Hopkins, Christina Rossetti, and Pre-Raphaelitism

Jerome Bump

As evidence mounts of the importance of the Pre-Raphaelites to artists as various as Yeats, Ford, Dalí, and Lawrence and movements as significant as Art Nouveau, the Imagists, and the Arts and Crafts Movement, their work is being increasingly regarded as one of the well-springs of the art of our time. One of the artists most indebted to them is Gerard Manley Hopkins. He was in fact a contemporary of theirs and they were in many respects his chief "anxiety of influence." Indeed, the influence was so pervasive, they even provided a model for his rebellion against it, and the revolt of the moderns against the Victorians generally. As Hopkins put it in his early manifesto, "On the Signs of Health and Decay in the Arts," "Recovery must be by a breaking up, a violence, such as was the Pre-Raphaelite school." Hopkins revealed what he meant by the term "school" in a letter to his first Pre-Raphaelite mentor and lifelong friend, Richard Watson Dixon:

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

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

I would argue that in certain respects he too must be affiliated with the Pre-Raphaelites and their circle or, as he called them elsewhere, "the school of Keats." Keats was obviously his early master and Hopkins shared many of the same tastes and keepings with the school of Keats in Victorian poetry. Indeed, because his early poems were even more full of imitations of Keats's sensuousness, statism, precious diction, and dreamy otherworldliness than those of most of his contemporaries, Hopkins proceeded to remove these influences even more eagerly than they did. Similarly, because his debt to "the school of Keats" was all too obvious, especially his debts to Christina Rossetti and to Swinburne, Hopkins made a great effort to remove the more obvious signs of their tastes and keepings as well. Nevertheless, his revolt against dualism and the metrical experimentation of his mature poetry suggest how he developed their ideas and techniques and made them accessible to modern poetry.

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

Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" was the germ from which all Pre-Raphaelite poetry sprang, according to Morris.4 Hence Geoffrey Hartman was on the right track when he suggested that "Hopkins seems to develop his lyric structures out of the Pre-Raphaelite dream vision. In his early 'A Vision of the Mermaids' and 'St. Dorothea' he may be struggling with such poems as Christina Rossetti's 'The Convent Threshold' and Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 'The Blessed Damozel,' poems in which the poet stands at a lower level than the vision, or is irresol-
ocably, pathetically distanced.” Among Hopkins’ early poems, there are examples of this stance—most obviously his “A Voice from the World,” which is actually subtitled, “An Answer to Miss Rossetti’s The Consent Threshold.” More importantly, we can discern Hopkins constructing the form that “differences” him from the “common” form of the Pre-Raphaelite dream vision even in his later poems. Take his most famous poem, “The Windhover,” for instance. The significance of Hopkins’ achievement may be better understood by perceiving this poem as a variation of one of the dream visions of the ultimate form of the obvious source of the inspiration of the Rossetti. Place “The Windhover” beside, say, the first dream vision of the Purgatorio—when an eagle swoops down at dawn from the heavens and bears Dante to the sphere of heaven’s fire, where both he and the bird burn—and the genesis of Hopkins’ poem not only seems apparent, the invitation to comparison seems explicit.

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

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

Of all the modern phases of Western civilization, the one most closely associated with this kind of dualism was Victorian England, increasingly identified in literary history with the idea of “the divided self,” with Arnold’s famous lines, “Wandering between two worlds, one world, one dead, / The other powerless to be born,” and with the opening phrases of A Tale of Two Cities:

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

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

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

One of the features that attracted many critics to Hopkins in the thirties was precisely this rejection of simplistic dichotomies, which they saw in Hopkins’ ambiguities, paradoxes, and metaphorical conceits. This revolt against dualism became one of the chief values not only of Hopkins’ poetry but of modern poetry generally. It may even be argued that most of the great achievements of the twentieth century derive from the repudiation of dualisms, Einstein’s renunciation of the matter vs. energy dichotomy being only the most obvious example. Indeed, in 1930 Arthur Lovejoy began the Paul Carus lectures, “I propose in these lectures to review the course and to attempt to estimate the results of a move- ment of thought which has been, on the whole, the most constructive and most ambitious philosophical effort of our generation in the English-speaking world of the past. The last quarter-century, it may fairly confidently be predicted, will have for future historians of philosophy a decisive importance and interest as the one that produced the Great Revolt against Dualism.” But the revolt began a century earlier, with the Pre-Raphaelites in the vanguard.

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

Hopkins soon rebelled against this emphasis on the eye alone, but again the Pre-Raphaelites provided the model for his movement away from them. Christina Rossetti, and later Swinburne, conceived of poems as primarily music and melody, as musical structures. Christina Rossetti provided the precedent for Hopkins’ rejection of her brother’s art-for-art’s-sake poetry. From some aspects of Pre-Raphaelite medievalism, such as their arcaic diction, Hopkins remained aloof and his criticisms are still apt. In other aspects, notably the religious dimension evident in Christina Rossetti’s poetry especially, he cultivated and carried to its logical conclusion, a conclusion which carried him beyond Dante Rossetti’s Keatian aesthetic. It is in this sense, as the culmination of nineteenth-century medievalism, that Pre-Raphaelism provides a particularly important context for Hopkins’ life and art.

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

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

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

7. For more on Hopkins’ revolt against dualism see Jerome Bump, "Hopkins, the Humanities, and the Environment," Gaff, 28, No. 2 (1976), 275-344.
longer perceive her in the center of the Pre-Raphaelite ex-
perience. She was of course a spirituality, and she of many of its most famous paintings, including Ere Inel Con-
Bella and The Girlhood of Mary Virgin, and, until the
publication of Dante Gabriel’s poems in 1870, she was
their chief literary figure. The praise that she received,
what there was of it, was chiefly for the seven poems she
contributed.12 More importantly, because Morris’s De-
fence of Guenevere volume went virtually unnoticed, the
publication of her Goblin Market and Other Poems in
1862 brought her fame—and of course to the Pre-
Raphaelites. Swinburne hailed her as the “fairy who led
her host to victory”; her brother William acknowledged her
as “Queen of the Pre-Raphaelites”; and Edmund Gosse
regarded her as the “high priestess of Pre-
Raphaelitism.”13 Her influence on Hopkins was par-
ticularly great because she was also the high priestess of
the Oxford Movement in poetry. Hence she embodied the
more genuine medievalism he sought. As F. L. Lucas put
it, “Her brother and Morris and Swinburne were moderns
seeking inspiration in the medieval; she, seems,
rather, a medieval wrath shrinking in shy disarray before
the harsh breadth of modernity. In the Age of Steam she
remained like some quiet anchorites of the Age of
Fame—who one might have set to Giotto, or knelt before
St. Francis at Assisi.”14

Nor was Christina Rossetti considered merely “the best
poet” of the Oxford Movement, and of early Pre-
Raphaelitism. Edmund Gosse felt that “as a religious
poet of our time she has no rival” except Newman, who
was inferior to her, while Percy Lubbock argued that she
was more religious than other famous Victorian poets and
was in fact one of the greatest religious poets in the
English language.15 In the 1860’s, therefore, her
influence was apparently enough to another many a
younger poet. Hopkins, however, desired to aspire to all
three of her titles—Pre-Raphaelite poet, poet of the
Oxford Movement, and pre-eminent Victorian religious
poet—and succeeded, unbecknownst to her and to the
Abbeys of his time, in commanding a rival far greater than
Newman or any of her other admirers.

They confronted each other in life as well as their
families were well acquainted and we know that Hopkins
worshiped her once. Now that she had been dead for a
century, it is difficult to know how that spiritual presence
had on her contemporaries. Perhaps the best

way to suggest what effect it must have had on Hopkins,
who also was susceptible at times to powerful experiences
of spirituality, would be to recall how easily she subdued
the most determined pagans of the century:

Son voix...elle avait un timbre si doux, si riche de sens, de
sens, de finesse, et de tendresse. Elle avait une voix qui
ressentait et exprimait de la tendresse et des sentiments
révères.

