet
To idle life away, a common herd."

"I have long waited, mother, for that word:
But wherefore now?"

"There is a man to die;
You have the heaviest arm under the sky."

"Whether under its daylight or its stars
My father stands amid his battle-cars."

"But you have grown to be the taller man."

"Yet somewhere under starlight or the sun
My father stands."

"Aged, worn out with wars
On foot. on horseback or in battle-cars."

"I only ask what way my journey lies,
For He who made you bitter made you wise."

"The Red Branch camp in a great company
Between wood's rim and the horses of the sea.
Go there, and light a camp-fire at wood's rim;
But tell your name and lineage to him
Whose blade compels, and wait till they have found
Some feasting man that the same oath has bound."

Among those feasting men Cuchulain dwelt,

And his young sweetheart close beside him knelt,
Stared on the mournful wonder of his eyes,
Even as Spring upon the ancient skies,
And pondered on the glory of his days;
And all around the harp-string told his praise,
And Conchubar, the Red Branch king of kings,
With his own fingers touched the brazen strings.
At last Cuchulain spake, "Some man has made
His evening fire amid the leafy shade.
I have often heard him singing to and fro,
I have often heard the sweet sound of his bow.
Seek out what man he is."

One went and came.
"He bade me let all know he gives his name
At the sword-point, and waits till we have found
Some feasting man that the same oath has bound."

Cuchulain cried, "I am the only man
Of all this host so bound from childhood on!"

After short fighting in the leafy shade,
He spake to the young man, 'Is there no maid
Who loves you, no white arms to wrap you round,
Or do you long for the dim sleepy ground,
That you have come and dared me to my face?"

"The dooms of men are in God's hidden place,"

"Your head a while seemed like a woman's head
That I loved once."
Again the fighting sped,
But now the war-rage in Cuchulain woke,
And through that new blade's guard the old blade broke,
And pierced him.

"Speak before your breath is done."

"Cuchulain I, mighty Cuchulain's son."

"I put you from your pain. I can no more."
While day its burden on to evening bore,
With head bowed on his knees Cuchulain stayed;
Then Conchubar sent that sweet-throated maid,
And she, to win him, his grey hair caressed;
In vain her arms, in vain her soft white breast.

Then Conchubar, the subtlest of all men,
Ranking his Druids round him ten by ten,
Spake thus: "Cuchulain will dwell there and brood
For three days more in dreadful quietude,
And then arise, and raving slay us all.
Chaunt in his ear delusions magical,
That he may fight the horses of the sea."
The Druids took them to their mystery,
And chaunted for three days.
Cuchulain stirred,
Stared on the horses of the sea, and heard
The cars of battle and his own name cried;
And fought with the invulnerable tide.

The Song of Wandering Aengus

I went out to the hazel wood,
Because a fire was in my head,
And cut and peeled a hazel wand,
And hooked a berry to a thread;
And when white moths were on the wing,
And moth-like stars were flickering out,
I dropped the berry in a stream
And caught a little silver trout.

When I had laid it on the floor
I went to blow the fire a-flame,
But something rustled on the floor,
And someone called me by my name:
It had become a glimmering girl
With apple blossom in her hair
Who called me by my name and ran
And faded through the brightening air.

Though I am old with wandering
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,
I will find out where she has gone,
And kiss her lips and take her hands;
And walk among long dappled grass,
And pluck till time and times are done,
The silver apples of the moon,
The golden apples of the sun.

Sailing to Byzantium

I
That is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arms, birds in the trees,
—Those dying generations—at their song,
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Monuments of unageing intellect.
II
An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress,
Nor is there singing school but studying
Monuments of its own magnificence;
And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
To the holy city of Byzantium.

III
O sages standing in God's holy fire
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
And be the singing-masters of my soul.
Consume my heart away; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is; and gather me
Into the artifice of eternity.

IV
Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

Among School Children

I
I walk through the long schoolroom questioning;
A kind old nun in a white hood replies;
The children learn to cipher and to sing,
To study reading-books and history,
To cut and sew, be neat in everything
In the best modern way—the children's eyes
In momentary wonder stare upon
A sixty-year-old smiling public man.

II
I dream of a Ledaean body, bent
Above a sinking fire, a tale that she
Told of a harsh reproof, or trivial event
That changed some childish day to tragedy—
Told, and it seemed that our two natures blent
Into a sphere from youthful sympathy,
Or else, to alter Plato's parable,
Into the yolk and white of the one shell.

III
And thinking of that fit of grief or rage
I look upon one child or t'other there
And wonder if she stood so at that age—
For even daughters of the swan can share
Something of every paddler's heritage—
And had that colour upon cheek or hair,
And thereupon my heart is driven wild:
She stands before me as a living child.

IV
Her present image floats into the mind—
Did Quattrocento finger fashion it
Hollow of cheek as though it drank the wind
And took a mess of shadows for its meat?
And I though never of Ledaean kind
Had pretty plumage once—enough of that,
Better to smile on all that smile, and show
There is a comfortable kind of old scarecrow.

V
What youthful mother, a shape upon her lap
Honey of generation had betrayed,
And that must sleep, shriek, struggle to escape

As recollection or the drug decide,
Would think her son, did she but see that shape
With sixty or more winters on its head,
A compensation for the pang of his birth,
Or the uncertainty of his setting forth?

VI
Plato thought nature but a spume that plays
Upon a ghostly paradigm of things;
Solider Aristotle played the taws
Upon the bottom of a king of kings;
World-famous golden-thighed Pythagoras
Fingered upon a fiddle-stick or strings
What a star sang and careless Muses heard:
Old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird.

VII
Both nuns and mothers worship images,
But those the candles light are not as those
That animate a mother's reveries,
But keep a marble or a bronze repose.
And yet they too break hearts—O Presences
That passion, piety or affection knows,
And that all heavenly glory symbolise—
O self-born mockers of man's enterprise;

VIII
Labour is blossoming or dancing where
The body is not bruised to pleasure soul,
Nor beauty born out of its own despair,
Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.
O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer,
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?

The Circus Animals' Desertion

I
I sought a theme and sought for it in vain,
I sought it daily for six weeks or so.
Maybe at last being but a broken man
I must be satisfied with my heart, although
Winter and summer till old age began
My circus animals were all on show,
Those stilted boys, that burnished chariot,
Lion and woman and the Lord knows what.

II
What can I but enumerate old themes,
First that sea-rider Oisin led by the nose
Through three enchanted islands, allegorical dreams,
Vain gaiety, vain battle, vain repose,
Themes of the embittered heart, or so it seems,
That might adorn old songs or courtly shows;
But what cared I that set him on to ride,
I, starved for the bosom of his fairy bride.

And then a counter-truth filled out its play,
`The Countess Cathleen' was the name I gave it,
She, pity-crazed, had given her soul away
But masterful Heaven had intervened to save it.
I thought my dear must her own soul destroy
So did fanaticism and hate enslave it,
And this brought forth a dream and soon enough
This dream itself had all my thought and love.

And when the Fool and Blind Man stole the bread
Cuchulain fought the ungovernable sea;
Heart mysteries there, and yet when all is said
It was the dream itself enchanted me:
Character isolated by a deed
To engross the present and dominate memory.
Players and painted stage took all my love
And not those things that they were emblems of.

III
Those masterful images because complete
Grew in pure mind but out of what began?
A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street,
Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,
Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut

Who keeps the till. Now that my ladder's gone
I must lie down where all the ladders start
In the foul rag and bone shop of the heart.

Politics

'In our time the destiny of man presents its meanings in political terms.'
THOMAS MANN.

How can I, that girl standing there,
My attention fix
On Roman or on Russian
Or on Spanish politics,
Yet here's a travelled man that knows
What he talks about,
And there's a politician
That has both read and thought,
And maybe what they say is true
Of war and war's alarms,
But O that I were young again
And held her in my arms.

The Second Coming

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,

And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

THOMAS STERNS ELIOT

One of the best poets in English of all times, Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888 – 1965), a Nobel Prize winner in 1948 "for his outstanding, pioneer contribution to present-day poetry," was also a successful playwright and an influential critic who helped establish a recognizable Anglo-American school of criticism. The time when Eliot's reputation was at its peak (1940 – 1960) was also called "the Age of Eliot." Some of the most prominent recent literary scholars, such as Harold Bloom and Stephen Greenblatt, claim that Eliot's poetry still retains the central position in the Anglo-American literary canon. Opening their chapter on Eliot, the editors of *Poetry Foundation* quote:

> When T. S. Eliot died, wrote Robert Giroux, "the world became a lesser place." Certainly the most imposing poet of his time, Eliot was revered by Igor Stravinsky "not only as a great sorcerer of words but as the very key keeper of the language." For Alfred Kazin he was "the *mana* known as 'T. S. Eliot,' the model poet of our time, the most cited poet and incarnation of literary correctness in the English-speaking world." Northrop Frye simply

states: "A thorough knowledge of Eliot is compulsory for anyone interested in contemporary literature. Whether he is liked or disliked is of no importance, but he must be read."

Eliot was born American in a wealthy Boston family, but moved to England in 1914. Although he renounced his American citizenship, by the end of his life he still claimed that without the emotional heritage from St. Louis, Missouri he would never be the poet he was. His childhood was rather quiet, by Mississippi river, and was mostly spent in the company of literature, as due to a congenital double hernia he could not take part in the activities of his peers.

Eliot enrolled classical studies at Smith Academy, then philosophy at Harvard, and eventually received M.A. in English literature from the same school. At this time he was already a published author, and, more importantly, became inspired with the Symbolist movement in literature, especially by the French poet Jules LaForgue. After this, Eliot moved to Sorbonne and for a year was the student of Henri Bergson, one of the most famous French idealist philosophers. He enjoyed the cultural life of Paris, the performances at Moulin Rouge, the subversive ideas he met with at Montparnasse, an even considered staying in Paris and writing poetry in French. However, he returned to Harvard to study Indian philosophy, Sanskrit, and Indian philology, which significantly influenced his world view (as evident in his greatest poems, in particular in the ending of *The Waste Land*).

In England, Eliot had several teaching positions in London, at Birkbeck College of the University of London, in a private London school Highgate, at the Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe, as well as held evening classes in London and Oxford. He also earned money writing book reviews. From 1917 until 1925, he was employed in Lloyds Bank in London to work on foreign accounts. Yet, for the history of English literature, more important is his editorial position in the journal *Criterion*, which lasted for a decade and a half. The first issue of this journal, appearing in October 1922, published Eliot's masterpiece, *The Waste Land*. Soon, in 1925, Eliot became a member of the board of directors in the publishing firm Faber and Faber, and published some renowned poets, such as W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, and Ted Hughes. In the meantime, Eliot received the Charles Eliot Norton professorship from Harvard and spent a year teaching there. In the early 1960s he was engaged as the editor of the Wesleyan University Press.

In 1915 Eliot married Vivienne Haigh-Wood. Their marriage was happy until Vivienne started showing symptoms of fatigue, insomnia, migraine, high temperature, and eventually an obvious mental instability, for which reason she was often hospitalized for longer periods of time. The couple complained that they did not marry out of love and separated in 1933. In 1938 Vivienne was sent to a mental hospital, where she stayed until her death in 1947. Eliot never visited her. In the meantime, he appeared in public with some other women, but in 1957 he married Esme Valerie Fletcher, who was his secretary in Faber and Faber. The couple had no children.

Crucial in Eliot's development and promotion as a poet was his meeting with Ezra Pound in London in 1914. Pound assisted in the publication of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," already in 1915 in *Poetry*. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, the

touchstone of English modernism, also references Pound, already in its dedication, as "il miglior fabbro," i.e. as "the better craftsman," because Pound did help edit the much longer original manuscript.

In 1927, Eliot converted to Anglicanism and proclaimed himself "classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic [sic] in religion." Most of the critics agree that his long poem *Ash-Wednesday*, published in 1930, expresses the struggles that forced the conversion of his religion and his need for a more comfortable Christian faith.

Eliot suffered from a pulmonary disease called emphysema, of which he died. His wish was to be cremated and his ashes held in the church of St. Michael and All Angels in East Coker from where his family originally came. A plague on the church wall now quotes from his *East Coker,* the second "quarter" in, for many, Eliot's most serious poetical work *Four Quarters*: "In my beginning is my end. In my end is my beginning."

Growing up in the midst of St Louis' rapid urbanization and transformations that spread through all the aspects of the city's life, Eliot naturally became a poet of urban chaos. His poetry abounds with the suggestions of urban absurdity, human confusion, rootlessness, and alienation in the modern, mostly war and post-war, culture that deprives individuals of hope, fate, significant rituals, and love, i.e. making them hollow (as we find in "The Hollow Men"). Looking for the coherent frames that might situate this drama, a pattern that might comprehend a diversity of human experience and suggest a potential unity of life, he investigates the old agrarian imagery of fertility and infertility, and looks into Roman poets, Dante, Shakespeare, Metaphysical poets, and French symbolists.

Eliot's ideas about literary criticism, which, like Hulme's, had a tendency of Classicist ordering rather than impressionistic response to a work of art, significantly influenced the Anglo-American school known as New Criticism. One of his most frequently quoted essays is "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in which he questions the idea of authority of an artist and the Romantic idea that artist creates from nothing. Instead, he advised that literature should be considered in its continuity, i.e. in its simultaneous existence from Homer to contemporary times. Another important Eliot's idea is that of the objective correlative, developed in his essay "Hamlet and His Problems." Poets must be highly sensitive to their responsibility to their age. Instead of elaborating on subjective impressions of certain phenomena and enforcing them onto a reader – because, as he said, a poem is "not a turning loose of emotion but an escape from emotion" – a poet should rather abstract from experience and employ a set of particular circumstances, images, and words that would convey the same idea or feeling but would be able to make their different readers' situation and experience comprehensive. In his essay *Aims of Poetic Drama*, Eliot declares:

> What I should like to do is this: that the people on the stage should seem to the audience so like themselves that they would find themselves thinking: "I could talk in poetry too!" Then they are not transported into an unaccustomed, artificial world; but their ordinary, sordid world is suddenly

illuminated and transfigured. And if poetry cannot do that for people, it is merely superfluous decoration.

