Looking and Perception in Nineteenth Century Poetry



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The thesis examines a series of nineteenth century poets whose poems are concerned with complex relations of looking and perception, and concentrates on Shelley and the poets he influenced: Browning, Rossetti, Swinburne, and Hardy. It focusses on poems dealing with the visual arts and æsthetic modes of perception, and concludes with a study of Walter Pater – an unrecognised follower of Shelley – and his notions of artistic character. An emphasis on the way face and bodily form are scrutinised, in poems concerning painting, sculpture and portraiture, leads to the hypothesis that the way the poet pictures essence or character through corporeal form is correlative to the essence or character of his own poetry. The particular spatial relations and visual representations of the poetry provide an index to specific patterns of reading. At the heart of this examination is a Shelleyan conception of the "unsculptured image", the characterising force and pre-given perspective of a poet's poem, which has a primary shaping effect on his language and representations, and continues to exert itself in the poem's reading. As this "image" is an imaginative rather than purely linguistic force, the analyses of selected poems avoid reduction to considerations of language and rhetoric alone, seeking rather to engage with the question of what constitutes a writer's own essence or particularity and what gives a strong poem its compulsive power.

The thesis draws on the work of the French literary critic Maurice Blanchot to inform its ideas of poetic space and depth, and to produce an understanding of the poetic text very different from that given by a classical reading; and so alter the way one perceives the poem as literary object. In addition to this, certain nineteenth century and earlier æsthetic writings, and the prose works of the poets themselves, establish the critical basis of the arguments advanced. The thesis also endeavours to follow through the arguments of traditional scholarship in order to provide critique on distinctions or departures made.

Chapter I examines Shelley's 'On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery'; Chapter II deals with portraiture in Browning's 'My Last Duchess' and Rossetti's 'The Portrait'; Chapter III turns to the sculpture of the hermaphrodite in Swinburne's early lyric 'Hermaphroditus'; Chapter IV looks at Thomas Hardy's poems about sketches and shades; Chapter V is an epilogue in which the work of Walter Pater draws together the ideas developed in the rest of the thesis.

(100,000 words approx.)

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A Note on the Text

For matters concerning thetic format and presentation, I have in the main consulted the first British edition of Kate L. Turabian's *A Manual for Writer's of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations*, prepared by John E. Spink (London, 1982). However, as no manual is perfect, if conventions observed in other Oxford theses presented themselves as superior, then these have been adopted with attention to their consistency throughout.

CHAPTER I

SHELLEY ON LEONARDO'S 'MEDUSA'

Consequently the eye transmits its own image through the air to all the objects which face it, and also receives them on its own surface, whence the 'sensus communis' takes them and considers them, and commits to memory those that are pleasing.

So I hold that the invisible powers of imagery in the eyes may project themselves to the object as do the images of the object to the eye.

Selections from the Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci, ed. Irma A. Richter (Oxford, London, and New York, 1977), p. 112.

Through [Lionardo's] strange veil of sight things reach him so . . . .

Pater, 'Notes on Lionardo da Vinci', *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (London, 1873), p. 104.

To drink in the spirit of their forms – this was what Shelley desired as he stood long at gaze before the monuments of ancient art in the galleries of Florence. In the fragment "On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci," we have an example of his power to translate the impressions derived from pictorial art into poetry.

Edward Dowden, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2 vols (London, 1886), II, 284.

i. Shelley and Poetic Vision

The contention of this chapter is that Shelley's poem 'On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery', a poem that until quite recently was much neglected, is essential reading, not merely as a impressive piece of writing, but as the epitome of a type of poetic vision manifested in Shelley which then becomes integral

to the æsthetic practice of a succession of his followers. Other chapters will deal with the way in which those followers took Shelley's working of poetic perception and adapted it to their own devices, retaining the crucial notion of a vision which constructs the poem and functions as part of the poetry. But it is important, first of all, to establish what is meant by 'vision', and, it will be immediately apparent to any reader of Shelley that such a discussion cannot draw on simple conceptions of pictorialism and mimetic representation. Sir Herbert Read, in what must be one of the earliest attempts to reassess Shelley's poetry at a time when it was much discredited, makes the following remark:

> Shelley . . . was not a "visuel"; he was a transcendentalist, for whom words are never sufficient for the vision they must express.[1]

Read obviously means that Shelley is not interested in presenting a detailed verisimilar transcription of the likenesses of real things – something Shelley articulates very strongly for himself:

> The Epipsychidion is a mystery – As to real flesh & blood, you know that I do not deal in those articles, – you might as well go to a gin shop for a leg of mutton, as expect any thing human or earthly from me.[2]

Nonetheless, Read recognises that Shelley's poetry includes a vision that does not reduce to language alone. Instead of regarding this vision, as one so easily might do, as a formula for some ineffable and inscrutable sublimity, it might be possible to read it as a creative tendency. Thus vision would operate not merely as a series of representations, but as a shaper of composition. George Hersey's distinction is useful:

> A verbal writer may be defined as one who is

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[1] Sir Herbert Read, 'In Defence of Shelley', in *In Defence of Shelley and Other Essays* (London and Toronto, 1936), p. 23

[2] Letter 668, to John Gisborne, 22 Oct. 1821, in*The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. F. L. Jones, 2 vols (Oxford, 1964), II, 363.

> interested in sequence, consequence, action, the passage of time. He avoids gaps, too many branchings-off, and the like. He wants to get the reader from point A to point B. A visual writer on the other hand is almost the reverse. He is interested in juxtaposition rather than sequence, simultaneity rather than consequence, appearance rather than time. He delights in colour, aura, texture, nearness, distance. He does not see thought as a form of transport from A to B.[3]

It would be likely that visual writing as poetry would not be a good medium for the imparting of direct and particularised information. This certainly was Shelley's opinion:

> Didactic poetry is my abhorrence; nothing can be equally well expressed in prose that is not tedious and supererogatory in verse.[4]

> Facts are not what we want to know in poetry, in history, in the lives of individual men, in satire, or panegyric. They are the mere divisions, the arbitrary points on which we hang, and to which we refer those delicate and evanescent hues of mind, which language delights and instructs us in precise proportion as it expresses.[5]

Notably, what Hersey calls "colour, aura, texture, nearness", in Shelley's poetry is applied not to the description of objects, but to cerebral processes or a sort of abstract representationalism. Swinburne was of the opinion that Shelley sought

> to render the effect of a thing rather than a thing itself; the soul and spirit of life rather than the living form, the growth rather than the thing grown.[6]

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[3] George L. Hersey, 'Ruskin as Optical Thinker', in *The Ruskin Polygon: Essays on the Imagination of John Ruskin*, eds. John Dixon Hunt and Faith M. Holland (Manchester, 1982), pp. 44-64; 45.

[4] Preface to 'Prometheus Unbound', in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, eds. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers, Norton Critical Edition (New York and London, 1977), p. 135.Where possible, all quotations from Shelley's poetry and prose are taken from this edition.

[5] Letter 616, to [A Lady], [? Spring of 1821],*The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, II, 277.

[6] Swinburne, 'Notes on the Text of Shelley', in *The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne*, Bonchurch Edition, eds. E. Gosse and T. J. Wise, 20 vols (London, 1925-7), XV (1926), 348-97; 380. Hereafter referred to as Bonchurch, with appropriate volume number. The essay was originally published in 1869, and then in *Essays and Studies* (London,1875), pp. 184-237.

William Keach in his excellent recent study of Shelley's poetry devotes a chapter of his book to what he calls Shelley's 'Imaging the Operations of the Human Mind', taking as his inspiration that moment in the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound* where Shelley declares that:

> The imagery which I have employed will be found in many instances to have been drawn from the operations of the human mind, or from those external actions by which they are expressed.[7]

Keach suggests a variety of ways in which this is achieved including a reversal of "the usual figurative function of imagery" so that a mental state or operation is made the vehicle in a figure whose tenor is sensory and physical - as in the example he cites from *Epipsychidion*:

> her way was paved, and roofed above
> With flowers soft as thoughts of budding love
> (*ll.*327-8).[8]

Precedents for Shelley's use of mental imagery are shown to exist in a variety of other poets with whose work Shelley was familiar, including Dante, Shakespeare and the Classical Greek playwrights. Keach quotes Mary Shelley's astute summation of her husband's gifts:

> More poets clothe the ideal with familiar and sensible imagery. Shelley loved to idealize the real - to gift the mechanism of the material universe with a soul and a voice, and to bestow such also on the most delicate and abstract emotions and thoughts of the mind. Sophocles was his great master in this species of imagery.[9]

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[7] Preface to 'Prometheus Unbound',*Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 133, cited by William Keach in *Shelley's Style* (New York and London, 1984), p. 43.

[8] 'Epipsychidion', *Ibid.*, p. 382, cited by Keach, p. 44. I have emended the punctuation given in Keach.

[9] Mary Shelley, 'Note on "Prometheus Unbound" ', *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, corrected by G. M. Matthews (Oxford, 1970), p. 272, cited by Keach, p. 68. Keach's misprision of "Most" emended to "More".

Unfortunately many of Shelley's critics have lacked Mary Shelley's percipience and have imposed totally inappropriate expectations of their own on his poetry, condemning it out of hand when it did not conform, without stopping to query their own assumptions. Very obviously, Shelley's powers of visualisation are not in the least concerned with seeing "the object as in itself it really is", to quote Matthew Arnold's famous dictum[10]; and, as we shall see, this will be one of the distinguishing marks of many of his followers. Although Timothy Webb, who is one of the chief critics responsible for rescuing Shelley's reputation, does a fine job in refuting Leavis's famous and inept deprecation of Shelley in *Revaluation*, it is not enough to point out that Leavis reads the 'Ode to the West Wind' inaccurately, undoubtedly true though this is;[11] the point is that Leavis's complaint of Shelley's "failure . . . with reference to any grasped reality"[12] assumes poetic skill to reside in the ability to depict tangible materiality, and this, in the face of such explicit and central statements of Shelley himself, such as: "You know I always seek in what I see the manifestation of something beyond the present & tangible object."[13]

The above remark is made in a letter written from Ferrara to Peacock on 7 November 1818, being part of an account of Shelley's impressions gathered while examining the handwriting of the Italian poets Ariosto and Tasso. The letter shows Shelley providing a kind of graphological analysis:

> The handwriting of Ariosto is a small firm & pointed character expressing as I should say a strong & keen but circumscribed energy of mind, that of Tasso is large free & flowing, except that there is a checked expression in the midst of its

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[10] See 'On Translating Homer' (1860) and 'The Function of Criticism' (1864), in*The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. R. H. Super, 11 vols (Michigan, 1960-77), I (1960), 140; III (1962), 258.

[11] Timothy Webb, *Shelley: A Voice not Understood* (Manchester, 1977), pp. 26-7.

[12] F. R. Leavis, *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (London, 1936), p. 231.

[13] Letter 485, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, II, 47.

> flow which brings the letters into a smaller compass than one expected from the beginning of the word. It is the symbol of an intense & earnest mind exceeding at times its own depth, and admonished to return by the chillness of the waters of oblivion striking upon its adventurous feet.[14]

At this point follow on the words about vision, accompanied by the additional comment "and as we do not agree in phisiognomy (*sic*) so we may not agree now."

There are several things worth noting here. First of all, the discussion is centred on the deduction of a more essential truth or character from visual clues which prompt a deeper envisioning. Significantly, Shelley compares this process with "phisiognomy", meaning the deduction of an individual's character from his facial traits, an idea we can imagine he found endorsed by his Neoplatonist inclination that "soule is forme, and doth the bodie make."[15] Graphology and physiognomy are a specific kind of portraiture wherein the subject's individual characters, be they letters, words, or features provide access to a deeper truth. Furthermore, the implications of graphology as a kind of reading process are fascinating, for it seems what is actually at stake is not the imported content of the written communication, interesting as that may be, but the way that the total look of the composition takes the reader through to the construction of another picture. Thus, the graphologist in his concentration on a particular aspect of the composition, reads the text before him by discounting normal reading protocols which would give priority to the semantic meaning of the words. In my reading of Shelley, I want to suggest, by way of analogy, that a modified version of this graphological approach is necessary for understanding the specific force of

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[14] *Ibid.*

[15] Edmund Spenser, 'An Hymne in Honovr of Beavtie' (*l.*133), in *Poetical Works*, eds. J. C. Smith and E. de Selincourt (London, New York, and Toronto, 1912), p. 591.

Shelleyan æsthetics.

The modification is important. Obviously the reading of a poem is different from analysing handwriting; the individual 'characters' that make up a poem are its words and images, not the physical look of pieces of type. But there are methods of reading which take one far beyond the paraphrastic business of deciphering what the signification of a given set of words might be, to the rather more interesting question of how an individual poem manifests, in a more abstract sense, what we might call the character of a particular poet's poetry. It is possible therefore to apply Shelley's statement to poetry itself and to declare that the reader of his poems should seek in what he sees something that is not reducible to considerations of language and representation alone, but which lies beyond them, and which they can but suggest. What is being hypothesised is a creative energy which is utterly co-extensive with the text of the poem, but which nonetheless preexists it. The poem is thus one mapping or expression of that energy as it makes itself felt in writing. Shelley is a poet who is fascinated by the source of his own poems and the process of their coming into being, and this fascination is implicated in the poems themselves, as well in the discursive context of the *Defence*. Again, this can be said to be true of his followers in that they all evince a passionate interest in the æsthetics of poetry which, in their strongest poems, turns into a concentrated exploration of the means whereby the poem reflects its origins.

William Keach documents an important ambivalence in Shelley's attitude towards language, which at moments becomes an open "skepticism about the adequacy of language to express the convictions of the poet"[16]. Keach quotes a range of examples, of which the following are representative.

_____These words are inefficient and metaphorical –

[16] Keach, p. 22.

> Most words so – No help –[17]

> How vain is it to think that words can penetrate the mystery of our being.[18]

Keach pursues Shelley's anxieties about expressive language through the *Defence* and provides a detailed and impressive reading of that essay as "a defense against, and a resourceful but uncertain triumph over, the linguistic skepticism which pervades Shelley's other writing."[19] Uncertainty is thus still central to the *Defence*, triumph or no, but, in my opinion, this uncertainty arises not simply from the question of whether or not language is sufficient to express particular ideas and images; rather what Shelley struggles with is the realisation of a power which informs poetry, gives it its strength, and of which language is but partially expressive. Keach makes the point that

> The language of poetry succeeds when it articulates by 'careful observation' its own idealized failure. Poetry as it actually exists records the failure of an ideal expressive completeness[20].

While this is useful in that it stresses that language is not the only factor of poetry, the vocabulary of success and failure obscures the fact that the energising power of poetry is not represented, even by default, merely in the expressive adequacy or inadequacy of language; this kind of power is not to be thought of as a specific conception which may, or may not, be recognised by linguistic appropriacy. The power isn't simply something that could get included in the fabric of the poem; the point is the poem simply does not work as a poem, unless this power is present. The moment when words seem to fail before the challenge of expressing

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[17] Shelley's note to 'On Love', in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 474, cited by Keach, p. 23.

[18] 'On Life', in *Ibid.*, p. 475, cited by Keach, p. 23. Keach's misprision of "it is" emended to "is it".

[19] Keach, p. 33.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

something to which they are unequal might not then be simply the sort of negative implication Keach implies, whereby an ineffable inspiration is signalled in the shortcoming of words' own expressivity; rather, a faltering of language might be the positive manifestation of a sudden burst of energy into the poem which reveals itself in a form other than signification, and which thus actively takes part in reading. To quote Shelley in the essay 'On Life':

> We are on that verge where words abandon us, and what wonder if we grow dizzy to look down the dark abyss of – how little we know.[21]

This scene is reminiscent of another described a few years earlier in 'Mont Blanc' in which the speaker stands and stares into the gulf of the Ravine:

> Dizzy Ravine! and when I gaze on thee
> I seem as in a trance sublime and strange
> To muse on my own separate phantasy
> (*ll.*34-6).[22]

The Ravine or abyss is the gulf in which language founders, but in which an immensely strong motivating energy surges forward to make itself felt – "Thou art pervaded with that ceaseless motion" (*l.*32). The companion poem to 'Mont Blanc', the 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty', like 'Mont Blanc' explores a source of power which, though at a remove from normative perception, can nonetheless reveal itself to the enquiring mind.

> The awful shadow of some unseen Power
> Floats though unseen amongst us
> (*ll.*1-2).[23]

> That thou – O awful LOVELINESS,
> Wouldst give whate'er these words cannot express.
> (*ll.*71-2.)[24]

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[21] 'On Life', *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 478.
[22] 'Mont Blanc', *Ibid.*, p. 90.
[23] *Ibid.*, p. 93.
[24] 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty', *Ibid.*, p. 95.

When discussing what Shelley says elsewhere about language, it might be tempting to ignore his more ambivalent remarks and see him as a kind of early precursor to Saussure and the Geneva School. Two famous statements from *Prometheus Unbound* come to mind, with a parallel in Saussure.

> Language is a perpetual Orphic song,
> Which rules with Dædal harmony a throng
> Of thoughts and forms, which else senseless and shapeless
> were.
>
> (IV.415-7.)

> He gave man speech, and speech created thought,
> Which is the measure of the Universe
>
> (II. iv.72-3).[25]

> Without language, thought is a vague, uncharted nebula There are no pre-existing ideas, and nothing is distinct before the appearance of language.[26]

However, it is important to note that Shelley resigns ultimate authority to what he calls imagination: "For language is arbitrarily produced by the Imagination and has relation to thoughts alone"[27]. Language is subsidiary to imaginative perception which permeates it. Poets, whom Shelley classes among those possessed of "the most enlarged imagination", have a special facility in making language indicative of imaginative forces. As the imagination works over language, it marks it in a way that suggests language can borrow or reflect something of that other sphere which lies beyond it. Shelley represents this marking by the figure of colour: "Poets . . . can colour all that they combine with the evanescent hues of this etherial world"[28]. The imagery of colour and hue is extremely common to

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[25] 'Prometheus Unbound', *Ibid.*, pp. 205, 174.

[26] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, revised edition, edited by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye with Albert Reidlinger, trans. Wade Baskin, (London, 1974), p. 112.

[27] 'Defence', in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 483.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 505.

Shelley's poetry:

> Spirit of BEAUTY, that dost consecrate
> With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon
> Of human thought and form
> (*ll.*13-15).[29]

But Shelley suggests that the colouring process imposed by imaginative perception is vulnerable and subject to 'evanescence' "like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed"[30].

> It visits with inconstant glance
> Each human heart and countenance;
> Like hues and harmonies of evening
> (*ll.*6-8).[31]

In 'Mont Blanc', Shelley, via his analogy of the Ravine with the access to the flood of power that sweeps the mind, elaborates a highly charged description of three different strata:

> Thine earthly rainbows stretched across the sweep
> Of the etherial waterfall, whose veil
> Robes some unsculptured image
> (*ll.*25-7).[32]

If perception-tinged language is the earthly rainbow, it flickers transiently across the "etherial waterfall" which is the stream of consciousness, and which itself masks and gives way to another yet unspecified layering – that of the "unsculptured image". Shelley deliberately seems to be directing our looking through various stages here to focus on what is all but unrepresentable. What is the unsculptured image, and why is it, as this scheme of looking seems to suggest, the crux of perception?

The scene that Shelley displays for us is organised in terms of space and vision. Is it possible to understand these qualities

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29 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty', *Ibid.*, p. 93.
30 'Defence', *Ibid.*, p. 504.
31 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty', *Ibid.*, p. 93.
32 'Mont Blanc', *Ibid.*, p. 90.

as implicated in reading at other than a representational level? To grasp such an idea is at first difficult as orthodox critical reading seems to rely on a putative linearity, where all is directional, sequential, and concerned with determinable significations. To recall Hersey's distinction between "verbal" and "visual" writers, verbal writers are always going to fare better under such reading decisions; hence, perhaps, the widespread neglect and incomprehension of many writers who can be described as visual. To restore our missing sense of dimension to the poetic text, we would have to think in terms of a different textual model which reinstates spatiality and visual depth. Only such a model will explain the puzzling connection between the perceiver and what is perceived: the unsculptured image. For Shelleyan perception, as presented in the statement: "I always seek in what I see the manifestation of something beyond the present & tangible object", is founded on the movement between perceiver and this just barely 'perceptible': it is the structure of the negotiation between the two, as the indeterminate contours of image offer themselves to and solicit the perceiving eye. But being without definition they thus sustain perception's repeated moment of inception, enfolded in the initiatory instant of indefinition between sculpture and unsculpture. "All things exist *as* they are perceived: at least in relation to the percipient."[33] What we must survey in Shelley's poetry is this relation, expressed in the passage of the "as", and being the passage of the perception process as it is constructed by the perceptible, where the perceptible is not specifically a thing, but the locus and generative source of perception.

To complicate then our idea of the poetic text, it might be useful as a way of reinstating depth, space, and a looking-beyond, to imagine it written on something like Freud's "Mystic Writing-

[33] 'Defence', *Ibid.*, p. 505. My emphasis.

Pad", a device which can "provide both an ever-ready receptive surface and permanent traces of the notes that have been made upon it", and which he uses as analogy for the psychical apparatus.

> It is true . . . that once the writing has been erased, the Mystic Pad cannot 'reproduce' it from within . . . . None the less, I do not think it is too far-fetched to compare the celluloid and waxed paper cover with the system *Pcpt.-Cs.* and its protective shield, the wax slab with the unconscious behind them, and the appearance and disappearance of the writing with the flickering-up and passing-away of consciousness in the process of perception.[34]

Freud, in that flickering up (*aufleuchten*), seems already to have determined "consciousness in the process of perception" as dependent on the cathectic innervation from within, namely from the unconscious.[35] To reiterate one might say

> the mind in creation as is a fading coal which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness: this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed[36].

'Coloured' consciousness in the process of perception, is produced, stimulated by unconscious energies, by the force exerted by the unsculptured image as it confers its 'visibility' into more accessible nearness. Perception's hue is not imposed on consciousness, or expressed in language, by something exterior to them both; as a poetic phenomenon, it is an integral textual occurrence, and is produced by means of an inner solicitation. Freud's model offers sophisticated intellection of the otherwise almost indescribable way

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[34] Sigmund Freud, 'A Note on the Mystic Writing Pad' (1924), in *The Pelican Freud Library*, gen. ed. Albert Dickson, 15 vols (Harmondsworth, 1973-86), XI:*On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, tr. and ed. James Strachey(1984), pp. 431, 433. Freud describes the "Mystic Pad" – a small writing tablet composed of a wax base overlaid with translucent wax paper and a topmost layer of transparent celluloid – in detail on p. 431. *Pcpt.-Cs.* is the abbreviated form for 'Perception-Consciousness'.

[35] See *Ibid.*, pp. 433-4.

[36] 'Defence', in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, pp. 503-4.

one space can bear upon another. This involves the complexity of mapping, layering, subsumption, as the unconscious space organises, inscribes, interrupts another more immediate space whilst retaining traces of anterior designs, characters and impressions.

That Shelley's figures, such as flower and coal, then manifest remarkably similar complex descriptive schemas is not surprising; as inevitably, the very forces that motivate the poems become represented in the poetry, and often themselves, as I will demonstrate, are constituted in such a way as to give direct contact with these forces. However, for the moment, we might simply advert again Shelley's imaging of poetic process.

> And the beasts, and the birds, and the insects were drowned
> In an ocean of dreams without a sound
> Whose waves never mark, though they ever impress
> The light sand which paves it – Consciousness.[37]
> (*ll.*102-5.)

In 1821, a year after the composition of this piece, a similar image recurs in the *Defence*.

> [Poetry] is as it were the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own; but its footsteps are like those of a wind over a sea, which the coming calm erases, and whose traces remain only as on the wrinkled sand which paves it.[38]

While I have cited Freud above, and will, at various other moments in this chapter, use analogies drawn from psychoanalysis, it should not be assumed that the intention is to make the idea of poetic energy coincide with the unconscious as it has been formally theorised by Freud and his followers. To describe poetic energy in terms of a textual unconscious would involve detailed work that would first have to establish the range of definitions psychoanalysis employs under the name 'unconscious', and secondly their

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[37] 'The Sensitive Plant', 'Part First', in *Ibid.*, p. 213.
[38] 'Defence', in *Ibid.*, p. 504.

appropriacy when used in a literary context. But the problem of transposing the conceptual vocabulary of one discipline onto another, however apparently sympathetic, means that one runs the danger of restricting one's observations to the descriptive procedures that vocabulary allows, and of over-analogy either too simple or complex which misrepresents the particularity of the movement one is trying to follow through. Therefore the few analogies made in this chapter do not occur as part of a general psychoanalytic thesis, although certain aspects of Freudian thought are used as models where they have a particular contextual rationale.

To return then to the image suggested by the writing pad, moving over what one first encounters as the outermost surface of the poetic text, it would be possible, by virtue of its permeability, to detect certain densities and clearings, or even, the location of former inscriptions, or to deduce the shift of a translation: "Any text is a new tissue of past citations"[39]. If one understands that the "invisible influence" of which Shelley speaks of as "an inconstant wind" could be a specific influence, then the inner spirit that ruffles or disturbs the surface of the poem might be that of the poet's precursor - to use the vocabulary of the "anxiety of influence" developed by Harold Bloom.[40] To put it another way, one could imagine within the poem, a submerged picturing, like that of an Old Master; in the same text, at different levels, but informing each other are two inextricably linked pictures or poems. The prior one - by which I mean the one that is submerged or buried - has a series of powerful and influential strokes which insist on, encroach on,

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[39] Roland Barthes, 'Theory of the Text' (1973), tr. Ian McLeod, in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (Boston, London, and Henley, 1981), p. 39.

[40] For the seminal work, see Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (London, Oxford, and New York, 1973). Bloom's later works develop his theory. Of these, and in spite of the esoteric title, *Kabbalah and Criticism* (New York, 1975) provides the clearest exposition of his concept of "misprision" as the self-protective and creative misreading made by a later poet of his poetic precursor.

have designs on the figures of the second. But the latter's figures, resisting that encroachment, swerve wildly and innovatively to create the 'freedom' of a new design. In this shift of picture, we witness changing of feature, concerted disfiguration, so that one portrait could grow into another and yet still retain identifiable birthmarks. When Walter Pater wrote of Leonardo's Mona Lisa, he specified "the changing lineaments" of that curiously composite figure.[41] It will be seen later on the degree to which his own influences show his personal implication in that change.

While the mystic pad beautifully conveys the sense of referred traces and their visibility, because the wax and celluloid layers are in themselves flat and unallowing of flexure, it's hard to describe the way in which deviation, as in Bloom's account of deliberate error or "misprision", disturbs transmission of the mark between one appearance and the next. Another description is necessary in order to account for the mutations of translation.

The French literary critic Maurice Blanchot gives in his essay 'The Book to Come' an exposition of what he calls "poetic space", and which has come nearer to my idea of textual space and vision in poetry than any other literary theoretical account.

> Words exist only to signify the area of correspondence, the space onto which they are projected and which, no sooner signified, furls and unfurls, never being where it is. Poetic space, the space and 'outcome' of language, never exists like an object but is always spaced out and scattered. . . . A sentence is not simply projected linearly. It opens out. In this opening other sentence and word rhythms emerge, space themselves out and regroup at varying depths – words and sentences which are interrelated by definite structural affinities though not according to common logic (the logic of subordination) which destroys the space and standardises the movement.[42]

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[41] Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*(London, 1873), p. 119. I refer throughout this chapter to the first edition.

[42] Maurice Blanchot, 'The Book to Come', in *The Siren's Song*(Brighton, 1982), pp. 227-46; 237-8.

Outside of the logic of linearity and standardised movement, what Blanchot's 'unfolding' and 'unfurling' achieve for reading, and for perception, is the recognition of *condensation* and *displacement*. These terms are two of the four mechanisms of the dream-work Freud enumerates whereby the latent dream-thoughts may be disguised as the manifest content of the dream. The philosopher Jean-François Lyotard gives in his *critique* of the Freudian dream-work, an effective image for the mutual activity of displacement and condensation, where displacement is treated as a preparatory step to condensation.

> [Condensation] has been shown to be closely connected to overdetermination, but to overdetermine supposes certain changes of emphasis in the initial text of the dream-thoughts. In condensing themselves, the dream-thoughts crush certain parts of the discourse, leaving others visible. Take a text written on a sheet of paper and crumple it. The elements of the discourse take on *relief*, in the strict sense. Imagine that before the grip of condensation compresses the dream-thoughts, displacement has reinforced certain zones of the text, so that they resist contraction and remain legible. The result is the 'textual difference' between dream-content (*Trauminhalt*) and dream-thoughts (*Traumgedanke*).[43]

The image Lyotard gives is elaborated in his further analogy of the wind-blown flag or standard. Like Shelley's wind-ruffled sea, the flag is rumpled by the wind (Desire) into a relief of folds, and the words printed or sewn upon the flag thus distort, contract, and read otherwise than in their original inscription, although certain key letters will remain legible.[44]

Lyotard is writing about dreams, phenomena indisputably visual, and one doesn't want to underestimate the difficulties of his thought by transposing his complex work to a literary application.

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[43] Jean-François Lyotard, in 'The Dream-work Does Not Think' , tr. Mary Lydon, *Oxford Literary Review* 6, no. 1 (1983), 3-34; 10.
[44] *Ibid.*, p. 11

But then as Shelley's work often suggests, perhaps the peculiarities of dreaming, its own grammar, tropology of disguises and interpretation come closer to poetic production than many other æsthetic forms.