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15. Goos, Critical Kit-Kat, p. 156; Percy Lubbock, "Christina Rosse-
18. The Life and Letters of Theodore Watts-Dunton, ed. Thomas Halie
19. Campion MS. D.V., "On the true idea and excellence of sculp-
20. Lubbock, V, 269; Mackenzie Bell, Christina Rossetti (Boston: Rob-


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The Victorian Newsletter

quaintnesses and offences. Irregular measure (introduced to my regret in its chief characteristic, by Coleridge) is the calumny of modern poetry. . . . your sister should excercise herself in the severest commonplace of metre until she can write as the public like."

Finally, in the thirties when Hopkins’ “sprung rhythm” was coming into its own, we tend to forget that Christina Rossetti’s sprung rhythm was also being praised for much the same reasons. Arthur Waugh, for instance, insisted that in fact Christina Rossetti effected “in Goblin Market, something very like a revolution in English metrical resources, and all with so natural a grace that it needs a prosidist as learned as Mr. Saintsbury himself to analyse her innovations.”

In the end, the Victorians’ initial criticisms were as completely rejected in her case as they were in Hopkins’. Geoffrey W. Rossetti was not alone in his assertion that “the apparent irregularity of the poem is completely ordered and disciplined, the variations of pace in the verse are fully controlled.”

Coleridge’s hint has come to be better obeyed, it will be much for the sake of Christina Rossetti’s lovely example.

Coleridge’s hint had already been better obeyed, of course, by Hopkins. Profiting from “Christina’s lovely example,” he perceived the need for more theory for and for a consistent application of it to minimize criticism of such measures as simply ambiguous or incorrect. A few years later when Saintsbury discovered that the more the “dedoggerised Skeltonic” metre of “Goblin Market” is studied, “the more audacious may its composition seem,” his comments seemed to fit “The Wreck of the Deutschland” as well: “a mix of meters which would have been regarded by earlier reviewers as a ‘Bedlam of discord’ . . . there is something of the tour de force in an effect so complicated . . . the way in which the most apparently lawless excursions can be reduced to law.”

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

University of Texas

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

Herbert Susan

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

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

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

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

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

Looking back to the early-Italian artists, those painters


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

"The Thing Signified" in The Dynasts: A Speculation

William E. Buckley

Despite differences of perception and emphasis among the critics of The Dynasts, critical orientation toward the poem's "outlook" has been essentially ideological, centering on the nature of the poem's metaphor and the degree of its Hardy's intellectual assault on the monistic figure in the Human Will. An interest centering in these matters has naturally, perhaps, led critics to assume that, when Hardy spoke in his preface about "the thing signified," he was pointing the reader's attention toward such ideologically ordering concepts. But if one assumes that these ideological mechanisms are in running counter to the expectation of narrative, particularly of narrative working out moral issues, then the only enigmatic, diffuse emotion. Swinburne, in Poems and Ballads, and Swinburne, in these at least not marked by a significant. His style bears little direct relation to that of Morris or of the Brotherhood, but his strategy is similar. In poems like "Faustine," "Dolorous," "Sapphics," he revales the received interpretation of the classical tradition to show the Greeks and Romans not as exemplars of Aemilian

2. Household Word 1 (15 June 1898), 205-206. 3. Holman Hunt, Pre-Raphaelite and the Pre-Raphaelite Brother- 

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

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

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

*All quotations from and references to The Dynasts have as their basis The Dynasts: An Epic-Drama of the War with Napoleon, by Thomas Hardy (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1947). This is a reprint of the first edition issued by Macmillan in 1894 with the same consecutive
conspicuously incompetent, even though we of the masses are still in life-and-death service to them; that there is likely to be little correlation between the truth of our perceptions and the actual war-and the adorers of the people alter their perceptions of reality hardly at all even in the face of the most harrowing and relevant experiences. It would be an intimidating programme of him as a subject, also, for it were the manifest examples of absurdity with equally manifest examples of genuine degrees of heroism, pathos, fidelity, high purpose, and authentic tragedy. Hence the very tangibility of symbolisms of images in the poem, oblique suggestions that are inexhaustibly disturbing. The poet-comprehensive, his poem with which the FIRST BOATMAN tells how the crow of the "Victory," they "brought the gallant hero home," "fairly saved their lives" by puncturing his casket and drinking him dry—that is, consuming the alcoholic spirits in which his body was being preserved on the long, leisurely home—is counterpointed by the inevitable realization, however delayed, that a cadaver thus preserved would release into the preservative its body wastes (residual excrimation, urine, semen, and a host of body chemicals and stored substances), thus converting the broad humor intended by the teller into a symbolist image of a grotesque and psychically distressful sort. The dark side of this image is then deepened in the direction of the authentically tragic by the song that closes the fifth act, "The Night of Trajalger," in which images of filthy sweeper over images of heroism:

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

These symbolist imprints accrete rapidly. An indelible image is imprinted on the mind when, at Austrelitz, Napoleon Napoleon's capriciousness and volition using such a of the frozen lake which 2000 Russians are crossing: "A ghastly crash and splashing follows the discharge, the shining surface breaking into pieces like a mirror, which fly in all directions. Two thousand fugitives are engaged, and their gnomes of despair reach the ears of the scoundrels like iron honey." (I, VI, IV, 121, emphasis added). Even the mirror metaphor is symbolic since it reflects the multiform tragedy that will be served up to Napoleon in his Moscow adventure, and the description of the Russians then in turn mirrors his action here: "My God, they are Scythians and barbarians still!" (III, VIII, 349). That Pitt should receive the news of Austrelitz while he is in the Picture Gallery at Shockewer House having highly cultivated talk with the Duke of Marlborough and Viscount St. John of the Yields.

The flatulence of the King's reply in juxtaposition to Pitt is itself disgusting, but the succession of images that George unwillingly releases become symbolist imprints of absurdity:

1. Life is a stage (2) on which商品 are paid for breathing at single-stick to assure the folk, four guineas the price for the man who breaks most heads. Afterwards there is in being a grim march through horse-collars—a very humorous sport which I must stay here and witness, for I am interested in whatever entertains my subjects.

It's but a stage, a type of all the world. The bourgeois have arranged this literary function. At six o'clock the King was seen at a meeting at single-stick to assure the folk, four guineas the price for the man who breaks most heads. Afterwards there is in being a grim march through horse-collars—a very humorous sport which I must stay here and witness, for I am interested in whatever entertains my subjects.

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

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

One of the most complex symbolist images implanted on the mind is that of the war as perceived by a group of English soldiers: "The hour is not Am As-

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

Walcheren represents a different kind of nadir to the English. That it is authentically historical in no way detracts from its massive metaphorical quality: one of the inevitable dimensions/possibilities of war is that one may, like the speaker in "Hap," have to forego the satisfaction of a consum-

our country's chairs, for their own fears to
Will leave our names and fate by this pale sea
To perish already!" (II, IV, VIII, 354-355).

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

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we perceive and can believe that he perceives them too. But there is no evidence that he is there, and these move the experience of the scene for the reader-spectator to a deep ironic level. Napoleon is beginning the long slide toward moral and psychological shallowness, and he is blinding himself to glaring contradictions in his self-projection: his projection toward the Russian sense of destiny counterbalances his own oft-repeated claim of a manifesto destiny, he attempts to eke out the disastrous strategy of invading Russia at an inopportune time of the year, wholly because of his willful error. French ingenuity in French insuperability, he falls back upon the "force" that moves him inexorably to offset the sense of ominous foreboding that has enveloped his psyche. But it is the images induced by the scene that scarify the mind. Napoleon's version of the "Mal- brong" air projects his self-serving return after abandoning his troops starving and freezing in Lithuania, while Stiener's revision of the same air projects the chaotic destruction of his remaining troops all at once, until the spring is coming! This is then immediately followed by an image of this "Christ of war," shrinking, shrinking to the aspect of a doll while the heavens burn with thunder and lightning and torrents of rain as if a divine dispensation were in fact ending. It is a literary realization worthy of Aristophanes.