Eliot's most successful theatrical pieces are *The Cocktail Party*, *The Family Reunion*, and *Murder in the Cathedral*.

As reading Eliot requires a somewhat .... we have opted for a larger selection from literary criticism referring to the three poems that we have chosen for our studies.

SELECTED CRITICISM

Russell Elliott Murphy, "Hollow Men, The" (1925), in Russell Elliott Murphy, *Critical Companion to T. S. Eliot: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, New York: Facts on File, 2007, pp. 251-260.

Containing perhaps one of Eliot's most often quoted lines, "The Hollow Men" nevertheless has a varied enough publication history to suggest that Eliot virtually stumbled on this celebrated achievement of his. The third part of "The Hollow Men," for example, was originally published in a sequence collectively called "Doris's Dream Songs" in the *Chapbook* in the autumn of 1924. Then entitled "This Is the Dead Land," it was included with two other poems, "Eyes That Last I Saw in Tears" and "The Wind Sprang Up at Four O'Clock," which were themselves later reprinted as minor poems in the same volume, *Collected Poems*, 1909–1935, as "Sweeney Agonistes."

Eliot's lifelong habit of recycling images and lines and, in some cases, whole sections of poetry can be a source of continuing temptation and confusion. "The Wind Sprang Up at Four O'Clock," for example, itself incorporates parts of "Song for Opherian," first published in 1921 and never subsequently collected by Eliot. There is also the curious fact that part IV of The Waste Land is lifted virtually verbatim from "Dans le restaurant," a poem published in 1918. (It is only virtually verbatim because the 1918 version is in French.) The danger would be in assigning too much significance to Eliot's intentions in cannibalizing earlier poems for the sake of later ones. Surely the parts must fit, but there must also be in his motivation the artist's powerful inclination not to let a good line fade into obscurity for lack of a permanent abode in his or her canon. Too, Eliot had a developing but nevertheless consistently coherent vision throughout his poetic career that lines from one piece might serve quite suitably in another really is no surprise at all. Whether these three poems were "dream songs" to Doris or about Doris, who had played a minor role in "Sweeney Erect" and was Sweeney's love interest, loosely defined, in "Sweeney Agonistes," is impossible to determine. Nonetheless, that connection between the poetry of "The Hollow Men" and of "Sweeney Agonistes" may provide insights into the former work's theme.

It appears that Eliot regarded the abortive verse play "Sweeney Agonistes," which he had begun in the autumn of 1923, as the major work that would provide a suitable successor to *The Waste Land*. Eliot abandoned the verse play entirely in 1925, although excerpts were published in the *Criterion* in October 1926 and again

in January 1927, and he would include it among his unfinished poems in *Collected Poems*, 1909–1935. More to the current point, he reportedly viewed the poem sequence that would eventually emerge as "The Hollow Men" as poems related in their own originality of tone and theme to "Sweeney Agonistes." Indeed, it is far more likely that much of "The Hollow Men" is composed of tangential material that Eliot had been working up for inclusion in the verse play and that he did not wish to discard wholesale once he had put the larger project aside. For now, then, it would be profitable to explore the patchwork publication history of the various individual poems that would eventually emerge as "The Hollow Men," for that history strongly suggests just how tentative were Eliot's overall intentions for a work that has by now come to be regarded as a major statement in his canon.

That it may have been far more a pastiche than a coherently executed piece would not diminish the impact of the poetry's final arrangement into a completed piece. It would, however, enable a more accurate assessment of the true critical worth and purpose of the verbal assemblage with which readers have ultimately to deal by allowing them to appreciate how much "meaning" is a thing that emerges from creative processes rather than something that that the creative intellect imposes on those processes to begin with. In summary, it is rather as if Eliot composed the poetry to discover its meaning instead of pursuing the opposite tack.

If, then, part III of "The Hollow Men" is a poem apparently discarded from an earlier work that was itself left unfinished, the other parts also had earlier independent incarnations before they found a final home in Eliot's corpus as sections of "The Hollow Men." Parts II and IV were subsequently published in the *Criterion* in January 1925, and then the first three parts were published independently in the *Dial* in March, although part I had already appeared separately. Part V, however, was not published until the poem came out in *Poems*, 1909–1925, once more indicating that Eliot was tinkering with the sequence up to the last minute.

Synopsis
A General Overview

When the poem is regarded as a single, coherent piece, which is what the sequence has rightly come to be regarded as by now, whatever paths its composition may have taken, the title seems to say it all: "The Hollow Men." Certainly the first five parts are linked, inextricably it must seem, by the recurring motif of "death's other Kingdom," variously called "death's dream kingdom" and "death's twilight kingdom." That this domain is a state of mind is a conclusion encouraged if not confirmed by the other linking element, incorporated into the title, that is the singular voice compounded of the collective "we" who are "the hollow men / . . . the stuffed men." Except in part II, where an "I" speaks instead, these pathetic souls bare the shame of their empty, meaningless lives, only to disappear entirely, after the nursery rhyme opening, into the third-person litany that forms part V, which itself peters out like an old record disk winding to a stop on the final word, whimper.

It is not a happy scene, but perhaps that is what makes it one of the few of Eliot's poems needing little in the way of a broad rendering of its meaning, so abruptly obvious is that general tone and meaning. It is as if all of a sudden all wit and irony had ceased to exist in creation—and this in a poem coming from Eliot, who had written the book on wit and irony in modernist literature. Can life really be all that bad, one is tempted to ask, but it is not about life itself that the poetry is speaking but about the lives that creatures like the hollow men lead—the kind of lives they lead both because they are hollow men and that make them hollow men. This particular poem of Eliot's will pay the reader off smartly and will open doors of opportunity for discovery into much of Eliot's later poetry, if the reader keeps that one premise in mind: that the poem is not a commentary on life, but a commentary, presented in their own words and voices, as it were, on hollow men—that is to say, on the choices and values that make individuals become that way. So, then, as good a place as any to begin a consideration of the poem itself is with the title and its possible sources and meanings, as limited as the latter may seem.

The Title

Eliot later claimed, in a January 1935 letter, that the title for the poem came about by combining the title of a romance by William Morris, *The Hollow Land*, with the title of a poem by Rudyard Kipling, "The Broken Men," but Eliot was also notorious for intentionally tossing red herrings into the path of source-hunting literary scholars. There is in the epigraph to "The Hollow Men," nevertheless, an overt allusion to Joseph Conrad's celebrated 1899 novella, *Heart of Darkness*.

There is also a covert but nonetheless equally obvious allusion to the same Conrad tale in the poem's title. When in the text of the poem the speakers repeatedly talk of themselves as the hollow men, the stuffed men, their heads filled with straw, among the various images—or, in Eliot's phrase, objective correlatives—that such a conceptual description may bring to mind for the reader are, no doubt, the corporate nonentities who are often portrayed as inhabiting the modern world's bureaucracies, from boardroom and committee room to classroom and church. Conrad, in *Heart of Darkness*, was among the first European authors to identify that new breed of humanity, the so-called Organization Man, who came into his own in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and who is thought of as all surface with nothing of any substance or fiber beneath or within—the hollow man. In any event, this type is described in exactly that manner by Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*. When Marlow, the story's protagonist, recounts his journey up the Congo into "the heart of darkness," he tells of encountering the manager of the Central Station of a colonial trading company. This manager is portrayed as a company man whose only managerial skill seems to be that "he inspired uneasiness," in Marlow's words, making him conclude that "[p]erhaps there was nothing within him." Shortly thereafter, among the various lackeys vying for position and advantage, Marlow meets a company agent "with a forked little beard and a hooked nose," a man who is so transparently oily that Marlow, no slouch when it comes to taking the true measure of a man, sees through him instantly. Marlow then describes this unctuous agent as a "papier-mâché Mephistopheles," in other words, as a devil that is all

surface without any substance or depth, a man whose values and character run no deeper than the slick façade that one encounters to begin with—like the manager, this agent represents another empty, hollow man.

This similarity does not necessarily mean that the Eliot poem and the Conrad story share the same theme or point of view with regard to it, although, like Eliot, Conrad, too, wrote fictions that were multilayered in their potentials for meanings, which were as capable of contradicting as enhancing each other. Suffice it to say that neither Conrad nor Eliot is out in either work simply to present a superficial putdown of Organization Men. Nevertheless, there is a definite commonality in the mutual mistrust for individuals who are hollow at the core, that is, committed to nothing but their own self-interest. The reader must keep in mind as well that the possibility that Eliot's title is an allusion to the Conrad work is further and dramatically underscored by the fact that the first of Eliot's two unattributed allusions in his epigraph comes from the Conrad tale as well.

The Epigraphs

Eliot cleverly splices together two entirely separate allusions to make the epigraph to "The Hollow Man" seem to be two consecutive sentences. "Mistah Kurtz—he dead. / A penny for the Old Guy." The curtness of the English sounds to be pidgin or at least not standard, as if the same hurried speaker utters the entire two sentences. For another thing, since it is not an uncommon practice to talk of putting coins on the eyes of the dead or a coin in the dead man's pocket for the sake of the ferryman who will be taking him over the mythical river into the land of the dead, it sounds reasonable that these words might come out of a context in which someone, after abruptly announcing that a man named Kurtz has just passed away, could then go on to ask for a coin for one of those ritual purposes. Nothing can be further from the truth. The two sentences come from two entirely different sources that are separated by several centuries and a wealth of background detail.

The source for the first part of the epigraph is Conrad's Heart of Darkness. To be sure, the words, "Mistah Kurtz—he dead," come in Conrad's text within less than a page of the passage from Conrad that Ezra Pound had convinced Eliot to discard as his original epigraph to *The Waste Land*. It almost seems as if Eliot refused to let go of his desire to allude to that passage from the Conrad novella in which the dying Kurtz, the mysterious idealistic trader turned moral monster whom Marlow is hired to rescue, is heard to utter the words, "The horror, the horror!" Whatever the case, Eliot found a place for a near allusion to it here in the epigraph to his poem published some three years later. In fact, the words from the epigraph to "The Hollow Men" are spoken to Conrad's narrator, Marlow, within moments of the time that Kurtz had had his final say about the horror, and they are spoken by a native retainer bringing Marlow the news that Kurtz, the legendary social reformer and light of Western civilization, has at last succumbed to the jungle fever that had, along with his moral blindness, driven him mad.

The second part of Eliot's epigraph, meanwhile, although it comes from an entirely different context, this one historical rather than literary, perhaps also points to an individual whose misguided idealism proved to be his undoing. "A penny for

the Old Guy" finds it origins in a centuries-old English celebration, variously called Guy Fawkes Day, Bonfire Night, and, in New England until the late 18th century, Pope Day. The festivities, such as they are, find their origin in the discovery and suppression, on November 5, 1605, of the infamous Gunpowder Plot, a conspiracy among a band of English Roman Catholics to blow up Parliament and, with it, King James I in order to foment an uprising of Catholics, who were then suffering under increasingly severe and restrictive laws at the hands of a Protestant establishment. The conspiracy was discovered and foiled with the arrest of one Guy Fawkes virtually in the act of lighting the fuse that would then have ignited 36 barrels of gunpowder that had been secreted in a cellar under the House of Lords. Fawkes and all the other conspirators were appropriately punished for their treasonous act, in most cases by imprisonment or execution. The story goes that when word spread through London that a plot to assassinate the king had been foiled, the relieved citizenry lit bonfires in thanksgiving, and the event has been repeated on the anniversary date ever since, with bonfires and firework displays throughout England. Effigies of Fawkes and frequently the pope, the head of the Roman Catholic Church, are burnt on these bonfires. It is another common practice for children to prepare a dummy of Fawkes, which they call "the Guy" and which they then carry through the streets, begging passersby for "a penny for the Guy." What they do with the coins they collect is their business, but the dummy is eventually thrown onto one of the bonfires.

Eliot's calling Guy Fawkes to mind just after calling Conrad's Kurtz to mind points the reader in a single-minded direction, it must be admitted, giving a certain sociopolitical cast to the poem to come, one that the poetry itself may not necessarily support. Fawkes, both in life and most definitely in death as a papier-mâché effigy, is another candidate for being, like Kurtz, a "hollow man"—someone whose core humanity was a superficial sham and who was directed just as powerfully by the abstract coldness of a cause, misguided or not, rather than by a primal sympathy for the simple welfare of other mortal creatures like himself. Surely, it is in that profound regard that Eliot's choice of epigraphical material seems to serve the far more spiritual tone and attitude of the poetry that follows.

The Text

The poetry of "The Hollow Men" is a challenge to many readers inasmuch as little is concrete in the way of an apparent setting or context onto which to latch. Even the speaker of "Gerontion" in his mewling musings sets a vivid scene by mentioning the condition of his house, the weather outside, and how he is being "read to by a boy." The hollow men of this poem are, in keeping perhaps with the thinness of their existence, little more than a tone, and a monotonous one at that, as well as an attitude that is itself barely more than a vacuous mumble and paper thin. The reader would be wrong not to recognize how those very effects are a good part of the poem that Eliot is aiming to achieve here, as well as of whatever meaning may be assigned to it. These speakers are self-confessedly barely alive, and the narrow band of modulation through which the poetry moves bears out that essential quality much more dramatically than any words ever could.

Furthermore, for the first time ever, perhaps, Eliot seems to be going out of his way to eschew the richly allusional qualities of much of his earlier poetry. Although the wide variety of literary and other allusions in an Eliot poem to this time was as often liable to mislead as to enlighten the reader who is desperate for direction, there was nevertheless the illusion that some sort of direction toward meaning was being provided. While "The Hollow Men," too, has its literary allusions, they are more debatable and far less ostensible. Some would argue that Eliot, who had faced some charges of literary plagiarism over the pastiche of past poets that the final, published version of *The Waste Land* turned out to be after Pound removed most of Eliot's original material, was being cautious. However, there is as likely a thematic motivation behind even this relative absence of obvious allusions from an Eliot poem.