> Our boat is asleep on Serchio's stream,
> Its sails are folded like thoughts in a dream
> (*ll.*1-2).[45]

For Shelley, poetry –like the Freudian account of dreams – remains supreme because of poets' use of language "as the hieroglyphic of their thoughts".[46] As we can see, "hieroglyphic" with its associations of picture, cipher, and interpretation scarcely suggests normative conceptions of language-use. Languages derived from the Greek alphabet such as English are phonological, rather than ideographic as is hieroglyphy. Shelley has accentuated the difference between poetry and ordinary communication by using the image of a logographic system that is totally 'foreign' to everyday purposes, and which has arcane significance requiring translation. Furthermore, the hieroglyph makes a specific appeal to sight, unlike the phonographic language whose signs often seem merely the cue to releasing the substance of the spoken words they represent. As with a graphological *interpretation*, an ideographic reading stresses that the look of individual characters can be construed to give a total picture. There are certain identifiable Western attitudes towards ideographic script including, most commonly, one of disparagement. This is not Shelley's attitude, and he can be identified as falling into that other group who mysticise the hieroglyph as a sublime abstraction.[47] Shelley's image of the

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[45] 'The Boat on the Serchio', *Shelley: Poetical Works*, p. 654.

[46] 'Defence', *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 483.

[47] The French scholar Madeleine V. -David writes concerning Father Athanase Kircher's *Prodromus coptus sive aegyptiacus* (1636): "According to the *Prodromus*, hieroglyphs are indeed a script, but not a script composed of letters, words, and determined parts of speech that we generally use. They are a far finer and more sublime script, closer to abstractions", cited in J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, tr.

hieroglyph functions as part of his leaning towards abstraction:

> in the *Defence*, Shelley appears to be aspiring towards a transcendence of grammar . . . . Shelley's ideal might be found in Chinese or Japanese poetry which characteristically dispenses with tense, person and gender.[48]

As evidence, we might refer to that moment in the *Defence* where Shelley says

> As far as relates to [the poet's] conceptions, time and place and number are not.[49]

Recalling Blanchot's descriptions of a furling and unfurling of space and Lyotard's wind-blown flag, the strangeness of ideogram could be what is read across the creasing, and occurs as the mark of a distorting pressure on writing, demanding reading other than by normal protocols. In the rumpled dream-flag, the folded canvas of sails or of a picture even, one is trying to read what is inscribed or pictured thereon in its implicit creasing and disturbance, not trying to iron it flat to obtain some hypothesised perfect legibility. The poem can only be read because it is linguistic, but its language is distorted by another pressure which is the one makes it poetic, and it is the reading that acknowledges distortion that reads most effectively. Alerted to the visual aspect, one reads with a sense that the space of the poem is itself become intrusive, is *dis-spelling* in its folding and unfolding the ostensible hold that linearity has on language. Poets' hieroglyphy is also a means of discounting the *data* of language-as-information – "time and place, and number" – and replacing it with imaginative coordinates only. In the imagination, time, place and number *are not*, that is, they do not refer to extra-poetic reality, and insofar as chronology, locale, quantity are specified in poetry, it is for symbolic value and not

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Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London, 1976), p. 80.

[48] Webb, pp. 58, 59.

[49] 'Defence', *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 483.

genuine reference.

This is the case with the poem I wish to examine, which, from its title, appears to refer to an actual picture in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence. However, as I will show, the significance of the painting itself is minimal. What is much more absorbing is the way Shelley uses the idea of the picture and the accompanying notion of æsthetic perception as a matrix for his ideas of poetic perception generally.

ii. The Poetic Context

Before discussing the poem proper, it should be given a context, and it is particularly necessary in the case of this poem to do so, as readers will look in vain in any of the major critical works on Shelley for account of what I think is both a demanding and fascinating poem. As familiar gloss is therefore unavailable, it should be said that it was likely that the poem was written in late 1819 while the Shelleys were wintering in Florence. Shelley spent during what was unusually cold weather, many hours in the Uffizi, where among other things that interested him, he saw the picture then believed to be the work of Leonardo.[50] There are various representations of Medusa apart from that assumed to be Leonardo's - as Walter Pater writes: "the subject has been treated in various ways"[51]. The

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[50] This painting, whichwas widely regarded as a Leonardo during the nineteenth century, has since been surmised to be the work of Peter Paul Rubens in the manner of da Vinci. See Raymond S. Stites, *The Sublimations of Leonardo da Vinci*(Washington, 1970), p. 31. Sir Kenneth Clark in his Introduction to the Fontana Library edition of Pater's *The Renaissance*(London, 1961), says: "I suppose that even a non-specialist will now recognise that it is not a work of the fifteenth century; but in Pater's description it becomes surprisingly Leonardesque." (P. 16.) Because Clark does not follow the First Edition of Pater's text, he misses Pater's dependence on Shelley which could , in part, account for the attribution, and which I will gloss later. Next to the illustration of the painting given in the Fontana edition, (Plate 12, occurring between pp. 112-13) Clark specifies the date of the painting as seventeenth century, and his footnote to Pater's text runs as follows: "The *Medusa* is a seventeenth century picture showing the influence of Caravaggio; but it may be based on a lost original by Leonardo." (P. 108.) In my opinion, the Uffizi Medusa has no connection with Caravaggio's painting.

Gorgon's head is a frequent device in Greek statuary – the most famous example being the Rondanini Medusa in Munich – and is seen in such later sculptural works as Benvenuto Cellini's *Perseus* (1533) in La Loggia dell'Orcagna at Florence, and two fine Persean sculptures by Canova in the Vatican and the Metropolitan Museum, New York. There is a particularly grotesque painting of the severed Medusa's head on a shield by Caravaggio, who was presumably trying to imitate what Vasari tells us was Leonardo's first attempt at this subject.[52] The Uffizi 'Leonardo' differs from this last example in that it picks up on the romantic rather than the grotesque element of the Medusa legend.[53]

That legend is as follows, although it should be added that there are various versions of the story.[54] A maiden, Medusa – a name which means 'the Queen' – is turned into a Gorgon as punishment for receiving her lover, Neptune, in the sanctuary of Athene, goddess of chastity. Retaining a partial beauty and also mortality, she lives with two other Gorgons, sharing their power to turn their onlookers into stone. When the hero Perseus undertakes to bring a Gorgon's head to wicked King Polydeuctes, Athene, his protectress, advises him to slay Medusa as only she among the Gorgons is vincible. Athene bestows on Perseus auxiliary powers of flight and invisibility, and also the gift of a shining shield which he

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[51] Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, p. 98.

[52] Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, tr. George Bull (Harmondsworth, 1965), pp. 258-60.

[53] The second version of the Medusa attempted by Leonardo and now lost is described by Vasari in the following words: "Leonardo then took it in mind to do a painting in oils showing the head of Medusa attired with a coil of serpents, the strangest and most extravagant invention imaginable. But this was a work that needed time, and so as with most of the things he did it was never finished. Today it is kept among the fine works of art in the palace of Duke Cosimo" (p. 260). It is this work which was thus assumed to be the Uffizi painting, which may well be a Leonardoesque imitation or reinterpretation of the lost work.

[54] Probably the most famous account is in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, IV. 770-803. Shelley was also familiar with Lucan's version in the *Pharsalia*, IX, and recalls the ensuing tale of Sabellus (*Pharsalia* IX. 762-88) in the image of the "Numidian seps" in *Prometheus Unbound*, III, i, 40-1. See *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 181. For a good, if incomplete, survey of the Greek accounts of the myth, see *Perseus: A Study in Greek Art and Legend*, Jocelyn M. Wooodward (Cambridge, 1937).

must use as a mirror, viewing the angled reflection of his adversary alone, as to look upon her directly would mean instant petrification. Perseus is successful in his mission, and from the decapitated Medusa's body spring, as a result of her liaison with Neptune, Chrysaor and the winged horse Pegasus.[55] Perseus takes the head away with him in a wallet, using its petrifying powers from time to time to aid him in further heroic exploits, and eventually, to put an end to Polydeuctes. In their physical appearance, the Gorgons were said to have golden wings, bronze claws and, most famously, live serpents for hair. Capitalising on its reputation to terrify, the Greeks used Medusa's head, which became Athene's sign, as a protective device on shields, amulets, and the battlements of their fortifications to instil fear and to ward off the evil eye. This apotropaic act follows the logic that "What arouses horror in oneself will produce the same effect upon the enemy against whom one is seeking to defend oneself."[56]

All the same, one might wonder why there should be such a seeming critical aversion or shunning of the poem. While the piece is technically incomplete – there are two small *lacunæ* in the version printed by Mary Shelley in the *Posthumous Poems* of 1824, this, in itself, does not seem sufficient reason for the lack of documentation in full-length works on Shelley. Richard Holmes mentions the poem briefly in his biography,[57] and Mario Praz uses it as a marker of a genre – 'combination of terror with loveliness' – in *The Romantic Agony* yet curiously does not treat the poem

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[55] In some accounts, such as Ovid's and Lucan's, blood falling from the severed head begets the dreadful serpents of Libya. Hence Lucan's catalogue of the serpents, and the tale of Sabellus, bitten by the seps. Shelley writes of his admiration for Lucan's *Pharsalia* in two letters to Thomas Jefferson Hogg (Letters 291 and 294) in August and September 1815. See *Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, I, 429-30, 432.

[56] Sigmund Freud, 'Medusa's Head', (1922), in *Collected Papers*, tr. and ed. James Strachey, 5 vols (London, 1924-50), V (1950), 106.

[57] Richard Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit*, Penguin Literary Biographies (London and Harmondsworth, 1987), p. 567. Holmes tersely notes "the unfinished poem 'On the Medusa', which meditates on the qualities of a repulsive picture attributed to Leonardo."

itself.[58] There have, however, been a number of articles on the poem starting with Neville Rogers's short essay 'Shelley and the Visual Arts', which is concerned with Shelley's treatment of the empirical picture read as an observed visual description with creative embellishment or alteration.[59] Rogers's piece has also been responsible for promulgating the misleading idea that the poem has a sixth stanza which he supposedly recovers from the only available holograph of the poem in a notebook of Mary Shelley's, now held by the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Examination of this additional 'stanza' in the holograph, reveals it to be composed of two discrete fragments which are, in fact, separated from each other by a run of several pages containing other writing. Rogers has simply welded the two fragments together and called them a stanza. It is in this form that he prints the poem in his Oxford University Press edition of Shelley's *Selected Poetry*.[60] Unfortunately, this has meant that other articles on the poem such as those by Daniel Hughes, Jerome McGann and Carol Jacobs have, to a certain extent, been affected by this misinformation.[61] Thus in Hughes's article, he calls Neville Rogers "the most trustworthy of today's Shelleyans", and adds that in 'Shelley and the Visual Arts': "he also prints for the first time an important sixth stanza omitted by Mary Shelley in her edition of *Posthumous Poems* of 1824."[62]

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[58] Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, 2nd ed., translated by Angus Davidson (London, New York, and Toronto, 1951). The poem is quoted in the opening chapter 'The Beauty of the Medusa', pp. 26-7.

[59] Neville Rogers, 'Shelley and the Visual Arts', in *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin* 12 (1961), 8-17.

[60] *Shelley: Selected Poetry*, ed. Neville Rogers (London, 1969), pp. 357-8.

[61] For a more detailed account of this bibliographical problem, see my article 'Shelley's "Medusa": The Sixth Stanza', in *N&Q*, n. s. 36, no. 2 (June 1989), 173-4.

[62] 'Shelley, Leonardo and the Monsters of Thought', in *Criticism* 11, no. 3 (Summer, 1970), 195-212; 195-6. It is hard to see why Hughes should think Rogers "trustworthy", as his work is littered with inaccuracies. I refer readers to the unprecedented outrage which greeted the first volume of Rogers's edition of *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Oxford, 1972). See the unsigned review 'Shelley: the new poetical canon', in *TLS*, no. 3704 (2 March 1973), 246. Carol Jacobs's article,'On Looking at Shelley's Medusa', is in*YFS* 69,*The Lesson of Paul de Man*(1985), 163-79. While Jacobs sounds cautious about the status of the 'sixth stanza' at the beginning of her article (p. 163), towards the end she relies on its validity to advance her thesis about the nature of figural language: "We might think

The articles written on this poem all show a tendency to see it as a kind of allegory, whose content bears relation to æsthetic issues.[63] Presumably this tendency to allegorise is encouraged by the poem's connections to myth, as well as linkages to the recurrent symbolic language that Shelley uses in his æsthetic arguments. Of all the articles on the poem, that by Carol Jacobs is undoubtedly the most interesting and sophisticated. Written as part of a *festchrift* for the late Paul de Man, Jacobs provides a close and intelligent *critique* of the poem, which becomes an allegory of reading: "For Shelley's poem is about nothing if not about our own interpretive predicament as readers."[64] Jacobs, too, is surprised by the lack of mainstream critical interest in the poem, and suggests that the avoidance of the piece is due to the way the poem disturbs the standard critical categories of artist, spectator and work of art: "each of these characters is dislocated as a possible point of valorization."[65] Hence her conclusion that "One begins to understand the reluctance of Shelley's interpreters with regard to this text."[66]

Whilst it is impossible, and indeed probably undesirable, to lose all elements of allegorisation from reading, and especially from a reading a text of this kind which I have already posited as an epitome for Shelleyan vision, certain aspects of even Jacobs's interpretation show her as making the poem *conform* to a mime or

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of the close of the text as itself uncreating what came before, rewriting the earlier lines as it draws them into a final gesture of involution." (P. 174.) Jerome McGann also makes a reference to the 'stanza' in his article 'The Beauty of the Medusa: A Study of Romantic Literary Iconology', *Studies in Romanticism* 11 (1972), 3-25; 6.

[63] See Daniel E. Lees, 'Shelley's 'Medusa' and Hegelian Synthesis', in *Unisa English Studies* 12 (Sept. 1974), 1-3. Lees reads the poem according to a specific paradigm: Shelley's "poetic achievement was ingeniously wrought in a frame of Hegelian synthesis." (P. 1.) McGann reads the poem as an "allegory about the prophetic office of the poet and the humanizing power of poetry." (P. 7.) Hughes also sees the poem as celebrating the humanising hope of the poet who masters the Medusa, bringing "under his own submission this now 'identified' monster of thought."(Pp. 204-5.)

[64] Jacobs, p. 169.

[65] *Ibid.*

[66] *Ibid.*, p. 170.

allegory of a reading method: that is, she aligns the language and representations of the poem over-neatly with the vocabulary of her critical practice. It may seem carping to complain as all readings necessarily do this to a certain extent, and Jacobs's has the merit of being more genuinely thought-provoking than most critical analyses. Nonetheless, the assumptions of her reading often blind her to elements in the poem which have crucial implication, and there are several key issues which completely pass her by.

At no point does Jacobs give the title of the poem consideration, save in one of her introductory questions: "Does Shelley gaze directly at the Gorgon as suggested by the poem or at the painting attributed to Leonardo, as suggested by the title?"[67] The question implies that Jacobs sees a clear division between the title with its notion of painting, and a scene that belongs to the poem; it also rather problematically identifies Shelley as gazer, which while it is not untenable, blurs complex issues of poetic *personæ* and observers *ab extra* without explanation, or even reference to the text of the poem. In point of fact, the gazer as mentioned in line ten of the poem seems generalised and unspecific.[68]

We now know that the painting that Shelley chose as the inspiration for this poem is not by Leonardo. Does this matter? One very reasonable response is that it does not; the poem, and even the painting, still remain considerable æsthetic objects in their own right. However, we may get a useful lead on the poem if we alter the question somewhat and consider why Leonardo might matter to Shelley. I do not propose a set of verifiable historical and biographical references, rather a number of suggestions: to begin with, that Leonardo's reputation as the first among painters gives

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[67] *Ibid.*, p. 166.

[68] The text of the poem is that found in *Shelley: Poetical Works*, pp. 582-3. As the poem is fairly short, line references have only been given where clarity demands it.

him specific status; he is the image of the painter *par excellence* and thus a cipher for the mastery of portrayal. This attitude is undoubtedly the one that is current later in the nineteenth century and which, as I will show in my Epilogue, is the view of Walter Pater. Secondly, Leonardo is known to specialise in haunting and enigmatic subjects such as the oddly smiling 'Mona Lisa' and 'John the Baptist', and it has been intimated that the mystery of such ambiguous paintings is accented by their appeal to sexual curiosity – an appeal which, as will become apparent, is at least partially implicated in the subject of the Medusa.[69] Thirdly, Leonardo is known to have had an interest in the grotesque; an interest which presumably led him to paint his own versions of the Medusa to which Vasari refers.[70] However, I have stipulated that the painting to which Shelley's poem alludes is not grotesque, or at least not simply so: Shelley is moved by the latent beauty of the Medusean "dead face". Critics who examine the terror and loveliness theme of Shelley's poem, point to an earlier saying of the poet's, made when disparaging Michelangelo's 'Last Judgement' in Rome:

> I cannot but think the genius of this artist highly overrated. . . . What is terror without a contrast with & a connection with loveliness? How well Dante understood this secret[71].

But the idea of contrast could well come from Leonardo himself. Sir Charles Bell in his study of expression in the Fine Arts wrote of Leonardo that "This great painter ascribed much importance to contrast in painting, bringing extremes together."[72] Lastly,

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[69] John Brophy, *The Face in Western Art* (London, Toronto, Wellington, and Sydney, 1963), p. 28: 'The secretive face was an obsession with Leonardo".

[70] Brophy, p 28: "There is some evidence that he had a taste for the monstrous, and many of these faces were grotesque, one or more of the features being disproportionate to the others and to the whole or else distorted out of shape by the play of some emotion."

[71] See Letter 492 to Thomas Peacock, 25 Feb. 1819, in *Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, II, 80. Holmes connects this passage with the Medusa (p. 479). Jacobs strangely does not comment on this remark, but cites a parallel in Baudelaire, and a related moment in the *Defence*on pp. 167-8 of her article.

[72] Sir Charles Bell, *The Anatomy and Philosophy of Expression as Connected with*

Leonardo's vast expertise on a variety of topics shows him particularly interested in questions of looking and perception (see the epigraph to this chapter), as well as the debate concerning the issue *ut pictura poesis*. Here, for example, is a citation from Leonardo's *Paragone*, a work which is a comparison of the arts:

> Painting is poetry which is seen and not heard, and poetry is a painting which is heard but not seen. These two arts, you may call them both either poetry or painting, have here interchanged the senses by which they penetrate to the intellect. Whatever is painted must pass by the eye, which is the nobler sense, and whatever is poetry must pass through a less noble sense, namely the ear, to the understanding.[73]

Jacobs's neglect of *ut pictura poesis* and the whole question of poetry's relation to the visual arts – as was long a topic of discussion before Shelley, especially in the eighteenth century – means that she elides various subtleties concerning his use of picture in the poem. Concerning the topic of *ut pictura poesis*,[74] it should be

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the Fine Arts, 3rd ed, enl. (London, 1844), p. 22. Bell cites Leonardo's comment "*ch'il brutto sia vincina al bello, et il vecchio al giovane, et il debole al forte*" on p. 22. This is presumably a variant of "*il brutto vicino al bello, il grande al piccolo, il vecchio al giovane, il forte al debole*", from an entry in Leonardo's *Trattato* or *Treatise on Painting*. In full, and translated, the advice to the painter runs: "I say also that in narrative paintings one ought to mingle direct contraries so that they afford a great contrast to one another, and all the more when they are in close proximity; that is, the ugly next to the beautiful, the big to the small, the old to the young, the strong to the weak; in this way you will vary as much and as close together as possible." *On Painting: A Lost Book (Libro A)*, Reassembled from the Codex Vaticanus Urbinas 1270 and from the Codex Leicester by Carlo Pedretti, [tr. Florence B. Longman], Foreword by Sir Kenneth Clark (London, 1965), p. 80. We can compare this with that moment in the 'Defence', *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 505, cited by Jacobs, pp. 167-8, where Shelley says: "Poetry turns all things to loveliness; it exults the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed: it marries exultation and horror, grief and pleasure, eternity and change; it subdues to union under its yoke all irreconcilable things."

[73] Leonardo da Vinci, *Paragone: A Comparison of the Arts*, tr. and intr. Irma A. Richter (London, New York, and Toronto, 1949), p. 58. See also the declaration "Painting is mute poetry and poetry is blind painting" (p. 59), which is Leonardo's own version of one of the founding comments of *ut pictura poesis* that Plutarch attributes to Simonides of Ceos (*ca.*556-467 B.C.): painting is mute poetry and poetry a speaking picture. (*τὴν μὲν ποίησιν ζωγραφίαν λαλοῦσαν Moralia 346 f.*)*

[74] The term comes from Horace's *Ars Poetica* 361, and translates into "as a painting, so a poem." Jean Hagstrum comments the phrase "really implies only this: 'As sometimes in painting, so occasionally in poetry.' There is no warrant whatever in Horace's text for the later interpretation: 'Let a poem be like a painting.' " *The Sister Arts: the Study of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to*

*(τὴν μὲν ζωγραφίαν ποίσις σιωπῶσαν (προσαγορεύει) τὴν δὲ ποίσιν ζωγραφίαν λαλοῦσαν)

said that the term marks a debate in which there is no necessary consensus: various writers have at different times forged relations and analogies between the arts for quite different reasons. These reasons may involve: in the first place, the glossing of one art-form with another to reveal hidden qualities not normally noticed either in the one form or both; secondly, the vaunting of one art above another by means of a comparison which shows one art to be markedly superior to another (this is Leonardo's tack in his *Paragone*); thirdly, the suggestion that there are real æsthetic connections between the arts which have implications for conceptual philosophical thought concerning the nature of beauty, perception, and other allied issues.

I do not wish to assert that Shelley definitely knew Leonardo's contribution to the debate on the relationship of poetry to the visual arts, but his poem is almost certainly aware of the terms of that debate.[75] Leonardo's own contribution, as we have just seen, is an explicit privileging of painting. By an interesting irony, Shelley's poem undercuts the polemic of the Leonardo citation just given as he reassimilates poetry and painting. Painting becomes both

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Gray (Chicago and London, 1958), p. 9. The later interpretation of this phrase, which Hagstrum mentions, is partly due the earliest surviving comment on the text attributed to a third century scholar named Acron, but which probably dates only to the fifth century. The Pseudo-Acron's comment, which appears in many of the earliest printed editions of Horace, is :*Vt pictura poesis erit. i. non erit dissimilis/poetica ars picturae.* This comment influenced the punctuation of the Horatian text itself to be rendered as *ut pictura poesis erit*, with the verb placed with the first clause, thus making the reading of the phrase seem more dogmatic than it really is: "a poem *will be* like a painting." Modern authorities place *erit* with the second part of the sentence: *Ut pictura poesis: erit quae . . . .* See Hagstum, pp. 59-60. The later interpretation "Poetry ought to resemble painting" (Pomponius Gauricus, cited by Hagstrum, p. 61) is nonetheless crucial in establishing the debate as we know it in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

[75] It should be noted that Shelley's poem participates in the debate not merely by the display of pictorial qualities, but by the emphatic declaration of a specific work of art. Hagstrum devotes special attention to this kind of poetry: "This poetry, of which a work of graphic art is the subject, I shall . . . call 'iconic.' In such poetry the poet contemplates a real or imaginary work of art that he describes or responds to in some way. . . . Iconic poetry, which antedates all recorded criticism, became a significant part of the classical heritage, greatly to the enrichment of the tradition of *ut pictura poesis*. . . . Such poetry has a long and impressive history that extends from Homer to Yeats (pp. 18-19)."

a reading model for poetry alerting us to its obscurer visual qualities, but painting *qua* design is also a synonym for translation, as in Shelley's remarks about Moritz Retzsch's celebrated illustrations of *Faust*:

> What etchings those are! I am never satiated with looking at them, & I fear it is the only sort of translation of which *Faust* is susceptible[76].

In this instance, picture is shown to translate language better than could another language; there is something in the play Faust which is more accurately represented in design than in another tongue. Is it possible then that the image of the picture within the text, as occurs in the poem on the Medusa, also functions as translation of what otherwise could not easily be expressed? The difference here is that the translation does not involve the straight movement from language to picture as in *Faust*, but a dynamic movement from the poem's fundamental poetic space into representation. To borrow a religious vocabulary, the soul of one thing has been moved into the body of another. By this conceit, we might say that that iconic qualities of the poem, that is, its inclusion of graphic art, are a translation and embodying of poetic space or poetry's *soul*.

iii. The Poetic Scene

Obviously, as other commentators have suggested, Shelley's poetic imaging of the picture is not an empirical description of the painting, and it is misguided to suppose that one can treat the picture as a source for all that appears in the poem. Shelley specifically seems to disregard the frame of the painting; the reader is not situated as an observer in the Uffizi, but the onlooker of a bizarre scene. It is as if we are to imagine the canvas no longer

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[76] Letter 697, to John Gisborne, 10 April 1822, in *Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, II, 407.

obeying the strictures of the referential picture frame, but coming loose, curling and creasing, and distorting further what is already to the innocent eye a perverse description. Like 'Leonardo', Shelley cuts the myth down to one specific cutting: Medusa's head and the solicitations of her gaze; but he usurps the painter's signature with a hidden one of his own to show that he has appropriated the image for his own devices. None of the commentators appear to have noted the suppressed pun that is integral to this poem, the homophony of Perseus for Percy S., which, like the hero who masters the Medusa, remains invisible or covered, but is nonetheless there as the mark of the one whose peseverant gazing mingles with that which emanates from the focus of his inspiration or what might be called his Queen or Musa.[77]

This is no still life or *nature morte*; the representational space isn't at all secure. Shelley seems to have done something quite marked to the type of specification intimated in his title. Carol T. Christ has discussed the implications of particularity current in the very titles and inscriptions of many Romantic poems such as 'Tintern Abbey', which is 'Composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour, July 13, 1798'. These titles reflect "the very concrete location in time and space the Romantic poets often give their poems."[78] She continues

> For Johnson the information these inscriptions give would be irrelevant, distracting, and limiting at the beginning of a major poem, but for the Romantics, it singles out a movement of mind in a particular situation, at a particular time and place, as a significant subject for poetry.[79]

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[77] Edmund Blunden has this to say concerning a satirical narrative of Byron's which pretends to be an account of a voyage undertaken by himself and a distinctly unheroic friend he calls Percy S–: "In a highly entertaining work entitled 'Narrative of Lord Byron's Voyage to Corsica and Sardinia, during the Summer and Autumn of the year 1821', we soon come upon anecdotes of one of Byron's company aboard the *Mazeppa*, a regrettable character named Percy S–." See *Shelley* (London, New York, and Toronto, 1965), p. 252.

[78] Carol T. Christ, *The Finer Optic: The Æsthetic of Particularity in Victorian Poetry* (New Haven and London, 1975), p. 11-12.

[79] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

If this is the case, then Shelley's poem seems to break with the convention; as we have seen, the name of Leonardo is invoked to represent a cluster of associations, and also the possibility of a reaction or revision. The idea of location as given in the title, and which announces an actual painting situated in time and space, is disturbed by the poem which distorts notions of easy mimesis. And if we turn our gaze to the poem, we can see that within the piece itself the notion of a definite location is obscure, as the prepositions do not pin the picture down to clearly defined *mise en scène* but instead mark abstract relations, suspended states or statements even, so that the poem appears "in death" (*l.*40) indefinitely. The abstraction of much of the action of the scene means that what happens does not conform to the normal facts of visibility: we are shown "struggling *underneath*, the agonies" (*l.*8), told of the transformation of a "spirit *into* stone" (*l.*10), see "beauty thrown/*Athwart* the darkness" (*ll.*14-15), and ponder the implication of "death *within*" (*l.*23). We get the impression that the most substantial thing present may be "the solid air" (*l.*24), as if space were itself given substance, and the presentational arena were fully realised and involved in the play of representations. The emphases of sight become altered, and phenomenal vision is interrupted, as through the vista projected by the unspecific "Below" of "Below, far lands are seen tremblingly" (*l.*3), there's already a haze. That tremor marks the gazer's agitation: how *should* he deduce location, when stand and view-point have been baffled by the imprecision of frame and *topoi*? But it also marks the oscillation, frisson in looking's wake and run across an intervening filmic folding gauze of visioned space – space, as it takes on a prominence and opacity of its own.

That space, normally so unobtrusive, should be made to

figure so dramatically, points to a disturbance at the heart of Shelley's poem; but the result of examining this disturbance will be to see how Shelley claims it as an intensification of what happens generally in his poetics of perception, and thus a necessary element in his æsthetic practice. Thematically it is easy to identify the eerie power of the slain Medusa as centring the poem; Shelley makes much of the creature's uncanny after-life as manifested in the unruly snaked mane, and the still effectual power of the petrifying severed head. Hence the series of present participles which describe the continuing activity: "struggling", "unending", "hastening", "thrilling", "shifting", and the images of heat, light, and growth. One of the fragments that belong to this poem makes an explicit allusion to this after-life, or rather, to be more precise, specifies a vital disturbance which takes place in death:

> It is a trunkless head, and on its features
> Death has met life, but there is life in death,
> The blood is frozen – but unconquered Nature
> Seems struggling to the last – without a breath
> The fragment of an uncreated creature[80].

It is possible that Shelley may have taken the phrase "life in death" from Coleridge's 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner', first published in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), where it occurs capitalised as the name of the terrifying Spectre-Woman, who is DEATH'S mate. This creature, like Shelley's Medusa, has a partial beauty, and also, Coleridge implies, the capacity to freeze or petrify.