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

What happens within this symbolistic envelope provides the key chief to "the thing signified" by The Dynasts. It should be noted that, when Napoleon arrives at Moscow, he has been seriously depleted: the arors of the march and the campaign are here he has also lured the modern French army of his army. As he says, "And it was time." Thus he is ill-prepared, in physical or psychological resource, for the failure of his expectation that Rostopchin and Kutuzov have prepared him. Here he is, the supreme European, facing to face with Asia, and Asia has prepared a bag of "fool tricks" for him: "My god, they are Scythians and barbarians still!" For Napoleon to arrive, after such hardship, at an abandoned Moscov at as bizarre as for Marlows, in Conrad's Heart of Darkness, he is ill-prepared for an kind of atmosphere: it is surreal, defying comprehension by the highly coded European mind. It is a "crazed act", an "infinite scheme" which some "Satan" has devised. This Europe-Asia dichotomy is made explicit, in Hardy's iberic, ironic, way, on Napoleon's journey to Elba. He says to Bertrand, "Yes—all is lost in Europe for me now!" Bertrand replies, "I fear, sire, so. Then Napoleon: "But Asia waits a man/ A half a mile more, and I'll save it till the spring. (III, II, 383)" the poet-designer has noted, "Nationalities from the uttermost parts of Asia here meet those from the Atlantic edge of Europe for the first and last time."

This climactic revelation—that for the coded European mind to look into Asia is to look into a vast mystery, an in- comprehensibility, with which it is not prepared to cope—is a perception that has haunted the twentieth century. Hardy suggests it somewhat circumstantially, to be sure; but it is highly significant as one of a cluster of perceptions that draw us to the terrifying conclusion—perhaps "the thing signified" in The Dynasts—that the modern European is possessed of a whole repertoire of strategies for coping that are simply irrelevant to the things to be coped with; that his re- ality is a preferential disposition, not the true truth; that beyond the painted shell of his privately packaged universe there are "deep wells of nothingness" with which he has no capacity to deal. It is a frightful vision, and if one takes Hardy's epic anomaly seriously, The Dynasts spells the doom of modern Europe as surely as the Iliad spelled the doom of ancient Troy. But Hardy does not seem to have been inclined to trans- late these dire imaginations into a voice in proun individual and remain the role of a minor writer. Like the preceding, and the following generations of poets, he was "dramatic," "poetic," creating structures in which truth was not authentically meditated but authentically ex- plored through the aesthetic placement of a reader-specta- tor who is not infallible in a position analogous to that of an author who is not infallible watching a protagonist who is not infallible. Such structures could be as compar- atively simple as the dramatic lyric in sonnet form implied "Hapgood", or epically direct, and aesthetically inauthentic as The Dynasts. But the mark of their modernism, being atypical, is the same. The modern artist has no obligation to dismantle the past, however anarch- ic (and there are many who have also attended to the modernist dis- Arnold says, does not deal in pastness or presentness, but in relevance; he makes the past and the present creative bed- fellows to the degree that he makes his individual talent and his inherited literary traditions organic. Thus both mod- ernism and the modern artist are in a perpetual state of be- coming. Like the Immemorial Will, in many ways a fit ana- logue to the artist right down to the unconscious center of his creativity, the modern artist is an instrument of creation's own aim "to alter evermore/Things from what they were before" (III, VII, 518); or, to trans- lute this into words from Hardy's preface to The Dynasts, to adopt as one's single aim "the modern expression of a modern outlook."

Thus the modern poet puts a premium, not on action, but on awareness: consciousness-raising (spiritual transforma- tion, imaginative elevation) is the goal to which everything else he does is subordinate. His faith is not in social arrange- ments or in political or religious creeds but in metaphors and myths because they are his instruments of metamorph- osis. The imagination, he knows, is an organic part of every- man, and the cultivation of the imagination, for both the mod- ern, and the civilization of the poet—has special gifts, is an organic cultivation promising organic (and hence permanent) results. Every di- vision of man's consciousness—from day-to-day percep- tion to loving-kindness to cosmic symbolism—is dependent on the state of cultivation of that man's individual imagina- tion.

What we have in The Dynasts, then, is a frightful vision set against an irrefragable faith. The root centur of a universe that very quickly outstrips rational comprehension (a uni- verse centered in the consciousness as well as in the common) is juxtaposed to an aesthetic way of ordering reality, a way exemplified by both The Dynasts and its analogue, the Iliad. At the end of the modern epic drama, the Iliad and The Dynasts constituted, for the moment, a literary frame, an alpha and an omega of sorts, of man's imaginative efforts to deal with his woes and to establish, at least suggestively, a symbol of reconciliation to his frightful condition. This symbol became literature itself, The Dynasts and all those images of instrumental awareness, from Homer and Aeschylus and Sophocles to Dante and Shakespeare and Shelley and Hardy with its Heideggerian roots and metaphors of the "Iliad ed il Poeta [No one deserves the name of creator, ex- cept God and the Poet]"—with this fundamental difference: that the time Hardy wrote The Dynasts, the poet stood alone.

It should be clear from the foregoing that anyone who does not know The Dynasts simply does not know Hardy. To ignore his epic drama is to ignore his efforts to create a truly monumental work, to weld his individual talent and his keen sense of contemporary spiritual ambiguity to the most an- cient theory and practice of the Western literary tradition, to convert history into myth and then to place the inter- twining of Europe in the literary pantheon of the Indo-European ages. It is to ignore, too, a fine literary achievement that, in retrospect, is more and more seen as the twentieth century's most forward-looking imaginative limb: that aesthetic structure that gathers in the fright and the frag- ments, the pulverizations and the importunities, the inher- itances and the alienations—the epic, narrative, dramatic, lyrical, elegiac, symphoniac, panoramic, picturesque, impres- sionistic, grotesque, symbolist artistic expressions and despair of all these disordered years of our prematurely aff- ciated century. . . . Hardy brings to bear on the literary procedure of the poem his complete literary repertoire as he tries to create a massive artistic structure in which there is a place and function, not only for the sweeping panoramic spectacle, but also for the thousands of bits of individual dra- matic role-playing, in high and low, how to make up a densely textured, Brueghel-like, vibrant representa- tion of life. And he does this, in what must be called a grand literary paradoxx, HomERICALLY rather than Miltonically: he overlapped the whole Christian experience in literature to find and make up a literary text that, as Hardy read it, did not depend on "an indivisible and regular sys- tem, which occupies the whole extant of the believing mind," but is "composed of a thousand loose and flexible parts."

The Dynasts represents, in a quiet new degree, a break- through from systematic ideology to genuine metaphoric awareness, even from a closed system used metaphorically to a metaphorically open-endedness in which one's own system- making can go on indefinitely constructing and recreating, is really non-judgmental as a literary work, and in it even the soul-wraps of representative modern men are allowed to surface and show. It is a work that creates a massive collision of individual systems—a system nonsensical and not simply sentimental, some conscientiously researched, some got up on the run and for the occasion—for the singular purpose of exposing in the raw and in the mass modern man's perceptual resources and per- ceptual limitations, so that we can begin to sense the ex- posures of man's perceptual needs if he would hope, with anything like the "complete rationality" necessary for human survival, to reconcile himself through his individual conscious- ness to his various existences.

Twentieth-century poets have long since recognized that Hardy had discovered in his long dramatic poem a "modern expression of a modern outlook" that was eminently usable by pursuers of their craft. Twentieth-century critics have been slower—perhaps because they have been imaginatively
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Duleller, perhaps because they have felt no need, in the pursuit of their craft, for the recognition. Nevertheless, it has been an uncommon critical short-sightedness, allowing one of the pedestal documents in modern literary transmission and definition to lie gathering dust in the full but glazed sight of all.

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

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

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

New York University

Catherine Barnes Stevenson

Tennyson began his composition of the Idylls of the King with the tale of the "fall" of the mythic necromancer of Arthur's court, with an account of the vision, the despair, and the retreat from society of a character who is, as several recent critics have argued, a type of artist.1 The Merlin of the 1850 "Merlin and Vivien," however, is not only an artist but also a prophet/hard, a member of a family of such figures who appear in Tennyson's poetry for fifty years. A product of Tennyson's reading in the 1840's and 50's about Druids, bards, and the legendary wizard of Camelot, this 1856 Merlin embodies Tennyson's reflections on the aesthetic limitations of bardic art on the personal costs of prophetic vision. Moreover, when Merlin reappears in the idylls of 1869 and 1872 his character and the nature of his artistry have been subtly modified in accordance with Tennyson's reading and his evolving ideas about the function of art and the relationship between the gifted artist and his often unreceptive society.