Hollow men, it would stand to reason, are not the sorts who would have absorbed much of the world around them, particularly its store of cultural values and moral issues that is comprised by literature, religion, and history. Indeed, the poetry of the poem is so much a reflection of the emptiness of the lives of its collective speakers that readers who do not known all of the background information about "The Hollow Men" might, for all the poetry's apparent complexity, have a great deal less difficulty getting their proper bearings, provided that they trust to the simple rule that what a text says should not be too far afield from what it means (even when the text in question is one composed by T. S. Eliot).

Part I

For example, a reader without this background, having just encountered the poem's title, "The Hollow Men," then would read the epigraph as a single, consecutive passage of speech, spoken as if in dialect, relating that someone has died and that the person relaying that tragic news is for some reason asking for a token memorial to "Mistah Kurtz." The reader, armed only with interpretive skills, would have a great deal less difficulty getting into the poem that follows. Such a reader would very likely imagine, beginning to read the text of the poem "The Hollow Men," that what is being read is the sort of vacuous, pitifully pitiless, evasive response to the initial plea for sympathy that the epigraph seems to be making if it is construed as a single statement, however pathetic a form that response seems to be taking. Heard in this context, the hollow men's "dried voices," their conspiratorial whispers that are "quiet and meaningless," their "[p]aralysed force, [and] gesture without motion"—all these details connotative of a deadness of feeling, along with the excruciatingly begging and self-deprecating tone in which the words are being spoken, would seem appropriate to souls who could not muster the energy, let alone the humanity, to respond to the epigraph's apparent plea for some meager measure of grief for a fellow mortal's tragic fate.

Nor would such a reading by such a reader be very far from wrong. For if now, to this rendering of the characteristics that the hollow men exhibit be added all the aforementioned information regarding the poem's connections with "Sweeney Agonistes," the title's allusion to Conrad, and the epigraphs' additional allusions to the sorry cases of Kurtz and of Guy Fawkes, any reader would see these hollow

men for exactly what they are—and that is exactly as they see themselves: as hollow men, individuals without pity or energy or feeling for themselves or for others. The oxymoronic "hollow men / . . . stuffed men" can make sense in no other context but that. Though there is nothing within them of substance, they are crammed to the gills with the detritus of their vain and empty worldliness. Whatever they have pursued, it has been dust blown on the wind to the narrow, tinny sound of "rats' feet over broken glass." Eliot doubtless imagines such men to be among the living who form the listless, faceless crowds that one sees daily in any modern urban setting, dispirited individuals similar to those in the crowd flowing over London Bridge at the end of "The Burial of the Dead," the first section of *The Waste Land*.

Eliot ends part I of "The Hollow Men," however, by strongly suggesting that these hollow men, though living, also might as well be wandering through Dante Aligheri's *Inferno*. Ultimately, however, it makes little difference whether the reader imagines that the hollow men are literally or figuratively dead, for that is the very point: For them, the difference is a negligible one.

The poem does seem to partake of certain themes and interests and images that were occupying Eliot's attention at the same time that he was composing the poetry of "Sweeney Agonistes." For example, some of the most strikingly unsettling lines given to Sweeney in that fragmentary play deal with how much existence is itself a living death, as when Sweeney tells Doris, "Death is life and life is death," and the formulation does not sound at all facile. For Sweeney, it would be better if it were. For the hollow men, on the other hand, it is as if it never were anything but. So, then, if Eliot was striving in this post–*Waste Land* poetry to contrive a verse that sounded wholly original, the hints of the landscape of Dante's hell that come to mind in the last stanza of part I of "The Hollow Men" suggest either that he was not striving too hard or that he knew a good echo when he heard it. Whoever those "who have crossed / With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom" may be according to Eliot's intentions, the image brings to mind Dante entering the portals of hell where he witnesses the first of the sinners undergoing the pains of eternal damnation, the opportunists. They are the individuals who, when in the world, neither denied nor embraced evil any more than good, so that heaven does not want them and hell will not take them. As a result, they are kept outside the boundaries of hell proper and blown both this way and that on a vast and indifferent wind, in keeping with the purposeless processes of a dispassionate and heartless vacillation that was their course of action in life. In essence, they who were not alive in life are not permitted to experience even the fullness of the death of the soul that is the fate of all the other sinners condemned to hell. These are the hollow men, who have spent their lives in what the poem will later call the "twilight kingdom" of neither/nor and who will not be remembered as "lost / Violent souls," only as what they in fact are—hollow men, stuffed with only the empty whims of the passing moment.

Part II

The second part of the poem opens with the compelling idea that such a person will not meet another's eyes even in his dreams, so much is he caught up in

gathering the nothingness of his own isolated being. At best, like the fictional Kurtz and the historical Fawkes, the hollow men live and die lives committed to the vague abstractions of social and political causes rather than to the flesh-and-blood realities that call individuals to a passionate engagement with the world and their fellow humans.

So, then, in this "death's dream kingdom," it is perhaps beneficent that these eyes do not appear to trouble the hollow men's selfish dreams, and, in keeping with the experience of living that they kept at arm's length, everything about them is composed of broken objects or distant sounds, carried off on a ceaseless wind echoing the emptiness of abstract thought. Having kept both life and the living at a distance, the better to keep from feeling, perhaps, one would of necessity ask not to be any nearer to life and the living in death, and instead would hope to go about in whatever guise will continue to keep others at bay—a rat, a crow, a scarecrow, "[b]ehaving as the wind behaves." The way the wind behaves is never to be still, so as always to avoid "that final meeting"—which is, for a hollow man, any meeting with another or with otherness—since that would involve the untidiness of interpersonal entanglements.

Part III

Out of their bitter selfishness is bred the arid desert of personality without context, life to no purpose, so part III depicts the desert of emotional sterility that such an existence becomes, their lives spent nurturing nothing, fructifying nothing, producing nothing. Theirs is "the dead land . . . [the] cactus land," a place of "stone images," where rituals are performed by "a dead man's hand." Eliot had, of course, already used this stone-and-desert imagery to great advantage in *The Waste Land*, but it serves him no less well here. Still other lines in part III, meanwhile, may remind the reader of "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" or "The Preludes": "Waking alone / At the hour when we are / Trembling with tenderness." And then the old stiletto twist of the bitter irony that this tenderness comes too late, for there is nothing and no one there to kiss, only broken stone to which to pray.

That dreamy, twilight kingdom of death that the speakers' intellect haunts but fears may be a real locale or only a semblance of horrors that run too deep and dark for words, let alone images, to portray. In a word, the hollow men are those who have led wasted, empty lives by squandering their love and attachment on transitory things, wherever they may be found and whatever they may be, and who have, additionally, come to realize as much but to no avail. Their fate is recognition without reform, reckoning without recompense. They are, in a word, lost, and in part IV that recognition is realized as the vista of ceaseless hopelessness that it necessarily entails.

Part IV

The poetry now picks up the imagery from parts I, II, and III in a sweeping crescendo of dashed opportunities. The eyes one earlier dared not meet become "eyes [that] are not here" at all; the stars are "dying stars"; the landscape is a

"hollow valley"; death's varying kingdoms have become "our lost kingdoms." Speechless, the hollow men "grope together" as if they are blind, avoiding any contact even among one another. Here, "on this beach of the tumid river" (an image that calls up once more Dante's opportunists, who only ever get as far as the hither side of the Acheron, being denied access into hell proper as they are), though sightless, they seem at least able to imagine Dante's multifoliate rose. It is his emblem and image of the blessed in paradise who, rather than gathered in the faceless, speechless crowd of hollow men, are gathered at the far end of eternity around the throne of God. As part IV ends, it seems that the "hope only / Of [these] empty men" is that somewhere there is the peace and contentment of salvation, but it is not there for them. Instead, in keeping with their character, it remains for them a distant and impossible prospect that teases them into self-pity but not, apparently, the capacity for shame.

Part V

"The Hollow Men" ends on what is perhaps the most quoted line in 20th-century English-language verse. The entire section is a dirgelike rendering of the hollow men's inability to change. They are caught on the wheel of their own making, ceaselessly circling their own moral and spiritual ineptitude as, in a parody of a children's nursery rhyme, they go round and round the "prickly pear," heading nowhere. Half-formed lines from the Lord's Prayer punctuate the page. Like an old phonograph record whose needle is stuck, or like the monotonously circling game, their praying, like their faith, progresses nowhere.

The explanation for their state of near-suspended animation—"[p]aralysed force" is how it was described earlier—is embodied in the Shadow that falls between the hollow men's every impulse and its execution: the idea and the reality, the motion and act, conception and creation, and so forth. The reader is compelled to regard that Shadow as whatever may turn a person from completion, from fulfillment, from contentment, but it must be a darkness that is self-generated as well, the shapings of an inner failing rather than anything external and uncontrollable.

That Shadow is also reminiscent of the Conrad novella from which the concept of the hollow men seems to have been partly spawned. Marlow, as noted, is Conrad's narrator in *Heart of Darkness*, but Conrad's framed narrative technique is more complicated and ambiguous than that. Readers first meet an anonymous narrator who sets the scene. He and a group of friends, among them Marlow, are on a cruising yawl at dusk in the lower reaches of the Thames, waiting for the tide to go out. This anonymous narrator then tells how, in the twilight stillness, Marlow tells the story of his harrowing journey up the primordial river to "rescue" Kurtz. Marlow begins his story of Kurtz by imagining what the mouth of the Thames must have seemed like to the ancient Romans who first encountered it some 2,000 years earlier when Britain was inhabited solely by Celts who would have seemed, to the invading Romans, to be barbarians at best, savages at worst. "And this also . . . has been one of the dark places of the earth," Marlow observes, breaking the anonymous narrator's private reverie, which had been focused on the light of

civilization that had over the centuries flowed down the Thames out into a benighted world. Marlow may begin by invoking the experiences of the ancient Romans in Britain, but it becomes clear that he is speaking about all humanity when he hastens to add, playing on those metaphors of light and of darkness, that "we live in the flicker."

The Conrad tale makes the same point that the reader hears in the closing litany of Eliot's "The Hollow Men," when, amidst echoes of the Lord's Prayer, the hollow men—or is it the poet himself now?—remind the reader/listener that between all human impulses and their fulfillment, all human aspirations and their achievements, "falls the Shadow." Conrad's profound critique of the limits of human endeavor are there in Eliot's vision of misguided desire and ambition, limitations in the persistent failure that humans experience by trying to match aspiration to achievement. All experience, in this imperfect universe, can be perceived as a litany of failures. Eliot does Conrad one better, however, by pointing out that the hollow men, having experienced such failures, succumb to them, taking the easy way out of making life choices. In place of the heroic ambiguities of Marlow's struggle to come to grips with the short flickers of light that we do catch here, Eliot's hollow men do not have the courage or the passion even to curse the darkness. Rather, they accept their self-willed fate, their pitiful tale ending, like the poem, "[n]ot with a bang but a whimper."

Critical Commentary

Following the publication of *The Waste Land* in late 1922, Eliot engaged in a period of experimentation that was as much a groping for new ways of expressing his insistent vision of a contemporary human scene in crisis if not chaos. The products of this effort were largely either stillborn (the unfinished "Sweeney Agonistes" providing the most outstanding example) or otherwise piecemeal, lacking the ambitious focus that the critical success and notoriety of *The Waste Land* seemed to require. This creative dry spell, such as it was, would end with the publication of "The Hollow Men" in 1925. Intriguingly enough, it is a poetry of apathy. Indeed, the hollow men seem to make the case against their pervasive apathy so well that readers may conclude that, short of paraphrase, their poetic vehicle does not require very much in the way of further elucidation.

While that would be a fair conclusion, it would not be an adequate or, perhaps, accurate one either. By the same line of reasoning, for example, a reader could conclude that "The Hollow Men" is another of Eliot's many fine psychological studies masquerading as dramatic monologues and doubling as poems. The poem in that case would be exposing a state of mind more than particularly expatiating on a specific theme woven into its subtle network of allusion, symbolic imagery, and self-revelatory statement.

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" comes most immediately to mind as the forebear of Eliot's poems in this manner, followed by the masterwork "Gerontion," which may strike the reader as a companion piece to "The Hollow Men." By this reckoning, just as "Prufrock" examines the inner workings of the mind of a personality painfully incapable of asserting his existence in any social

setting, and "Gerontion" gathers into a poem the idle musings of a man lost in his own past—each of them perturbed into "speaking his mind" because he is incapable of taking any more decisive or definitive action—so does "The Hollow Men" present its readers with the verbal equivalent of nonentities who recognize the meaningless choices that they have made but are content to live with them for the lack of any lingering initiative to do otherwise.

As reasonable as that may sound, however, it is very likely far from the truth of Eliot's aim for the poem. Beginning with *The Waste Land*, with its gropings toward a resolution that had something more enduringly permanent about it than the mere requirements of social realignments, Eliot's poetry seemed to be taking on a more and more decidedly spiritual if not religious slant. Readers sensitive to that trend may have detected it in his poetry from as early as the more superficially ludicrous of the quatrains. "The Hippopotamus" and "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service" come instantly to mind as works that, for all their ostensible irreverence, bite impatiently at the bit of spiritual shallowness. The question is what to replace it with. Surely anyone so bold as to provide an epigraph from Dante for his most accomplished early success as a poet is not concealing the fact that there is a spiritual dimension to his work, although it does seem that in these early efforts, that dimension is openly introduced by and large. Thus, it may be dismissed or otherwise exploited more for effect than for substance. Not so with "The Hollow Men," and that is so much the case that the presence of the spiritual, if not indeed the religious, in the poem may not impress readers as powerfully as it ought to. The hollow men are presented in such a manner as to elicit not so much sympathy or even impatience from the reader as judgment if not outright condemnation, and it is for their spiritual rather than their social or moral shortcomings that they elicit this response. The evidence suggests that this sort of a response is precisely what Eliot is seeking, and in doing so he has finally begun to free his poetry from the pervasive ambiguity and irony that had dominated it from the beginning. The evidence in question comes from three sources: the epigraphs; "Sweeney Agonistes," which shared an equal place in Eliot's interests at the time that he was preparing the sequence that became "The Hollow Men"; and, of course, Dante.