> *Her* lips were red, *her* looks were free,
> Her locks were yellow as gold:
> Her skin was as white as leprosy,
> The Night-mare LIFE-IN-DEATH was she,
> Who thicks man's blood with cold.
>
> (*ll.*190-4.)[81]

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[80] The fragment occurs in MS Shelley adds. d. 7, notebook no. 2, p. 170. I follow Mary Shelley's pagination. For further remarks on the pagination, see my article as referred to above. The other fragment is found on p. 162, and runs thus: "It is a woman's countenance divine/With everlasting beauty breathing there/Which from a stormy mountain's peak, supine/Gazes into the nights trembling air."

Shelley's use of the phrase seems to imply not that the Medusa herself lives on, nor that there is an after-life in any spiritual sense, but rather that there occurs an activity which is one with the creature's death. That Shelley does not attribute this "life" to the Gorgon herself, is seen in his studied use of the pronoun "it", which he uses throughout to indicate the impersonal force of what, after all, is all that can be seen of her, her severed head which yet still retains her power. This "fragment", the head alone, thus curiously seems to assume in its own right, the total significance of the whole body – a paradox which is mimed by the interior imagery of the poem:

> And from its head as from one body grow,
> As grass out of a watery rock,
> Hairs which are vipers
>
> (*ll.*17-19).

Thus if, as Shelley's critics do, one refers to a "she" or "her", as indeed it first appears obvious to do, this has the effect of smoothing out what for Shelley is an extremely important facet of the poem. Death, or what happens "in death", does something very specific to the nature of the being portrayed, to its very "features" even, and thereby alters the nature of the portrayal, and attendant looking. What the poem has to say about the survey of that "dead face" (*l.*11) which becomes so arresting for the gazer seems entwined with what Shelley intimates by the survey of the "unsculptured image".

In Freud's essay 'Medusa's Head', he writes: "To decapitate=to castrate. The terror of Medusa is thus a terror of castration that is linked to the sight of something."[82] That uncompromisingly stark equation yields more if one recalls that, in algebra, whose etymology means 'the reunion of fragments', symbols

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[81] *The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. E. H. Coleridge, 2 vols (Oxford, 1912), I, 186-209; 194.
[82] Freud, *Collected Papers*, V, 105.

stand in for numerical relations and properties, that is, systems and structures. For Freud too, the terms denote not a specific act or event, but a structure which is not organic. Samuel Weber's reading of another essay of Freud's which treats castration - 'The Uncanny' - brings out the implications for perception where castration "is linked to the sight of something."

> Not merely do the eyes present the subject with the shocking "evidence" of a negative perception - the absence of a maternal phallus - but they have to bear the brunt of a new state of affairs, which confronts the subject with the fact that it will never again be able to believe its eyes, since what they have seen is neither simply visible or wholly invisible. . . . what is involved here is a restructuring of experience, including the relation of perception, desire and consciousness, in which narcissistic categories of identity and presence are riven by a difference they can no longer subdue or command. . . . [Castration] robs the eyes of the desired phenomena and thus alters the structure of perception[83].

Weber also writes:

> The Freudian theory of castration, as developed by Jacques Lacan, marks the *moment* - in a genetic, but also in a structural sense - of discovery when the subject is confronted with the object of its desire as being almost nothing, but not quite.[84]

In thematic terms, Shelley shows the scene of his poem, a scene in which beholders ineluctably desire to survey the severed head, a sight at once gruesome and graceful - "the tempestuous loveliness of terror" (*l.*33) - with many details that accord with Weber and Freud's descriptions. Weber tells us that the uncanny, whose structural determination involves "the recurrence and repetition of castration"[85], is "bound up with a *crisis* of perception and

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[83] Samuel Weber, 'The Side Show: or Remarks on a Canny Moment', in *MLN* 88, (1973), 1113.
[84] *Ibid.*, p. 1112.
[85] *Ibid.*, p. 1132.

phenomenality"[86]. He specifies that

> castration is . . . bound . . . also to laws of articulation in which repetition consists not in the re-presentation of the identical but rather in the indefinite, incessant and often violent displacement of marks and traces never entirely reducible to a signified significance: a process of reference without ultimate or fundamental referent.[87]

In the poem we might read the baleful gash of decapitation as repeated in the wounding of the air by the serpents who "saw" it; the cave is "cleft" by the hideous light which emanates from the Medusa head. Furthermore, the language of the poem, by homonymy, furtively links castrational sight and cutting as in "saw" and "hue" (hew). Assuming the inappropriacy of empirical standards of knowledge from its onset, the poem speaks generally of a disturbance of cognition: the attracted bat is "bereft/Of sense" (*ll.*27-8). Throughout, normal sense relations are jarred by Shelley's characteristic use of synæsthesia: colour sounds in the "melodious hue" that *cuts* across the action of stanza two, and which reverbs in "humanize and harmonize the strain", where "strain" can be musical sound, pressure, force, exertion, the residues of thought or vision, or their theme or type, drift or character – as in 'to carry on in this strain'. (Shelley explicitly uses the word "strain" to indicate the dislocating energies of poetry when he justifies proposing Lord Bacon as a poet; Bacon's language is "a strain which distends, and then bursts the circumference of the hearer's mind"[88].) There is also the electrical sound, touch, look of "thrilling vapour". This general *bereavement* of normative sense, mirroring the loss conferred upon the child by castration, when his senses, too, are thrown into turmoil, (the eyes being robbed of "the desired phenomena"), runs parallel to the disruption of the very integrity of

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[86] *Ibid.*, p. 1131.
[87] *Ibid.*, p. 1132.
[88] 'Defence', *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 483.

the gazer's identity. The second stanza of the poem, which I shall examine at greater length later on, appears to speak of a movement of looking in which the gazer seems to lose face, and to acquire that of another, which yet, in the last instance, eludes description. But while, "thought no more can trace", there nonetheless does seem to be something left by way of a restitution. Weber speaks of the experience of the child as discovering that the object of his desire is "almost nothing, but not quite." Shelley marks across the scene of the gazer's deprivation, a small but significant compensatory glimmer:

> 'Tis the melodious hue of beauty thrown
> Athwart the darkness and the glare of pain,
> Which humanize and harmonize the strain.
> (*ll.*15-16.)

This prismatic flicker which spans the darkness like a tiny rainbow (and the rainbow is traditionally a sign of restitution) can be recognised as the colouring of Shelleyan perception as it touches language; and it steadies and controls the total self-destruction of a "strain" which could be pushed to its limits. The strain could therefore be the thrust of poetic space into the poem as it is contained by language and figure. Often in Shelley, the poetry seems to be speaking of the moment in which it could nearly be dissolved, die, or be erased; it speaks of a look towards its own inchoate origins; it meditates longingly an obliteration which would be its apotheosis. In Shelley, poetry as language seems to tend towards the place where it is refined or dissolved back into essence, but the paradox is that because this place of ultimate expressivity is non-linguistic – words are but poor shadows of it – the triumph of poetry is its disappearance. But to be legible, language is necessary; and the next best thing to this ecstatic dissolve is to speak of it within the poems, and to map and contain poetic space in such a way that the

reader's focus is continually directed beyond the poem's surface to see the depth from which the poem emerges.

The theme of castration thus offers one way of approaching the poem to elucidate, through a dynamics of vision, the idea of something barely visible which is nonetheless the whole lure and incitement of our looking. Castration, as described psychoanalytically, provides a complex web of associations: crisis of vision and phenomenality, loss of cognitive authority, desire, loss, fear, partial restitution, all of which can be read in Shelley's poem. Nonetheless, it does not fully account for the poem, and I would suggest that one could, having taken one's cue from the ideas generated by the castration motif, develop one's reading to the point where that motif can be read as a metaphor or substitution for something else. What is that something else? This is what I shall attempt to explain in the remainder of this chapter, but it can be said that in the broadest terms possible, it is a way of looking of which castrational perception is but one aspect.

iv. "If the Absym /Could vomit forth its secrets"

"Neither the eye or the mind can see itself, unless reflected upon that which it resembles."[89] This is a difficult remark of Shelley's both in concept and expression, and I am aware that could be read in a number of ways. However, in its context, Shelley clearly means us to understand something like 'Perception can only be perceived as such, by its perception in a form which is analogous to it.'[90] The form specified in his argument happens to be the Athenian drama – which itself is a type of poetry – and Shelley describes it as a mirror:

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[89] *Ibid.*, p. 491.

[90] See also the comment "But thought can with difficulty visit the intricate and winding chambers which it inhabits." 'Speculations on Metaphysics III: Difficulty of Analyzing the Human Mind', in *The Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, eds. Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck, 10 vols (London and New York, 1927-30), VII (1930), 64.

> The drama, so long as it continues to express poetry, is as a prismatic and many-sided mirror, which collects the brightest rays of human nature and divides and reproduces them from the simplicity of these elementary forms, and touches them with majesty and beauty, and multiplies all that it reflects, and endows it with the power of propagating its like wherever it may fall.[91]

Thus human perception resembles the poetic drama, and the drama thus reflects perception back to itself. The mirror image and its attendant conception of reflection – a favourite of Shelley's, since reflection implies both a mental and a visual action – is often used by him to discuss poetry. But the reflection of the æsthetic mirror-which-is-poetry is not straightforward, as can be seen in the above citation and others, such as "Poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted."[92] Does this mean that perception always sees itself transformed, and that it is impossible for it to see itself before the renovation of art? And if this is so, how can perception really be said to see itself, if what it sees is always altered? The answer lies in a refocussing: what perception, after all, must be, is a process and not an object; perception sees itself being formed in poetry; there are not two states – one before and one after. When perception sees itself, it is as the gradual realisation of its own emergence; perception "resembles" poetry, because poetry is, among other things, a refined type of perception, and resemblance, like reflection, is the work of perception as it once more pictures itself. Considered temporally, the paradox is that perception must already 'know' what it looks like in order to find what is analogous to it; it must conceive the nature of the resemblance it has with the drama. Resembling becomes active, and, to use Shelley's figures, a multiplying and propagation. The end

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91 'Defence', *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 491.

92 *Ibid.*, p. 485. Compare with that citation given earlier, beginning "Poetry turns all things to loveliness . . . ."

result would seem to be the reflection of a mirror image – the reflection of a reflection. To pursue the implications of the Shelleyan statement means that one ends up in a circuit of perception, in which perception is created out of the urge to see its own origins. It is my contention that this attempt of perception to see itself is what structures Shelley's poems.

The Shelleyan figure of reflection is often used specifically to gloss the non-mimetic idealising work of æsthetic representation:

> Why is the reflection in that canal more beautiful than the objects it reflects? The colours are more vivid, and yet blended with more harmony; the openings from within into the soft and tender colours of the distant wood, and the intersection of the mountain lines, surpass and misrepresent truth.[93]

Besides this, it is pertinent to quote Blanchot:

> Nevertheless: doesn't the reflection always seem more spiritual than the object reflected? Isn't it the ideal expression of that object, its presence freed of existence, its form without matter? And artists who exile themselves in the illusion of images, isn't their task to idealize beings, to elevate them to their disembodied resemblance.[94]

Blanchot's "disembodied resemblance" is Shelley's 'seeing beyond' or 'surpassing of truth', by which, of course, he means the truth of the empirical world; the truths he espouses are what he calls "the eternal truths charactered upon the imaginations of men."[95] It is the characterising of an imaginative Shelleyan scene that the poem on the Medusa reveals.

In the poem, the complexity of what is seen is

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[93] 'Three Fragments on Beauty' (1819): I, in *Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, VII, 154.

[94] Maurice Blanchot, 'Two Versions of the Imaginary', in *The Gaze of Orpheus*, tr. Lydia Davis (Barrytown, New York, 1981), pp. 79-89; 81. This essay is taken from Blanchot's *L'Espace Littéraire* (Paris, 1955), translated as *The Space of Literature* by Ann Smock (Lincoln, Nebraska and London, 1982) in which an alternative translation may be found, pp 254-63; 256.

[95] 'Defence', *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 501.

reduplicated or multiplied as, what was in stanza three "The solid air", now "a thrilling vapour of the air", is "Become a and ever-shifting mirror" (*l.*37). Jacobs takes the odd step of glossing the poem with the 'Leonardo' picture at this stage; the "thrilling vapour" she identifies as the breath which is shown exhaled by Medusa. But there is no need to move outside the poem, and certainly no need to attribute such a move to an inadequacy within the poem or what she calls "the simplistic mimetic thrust that seems intermittently to govern the poem."[96] The scenario can be read quite easily within the poem: the Medusa head can't help but gaze on the air above, which in turn is petrified, or made "solid". This unavoidable state of affairs is surely what is meant by "inextricable error"[97], as the Medusa head inevitably gets entangled in the implication of her own look[98]; it is not a matter of conscious will, choice or control (after all, it is not a persona, but a power or effect that is enacted, regardless). *She* or 'it' has no more control than did Midas have over his tactile ability to turn things into gold. There are two possible accounts of how the mirroring comes about: the first is that adopted by Rogers and Jacobs where the "mailed radiance of "long

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[96] Jacobs, p. 174. Jacobs tries to smooth this point in her footnote which reads "Intermittently, because the entire poem functions like the vaporous mirror, ever shifting between a mimetic concept of reproduction [stanzas 1,4, 6] and another that has yet to be traced. Those seemingly simple descriptive moments, therefore are, from the very beginning, *images* of the mimetic." This won't do because, as I have shown, Shelley's view of the mimetic isn't simply reproductive; nor do I think that Shelley uses the picture in the way Jacobs suggests.

[97] The phrase has been something of a crux for commentators on the poem. Daniel Lees says that: "The hair-snakes are an 'error', or a deviation of nature." (P. 3.) Rogers reads "error" as the physical winding of the serpents (p. 16), deriving it from Virgil's *inextricabilis error*, which describes the winding ways of Dædalus' s maze. See *Æneid* VI, 27. Rogers comments that because the phrase in its original context refers to the maze, and not to snakes, "the echo is not entirely a apt one." But, if what Shelley is describing, is, like the maze, a crux or puzzle, as well as the entanglement of looking the Medusa head produces, then Rogers's desire for a corroborating serpentine image seems misplaced, and Virgil's mention of "the winding track that might not be unravelled" usefully resonant.

[98] Compare this moment with the following lines from the 'Life of Life' lyric in 'Prometheus Unbound', *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 178: "In those looks where whoso gazes/Faints entangled in their mazes." (II. v. 52-3.) Shelley's use of "mazes" nicely corroborates my point on Shelley's use of his Virgilian source. *Prometheus Unbound* was finished the same year that Shelley wrote his 'Medusa'.

tangles" (*l*.20) is synonymous with "inextricable error". The glare given off by these shiny serpentine movements makes the vaporous air into mirror which then reflects the head. Alternatively, the Medusean gaze caught in its peculiar bind makes the air into a mirror of the severed head, and this mirror, reflecting "all the beauty and the terror there", illuminates or kindles the brazen sheen of the serpents. The second of these two versions seems the better to me, as the movement described there – that of the Medusean gaze which constructs a resemblance so that it may look upon its own gaze – is one that is more in accord with the dynamic of Shelleyan perception just expounded. The circuit of perception which culminates with the snakes illuminated by the mirror which reflects both them, the head and the gaze – with the gaze being the maker of the mirror – is typically Shelleyan.[99] Furthermore, this movement is one that replicates what is the most important moment for the poem: the arrest of the gazer's spirit in stanza two.

First of all, we might enquire who is the gazer? Although Shelley has turned the scene into his own rather than keep Leonardo's and has signed it with his signature, there is no reason why we should identify the gazer with Shelley himself, although it is possible to specify this figure as a type of the Shelleyan perceiver, and thus a cue for perception as it is pictured in Shelley's poems. This perceiver, unlike Perseus in the myth, does not seem to carry a protective or defensive mirror-shield with him; he regards the Medusa head directly. It can be said that the poem itself is a mirror, reifying Shelley's image of poetry as mirror. But does this poem, in fact, defend its readers from a demanding contact, or does it rather expose them? The Shelleyan mirror may make beautiful that which is distorted, but it is implied that it does not exclude terror or negative value; the distortion is preserved along with the beauty, and

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[99] For a wider survey of Shelley's extensive use of reflexive imagery, see Ch. III of William Keach's *Shelley's Style*, pp. 79-117.

is bizzarely made constitutive of the total effect. The poem is not a testimony to the taming, appropriating powers of art. The gazer does not take control as Daniel Hughes thinks:

> From the serpents of Medusa's head comes the glare that makes a mirror by which Perseus-Shelley is able to both distance and seize the image in the climactic fifth stanza[100].

The image is not seized in the fifth stanza; it is hard to see how Hughes can impute such a strongly authoritative agent here when Shelley has specified the gazer's spirit turned to stone in the second stanza. The mirror, which is supposed to save, is ever-shifting and elusive of appropriation. If Shelley is using the figure of the mirror to say something about poetry, it is not what Hughes recuperates. Additionally, it is worth noting that, in this poem, it is the Medusa head that makes and introduces the mirror, and not the gazer. Hughes postulates a holding at bay through distance and assumes eventual mastery, thus implying that the image – by which I assume he means the Medusa head – has no ultimate power. But Shelley's poem seems to demonstrate precisely the opposite of this: Medusa's head, an image, and I contend, an image of the poetic image, is shown to play a crucial part in his poetics of perception. I want to quote from Maurice Blanchot on the contact established by the image, a contact I think is beautifully enacted in Shelley's poem.

> Seeing presupposes distance, a wilful separation, the ability to avoid contact, and when in contact to avoid merging. Seeing means that separation is none the less encounter. But what happens when what we see is separate but seems none the less to affect us through a pervasive contact? When seeing becomes a kind of proximity, a *contact* from a distance? When what we see compels us to see as if our eyes were grasped, touched by, and connected to what we see? And this not through a positive contact involving the active initiative of an actual grasp. No. Our eyes are merely drawn, absorbed in a motionless gesture, a depthless depth. That

[100] Hughes, p. 205.

> which we perceive through a distanced contact is the image. And the spell is our desire for the image.[101]

What Shelley presents in the poem is the moment for the reader when, like gazer, he makes this contact with the image, a contact that brings with it the meeting with poetic space.

In the second stanza, the gazer looks directly at the Medusa head, but Shelley specifies that it is his "spirit" that is turned to stone. At no point then, do we see clearly the gazer's own face; what we see is his "spirit" already in the process of petrification, and being graven with other marks. Why does Shelley specify "spirit" ? Because his interests lie not with flesh and blood, but with essence; because "spirit" means essence or character and denotes the abstract rather than the physical look of an individual. Whereas, as we shall see at later points in this thesis and in other poems, face very often stands in for character, Shelley makes here a reversal, and has character as spirit stand in for face. The semantic associations rehearsed here, also function in the word character itself, which Shelley uses as a plural in line twelve; for, as well as denoting the general essence of a person, character can designate feature – what Shelley calls in the plural "lineaments", and what we might ordinarily call facial 'characteristics'. From the characters or characteristics of someone's face we might deduce character. What happens in the scene of looking is this: the Medusean lineaments become graven on the gazer's spirit. Notably, Shelley puns on the etymology of 'character' which in the Greek denotes a mark or impression that is incised in stone or some other workable medium. We may then presume that "characters" in line twelve refers to the lineaments of the Medusa, but if spirit stands in for face, they may represent an oblique glance at the identity of the gazer. So as the Medusean lineaments are imposed on the gazer, his features grow

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[101] Blanchot, 'The Essential Solitude', in *The Siren's Song*, pp. 97-109; 106-7.

into the dead Medusa face ("itself"), or alternatively, Medusa's lineaments as characters saturate the look of the gazer's spirit (another possible reading for "itself"), or thirdly and most oddly, the transposed Medusean characters dissolve without trace into the transferred dead face "itself", which thus becomes unreadable and inaccessible. The first two readings can imply the third: that added to a transfer of feature is a disfiguration so intense that the Medusean visage absorbs itself; its "characters are grown/Into itself". Adds Shelley to this: "and thought no more can trace", which could represent the Medusa's thought (what is styled "the agonies of anguish and of death" *l.*8), the gazer's thought, or the thought of the observer *ab extra* who watches the scene of transformation. Thought can be therefore the object or the subject of trace: the characters can, or rather cannot, trace thought (that is, reveal character through expression), or alternatively, thought as subject can no longer trace what the dissolved characters connote.[102] If the "eternal truths" are "charactered upon the imaginations of men", then they can only have their full impact at the point where the characters disappear. For "the deep truth is imageless"[103], or rather it is that moment where the image is unsculptured. It is this central moment of obliteration which focusses Shelley's poem, straining perception to the moment of maximum concentration to watch

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[102] Jacobs seems to follow through neither of these possibilities (p. 170), but then she does not strenuously follow through the movement of the contact of stanza two as Shelley describes it, and misses the implication of the facial dissolve. Perhaps this is to do with the rather glib and unsupported reading she makes of the word "characters": "Nor are the "characters" in this performance of artistic production simply the features, the cast of countenance, delineated in stone. They include all those creatures we have seen the poem to conceive – the Medusa as object imitated, the gazer as poet, artist, reader, or beholder, and the graven work of art, poem or painting (p. 169)."

[103] 'Prometheus Unbound', in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 175. This occurs as part of the speech of that master Gorgon – Demogorgon: " –If the Abysm/Could vomit forth its secrets:– but a voice/Is wanting, the deep truth is imageless". (II. iv. 114-6.) Notably, Demogorgon is himself an unsculptured image. Describing him, Panthea says: "I see a mighty Darkness/Filling the seat of power; and rays of gloom/Dart round, as light from the meridian Sun,/Ungazed upon and shapeless – neither limb/Nor form – nor outline; yet we feel it is/A living spirit." (II. iv. 2-7.)

itself vanishing into the gap presented by the very structure which brought it into being.

The movement between gazer and Medusa thus is both a reflection involving reduplication, and the dissolve of perception back into the the matrix of its origination. The central moment of the poem functions like a sort of black hole to which all attention is irresistibly drawn. But the hole isn't merely a negative or destructive void, but the place in which perception is also founded. The dissolve of the arresting Medusa face is our tracing of the contours of unsculpture in the unsculptured image; a glimpse of poetic origins as the deep space of the poem wells up under our gaze to take part in reading. In such a reading, space becomes character and character becomes space. The way a poet maps poetic space into his representations is at the core of what forms the character of his poetry. The emphatic allure of such charged moments is what Blanchot calls fascination:

> One could say that whoever comes under this spell does not see real objects or real people; what he sees is not part of reality but belongs to the indeterminate world of the enchantment – an absolute world. Distance is not excluded from it yet it is measureless – it is the plumbless depth behind the image, the lifeless, unverifiable, totally present but unyielding depth into which an object sinks when it loses its significance and merges with its image. This enchanted world where the seen object takes possession of our gaze and makes it endless, where our gaze becomes frozen light, and light is the perfect gleam of that unseen, ever visible eye which is our own mirrored gaze, this world is eminently attractive and fascinating – a light which is also darkness, a terrifying, spellbinding, all-engulfing luminosity.[104]

This Medusean moment reminds us of the *circuit* of perception: that while the Medusa head makes the gazer's spirit a mirror-image of its own dead face, the gazer sees in the Medusa head a gaze which

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[104] Blanchot, 'The Essential Solitude', *The Siren's Song*, p. 107.

is the mirror of his own.[105] "Neither the eye nor the mind can see itself, unless reflected upon that which it resembles." Blanchot, continuing his survey of the spell of this moment, gives us a clue to why something like the castration complex must remain a metaphor or partial substitution for what he calls fascination:

> If our childhood fascinates us, it is because childhood is the age of enchantment – an enchanted age – and this golden age seems to be suffused in a wonderful, invisible light. But this light is foreign to visibility, has nothing to make it visible, is no more than a reflection, a beam which is only the radiance of a reflection. Doubtless the mother-figure's importance derives from this enchantment. It could even be said that if this figure is so fascinating it is because it first appears while the child still inhabits the reflected light of enchantment and the mother is the essence of such enchantment. It is because the child is fascinated that the mother is fascinating; and that also explains why our earliest memories have that fixity proper to fascination.[106]

There are, of course major poems in the literary canon that deal with the fascination of childhood. Wordsworth's 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood' is the prime example, its opening lines speaking of the wonderful light Blanchot describes:

> There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
> The earth, and every common sight,
> To me did seem
> Apparelled in celestial light,
> The glory and the freshness of a dream.[107]

From the vantage point of adulthood ("Whither is fled the visionary gleam?"), the child is a *savant* whose survey has privileged access to a region the poet now can only glimpse at:

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[105] This mirroring is reflected in the various uses of the word "gaze" to describe *both* the vision of the Medusa head and the scene's observer.

[106] Blanchot, 'The Essential Solitude', *The Siren's Song*, p. 107-8.

[107] William Wordsworth, 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Early Childhood', *Wordsworth: Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, A new edition, rev. Ernest de Selincourt, Oxford Paperbacks (Oxford, 1969), p. 460.

> Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep
> Thy heritage, thou Eye among the blind,
> That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep,
> Haunted for ever by the eternal mind
> (*ll.*110-3).[108]

The poet is fascinated by the picture of the child's fascination. Blanchot continues: "He who is fascinated never actually sees what he sees." What that might mean in relation to Wordsworth's poem, and in relation to the different moments of looking the poem presents would be a story of its own; what it means in relation to Shelley's poem is that the gazer never actually sees the Medusa head he gazes on, any more than does the reader quite trace what is seen as the image effaces itself. In such a way, we might say that the child does not actually see the maternal phallus he attributes to the mother. But we could also say that castration itself, whether achieved or otherwise, is itself a kind of substitution: the concentration on the mother and, more specifically the maternal genitals analogised as the Medusa head and posited as a scene of loss and substitution, is symptomal of a more fundamental type of looking: "It is because the child is fascinated that the mother is fascinating." This deeper look invests the scene with a restitutive luminosity – "the melodious hue of beauty thrown athwart the darkness" – imposed about the core of an origin that is an absence.

> Fascination is profoundly related to the anonymous, impersonal presence of an indeterminate They, a gigantic featureless Somebody. It is the relation established by our anonymous, impersonal gaze with the unseeing, shapeless depth, the absence which is visible because it is blinding.[109]

When Samuel Weber describes the perceptual structure of castration in his essay on the Uncanny, he concludes from the series of literary

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[108] *Ibid.*, p. 461.

[109] Blanchot, 'The Essential Solitude', *The Siren's Song*, p. 108.

analogies he makes, analogies that are drawn from a variety of different languages, that

> castration "itself" – a necessary fiction – can only be glimpsed obliquely, sideways, seitwärts, en travers: never en face.[110]

This oblique gazing is also true of Perseus in the myth who looks sideways onto his shining shield to see the Medusa's reflection; furthermore, it is inverted in the apotropaic movement to which Freud alluded, whereby the enemies of the Greeks had to turn away or avert their gaze from the frightful effigies of the Gorgon set up to intimidate them. But in the poem and in Blanchot, we strain to see what we want to see with full face; and that absorbing contact is synchronous with dissolve and effacement as we encounter the space into which the image disperses.

v. Medusa's Progeny

In concluding this chapter I want to make several connections between Shelley's poem and other poems by different poets. For the poet

> might as wisely and as easily determine that his mind should no longer be a mirror of all that is lovely in the visible universe, as exclude from his contemplation the beautiful which exists in the writings of a great contemporary.[111]

I have already intimated that there may be a connection between Wordsworth's Ode where the child gazer is the eye who reads the eternal deep in the glow of luminous fascination, and the scene of looking presented by the Medusa.[112] Another poem, also bathed in the luminosity of fascination may be Keats's 'On First Looking into

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[110] Weber, p. 1132.

[111] Preface to 'Prometheus Unbound', in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, pp. 134-5.

[112] Shelley quotes the 'Intimations' Ode in the conclusion to 'Alastor' (1815), *l.*713: "It is a woe 'too deep for tears' ". *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 87.

Chapman's Homer' – a poem that like Wordsworth's and Shelley's unites looking with reading. The light in Keats's poem comes from the enchanted world of romance literature: "Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold"[113]. At first sight, the scenes and the subjects of the two poem seem very distinct. On closer examination, it becomes noticeable that Shelley has removed part of the landscape of discovery from the end of Keats's poem into the beginning of his own. The phrase "upon a peak in Darien" appears as "Upon the cloudy mountain-peak supine". With regard to the Uffizi picture, Shelley has completely invented this setting: one could not tell from the picture whether it's a mountain peak or not, and there is certainly no panorama or vista of the kind both Keats and Shelley imply. Shelley has not taken any hint from the myth where we find that the Gorgons' eyrie is a sea-bound rock. Moreover the "wild surmise" of Cortez's men echoes extraordinarily in the "mad surprise" of Shelley's sense-bereft bat. Thus the triumphant and heroic forward- looking that so typifies the Keatsian "watcher" who ever scans the vast for new worlds and new horizons is transformed by Shelley into a gazing that is always trying to envision itself. Beginning where Keats appears to end, Shelley turns the optimistic hopefulness of "wild surmise" into the rather more formidable surprise caused by the bereavement of sense. Keats's early sonnet that opens 'How many bards gild the lapse of time' shows a seemingly benign use of bereavement that works to the poet's good: "distance of recognizance bereaves", he writes, explaining how disparate sounds, like the voices of precursor poets, are dulled and harmonised by space and time into unthreatening pleasant music rather than intimidatory clamour.[114] The poet insists he is not made

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[113] *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. Jack Stillinger (London, 1978), p. 64. Keats's poem was published in 1817, but, by that time, the poets had already been introduced to each other by Leigh Hunt. Keats wrote the poem October 1816, after a return from an evening spent with Cowden Clark who had read to him from Chapman's translation of Homer.