In 1856 Tennyson depicted Merlin as


2. All textual quotations are taken from Christopher Ricks, The Poems of Tennyson (London: Longman, 1969), Herneham cited as PoMS.


"A Defence of Poetry" (published 1830-40), and Carlyle in "The Hero as Poet, Dante; Shakspeare" (1841) allude to versions of this myth.14 This image of the bardic poet is particularly important to Tennyson's poetry of the 1850's. When alarmed over the threat to England posed by Napoleon II (1852), Tennyson wrote three poems which he submitted to Napoleon as a pseudonym: "Merlin," "Talinus" (sic). The bard's "rhythm hammer" clanged in the "manly"-or, in Tennyson's own words, the "foreboding"-16-style of verse of "The Third of February," "Hands All Round," and "Suggested by Reading an Article."14 Like the prophet, the speaker of these is a righteous individual who, seeing the dangers to which society is oblivious, attempts to rouse "Godlike men." Like a Druidal bard, the persona evokes a quintessential national ideal of bravery and liberty. The speaker of "Suggested by Reading an Article" attacks the animalistic sensuality and materialism of contemporary England in the same caustically reproving tone employed by the "Thur" of 1832: 14 I feel the thousand years of our state. I vainly shake their triple-fold ease. The hop, who can believe in nothing great, Soothing bedridden in the drows of Peace, Originate their meats and wine, With sly sniffs at all things human and divine! (11.43-48)

The bard still wants to "shake" or "spunk" other men as he did to the east because he alone knows what they cannot—"the (frightful) omen of the future": There hangs within the heavens a dark disgrace, Some vast Assyrian doom to burst upon our race. (11.47-48)

Even the diction in this passage—"Assyrian doom"—evokes Old Testament and the prophets of the 1827 volume. Bardic poetry is the agent of moral renewal of society; the bard himself is paradoxically both a military outsider and a man crucially involved in the fate of his society. He alone can...raise the people and chastise the times with such a heat as lives in great creative hymns. (11.54)

15. Tennyson owned the 1853-edition of Maob in which Southerly speaks of the bard as "inhabits of the lore of the Druids and as preservers of the hidden wisdom of the years of old." In this poem of the novel Barad Carao sings an elliptical song about the mysterious fate of Merlin... 16. "He is the crystal Ark, Whither sailed Merian with his band of barbs, Old Merlin, with the scythe of the same sort? Belike his crystal Ark, instinct with life Oblivious to the mighty armies, that The land of the departed, there, belike The knife, that is the blade of death. Drink the gales of bliss. (p. 22) He was also familiar with Carlyle's notion that the east, the poet-

prophet, knows "the divine mystery" and "is sent hither to make it more impertinently known to us." Works, ed. H. D. Traill (London, 1890), V. 80-81, and with the stirring conclusion to "A Defense of Poetry" which Shelley says that poets are "the hierophants of an unpretend sky; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the earth.

17. In the opening stanza of "Suggested by Reading an Article" and the Unitarian Poems of 1842 he accompanied the bardic mode of poems, Tennyson praised the style of his own anonymously published "The Third of February" and "Hands All Round." 18. Davies, p. 436.


II

Merlin of the Idyll, the architect, the artist, the sage, the prophet of social doom, emerges only after Tennyson has reflected on the rich tradition about bardic poets, prophecies, and Druids for a number of years. Tennyson's Merlin of 1850 is closer to the Druids depicted by Davies with their social importance, their architectural skills, and their visionary powers than he is to Malory's Merlin, that laicized magician and astute politician who uses his prophetic powers and preternatural gifts to advance Uther Pendragon's plan to "terrorise" Britain.14 Tennyson's "Merlin" (1.49f) Merlin explicitly refutes the title, "Devil's son," given him in Morte D'Arthur. Merlin, according to Davies, was "a supreme judge, a priest, and a prophet" who had secret knowledge of the mysteries of the divinities Remember St. Whence he came into office, the bardic poem "which music yet prevails" and lists several figures discussed by Davies: Aneurin, Taliesin (sic), and Aed the Great, a "mystical personage."19 In Merlin and Vivien, "the great Enchanter of the Time,"14 we can see visions of the potential future which enables him to foresee the "comming" wave that will destroy Arthur's order (much as the speaker of the 1852 political verse could see the "vast Assyrian doom" which was poised over his nation). This privileged vision brings only melancholy, however, because with it comes a certain impotence; unable to act, himself, the bard/bard seems incapable of affecting action. The bard's "rhythm hammer" can neither change history by "raising the people and chastising the times" nor console the vision of impending disaster, which is the hope of an im-

proved future. Seeing what others cannot, Merlin is ap-

palled and flees from the inevitable doom: first, by physically deserting Arthur's court; second, by turning away from the "responsibility"-name and use-fame—and toward the satisfaction of personal needs, "ease of heart" (1.890). Insofar as Vivien seems to offer...
him consolation by flattening "his own wish in age for Love" (1.814), she is the external agent of his "fall." But Merlin, who is throughout the idyll aware of Vivien's wishes, causes his own "fall."20 His debates with Vivien about the proper social uses of one's special gifts, for example, are really attempts to talk away what he most fears but feels happening to him: the destruction of the "sweetening of rhyme" about the need for absolute faith in love is specifically identified with the charm of woven pieces which underlines his individual's social utility. Merlin comments:

But, Vivien, when you sang me that sweet rhyme, I felt as though you knew this cursed charm, Wore grooving it on me, and that I lay And felt them slowly ebbing, name and fame. (11.430-435)

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

Seen in the context of Tennyson's poetic endeavors in the 1850's, "Merlin and Vivien" takes on a special significance. In the political poems of 1852 and in Maud, Merlin stands as a prophet and an enchanter. In the 1857-1858 Idylls, Merlin is the one who denounced the "vice and corruption," the "personal and political" evil, prophesied social disaster, and often urged violent action to avert social catastrophe. The anonymity of the political verse shielded Tennyson from attack, but Maud and Vivien are far more personal and social in vision.21 Merlin's outburst on the costs of Fame and on the consequence of trying to give men "greater wits" with the bitterest of modern experiences:

Use gave me Fame at first, and Fame again Increasing gave me use. Lo, there my bond! What other for men sought to prove me vile, Because I gave them wits?

Sweet were the days, when I was not known, But when my name was lifted up, the storm Brake on the mountain and I cared not for it. (11.491-500)

Jeremy Buckley reads this passage as proof that Tennyson had established the "Idylls of the Blessed" with the disillusioned Merlin.22 If the political verse and Maud represent the public path that the prophet might take, "Merlin and Vivien" considers another course of action possible in the face of the horrifying vision of the collapse of society. Merlin, made melancholy by the imminent disaster he foresees, surrenders his will, abdicates his social conscience, and turns inward. The mad speaker of Maud and the "Mage of Arthur's court" enact two sides of the same conflict: one shuns society, plunges into the "abyssal deeps" of personality, but eventually embraces his social calling—potentially suicidal action; the other flees society, surrenders his public personality, and sinks into a limbo of passivity akin to death. In either case, self-destruction seems to follow from prophetic vision. If the Merlin of 1856 represents the prophetic personality doomed by its own sensibility, the Merlin of the 1869 Idylls is a slightly different character—or at least a character who is seen from a different angle. In "The Holy Grail," for example, we are given another account of Merlin's "loss of himself." Recalling the inception of the Grail quest, Percival tells of Merlin's creation, which was partly responsible for the Grail mainland:

In our great hall these stood a vacant chair, Fashioned by Merlin he sat away, And eaten with strange figures; and in and out The figure, like a serpent, ran a spell Of letters in a tongue no man could read. And Merlin called it "The Siege perilous," Perilous for good and ill; for them, "they said," No man could serve the Grail without himself.