Once the poetry of "The Hollow Men" has been adequately considered for the sake of discovering the apparent drift of its thematic implications, the particular appropriateness of Eliot's choice of epigraphs becomes clear. For Kurtz and Guy Fawkes, in their devotion to a cause at the expense of all else, each represents the type of individual who fulfills the requirements subsequently implied by the hollow men's half-hearted heartlessness. On the surface, granted, that may hardly seem to be the case. Kurtz and Fawkes, it has just been said, had causes to which they were apparently committed, but the reader should recall that the hollow men are stuffed men. That is to say, having a cause does not automatically ennoble one, especially if the cause in question was an empty one to begin with.

Kurtz's objective was to enlighten the native population, whom he took to be tragically benighted. It is that very status of his as a "true believer," to use a phrase coined by the 20th-century philosopher Eric Hoffer, that makes Kurtz far more reprehensible than his fellow white traders, who, for all their own hypocrisy, do not imagine that they are in Africa for any other purpose than to exploit the land

and its people for personal gain. From that angle, Kurtz's going mad with the power that he gradually assumes among the native people is, rather than a dramatic conclusion, merely a tangential result of his putting more stock in his ideals than in his common humanity.

Fawkes comes through as a similarly misguided idealist whose ideals were contradicted by his actions. In the name of his own religious faith, a doctrine founded on the principles of love for and forgiveness of others, especially one's enemies, he contrived to be the trigger man, as it were, in a plot to kill scores of people in a violent explosion and throw an entire nation and people into chaos just so that his side might prevail. Fortunately, the plot failed under the weight of its own ineptitude, allowing the enemies whom Fawkes had hoped to vanquish once and for all instead to profit from his catastrophe and overwhelm the cause of a Catholic restoration in England for centuries to come, perhaps even permanently. (James II was a Catholic king, but not for very long.) Therefore, Eliot can intone "Mistah Kurtz—he dead. A penny for the Old Guy" in a memorial of pity for these two model hollow men who set the standard of "[p]aralysed force, gesture without motion" that so many others would follow in the 20th century.

Such a reading may lead to the erroneous conclusion, however, that the type is limited to the sphere of public personalities engaged in public action, such as Kurtz and Fawkes were. That is where the poem's known connections to the fragmentary verse drama "Sweeney Agonistes" serve their purpose by extending the range of human experience that is susceptible to a hollowness of spirit. In that play, Eliot made it clear in a 1934 lecture at Harvard University, Sweeney is the spokesman for the point of view that Eliot wished to convey to the audience. What Sweeney reveals is that a life lived without reference to otherness—to someone or something other than the self—is worse than hell; it is a death. That death of spirit in the midst, life is, of course, the same inner bleakness that afflicts the hollow men, who, like Sweeney, do not know if they are living or dead since there is so little distinction in their impoverished behavior toward others between the one state of being and the other.

Finally, to support the idea that the crisis of the hollow men is a crisis of soul rather than one of mind or attitude, there is Eliot's cautious blending of Dante's vision into his own, so that the ideas and the feelings he is trying to convey are what prevail, suggesting their great importance. Till now, Eliot had used the literary allusion almost as an embellishment, so loudly did its presence among his own original lines of verse announce itself, as if he were more interested in presenting the allusion than in combining it into his own essential vision. While his ability to make the allusion an authentic enhancement rather than a pronounced embellishment of his own poetic aims would not be fully realized, perhaps, until the publication of "Ash-Wednesday" in 1930, in the use of Dante in "The Hollow Men," Eliot is already making something new out of the old, rather than merely laying one atop the other. Someone mindful of Eliot's relatively obvious allusions to Dante in the last stanza of part I and in the second and third stanzas of part IV would surely appreciate their effectiveness in advancing the cause of Eliot's own poetic agenda. These allusions provide the inescapable clue that these hollow men are "lost souls" similar in their spiritual failings to Dante's opportunists. In Eliot's

case, however, such individuals are further removed from even the passions of remorse, a spiritual luxury allowed the damned by Dante. Unlike their semblances in the *Inferno*, Eliot's hollow men are able to witness the beatific vision of the blessed in paradise and thereby feel in real terms the vastness of the distance that separates them personally from blessedness. That the capacity for recognizing their immense shortcomings nevertheless has no ameliorative effect on their behavior is Eliot's way of emphasizing how pathetic their lives are.

A reader who does not recognize these allusions to Dante, however, and the spiritual shortcomings of the hollow men that are thus mapped out by them should nevertheless get the idea of those images of a listless crowd gathered on the shore of a tumid river and gazing up at a distant star described as a multifoliate rose. Such a reader would be no less likely to imagine that there is an immense distance separating the lives that the hollow men live from the possibilities of redemption and salvation that are arrayed before them. For either reader, Eliot has effectively managed to portray an inner state of being in a manner that does not distort his own apparent intentions, or the reader's attention, for the sake of displaying his wide-ranging literary erudition. The effective communication of feeling and idea takes precedence, in "The Hollow Men," over the peculiarities of technique and method. This may very well be a first for Eliot. Eliot finally seems to feel that he has something to say, something to share with his readers. That is not to say that he had not had as much to say before, only that now the importance of its being said seems to supersede the manner in which it gets said. The poet has triumphed over the wit. This final observation, if accepted, ought to permit the reader not to fall prey to the last fatal error in reading great literature—to imagine that, unless the portrait painted is flattering, it is about someone else and not oneself.

When Pound composed for his long and continuing work, *The Cantos*, a section that was intended by him to do for the moral failings of the modern world what Dante's *Inferno* had done for similar failings in his own, Eliot is said to have criticized the work that Pound thereby produced, observing that his friend had "created a Hell for other people, not for us and our friends." It is an astute observation with great general applicability, and certainly with applicability to Eliot's "The Hollow Men." For it would be wrongheaded to imagine that his hollow men are other people and not "us and our friends." Perhaps Eliot's Sweeney is a special case, and perhaps that is why, after the unfinished "Sweeney Agonistes," Eliot never essayed that personage again. But the hollow men, like Prufrock and like the characters who people *The Waste Land* and even perhaps the speaker of "Gerontion," are not special cases at all. Their lives, their world, like so many others' typically end with a whimper rather than a bang, unless there is something else to a life, and to the world and its purpose or purposes. Discovering that something else, and its possible shape and direction, would become more and more the underlying principle that guided Eliot's poetry virtually from this point on.

Further reading

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John Xiros Cooper, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," in John Xiros Cooper *The Cambridge Introduction to T. S. Eliot*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 48-55

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" operates in the same psychoethical regions as "Portrait of a Lady," but with greater penetration and reach. In one respect the poem has already seen past the psychological construction of the self: although psychology was a new discipline at that time, Eliot even then anticipated a postmodern construction of personal identity. Years later, he was to describe this new condition of personhood more explicitly in his essay on the poet Lord Byron. Eliot perceived in Byron his making of "a self that is largely a deliberate fabrication – a fabrication that is only completed in the actual writing of the lines" (PP 203). Prufrock, like Byron, devotes "immense trouble to becoming a role" (205, italics in original), but, unlike Byron, Prufrock, performing what is now a clownish routine, can no longer carry off "such a useless and petty purpose" with the heroic persistence of a Byron (203). In the hundred years that separate Prufrock from Childe Harold, Byron's heroic masquerade suffuses the whole of society but with its heroism in tatters. Prufrock does not exist except as a personality saturated in the vapid egoism that pervades masculinity at every level, from its sociopolitical heights, in a character like the ''romantic aristocrat'' George Wyndham (comically deflated by Eliot in The Sacred Wood, 24–32), down to the faceless, sad clerks in offices. This conscious exploration of the self as a "deliberate fabrication" does not actually begin with Eliot. The Victorian poet Arthur Hugh Clough skirted the same terrain in the character of his antihero Claude, in *Amours de Voyage* (1920).

Oh, 'tisn't manly, of course, 'tisn't manly, this method of wooing;
'Tisn't the way very likely to win. For the woman, they tell you,
Ever prefers the audacious, the wilful, the vehement hero;
She has no heart for the timid, the sensitive soul; and for knowledge.

Moreover, the development of the dramatic monologue precisely in that historical moment when interest peaks in the fascinations of personality and in psychology as a discipline is also very suggestive. For Eliot, however, the dramatic monologue is no longer a vehicle for the exposure of an interesting personality, but an invitation to the reader to experience the dismantling of personality. The monologue invites the reader not simply to observe, but to participate actively in the poet's creation, from the inside as it were, by reenacting subjectively the world of the persona. It was the critic Robert Langbaum who formulated the central

rhetorical tension in the dramatic monologue, namely, "the effect created by the tension between sympathy and moral judgement." The conflict between "sympathy" and "moral judgement" occurs not in the poem itself but in the reader. The tension we feel in reading Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess," for example, lies in our being charmed and delighted by the voice of an attractive personality while knowing, from his own lips, his capacity for barbarity and wickedness. The reader experiences an ambivalent response by which the speaker's wickedness somehow adds point and flavor to his charm. Of course, it is Browning who is responsible for creating this internal tension in the reader. Browning knew his readers better than they knew themselves. He knew the tremendous psychic charge which the exquisite joining in a single personality of the aesthete and the murderer might have on the moral sensibilities of mid-Victorian readers. The creation of a mask or persona, in which the poet disappears, so to speak, and tells his story in the guise of another character, offered Jules Laforgue and Eliot a way of viewing the narrator in what seemed to be an objective or ironic way. The persona can be simple or very elaborate, but it is always at a distance from both author and reader. Indeed, the poet seems to be in a relationship of collusion with the reader in watching and listening to this "character" out there.

Although we may judge a person or character on the basis of their behavior or morals, we may come to understand why they have done what they have done and as a result are drawn into possible sympathy. If they are wrongdoers or fundamentally dishonest or even amoral, our judgments are put into a state of tension with our sympathy for them as human beings. The dramatic monologue's power as poetry and, one supposes, its beauty, lies in just this tension. But we can take this one step further. The reader is always put in a position of taking in the persona in the poem in ways that the persona can never know or understand. This is very common in life. Others see you in ways that you can never know completely or surely; indeed, in all the intimacy of their perception you cannot control another's knowledge in its entirety, no matter what degree of personal disciplining of dress and manner you affect. There is always a gap between what or who you think you are and what or who others make of you. The dramatic monologue brings this gap or fissure to light. And Eliot's interest in this irresolvable dilemma tells us something, perhaps, of his psychology. At least, it can illuminate his literary critical interest in the poetry of impersonality. The need to invent personas and masks is tempered by the horror of how others might see us or might see past our façades, whether in judgment or sympathy, and, for Eliot, sympathy was the greater horror, even more than that of being judged. On one side of this divide lies abjection, abasement, humiliation; on the other, damnation. Eliot gave the name of J. Alfred Prufrock to this condition.

Laforgue led Eliot onto this terrain of poetry not only as an art but as a path to self-knowledge as well. Again and again Eliot would explore in his creative work the experience of abjection. In his poetry especially, he would open his speakers to the sickening dilemma and horror of contingency and the fraught tension between our own sense of self and the uncanny presence of others. The constant pressure of the unpredictable and our awareness of the limits of our knowledge in day-to-day life put into crisis the meaningfulness that gives to existence a semblance of

stability. One can bring a great deal under personal control and give to it some kind of significance, but others are always sources of disruptive and disturbing power simply from their sheer presence out there beyond the reach of our knowledge. The other's presence marks the site where the relentless upwelling of the incalculable always threatens to undercut us. Our reaction to this varies only by the degrees to which the resulting trauma erodes our sense of wellbeing. This experience, so characteristic of modernity, penetrates us in many different ways. It can make us passively abject, dangerously obsessive, depressed, even violent and suicidal. A corpse, for example, represents a particularly sickening limit and puts our own wretched materiality before us; so do other provocative symbols, such as suppurating wounds, waste matter, rotting garbage, sewage, and, as suggested by the theorist of these maladies of the soul, Julia Kristeva, so does something as trivial as the sticky membrane that forms on the surface of hot milk. Beginning in his earliest poetry, Eliot worked through these psychological tropes of inner horror until he was able to find a resolution in the redemptive promise of Christian faith, a point of rest – "still point" would be his phrase – that he would acknowledge in his greatest poem, *Four Quartets* (1944). But in his early collections of poetry and in his masterpiece, *The Waste Land* (1922), Eliot would explore abjection, inner horror, and disgust in a way that would make a whole generation of young people, a generation mutilated by war, come to know his work as if it were their own personal experience. The dramatic monologue form helped him to accomplish this.

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" engages the reader's inner life by involving us in Prufrock's agonies, so that they become our own in the course of the poem. Eliot assembles an array of possible identities: the neurasthenic dandy for one (suggested by the stylistic proximity of Laforgue), the finally and truly damned (Guido de Montefeltro in the epigraph), Hesiod, Michelangelo, John the Baptist, Lazarus, Andrew Marvell, Hamlet, Polonius, and John Donne. The "Prufrock" voice urges us to test these choices of role in a state of nervy passivity. The point of view is only partially psychological here, though many critics and scholars read Prufrock's problems as entirely psychological.

The hell that Prufrock occupies – Guido's speech from Dante's *Inferno* in the epigraph offers the first clue – is interpreted psychologically as something like a severe social phobia. If we return for a moment to Eliot's diagnosis of Byron, "a self that is largely a deliberate fabrication – a fabrication that is only completed in the actual writing of the lines" (my italics) – we can see that the issue cannot be entirely grasped in psychological terms. There is deliberation here and the process is not completed by the "self" in performance, as some form of life theatre, but is "completed" in language, "in the actual writing of the lines." Prufrock's problem is not a bad case of self-consciousness but a more deeply philosophical dilemma. The rattling play of self-images and the increasing awareness of personal identity as a metaphysical fiction unsettle both Prufrock and the reader. What has broken down in the poem is the editorial process by which we fabricate our identities. By editorial process, I mean the cutting and pasting from the given cultural resources that we draw on in putting our selves together, whether from literary works or popular culture. That this new paradigm of the self begins to resemble a collage points toward the more ambitious performance of the same process in *The Waste Land*.