[114] *Ibid.*, pp. 63-4.

anxious by his poetic predecessors who exert only a helpful influence:

> But no confusion, no disturbance rude
> Do they occasion; 'tis a pleasing chime.
> (*ll.*7-8.)

We may well think that the poet protests too much and that the language of bereavement is, in fact, far less innocent than it first appeared, and indeed is a pointer to the poet's aggressive covering of his traces. Shelley's poem does not attempt to shield the reader from the glare of violent action it portrays and its possible ritual petrifying and erasing of Wordsworth and Keats.

That glare becomes reflected in other texts after Shelley's. Charles Kingsley, no admirer of Shelley by his own account, has something of the colour of melodious hue rub off with the romantic pathos in his retelling of the myth for children:

> Her plumage was like the rainbow, and her face was like the face of a nymph, only her eyebrows were knit and her lips clenched, with everlasting care and pain.[115]

This obviously recasts details from stanza one:

> Upon its lips and eyelids seem to lie
> Loveliness like a shadow, from which shine,
> Fiery and lurid, struggling underneath,
> The agonies of anguish and of death.[116]

Rossetti's short poem entitled 'Aspecta Medusa' (1865) and

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[115] Charles Kingsley, *The Heroes* (Cambridge, 1856), p. 29. For Kingsley's dislike of Shelley, see his 'Thoughts on Shelley & Byron', first published in *Fraser's Magazine* (Nov. 1853), and then reprinted in Kingsley's *Miscellanies*, 2 vols (London, 1859), I, 304-324.

[116] Both Kent Patterson, in his article 'Medusa in Three Victorian Poets', *Tennessee Studies in Literature* 17 (1972), 115, and McGann, pp. 18-21, when discussing the pathos of the Medusa's beauty refer the reader to William Morris's setting of the Perseus myth in 'The Doom of King Acrisius' one of the tales in *The Earthly Paradise*. See *The Collected Works of William Morris*, ed. May Morris, 24 vols (London, New York, Bombay and Calcutta, 1910-15), III (1910), 171-241. But here Medusa is pitiable rather than terrifying, and the emotion of Morris's tale rests in the description of what Patterson calls "a sentimental heroine doomed to a pathetic fate". I can find no direct link with Shelley's poem.

accompanied by the brief '(For a Drawing)' revises the Shelleyan gaze back from contact into a defensive distancing:

> ANDROMEDA, by Perseus saved and wed,
> Hankered each day to see the Gorgon's head:
> Till o'er a fount he held it, bade her lean,
> And mirrored in the wave was safely seen
> That death she lived by.
>
> Let not thine eyes know
> Any forbidden thing itself, although
> It once should save as well as kill: but be
> Its shadow upon life enough for thee.[117]

This drawing does not sound like the extant drafts for the painting of the Medusa Rossetti planned to execute[118]; although it corresponds to Burne-Jones's later fine painted treatment of the scene wherein Perseus holds up the head for Andromeda over a small font.[119] The painting Rossetti planned seems much more directly to pick up the romantic element of the Medusa theme. We know this from Rossetti's defence of the Medusa as a fit subject for painting:

> the head, treated as pure ideal, presenting no

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[117] *The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, rev. and enl. ed., edited by William M. Rossetti (London, 1911), p. 209.

[118] See *The Diary of William Michael Rossetti 1870-1873*, ed., with an introduction and notes by Odette Bornand (Oxford, 1977), p. 20, footnote 6. 'The *Aspecta Medusa*, a pencil-and-crayon design begun in 1861, practically completed in 1866, and improved in 1867. It is now in the Birmingham Art Gallery. In 1865 D. G. R. wrote nine lines of verse to accompany the drawing." For gloss and illustration of the drawing, Bornand refers us to *The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti 1828-1882: A Catalogue Raisonné*, ed. V. Surtees. 2 vols (Oxford, 1971), I, 106, no. 183, and II, plate 270. It is hard to see how the slight sketch shown in this volume could be thought to be the completed and improved drawing Bornand takes it to be. Importantly, the design which shows Perseus and Andromeda kneeling by the rim of a small pool contains no depiction of the severed head; we may assume that Rossetti had not yet included it. An adjacent plate, 271, shows a more finished version of Andromeda's head. The painting was commissioned by C. P. Matthews the brewer of Ind Coope & Co., for 1500 guineas. See Letter 723 to Mrs. Gabriele Rossetti, 20 July 1867 in *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, eds. Oswald Doughty and John Robert Wahl, 5 vols (Oxford, 1965-7), II (1965), 624, for Rossetti's own account and citation of the poem. See also *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Letters and Memoir*, ed. William Michael Rossetti, 2 vols (London, 1895), I, 241: "But the courage of the proposing purchaser failed him – he thought the subject too 'horrid' . . . ."

[119] *Burne-Jones*, with an introduction by May Johnson (London, 1979), Plate 30, *The Baleful Head*, from the Perseus cycle, 1886-7, now in the Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart. Another version of the same painting is in Southampton Art Gallery.

> likeness (as it will not) to the severed head of an actual person, being moreover so much in shadow (according to my arrangement) that no painful ghastliness of colour will be apparent, will not really possess when executed the least degree of that repugnant reality which might naturally suggest itself at first consideration. I feel the utmost confidence in this myself, as the kind of French sensationalistic horror which the realistic treatment of the severed head would cause is exactly the quality I should most desire to avoid.[120]

Rossetti's stress on idealism rather than realism is what keeps him a Shelleyan. Three years after the completion of Rossetti's drawing, the Medusa makes an appearance in Walter Pater's essay 'Lionardo da Vinci', first published in the *Fortnightly Review*, and then in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* some four years later. The Medusa that Vasari describes Leonardo as having painted as a boy is seen by Pater as a preparation for the picture now hanging in the Uffizi – "the one great picture which he left behind him in Florence."[121] Here then is Pater's description which will immediately be seen to be written in the light of Shelley's poem:

> The subject has been treated in various ways; Lionardo alone cuts to its centre; he alone realises it as the head of the corpse, exercising its powers through all the circumstances of death. What may be called the fascination of corruption penetrates in every touch its exquisitely finished beauty. About the dainty lines of the cheek the bat flits unheeded. The delicate snakes seem literally strangling each other in terrified struggle to get away from the Medusa brain. The hue which violent death always brings with it is in the features; features singularly massive and grand, as we catch them inverted, in a dexterous foreshortening, sloping upwards, almost sliding down upon us, crown foremost, like a great calm stone against which the wave of serpents breaks.[122]

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[120] See Letter 756 to C. P. Matthews, ?12th Nov. 1867, in *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, II, 643. Rossetti adds the comment: "The subject does not exist in any completely rendered form that I know of", which may imply that he did not know the Leonardo painting, at least directly. As Shelley was one of Rossetti's passions, it seems unlikely that he did not know the poem.

[121] Pater, p. 98.

[122] *Ibid.*, pp. 98-9.

At this point, in the first edition of his text Pater adds the crucial words: "But it is a subject that may well be left to the beautiful verses of Shelley." This, one of the very few acknowledgements of his precursor to appear in his work, Pater mysteriously cuts in subsequent later editions of *The Renaissance* so that, for the most part, it has passed unnoticed. The excision marks Pater's attempt to sever himself from the Shelleyan corpus, but in spite of this the passage reflects what it resembles. Pater's "dexterous foreshortening" of the poem preserves as the same time as it effaces; there is no real struggle to get away from the central core of Shelley's poem. There appears the same language of disseverance: "cuts", the pun "exercising" (one might remark, incidentally, Rossetti's similar unconscious pun: "the severed head . . . will not really possess when executed . . . repugnant reality . . . ."); we also recognise Shelley's specific emphasis in "the head of the corpse", and its life-in-death powers. Again we encounter "hue", violence, and a scanning of the head's "features", here inverted, just as characters would be in a mirror-reflection. And Pater scatters some of the poem's literal characters, for example the 'g' Shelley favours so extensively as voiced post-palatal stop (struggling, agonies, anguish, grace, gazer, glare, ragged, tangles) in the part repetition of "struggle", and in "strangling", "singularly", "grand" and "great", as well as mimicking its softer present participle occurrences in his own usages such as "exercising", "strangling", "-shortening". These repeated waves break against the monumental inscriptions of the prior poem.

As McGann and other commentators have pointed out, Pater's account of the Medusa is a prefiguring of another prose picture: namely, the passage for which he is most famous – the celebrated and beautiful description of Leonardo's Mona Lisa, which

occurs at a later point in the same essay.[123] Here too, but more deftly and covertly does Pater draw on Shelley. Being, as Pater describes her, a composite and summation, the type of types, La Gioconda is more than Medusa; but there's a special charm in seeing "the embodiment of the old fancy", "older than the rocks among which she sits"[124] in the changed and "changing *lineaments*"[125] of Medusa's "dead face", or, as Shelley has it

> A woman's countenance, with serpent locks,
> Gazing in death on heaven from those wet rocks.

For "the secrets of the grave" could be the "graven" lineaments and the characters that are absorbed in a continuing defacement.

Pater's fascination with the head of the Medusa does not end here; the image recurs in his novel *Marius the Epicurean.* Marius's childhood home, was founded two generations before him by a certain Marcellus:

> A chamber, curved ingeniously into oval form, which he had added to the mansion, still contained his collection of works of art; above all, that head of Medusa, for which the villa was famous.The spoilers of one of the old Greek towns on the coast had flung away or lost the thing, as it seemed, in some rapid flight across the river below, from the sands of which it was drawn up in a fisherman's net, with the fine golden *laminæ* still clinging here and there to the bronze.[126]

Notably Pater makes the head the focus of the house; but it is also a relic whose origins are somewhat obscure, like Pater's own revised version of Leonardo's Medusa which clouds the link with Shelley. Nonetheless, the details of the gold and bronze of the head are reminiscent of the "brazen glare" in Shelley's poem.[127] Pater's

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[123] *Ibid.*, pp. 116-9.

[124] *Ibid.*, pp. 119, 118,

[125] *Ibid.*, p. 119. Emphasis mine. Curiously enough while McGann states that: "The Medusa is Pater's anticipatory symbol of La Gioconda" (p. 12), he does little more to further this suggestion and makes no textual connections between the two passages.

[126] Walter Pater, *Marius the Epicurean* (London, 1910), pp. 19- 20

[127] Of course, "brazen", as a common adjectival use for 'bronze', carries the

Medusa not only goes on to foster a series of repetitions through her inclusion in La Gioconda, repetitions I will discuss in other chapters, but has progeny closer to home. In 1888, three years after the publication of *Marius*, Pater's friend and near neighbour Mrs. Humphrey Ward reused the motif of the Medusa head in her splendid best-selling novel *Robert Elsmere*. The head first appears to the eponymous hero of the novel as he sights it in the library of the redoubtable squire, Mr. Wendover.

> He bowed. The squire also bent forward. At that moment Robert caught sight beside his shoulder of an antique, standing on the mantelpiece, which was a new addition to the room. It was head of Medusa, and the frightful stony calm of it struck on Elsmere's ruffled nerves with extraordinary force. It flashed across him that here was an apt symbol of that absorbing and overgrown life of the intellect which blights the heart and chills the senses. And to that spiritual Medusa the man before him was not the first victim he had known.[128]

Ward may have taken the idea of the sculptural *objet d'art* from *Marius*, but she almost certainly borrows from the language of the essay on Leonardo; we might notice that she preserves Pater's characterisation of the "great calm stone" in her mention of "the frightful stony calm of it". Furthermore, she inverts the accompanying wave imagery. The sculpture "struck on Elsmere's ruffled nerves with an extraordinary force" whereas in the Pater passage the head is like a stone "against which the wave of serpents breaks." It's likely if Ward used the first edition of *The Renaissance* that contained the allusion to Shelley that she may have drawn on the poem as well; the reference to sense deprivation, and the

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connotations of sound (loudness) and ferocity, as well as colour.

[128] *Robert Elsmere*, ed., with an introduction by Rosemary Ashton, The World's Classics (Oxford, 1987), p. 254. This head makes its appearance at various other moments in the novel, as a type of symbolic adjunct to the squire: "Mr. Wendover, . . . the Medusa head peering over his shoulder" (p. 327); "Out of [the dim light] the squire's face gleamed almost as whitely as the tortured marble of the Medusa just above their heads." (P. 559.)

phrase "absorbing and overgrown life of the intellect" seem to come from "the beautiful verses" and the scene of absorption and 'growing into' (*ll.*12-13) they present. If this is the case, then Ward's deprecation of the Medusa as a symbol of excessive self-reflection, might also function as her moral verdict on a poem which puts especial stress on "imaging the operations of the human mind."

Other connections with this particular Shelleyan scene are teasing. Does Browning's identification with the Perseus and Andromeda myth in *Pauline* (1833) and *The Ring and the Book* stem from a recognition of the encrypted name of his precursor Shelley in the Medusa poem?[129] In some versions of the myth, Perseus saves Andromeda by exposing the sea-monster that threatens her to the severed head, and thus freezing it in its tracks.[130] In such a way, the idea of the Medusa head is always

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[129] Browning mentions the poem in a letter to the publisher Edward Moxon [? January 1839] which seems to indicate that he read the proofs of Moxon's *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* edited by Mrs. Shelley, which came out that same year, and was the first complete edition of Shelley's poems. See Letter 678 in *The Brownings' Correspondence 1812-1889*, eds. Philip Kelley & Ronald Hudson, vols I– (1984–), IV *January 1838-December 1840* (1986), 113. "You will see at a glance which are the real corrections of errors, and which mere attempts to clear the text by tracing the construction, – as in the lines on the 'Medusa' . . . ." In a footnote to this letter, the editors mention that Moxon presented Browning with an inscribed set of the *Poetical Works*. Browning first discovered Shelley's poetry in 1826 in a pirated edition. William Benbow, "a notorious piratical publisher", brought out in 1826 two collections of Shelley's verse, one of which was bought by James Silverthorne "who gave it to his cousin Robert Browning, and it was thus that Browning first discovered Shelley's poetry." *The Early Collected Editions of Shelley's Poems: A Study in the Transmission of the Printed Text*, Charles H. Taylor Jr. (New Haven, 1958), pp. 11, 14. Both of Benbow's collections contain Shelley's "Medusa". Frederick A. Pottle, in *Shelley and Browning: A Myth and Some Facts* (Chicago, 1923), tells us that in Browning's 1826 edition of *Miscellaneous Poems*, the poem is "Especially marked", and "The first three lines of the third stanza are underscored (p. 84)." Browning's interest in the myth is discussed in William C. De Vane, 'The Virgin and the Dragon', in *Yale Review* 37 (Sept. 1947) 33-46. and Robert Langbaum 'Browning and the Question of Myth', in *Robert Browning: A Collection of Critical Essays*, eds. Harold Bloom and Adrienne Munich , Twentieth Century Views (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1979), p. 148-66. De Vane tells us that "the young poet always wrote at a desk over which there hung a copy of Caravaggio's picture of Andromeda, 'the perfect picture' as he called it. As he wrote his his first poem 'Pauline,' he glanced up at the picture and recorded what he saw in verse" (p. 35)." Caravaggio is Polidoro da Carravaggio (or Caldara) *ca.*1500-43.

[130] This is what happens in Charles Kingsley's poem 'Andromeda'. See *Andromeda and Other Poems* (London, 1858), pp. 1-49. The only classical source for this version of the story I can trace is in the Greek poet Lucian's *Dialogues of the Sea-Gods*, Dialogue 14 (Triton and Nereids). For a parallel text, see *The Works of Lucian*, Loeb Classical Library, 8 vols (Cam., Mass. and London, 1913-67), VII (1961), tr. M. D. MacLeod, 226-31. John Maynard, in *Browning's Youth* (Cam., Mass. and London,

present, explicitly or not, whenever the Andromeda myth occurs. The salvation of Andromeda is also, significantly, the next event that takes place after the slaying of Medusa; Perseus, fresh from the kill, becomes involved in another story. Could Browning's use of the myth mark his adoption of the heroic title of the precursor but for another, or in fact, the next scene in the mythic narrative, which he is to claim as his own? Another link is with Swinburne whom we know admired Shelley's poem greatly and referred to it in his bibliographical essay 'Notes on the Text of Shelley' while reviewing William Rossetti's suggested emendations of Shelley.[131] Edmund Gosse reports in his *Life* of the poet, a visit of Swinburne's in March 1864 to Florence:

> Swinburne stayed some weeks in Florence, where he visited pictures in the delightful company of Mrs. Gaskell. Long afterwards he told me that she was the only person who sympathised with his raptures over the 'Medusa' of Leonardo da Vinci: unfortunately the cruel art-critics will now have it that this panel was never touched by Leonardo.[132]

Swinburne would have been familiar with the poem long before his sighting of the picture, and it is possible that Shelley's non-mimetic treatment of the painting as the point of inspiration for a poem may have influenced him to write his own poem about an art object which takes its origins from an ambiguously beautiful and disturbing mythic subject - I refer to his poem 'Hermaphroditus' which will be discussed in my third chapter. It has been suggested that some of the imagery in Swinburne's descriptions of paintings in the essay 'Notes on the Designs of the Old Masters at Florence' owe something to Shelley's poem.[133] Although the painting of the

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1977), asserts Browning's familiarity with Lucian on pp. 250, 302.

[131] 'Notes on the Text of Shelley', Bonchurch, XV, 365-6.

[132] Edmund Gosse, *The Life of Algernon Charles Swinburne*, Bonchurch, XIX (1927), 97-8.

[133] Patterson, p. 117. Swinburne "knew and admired Shelley's poem, Rossetti's picture, and the original painting from which Shelley got the idea for his poem." Patterson links the poem and Swinburne's essay on p. 118.

Medusa is not among those discussed in Swinburne's essay, Kent Patterson and Swinburne's biographer Philip Henderson have implied that the poet's account of the studies of a female head by Michelangelo in the Buonarroti Palace derive from his interest in certain aspects of the Medusean theme – explicitly, the linking of woman with snake to create an erotic type.[134] Such snake imagery is prominent in several places in the essay, and the certain aspects of the Medusa get woven into that other snake woman – the Lamia:

> In one drawing she wears a head-dress . . . plaited in the likeness of closely-welded scales as of a chrysalid serpent . . . . her mouth crueller than a tiger's, colder than a snake's, and beautiful beyond a woman's. She is the deadlier Venus incarnate. . . . For what indeed is lovelier or more luxuriously loving than a strong and graceful snake of the nobler kind?[135]

Swinburne's creation of this erotic type seems to me to bear only the faintest allusive relation to the Shelleyan image of the Medusa head; nonetheless since Pater acknowledged that he derived his impressionistic style from Swinburne's art criticism,[136] it is interesting to see how the Shelleyan Medusa image comes to Pater both directly and through the writing of his immediate precursor. The passage in which the first two extracts cited above appear has been suggested as one of the sources for Pater's La Gioconda.[137]

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[134] Patterson, p. 118. Patterson misreads Swinburne's attribution of the design to Michelangelo and substitutes the name of Leonardo. Philip Henderson's juxtaposition of the 'Medusa' poem and picture with the same extract suggests a recognition of shared elements. See his *Swinburne: Portrait of a Poet* (New York, 1974), pp. 81-2.

[135] 'Notes on the Designs of the Old Masters at Florence', Bonchurch, XV, 155-95; 160, 162. Originally published in the *Fortnightly Review*, (1 July 1868) and then in *Essay and Studies*, pp. 314-57.

[136] See Swinburne's letter to Lord Morley, 11 April 1873: "I admire and enjoy Pater's work so heartily that I am somewhat shy of saying how much, ever since on my telling him once at Oxford how highly Rossetti (D. G.) as well as myself estimated his first papers in the *Fortnightly*, he replied to the effect that he considered them as owing their inspiration entirely to the example of my own work in the same line." Letter 476, *The Swinburne Letters*, ed. Cecil Y. Lang, 6 vols (1959-62), II: *1869-1878* (1959), 240-1.

[137] McGann, p. 14. William Gaunt, in *The Æsthetic Adventure*, New Edition (London, 1975), p. 54, sees traces of Swinburne's brief treatment of Leonardo in this

I want to end this chapter by making one final connection, this time with a later poem by Shelley himself. The commentators appear not to have noticed that Shelley reuses Medusean imagery in the short 1820 piece, 'The Tower of Famine'; a piece which is inspired by Dante's treatment in the *Inferno* of the starvation of the incarcerated Ugolino and his sons, and which is written in Dantesque *terza rima*. The poem describes the appearance of the tower amid all the other towers in Pisa.[138] I cite the conclusion:

> the tempest proof
> Pavilions of the dark Italian air,–
> Are by its presence dimmed – they stand aloof,
>
> And are withdrawn – so that the world is bare;
> As if a spectre wrapped in shapeless terror
> Amid a company of ladies fair
>
> Should glide and glow, till it became a mirror
> Of all their beauty, and their hair and hue,
> The life of their sweet eyes, with all its error
> Should be absorbed, till they to marble grew.[139]

Shelley's phantasmagoria produces a chain of substitutions: a tower is like a shapeless spectre, which then becomes a mirror which has the Medusean power of turning fair women, supposedly representing other towers, to marble statues. As one progresses towards the end of the poem, one seems to move into a scene, and another poem even, that is markedly different from that which

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essay resurfacing in Pater's description of La Gioconda.

[138]Browning says that Shelley, while staying in Pisa, mistakenly took the Torre Guelfa to be Ugolino's Tower of Famine ("the vestiges of which should be sought for in the Piazza de'Cavalieri"). See his 'Essay on Shelley', ed. Donald Smalley, in *The Complete Works of Robert Browning*, gen ed. Roma A. King, 8- vols (Athens, Ohio and Waco, Texas, 1969–), V (1981), 149. William Michael Rossetti thinks that Shelley, in fact, described the Torre Beniforti, by which Rossetti's editor, Odette Bornand, thinks he means the Torre Ghibellina. See 14 Aug. 1871, in*The Diary of William Michael Rossetti*, p. 106.

[139] 'The Tower of Famine', *Shelley: Poetical Works*, pp. 623-4. Notably, in scattering the vocabulary of the poem on the Medusa in this poem's conclusion, Shelley reuses the mirror/terror/error rhyme of the first poem. While "error", here rather obscurely glossing the "life" in the fair ladies' eyes, does not mean what it does in the Medusa poem, it certainly does not endorse Rogers's suggestions about the serpents.

preceded it. The imagery of the conclusion is so striking that, at first, it seems to be independent of the rest of the writing. The associations of trance and bewitchment in the action seem so to lend themselves to the very poetic movement that the reader is borne unresistingly into a realm which seems far removed from the city scape which is the announced topic of the piece. We may say that such is the continuity of the poem's flow that it is only latterly that we establish a discontinuity. What appears to have happened is that the metaphoric comparison Shelley uses seems to have become self-sufficient and detached from what it is supposed to elucidate. On careful consideration, the subtlety of the comparison does become clear: just as the mirroring spectre deprives the fair women of their colour, beauty and vitality, so does the intimidating Tower of Famine deprive the surrounding towers of their natural grace by its dark and dominating presence and its implicit threat. All the same, the connections are not immediately obvious as the vivacity of personification and drama tends to over-power the inanimate objects under surveillance, and there are features of the scene-play that do not seem to transfer back to the original scene at all, but are constituted as part of an errant strain of poetic conceptualisation that brings us face to face with a typically Shelleyan perception motif. Shelley tells us that the spectre of his comparison is "wrapped in shapeless terror" which implies that the spectre is so masked or shrouded that its features and form are not visible, thus enabling its terrifying blank but luminous surface to become a mirror. Shapelessness is a favourite Shelleyan device and is often, curiously enough, integral to what Shelley specifies as a "shape", which, as it is given no determining characteristics, is usually without proper contour. As with the "shape all light" in *The Triumph of Life*, the shapeless spectre is illuminate – light having no distinct outline of its own. The women in the poem quite literally

have all their vitality absorbed or sapped by the mirror so that they become but statues or effigies of their former selves; the blank spectre-turned-mirror steals their images and leaves them erased of character. Here then is the Shelleyan picture of the gazer's total absorption in and by what he sees,[140] an absorption enacted, as I have already hinted, in the poem's movement for the reader. Here, also, is Shelleyan erasure as the characters become grown into the spectral mirror; an erasure mimed in the poem's very fabric in that the referents of the metaphor are absorbed by the images that are supposed to gloss them. We may speculate that what is behind this movement is allusion to and use of the unsculptured image, whose power is the charge behind the shapeless spectral mirror which absorbs every gaze and is the focus underlying every erasure or dissolve. It is this image that I will show as responsible for the appeal of two portraits as, in my next chapter, we look at the connections between two of Shelley's followers, Browning and Rossetti.

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[140] See Shelley's corrections to Medwin's translation of the original passage in Dante's *Inferno*. *Shelley: Poetical Works*, pp. 729-31. As printed in this edition, the corrections are in italics, and a number of the most interesting corrections relate to perception. For example, Ugolino regards the eyes of his sons and is petrified: "When I/*Heard locked beneath me of that horrible tower/The outlet; then into their eyes alone/I looked to read myself*, without a sign/Or word. I wept not – turned within to stone." (*ll.*29-32.)The mirror image recurs in "came forth the light/Of the new sun/. . .*Three faces each the reflex of my own/Were imaged by its faint and ghastly ray*". (*ll.*39-40, 42-3.) While Medwin's translation dates from 1821, – see Thomas Medwin, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, revised ed. H. B. Forman (Oxford, 1913), pp. 246-9 – we know that Shelley was familiar with Dante long before that. J. A. Notopoulos dates Shelley's first acquaintance with Dante to 1814, although he gives no concrete evidence for this. See *The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Platonic Mind* (Durham, N. Carolina, 1949), p. 189. However, Holmes records Shelley copying Canto V of the *Inferno* into a notebook in 1813. (P. 227.) Holmes also cites a deleted entry from the diary of Mary Shelley's half-sister, Jane, for 18 Oct. 1814, which notes a discussion with Shelley about Dante. (P. 261.) Could it be that the images of mirroring and petrification in Dante's poem reminded Shelley of his own Medusean imagery and became amalgamated with it in his derivative 'Tower of Famine' poem? Ugolino's survey of his sons is a brilliant literalisation of the claim that "Neither the eye nor the mind can see itself, unless reflected upon that which it resembles."

CHAPTER II

BROWNING AND ROSSETTI: PORTRAITS

I *know* that I don't make out my conception by my language, all poetry being merely a putting the infinite within the finite. You would have me paint it all plain out, which can't be; but by various artifices I try to make shift with touches and bits of outlines which *succeed* if they bear the conception from me to you. You ought, I think, to keep pace with the thought . . . .

Robert Browning, Letter to John Ruskin, 10 Dec. 1855, in *Works of Ruskin*, XXXVI (1909), xxxiv.

[The subjective poet] does not paint pictures and hang them on the walls, but rather carries them on the retina of his own eyes: we must look deep into his human eyes, to see those pictures on them.

Browning, *Essay on Shelley* (1852), in *The Complete Works of Robert Browning*, V (1981), 139.

All pictures look more like other pictures than what they are pictures of.

One draws a picture by depicting some picture, by drawing not from life but, in a sense, by tracing a kind of picture that he already sees. So, too, with poems.

John Hollander, *Vision and Resonance* (New York, 1975), pp. 246, 247.

i. Shelley's "naked countenance"

In the *Posthumous Poems* of 1824, Mary Shelley opened the section entitled 'Miscellaneous Poems' with the poem on Leonardo's Medusa.[1] This detail, in itself, may go some way to explaining why

[1] Charles H.Taylor gives a full bibliographical description of the *Posthumous Poems* in *The Early Collected Editions of Shelley's Poetry*, pp. 90-1. The 'Medusa' is listed on p. 90.

the poem, placed in such a prominent position, caught the attention of so many other nineteenth century writers. This ordering of Mrs. Shelley's was preserved in nearly all the unofficial and pirated editions of Shelley's verse up to his widow's authorisation of Moxon's 1839 editions.[2] Thus, for example, Browning would have found the poem so placed in his shorter 1826 Benbow edition. In the 1839 editions, the earlier consisting of five volumes and the later revised edition compact in one volume, Mary Shelley reordered the poems according to chronology, adding a general informative note on the works undertaken during each year of the poet's life. These notes are invaluable for their insights into Shelley's writings and their genesis of composition, and provide a useful gloss on his personal history, travels, and comparative reading. Nonetheless, it has been asserted that the stressed and ailing Mary Shelley, when she returned anew to her editorial duties in 1839, produced, in bibliographical terms, a less accurate edition than that of 1824, even missing some of the corrections she made to the later impression of the *Posthumous Poems*.[3] While one can see the usefulness of a chronological edition, the original ordering of *Posthumous Poems*, a volume which in its own right is said to be a fine and accurate edition, makes other equally interesting emphases. While we can't know for certain how the poet rated many of the works in his *œuvre*, that Mary Shelley placed the poem on the Medusa at the head of the shorter lyrical works hints at her sense of that poem's significance for her husband. As the first of the shorter poems, the poem achieves a focal status as a representative type of the lyric

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[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 93-99. Of the seven pirated editions, only two alter the order: Stephen Hunt's *Beauties* (1830) changes the order of the section entitled 'Miscellaneous Poems' starting with the 'Stanzas written in Dejection', and including 'Mont Blanc'. However 'Mont Blanc' is still followed by the 'Medusa', although the order after this does not follow *Posthumous Poems* (Taylor, p. 95). Daly (1836) also reorders the section entitled 'Miscellaneous Poems', and he places 'Mont Blanc' immediately after the 'Medusa' (p. 98). Moxon's five volume 1839 edition is described in Taylor, pp. 99-101.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

mode, a status that is, of course, lost in the the reordering of the 1839 edition. This issue thus raises the fascinating question of a poem's literal context: how both the position of a poem within a printed volume and its juxtaposition with the other pieces of writing that surround it affect our reading of it. This question obviously relates to other more general ones concerning context: poems can be made to read with varying accentuation according to what networks of affiliation they are assumed to belong, be these poems by the same poet and grouped according to dates, themes, imageries, or poems by other earlier, contemporary, or later poets. Any juxtaposition of one piece of writing with another, planned or fortuitous, makes both pieces read in the light of the other. Furthermore, the literal placings in an edition have a special status of their own as they may signal the poet's own sense of linkages in his work. The order of poems will be more important in some cases than in others, and need not limit other comparisons, but as an easily over-looked feature of a volume should not be neglected.