And once by misadventure Merlin sat In his own chair, and so was lost; but he, Galahad, who had heard of Merlin's doom, Said, "I love myself!" (11.157-178)

Malory's Merlin fashioned the chair but is not destroyed by it; Tennyson's Merlin is here trapped by the precise skills that make him a wizard. Two sets of facts confirm an aesthetic reading of this narrative of Merlin's "fall": First, the "Siege perilous" with its "scroll of letters in a tongue no man can read" resembles in its inscrutability and potential hazardiness the magician's book in "Merlin and Vivien," which is written in a language no man can read (even Merlin can decipher only the marginalia). In addition, the chair, the product of Merlin's ingenuity and special skill, is the agent of his "fall" just as the charm, of which he as a "Mage" alone has knowledge, is the ostensible cause of his "loss of himself." Both the charm and the chair symbolize the esoteric, even lethal, knowledge that the prophet-bard possesses. Algernon Herbert's Britannia After the Romans (1838), which Tennyson owned, explicitly connects the "Siege perilous" with the arcane knowledge to which the Druids had access: the seat, he claims, "signifies to us the private belief of the Druidists in a code of astronomy different from that which they published, but one of which they deemed the establishment essential to the sure enforcement of Apollon Belenus."23 The literature about the Druids also connects the "chair" of the ancient bard with the public recognition of his professional status. Davies quotes a poem by Philip Brydges (1200-1260) who makes this "chair" a "symbol of the Presidency": "The chair of the great Maegwn was publicly prepared for Bards; and not to porters was it given in compliment: and if, at this day they were to aspire to that chair, they would be proved, by truth and privilege, to be what they really are: the grave Druids of Britain would be there."24 Furthermore, according to Davies, an obscure, mystical poem by Taliesin called "The Chair of Taliesin" lists in a veiled form the apparition needed to celebrate the rites of the goddess Ceridwen. Thus, the "chair" of the ancient bard suggests both his unique position in society and the private knowledge that comes with that status.

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

20. John Reed, Perception and Design in Tennyson's "Idylls of the King" (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1969), p. 54, sees Merlin as a type of the intellect depooled of intuition and faith and reads the idyll as an allegory of the rational tradietion, their "triumphal war that longs for the peace that surrender will bring."21 John Rosenberg, "The Fall of Camelot: A Study of Tennyson's "Idylls of the King" (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 138, points to the parallelism of gesture as part of a larger pattern of correspondences between the idylls, a "tragic" and "triumphant" meaning that longs for the peace that surrender will bring.

21. Lawrence Potter, "The Two Provinces of Tennyson's Idylls," Criticism, 9 (1968), 373-78 argues that Merlin's surrender is a withdrawal into a Palace of Art, an "extravagant by his own desire for beauty," I would add to this that Merlin's desire for beauty emerges under the pressure of the special vision given to the same.

22. Edgar F. Shannon, Tennyson and the Reviviscence: A Study of His Revolution in Art and Thought (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania University Press, 1931), p. 236 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), p. 401, points out that Tennyson's war philosophy, which drew the most hostile criticism from the reviewers of Maud, was most often regarded as "the poet's own philosophy." According to Shannon, the poem received more unfavorable than favorable reviews. The Christian Remembrancer, for example, quoted: "That poem . . . received with a leader outsize than Maud—with such regret, despair, even contempt? (April 1856). For parody of the moral philosophy of Maud, see Punch, August 25, 1855 and November 3, 1855.


24. Algernon Herbert's Britannia After the Romans (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1858), p. 94. Herbert believes that the Druidite bards were accustomed to "prefer the name of Grail to that of "knight," and that the Round Table was "an arrangement of the arts, sciences, war and chivalry." As "the name of Grail is connected with "saint," one is reminded of "the story of "the chair" of the two Merlins, Taliesin, St. Maben, and others.

25. Davies, p. 21. A book that Tennyson might have known, Raddius by John Williams ab Ithel (London: Longman, 1862), lists, of a figure in which there is an "implication of a "chair." The Round Table was an "arrangement of the arts, sciences, war and chivalry." As "the Grail" of "the chair" is the "chair" of the two Merlins, Taliesin, St. Maben, and others.
In "Merlin and Vivien," on the other hand, the means of Merlin's "fall" is the charm while the motive seems to be the need for rest and solace in the face of despair. "The Holy Grail" features psychological motivation ("misadventure" is the only cause that Percival mentions) but clearly identifies Merlin's own artistry as the means of his downfall. In some sense, the later idol simplifies the task of interpreting Merlin's actions by confirming what is only intimated in "Merlin and Vivien": the bard becomes his own victim when he surrenders totally to the imperatives of his special vision, when he plunges completely into what Tennyson calls "spiritual suicide." The world of Arthur's court turns from the "minstrels" to the "romancers." Merlin's creation on Galahad and the rest of the Round Table is, then, instructive. When he sits in Merlin's chair, Galahad "loses himself"; that is, he casts aside his social self, his potentiality, to find his spiritual identity through a private quest. By his example, the less worthy knights also seek personal spiritual exaltation and thus precipitate the decline of Arthur's realm; Merlin's loss of himself is but the first domino. Arthur in his speech to Galahad at the idyll's end points to the ultimately private nature of the vision of "fairy prophet in old times./And all the sacred madness of the bard" (1.1172-73). As Arthur knows, the experience of a transcendent reality can be only partially and unsatisfactorily translated within the limits of the "framework" and the "chord" of the individual. "Divine madness" then, though it may be glorious, is socially disruptive and personally isolating.

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

And four great zones of sculpture, set betwixt,
With many a round hall thence the ball,
And in the first men are slaying men,
And in the second men are slaying beasts,
And in the third are warwixn, perfect men,
And last of the forth men now with great prop. (11.232-237)

This creation enshrines the unrealized goal toward which the society and its individual members are striving; a goal, moreover, which is accessible only to the Arthurs and the Galahads of the kingdom. This presentation of a James-faced Merlin who is a traditional pagan bard and a latter-day Christian prophet can be traced to Tennyson's reading of W. D. Nash's Merlin the Enchanter, Merlin the Bard (1866), which was given to James Knowles by Nash and to Tennyson by Knowles sometime after their 1866 meeting. Nash, who stresses Merlin's centrality in the Arthurian legend, also identifies him as a symbol of the intellect; Tennyson in his later allegorical comments on his Idolphus similarly characterized Merlin as one of the "seven great intellectual geniuses." (Ricks, p. 1595n.) Nash points to a dual tradition in the legends about Merlin: one group of stories depict him as "a magician possessed of supernatural powers, if not given to diabolic activity." Although Tennyson was clearly aware of this tradition even in "Merlin and Vivien," he did not depict Merlin primarily as a "wily wizard. The wording of the description in that idyll is indicative: "people called him Wizard" (1.116, 116 lines). On the other hand, as Nash observes, Welsh versions of the great "ignore the magic and represent the enchanter as a pious Christian." In fact, he continues, the French Arthurian scholar Villermargoué argues that Merlin was really an historical personage, an architect, a mathematician, a bard in the tradition of the Druids, and a Christian clergyman at the court of the king Aurelius Ambrosius. Villermargoué claims that "if any one in the British isles has represented in Christian times the Causes of the olden time, if any one has enjoyed their privileges, known their secrets, preserved their traditions, led their mysterious life,—if any one can give an idea of these en

Thou art in the Coming of Arthur, Merlin answers her with the elliptical triplets:

Rain, rain, and sun! a rainbow in the sky!
A poisonous scat joins on the crest of all life.
An old man's wit may waver on his head.

Rain, rain, and sun! a rainbow on the lead!
And truth is this to me, and that to thee;
And these to him, and these to be.

Rain, sun, and rain! and the free blossom blows: Sun, rain, and sun! and where is he who knows?
From the great deep to the great deep he goes. (11.402-416)

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

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

so great bard of him will sing
Renaissance, and dark sayings from old

27. W. D. Nash, Merlin the Enchanter, Merlin the Bard, in Merlin, or the Early History of Arthur, The Early English Text Society (London: Kegan Paul, Treacher, Trübner and Company, 1895), pp. 1172-73. New York: Greenough Publications, 1906. It is impossible to reproduce here the debate that raged among the students of Arthurian studies about these three figures. Ambrosian, a pre-philochrist and king; Merlin Enys, the enchanter and contemporay of Arthur; and Merlin Wyll, Silvretta, or Caedmon, an historical Welsh bard. At the heart of this controversy are these issues: was Merlin the enchanter an historical personage? Was he a Christian or a pagan? Was he in some sense confused? Since this debate is beyond the scope of this paper, the issues by asking for the latter question. See also, Robert D. Huyge and Toby O'Dell, "Ambrosius in 'The Holy Grail': Source and Function," NQG 18 (1960), 205-09.