The method of composing by assembling fragments is a means for avoiding linearity, a beginning-middle-and-end narrative, with its suggestion of purposiveness and necessity. Experience and language have lost their unity and resilience. The poem comes to us precisely as an accumulation of pieces, in short, a collage. If anyone were to set “Prufrock” to music, it would have to be to the accompaniment of shattering glass. The method of composition and the portrait of the human subject in the poem mirror each other.

Prufrock is the name of the zone where the usually silent and hidden process of self-fashioning is not only made visible but shown in crisis. As a result, Prufrock’s suspension of the inherited canon of given identities becomes the only possible style that emphasizes a discernible separation from the phallic idiocy of Anglo-American hero worship. The speaker wonders whether he can “force the moment to its crisis” with his female companion. But he cannot find the appropriate role. He is, as he alludes, no John the Baptist or some other charismatic figure. He is in fact abject through and through. “I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker, / And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker, / And in short, I was afraid” (CP 16). The conventional psychosocial mastery of Victorian male style cannot survive many such moments. Corroborative evidence for this can be found in the contemporary writings of Eliot’s Bloomsbury acquaintance, Lytton Strachey. In Eminent Victorians (1918) Strachey’s persona as historian, an innocent searcher after truth, takes on a refreshingly feline plasticity in contrast to his depressingly rigid and obsessed masculine subjects. His four portraits provide an ironic survey of male style among the Victorians – including, most comically, that virile proconsul of hygiene, Florence Nightingale. If we look past what the poem offers as drama, the performance of the speaker’s anxieties, we find that it makes us look past inherited conventions of being: the existence, as we have noted, of an unshakable identity, expressed as the mask of personality, or of the existence of a will to power, of clearly marked gender differences, of male authority, and so on. These, in traditional settings, often act to regulate behavior and self-knowledge.

“Prufrock” opens a vista on the working of these conventions through the poem’s system of displacements. This is expressed in a number of ways and it becomes Eliot’s principal operating procedure throughout his career. It begins in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” where something like disparagement is at work. But it is not limited to the disparagement of an individual character named Prufrock. It extends to ways of writing and to certain kinds of poetry. Hugh Kenner in Invisible Poet hears Tennyson mocked in the reverberations of

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo (13)

and in

I grow old . . . I grow old . . .
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled. (CP 17)

Kenner suggests that the lines both destroy and recreate an established poetic discourse. The early critics of modernism often interpreted these destructive maneuvers as discursive purgatives, that is, a way of revitalizing moribund literary traditions. There is also something more radical at work. It is not only certain surpassed forms of poetry that are questioned but language itself. “The lines don’t stand in an assured, ironic relationship to Victorian mannerisms: deep down, they turn in on themselves, insecure, self-doubting. Their sounds and their sense slide apart. The mock-heroic disproportion within the language becomes the means of revealing a radical flaw.” Eliot interferes with the conventional processes of making poetry. Direct statements lose their straightforward character. Not “I have gone at dusk through narrow streets” but “Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets . . . ?” (15, my italics). Uncertainties of expression bleed into uncertainties of action, “Should I, after tea and cakes and ices, / Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?” (15–16). The imperative gesture at the beginning of the poem, “Let us go then you and I” (13), is immediately immobilized in the operating room simile. This method of composition raises an important structural potential in the poem that is not often noticed. Prufrock can say anything, he is faced with enormous possibility; but he cannot say anything that communicates decision or even meaning. In terms of the process of the poem, at any particular point Eliot could go anywhere, but nowhere is necessary, or right. The writing here has attenuated or lost its sense of direction or destination. The wandering in the streets (or on the beach at the end) tropes the unstitching of one of the usual necessities of expression, that this is speech with a mission. The line quoted above is only a possible sentence; its assertiveness is undercut by the continual self-questioning (“Shall I say . . .?”). We are left with a poem, but only one from among the many that might have been. The lyric’s normally compelling trajectory of feeling or emotion decays on the terrain of the subjunctive.

It also silences or displaces the lover’s lyricism, the love song of the title. Prufrock recognizes from afar the luminosity of lyrical song, “I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each” (17). The reference to Donne’s song “Catch a falling star” evokes the tradition of lyrical intensity, a place where language is radiant and active, where human voices, Donne’s in this case, have the capacity for achieving song. Prufrock can only caricature this kind of lyricism; indeed, he cannot believe that it can be addressed to him – “I do not think that they will sing to me” (17). Again and again the poem cites inner authority wryly in order to dash it to the ground, “I am no prophet – and here’s no great matter” (16). The poem refuses to legitimate the human subject on the basis of simple lyric effusiveness. Shelley might be able to write in 1822

The keen stars were twinkling
And the fair moon was rising among them,
Dear Jane!
The guitar was tinkling
But the notes were not sweet till you sung them
Again.

By 1917 this emotional confidence lies in ruins. “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” refuses at every point to reproduce the emotional satisfactions of the love song. The affective, perhaps libidinal, unity for which “Jane” stands in Shelley’s poem has been replaced by the libidinal obsessiveness of the fetishist: “Arms that are braceleted and white and bare / (But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)” (15). The displacement of a lyric paradigm eludes both the structural pull of traditional verse forms and the constraints of a problematic subjectivity. The particular sound-shape of lines such as “Do I dare / Disturb the universe?” (14) is controlled not by genre, mode, or prosodic requirements, nor by the needs imposed by a philosophical idea or theme in the usual sense, but by the accumulated anxiety that the preceding lines constitute as a comic derangement of the persona of the late Victorian man of action. His decisiveness, it turns out, is propped up by his costume: “My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin” (14), the word “firmly” capturing here an elusive irony whereby resolve hollowly becomes a function of gentlemanly scrupulousness of dress.

What the poem brings vividly to our ears is the stammering into which a certain privileged humanist discourse has degenerated by Eliot’s time. Stripped of all its typical maneuvers or camouflage, the human subject is laid bare. The Renaissance ideal of “Man” as the measure of all things has shrivelled to a “pair of ragged claws / Scuttling across the floors of silent seas” (15). Yet the sympathy we are asked to feel is not for the existential agonies of “modern man” hoping to have a heart-to-heart conversation in a world of chit-chat, but something more important than that. The poem silently laments the absence of an external or historical measure or standard for human agency, a criterion embodied in institutions (such as a church, for example) that give individual identities not only metaphysical density but meaning as well. What I mean by this is simply that we cannot ascend from the details of experience in “Prufrock” to a framing cosmology, as we can, say, in any of Donne’s dramatic lyrics. “The Canonization” is an instance, no matter what mutations of tone the speaker performs, of the imperturbability of the Christian cosmos, not just as doctrine, but as a web of living norms, a model of thought, feeling, and conduct. The speaker’s defiance in defence of a singular love at the beginning of Donne’s poem, in which, at first, separation from the world is emphasized, slowly dissolves as he finds his way back under the symbolic canopy of Christian values from which, he discovers, the lovers have never really escaped. The changing tonalities of the speaking voice signal the phases of this motion without movement. Donne begins with an angry outburst which protects the libidinal integrity of the lovers. It ends in the celebratory calm of their inclusion through the ageless rituals of a historical community of feeling and belief.

Harriet Davidson, “Improper desire: reading *The Waste Land*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot*, edited by A. David Moody, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 121-131.

When Ezra Pound read the manuscript of *The Waste Land* at the end of 1921, he objected to Eliot's epigraph from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899):

> Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge? He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision, - he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath - "The horror! the horror!"

Pound argued that Conrad was not "weighty" enough for an epigraph, while Eliot, unsure about whether Pound objected to this quotation or to Conrad himself, responded that the passage was the most "appropriate" and "elucidative" he could find (Letters 1, pp. 497 and 504). Pound won out in the end, for Eliot replaced this quotation with the present epigraph from Petronius' *Satyricon*, a passage in Latin and Greek which in its ancient and mythic references could be said to present the reader with a much weightier, indeed, intimidating opening to the poem:

> Nam Sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse oculis meis vidi in ampulla pendere, et cum illi pueri dicerent: Σιβυλλα τι θελεις; respondebat illa: αποθανειν θελω.

The passage from the *Satyricon* is appropriate to the poem in its references to imprisonment and desire for death, and in its connection to the Greek and Roman beginnings of European civilization. But the passage is hardly elucidative, both because the ancient languages themselves need to be elucidated for most readers and because the story of the Sibyl only ambiguously relates to the contemporary situation Eliot evokes in the poem. Indeed, the Sibyl's wish to escape her living death of immortality through a real death is put into immediate contrast with the opening of the poem which seems to yearn for the living death the Sibyl can no longer bear. The story of the Sibyl remains another disjointed piece of this puzzling poem.

More than accessibility was lost with the decision to begin with Petronius rather than Conrad. The change suppresses Eliot's appreciation of his contemporaries, instead impressing upon the reader the seriousness of classical scholarship. And importantly, the reader loses a helpful psychologizing of the emotional tone of the poem in Conrad's depiction of Kurtz's horror at his improper acts, so contrasted with Eliot's images of Prufrockian timidity and propriety. Kurtz's response of horror is not to an empty or even necessarily meaningless life, but to his rather too full embrace of human possibilities quite beyond the bounds of "proper" behavior.

The Waste Land can be read as a poem about the proper and the improper. Eliot's change of epigraph is one of many circumstances that contribute to emphasizing what we might call the "proper" side of this poem, that is, its scholarly apparatus, its respect for tradition, and its recoil from the chaos of life, rather than its "improper" side—its equally apparent lack of respect for tradition and poetic method and its fascination with mutation, degradation, and fragmentation. Proper

means not only respectable or correct, but also in its etymology as "own" it means belonging to one thing, connecting the proper not only to social propriety, but also to property and the jealous guarding of boundaries. The poem returns again and again to "improper" sexual desire, temptation, and surrender and their often tragic consequences. The poem also, in its interest in metamorphosis and use of quick juxtapositions, blurs the proper boundaries between things; different characters and voices confusingly mutate into each other. Most obviously, the poem questions the boundaries between poems, liberally appropriating other poets' property as its own. As any reader of *The Waste Land* knows, none of this is done in the spirit of play; the overriding tone of the poem seems to yearn to be rid of improper desires, setting up a deep contradiction within the poem.

This contradiction, along with the poem's lack of thematic clarity and its careful refusal of connections between images, scenes and voices, makes *The Waste Land* particularly open to different interpretations. In fact, it is a measure of the poem's indigestibility that many of the controversies surrounding the poem when it was published in 1922 persist today. Readers in the twenties argued over whether the poem was too radical and meaningless or too conservative and tied to traditional values. New readers are still likely to come away from the poem bewildered by the many voices, allusions, and shifting tones of the poem. And professional critics still argue over the most basic of issues: what voice, if any, dominates the poem, what themes control the poem, and what values are upheld by the poem?

Given these unresolved questions, it seems surprising that the poem has come to seem such a monolithic representative of the long dominant New Critical values. Early New Critical readings of the poem canonized the poem as the exemplar (even origin) of a kind of high modernism that powerfully depicts and rejects modern life, valorizing myth over history, spatial form over time, an orderly past over a chaotic present, and the transcendence of art over the pain of life - what I would call the proper over the improper. Recent, politically minded critics make similar observations to dismiss the poem as the worst, most conservative side of modernism.[1] These interpretations tend to concur that the barren waste of the poem's title is a metaphor for the chaotic life within the poem and that the enormous longing to escape that life implies that a world of greater propriety, of stability, order, and beauty must exist somewhere, usually in a transcendent realm of the past, of religion, or of the aesthetic imagination. But the power of the poem, I will argue, comes from its refusal to supply anything to appease the longing for propriety. The poem treats myth, history, art, and religion as subject to the same fragmentation, appropriation, and degradation as modern life — nothing transcends the effects of finitude and change brought on by the regeneration of April. The strong binary oppositions in the poem between desert and water, emptiness and crowdedness, suggest that the barren waste can be read as different from, and in opposition to, the chaotic life in the poem, not as a metaphor for it.

In this reading, the empty unchanging desert represents what would happen if our wish to escape the uncertainties of life through absolutes, transcendence, or, like the Sibyl, immortality were to be granted. Sadly, the only alternative to the human world of thwarted and degraded desires, loss, change, and confusion is a barren waste. While the poem provides an emotional and often visceral critique of

the state of human life, it equally provides a critique of the desire to transcend and escape that life, and it offers no alternatives beyond that life or the persistence of that desire.

Eliot's prose writings of the time, especially his philosophical writings, show very clearly that the young Eliot believed that nothing transcends the finite and particular world. In these writings, particularly his dissertation written for a doctorate in philosophy, he challenges the philosophical notion of a transcendent Absolute, either Ideal or Real, and argues that change and diversity alone are absolute, thus undermining the stability and unity of all ideas, things, and personalities. But Eliot is no relativist; he admits that things, selves, and ideas often seem clear and fixed. Eliot's philosophical position resembles the pragmatism of his professors at Harvard: the world is neither objective nor subjective, nor empirically verifiable, but also not relative for each individual. Instead, selves and objects simultaneously arise out of and create a shared culture, giving us the strange situation in which, "We are certain of everything - relatively, and of nothing - positively" (KE p. 157). Our certainty is only within a particular, historical, cultural context, which will, inevitably, change for better or worse.

His prose presents all this rather matter-of-factly, but the young Eliot's poetry is haunted by the metaphysical uncertainty about the self and the cultural dependence of identity; the poetry is by turns bitingly satiric about social roles and despairing of any more authentic existence. The older Eliot solved his dilemma about the self by embracing the most stable culture and tradition he could find and accepting the identity it gave him, thus becoming a royalist, Anglican, and proper Englishman. These actions are consistent with his rejection of an idea of the authentic self, but they suppress the instability and fragmentation of the actual self and world. His embrace of a conventional British identity and his often reactionary arguments for homogeneous and stable cultures suggest a dauntingly complacent cultural conservatism that effectively hides the experimental and improper impulses of his youth. Just as in *The Waste Land* the powerfully rendered voice yearning to escape life under the forgetful snow has had a disproportionate effect on subsequent readers, so Eliot's image of propriety has had enormous impact on the study of his poetry (and indeed all literature) up through the 1960s.