In the editions before 1839, the poem that immediately precedes the 'Medusa' is 'Mont Blanc', a key Shelleyan manifesto of poetic perception which presents the idea of the unsculptured image.[4] While the two poems are separated from each other chronologically by a period of three years, it is possible to glimpse a prefiguring of the later poem in the earlier.

> Power dwells apart in its tranquillity
> Remote, serene, and inaccessible:
> And *this*, the naked countenance of earth,
> On which I gaze, even these primæval mountains
> Teach the adverting mind. The glaciers creep
> Like snakes that watch their prey, from their far fountains,
> Slow rolling on
>
> (*ll.*96-102).[5]

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[4] 'Mont Blanc', *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, pp. 89-93.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 92.

Shelley delineates the outline of a face that the gazer's perceptive mind must heed or turn towards just as the later Persean gazer confronts the severed head; and the surrounding glaciers, imagined as snakes, seem to frame that face with Medusean locks.[6] Earth and mountains teach the gazer, but they provide a negative knowledge – that Power dwells apart. The "naked" earth and mountains comprise the "wilderness" (*l.*76), which is separate from the more pastoral fields, lakes, forests, and streams (*l.*84), and alien to the cycle of natural processes described in lines eighty four to ninety five. The aspect of this barren visual scene thus draws an eloquent blank[7]; it is as if the face onto which the gazer looks has no character of its own, but that, devoid of feature, it speaks of another power which looks through it. The barren landscape is not the Power; but its remote stark qualities provide an excellent site in which the Power can reside and be recognised. Thus the narrator addresses the mountain Mont Blanc which is the locus of this force:

> The secret strength of things
> Which governs thought, and to the infinite dome
> Of heaven is as a law, inhabits thee!
> (*ll.*139-41.)[8]

As Harold Bloom makes clear in his reading of the poem, the physical mountain is but the emblem of the Power, and

> the importance of this emblem to us is in the "human mind's *imaginings*" (my italics), for it is in our imaginings that we draw upon that power, insofar as we can draw upon it.[9]

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[6] Ruskin, discussing in *Modern Painters*, V, Turner's links to the Hesperid tradition and his picturing of the Hesperian dragon, claims "the Dragon's descent from Medusa". In a first draft of a ensuing passage (preserved in a footnote by his editors), Ruskin writes: "Now if I were merely to draw this dragon as white, instead of dark, and take his claws away, his body would become a representation of a great glacier, so nearly perfect, that I know no published engraving of the upper part of the Glacier des Bois, when it first breaks over the rock towards the Source of the Arveron, so like it as this dragon's shoulders would be, if they were drawn out in light". The editors then note that "The resemblance of the glacier to a serpent was seized also by Shelley, in his lines on 'Mont Blanc'. . . ." *Works*, VII (1905), 402.

[7] This blank is, of course, mirrored in the name of the mountain which gives poem its title.

[8] 'Mont Blanc', *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 93.

It is these imaginings that construct a face for the earth: a "naked countenance". We may assume that "naked" here does not merely denote the unrelieved stark appearance of the wilderness, but that "naked countenance" as the focus of a gaze has, in its own right, a special significance. The phrase is suggestive of a number of things: of direct encounter, of something stripped down to its essentials, and yet also of something that lacks definition or determinable feature. It implies the mobile focal space of the countenance prior to the inscribing or differentiation of facial characteristics, and, as such, is a premonition of the unsculptured image of the Medusean face which demands a full and concentrated looking wherein it shows itself as indecipherable and dissolves into itself. The Medusean face is like the aspect of the mountain which gives access to what is in the last analysis "inaccessible". But having said that, the Power, like the power of poetic space, is understood by Shelley to underlie the manifestation of much that *is* accessible:

> Mont Blanc yet gleams on high:– the power is there,
> The still and solemn power of many sights,
> And many sounds, and much of life and death.
> (*ll.*127-9.)[10]

In this chapter, I want to examine some poems by Browning and Rossetti that in their stress on portraiture partake of the strength of "naked countenance" and which allow an access to the inaccessible. This examination begins by way of a comparison.

ii. The Demand for the Look

Shelley's earliest poetry speaks of the necessity of the attentive gaze.

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[9] Harold Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking*, Cornell Paperbacks (Ithaca, New York, 1969), p. 34.

[10] 'Mont Blanc', *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 92.

Very often it is the voice of the lover who demands it; he entreats or orders the attention of his mistress so that he can realise himself as self by the confirmation of her looking:

> THUS to be lost and thus to sink and die,
> Perchance were death indeed! - Constantia turn!
> In thy dark eyes a power like light doth lie
> (*ll.*1-3).[11]

The beloved also takes part in a process of reflection in which each partner ideally mirrors the other. Thus, absorption in the image of the other is a means of self-preservation: "I have no life, Constantia, now but thee" (*l.*32). This is seen clearly in 1814/15 poem "To——", which is sufficiently short to be quoted entire.

> YET look on me - take not thine eyes away,
> Which feed upon the love within mine own,
> Which is indeed but the reflected ray
> Of thy own beauty from my spirit thrown.
> Yet speak to me - thy voice is as the tone
> Of my heart's echo, and I think I hear
> That thou yet lovest me; yet thou alone
> Like one before a mirror, without care
> Of aught but thine own features, imaged there;
> And yet I wear out life in watching thee;
> A toil so sweet at times, and thou indeed
> Art kind when I am sick, and pity me.[12]

The poem can be read as an exploration of the theory of identity given in the essay 'On Love'.[13] In this essay, as part of an attempt for the self to recognise itself, Shelley proposes a literalisation of the reflection and resemblance movement I described in my first chapter. While the circuit of perception was an abstract movement, reflection and resemblance are more obviously reified in this essay in the image of the beloved. Love is the motivating force that constitutes the self which sees itself as ideal reflected in the beloved. Shelley at first explains that: "We dimly see within our

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[11] 'To Constantia, Singing' (1817). I quote from the version given in *Shelley: Poetical Works*, pp. 539-40.
[12] 'To——', *Ibid.*, p. 523.
[13] 'On Love', *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, pp. 473-4.

intellectual nature a miniature as it were of our entire self, yet deprived of all that we condemn or despise".[14] This "ideal prototype" has, we might note, a visual correlate, being imaged as a portrait. The outward look of the subject is not discounted – Shelley presumably remains faithful to the Neoplatonist idea of expressive character – but is supplemented by an internal portraiture. For the prototype is "Not only the portrait of our external being, but an assemblage of the minutest particulars of which our nature is composed"[15]. This portraiture is described as a refining mirroring of the kind we saw proposed in the 'Fragment on Beauty' and the *Defence*: "a mirror whose surface reflects only the forms of purity and brightness: a soul within our soul"[16]. The perfected soul as ideal prototype seeks its "antitype" or likeness in other beings. We are thus engaged in a search for that which resembles us, because, Shelley implies, the antitype clarifies the dim sight with which we behold our prototype by reflecting that prototype back to us; there is pleasure to be had both in finding correspondences in another, and in the way that the other pictures for us our own self. Shelley suggests that it is the search and the possibility of meeting and union – these things together making what he terms "Love" – which is the true end of our lives as well as our motivating energy: "We are born into the world and there is something within us which from the instant that we live and move thirsts after its likeness."[17] The depletion of this energy effectively kills the will to live. The one who can no longer relate to – in Shelley's vocabulary 'correspond' with – other beings or, at very least, Nature, dies to himself, sealed off or entombed in his own person: "So soon as this want or power is dead, man becomes the living sepulchre of himself, and yet what survives is the mere husk of what once he was.–"[18] This, of course, is the

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[14] *Ibid.* p. 473.
[15] *Ibid.* p. 474.
[16] *Ibid.*
[17] *Ibid.* p. 474.

fate of the youth in *Alastor*, who failing to find the veiled maid of his vision, ever wastes away and eventually perishes.

In the short poem 'To—', the lover entreats the gaze of his mistress to remain with him as his does with her, inducing a mutually specular regard. His anxiety is that she may treat his look in a superficial manner using his eyes as a common mirror which simply replicates her outward image rather than as the index of his ideal soul and her antitype. He, on the other hand, *watches*, and thus is properly bound up with the deeper looking of the soul. A more involved reading of this poem could no doubt fathom more precisely its intricate and peculiar contradictions: that the ideal of specularity is in fact thrown into question by the lover's uncertainty as to what it is his mistress sees; and that physical and spiritual properties are linked in lines two and four ("love" and "beauty") and then dissevered uneasily in line nine ("thine own features"). However, rather than make a critique, my purpose here is to establish the apparent ideal, so that it is possible to see how Browning transforms it in his own short poem of 1864:

Eurydice To Orpheus
A Picture by Leighton

But give them me, the mouth, the eyes, the brow!
Let them once more absorb me! One look now
Will lap me round for ever, not to pass
Out of its light, though darkness lie beyond:
Hold me but safe within the bond
Of one immortal look! All woe that was,
Forgotten, and all terror that may be,
Defied, – no past is mine, no future: look at me![19]

Browning ostensibly describes a painting by his close friend

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[18] *Ibid*, p. 475. Shelley's essay bears interesting comparison with Freud's essay 'On Narcissism', notably that moment where Freud declares: "in the last resort we must begin to love in order not to fall ill, and we are bound to fall ill if, in consequence of frustration, we are unable to love." 'On Narcissism: An Introduction', in Vol IX:*On Metapsychology*, Penguin Freud Library, pp. 65-97; 78-9.

[19] *Robert Browning: The Poems*, ed. John Pettigrew, supplemented and compiled by Thomas J. Collins, 2 vols. (New Haven and London, 1981), I, 816.

Frederick, Lord Leighton, shown at the 1864 Royal Academy Exhibition, but the poem seems to owe as much to Shelley's short lyric which was first published by Mrs. Shelley in the second 1839 edition of her husband's *Poetical Works*. Browning's poem, mistakenly printed as prose, initially appeared accompanying the catalogue description of the picture.[20] Leighton's picture, which is a strong and fine one, goes some way to explaining the context of Browning's composition.[21] In the painting, Eurydice seems almost to wrestle with her husband Orpheus, who struggles to free himself from her desperate grasp. In spite of the extraordinariness of her pose, the depiction of Eurydice is a little sentimentalised and somewhat conventional; she looks wan and vulnerable and, melodramatically, a nineteenth century lady in distress. Orpheus, however, is strikingly Carravaggesque, and his violent movements of escape make a blunt contrast with the feminine entreaty of his wife. Why did Leighton choose to paint this scene when there is no justification for it in the mythic narratives? For the standard version of the myth runs otherwise: that Orpheus is allowed to redeem his dead wife from Hades on the promise that he does not look back at her as they journey to the upper regions from the Underworld. Inevitably, he breaks his promise and looks back, only to see his wife forced to turn away and retrace her steps. It is only at this juncture that Eurydice speaks in Virgil's fourth *Georgic* where she laments her husband's imprudence;[22] in Ovid's *Metamophoses*, she even yet remains silent:

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[20] William Clyde De Vane tells us the poem, originally entitled 'Orpheus and Eurydice' appeared in prose on p. 13 of the Exhibition catalogue and was signed "Robert Browning, *A Fragment*". A manuscript of the poem exists with the date April 5 1864. The poem as 'Orpheus and Eurydice' was included in a selection of Browning's work in 1865, and then, in 1868, renamed 'Eurydice to Orpheus: A Picture by Leighton', was added to the poems in *Dramatis Personae*. *A Browning Handbook*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1955), p. 316.

[21] For illustration, see Leonée and Richard Ormond, *Lord Leighton*, The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art (London) Ltd. (New Haven and London, 1975), plate 101.

[22] *Georgics* IV. 494-10.

> Eurydice, dying now a second time uttered no complaint against her husband. What was there to complain of, but that she had been loved? With a last farewell which scarcely reached his ears, she fell back again into the same place from which she had come.[23]

In neither of these accounts is there any mention of Eurydice either demanding that her husband look at her or attempting to confront him. What then prompted Leighton's picture? The answer is provided by the operatic tradition.[24] As Murray Krieger points out the composer Gluck (1714-87) and his librettist Calzabigi made important changes to the myth:

> In contrast to the Vergil and Ovid versions, in which there is total silence between the lovers during the departure from Hades, Gluck and Calzabigi permit the lovers to talk to one another, so that through her constant complaints, Eurydice seeks to persuade Orpheus to look at her: as they are departing the underworld, she berates him for his apparent disregard of her. Moreover . . . Orpheus is forbidden not only to *look* at Eurydice, but even to *tell* her why he won't. Still, under constant pressure from her, which he has in advance been rendered powerless to relieve satisfactorily, he violates the condition for her release by yielding to her entreaties.[25]

Leighton's picture shows this late version of the myth in which the wife entreats the husband.[26] Nonetheless, even once we have understood why Eurydice speaks in Browning's poem, the lyric can not be fully comprehended in terms of the picture which is said to

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[23] *Metamorphoses* X. 1-85. Translation from *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, tr. Mary M. Innes, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth, 1955), pp. 246-7.

[24] I have not seen this suggestion made in any of the commentaries or handbooks that deal with the poem. Most accounts usually cite the traditional myth.

[25] Murray Krieger, 'Orpheus *mit Glück*: The Deceiving Gratifications of Presence', in *Theatre Journal* 35, no. 3 (October 1984), 295-305; 295. Krieger's article is purely concerned with opera and makes no reference to Browning's poem.

[26] Mrs. Sutherland Orr, Leighton's sister and author of the famous *Handbook to the Works of Robert Browning*, 3rd ed., rev. (London, 1887), seems unaware of the version of the myth painted by her brother, and yet intuits something of the drama: "But the face of Leighton's Eurydice wears an intensity of longing which seems to challenge the forbidden look, and makes her responsible for it." (P. 248.)

inspire it. Browning's poem does not seem to coincide with the picture in that it is not a clear manifestation of the drama presented there. The title indicates Orpheus as addressee, but nothing of Leighton's characterisation of either the singer or his wife is present. Eurydice's short soliloquy voices a demand with no allusion to the conflict of will that the picture makes visible. The poem works solely through her voice which bestows no descriptive detail by means of which one could image the painter's interpretation for oneself. The voice of Eurydice as it is heard in the poem bears little resemblance to the woman portrayed in the painting; that voice, though insistent and moving, has an almost impersonal dignity and authority which contrasts sharply with suppliant desperation of Leighton's heroine. The picture, striking though it is, preserves in the encounter too much of a domestic tone. Without proper recognition, it could be assimilated into a genre of Victorian narrative painting in which a stern husband or lover is depicted as resisting or impervious to a woman's desperate appeal. To say this is not to deprecate Leighton, whom I think is an extremely interesting painter, but rather to mark the differences between his work and Browning's poem.

William Clyde De Vane in the *Browning Handbook* hints that the subject may have attracted Browning on account of his recent bereavement of his much loved wife.[27] While this may be partly true, the treatment of the topic is unusual in that, as we have seen, it is not a matter of a male persona emulating the Orphic lament for a lost wife; it is the lost woman, Eurydice, who speaks. Throughout his life a number of related themes keep surfacing in Browning's work: a leading motif is the often mortal plight or crisis in which a female character finds herself, and her rescue or attempted rescue by a male character.[28] This rescue, as in the case

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[27] De Vane, p. 316.

[28] Obviously this rescue theme is the one that coincides with the myth of Andromeda to which I referred in Chapter I.

of the long poem *Balaustion's Adventure* (1871), can even involve redemption from death itself – as in the restoration of Alkestis by Hercules. Alternatively, the theme has a darker outcropping in that the notion of preservation of the woman by the man gets transformed into the the macabre substitutions of 'Porphyria's Lover' and 'My Last Duchess' – poems in which the male speaker attempts to fix, preserve or memorialise the woman as *he* wants her, by actually effecting her death. In the Eurydice lyric, the woman asks for rescue, but it is not the rescue from Hades that we normally associate with the myth. Indeed Browning's Eurydice seems to know that what she asks for is separate from all other eventualities, and that it may cancel out her redemption from the Underworld; yet, undeterred, she still asks. So what is it that Eurydice asks for? What is it that she counts as more important than her return to the world? Like Shelley's speaker, she asks for her partner's gaze, but her demand does not seem to rise out of the desire for mutual self-confirmation, or even, it might be argued, the need to see love manifest itself. Browning takes certain aspects of the Shelleyan demand and revises them according to his own purposes. There are several key Shelleyan ideas involved in this poem which are creatively developed by Browning to become part of his own poetics of perception: these ideas are centered around moments of focus, absorption, and disfiguration. In both poems there is a stress on the duty of the petitioned partner to provide the speaker with a face. In the Shelley poem, this is apparent in the speaker's anxieties about reflection: his mistress may obliterate his image (and so, it is implied, his self), if, to satisfy her own facile narcissism, she treats him like a common mirror; but if, on the other hand, she recognises him more profoundly (as she does when she regards him with pity), then this recognition is like the reflection which confirms an individual's sense of self. In the Browning poem, the vocabulary of

reflection is no longer to the fore, but crucial parts of the submerged Shelleyan ideas are still operative. The woman is not mirrored in her partner's countenance; rather, for the survival she wants – a survival which is not that of the return to the world – it is his countenance itself that she requires and which it is his duty to provide. The first line of Browning's lyric is complex in its entwining of possibilities: "But give them to me, the mouth, the eyes, the brow!" This could be read as Eurydice yearning to recapture the sight of the beloved familiar features of Orpheus from whom she has been separated. And, of course, it *is* a demand to see those features again; but it is not *just* that. The word "give" rather than, say, 'show' implies that the look Eurydice craves is not only her husband's regard, but his very aspect. What Browning does is to remark the play of identity in Shelley's poem which presents the possibility of a realisation by the look of the other; but he also then transmutes that poem's subsidiary Shelleyan suggestion – that the other's look may deprive one of face rather than confirm one's own – into a demand that Orpheus give his face to Eurydice who has none. In Browning's poem, it is the female speaker who, aware of her lack, asks that her husband deface himself for her.

The demand of Eurydice which is the demand for the gaze which alters face, the gaze which transposes face from one party to another, the gaze which disfigures a face and then leaves it blank and untraceable, is, at least partially, Browning's version of the Medusean look described in Chapter I. The obvious difference is that the Medusean aspect, bestowed upon the gazer, then becomes impossible to fathom as it disappears into itself; nonetheless, Browning's Eurydice might be thought to transpose her very non-visibility onto her spouse in return for the face he surrenders to her. In such a way, the uncircumscribed blankness which is Eurydice is

replaced by the erasure of Orpheus.

Maurice Blanchot reads the Orphic myth as the need of Orpheus to confront Eurydice who is "the ultimate depth to which art can attain." Blanchot explains the Greek idea behind the myth as being

> that a work of art can only be achieved when the artist does not seek the experience of unrestrained intensity as an end in itself. . . . Intensity cannot be perceived face to face, but only concealed in the work of art. . . . But the myth simultaneously implies that Orpheus' fate is to refuse to submit to this law[29].

Orpheus's betrayal is a necessary one, and preferable to that other betrayal which would be that

> he lacked faith in the unrestrained, reckless power of his purpose which is not to find Eurydice's daylight reality and superficial charm, but her nightmare darkness and elusiveness, her secret body and her inscrutable face.[30]

Blanchot tells us that Orpheus

> does not wish to see her visibility but her invisibility, not to possess her in the intimacy of familiar surroundings but in the unfamiliarity of that which is deprived of intimacy, not to make her live but to perceive her alive in the fullness of her death.[31]

Furthermore, this wish of Orpheus to risk all and confront what is most expressly forbidden is one that may also result in his erasure:

> Invisible, he sees her; he touches her whole, unshadowed, in a veiled presence that fails to conceal her absence, that is the presence of her infinite absence. Had he not looked at her he could not have brought her forth and indeed she is perhaps not there and he is himself absent in that gaze, no less dead than she, having died the other death, not the peaceful death of this world which is

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[29] Blanchot, 'Orpheus' Gaze', in *The Sirens' Song*, pp. 177-81; 177.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 178.

[31] *Ibid.*

> rest, silence and end, but that death which is endless dying, evidence of the absence of an end.[32]

When Browning's Eurydice speaks of the momentary respite of her husband's look that clothes her and makes her visible, she intimates the centrality of this moment as one that is born out of the reflex of its immediate dissolution, surrounded on all sides by the conditions of its destruction. But, according to the logic of what Browning calls elsewhere the "good minute"[33], that is, the epiphanic moment of perfect resolve or stasis which is so often described in his poetry, this moment of the "immortal look" has an endurance of its own which will transcend its purely temporal failure:

> One look now
> Will lap me round for ever, not to pass
> Out of its light, though darkness lie beyond . . . .

This epiphanic moment here and generally in Browning's writing may be considered a concentrated form of what he describes in the letter to Ruskin which heads this chapter as "a putting of the infinite within the finite" which is the special characteristic of poetry. The good minute or moment is thus a focal instant of perception which allows us to see 'infinity'. "I *know* that I don't make out my conception by my language", says Browning; the point is that the compressed power is not in itself linguistic but depends on language for its release. Hence the transcendental, Neoplatonist and Shelleyan vocabulary Browning uses to describe this power. The necessity of speaking of such a power requires that poets invent, borrow or transform an appropriate vocabulary. The Shelleyan poets use a spiritual or phantasmal vocabulary employing such words as

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[32] *Ibid.*

[33] The phrase occurs in Browning's poem 'Two in the Campagna' (*l.* 50), which ends with the following lines: "Only I discern–/Infinite passion, and the pain/Of finite hearts that yearn." *Robert Browning: The Poems*, I, 730 (*ll.*59-60). For another example among many, see "Oh moment, one and infinite!", in 'By the Fire-Side' (*ll.*181), in *Ibid.*, p. 558.

spirit, soul, ghost, essence, character, genius, immortal, infinite, to describe the special force of poetry. Hence Browning's words

> struggle with the weight
> So feebly of the False, thick element between
> Our soul, the True, and Truth![34]

"You would have me paint it all plain out, which can't be", complains Browning; the vocabulary and metaphors of painting do offer an excellent way of suggesting a reading which is not linear and message-oriented, but relies on a total effect and another type of focus. But of course, as Browning implies not all painterly models are useful; the type he espouses are predominantly suggestive: "by various artifices I try to make shift with touches and bits of outlines which *succeed* if they bear the conception from me to you. You ought, I think, to keep pace with the thought".[35] Art and its artifices are useful for the way in which they seem to immortalise certain moments and to stay otherwise fleeting essences so that they may be savoured anew. The portrait as a specific type of painting may be felt to memorialise the character of the depicted subject. 'Eurydice to Orpheus' is described as a poem of a painting and should rightly be the portraiture of two legendary characters. Browning eschews the rigorous mimesis of formal portraiture to comment on the "immortal look" which makes a different kind of characterisation – one which typifies poetry. Declaring one's poem a painting introduces more directly the notion of accounting for

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[34] 'Fifine at the Fair', *Ibid.*, II, 34.

[35] As will be seen in Chapter IV, Ruskin himself has much to say concerning the efficacy of the incomplete sketch or drawing. The idea is given influential treatment by Edmund Burke: 'The spring is the pleasantest of the seasons; and the young of most animals, though far from being compleatly fashioned, afford a more agreeable sensation than the full grown; because the imagination is entertained with the promise of something more, and does not acquiesce in the present object of the sense. In the unfinished sketches of drawing, I have often seen something which pleased me beyond the best finishing; and this I believe proceeds from the cause I have just now assigned." See Part Two, Section XI: 'Infinity in pleasing Objects', in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, rev. ed., edited with an introduction and notes by James T. Boulton (London, 1987), p. 77.

poetic power by a visualised if abstract æsthetic; it means that the immortal look that poem describes can be seen to partake of the look towards inspiration and æsthetic origins which Blanchot declares is inscribed in the work. Blanchot tells us that: "The moment of inspiration is, for art, the moment of maximum insecurity. That is why art tends so often and so violently to resist what inspires it."[36] One of the most noticeable things about the Shelleyan poets is the way their poems do not resist this presentation of their origins, but instead make it a focus for the poem and a point of strength. Hence the oddity of Eurydice imploring the look which will logically destroy her.

> In this gaze art is lost. It is the one point where it is totally lost, where something more important than art, and more devoid of importance, emerges and exists. For Orpheus the work of art is everything – except the one look which destroys it. So that it is also only in this gaze that it can surpass itself, merge with its origin and assert itself in the impossible.[37]

The thing that is more important than art, than the artifices of language, is the priority of poetic space. It is this to which our gaze and that of Orpheus ineluctably tend. In the scarcely visible figure of Eurydice, Browning represents the power of "naked countenance": the unclothed, unsculptured essence of face which solicits a direct confrontation. When Eurydice calls for the clothing of her husband's aspect, the very way she makes the desired features into a list makes them sound curiously arbitrary or secondary. The extreme condensation of language as artifice in this poem – language over-determined by the force of ulterior space – means that while one might try to construct a more conventional interpretation, that is, perhaps, a version of Leighton's scene, nevertheless, on close scrutiny, that scene could unfold to reveal an altogether more

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[36] Blanchot, 'Orpheus' Gaze, *The Siren's Song*, pp. 179-80.
[37] *Ibid.*, p. 180.

uncanny picture. "Let them once more absorb me!", says Eurydice of the listed features, features of which she has said not 'give them *to* me', but "give them me". Listed like that, they also have the ring of something faintly impersonal. Orpheus is the addressee, and we may assume for the most part that they are his features of which she speaks, just as it is his look that she begs. But specified by the article rather than a possessive pronoun, the listed features sound like properties that already seem to be in the claim of Eurydice, properties that were once familiar to her and now are resought. Eurydice has the capacity to make those listed features sound at once quite arbitrary and impersonal, and yet also her due, whether as her own lost characters or those that belong to Orpheus. The poem disturbs the notion of discrete apportionings and propriety in poetic language, as the set of characters given to one entity do not necessarily remain fixed and immutable, but may resurface in the guise of another. How much Browning lets saturate into that word "absorb"! Eurydice wants not merely to study her husband's features but to be both wholly engaged by them, mentally and physically, as if she should seep into and combine with them, or they, like Shelley's characters 'grow into' her. But in this process, Orpheus is also absorbed. Submitting to his wife's petition, his lineaments, claimed by her, lose the definition he himself gives them, and he effectively disappears into her. In the attempt to figure forth Eurydice, Orpheus must endure disfiguration and the loss of himself. This loss and disfiguration suggested by Browning, and implied by Blanchot, runs counter to the usual telling of the myth. But it presents a scene not unlike that of the Medusean exchange of looks. Like Shelley's Persean gazer, Orpheus does look with full face, although what he sees is barely visible; and the action of the look exposes looker and looked-at to different kinds of dissolve and obliteration. Furthermore, it could be advanced that Browning brings out the

latent threat that is present in the Shelleyan antitype to make it compatible with the dissolve of the Medusean exchange. In doing so, he aggressively revises the ideal of the antitype into something other than an expression of mutuality. This distortion of the ideal can be read as both his necessary creative distortion of Shelley and his own version of a look that expresses poetic character.

I want to suggest that this late short lyric of Browning's which beautifully combines so many of his prevalent poetic themes – feminine rescue, the infinite moment, the demand for the look, the appeal of art – is the composite expression of what those themes in their varied ways most often attempt to communicate elsewhere in his poetry: namely, the poet's characterisation of poetic space. To clarify my argument further I want to look at another much earlier poem of Browning's which shows a similar alliance of these themes and to offer a critical reading which may go some way to explaining the lasting appeal of what may perhaps be regarded as his most famous and popular poem: 'My Last Duchess'.[38]

iii. 'My Last Duchess'

> That is a portrait of me on the wall–
> Three lines, my face comes at so slight a call . . . . .
> 'Any Wife to Any Husband' (*ll.*46-7), in
> *Robert Browning:The Poems*, I, 563.