28. Quoted by Nash, 1172.

29. Davies, pp. 75-76. See also J. M. Gray, who analyzes these triplets and notes that Ambrosius appears in Teuton in Men and in The Holy Grail ("late 14th century"). But see also "falls into Tennyson's idylls," and see also P. F. Millard, "Ambrosius in 'The Holy Grail': Source and Function," NQG 18 (1960), 205-09.

30. Froston offers an important aesthetic reading of this riddle: "Art is a form of speaking by indirection. It creates an illusion world which is regulated by its own laws, in effect an 'evasion' of material reality, and yet it also requires 'relation': the awareness of an aesthetic order within the work and a definable relationship between the work and the reality it portrays," p. 81.
The philosphe's influence has narrowed from the whole society to the individual, and his message has become almost exclusively moral and spiritual as the "chair" of the bard has been replaced by the podium of the teacher.

This complex, highly literary and traditional figure of the, the "rubrics" five lines of Tennyson's poetry like a colossus, expressing some of his fundamental aesthetic concerns. That the character of Merln as he evolves in the Idylls should embody various stages Tennyson's thought about the dangers of violence and war, the function of the contemporary artist, and the potency of his words is not surprising. After all, as Tennyson wrote in 1889:

I am Merln,
And I am dying,
I am Merln
Who follow The Gleam.8 ("Merlin and The Gleam," 11.7.10)

University of Hartford

Thackeray's Journalism:
Apprenticeship for Writer and Reader

Elisabeth Segal

Charlotte Bronte regarded Thackeray as "the first of the modern masters"; G. H. Lewes asserted that . . . England has at no time produced a writer of fiction with whom Thackeray may not stand in honourable comparison9; Trollope believed Henry Esmond "the finest novel in the English language."10 Thackeray's reputation declined sharply, however, after his death and remained relatively low until its steady climb in our own time back into the sunshine of critical esteem.

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

In the years between the publication of Trollope's critical biography (1879) and the appearance in the 1960's of major sympathetic studies of Thackeray by Gordon Ray and Geoffrey Tillotson,11 numerous books about Thackeray focused on his attitudes, character, or alleged values, and were characterized by weak logic, bias, and vindictiveness.12 Lionel Stevenson, writing in 1955, deplored the tone of Thackeray criticism up to that time and suggested the reason for it. The critics who have written on Thackeray, he said, ". . . have one characteristic in common: they are strongly subjective in their attitude toward Thackeray; with the exception of Gordon Ray in The Buried Life, they make little use of the technique of research. Thackeray was so much the most personal of all major novelists that he induces a similarly personal mood in his critics." Many, many "studies" of Thackeray were simply distorted examinations of and attacks on Thackeray's temperament, attitudes, and personal relationships.

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

3. I would like to thank the National Endowment for the Humanities for the Fellowship in Residence for College Teachers (1977-78) which supported this research and Prof. David De Laure for his encouragement and good counsel.
that the first readers of Vanity Fair and the subsequent novels did not have to fall into this conclusion because they were familiar with the clear-cut narrative personas which Thackeray had been using in his numerous periodical sketches, reviews, and short fiction for a decade before Vanity Fair appeared in 1847. The striking revival of Thackeray’s reputation in the last twenty years, on the other hand, does not stem from a rediscovery of Thackeray’s early journalism, which truthfully speaking does not warrant resurrection, but on greatly increased critical interest in and sensitivity to the complexities of the narrative persona in Literature.

Thackeray began using the device of a narrative persona very early in his journalistic career, experimented extensively with its potential, then used it in one form or another in every novel he wrote. Thackeray’s career as a free-lance writer was launched in 1837 with the collapse of the radical newspaper, The Constitutional and Public Ledger, which employed him as Paris correspondent. Fraser’s Magazine was the most dependable market for his work in the next seven years, and most members of the gallery of Thackeray’s narrative personas originated in its pages. After contributing to Fraser’s one review and a ballad, Thackeray hit upon the idea of using a narrative persona to authorize his reviews of December 1837 (November 1837). The faults of the book, a pompous guide to high-society etiquette called My Book; or, The Anatomy of Conduct by John Henry Skelton, were perfectly exposed by having the critique of its contents originate with the anonymous contributor who had devised theuckleberry footman Yellowpkul. The newly created character scored a hit with the public and so was used for several more comic pieces in subsequent issues—another review and several narratives involving “behind-the-scenes” glimpses of the aristocracy in its dinger moments. Thackeray’s second narrative persona in the pages of Fraser’s also was created to enliven a routine assignment, when Thackeray was asked to report on the Royal Academy art exhibition of 1838. The sentimental struggling artist, Michael Angelo Tittmarsh, became from this time on Thackeray’s means of levanning with humor the occasionally tedious task that faced him as Fraser’s critic of the visual arts. Tittmarsh became an omnivorous reader and writer with Thackeray himself that he was before long the most hard-worked of Thackeray’s narrator figures. Besides the regular reviews of major London and Paris art exhibitions, Mr. Tittmarsh’s name appeared on the title-pages of the following works, in and out of Fraser’s: the Paris Sketch-Book, Comic Tales and Sketches, The Second Funeral of Napoleon, the Fraser’s essays “Memorials of Gourmandising,” “Men and Pictures,” and “Men and Coats.” The History of Samuel Tittmarsh and the Great Hoggarty Diamond, the Irish Sketch Book, Tittmarsh’s Caricature Lithographs, Little Travels and Road-Side Sketches, Legend of the Rhine, Notes of a Journey from Cornwall to Grand Cairo and Mr. Perkin’s Ball, to list only the most prominent pieces. Thackeray even began consistently to refer to himself as Tittmarsh in personal notes and the like in the narrative persona tended to break down: “It is a curious fact that both Boz and Tittmarsh reached Liverpool the same day [June 29, 1842; Thackeray on the way to Ireland, Dickens returning from New York]; but the journals have not taken notice of the arrival of the latter. Gross jealousy!”

Other personas adopted by Thackeray in his Fraser’s contributions were Iky Solomons, Esq., junior, for the novel Catharine, Sam Tittmarsh, who narrates his own story in “... The Great Hoggarty Diamond” (Michael Angelo Tittmarsh, Sam’s cousin, acts as editor and illustrator of this narrative), George Savage Fitzpoodles, the non-literate author of the many pieces in the three serialized books, Professional, or If I Were You, as well as the alleged but undeveloped narrator of Barry Lyndon’s adventures in their original version. Barry Lyndon, the actual narrative persona in that book, also was a Fraser’s figure, for the book was first published in that magazine in 1843. In 1844 Thackeray left Fraser’s for a more lucrative staff position on the new comic periodical Punch. Harold Strong Gulliver presents a formidable catalog of thirty Thackeray pseudonyms which appeared within Punch’s covers. Some were used merely for brief filler paragraphs but virtually all were developed as narrative personas as well as pseudonyms.6 In creating this extensive gallery of pseudonymous narrative personas, Thackeray was following the common journalistic practice of the day, which was probably fostered originally by the strong tradition of anonymity in newspaper and magazine contributions. Anonymity served several purposes in this undisciplined adolescence of journalism. Protection from libel suits was doubtless a primary consideration. Furthermore, journalism was generally looked on as a degrading, blackguardly pursuit; not for years to come would its practitioners be considered professional members of society. Many of the journalists who wrote for the periodical press would have lost rather than gained reputation by appearing in print without protective disguise. Thackeray himself pointed out another consideration: it did not do for writers to be too good to sign his name to such humdrum, common productions of the overworked pen.7 Another benefit suggested by Thackeray in the same essay was no doubt substantial—that of protecting the author’s privacy at a time when the conditions of publication tended to encourage an intimacy between author and public.