The Waste Land strongly reveals the unruly forces of improper desire in its emotional yearning, in its constant return to sexual tragedy, and in its disorienting juxtapositions and displacements. But the textual history of the poem, from draft, to edited version, to published version with endnotes, tends to tame some of the unruliness of the poem. The manuscript draft of the poem, which is even more various than the final poem, includes three long narrative sections cut in the final version by Pound and by Eliot himself. These cuts excise Eliot's rawer side: scenes of drunkenness, whoring, urinating, defecating, and bigotry are removed from the poem and from Eliot's emerging public persona. And with the removal of the manuscript's comic, narrative opening, the poem foregrounds the life-denying voice, which begins by recoiling from spring: "April is the cruellest month."

Perhaps even more important for confusing understanding of the poem are the notes which were not originally attached to it but were added only for the book version.[2] The notes focused critical attention on the scholarly exegesis of sources

and allusions, and encouraged the kind of source hunting that began to take over readings of the poem. Eliot may not have intended them to be taken so seriously, and may even have been playing an elaborate and highly successful practical joke on the academic profession. He was later to write, “I regret having sent so many enquirers off on a wild goose chase after Tarot cards and the Holy Grail.”[3] Nevertheless, the notes seemed to offer a key to the poem and to promise a full and scientifically accurate explanation which would overcome its fragmentation and suggestiveness. Regretfully or not, Eliot had endorsed a public image of scholarly propriety and encouraged interpretations which tended to erase the improper side of the poem in favor of its proper, pedagogic side.

Knowing the story of the quest for the Grail or the significance of the Tarot does not, of course, hurt when reading *The Waste Land*, Stones of death and renewal or damnation and salvation, from the Grail legends and fertility myths outlined by Jessie Weston in *From Ritual to Romance*, and from Dante's *Divine Comedy*, greatly haunted Eliot's imagination and contributed to his conversion to Christianity in 1927. But part of Eliot's interest in the anthropological work of Weston and of Sir James Frazer in *The Golden Bough* may have lain in the examination of the many variants and mutations in fertility myths over time. As Weston's and Frazer's work powerfully shows, there is no proper or original form of these myths. In Eliot's own variant on these stories in *The Waste Land*, death is never redeemed by any clear salvation, and barrenness is relieved only by a chaotic multiplicity, which is not only an ironic kind of fertility, but is also the distinctly urban chaos that the young Eliot appreciated as conducive to his work [Letters 1 p. 55). The other lesson of the fertility myths, in which a sacrificial death (often a ritual death by water) is necessary for life to continue, is the connection of life and death. Death is not the only horror, as the Sibyl, incapacitated with age and loneliness after being granted her wish for immortality, well knows. Kurtz's cry of horror at the vision of his wretched life and death is matched by the Sibyl's horror at a sterile, changeless state without life, death, love, or loss.[4]

The Waste Land suggests both horrors. Imagistically, the "little life with dried tubers" (1, line 7) and the dry, unchanging desert contrast throughout the poem with life-giving rain and the drowning sea. The images are supported by two distinct ways of speaking. The lyric voice opening the poem uses highly metaphoric, often symbolic images and speaks in repetitive, stylized syntax, suggesting on the one hand order and propriety, and on the other hand stasis. This voice speaks with authority and finality as it recurs in scenes throughout the poem where the vision of barrenness and revulsion from life is intensely clear and controlled.

This voice contrasts with the babel of many voices speaking in metonymically rendered narrative scenes full of movement and change. These other voices resist categorization, ranging from vivid characters such as Marie, the hyacinth girl, Stetson's friend, Madame Sosostris, the nervous woman, the pub woman, Tiresias, and the Thames daughters, to the non-human voices of the nightingale, the cock, and the thunder, and the voices from literature in the many allusions in the poem. The many abrupt changes and mutations in the voices of the poem often blur the proper boundaries between identities, further increasing the reader's confusion about

who is speaking. Both modes - of sterile propriety and fertile impropriety - cause despair, but neither is repudiated entirely. Much of the drama of this poem comes from the interweaving and crisscrossing of these two modes as desire disrupts order and desire for order sets up paradoxical and unbearable tensions. The poem frustrates the reader's attempts to follow themes or images in an orderly way; rather, in the best modernist spirit, form gives us a lesson in mutability that is well illustrated from the very opening of the poem.

"The Burial of the Dead" famously begins with a desire for stasis and anxiety about the change, growth, and sexuality symbolized by April and the spring rain. The slow, repetitive syntax and hanging participles -"breeding," "mixing," "stirring" - seem to freeze and control the movement in the first seven lines. This despairing opening voice is universal and dislocated; it is not in a narrative, nor does it speak to the reader. The clarity and authority of this voice mark it as the voice of propriety, wanting to maintain clear boundaries and rules, and, at its most extreme, hoping to halt forward movement and stop the proliferation of possibilities in life or language. As readers of The Waste Land, we tend to privilege this voice because we, too, would like clarity and the stability of a proper meaning for this confusing poem. But the desire for stability, the desire to end desire, is always a paradoxical one. If we follow recent psychoanalytic theory, we could say that desire is both caused by the lack of absolutes in human life, the inevitable finitude and change, and causes change in its restless search for something to relieve this lack. The reader's interpretation, like any desire for order, is really just another proliferation of possibility, not at all a stabilizing of the poem. In this sense all desire is improper desire, disrupting clarity and stability in favor of change and movement. And the figure of desire, that endless movement from object to object, is metonymy.5 Thus, in these opening lines the desire for stasis brings about change.

Line eight begins as if to continue the rhythm and tone of the preceding lines, but then the syntax suddenly mutates into a chatty and incidental narrative:

> Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee
> With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
> And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten,
> And drank coffee, and talked for an hour. (i, lines 8—n)

Now the participle "coming" is not left hanging to indicate continuingaction by the generic "Summer," but is connected to its object indicating anaction of limited duration by a particular "us." With the syntactic shift from metaphoric similarity to metonymic contiguity, we have left the angst and symbolic world of the opening lines and entered a realist, fairly neutral narrative world replete with the familiar cultural actions of talking, walking, and drinking coffee. In spite of this simple familiarity, most readers feel anxious when confronted with this new turn in the poem. The clear ideas and syntax established in the opening lines no longer control the poem, and attempts to continue a symbolic reading of these lines founder on the difficulty of turning metonymic details like drinking coffee into metaphoric meaning. Not only the coffee in the Hofgarten, but also the overheard line in German, Madame Sosostris's bad cold, LiPs teeth, the typist's stockings, all seem to

function as metonymic details from the culture of the time, and they generate a context and a chain of associations which tend to disperse clear meanings.

The speaker of these lines also seems more particularized than in the opening lines, and in lines thirteen to eighteen the clearly gendered voice of Marie further disrupts the expectation of universality. Her story also ignores the metaphors established at the opening; now snow is associated with memory and desire as she remembers a thrilling sled ride with her cousin.

Marie, along with the many other women characters in the poem, is associated in a traditional way with sexual desire, fertility, and generation. But quite untraditionally the poem concerns itself not just with women as objects of desire, but also with women as subjects with desires. Marie, Madame Sosostris, the nervous lady and pub lady of part n, the Thames daughters from part in, all bring their own yearnings to this poem; the female perspective, particular and sexual unlike the ungendered metaphoric voice, insists on the continuation of desire but also shows how often desire leads to frustration, ennui, and violence. The narrative world Eliot gives us as an alternative to the little life of dried tubers is driven by desires, but not often happily. The rather neutral scene in the Hofgarten metonymically moves into the emotionally charged story of Marie which ends abruptly in a scene of loneliness and deadening routine: "I read much of the night and go south in the winter" (i, line 18). Once we enter the everyday world, we also enter the world of loss, unfulfilled desire and, inevitably, death.

The movement from metaphoric enclosure to metonymic movement is repeated twice more in "The Burial of the Dead" - as the metaphoric voice tries to control the improper desires, and the metonymic voice breaks out of this control. First, the horrifying red rock section (i, lines 19—30) returns to a symbolic mode of commanding finality. But it is interrupted by the German allusion to the great story of improper love, Tristan und Isolde, by the narrative of desire and loss in the hyacinth girl passage, and then by the comic realism of Madame Sosostris. Second, the "Unreal City" passage (i, lines 60—68) returns to a symbolic, static vision of London as a suffocating hell, but here the symbolic enclosure is burst apart by the narrative address to Stetson and then to the reader. The energy of these final lines transgresses a variety of boundaries in their wild historical mixing, grisly violation of the grave, and dense allusiveness. The allusion to Baudelaire in the last line "'You! hypocrite lecteur! - mon semblable, - mon frere!'" (1, line 76) confusingly blurs the narrator's voice with Baudelaire, Stetson, and the reader. We, too, are metonymically drawn into the chain of desire in our search for final meanings in a poem which suggests these meanings but then denies them any stability. The function of allusion in The Waste Land has been much debated; allusion can be considered a metaphoric device, which depends on similarities between the text alluded to and the present text. But allusion is also a dispersive figure, multiplying contexts for both the present work and the text alluded to and suggesting a cultural, historical dimension of difference.

For instance, the jolting allusion to Tristan und Isolde in this section has a certain propriety for the poem because of its theme of tragic love and its images of fresh wind and water complementing the stirrings of April. But the reader is first struck by the different, perhaps unfamiliar, language and scene, which needs translation,

interpretation, and contextualizing. While it is surely a relief to turn away from the chilling symbolism of the "handful of dust" (1, line 30), the reader ends up in a land of confusing particularity and unfulfilled desires.

The introduction of the impersonal, culturally resonant story of starcrossed love leads the speaker to a more personal and therefore more unbearable memory of love and loss in the hyacinth girl section. But even here the unbearable trauma, figured as silence and paralysis, is diffused by another allusion to Tristan: "Oed* und leer das Meer" (1, line 42). The image of the empty sea is an objective correlative for the desolate silence of the speaker. But as an allusion to a German opera, the line counters the speaker's sense of emptiness with cultural plenitude, leading the poem and the reader right back out into interpretation (and translation) and away from silence. Positioned in this way, the allusion to Wagner seems to reach in two directions at once: it both supports some emerging themes of the poem in its watery images and story of tragic love, and it also disperses attention away from clear themes to disorderly interpretation. In general, the allusions in The Waste Land disperse clear meanings into other contexts, undermine the notion of authentic speaking, and blur boundaries between texts. I will discuss the middle three sections of The Waste Land only briefly before ending with a closer look at the final section, "What the Thunder Said." Section n, "A Game of Chess," seems to be thematically centered on a sterile vision of modern life, especially in lines 135—38. But this vision is countered by the narrative animation of the scenes: the sensuous movement of objects in the boudoir, the hysterical woman's insistent questioning, the playful mutation of Shakespeare to a "Shakespeherian Rag," the pub lady's vivid chatter - all suggest the continuation of desire under the static surface.

But desire is also particularly tragic for the women of this section, from the allusions to the love suicides of Cleopatra, Dido, and Ophelia (11, lines 77, 92, and 172) and the rape of Philomela, to the loneliness of the nervous woman and the sad domestic life of Lil. Philomela's story (11, lines 97-103), a picture animated into a narrative, is a paradigm of the simultaneously destructive and creative force of desire. After being raped, Philomela is transformed into the nightingale whose song is often a symbol for the poet. But her transcendence of violence is not eternal: her "inviolable voice" is changed into "'Jug Jug' to dirty ears," as the chain of transforming desire leaves nothing inviolate, nothing static.

"The Fire Sermon" refers to Buddha's sermon on the purification of sexual desire. But this section is ruled by water, primarily the river Thames, first described as "sweet" and later as sweating "oil and tar" (111, lines 176 and 267). The mutating panoply of scenes in this section shows desire unleashed, momentarily in love and beauty, more typically in degradation and despair.

But Eliot's notes to "The Fire Sermon" also point to a pattern of music which, like the nightingale's song, arises from desire. At the end when the speaker tries to burn away his desires, the music of the poetry, too, is reduced to syntactic incoherence until only the single word "burning" remains (m, lines 308—11). This ending starkly contrasts with the short, musical lyric which follows it. "Death by Water" counters both spiritual burning and linguistic aphasia with the sea and with easy syntactic connections, especially in its many rhythmic pairs. The peaceful surrender of the body to the water suggests an acceptance of death and change, a gentle

memento mori in opposition to the anxiety about change at the end of "The Fire Sermon." But the burning returns at the beginning of "What the Thunder Said" with "the torchlight red on sweaty faces" (v, line 322). This final section returns to a barren waste, an inhuman landscape where repetition suggests a pointless circularity. The continuing force of desire is suggested in lines 346-59 as the imagination tries to break out of the sterility of the desert by thinking "If there were water . . ." Trying to imagine water, the voice metonymically moves from the rock to "a pool among the rock" to the "sound of water" and finally to music once again as these lines culminate in imagining the singing of the hermit thrush in the pine trees and the "drip drop" of water.

This magical metamorphosis abruptly stops as the categorical voice of the desert insists, "But there is no water." Still, change cannot be stopped. Immediately after this line, the clarity of the desert dissolves and visions begin to proliferate wildly, from the uncertain vision of "another one walking beside you" (v, line 362), the unclear "Murmur of maternal lamentation" (v, line 367), to the city that "cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air" (v, line 372). These visions culminate in the surreal scene of a woman fiddling on her hair, of bats with baby faces, and of upside-down towers. This vision is deeply improper, not respecting conventional metonymical association. And the impropriety is a sign that desire has not been burned away. Instead, the continuation of desire is announced rather forthrightly in the crow of the cock, the flash of lightning, and the welcome gush of rain:

> Only a cock stood on the rooftree
> Co co rico co co rico
> In a flash of lightning. Then a damp gust
> Bringing rain (v, lines 392-95)

These lines rewrite the formal strategy of the opening lines; here the participle "bringing" is attached to its object, giving a sense of release to the sexual and spiritual desire in these lines. Appropriately, the voice of the thunder is neither categorical, proper, nor clear; it is a meaningless syllable, "DA," which needs to be interpreted, starting another chain of dispersion and obscurity. The thunder is interpreted in the Sanskrit words "Datta," "Dayadhvam," "Damyata," allusions to the fable of the thunder in the Upanishads, a different and perhaps unfamiliar cultural context. The translations of these words into the English imperatives "give," "sympathize," and "control" are further interpreted in the poem in enigmatic lyrics.