Of all Browning's poems, 'My Last Duchess' is probably the one that has received the most critical attention. Critics have produced any number of essays discussing the Duke's character as alternatively shrewd or witless, speculating on the affective force of the dramatic monologue, and pursuing real-life sources for the people mentioned

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[38] The text of the poem is taken from *The Poetical Works of Robert Browning*, eds. Ian Jack, Margaret Smith, and Rowena Fowler, 3 vols (Oxford, 1983-), III, eds. Ian Jack and Rowena Fowler (1988), 186-88. This edition is used in preference to any other when possible. Line references only given where clarity demands it.

in the poem. In spite of all this activity, very little has emerged that seems to enhance our initial recognition of the power of this extraordinary poem. To know that Frà Pandolf and Claus of Innsbruck are imaginary figures, but that the Duke, possibly, was inspired by Duke Alfonso II of Ferrara, is mildly interesting, but not, in the least, illuminating. The portrait of the Duchess with her "spot of joy" remains the literary equivalent of Leonardo's Mona Lisa with her enigmatic smile.

Much of the criticism on 'My Last Duchess' gives only a glancing treatment of the figure of the Duchess herself, preferring to read the Duke's words as his self-portrait, and one in which he either damns himself or wins the reader's identification, according to the way one's sympathies are moved. For many critics, the notion of the depicted painting seems to get little coverage beyond the obvious pathos generated by the Duchess's plight, and appears merely to function as the device which prompts the speaker to unfold a personal history. B. R. Jerman dismisses the picture altogether:

> What appears at first glance to be a masterpiece, then, is (on the basis of the Duke's own description of its history, it must be remembered) a mechanically reproduced, realistic portrait of a photogenic woman, a dilettante's trophy.[39]

A more subtle approach is that which notes that the Duke:

> considers works of art as discrete static objects to be owned and controlled, and, as many readers have noticed, he thinks of persons in precisely the same way. In the opening lines of the poem, no distinction is made between the Duchess and her portrait; "she" stands before the visitor, looking to the Duke as alive as she ever looked. And when he hints that his appraisal has undergone change, "that piece" could as easily refer to the Duchess herself as to her picture.[40]

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[39] B. R. Jerman, 'Browning's Witless Duke', *PMLA* 72 (1957), 488-93; 491-2.

[40] Loy D. Martin, 'An Essay on the Inside of Time: An Essay on the Dramatic Monologue', in *Robert Browning: A Collection of Critical Essays*, p. 76.

Such a view has a partial truth: the Duke does try to fix his lady; but the blurring between objects and persons as figured in the Duke's language can be read in a variety of ways and does not necessarily mean that the attempt at reduction, stasis and control was successful. The Duke both does and doesn't think of persons in precisely the same way as objects. He presumably tries to make the Duchess into an object because he perceives objects as being more manipulable. But, in the poem, the painting is then repersonified as it becomes apparent that art-objects are not as controllable as one might think. For a person may be reduced to an art-object in the hope of greater control; but an art-object in its ability to arouse the strong emotions of its viewers can out-manœuvre the desire and wishes of its owner. The art object which is the Duchess doesn't remain immobile or fixed in the way the Duke would like; the Duchess still moves and delights and demands attention; the "depth and passion" of her depicted glance still has to be owned by the Duke as springing from a source other than himself.

The relationship between the woman, her portrait and the Duke is a complicated one; nonetheless, the idea of the depiction is of crucial importance in understanding the poem. For the concept of design functions not solely in the woman's portrait, but also in the continued activity of the Duke. Attached to the edges of that haunting portrait are many scraps of other picturings: various bits of scene play and rehearsal, projected hypothetical speeches, shreds of recall, embroidered memory and fantasy. The Duke builds up a gallery of alternative views beside the painting, and these views all seem to be located at different points in time and oddly scrambled. There's the inclusion of a *repeated* scene of the picture's showing ("For never read strangers like you . . . ") and of its beholders' predicted look of enquiry. There is also the portrayal of

the scene of composition with a thumb-nail sketch of the artist, his relayed real or imagined words, and the woman's response. We may add to this the remembered fragments of the Duchess's life, a possible but unrealised scene of reproach with a present-tense rationalisation ("Even had you speech . . . "), the survey of a substitutive new alliance, and then the parting glance at Neptune and another artist, Claus of Innsbruck. Whilst the flow of pronouncement is apparently smooth-mannered and seamless, on closer inspection, it looks dense and riven with the collage of all these enjambed and juxtaposed additions. As if to rival Frà Pandolf, the speaker draws with a fervid energy extensions and grafts about the subject of contemplation, although his aim seems almost as much to screen himself from its regard. If his aim is to screen, can we say this screening is successful?

When the Duke does not want to see the portrait, it is kept covered by a curtain. His mastery over the picture consists in the simple fact that only he is allowed to show it:

> (since none puts by
> The curtain I have drawn for you, but I) . . . .

The 'drawing' of a curtain can be either forwards or backwards, to close or to open it. The Duke here intimates that he 'puts it by', but a large part of the poem would seem to consist of an attempted but failed obfuscation. But even while the Duke conceals, he shows us through the curiously condensed language which Browning uses to register ulterior energy, that another power is making itself felt through the veil of his words.

Browning's poem uses the word "draw" twice (*ll.*10, 30), though in neither instance is it in the sense of sketching. Yet, the whole poem seems organised around ideas of delineation and graphic embellishment or alteration. The Duke's words includes scraps of an artist's vocabulary: "I said/'Frà Pandolf' by design", "here

you miss,/Or there exceed the mark". The remark about drawing the curtain occurs immediately after the first mention of Frà Pandolf; it is Pandolf, and not the Duke, who is responsible for the intensity of the Duchess's look. The Duke acknowledges the artist's claim with his own puns on design and drawing. At one level, these puns contribute to the Duke's sardonic self-deprecation: "Sir, 't was not/Her husband's presence only"; that is, they suggest a self-mocking parody of artistry which is meant to look a poor second in the face of Pandolf's triumph. At another level, they are symptomal of that wider preoccupation with the power of delineation which the central figure of the portrait urges over the whole poem. The Duke is forced to become artist, and must in his own words retrace a design which is not his own.

The disturbance of the Duke's language is not just a form of dramatic irony; it is not a question of reading the poem to discover the Duke's respective consciousness or unconsciousness, or, for that matter, that of Browning. The poem has often been read as blowing the cover of the Duke's urbanity to reveal malignity, dementia, or even awareness of his own defective self. But this is to enter a game of variant beliefs and culpabilities and to consensually ally oneself with the hypothetical "you" implicated in the Duke's self-defence: "Even had you speech . . . ." To assume this position, even if to quarrel with it, means that one has succumbed to the *rôle* of interlocutor in a moral discourse or a judge who may condemn or reprieve on the basis of evidences. The poem becomes the drama of the defendant, and the Duchess's portrait appears only as exhibited evidence for the prosecution. Harold Bloom in his introduction to the Browning selection in the *Oxford Anthology of English Literature* says of the poet:

> his poems are neither dramatic nor monologues, but something else. They are not dramatic, but

> lyrical and subjective, despite their coverings and gestures, and they are not monologues, but antiphons in which many voices speak[41] .

Bloom fractures the notion of monologue with its attendant notion of a coherent identity by suggesting we hear "antiphonal voices" – voices which presumably include those of the poet's precursors. While my interest lies less with voice and more, in this instance, with the way the silent pressure of suppressed delineation overwhelms the Duke's language, there is one important voice which I feel can be sounded. Through the mannered tones of the Duke's speech can be heard the frantic mania of Othello. We might compare

> Oh sir, she smiled no doubt
> Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
> Much the same smile. This grew; I gave commands
> Then all smiles stopped together . . . ,

with the scene in which Othello rebukes Desdemona in front of the scandalised Lodvico:

> Ay, you did wish that I would make her turn.
> Sir, she can turn and turn; and yet go on
> And turn again; and she can weep, sir, weep;
> And she's obedient, as you say obedient;
> Very obedient. – Proceed you in your tears. –
> Concerning this, sir – O well-painted passion! –
> I am commanded home. – Get you away;
> I'll send for you anon. – Sir, I obey the mandate,
> And will return to Venice. – Hence, avaunt![42]

Transposed into Browning's verse are the spectacle the jealous husband makes of his authority for an onlooker, and the husband's bitter irony which includes the derisive repetition of a word that glosses his wife's action ("smile", "turn"). The 'obedience' of

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[41] *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature*, gen. eds. Frank Kermode and John Hollander, 2 vols. (New York, London, and Toronto, 1973), II: *1800 to the Present*, eds. Harold Bloom and Lionel Trilling, p. 1280.

[42] *Othello*. IV. i. 252-60. Text taken from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, textually edited by G. Blakemore Evans, with a general introduction by Harry Levin (Boston, 1974), p. 1230. The Shakespearean resonance is also present in the phrase "set/Her wits to yours", which Ian Jack and Rowena Fowler point out is found in Shakespeare, giving as example *Troilus and Cressida*. *The Poetical Works of Robert Browning*, III, 187.

Desdemona which seems so suspect to Othello is reborn in the Duke's unspoken desire that the Duchess "let/Herself be lessoned so". Fragments of Othello's outburst are scattered across the surface of Browning's poem: casually in similar vocabulary such as "sir", "command", but as a generative kernel in the phrase "O well-painted passion" which bears a distinct fruit when transplanted in Browning's poem and "the depth and passion" seen in the "pictured countenance". Stephen Greenblatt, one of the ablest commentators on the play reads it as a structural struggle of power and identity. For him, Desdemona, through her very erotic submission, "subverts her husband's carefully fashioned identity."[43] The Duchess does not submit in this way, but she does disrupt the Duke's identity. In the terms of his specific complaint, she achieves this by an indiscriminate pliancy which takes the satisfaction out of his superior position

> as if she ranked
> My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
> With anybody's gift.

But in a deeper sense she disrupts his identity by making the monologue not so much an index of personality but a speech which is indivisible from an integral cryptic power which renders what the Duke says always more than a revelation of self. For without any change *in themselves*, the words of the Duke's discourse translate the still effectual power of the Duchess. When the Duke says "That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,/Looking as if she were alive", this is not merely over-casual callousness; through the present tense and blurring of object and person the Duchess asserts her presence and she does not seem contained by any frame. The 'look' of "Looking" refers not to a semblance the Duke apprises; the

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[43] Stephen Greenblatt, 'Improvisation and Power', in *Literature and Society: Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1978*, n. s. no. 3, ed., with a Preface by Edward W. Said (Baltimore and London, 1980) , pp. 57-99; 80.

"Looking" can allude not to the look of her, but to the "looks" (*l.*24) she gives and the glance that bears uncanny witness to an after-life. Thus when the Duke says "And there she stands" (*l.*4), she appears like an apparition which can't be assimilated into static depiction. Pronouns such as "she" and "her" have the immediacy of person, and the Duchess comes through, not in spite of the Duke's words, but because of them. What the Duke says is totally bound up with the fact that he cannot extricate himself from the woman who prompts this speech, who, while she was an episode in his past, insists on every word of his present. Herbert Tucker has pointed out the recurring hesitant gesture of speech that the Duke voices three times in the course of the poem; a gesture that "his critics have generally dismissed . . . as an item from his rhetorical stock of commonplaces."[44] Tucker does not explicitly attribute the "moments when the polished surface of his speech begins to crack"[45] to the power of the Duchess; he represents them more as "the expression of a private struggle."[46] But moving away from the drama of psychology, it is possible to read as legible in what, after all, are literal breaks and *lacunæ* in the poem's language, the ingression of a force that is other than linguistic and which can disturb the boundaries and proprieties of the most mannered discourse. At these moments, the power of the Duchess, which is what underlies and motivates the poem, directly expresses itself in the Duke's incapacity for expression. The boundaries that the Duke laid down in life are now just as firmly overstepped or overtaken as they were at the time of his unvoiced criticism: "Here you miss/Or there exceed the mark". The Duchess's exceeding of the marks of the Duke's language are also realised in her own slight but tantalising marks: her glance, the spot of joy, the remembered

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[44] Herbert F.Tucker, Jr., *Browning's Beginnings: The Art of Disclosure* (Minneapolis, 1980), p. 178. For this hesitancy, see *ll.* 21-2; 31-2; 35-7.
[45] *Ibid.*, p. 177.
[46] *Ibid.*, p. 178.

smile.

iv. Alexander Cozens's *New Method*

The poem does not give anything like the full picture of "that pictured countenance". There is no proper detailing of the woman's appearance; what details we have pertain to an expression rather than a likeness. But the expressive marks Browning gives us, small though they are, succeed far better in communicating the appeal of the Duchess than would a more formal inventory. Tucker proposes the Duchess's "spot of joy" as what eludes the Duke's control, as something that hovers between figuration and literal meaning.[47] The spot is also a presentiment of the greater scope of the unseen picture which we can deduce through what the Duke says. To explain this further, I want to develop some points that arise from a manifesto of design that long predates Browning's poem. I refer to Alexander Cozens's *New Method* (1785), which is admirably explicated in a recent essay by Jean-Claude Lebensztejn.[48] I will quote Lebensztejn's introductory note by way of explanation:

> Alexander Cozens (c. 1717-1786), the English landscape painter, created a number of systems, the most well-known of which remains the *New Method*. It is a procedure by which landscapes are composed on the basis of ink-blots. Eighteen blots, twenty clouds, a sketch, and four drawings illustrate this method, in which there is a complex interplay between imitation and invention, method and genius, chance and design, all of which are brought into a taxonomy of limitless range, related to a point of origin made to regress indefinitely.[49]

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[47] "In that 'spot of joy' on the Duchess's face Browning finds one of his happiest names for the difference between figuration and meaning out of which poems are written." *Ibid.*, p. 179.

[48] Alexander Cozens, *A New Method of Assisting the Invention in Drawing Original Compositions of Landscape*(London, 1785). See Jean-Claude Lebensztejn, 'In Black and White', in *Calligram: Essays in New Art History from France*, ed. Norman Bryson (Cambridge, New York,
New Rochelle, Melbourne, and Sydney, 1988), pp. 131-151.

[49] Lebensztejn, p. 131.

In a short expository essay, Cozens, with great elegance, expounds his theory of artificial blotting:

> An artificial blot is a production of chance, with a ſmall degree of deſign; . . . The blot is not a drawing, but an aſſemblage of accidental ſhapes, from which a drawing may be made. . . .To blot, is to make varied ſpots and ſhapes with ink on paper, producing accidental forms without lines, from which ideas are preſented to the mind.[50]

Cozens tells us he finds an authority for his method in a passage in Leonardo's *Treatise on Painting*, from which he then cites. As the citation which he gives is somewhat incomplete, I have preferred to quote from a later and more accurate translation[51]:

> I cannot forbear to mention among these precepts a new device for study which, although it may seem but trivial and almost ludicrous, is nevertheless extremely useful in arousing the mind to various inventions. And this is, when you look at a wall spotted with stains, or with a mixture of stones, if you have to devise some scene, you may discover a resemblance to various landscapes, beautified with

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[50] In preference to the modernised version of Lebensztejn's extract and for other excerpts from Cozens, I use a facsimile edition of his text – Alexander Cozens, *A New Method of Landscape*, intr. Michael Marqusee, Paddington Masterpieces of the Illustrated Book (London, 1977), pp. 6, 8.

[51] *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, compiled and edited from the original manuscripts by Jean Paul Richter, 2nd edition, enl. and rev. by J. P. Richter and Irma A. Richter, 2 vols (London, New York, and Toronto), I, 311-12. For the purposes of comparison, Cozens's version is as follows, pp. 5-6: "Among other things I ſhall not ſcruple to deliver a new method of aſſiſting the invention, which, though trifling in appearance, may yet be of conſiderable ſervice in opening the mind, and putting it upon the ſcent of new thoughts; and it is this. If you look upon an old wall covered with dirt, or the odd appearance of ſome ſtreaked ſtones, you may diſcover ſeveral things like landſcapes, battles, clouds, uncommon attitudes, humourous faces, draperies, &c. Out of this confuſed maſs of objects, the mind will be furniſhed with abundance of deſigns and ſubjects perfectly new." It appears that with some small changes in orthography and punctation, Cozens is quoting from the first English edition of the *Trattato – A Treatise of Painting by Leonardo da Vinci Tranſlated from The Original Italian and adorn'd with a great Number of Cuts, To which is prefix'd the Author's Life Done from The Last Edition of the French* (London, 1721), p. 34. For valuable information concerning the English and other editions of the *Trattato*, see Kate Trauman Stenitz, *Leonardo da Vinci's Trattato della Pittura . . . : A Bibliography of the Printed Editions 1651-1956 based on the Complete Collection in the Elmer Belt Library of Vinciana*, with a Preface by Elmer Belt, Library Research Monographs, vol. 5 (Copenhagen, 1958). Michael Marqusee, in his introduction to the *New Method* (p. ix), cites a passage analogous to the Leonardo citation, from the eleventh century Chinese artist Sung Ti.

> mountains, rivers, rocks, trees, plains, wide valleys and hills in varied arrangement; or, again, you may see battles and figures in action; or strange faces and costumes, and an endless variety of objects, which you could reduce to complete and well-drawn forms. And these appear on such walls confusedly, like the sound of bells in whose jangle you may find any name or word you choose to imagine.

Cozens explains that as such walls are to be found but rarely in nature, his method of blotting and then developing from such blots such pictorial ideas as present themselves to the imagination, is an artificial means to much the same end. His interest lies with subjective and imaginative processes of composition and the production of the ideal, rather than a literal going to nature. Thus the *New Method* is an entirely apt way of realising the ideal.[52]

> I am perſuaded, that ſome inſtantaneous method of bringing forth the conception of an ideal ſubject fully to the view (though in the crudeſt manner) would promote original compoſition in painting; and that the want of ſome ſuch method has retarded the progreſs of it more than impotence of execution.[53]

Having seen that a ideal composition can be developed from a blot, Cozens turns the proposition about and perceives that a finished work can be seen to be composed of constituent masses or blots:

> If a finiſhed drawing be gradually removed from the eye, its ſmaller parts will be leſs and leſs expreſſive; and when they are wholly undiſtinguiſhed, and the largeſt parts alone remain viſible, the drawing will then repreſent a blot, with the appearance of ſome degree of keeping.[54]

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[52] Concerning the belief in the ideal, as opposed to verisimilar, study of nature, Michael Marqusee says on p. vii: "When Thomas Gainsborough was asked by Lord Hardwicke to paint a view of the Lord's estate, he replied in the polite third-person of the usage of the time: '. . . with regard to *real views* from nature in this country, he has never seen any place that affords a subject equal to the poorest imitations of Gasper or Claude . . . if his Lordship wishes to have anything tolerable of the name of G[ainsborough], the subject altogether, as well as figures, etc., must be of his own brain . . . ."

[53] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

[54] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

As Michael Marqusee points out in his Introduction

> just as people found out they could transform any painting into an "Impressionist" painting by squinting at it, so Cozens discovered blots latent in the most finished works of art[55].

I want to suggest that the Duchess's marks, and, in particular, the "spot of joy" are analogous to Cozens's blot. The analogy works in more than one way. Standing back, as it were from the poem, and distancing ourselves from from the immediate claim and authority of the Duke's words, the total pictorial effect is of the shaping marks that compose the Duchess which subsume what the Duke says. Nothing of what he says has any ground without the figure of the Duchess and the poem observes the way in which her phantasmal presence takes over the space of his discourse. The constituent marks of the Duchess which include both the slight physical hints and her personal history assert themselves to the degree where they might be said to absorb the more mannered superficial detail of the Duke's discourse. They spread over the entire canvas of the scene. This spreading is curiously enacted in the poem in the passage I compared to *Othello*:

> who passed without
> much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
> Then all smiles stopped together.

"This grew", says the Duke, referring broadly to the Duchess's behaviour, but also, it seems, to her smile. He stops the smiles he can control with a command, but, in that phrase "This grew", the residue of the Duchess's smile still lingers, her defaced characters growing into the fabric of the poem. It is thus that the Duke is himself disfigured; for, what could so easily be his presentation of character is overwhelmed by the Duchess's subsumption, and the

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[55] *Ibid.*, p. xi.

characters of his speech are effaced, blotted out, or grown into his involuntary self-obliterating acknowledgement of the other. To recognise as focus the spot which is one of the tiny yet significant traces of the Duchess, and to see it as a "spot of joy" is another version of the blotting process. The Duke sees the spot, and it is his own recognition of its "joy" that shows us the germ or the "conception of an ideal" intimated therein. The spot together with the other marks project this ideal, appealing to the reader's invention to compose the picture of the Duchess, not as a likeness, but as the dominating figure in the poem. That the particulars of this figure are not distinct, that it is seen by means of projection and through its disfiguration of the Duke's characters, does not detract from its power. As Lebensztejn comments: "by eliminating detail, the blot is, in a certain sense, closer still to the ideal."[56] Bloom's assertion that Browning's dramatic monologues are not dramatic, but lyrical and subjective, is vindicated by such a work as 'My Last Duchess' which depends on such marked subjective interpolation for its effects. The poem is also linked genetically to the poetic tradition of the sublime; for Lebensztejn makes a connection between the blot and the sublime.[57] The connection is made using Burke's *Enquiry*, which links the sublime to obscurity and infinity. Burke contends that in both nature and in painting

> dark, confused, uncertain images have a greater power on the fancy to form the grander passions than those have which are more clear and determinate.[58]

Lebensztejn comments:

> The obscure, the formless, the indistinct are

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[56] Lebensztejn, p. 140.

[57] See, for example: "the blot emerges as an almost absolute image of the sublime." *Ibid.*, p. 147.

[58] Burke, *Enquiry*, Part Two, Section IV, p. 62. References to the *Enquiry* are from the revised edition, not the paperback edition (Notre Dame, 1968) used by Lebensztejn.

> figures of the infinite and consequently, motifs of the sublime.[59]

Lebensztejn supports this claim with the following citations, the first from the *Enquiry*, and the second from Kant:

> Infinity has a tendency to fill the mind with that sort of delightful horror, which is the most genuine effect, and truest test of the sublime.
>
> The Beautiful in nature is connected with the form of the object, which consists in having boundaries. The Sublime, on the other hand, is to be found in a formless object, so far as in it or by occasion of it *boundlessness* is represented[60].

Browning's Duchess, is criticised by her husband for her failure to keep within the proper bounds belonging to her position as his wife:

> she liked whate'er
> She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.

As the figure that then continually breaks the bounds of the Duke's discourse and the figure which, as power, cannot be represented by precise delineation, the Duchess is a sublime image. The Wife in Browning's poem 'Any Wife to Any Husband' declares "Thy soul is in thy face."[61] When we come to look directly at the scarcely visible face of the Duchess, we experience that Shelleyan phenomenon of an intense concentration upon that which in itself can be barely seen. Frà Pandolf is represented as telling the Duchess "Paint can never hope to reproduce" the subtleties of her appearance. Thus, to forgo, in all but a few details, the description of her appearance becomes, strangely, a more reliable way of projecting the woman's essence. The "pictured countenance" is practically a naked one; yet the few visible marks combine to project the distinct force of an

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[59] Lebensztejn, p. 145.

[60] *Ibid.*; Burke, *Enquiry*, Part Two, Section VIII, p. 73; Immanuel Kant, *Kant's Critique of Judgement*, 2nd ed., translated by. J. H. Bernard (London, 1914), paragraph 23, pp. 102-3.

[61] *Robert Browning: The Poems*, I, 561, *l.*12.

abstract image which can be deduced if not visualised. In his conversational poem 'Julian and Maddalo', Shelley has Julian announce:

> I love all waste
> And solitary places; where we taste
> The pleasure of believing what we see
> Is boundless, as we wish our souls to be[62].

Like a sublime landscape or the naked countenance of earth, the unbounded depiction of the Duchess correlates with an unfettered spirit, which, in her case, is more than an ascribed wish. The whole poem beautifully encapsulates the paradox of the infinite in the finite that Browning sees in the good minute. It works beyond the Duke's shallow perception of staying the woman's essence in the art-object to confound him by making her character absorb the very means by which he presents himself. "Sir, 't was all one!", he protests of the Duchess's indiscriminate behaviour, and the Duchess's triumph consists in that she continues to make that one – the Duke, the poem – one with herself. If we understand the figure of the Duchess in the poem to be Browning's utilisation of the power of poetic space as it informs his poetry, then 'My Last Duchess' is thus a magnificent example of the way a poet shapes poetic space to his own purposes and makes it function as an integral part of the poem.

The remainder of this chapter continues the analysis of poetic space in a discussion of another poem about a portrait. However, the line of development is somewhat different here, as I want to show how the use of poetic space can be complicated, when in a clear case of literary influence, one poet inscribes his poem on the space of another.

v. Rossetti's 'The Portrait'

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62 *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 114.

> It is chiefly in a series of women's faces that these ideas seek expression. All these have something in common, some union of strange and puissant physical loveliness with depth and remoteness of gaze. . . . all have the look – characteristic of Rossetti's faces as the mystic smile of Leonardo's – the look which bids the spectator murmur– "What netherworld gulf-whispers doth she hear . . . ?"
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> F. H. W. Myers, 'Rossetti and the Religion of Beauty', in *Essays Modern* (London, 1908), p. 326.

The genesis of Rossetti's poem 'The Portrait' was an involved affair. We have the drafts of an early related version which Rossetti wrote in 1847 for his family's album 'The Hotch Potch'.[63] This version called 'On Mary's Portrait' is substantially very different from the poem eventually published in Rossetti's first major collection of his own poems in 1870. Paull Franklin Baum thinks William Michael Rossetti's claim that his brother considerably revised the earlier poem is something of an understatement, and comments:

> The earlier poem comprises sixteen stanzas or 144 lines; the later poem comprises twelve stanzas or 108 lines, and retains only nine and a half lines from the first.[64]

In fact, whilst we may not match lines precisely, there are many echoes of the earlier poem in the later, and as they both share the same rather unusual stanzaic pattern and rhyme scheme, William Michael's assertion is not so wide of the mark as Baum suggests. The poems both examine the portrait of a dead woman now lost to her painter-lover, and dwell on the memories that arise from surveying the picture. For Baum, "In the earlier poem the feeling of separation

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[63] *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: An Analytical List of Manuscripts in the Duke Library with hitherto Unpublished Verse and Prose*, ed. Paull Franklin Baum (Durham, N. Carolina, 1931), pp. 67-71. References to this poem are, when necessary, to stanza and page no.

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 27.

by death is simply conventional romanticism", while in the later poem he sees "The same acute sense of loss, the same troubled longing and regret, the same half-mystical vision, so familiar elsewhere in Rossetti's poetry written in the decade after his wife's death"[65]. His reading of the later poem is thus coloured by the fact that that Rossetti made his 'revision' in 1869, after his disinterment of the poems buried with his wife Elizabeth Siddal. Baum speculates that 'On Mary's Portrait' was one of these recovered poems, and that Rossetti's revision would thus be marked by the pathos of mourning and produce a finer poem. From the evidence Baum musters, it does seem likely that Rossetti renamed the earlier poem 'The Portrait', and it probably is to this poem that he refers in a letter to Swinburne of 1869:

> I have also condensed a shady thing called *The Portrait*, which you may remember, and made a good short poem of it I think.[66]

While I shall not give a comparative reading of the two poems, Baum's faint deprecation of the earlier piece which was written not long after the Rossetti's first major poem 'The Blessed Damozel' seems misplaced. While the later poem does concentrate far more on the speaker's sense of loss, the prior poem's scene of mourning has its own power, and seems to me an early attempt at the evocative mode with which Baum characterises Rossetti's poetry after 1862. Moreover, I would say that 'On Mary's Portrait' is an

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[65] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

[66] Letter 893, 30 October 1889, in *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, II, 763. Rossetti's workmanlike tone sounds hearty when set against the air of melancholy Baum and others wish to attribute to the poem's revision. A thorough textual history of the poem is given in Robert N. Keane's excellent article 'Rossetti: The Artist and the Portrait', in *ELN* 12 (December1974), 96-102. Keane's work locates the shorter 1869 draft (now in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge), and proposes that Rossetti very likely made several versions of the poem between 1847 and 1869. (P. 99.) This proposal directly contradicts Baum, p. 32. However, my comparison rests only on the differences between the 1847 and 1870 version. In his article on pp. 97-8, Keane also tends to compare the early poem unfavourably beside the later one as part of a critical view that seems overly influenced by the poet's biography. It does appear that this kind of approach means that value judgements are made which have less to do with merit than with the critic's sense of sentiment and propriety.

interesting poem in its own right and remarkably accomplished for a writer of nineteen. But Baum wants to put a distance between the two poems so that he can rest his claim that

> What was an imaginary portrait has become an autobiographical fact . . . Rossetti has fused an impersonally dramatic situation with an intensely personal emotion.[67]

But presumably many poems by other poets could be similarly described, and it is a truism to say that a poet may draw on his own experiences for his poetry. It is also true to say that the experience of authentic emotion doesn't in itself make a poem either successful, or superior to another poem. Furthermore, whilst it may be the case that an experience of mourning heightened the descriptive pathos of the later Rossetti poem, this is not susceptible of proof. What interests me more about both of these poems is the way that both of them are indebted to another poem and another memorial picture.