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

Once used, these characters were resurrected time after time, if successful in amusing readers and editors, simply to cash in on that success; in this way some personas appeared regularly for a time as part of a series, the backbones of these comic magazines, while others that didn’t catch on made but one brief appearance. The recurring characters in a continuing series enabled an author to tie together sketches or essays on widely diverse subjects and gave the readers the special pleasure of renewed acquaintance and intimacy that comes with familiarity. Even a successful persona would, of course, be dropped in time so as not to become tiresome and to make way for a new figure that might capture the public’s notice and fancy. Editors were firm believers in frequent change of series and hence of personas, according to the description of the writer.8 A fact that makes the longevity of Tittmarsh the more remarkable.

These were the pragmatic motives, rooted in the commercial enterprise of mid-nineteenth-century journalism, that dictated Thackeray’s nearly inevitable use of narrative personas for the periodical press. The device proved so particularly useful and congenial to Thackeray’s artistic goals, however, that after he had refined an essentially crude narrative technique into a precise and efficient tool, he carried it over from slapdash journalism to his major novels where he gave it a central role.

Wayne Booth has pointed out in his seminal study of fictional rhetoric that a narrative persona may coincide more or less with the implied author of the work or "may be separated from him by large ironies."9 A failure to observe this distinction accounts for the great bulk of wrong-headed criticism of Thackeray’s novels. Where the gulf between implied author and narrative persona is too vast to overlook, Lyndon, narrated by an eighteenth-century Irish rogue, the values espoused by the work have never been badly misinterpreted (though many readers have objected to the unpleasant world revealed in Barry’s totally amoral "code of a gentleman"). Where the mask more closely resembles the middle-aged English journalist-novelist, however, as in the shadowy figure of Vanity Fair’s showman or in Pendennis, narrator of The Newcomes and Philip, the characteristic bugaboo of Thackeray’s readers group—up—the tendency to simply miss the presence of the persona or mask and to attribute both commentary and its implied values directly to Thackeray the author. Lamborn E. Kimbrough has written: "He was either his own narrator, as in Vanity Fair and Pendennis, or was using as mouthpiece a character whose attitudes were so like his own that the digressions are not noticed or are used by the reader. The reader is usually followed and hence compounded by an attack on Thackeray the author, for shallowness, ambivalence, or similar vices detected in the persona’s view of life.

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

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

7. A first-rate example of this critical interest and sensitivity appears in Julian Markham’s piece, "Poe’s Edgar警务: "It is my own contention that Thackeray is a consummate artist very much in control of what he is doing. Thackeray has the best of both worlds: the best of critical coherence and aesthetic integrity; and that he is also a highly sophisticated critic, exploiting to the full the potential of the various personas he adopts, and introducing ambiguity deliberately,

8. The writers of The History of Samuel Tittmarsh and the Great Hoggarty Diamond, ed. Gordon N. Ray (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1945, II, p. 120), highly sophisticated critics, exploiting to the full the potential of the various personas he adopts, and introducing ambiguity deliberately.


unsympathetic criticism of Thackeray is Saintsbury's monumental work, the critical introductions to its volumes of the 1908 Oxford Edition of Thackeray's Works, and it is an exception that does indeed prove the rule and bolster the argument. The reason for this is that Saintsbury was, by all indications, more intimately familiar with every bit of Thackeray's writing than any other critic in the last century. Thackeray's works, Saintsbury tells us in the preface to the collection of his introductions that was issued in 1881, "had been for nearly forty years, more frequently in his hands, and more constantly in the head and heart of the student [Saintsbury] than any other in prose..." 23 Later he mentions that he has read Coxe's Dairy, which he would not call one of Thackeray's best or even second best works, "at least a score of times."

23. Ibid. and The Irish Sketch Book he writes, "...there is hardly a book of Thackeray's that I have read oftener." It is no accident then that Saintsbury's criticism includes many insights into the nature of Thackeray's narrative personas, which Saintsbury calls edola. How many volumes of wrongbeaded criticism would we have been spared had subsequent critics taken this observation two steps further? That is to say, that the people who go wrong trying to identify certain of Thackeray's characters stock and block with real persons, might take a lesson from these various edola. They always have something Thackerayan; they never by any chance contain anything like the whole Thackeray. 24

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

Ruskin's Changing Evaluation of Poetic Vision

Helen Pike Brown

In Modern Painters III and The Stones of Venice Ruskin renews the Medieval and Renaissance framework of mind and some works of art they produced. He discusses frequently, as illustration, the poetry of Dante and Milton. His praise, especially of Dante, is almost total. "I think that the central man of all the world," he writes in 1853 in The Stones of Venice III, "as representing in perfect balance the imaginative, moral, and intellectual faculties, all at their highest, is Dante." In The Stones of Venice II he wrote, "every line of the Paradise is full of the most exquisite and spiritual expression of Christian truth; and that poem is only less read than the Inferno," because it requires far greater attention, and perhaps, for its full enjoyment, a holier heart" (X, 378-80). His appreciation of Milton is more qualified, and in The Stones of Venice II and III, "as representing the Stones of Venice tend to be unflattering comparisons to Dante. Still, Ruskin's admiration of Milton is strong. During the time he was composing The Stones of Venice he was steadily reading Milton and writes to his father frequently of his conclusions. He writes on 23 April 1852, for example, comparing Milton to Dante and Shakespeare, "I think in the setting forth of a sublime vision by the best possible words and metaphors, Milton beats them both" (X, 307-9fn.). And Ruskin argues in the writings of the mid-1850's that Dante and Milton have given us a daring and valuable insight into both the nature of last things and the kind of life necessary for man to live in order to achieve Christian salvation. And yet, from the 1860's to the end of his life Ruskin's remarks on these poets reveal a changed opinion of their work and of what readers can learn from it. Their scenes of eternal beatitude and punishment become to Ruskin "idle imaginations," "vague and visionary" (XVII, 209). Ruskin no longer seeks out the images Milton and Charlotte Bronte and William Black give us of the supernatural; he comes to believe we cannot trust such expressions. All we can cling to are those poets' conclusions about the conduct of our daily life.

18. Geoffrey Crayon was a persona used by Irving.
19. September 1849, quoted by Richard Clark Tobias in "American Criticism of Thackeray 1845-1855," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 8 (June 1956), 54.
21. Ibid., p. 57.
22. Ibid., p. 82.
In order to account for this change in Ruskin's response to this poetry one must first locate the power in which he originally found it. On what grounds according to Ruskin, do Dante and Milton erect their visionary structures? Does Ruskin's opinions about this foundation change? Why, if his trust in these visions diminishes, does his faith in the moral wisdom of these poets remain strong?

One might be tempted at first to attribute this change simply to Ruskin's declining faith in the Evangelical Christianity of his youth, crystallized in his "unconvertment" at Turin in 1855. But his loss of faith in the content of poetry is not simply a rationalization of the poet and his work with religious prophecy would suggest. Moreover Ruskin's changing evaluation of poetic vision has strong consequences for his attitude towards the symbolic imagination.

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

And yet, in Modern Painters III and The Stones of Venice, Ruskin speaks of another order of poets, those who do not construct but receive their images. In Modern Painters III he outlines the "true ideal" as it exists in art. One branch of that true ideal is: "It is the "central and highest branch of ideal art which concerns itself simply with things as they are, and accepts, in all of them, alike the evil and the good" (V, 111). The idealistic Ruskin argues, is in the artist's arrangement of what he sees. But as he develops his thoughts about such art, Ruskin's most frequent literary examples are from Dante and Homer; these are poets whose strength is not simply in their fidelity to fact, and to subsume them under the naturalist ideal is to raise problems about how we are to receive their work. Ruskin continues, "all the great men see what they paint before they paint it—see it in a perfectly passive manner,—cannot help seeing it if they would; whether in their minds eyes, or in bodily forms; they see it, and being under the might of its presence, to alter one jot or tittle of it as they write it down or paint it down; it being to them in its own kind and degree always a true vision or Apocalypse, and invariably accompanied in their hearts by a feeling correspondent to the words,—"Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are" (V, 114). This injunction and Ruskin's subsequent discussion in this chapter emphasize the artist's verisimilitude rather than arrangement. Moreover, the emotional tenor of the description, Ruskin's reference to the Bible, his borrowing of sacred language to describe this creative process, his use as examples of poets whom we would categorize as mythical or allegorical, all point to the naturalist ideal as including an order of art with more profound and spiritual implications than might first be apparent. These visionary poets believe fully in what they describe; yet what they describe is not accessible to the ordinary sight of men.