Many readers find these three lyrics and the allusive ending of the poem which follows some of the most difficult lines of the poem, and they have been interpreted variously as showing resignation, salvation, or nihilism.

The sense of change, variety and movement is strong in these lines, as is the sense of being in a social, cultural world. In the first lyric (v, lines 401-10), the voice is conversational, opening out to the reader in the address to "my friend" and the use of the first person plural words "we" and "our":

> Datta: what have we given?
> My friend, blood shaking my heart
> The awful daring of a moment's surrender
> Which an age of prudence can never retract

By this, and this only, we have existed (v, lines 402-6)

The surrender to desire, to the shaking heart, is life, not the safety of prudence nor the lifeless, "empty rooms" (v, line 410). In the subsequent lyric (v, lines 411—17) both the images of the prison and of the key connect with the Sibyl's lonely prison of immortality; the desire for the key, the clear answer, the end to human troubles, is what ironically "confirms a prison," while the revivifying "aethereal rumors" of twilight represent yearning and possibility (v, lines 414—15).6 Most importantly and optimistically, in the third lyric (v, lines 418-23) the image of the sailboat both propelled by and controlling the wind and water combines the force of desire and control. In this image order and control are linked to the continuation of desire in the boat's movement across the water.

At the end of the poem, the desire for order and the surrender to the chaotic desires of life remain in tension. The speaker sits by the sea, turning his back on the "arid plain" of the desert. Still he asks, "Shall I at least set my lands in order?" (v, line 426) indicating the continuation of a quest for order and meaning. But the speaker is answered by a series of allusions which are neither properly "my lands" nor in any discernible order. The lines themselves speak of disintegration and disorder, madness and desire. And the variety of voices here, speaking in different languages and different tones, indicates a world rich with possibility as well as confusion, with salvation as well as loss. The ending is deeply improper, not respecting boundaries between poems, between cultures, or between voices. The impropriety suggests the disrupting power of desire in The Waste Land. The passionate and paradoxical desire to end desires leads only to the continuation of life in all its variousness, confusions, tragedies, and improper desires.

NOTES

1 See, for instance, Terry Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology (1976; London: Verso, 1978), pp. 145—51; also Sandra M. Gilbert, "Costumes of the Mind: Transvestism as Metaphor in Modern Literature," Critical Inquiry 7 (1980): 400—4.

2 The Waste Land was published in the Fall, 1922 in the Dial in New York and the Criterion in London. In December it was published in book form by Boni and Liveright with the notes included.

3 Quoted in Hugh Kenner Invisible Poet (New York: McDowell, 1959), p. 151.

4 In an essay on Baudelaire written in 1930, Eliot writes, "it is better, in a paradoxical way, to do evil than to do nothing: at least we exist," SE (1950), p. 380.

5 See Jacques Lacan's discussion of metonymy and desire in "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud," Ecrits: A Selection (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1977), pp. 146-75.

6 In his notes to The Waste Land, Eliot quotes F. H. Bradley's statement of solipsism in relation to these lines, but in his dissertation of 1916 Eliot is at some pains to refute the possibility of solipsism, saying that the sense of self only comes with a sense of others (KE, p. 150).

SELECTED PROSE AND POETRY

Tradition and the Individual Talent

In English writing we seldom speak of tradition, though we occasionally apply its name in deploring its absence. We cannot refer to "the tradition" or to "a tradition"; at most, we employ the adjective in saying that the poetry of So-and-so is "traditional" or even "too traditional." Seldom, perhaps, does the word appear except in a phrase of censure. If otherwise, it is vaguely approbative, with the implication, as to the work approved, of some pleasing archaeological reconstruction. You can hardly make the word agreeable to English ears without this comfortable reference to the reassuring science of archaeology.

Certainly the word is not likely to appear in our appreciations of living or dead writers. Every nation, every race, has not only its own creative, but its own critical turn of mind; and is even more oblivious of the shortcomings and limitations of its critical habits than of those of its creative genius. We know, or think we know, from the enormous mass of critical writing that has appeared in the French language the critical method or habit of the French; we only conclude (we are such unconscious people) that the French are "more critical" than we, and sometimes even plume ourselves a little with the fact, as if the French were the less spontaneous. Perhaps they are; but we might remind ourselves that criticism is as inevitable as breathing, and that we should be none the worse for articulating what passes in our minds when we read a book and feel an emotion about it, for criticizing our own minds in their work of criticism. One of the facts that might come to light in this process is our tendency to insist, when we praise a poet, upon those aspects of his work in which he least resembles any one else. In these aspects or parts of his work we pretend to find what is individual, what is the peculiar essence of the man. We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors; we endeavour to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed. Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously. And I do not mean the impressionable period of adolescence, but the period of full maturity.

Yet if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, "tradition" should positively be discouraged. We have seen many such simple currents soon lost in the sand; and novelty is better than repetition. Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to any one who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only

of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism. The necessity that he shall conform, that he shall cohere, is not onesided; what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. And the poet who is aware of this will be aware of great difficulties and responsibilities.

In a peculiar sense he will be aware also that he must inevitably be judged by the standards of the past. I say judged, not amputated, by them; not judged to be as good as, or worse or better than, the dead; and certainly not judged by the canons of dead critics. It is a judgment, a comparison, in which two things are measured by each other. To conform merely would be for the new work not really to conform at all; it would not be new, and would therefore not be a work of art. And we do not quite say that the new is more valuable because it fits in; but its fitting in is a test of its value—a test, it is true, which can only be slowly and cautiously applied, for we are none of us infallible judges of conformity. We say: it appears to conform, and is perhaps individual, or it appears individual, and many conform; but we are hardly likely to find that it is one and not the other.

To proceed to a more intelligible exposition of the relation of the poet to the past: he can neither take the past as a lump, an indiscriminate bolus, nor can he form himself wholly on one or two private admirations, nor can he form himself wholly upon one preferred period. The first course is inadmissible, the second is an important experience of youth, and the third is a pleasant and highly desirable supplement. The poet must be very conscious of the main current, which does not at all flow invariably through the most distinguished reputations. He must be quite aware of the obvious fact that art never improves, but that the material of art is never quite the same. He must be aware that the mind of Europe—the mind of his own country—a mind which he learns in time to be much more important than his own private mind—is a mind which changes, and that this change is a development

which abandons nothing *en route*, which does not superannuate either Shakespeare, or Homer, or the rock drawing of the Magdalenian draughtsmen. That this development, refinement perhaps, complication certainly, is not, from the point of view of the artist, any improvement. Perhaps not even an improvement from the point of view of the psychologist or not to the extent which we imagine; perhaps only in the end based upon a complication in economics and machinery. But the difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show.

Some one said: "The dead writers are remote from us because we *know* so much more than they did." Precisely, and they are that which we know.

I am alive to a usual objection to what is clearly part of my programme for the *métier* of poetry. The objection is that the doctrine requires a ridiculous amount of erudition (pedantry), a claim which can be rejected by appeal to the lives of poets in any pantheon. It will even be affirmed that much learning deadens or perverts poetic sensibility. While, however, we persist in believing that a poet ought to know as much as will not encroach upon his necessary receptivity and necessary laziness, it is not desirable to confine knowledge to whatever can be put into a useful shape for examinations, drawing-rooms, or the still more pretentious modes of publicity. Some can absorb knowledge, the more tardy must sweat for it. Shakespeare acquired more essential history from Plutarch than most men could from the whole British Museum. What is to be insisted upon is that the poet must develop or procure the consciousness of the past and that he should continue to develop this consciousness throughout his career.

What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.

There remains to define this process of depersonalization and its relation to the sense of tradition. It is in this depersonalization that art may be said to approach the condition of science. I, therefore, invite you to consider, as a suggestive analogy, the action which takes place when a bit of finely filiated platinum is introduced into a chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide.

II

Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation are directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry. If we attend to the confused cries of the newspaper critics and the *susurrus* of popular repetition that follows, we shall hear the names of poets in great numbers; if we seek not Blue-book knowledge but the enjoyment of poetry, and ask for a poem, we shall seldom find it. I have tried to point out the importance of the relation of the poem to other poems by other authors, and suggested the conception of poetry as a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written. The other aspect of this Impersonal theory of poetry is the relation of the poem to its author. And I hinted, by an analogy, that the mind of the mature poet differs from that of the immature one not precisely in any valuation of "personality," not being necessarily more interesting, or having "more to say," but rather by being a more finely perfected medium in which special, or very varied, feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations.

The analogy was that of the catalyst. When the two gases previously mentioned are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulphurous acid. This combination takes place only if the platinum is present; nevertheless the newly formed acid contains no trace of platinum, and the platinum itself is apparently unaffected; has remained inert, neutral, and unchanged. The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum. It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material.

The experience, you will notice, the elements which enter the presence of the transforming catalyst, are of two kinds: emotions and feelings. The effect of a work of art upon the person who enjoys it is an experience different in kind from any experience not of art. It may be formed out of one emotion, or may be a combination of several; and various feelings, inhering for the writer in particular words or phrases or images, may be added to compose the final result. Or great poetry may be made without the direct use of any emotion whatever: composed out of feelings solely. Canto XV of the *Inferno* (Brunetto Latini) is a working up of the emotion evident in the situation; but the effect, though single as that of any work of art, is obtained by considerable complexity of detail. The last quatrain gives an image, a feeling attaching to an image, which "came," which did not develop simply out of what precedes, but which was probably in suspension in the poet's mind until the proper combination arrived for it to add itself to. The poet's mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together.

If you compare several representative passages of the greatest poetry you see how great is the variety of types of combination, and also how completely any semi-ethical criterion of "sublimity" misses the mark. For it is not the "greatness," the intensity, of the emotions, the components, but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place, that counts. The episode of Paolo and Francesca employs a definite emotion, but the intensity of the poetry is something quite different from whatever intensity in the supposed experience it may give the impression of. It is no more intense, furthermore, than Canto XXVI, the voyage of Ulysses, which has not the direct dependence upon an emotion. Great variety is possible in the process of transmutation of emotion: the murder of Agamemnon, or the agony of Othello, gives an artistic effect apparently closer to a possible original than the scenes from Dante. In the *Agamemnon*, the artistic emotion approximates to the emotion of an actual spectator; in *Othello* to the emotion of the protagonist himself. But the difference between art and the event is always absolute; the combination which is the murder of Agamemnon is probably as complex as that which is the voyage of Ulysses. In either case there has been a fusion of elements. The ode of Keats contains a number of feelings which have nothing particular to do with the nightingale, but which the nightingale, partly, perhaps, because of its attractive name, and partly because of its reputation, served to bring together.

The point of view which I am struggling to attack is perhaps related to the metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul: for my meaning is, that the poet has, not a "personality" to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways. Impressions and experiences which are important for the man may take no place in the poetry, and those which become important in the poetry may play quite a negligible part in the man, the personality.

I will quote a passage which is unfamiliar enough to be regarded with fresh attention in the light—or darkness—of these observations:

And now methinks I could e'en chide myself
For doating on her beauty, though her death
Shall be revenged after no common action.
Does the silkworm expend her yellow labours
For thee? For thee does she undo herself?
Are lordships sold to maintain ladyships
For the poor benefit of a bewildering minute?
Why does yon fellow falsify highways,
And put his life between the judge's lips,
To refine such a thing—keeps horse and men
To beat their valours for her? . . .

In this passage (as is evident if it is taken in its context) there is a combination of positive and negative emotions: an intensely strong attraction toward beauty and an equally intense fascination by the ugliness which is contrasted with it and which destroys it. This balance of contrasted emotion is in the dramatic situation to which the speech is pertinent, but that situation alone is inadequate to it. This is, so to speak, the structural emotion, provided by the drama. But the whole effect, the dominant tone, is due to the fact that a number of floating feelings, having an affinity to this emotion by no means superficially evident, have combined with it to give us a new art emotion.

It is not in his personal emotions, the emotions provoked by particular events in his life, that the poet is in any way remarkable or interesting. His particular emotions may be simple, or crude, or flat. The emotion in his poetry will be a very complex thing, but not with the complexity of the emotions of people who have very complex or unusual emotions in life. One error, in fact, of eccentricity in poetry is to seek for new human emotions to express; and in this search for novelty in the wrong place it discovers the perverse. The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones and, in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all. And emotions which he has never experienced will serve his turn as well as those familiar to him. Consequently, we must believe that "emotion recollected in tranquillity" is an inexact formula. For it is neither emotion, nor recollection, nor, without distortion of meaning, tranquillity. It is a concentration, and a new thing resulting from the concentration, of a very great number of experiences which to the practical and active person would not seem to be experiences at all; it is a concentration which does not happen consciously or of deliberation. These experiences are not "recollected," and they finally unite in an atmosphere which is "tranquil" only in that it is a passive

attending upon the event. Of course this is not quite the whole story. There is a great deal, in the writing of poetry, which must be conscious and deliberate. In fact, the bad poet is usually unconscious where he ought to be conscious, and conscious where he ought to be unconscious. Both errors tend to make him "personal." Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.