Baum notices in 'The Portrait' "the obvious reminiscence of Browning's 'My Last Duchess' ". Citing various echoes, he comments: "The parallel is almost too close to be accidental"[68]. But having established this fact, he does not make any suggestion as to why Browning's poem might enter Rossetti's. Instead, he seems keener to prove that the Browning link is only with 'The Portrait', and not 'On Mary's Portrait':

> 'On Mary's Portrait,' however, has nothing of Browning in it unless the conventional framework be taken as a borrowing from the dramatic monologue technique.[69]

This is quite simply not true. While there are more echoes of whole phrases from 'My Last Duchess' in 'The Portrait', 'On Mary's Portrait' has, in addition to some verbal reverberations, a number of motifs

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[67] Baum, pp. 28-9.
[68] *Ibid.*, p. 29.
[69] *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

from Browning's poem peculiar to itself alone. The cited parallel Baum gives consists of the openings of 'The Portrait' and 'My Last Duchess':

> There is her picture as she was:
> It seems a thing to wonder on,
> . . . . . .
> . . . and there she stands.
>
> (stanzas 1, 4.)[70]

> That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
> Looking as if she were alive. I call
> That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
> Worked busily a day, and there she stands.[71]

'On Mary's Portrait' opens with the lines

> Why yes: she looks as then she looked;
> There is not any difference . . . .

While this opening lacks the reference to picture, it preserves, as 'The Portrait' does not, the stress on the woman's looking which can be both a semblance and a gaze. The word "alive", in fact, resurfaces at the end of 'On Mary's Portrait' in a telling moment: "But I look round and see nought else/Alive", says the speaker of the picture.[72] The phrase "To see her portrait where it stands" occurs in stanza four of the early poem,[73] and seems to resemble the Duke's remark "and there she stands" which is repeated in 'The Portrait'. What is striking about 'On Mary's Portrait' is that this poem makes it clear that there is a specific auditor who, like the envoy in 'My Last Duchess', is shown the picture by a speaker who relates its history. In 'The Portrait' this is not apparent and the second person is used more in the way of generalisation than address: "a covert

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[70] Baum misquotes the opening word "This" as "There". See Baum, p. 29. I have emended the punctuation to the text of the poem as it appears in *The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, pp. 169-70. References to this poem, when necessary, are to stanzas.

[71] Punctuation emended to the text given in the *Poetical Works of Robert Browning*, III, 186.

[72] Baum, p. 71.

[73] *Ibid.*, p. 68.

place/Where you might think . . . ." The conversational tone of 'On Mary's Portrait' is marked from its very beginning where we find a response ("Why yes"), just as in Browning's poem the Duke intimates that the envoy looks to him to have answered the obvious query. While the speaker in Rossetti's early poem is not in the least like the Duke, slight reminiscences of the courtly manner linger:

> Your pardon, – I have wearied you
> To you these things are cold and dead
> (stanza 16).[74]

Another significant link is the fact that Rossetti's painter, like Frà Pandolf, makes a point of telling us he completed the portrait in a day ("Frà Pandolf's hands/Worked busily a day, and there she stands"). Critics of 'My Last Duchess' have often remarked upon this detail as a ducal artistic license; unless, as has been suggested, Frà Pandolf worked in fresco, it would be virtually impossible to finish such a portrait in a day.[75] Rossetti, perhaps with an artist's knowledge, revises the speaker's claim to mean that the *essence* of the picture was so rendered:

> I moved not till the work was grand,
> Whole, and complete. You understand,
> I mean my thought was all expressed
> In that one morning: For the rest –
> Mere matters of the eye and hand.
> (stanza 14.)[76]

In addition to these connections, Rossetti seems to have used various elements of the vocabulary of Browning's poem and reorganised them to his own effect. Certain words – cheek, breast, smile, mark, bough, stoop – recur in the later poem, along with synonyms "grave eyes" (st. 15) for "earnest glance", or "marvelled" (st. 15) for "I call/That piece a wonder".

Browning's poem was published in 1842. Rossetti is said

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[74] *Ibid.*, p. 71.
[75] B. N. Pipes, Jr., 'The Portrait of "My Last Duchess" ', in *VS* 3 (1960), 384.
[76] Baum, p. 71.

by his brother to have discovered Browning's poetry in 1847, the year of the composition of 'On Mary's Portrait'. Byron had been the first poet to make an impression on Rossetti, but was superseded by an enthusiasm for Shelley whom he read in 1844 in a small pirated edition.[77] Browning then became Rossetti's favourite poet, and was to remain so for much of his life.[78] Rossetti absorbed Browning so deeply that he was able to recognise anonymous work:

> My brother lighted upon *Pauline* (published anonymously) in the British Museum, copied it out, recognized that it must be Browning's, and wrote to the great poet at a venture to say so, receiving a cordial response, followed by a genial and friendly intercourse for several years.[79]

Browning, we know, was not quite so enthusiastic about his admirer. While thanking Rossetti warmly for his poems in 1870 with but a slight demur,[80] he complained a few weeks later to Isabella Blagden that they were

> *scented* with poetry, as it were – like trifles of various sorts you take out of a cedar or sandal-wood box: you know I hate the effeminacy of his school, – the men who dress up like women, that use obsolete forms, too, and archaic accentuations to seem soft – fancy a man calling it a lil´*y* – lil*iés* & so on: Swinburne started this with other like Belialisms, – witness his "harper-playér" &c. It is quite different when the object is to *imitate* old

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[77] *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Letters and Memoirs*, I, 100; Preface to *The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, pp. xiv-xv. "Lastly, came Browning, and for a time, like the serpent-rod of Moses, swallowed up all the rest. This was still at an early stage of life; for I think the year 1847 cannot certainly have passed before my brother was deep in Browning." (P. xv.)

[78] The story of the rupture in the poets' friendship is told in Helen Rossetti Angeli, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Friends and Enemies* (London, 1949), pp. 164-8. Rossetti believed Browning to have slandered him in *Fifine at the Fair*, but nonetheless is reported to have returned to his admiration of Browning's work towards the end of his life. (P. 168.)

[79] Preface to *The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, p. xv. Rossetti wrote to Browning concerning *Pauline* on 17 October 1847. Letter 26, *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, I: *1835-60* (1965), 32-3.

[80] Browning's letter of 16 May 1870 is reprinted in Angeli, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Friends and Enemies*, pp. 168-9. After remarking that he does not enjoy either the personification or archaisms, Browning nonetheless avers "the main is masterly and conclusive, with whosoever shall need it, of your right to all the honours in poetry as in painting, 'double-lived in regions new'." (P. 169.)

> ballad-writing, when the thing might be; then, how I hate "Love", as a lubberly young man putting his arms here and his wings there, about a pair of lovers, – a fellow they would kick away, in the reality.[81]

Browning's impatience reflects the reaction of many readers to Pre-Raphaelite verse and in particular that of Rossetti. Critics have proved resistant to what in that poetry seems foreign to a perceived tradition in English poetry as written "in a selection of language really used by men, . . . arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings".[82] Pre-Raphaelite poetry has recently begun to receive more attention after many years of neglect. George Steiner was still able to write in 1975:

> We are, in the main, 'word-blind' to Pre-Raphaelite and Decadent verse. This blindness results from a major change in habits of sensibility. . . . We have for a time disqualified ourselves from reading comprehensively (a word which has in it the root for 'understanding') not only a good deal of Rossetti, but the poetry and prose of Swinburne, William Morris, Aubrey Beardsley, Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, and Richard Le Gallienne. . . . What conceivable revolution of spirit would redirect us to a land of clear colours and stories
>
> > In a region of shadowless hours,
> > Where earth has a garment of glories
> > And a murmur of musical flowers . . . ?
>
> It is, literally, as if a language had been lost or the key to a cipher mislaid.[83]

While Steiner no doubt would be surprised by the current ascendancy of the Pre-Raphaelites, the blindness he describes is still pervasive enough to be commonplace. Browning's blindness to his follower may indicate a response to what in Rossetti is truly

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[81] Letter 128, June 19 1870, in *"Dearest Isa": Robert Browning's Letters to Isabella Blagden*, ed. with an introduction by Edward C. McAleer (Austin and Edinburgh, 1951), pp. 336-7.

[82] Preface to the 'Lyrical Ballads', *Wordsworth: Poetical Works*, pp. 734, 735.

[83] George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (London, Oxford, and New York, 1975), pp. 14, 15.

antithetical to his precursor. The degree of innovative distortion a poet makes upon the work of his master and the measure he adds of himself might be those aspects of his work least calculated to appeal to the prior poet. In 'The Portrait', the painter says that his "memories" vibrated

> Till I must make them all my own
> And paint this picture.
>
> (stanza 7.)

Rossetti's poem is interesting for the very way it shows us the poet making his memories of Browning's poem his own. It acts, in part, as a commentary on the creative process showing both the traces of debt and the countering marks of innovation. That Rossetti, who we are told, was scrupulous to avoid echoes of others works,[84] should have strengthened the connections with 'My Last Duchess' rather than muted them, when he came to revise his poem in 1869, at first, looks surprising. But, if the poem is an oblique statement of the working of poetic influence, this apparent anomaly disappears. Rossetti removed the more obvious indications of dramatic monologue such as the implied auditor to make the poem more of a reverie, but that reverie seems as much about poetic origins as anything else. The atmosphere evoked by the poem is one of almost claustrophobic intensity; but this sensation of confine is perhaps not so strange when we realise that the later poem is heavily inscribed on the space of the earlier piece, and takes much its strength from what it encloses or covers. Throughout 'The Portrait' there appear to be many allusions to a mysterious contained or suppressed power or a hidden topography. The lament of the bereaved painter carries a peculiar ambivalence, and, in the context of the narrative, this ambivalence manifests itself in the uneasy equivocation over the status of the dead woman. The painter swings from

[84] Baum, p. 29; Keane, p. 98.

acknowledgement of some kind of communication with her through memory and fantasy, to claims of total loss and severance. In this, Rossetti not only recasts the relation between the Duke and Duchess with its complex accompaniment of loss, recovery and communication, but also seems to imply an interrogation of the position of the earlier poem with regard to his own. That earlier poem is mourned, celebrated, yet required as lost for the present design to take place. Rossetti marks indelibly the substitutive work of his poem into its many substitutive figures. Representation as substitution is implicated in an immediate and simple sense when the painter uses "the plants in bloom . . . /To feign the shadows of the trees" (st.7), but makes a more complex appearance in that series of exchanges of picture for the woman, memory and fantasy for the picture, "the mystery of death" (st.9) for memory, and eventual vision for the present sorrow. Other intricate substitutions are insistent; Rossetti seems to use Shelleyan antitypical language in that opening figure of the woman's picture compared to the speaker's mirror-image. Browning does not use antitypical language as such in 'My Last Duchess', as the relation between Duke and Duchess is not an expression of reciprocity or willed identification, but secret subsumption. Rossetti's antitypical usage is not straightforward because it covers both the speaker's relation with his lady, and the poem's relation with its model. Furthermore, it involves an inherent complication of representational spaces:

> This is her picture as she was:
> It seems a thing to wonder on,
> As though mine image in the glass
> Should tarry when myself am gone.
>
> (stanza 1.)

One might expect initially that the third and fourth lines would read 'her image' and 'herself', but the comparison is made partly to show the entwining of identities in an ideal Shelleyan partnership. It's as

if, momentarily, the picture is a "glass", and the portrayed dead woman is as much a reflection of the speaker as the beloved addressed in the Shelley lyric. But if Browning's poem is, as it were, imagined as standing in an antitypical relation to Rossetti's own, then the appropriation of the other as self - the claiming of "her picture" for "mine image in the glass" - seems entirely explicable. Nonetheless, at the same time as these lines appropriate, they also signal the idea of a permanent remainder: the lingering of an allied image. So it is not odd that this admission of an image that still lingers should also be one of the poem's strongest allusions to 'My Last Duchess', and Browning's portrait of a woman whose image cannot be extinguished by death. This finely worked web of substitutions thus calls upon the poem's relation to the prior poem by relocating certain of its key words and images. This is seen later in the figure of echo employed in stanza five which is the aural equivalent of the specular moment:

> And with her
> I stooped to drink the spring-water,
> Athirst where other waters sprang;
> And where the echo is, she sang,
> My soul another echo there.[85]

The compliance which is refused by the Duke "and I choose/Never to stoop" is here adopted; there is a bending and inclination not just to a partner, but to the reverberations of a partner-poem's language. The declared unwillingness of the Duke to take up an attitude in which he could better follow through the Duchess's glance is transformed into an eager thirst to drink from another source or "other waters".

The third stanza of 'The Portrait' depicts the phantasmal scene of the painting:

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[85] The 1911 *Works of Dante Gabriel* prints "stopped" for "stooped". I have emended this almost certain misprint, as "stooped" occurs in both the first edition of Rossetti's poetry, *Poems* (London, 1870), p. 129, and *The Collected Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed., with a Preface and notes by W. M. Rossetti, 2 vols (London, 1886), I, 241.

a covert place
Where you might think to find a din
Of doubtful talk, and a live flame
Wandering, and many a shape whose name
Not itself knoweth, and old dew,
And your own footsteps meeting you,
And all things going as they came.

This visionary setting has its roots in a displaced or suppressed familiarity; it is a place of returns and *revenants*, of newness juxtaposed with oldness, of recognition and amnesia. The scene is thick with the return of the repressed, and mimes the haunting of half-obscured images and words from another source, which then, literally, become the background to the present poem. In that bizarre and eloquent image of being met by one's own footsteps, Rossetti refers to one of his favourite motifs, that of the *döppelganger* and the meeting of the individual with his double. The stress is on encounter, and, as "footsteps" is synæsthetic being both an aural and a visual print, it makes sense if one imagines this meeting as something like a reflection, a mirror-image of one's own progress from afar to the point of complete contact. To portray the precursor as correspondent rather than temporally prior, or rather to portray his steps as one's own instead of depicting oneself humbly treading in his footsteps, is clearly defensive. On the other hand, the *döppelganger* legend warns of the ill-omen of meeting one's double. Rossetti would have come across highly dramatic variations of the *döppelganger* theme in the short stories of Edgar Allan Poe, which he loved.[86] In 'William Wilson', Poe had already used the idea of the

[86] The influence of Poe on Rossetti was substantial. Rossetti's 'The Blessed Damozel' was influenced, he said, by Poe's *The Raven*. *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters with a Memoir*, I, 107. There was a (now lost) parody by him of 'Ulalume', a poem which also may have influenced 'The Portrait', in its depiction of the bereaved lover's nocturnal wandering. Some of Rossetti's earliest drawings illustrate both these poems. David G. Riede, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Limits of Victorian Vision* (Ithaca and London, 1983), pp. 22, 25, 30. J. Runden suggests that lines from Poe's 'To Helen' may also be behind the image of Palestine in 'The Portrait'. 'Rossetti and a Poe Image', *N&Q* n.s. 5, no. 3 (June, 1958), 257-8. Dianne Sachko Macleod points out the borrowing of 'Ligeia' from the early Poe story of that name, in 'Rossetti's Two Ligeias: Their Relationship to Visual Arts, Music, and Poetry', *V P* 20,

double as psychological device to express the means by which the self may thwart itself. Rossetti thus had a fine example of the way in which that theme could be made eloquent of psychological subtlety rather than plain superstition. His own marvellous and virtually unknown short story 'St. Agnes of Intercession' written in 1850 combines the idea of the *döppelganger* with portraiture and a hint of the Shelleyan antitype.[87] In this tale, the hero's portrait of his *fiançée*, a young woman named Mary, is shown at an exhibition where it is deprecated by a critic who pronounces it to be like the head of St. Agnes by an early Italian painter called Bucciuolo Angiolieri. The hero, suddenly realises that the woman he has painted, in fact, corresponds perfectly to Bucciuolo's painting which he loved, when as a child, he found it in an old art-guide book. Unable to find this book and wishing to see the painting again, he sets off for Italy, where, after a long search, he comes upon it in the Academy at Perugia:

> The countenance was the one known to me, by a feeble reflex in childhood; it was also the exact portrait of Mary, feature by feature. I had been absent from her for more than five months, and it was like seeing her again.[88]

The model for the portrait turns out to be Bucciuolo's own lover, who, when mortally ill, insisted that he paint her portrait before she died:

> _____ and for two days, though in a dying state, she sat

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nos. 3 & 4 (Dante Gabriel Rossetti Special Issue), guest edited by William E. Fredeman, (Autumn-Winter, 1982), 89-102.

[87] 'St. Agnes of Intercession' was originally called 'An Autopsychology'. *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters with a Memoir*, I, 155. In *The P. R. B. Journal*, William Michael Rossetti writes on Thurs. 21 March 1850 that Gabriel "is now engaged, as regards writing, on a tale entitled 'An Autopsychology', originally suggested to himself by an image he introduced into 'Bride-Chamber Talk'. (P. 64.) 'Bride-Chamber Talk' was the original title for 'The Bride's Prelude', in *The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, pp. 17-35. In this poem a *döppelganger*-type image occurs on p. 26 – "Thine own voice speaking unto thee" – which William Michael Rossetti says was the possible cue for Rossetti's *döppelganger* picture 'How they met themselves'. *Ibid.*, p. 648.

[88] *Ibid*, p. 564.

> with wonderful energy to her lover: clad in her most sumptuous attire, and arrayed with all her jewels[89].

Rossetti's hero, still stunned by the shock of the identification, then discovers that the gallery also houses a self-portrait by Bucciuolo:

> A trembling suspense, with something almost of involuntary awe, was upon me as I ran towards the spot; the picture was hung low; I stooped over the rail to look closely at it, and was face to face with *myself !* I can recall my feeling at that moment, only as one of the most lively and exquisite fear.[90]

Having examined the portrait, the young man comes to the following conclusion:

> That it *was* my portrait, – that the St. Agnes was the portrait of Mary, – and that both had been painted by myself four hundred years ago, this now rose up distinctly before me as the one and only solution of so startling a mystery, and as being, in fact, that result round which, or some portion of which, my soul had been blindly hovering, uncertain of itself.[91]

As David G. Riede points out, the crushing effect of the hero's discovery is that he realises his work and experiences are second-hand, and not original as he had supposed; the details of his life that seemed most intimately peculiar to himself prove to be remembrances or repetitions of another's experiences.[92] 'St. Agnes of Intercession' was composed after 'On Mary's Portrait', but before the 1870 revision where the line "And your own footsteps meeting you" substitutes for the earlier "And red-mouthed damsels meeting

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[89] *Ibid.*, p. 565.

[90] *Ibid.*, p. 566.

[91] *Ibid.* It may be that Rossetti's story, which tells of the recognition of one's double in a portrait, lies behind Milly Theale's recognition of herself in the Bronzino portrait in Henry James, *The Wings of the Dove*, The World's Classics (Oxford and New York, 1984), p. 157. James's novel was written during the period June 1901-May 1902. He would have found 'St. Agnes of Intercession' included in *The Collected Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, I, 399-426.

[92] Riede, pp. 49-50. Riede's interpretion of the *döppelganger* theme in 'St. Agnes of Intercession' is behind my own here, and lent itself to the development of that theme in terms of an intrapoetic influence.

you".[93] During this time, Rossetti developed his idea of the double, and, in the later poem, it appears that he uses his own notion of the double's prefigurement as a gloss on the relation between the poet and his poetic precursor. While the double or mirror-image seems to be contemporaneous and a defensive equivalation by which the later poet, through simple identification, undoes the priority of his precursor's work, it can also, in Rossetti's scheme of things, represent a pre-empting and the recognition that one's poetic self is secondary, being the reflection of another. The double thus deprives the self of its claim to be unique; replication introduces the question of imitation in which one object precedes the creation of the other to which it gives the marks of its identity. The deliberate artlessness of the last line of stanza three – "And all things going as they came" – serves as a summation of the ambiguity of origins in Rossetti's poem, the fading in and out of the earlier poem as it broaches the space of the later one. The phrase in the next stanza which alludes to this strange woodland scene – "and there she stands" – is the most complete echo of 'My Last Duchess' in Rossetti's poem, and the decisive evidence of the grounding design that underlies Rossetti's variations.

The phrase "and there she stands" is also important because, like the other major echoes, it fastens upon what is, for Browning's poem, a key moment of survey. At such moments, Rossetti draws on the the force of Browning's Duchess and her significance for the Duke. Browning never makes it manifest in the poem that the Duchess is dead; we assume that she most likely is, but the fact of his saying so would disturb the fruitful ambiguity that surrounds her influence.[94] Unlike Browning's Duke who is not in

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[93] The line is itself an echo of the one already cited from 'The Bride's Prelude': "Thine own voice speaking unto thee."

[94] There is of course the famous anecdote cited in *The Poetical Works of Robert Browning*, III, 187-8, concerning the poet's response to what he meant by the phrase "I gave commands". Browning replied: "I meant that the commands were she should

any recognisable state of bereavement, Rossetti's painter mourns; but, as in 'My Last Duchess', the death is never mentioned as a death, but is always described paraphrastically:

> O heart that never beats nor heaves,
> In that one darkness lying still,
> What now to thee my love's great will
> Or the fine web the sunshine weaves?
> (stanza 8.)

It must be death that is described, but the veil of fantasy that touches the poem, and the poetic euphemism, preserve the sense of a continuance that must ultimately derive from the figure of the Duchess. In stanza two, the painter speaks of that which, beside the portrait, "in mournful guise/Takes counsel with my soul alone". If Rossetti's poem attempts to cover Browning's, it also does "take counsel" or communicate with the image it buries and to which it alludes in its cryptic metaphors of interment, confinement and enclosure. Stanza six recalls the painter's wooing address to his lady; an address first made over and above the brooding suppression and intensity of a storm which is about to break – "Thundered the heat within the hills." The words of the address are repeated in the evening of that same day:

> And there she hearkened what I said,
> With under-glances that surveyed
> The empty pastures blind with rain.

It is obvious that the landscape the woman affects to see is not really the object of vision; the pastures are "empty" and the blinding of the rain is a transferred epiphet. The woman's "under-glances", although they appear to look away, are the mark that she is scanning what lies beneath her lover's words. But the term "under-glances" also evokes the mobile glance of Browning's Duchess which is the glance that lies beneath the look of the painter's lady. This juncture in the poem

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be put to death. Or he might have had her shut up in a convent."

provides both a glance at its origins and the original glance which filters through into the present text. The poem makes it clear thematically that it is not the immediate context which is the object of the glances. The glances go as they come; for the ambiguity of the prefix "under" indicates they submerge or, being submerged, come again into view.

Rossetti's poem owes the ease with which it slides between picture, fantasy, memory and vision to an observable lack of framing or border which might demarcate these different states. One scene merges almost imperceptibly into another, as in the opening lines of stanza four –

> A deep dim wood; and there she stands
> As in that wood that day –

where picture and memory, present and past are skilfully combined. The only notable division occurs in stanza ten where the "wandering" painter stands bereft and

> Upon the desolate verge of light
> Yearned loud the iron-bosomed sea.[95]

While that "verge of light" does seem to mark the separation of the loved one from the questing lover, the haziness of the narrative makes it impossible for the reader to tell whether this night-time journey is actual or one made in the remembered landscape of the speaker's recollection. The poem therefore does not restrict itself to any one view, but like 'My Last Duchess' presents a series of shifting impressions, which are all based about the central idea of a woman's image. Rossetti's treatment of the woman's portrait is even more elusive than Browning's. Like Frà Pandolf, the painter is keen to indicate the design's insufficiency for those who have seen the

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[95] These two lines are, in fact, taken from Rossetti's 1849 poem 'A Trip to Paris and Belgium', *The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, p. 177, where, in a slightly different form, they conclude the first part of the poem which is entitled 'London to Folkstone'. It is perhaps not surprising that the most noticeable junction in 'The Portrait' should be founded on the poem's own border with another poem.

lady herself:

> And such the pure line's gracious flow.
> And passing fair the type must seem,
> Unknown the presence and the dream.
> (stanza 4.)

However, as in 'My Last Duchess', the idea of the picture has its own power which isn't bound by the strictures of precise representation. Part of that power is derived from the implication of Browning's own portrait-poem. But, in the last stages of his poem, Rossetti makes a remarkable innovation. It occurs after that moment in the poem where the speaker heralds a transcendence of the present in a spiritual renaissance:

> How shall my soul stand rapt and awed,
> When, by the new birth borne abroad
> (stanza 11).

In this future state, Bliss will be not the mergence of the individual soul with the Godhead, but the mergence of the now separated lovers. It is this hope of blissful transformation which is then projected back onto the woman's portrait:

> Here with her face doth memory sit
> Meanwhile, and wait the day's decline,
> Till other eyes shall look from it,
> Eyes of the spirit's Palestine . . . .

The first line of this the twelfth and last stanza can be read in a number of ways that map space variously. The peculiar ambiguity of "with her face" suggests both memory as a companion or accompaniment, and memory in the *guise* of the pictured figure. The "face" in the second instance becomes something like a mask which memory wears but which, at some future point, will be taken over by another. If memory is the reminiscence of Browning's Duchess, the qualification "Even than the old gaze tenderer" implies

that here is a new departure. The portrait is reanimated by a force that ranges beyond recollection of a former scene. The conception of a portrait that is looked through, of a gaze that hovers behind even the memorial portrait returns us to the idea of a space that pressures language with a force beyond itself. The notion of the looked-through eye, or of the other eye that ultimately replaces the more immediate one indicates the power of the space behind poetic form which preexists it and is a constructive energy in its realisation. While much of Rossetti's poem may be thought to use Browning's writing as a prior writing space, it is most compelling when it ceases to alter the prior poem, but instead forges an independent relation to an ulterior space of its own. The disfigured script of 'My Last Duchess' thus lies as an intermediary between Rossetti's text and its own will to expression. Because 'My Last Duchess' itself so potently narrates the manifestation of ulterior energy, Rossetti makes that poem partially substitute for ulterior space. But no successful poem can wholly depend on another, and so while 'The Portrait' is, in part, the story of its own antecedents, it shows also the impulse to characterise itself as a distinct power. While this desire to innovate is born of the poet's struggle with his precursor, in instances where the poem strives to go beyond its tacit or acknowledged derivation, it transcends the web of affiliation to make a "new birth" and the assertion of its individual character. In the last few lines of the poem, the narrator describes how "hopes and aims" will

> Stand round her image side by side,
> Like tombs of pilgrims that have died
> About the Holy Sepulchre.

The tombs refer us back to the theme of interment, but the religious simile implies the promise of resurrection and renewal. The pilgrims are buried about the Holy Sepulchre in the hope that when

they rise from death, they will be close to Christ. It is possible that behind this imagery and the references to reflections and shadows in stanza four, lies St Paul's hope of a perfected spiritual vision: "Now we see but a poor reflection; then we shall see face to face."[96] The poem signals the desire of the beholder to see the transfigured face of his lady. As the desire for the proper image of the woman is what motivates this poem (being that which confirms the artist's self-hood), we might surmise this as correlative to the impulse to discover "naked countenance": the barely imaginable but authentic scene of poetic vision which grounds a strong poem.

In this final stage of the poem, Rossetti makes explicit use of the portrait; he devotes attention to the accompanying notion of character and the searching look of the beholder, in addition to the gaze of the pictured image itself. Rossetti's particular emphasis is on the renewal of the gaze as the mark of the poem's own realisation of its strength. It is this new gaze that the lover eventually will join with his own as he "enters in" his mistress's soul. Rossetti, like Shelley and Browning, develops a concentrated form of looking in which the gaze mingles with that of another, but with some singular differences of his own. In Shelley and Browning there is expressed the demand for the look; in Rossetti, it is the lover's desire that makes him seek out his beloved's gaze. Rossetti does not present lovers' mergence as the ambivalent or dangerous thing it can seem in his precursors where the stress lies more on absorption and disfiguration. While 'The Portrait' takes energy from the encrypting of 'My Last Duchess', this is possible because Browning's poem is indicated as contained in Rossetti's; it is obscured and revised, but not violated or disfigured so as to avoid recognition. Rossetti takes the notion of the antitype from Shelley and purges it of Shelley's anxiety; he observes what could be considered the aggression and ironisation bestowed on the notion in Browning,

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[96] I Cor. 13:12, *NIV*.

where the antitype gives way to a subsumption in which one party effectually effaces another, and returns the concept to a confident expression of reciprocity. The possible negative aspect of the motif surfaces, not in ambivalence about the beloved, but in the associated theme of the *döppelganger* who threatens one's claim to individuality. If the mark of soul is one's face, then an exact likeness makes questionable the uniqueness of essence.

While my next chapter discusses a poem by Swinburne, I will return to the notion of the portrait in my fourth chapter, when considering the poetry of Thomas Hardy, and will examine, in particular, the notions of death and memorial which have arisen but which have not received specific attention here. However, as conclusion to this present work on Browning and Rossetti, it is worth indicating a poem of Hardy's written in the Spring of 1913 and called 'On Looking at a Picture on an Anniversary'[97].

vi. Looking Forward: Hardy

Hardy adds another speaker to the series of lovers who regard pictures of women lost to them. In this case, the survey takes place on the anniversary of the couple's first meeting. Hardy's speaker addresses the woman and, in doing so, employs the conceit of imagining her continuance that both Browning and Rossetti, in different ways, also employ. But the speaker in Hardy's poem uses the conceit with a certain irony which is based on the knowledge that the woman cannot hear him. For him the picture is, for the most part, just a picture; the image of the departed woman is bound by its frame and the conditions of its material state. Thus the speaker puns on the unresponsiveness of the figure:

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[97] *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, ed. James Gibson, The New Wessex Edition (London and Basingstoke, paperback:1981), p. 533.

> Though at this query, my dear,
> There in your frame
> Unmoved you still appear . . . .

The speaker pursues this delicate irony by insisting that the woman's muteness is coquetry:

> You must be thinking the same,
> But keep that look demure
> Just to allure.