In a later chapter of this volume Ruskin contrasts Milton's hell with Dante's and complains that "all is wild and senseless with Milton... But Dante's Inferno is accurately separated into circles drawn with well-pointed compasses" (p. 270). "It does not follow, because Milton did not map out his Inferno as Dante did, that he could not have done so if he had chosen; only, it was the easier and less imaginative process to leave it vague than to define it. Imagination is always the seeing and asserting faculty" (p. 271). And, Ruskin writes elsewhere by the volume, "the great men have no choice in the matter, they do not know or care whether the things they describe are vulgarities or not. They see them; they are the facts of the case. If they had merely composed without passion, they might have done it at their will to refuse this circumstance or add that. But they did not compose it. It came to them ready fashioned." (p. 115).

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

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

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

In fact this is a discussion of art, one of the protheses that the prophetic powers of a particular poet implies that he poet provides about the nature of reality a moral insight beyond the common wisdom of men. In this sense Dante and Milton speak an inspired truth, but it is a truth that to be an artist and poet is to be a prophet; and he can do this because the theory of his writing, like a religious mission, derives from a theological tradition which holds that such a mode is necessary to accompany the divine. Ruskin's theory of the prehistoric and Turner, for example, claims that Ruskin "takes quite seriously and quite literally the idea that to imagine deeply is to prophesy, and

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3. See, for example, VI, 38.

4. Here Ruskin's writing on the prophetic influence of the paintings of others can provide a number of examples of how Ruskin learns as he paints. See especially the writings of Turner and of the prehistoric. Ruskin points out, for example, that there is no possible way of determining how much of Ruskin's writing on Turner is "preconscious". His writing on Turner, for example, often contains the idea that Ruskin takes quite seriously and quite literally the idea that to imagine deeply is to prophesy, and
that they meet by preparing themselves in thought and act. It is a truth that they actively seek. Their own wisdom enables them to see it, just as our moral integrity prevents us from the same leap. Ruskin does not argue that the imagery Dante and Milton use to convey their understanding is inspired; the structure, characters, metaphors of their literary works are not revealed by God. God is most apparent in artistic embodiments, according to Ruskin, in Turner’s paintings. (III, 611-12) But it is nature Turner captures imperfectly on canvas, the physical extension of God’s attributes, according to Ruskin’s theory of typical beauty. Poetry is not that. One can rephrase the problem: who gives us the image of heaven in Dante’s poetry; who gives us the moral conclusions about life?

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

There have been few such artists in the history of literature. They are those who most closely come to a comprehension, almost divine in its intensity and truth, of human life. Such an artist penetrates to the meaning of situations, but carries his insights, understandings, with him, learning, growing, and enriching those pieces of knowledge about the world until he builds, unconsciously, an immense fund of understanding. His accumulated insights, slowly developed, organized, modified, and given body by his storehouse of images come back as profound visions of the world to be captured in poetry. The vision may demand effort to be recreated entirely in poetry; so Ruskin considers Milton less imaginative a poet than Dante because he does not push through to the purely visual dimension of his meaning. But once the core of the vision is seen, it overcomes the poet; he is held by it. Unlike poets who work according to the regular processes of the imagination, these visionary artists give us an art whose embodiment is inescapable and has the same immediacy, reality and power as its meaning. Because so much of this kind of art derives directly from the unconscious, its structure may spread out seemingly beyond the poet’s control; he can only tell what he saw.

It is important to stress that Ruskin sees the artist’s vision as inherently dependent upon his own nature, upon his character, his intellectual and emotional insight and his accumulated images. For as Ruskin grows older this aesthetic theory causes him to lament. In the writings of the 1850’s Ruskin stresses the wholeness and power of these visions, the integral relationship between the artist’s moral insight and his images, the ways such images can both entrance us with their beauty and lead us to an understanding of their moral source. As he grows older and his own beliefs about the soul of man and the power of sin darken, however, as his public writings become less visionary and more cold, the indisputable truths of human life captured in art and a more confrontation with the brutality he finds in the world around him, Ruskin’s attitude towards this visionary poetry changes; he no longer admits its integrity. Because one can document Ruskin’s rejection during his middle years of the doctrine of an afterlife one might be led to assume that this loss of faith causes his rejection of the images of eternity Dante and Milton give. And to some extent this is true. But Ruskin later regained a belief in eternal life, altered in content though it was from his early faith, and this did not noticeably affect his understanding of visionary poetry. Moreover, these visions were always to Ruskin dependent upon the artist. It is the artist he begins to question. Ruskin’s marketing view of man alters his trust in apocalyptic predictions. One can no longer believe that what the visionary poet tells us is unaffected by pride or ignorance or motive. In Musura Pulveris Ruskin declares that Homer and Dante and Milton, those he had most often mentioned as visionaries, “have permitted themselves, though full of all nobleness and wisdom, to coin idle imaginations of the mysteries of eternity, and guide the faiths of the families of the earth by the courses of their own vague and visionary arts while they are too often careless, or inhuman, or inhuman, respecting which they all have but one voice, lie hidden behind those veils of phantasy, unsought, and often unsuspected” (XVII, 209). And he speaks throughout this volume of these and all writers as if they were not only fully but consciously responsible for their images, and as if the greatest value of the Iliad and the Commedia were the insights they give into what Homer and Dante could teach about human life.

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

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

I tell you truly...it seems daily more amazing to me that men such as these should dare to play with the most precious truths...by which the whole human race listening to them could be informed, or deceived...they do but play upon seditiously modulated pipes...and fill the openings of eternity...with idle puppets of their scholastic imagination. (XVIII, 137-88)

Ruskin’s long need for truth in art becomes almost paramount, and the demand that writers lead him to truth begins to usurp his aesthetic appreciation. Aesthetic contemplation now seems a path to understanding. His dismissal of the visionary mode. “a vision only,” and of each while function of Milton’s images indicate that Ruskin’s declining faith in the artistic embodiments of Milton and Dante signify a decline of faith in the power of symbolic understanding. A more direct, autonomous knowledge is called for. Toward the very end of his life, this demand for the consciously moral voice of the poet, for reminded truth, without exaggeration or invention, culminates in Ruskin’s telling his readers that he had always chosen Byron above all others for his master. Byron tells the truth as he knows it and it is a serviceable truth.

It was of no use for Homer to tell us that Pelion was put on the top of Ossa. I knew perfectly well it wouldn’t go on the top of Ossa... Nay, the whole world, as it was described to me either by poetry or theology, was every hour becoming more and more shadowy and impossible...I felt already, with literal and increasing sadness, that there was no clear utterance of anything—that there were for me neither Goddess guides nor prophetic teachers... But at least I had found a man [Byron] who spoke only of what he had seen, and known, and spoke without exaggeration, without mystery, without enigma, and without mercy. "That is so—make what you will of it." (XXX, 144-49)

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

Larchmont, New York
Books Received


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


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


Sussman, Herbert L. Fact into Figure: Typology in Carlyle, Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1979. Pp. xx + 158. $11.00. "Like Carlyle and Ruskin, the Brothers sought to reconcile their art through the principle that art is a symbolic realism that sees and expresses beauty in the social and political affairs of society. . . . [T]he Brotherhood, deeply influenced by Carlyle and Ruskin, employed a symbolic realism that sees art as spiritually and naturally oriented. To prove this, they employed detailed representation of this natural and historical fact to be seen as figurative and transcendental."


Victorian Group News

DICKENS SOCIETY ANNUAL AWARD

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

NORTH AMERICAN UNION LIST OF VICTORIAN PERIODICALS

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

LEWIS CARROLL ANNIVERSARY

To celebrate the 150th anniversary of C. L. Dodgson's birth (January 27, 1862), Edward Guiliano is editing an anthology of new essays. Submissions on any aspect of Carroll's life or work are welcome. Essays should be between ten and forty typewritten pages and may contain illustrations. Queries and submissions should be sent to Edward Guiliano, 41 Jane Street 4D, New York, NY 10014.

NOTICE

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

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

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