III

δ δε νους ισως Θειοτερον τι και απαθες εστιν

This essay proposes to halt at the frontier of metaphysics or mysticism, and confine itself to such practical conclusions as can be applied by the responsible person interested in poetry. To divert interest from the poet to the poetry is a laudable aim: for it would conduce to a juster estimation of actual poetry, good and bad. There are many people who appreciate the expression of sincere emotion in verse, and there is a smaller number of people who can appreciate technical excellence. But very few know when there is an expression of *significant* emotion, emotion which has its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet. The emotion of art is impersonal. And the poet cannot reach this impersonality without surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done. And he is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living.

The Hollow Men

Mistah Kurtz-he dead
    A penny for the Old Guy

I

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
Our dried voices, when
We whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless
As wind in dry grass
Or rats' feet over broken glass
In our dry cellar

Shape without form, shade without colour,

Paralysed force, gesture without motion;

Those who have crossed
With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom
Remember us-if at all-not as lost
Violent souls, but only
As the hollow men
The stuffed men.

II

Eyes I dare not meet in dreams
In death's dream kingdom
These do not appear:
There, the eyes are
Sunlight on a broken column
There, is a tree swinging
And voices are
In the wind's singing
More distant and more solemn
Than a fading star.

Let me be no nearer
In death's dream kingdom
Let me also wear
Such deliberate disguises
Rat's coat, crowskin, crossed staves
In a field
Behaving as the wind behaves
No nearer-

Not that final meeting
In the twilight kingdom

III

This is the dead land
This is cactus land
Here the stone images
Are raised, here they receive
The supplication of a dead man's hand
Under the twinkle of a fading star.

Is it like this

In death's other kingdom
Waking alone
At the hour when we are
Trembling with tenderness
Lips that would kiss
Form prayers to broken stone.

IV

The eyes are not here
There are no eyes here
In this valley of dying stars
In this hollow valley
This broken jaw of our lost kingdoms

In this last of meeting places
We grope together
And avoid speech
Gathered on this beach of the tumid river

Sightless, unless
The eyes reappear
As the perpetual star
Multifoliate rose
Of death's twilight kingdom
The hope only
Of empty men.

V

Here we go round the prickly pear
Prickly pear prickly pear
Here we go round the prickly pear
At five o'clock in the morning.

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow
For Thine is the Kingdom

Between the conception
And the creation

Between the emotion
And the response
Falls the Shadow
Life is very long

Between the desire
And the spasm
Between the potency
And the existence
Between the essence
And the descent
Falls the Shadow
For Thine is the Kingdom

For Thine is
Life is
For Thine is the

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse
A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,
Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.
Ma percioche giammai di questo fondo
Non torno vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero,
Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question ...
Oh, do not ask, “What is it?”
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go

Talking of Michelangelo.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,
Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;
There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate;
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

And indeed there will be time
To wonder, “Do I dare?” and, “Do I dare?”
Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair —
(They will say: “How his hair is growing thin!”)
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin —
(They will say: “But how his arms and legs are thin!”)
Do I dare
Disturb the universe?
In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

For I have known them all already, known them all:
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;
I know the voices dying with a dying fall
Beneath the music from a farther room.
So how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known them all—
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
            And how should I presume?

And I have known the arms already, known them all—
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
(But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)
Is it perfume from a dress
That makes me so digress?
Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.
            And should I then presume?
            And how should I begin?

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows? ...

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!
Smoothed by long fingers,
Asleep ... tired ... or it malingers,
Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.
Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?
But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter,
I am no prophet — and here’s no great matter;
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,
And in short, I was afraid.

And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
Would it have been worth while,
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it towards some overwhelming question,
To say: “I am Lazarus, come from the dead,

Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"—
If one, settling a pillow by her head
    Should say: "That is not what I meant at all;
    That is not it, at all."

And would it have been worth it, after all,
Would it have been worth while,
After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor—
And this, and so much more?—
It is impossible to say just what I mean!
But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:
Would it have been worth while
If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
And turning toward the window, should say:
    "That is not it at all,
    That is not what I meant, at all."

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old ... I grow old ...
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.
We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

The Waste Land
BY T. S. ELIOT

FOR EZRA POUND
IL MIGLIOR FABBRO

I. The Burial of the Dead

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.
Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee
With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten,
And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.
Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch.
And when we were children, staying at the arch-duke's,
My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,
And I was frightened. He said, Marie,
Marie, hold on tight. And down we went.
In the mountains, there you feel free.
I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter.

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
There is shadow under this red rock,
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
I will show you fear in a handful of dust.
Frisch weht der Wind
Der Heimat zu
Mein Irisch Kind,
Wo weilest du?
"You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;
"They called me the hyacinth girl."
—Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden,
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither

Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.
Oed' und leer das Meer.

Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante,
Had a bad cold, nevertheless
Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe,
With a wicked pack of cards. Here, said she,
Is your card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor,
(Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)
Here is Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks,
The lady of situations.
Here is the man with three staves, and here the Wheel,
And here is the one-eyed merchant, and this card,
Which is blank, is something he carries on his back,
Which I am forbidden to see. I do not find
The Hanged Man. Fear death by water.
I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring.
Thank you. If you see dear Mrs. Equitone,
Tell her I bring the horoscope myself:
One must be so careful these days.

Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,
To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.
There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying: "Stetson!
"You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!
"That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
"Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
"Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
"Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,
"Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!
"You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!"

II. A Game of Chess

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,
Glowed on the marble, where the glass
Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines

From which a golden Cupidon peeped out
(Another hid his eyes behind his wing)
Doubled the flames of sevenbranched candelabra
Reflecting light upon the table as
The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it,
From satin cases poured in rich profusion;
In vials of ivory and coloured glass
Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes,
Unguent, powdered, or liquid—troubled, confused
And drowned the sense in odours; stirred by the air
That freshened from the window, these ascended
In fattening the prolonged candle-flames,
Flung their smoke into the laquearia,
Stirring the pattern on the coffered ceiling.
Huge sea-wood fed with copper
Burned green and orange, framed by the coloured stone,
In which sad light a carvéd dolphin swam.
Above the antique mantel was displayed
As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene
The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king
So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale
Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
And still she cried, and still the world pursues,
"Jug Jug" to dirty ears.
And other withered stumps of time
Were told upon the walls; staring forms
Leaned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed.
Footsteps shuffled on the stair.
Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair
Spread out in fiery points
Glowed into words, then would be savagely still.

"My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad. Stay with me.
"Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak.
"What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
"I never know what you are thinking. Think."

I think we are in rats' alley
Where the dead men lost their bones.

"What is that noise?"
The wind under the door.
"What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?"
Nothing again nothing.
"Do
"You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember

"Nothing?"

I remember
Those are pearls that were his eyes.
"Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?"

But
O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag—
It's so elegant
So intelligent
"What shall I do now? What shall I do?"
"I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street
"With my hair down, so. What shall we do tomorrow?
"What shall we ever do?"
The hot water at ten.
And if it rains, a closed car at four.
And we shall play a game of chess,
Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door.

When Lil's husband got demobbed, I said—
I didn't mince my words, I said to her myself,
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart.
He'll want to know what you done with that money he gave you
To get yourself some teeth. He did, I was there.
You have them all out, Lil, and get a nice set,
He said, I swear, I can't bear to look at you.
And no more can't I, I said, and think of poor Albert,
He's been in the army four years, he wants a good time,
And if you don't give it him, there's others will, I said.
Oh is there, she said. Something o' that, I said.
Then I'll know who to thank, she said, and give me a straight look.
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
If you don't like it you can get on with it, I said.
Others can pick and choose if you can't.
But if Albert makes off, it won't be for lack of telling.
You ought to be ashamed, I said, to look so antique.
(And her only thirty-one.)
I can't help it, she said, pulling a long face,
It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said.
(She's had five already, and nearly died of young George.)
The chemist said it would be all right, but I've never been the same.
You *are* a proper fool, I said.
Well, if Albert won't leave you alone, there it is, I said,
What you get married for if you don't want children?
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME

Well, that Sunday Albert was home, they had a hot gammon,
And they asked me in to dinner, to get the beauty of it hot—
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May. Goonight.
Ta ta. Goonight. Goonight.
Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night.

III. The Fire Sermon

The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf
Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind
Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed.
Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.
The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,
Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are departed.
And their friends, the loitering heirs of city directors;
Departed, have left no addresses.
By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept . . .
Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song,
Sweet Thames, run softly, for I speak not loud or long.
But at my back in a cold blast I hear
The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear.

A rat crept softly through the vegetation
Dragging its slimy belly on the bank
While I was fishing in the dull canal
On a winter evening round behind the gashouse
Musing upon the king my brother's wreck
And on the king my father's death before him.
White bodies naked on the low damp ground
And bones cast in a little low dry garret,
Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year.
But at my back from time to time I hear
The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring
Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring.
O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter
And on her daughter
They wash their feet in soda water
Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!

Twit twit twit
Jug jug jug jug jug jug
So rudely forc'd.

Tereu

Unreal City
Under the brown fog of a winter noon
Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant
Unshaven, with a pocket full of currants
C.i.f. London: documents at sight,
Asked me in demotic French
To luncheon at the Cannon Street Hotel
Followed by a weekend at the Metropole.

At the violet hour, when the eyes and back
Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits
Like a taxi throbbing waiting,
I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,
Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see
At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,
The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights
Her stove, and lays out food in tins.
Out of the window perilously spread
Her drying combinations touched by the sun's last rays,
On the divan are piled (at night her bed)
Stockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays.
I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs
Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest—
I too awaited the expected guest.
He, the young man carbuncular, arrives,
A small house agent's clerk, with one bold stare,
One of the low on whom assurance sits
As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire.
The time is now propitious, as he guesses,
The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,
Endeavours to engage her in caresses
Which still are unreproved, if undesired.
Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
Exploring hands encounter no defence;
His vanity requires no response,
And makes a welcome of indifference.
(And I Tiresias have foresuffered all
Enacted on this same divan or bed;
I who have sat by Thebes below the wall
And walked among the lowest of the dead.)
Bestows one final patronising kiss,
And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit . . .

She turns and looks a moment in the glass,
Hardly aware of her departed lover;
Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:
“Well now that’s done: and I’m glad it’s over.”
When lovely woman stoops to folly and
Paces about her room again, alone,
She smoothes her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone.

“This music crept by me upon the waters”
And along the Strand, up Queen Victoria Street.
O City city, I can sometimes hear
Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street,
The pleasant whining of a mandoline
And a clatter and a chatter from within
Where fishmen lounge at noon: where the walls
Of Magnus Martyr hold
Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold.

The river sweats
Oil and tar
The barges drift
With the turning tide
Red sails
Wide
To leeward, swing on the heavy spar.
The barges wash
Drifting logs
Down Greenwich reach
Past the Isle of Dogs.
Weialala leia
Wallala leialala

Elizabeth and Leicester
Beating oars
The stern was formed
A gilded shell
Red and gold
The brisk swell
Rippled both shores
Southwest wind
Carried down stream
The peal of bells
White towers
Weialala leia
Wallala leialala

"Trams and dusty trees.
Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew
Undid me. By Richmond I raised my knees
Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe."

"My feet are at Moorgate, and my heart
Under my feet. After the event
He wept. He promised a 'new start.'
I made no comment. What should I resent?"

"On Margate Sands.
I can connect
Nothing with nothing.
The broken fingernails of dirty hands.
My people humble people who expect
Nothing."
                    la la

To Carthage then I came

Burning burning burning burning
O Lord Thou pluckest me out
O Lord Thou pluckest

burning

IV. Death by Water

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
And the profit and loss.
                              A current under sea
Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
He passed the stages of his age and youth
Entering the whirlpool.
                              Gentile or Jew
O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,
Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you.

V. What the Thunder Said

  After the torchlight red on sweaty faces
After the frosty silence in the gardens

After the agony in stony places
The shouting and the crying
Prison and palace and reverberation
Of thunder of spring over distant mountains
He who was living is now dead
We who were living are now dying
With a little patience

Here is no water but only rock
Rock and no water and the sandy road
The road winding above among the mountains
Which are mountains of rock without water
If there were water we should stop and drink
Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think
Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand
If there were only water amongst the rock
Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit
Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit
There is not even silence in the mountains
But dry sterile thunder without rain
There is not even solitude in the mountains
But red sullen faces sneer and snarl
From doors of mudcracked houses
                                                  If there were water
    And no rock
    If there were rock
    And also water
    And water
    A spring
    A pool among the rock
    If there were the sound of water only
    Not the cicada
    And dry grass singing
    But sound of water over a rock
    Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees
    Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop
    But there is no water

Who is the third who walks always beside you?
When I count, there are only you and I together
But when I look ahead up the white road
There is always another one walking beside you
Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded
I do not know whether a man or a woman
—But who is that on the other side of you?

What is that sound high in the air
Murmur of maternal lamentation
Who are those hooded hordes swarming
Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth
Ringed by the flat horizon only
What is the city over the mountains
Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air
Falling towers
Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
Vienna London
Unreal

A woman drew her long black hair out tight
And fiddled whisper music on those strings
And bats with baby faces in the violet light
Whistled, and beat their wings
And crawled head downward down a blackened wall
And upside down in air were towers
Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours
And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells.

In this decayed hole among the mountains
In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing
Over the tumbled graves, about the chapel
There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home.
It has no windows, and the door swings,
Dry bones can harm no one.
Only a cock stood on the rooftree
Co co rico co co rico
In a flash of lightning. Then a damp gust
Bringing rain

Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves
Waited for rain, while the black clouds
Gathered far distant, over Himavant.
The jungle crouched, humped in silence.
Then spoke the thunder
DA
Datta: what have we given?
My friend, blood shaking my heart
The awful daring of a moment's surrender
Which an age of prudence can never retract
By this, and this only, we have existed
Which is not to be found in our obituaries
Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider
Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor

In our empty rooms
DA
Dayadhvam: I have heard the key
Turn in the door once and turn once only
We think of the key, each in his prison
Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison
Only at nightfall, aethereal rumours
Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus
DA
Damyata: The boat responded
Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar
The sea was calm, your heart would have responded
Gaily, when invited, beating obedient
To controlling hands

I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
Shall I at least set my lands in order?
London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down
Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina
Quando fiam uti chelidon—O swallow swallow
Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie
These fragments I have shored against my ruins
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.
Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.
Shantih shantih shantih

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