The irony is intensified if we catch a glimmer of a reference to Browning's 'My Last Duchess' in the words "There . . . you still appear". Unlike Browning's Duke, Hardy has indicated that the woman is bound within her frame, but the ironic banter keeps up the pretence of her life-likeness, which in the earlier poem is a determining force. Both the Duke and Hardy's speaker fix upon a look – "that look" in Hardy – which tells of the woman's "passion" or "allure". Moreover, there is in the poem a mark of a linkage between Browning and Hardy. Concerning the phrase "rainbow-rays" which occurs in the poem's first line, F. B. Pinion, having referred to other similar usages by Hardy in 'Her Apotheosis', 'To Outer Nature', and 'On a Fine Morning', writes:

> The first use of the iris-bow image by Hardy to express the idealizing effect of love is found in [*The*] W[*oodlanders*] xvi. Hardy sent Browning a copy of *Wessex Tales* as a birthday greeting in May 1888; as a result Browning may have read *The Woodlanders* and used the same image in the Prologue to *Asolando* (1889).[98]

It is of course possible that Hardy may have taken the image from the Prologue to *Asolando* which is Browning's own moving version of the Intimations Ode.[99] The image occurs in the first stanza:

> 'The Poet's age is sad: for why
> In youth, the natural world could show

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[98] F. B. Pinion, *A Commentary on the Poems of Thomas Hardy* (London and Basingstoke, 1976), p. 155.

[99] *Robert Browning: The Poems*, II, 875-6.

No common object but his eye
At once involved with alien glow–
His own soul's iris-bow. . . .'[100]

Like Wordsworth's Ode, both Browning's and Hardy's poems look back nostalgically to a blessed time in the past, a past which even now for Hardy's speaker is part-preserved in the anniversary he celebrates. But if Hardy remembers Browning, he almost certainly recalls Rossetti. Hardy's poem, which in its draft bore the more Rossetti-like title 'Looking at her Picture', includes in a condensed form the startling image of the renovated gaze:

For this one phase of you
Now left on earth
This great date must endue
With pulsings of rebirth? –
I see them vitalize
Those two deep eyes!

While Hardy's poem lacks the committed idealism of Rossetti's, during the course of the lyric, the tender self-mocking delusion of the speaker turns into a moment of vision and belief. A "trace" of seeming recognition on the face of the woman reanimates her image. In the original draft, this animation was endorsed even more strongly than it is here; for the question mark that follows the word "rebirth" was, in the first instance, an exclamation mark. The published version of the poem makes the moment of realisation more fragile and less emphatic. Those "deep eyes" evoke both the "other eyes" of Rossetti's 'The Portrait' and "the depth and passion" of the Duchess's glance. It is as if, at the slender moment of recognition that centres Hardy's poem, we see glancing through the apparent slightness of this simple lyric the concentrated energy of two other poetic portraits. While in Rossetti, the "other eyes" represented, not those of the Duchess (whose looking entered the poem elsewhere) but the poem's self-determining energies, in

[100] *Ibid.*, 876.

Hardy's poem, both the Rossetti's and Browning's images are combined. While this accumulation of imagery is itself, like Hardy's poem, a commemoration of the past, the power of this moment is not owing to derivation alone. The prior poems are not completely contained in Hardy's piece, but are energising points of contact that help kindle a "rebirth". They make Hardy look in this portrait for the power of his own poetic energy as it comes throbbing through into writing. Furthermore, the poem as a whole, needs to be read in the context of Hardy's own pervasive imagery of aspect, which is itself intimately linked to his conception of poetic production and which I will treat in Chapter IV. I cite Hardy's poem then as one instance of the accumulation of a look, of portrait as expressive of poetic character, and of the intimation of portrait in portrait as the expression of poetic influence.

My next chapter, however, deals with the poetry of Swinburne and another type of vision, influenced by Shelley, which is clearly posited as a type of poetic perception. We will see how Swinburne, going beyond mere representationalism, uses the ambiguous sculpture of the hermaphrodite as an epitome for the type of vision both demanded by his poetry and upon which that poetry is based. Moving beyond the face to look upon a body that does not conform to but outrages expectation, Swinburne's model exacts from its readers a deprivation which is compensated by a perceptual readjustment. It is this shift that I propose to illustrate in Chapter III.

CHAPTER III

SWINBURNE'S 'HERMAPHRODITUS'

Either in fact he does not see nature at all or else he overlays the landscape with such phantasmata, secondary images, and what not of a delirium-tremendous imagination that the result is a type of bloody broth: you know what I mean. At any rate there is no picture.

> *Letters of G. M. Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, ed. Claude Colleer Abbott (London,1935), p. 202.

It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to imagine the structure of a perception that contains several mutually exclusive variations of a theme in a single act of comprehension. For lack of a better word I would like to call this kind of perception the "or-or" structure of low-level vision. Low-level vision is not forced to make a choice between contradicting patterns but holds them in a single glance.

> Anton Ehrenzweig, 'Conscious Planning and Unconscious Scanning', *The Education of Vision*, ed. György Kepes (NewYork, 1965), pp. 29-30.

i. Swinburne's Image of the Hermaphrodite

Whilst in Paris during the spring of 1863, Swinburne wrote a sequence of four sonnets under the title 'Hermaphroditus'. The poem was first published in 1866 in *Poems and Ballads Series I*, and helped contribute to the sensation that volume – Swinburne's first major publication after *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865) – caused

among his readership of "Victoria's formal middle time"[1]. The subscription Swinburne appends, "*Au Musée du Louvre, Mars* 1863", indicates a source and inspiration, the celebrated antique statue known as the *Sleeping Hermaphrodite* of which several other copies exist.[2] The statue, restored by Bernini in a way that accounts for a faintly Baroque quality at odds with its Hellenism, had already been well-established as a literary topic. In Chapter Nine of *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835), a book Swinburne called "holy writ of beauty"[3], and "the most perfect and exquisite book of modern times"[4], Théophile Gautier has his narrator give eloquent testimony to the statue as a model of physical and sensual loveliness.[5] Gautier returns to the same theme in the poem 'Contralto' (1849)[6] – later to form part of *Émaux and Camées* (1872) – where the speaker addresses the statue as "*Rêve de poëte et d'artiste*"[7]. The statue also plays a significant part in Henri de Latouche's earlier but less prominent novel *Fragoletta* (1829), a work that obsessed Gautier.[8] Concerning the appearance of the statue in this novel, Jean Overton Fuller, Swinburne's biographer, comments: "it is the sight of it (or rather of the well-known Italian copy) in the art gallery of Naples which gives the heroine a clue as to her own condition."[9] *Fragoletta* inspired Swinburne to write a

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[1] Thomas Hardy, 'A Singer Asleep (Algernon Charles Swinburne, 1837-1909)',*The Complete Poems*, pp. 323-5; 323.

[2] The statue in the Louvre is also known as the *Borghèse Hermaphrodite*. For an illustration, see the photograph in Robert Peters, *The Crowns of Apollo: Swinburne's Principles of Literature and Art* (Detroit,1964), Plate 31. Other illustrations of similar statues can be found in Kenneth Clark, *The Nude* (Harmondsworth, 1960), p. 377, and J. J. Pollitt, *Art in the Hellenistic Age* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 149.

[3] 'Sonnet (with a Copy of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*)', *Swinburne's Collected Poetical Works*, 2 vols (London, 1924), I, 362. I use this edition throughout for Swinburne's poetry.

[4] 'Notes on Some Pictures of 1868', Bonchurch, XV, 212.

[5] Théophile Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, tr. Joanna Richardson, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth, 1981), pp. 196-7.

[6] First published in the*Revue des Deux Mondes*, 15 December 1849.

[7] Gautier, 'Contralto', (8.29). I use throughout for references to this poem *Émaux et Camées* (Lille and Geneva, 1947), pp. 30-33.

[8] A. C. Swinburne, *Lesbia Brandon*, ed.,with a commentary, Randolph Hughes (London, 1952), p. 411. Hughes's commentary gives extensive information about Swinburne's French literary. antecedents

poem of the same name which he placed after 'Hermaphroditus' in *Poems and Ballads Series I.* It also inspired Balzac, a close associate of Latouche, to produce two of his own famous works dealing with the themes of hermaphroditism and lesbianism respectively: *Séraphita* and *LaFille aux yeux d'or.* Swinburne, extremely well-read in French literature at an early age, discovered *Séraphita* while at Oxford. Over forty of Balzac's works alone appear on the list of books borrowed from the Taylorian Library between March 1859 and May 1860, according to the scholar Randolph Hughes.[10] This list includes *Séraphita.* Furthermore, Swinburne sent William Bell Scott his personal copy of the story with a letter dated February 1860.[11] Hughes identifies *La Fille aux yeux d'or,* along with the fore-mentioned French texts, as influences on Swinburne's *Lesbia Brandon,* the earliest part of which can probably be dated 1864. He also indicates the likelihood of Balzac's early story *Sarrasine* (November 1830) as a possible source: a narrative of mixed gender identity, better known today for the detailed structural analysis made of it by Roland Barthes in *S/Z.*[12] Hughes comments in a note to his documentation of Swinburne's novel:

> The temporal order of the afore-cited French works on this subject is: *Fragoletta, Sarrasine, La Fille aux yeux d'or, Séraphita, Mademoiselle de Maupin.* It is impossible to determine with certitude in what order they were read by Swinburne. As already mentioned, he was acquainted with Seraphita [*sic*] and the greater part of Balzac's works in 1859. He made enthusiastic mention of Latouche in a letter to Monckton-Milnes in 1860 (if one can trust the date given by Gosse and Wise). He probably read *Mademoiselle de Maupin* last of these very influential books.[13]

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[9] Jean Overton Fuller, *Swinburne: A Critical Biography* (London, 1968), p. 83.
[10] Hughes, p. 403.
[11] Letter 21, 25 February 1860, *The Swinburne Letters,* I: *1854-1869* (1959), 31-2.
[12] Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay,* tr. Richard Howard (New York, 1970).
[13] Hughes, note 3, p. 419.

Swinburne therefore takes his place in a peculiarly involved network of literary influence. It is hard to imagine any other major English writer of the period being quite so informedly responsive to the French Decadent and Æsthetic movements. The aims and ideals of these movements, their favoured types and topics – one of these being the exploration of alternative or ambiguous sexual identity and impulse – were familiar ground for Swinburne. It is easy to see him as a continuator of this tradition. But it is harder to work out exactly what that tradition might be without recourse to lurid psychologism or a kind of literary sociology. Accounts of the Decadents' interest in sexuality from Mario Praz's *The Romantic Agony* (1933) onwards tend to sensationalise the works they treat in a thoroughly reductive way. Very little attempt is made to see sexual themes as part of an æsthetic or literary practice. Lip-service only may be paid to the ideal of *l'art pour l'art*, or the ideal itself is implied to be disingenuous. A heterogeneous collection of titles becomes a genre – the sexually perverse – whose main function seems to be to shock bourgeois decency. Whilst undeniably these works are pitted against societal pieties and challenge conventional assumption, the popularist trend of regarding æsthetic writers as *avant-garde* apologists for sexual experimentation tacitly reinstates the didacticism they sought to eschew: amorality becomes morality. The æsthetic interest actually gets elided, as under this kind of examination, vanishes the appreciation of form which suspended the moral connection. This state of affairs may, in fact, be an unavoidable casualty of the sort of argument that deals with issues that are ideological and not literary, and which discounts language or subsumes it as ideology. The particularity of a work of literature, of its language, gets scant attention within this type of generic criticism. The way in which a literary work may subject a

recognisable theme or motif to its own devices is not investigated. Nor is the suitability of certain topics for literary treatment acknowledged. The hermaphrodite, for example, as Gautier, and later Swinburne himself testified, is specially interesting as a literary or artistic subject.

The phenomenon of actual physical hermaphroditism was not established during the nineteenth century: the concept occurred purely as symbolic, mythic, and fantastic. The hermaphrodite as *lusus naturae* is seen as existing outside of nature, life, empirical reality; is an artifice, a synthetic creation of the imagination and, predominantly, an æsthetic and literary topos, deriving - in the Western Tradition - from the famous account in Plato's *Symposium*, and the myth as given in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In a smaller way, the statue itself becomes a literary topic for various nineteenth century writers, involving as it does (among other things) the notion of a representation which is not mimetic, and thereby the victory of the imagination over reality, as art is and can be the only proper sphere for this particular 'incarnation'. The relation between the statue and literary representation is intriguing in that, as the statue can only refer us to the story, all reference takes place within an æsthetic and not an empirical sphere. Conversely, within that æsthetic sphere, the story can refer to the statue. We may assume Ovid had seen statues of the hermaphroditic type: "the number and quality of the extant copies substantiate that the Romans admired the figure"[14], and this may be responsible for the sculptural metaphor he uses to describe Hermaphroditus' body in contact with the water of the pool into which he plunges.

> As he raised first one arm and then the other, his body gleamed in the clear water, as if someone had encased an ivory statue or white lilies in transparent glass.[15]

[14] Pollitt, p. 149.

Confined to the orbit of representation, the hermaphrodite nonetheless shows a capacity to border and relate different representational forms. The complication of space involved in the hermaphroditic body which concurrently maps two potentialities, two outcomes, uncannily seems to transfer to the very representational space or domain in which the hermaphrodite is located. Thus, situated in one place, it will nonetheless suggest another also. One wonders, in fact, whether the hermaphrodite does not symbolise the passage or bridge which Pater, in 'The School of Giorgione', seems to intend in his use of the term *Anders-streben.*[16] The German word means literally 'other-striving'. Pater uses it thus:

> But although each art has thus its own specific order of impressions, and an untranslatable charm, while a just apprehension of the ultimate differences of the arts is the beginning of aesthetic criticism; yet it is noticeable that, in its special mode of handling its given material, each art may be observed to pass into the condition of some other art, by what German critics term an *Anders-streben* – a partial alienation from its own limitations, thorough which the arts are able, not indeed to supply the place of each other, but reciprocally to lend each other new forces.[17]

Pater then goes on to discuss the alliances between the various arts. Interestingly, poetry is linked by him to sculpture:

> poetry also, in many ways, finding guidance from the other arts, the analogy between a Greek tragedy and a work of Greek sculpture, between a sonnet and a relief, of French poetry generally with the art of engraving, being more than mere figures of speech[18].

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[15] *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, p. 112.

[16] Walter Pater, 'The School of Giorgione', in *The Renaissance*, (London, 1910), pp. 130-54.

[17] *Ibid.*, pp. 133-4.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 134.

The hermaphrodite, both a sculptural and literary topic, appears to become the means, or reify the means, by which this crossing of qualities is effected. It marks the point of a crossing, of incipient potentiality, of the one thing held within the field of the other. We shall see that this applies to more than the relation between the arts, but affects even the internal relations of a designated entity.

It is of interest also to consider how, historically, during the nineteenth century, the hermaphrodite comes to signify both one strain of thought, and then later, its antithesis. A. J. L. Busst devotes a scholarly essay, 'The Image of the Androgyne in the Nineteenth Century' to this very subject, and shows how a whole host of writers, philosophers, social theorists and artists claimed the androgyne or hermaphrodite as a symbolic representation of certain social, political, and æsthetic ideals.[19] I should intervene at this point to explain that Busst contends that the terms 'androgyne' and 'hermaphrodite' – not at that time clearly distinguished – were most often interchangeable, simply connoting a range of physical and psychical sex-type ambiguities. He writes:

> Rather than attempt to choose from or add to the already excessively long list of extremely doubtful distinctions, it is preferable to consider the two terms exactly synonymous by accepting their broadest possible meaning: a person who unites certain of the essential characteristics of both sexes and who, consequently, may be considered as both a man and a woman or as neither a man nor a woman, as bisexual or asexual.[20]

This running-together of categories seems lax in the light of modern physiological and psychological precision, but might explain why it is possible to read Swinburne's poem as belonging to the same genre as *La Fille aux yeux d'or*, even though today hermaphroditism and lesbianism would be discussed quite separately. Yet Busst adds an

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[19] A. J. L. Busst, 'The Image of the Androgyne in the Nineteenth Century', *Romantic Mythologies*, ed. Ian Fletcher (London, 1967), pp. 1-96.
[20] *Ibid.*, p. 1.

important footnote to his use of the word "synonymous": "Except, of course, when 'Hermaphrodite' with a capital letter is used as a proper name."[21] The proper name, as in 'Hermaphroditus', permits specificity. We are returned to the being described by Ovid with its peculiar physical condition. Furthermore, Swinburne's appended reference to another proper name, that of the Louvre, signals the statue and intimates that we are dealing with something which, in spite of its internal ambiguities, has concrete definition. These markers mean that it is both justifiable and necessary to read Swinburne's poem away from the generalisations about mixed-gender identity and see it as pointing to a determinate and precise, if puzzling, figure. Busst asserts that

> both exterior and interior sources of the image of the androgyne play little part in determining its meaning or value in any particular work[22].

Again this seems to except those cases where the image has been established with reference to the mythical being. Busst sees this utter variability of signification as responsible for the way in which two contradictory images of the androgyne dominated the nineteenth century:

> the one image is clearly optimistic and healthy, the other is pessimistic, unhealthy and decadent.[23]

This in turn is linked to a conception of 'a sign of the times':

> it may be said in a very general way that at the beginning of the century, in an age of optimism, the hermaphrodite was a symbol of optimism, and at the end of the century, in an age of pessimism and despair, the hermaphrodite was a symbol of pessimism.[24]

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[21] *Ibid.*, p. 86.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 10.
[23] *Ibid.*
[24] *Ibid.*, p. 10-11.

But if Busst attended more to the characteristics of the mythic hermaphrodite, it would be possible to view this variability as an effect of the figure itself. Ian Fletcher, presumably following Busst's article, concludes his brief analysis of Swinburne's poem with the words:

> Swinburne's response is poised between the optimism and pessimism that the hermaphrodite image generated in the nineteenth century[25]

and then quotes these lines as gloss:

> A strong desire begot on great despair,
> A great despair cast out by strong desire.[26]

But Swinburne has merely acknowledged what is already there in Ovid, his primary literary source. The myth itself, as Ovid narrates it, contains a contradiction. The story runs thus: Hermaphroditus the beautiful young son of Hermes and Aphrodite, is seen by the nymph Salmacis who immediately conceives a violent passion for him. He rejects her advances but she spies on him as he bathes, and attempts to seduce him. The couple struggle in the pool and Salmacis entreats the Gods not to separate them. Her prayers are answered and the two become united into

> a single form, possessed of a dual nature, which could not be called male or female, but seemed to be at once both and neither.[27]

At Hermaphroditus' request, his parents grant his prayer that should any man thereafter enter the pool,

> "may he depart hence no more than half a man, may he suddenly grow weak and effeminate at the touch of these waters."[28]

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[25] Ian Fletcher, *Swinburne*, Writers and their Work, n. s. no. 228, (London, 1973), p. 29.

[26] Fletcher does not give the reference which is 'Hermaphroditus' I.13-14. For the complete poem see *Swinburne's Collected Poetical Works*, I, 79-89.

[27] *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, p. 113.

[28] *Ibid.*

Ovid appears uncertain as to how this metamorphosis should be viewed. On the one hand the change is positive, a union granted as a favour of the gods; on the other, although Hermaphroditus is now meant to be incorporated with Salmacis into "a single form", he speaks of an injury done to him, that is, he retains the consciousness and identity of his former self.[29] This former self, seemingly imprisoned in another shape, regards the new state as a denigration and blight, and issues a curse; hermaphroditism is perceived as a misfortune. It may well be that if nineteenth century writers and thinkers were, in fact, more sensitive to the specific qualities of the hermaphrodite than Busst implies, then the diametrical swing from optimism to pessimism mimes the change in perception evidenced by the story. The hermaphrodite can prompt both these antithetical responses and they can either be held in tension; or alternatively, one of the responses may hold sway – to be replaced latterly by its opposite. The Busstian argument sees the figure of the hermaphrodite as subordinate to the tenor of expectation allowed by a particular era. But a view which respects the figure's productive force would see it as contributory; not just signifying a change in perspective, but involved in the way in which that change is brought about. In historical terms this is not the same as saying that the figure *per se* is responsible for that change. Rather that the figure is itself a bridge that allows for one tendency to turn into another. Although the figure may represent one point of view and then its opposite, it isn't definitively either of these view-points. Busst's position is that the figure does not possess any innate signification, but he misses the possibility of a more subtle line of thought: that the figure is the "neither" that allows it to be "both", or, to use a more critical

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[29] See *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, pp. 196-7, for Théophile Gautier's description of Théodore's beauty: "and yet I think that the feminine part is dominant in him, he has kept more of Salmacis than Hermaphroditus did in the *Metamorphoses*."

terminology, that whilst it does not itself signify in a determinate manner, it is a crucial signifying force, a generative period of suspension wherein impulses meet and cross into their opposites. The figure marks the moment of translation or, as with the Paterian *Anders-streben*, the moment of crossing. It is the figure of potentiality which is always more than just the single option, bordering on possibilities which could depart in totally divergent directions. The hermaphrodite figure is a stimulus, but it does not only cause response: it suspends it, introducing the possibility of turning it into its other. This suspension (which, while it lasts, forestalls the certainty of definition) governs the whole process. Thus the observer may in fact not be released into judgement or evaluation or meaning but may remain with his perception in suspension. Such a reaction appears to be the one J. J. Pollitt attempts to fathom in his discussion of the statue. What he writes is both useful gloss on the type of the statue and on its effects. He explains that hermaphrodite statues, especially of the sleeping type, were the most famous examples of late Hellenistic exotica dating from the second century B.C., and can be taken to be the *Hermaphroditusnobilis* mentioned by Pliny[30] - *nobilis* here meaning well-known rather than noble - originally the conception of the sculptor Polycles. Interestingly, Swinburne may have known something of this. In a footnote to his commentary on *Lesbia Brandon*, Randolph Hughes says that

> a reminiscence of Latouche's novel . . . occurs in a passage, towards the end of Chapter III, describing Herbert's beauty as he lay sleeping. '. . . a head to be caressed by Bacchus and carved by Polycles'. This Polycles (so little known in England that his name is not to be found in many standard books of reference such as Smith's *Smaller Classical Dictionary of Biography*) is the sculptor of the

[30] Pollitt, p. 149; Pliny, *Natural History*, XXXIV. 80. *Natural History*, ed. and tr. H. Rackham, 10 vols (London and Cambridge, Mass., 1962), IX (1952), 186: "*Polycles Hermaphroditum nobilem fecit*".

> statue of the Hermaphrodite which d'Hauteville, Fragoletta and another character see in Chapter IV of Latouche's book.[31]

Having established its historical background, Pollitt proceeds to ponder the sculpture's enigmatic significance, its "uneasy, seemingly tormented quality".

> The work was probably designed and positioned so that one saw first the sinuous female contours of its back and also, because of the extreme turn of the neck, its face. If one then asked who was this beautiful creature who sleeps so restlessly and walked around it in order to investigate further, the answer would come as a typically Hellenistic theatrical surprise. Tossing and twisting with . . . uneasy sleep . . . he is an ominously strange apparition. What is the meaning of such a work? . . . it does not seem simply to be a rococo joke. Perhaps it is a serious votive connected to a fertility cult. Hermaphroditic figures have a long history in the eastern Mediterranean, particularly in the cult of Apollo on Cyprus. Or does it express a complex psychological and philosophical view of the psyche, the Platonic idea that on a spiritual level the natures we call female and male become one? Is it an expression of the same instinct that led Hellenistic artists to give an increasingly effeminate form to the gods Apollo and Dionysos? . . . the significance and function of the Hermaphrodite are enigmas.[32]

Gautier in his famous description of the hermaphrodite also treats this failure of definition.

> For someone who worships only form, there is no more pleasant uncertainty than the one you are cast into by the sight of this back, these ambiguous loins, these legs which are so delicate and strong that you don't know if you should attribute them to Mercury about to take flight or to Diana coming from her bathe. . . . the whole body has about it something nebulous and vague which it is impossible to render, something which has an extraordinary attraction.[33]

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[31] Hughes, p. 401. Hughes is, of course, writing in 1952. Information about Polykles is now more widely available.

[32] Pollitt, p. 149.

[33] *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, pp. 196-7.

Furthermore, Gautier's poem 'Contralto' in which he uses the statue as an analogue for the rich ambiguities of the contralto voice (he was said to be inspired by the singer Ernesta Grisi), explicitly refers to suspension of judgement:

> *Est-ce un jeune homme? est-ce une femme,*
> *Une déesse, ou bien un dieu?*
> *L'amour, ayant peur d'être infâme,*
> *Hésite et suspend son aveu.*
> (2.4-8.)

The note of query that characterises all of these pieces as it does Swinburne's poem, is one of the identifying marks that indicate the presence and influence of the hermaphrodite.

Gautier's poem is also of interest because it involves a translation or crossing. The speaker declares that his caprice (his obsession with the sculpture) lingers on without owning its self-deception.

> *Mais seulement il se transpose,*
> *Et, passant de la forme au son,*
> *Trouve dans sa métamorphose*
> *La jeune fille et le garçon.*
> (9.33-36.)

Swinburne himself makes a similar acknowledgement - that his poem is a transposition - in another context: his reply to the censorious reviewers of *Poems and Ballads I* in 'Notes on Poems and Reviews'.[34] 'Hermaphroditus' had been one of the poems most strongly condemned. John Morley in his anonymous *Saturday Review* article of 4 August 1866, an article which it is claimed

> created the public uproar against *Poems and Ballads*, which led to the demand that both poet and publisher should be prosecuted for

[34] 'Notes on Poems and Reviews', in *Swinburne Replies*, ed. Clyde K. Hyder (New York, 1966), pp. 15-32.

> obscenity[35].

was of the opinion that

> The only comfort about the present volume is that such a piece as 'Anactoria' will be unintelligible to a great many people, and so will the fevered folly of 'Hermaphroditus', as well as much else that is nameless and abominable.[36]

Morley's article was responsible not only for the temporary suppression of *Poems and Ballads I* (ended only by the transferral of publishing rights from Moxon to Hotten), but directly provoked Swinburne's vindication. The passage that Swinburne devotes to his defence of 'Hermaphroditus' is of critical value because it confirms the importance of the æsthetic within the poem.

Commentators have felt that Swinburne's defence of his poem is thoroughly disingenuous, that his account of the poem is a cover for deliberate outrage. However, as Woodberry, one of Jerome McGann's recreated Swinburne critics, explains in his contribution to an imagined critical symposium:

> the fact is that the sonnets do treat the subject Swinburne has described. They do other things as well, of course – they outrage public morality, for example – but then *Notes on Poems and Reviews* is itself just such a piece of honest impudence. The passage . . . not only accurately details the aesthetic subject of 'Hermaphroditus'; it repeats, even more accurately the provocation which the poem had initiated. For this reason did reviewers of *Notes on Poems and Reviews* denounce Swinburne as an unrepentant sinner.[37]

Swinburne's defence is fascinating in its constant resource to the notion of translation; a notion inextricably connected with the figure of the hermaphrodite, who thus comes to

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[35] Philip Henderson, *Swinburne: Portrait of a Poet* (New York, 1974), p. 118.

[36] John Morley, 'Mr Swinburne's New Poems', reprinted in *Swinburne: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Clyde K. Hyder (London, 1970), pp. 22-29; p. 24.

[37] Jerome J. McGann, *Swinburne: An Experiment in Criticism* (Chicago, London, 1972), p. 205.

preside over even those parts of an argument which might not seen to acknowledge 'him' directly.

Plainly the hermaphrodite theme in itself does have a sexual pertinence. It is a scandal to (some) Victorian readers because it introduces such forbidden topics as sexual desire, the body and the body's sexual characteristics. And certainly other writers do exploit this, using the figure to express an indulgent voluptuousness. A. J. L. Busst, while admitting the hermaphrodite is a wholly cerebral and artistic device, contends:

> It must not be thought, however, that because it is the product of the mind, it is removed from sexuality or from lasciviousness.[38]

But Swinburne's provocation in his poem, and then again in his essay, consists precisely in his assertion that the hermaphrodite as represented, translated from conception to form, refines the type from any lasciviousness and makes it perfectly suitable material for artistic depiction:

> The theory of God splitting in two the double archetype of man and woman, the original hermaphrodite which had to get itself bisected into female and male, is repulsive and ridiculous enough. But the idea thus incarnate, literal or symbolic, is merely beautiful.[39]

The provocation comes not in the promulgation of qualities offensive to conventional decency, or even in the declaration that such a topic is a fit subject for art. It comes in the far more subtle argument that the translative power of art, in removing the subject to a purely æsthetic realm, redeems it from any charge of impropriety. While Swinburne no doubt did relish the prospect of using a theme that very probably would disconcert certain readers, his work does not dwell on this. The poem can be

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[38] Busst, p. 42.

[39] 'Notes on Poems and Reviews', *Swinburne Replies*, p. 28.

read as an extremely skilful attempt to convert that initial prejudice or disconcertment into æsthetic pleasure. The poem's title certainly and perhaps mischievously arouses the expectation of a sexually provocative theme, but the poem, like the hermaphrodite itself, deals with a remove from the sexual sphere. For the reader who allows the suspension of moral judgement, the poem's value is primarily artistic. Swinburne succeeds in promoting the hermaphrodite, already an imaginative and cerebral form, as a further translation from the empirical or experiential sphere of quotidian convention to an arena of predominantly æsthetic response. Here the laws of the former sphere have little force. However, having said this, Swinburne provides yet another twist to the poem and his readers' expectations in that an erotic element is subtly reinstated in the last sonnet in the sequence, but in a manner very different to pure sensationalism. We will see how he does this later on, and how it can only be effective for those who make the initial translation demanded. Only those who resist this attempt at translation can remain fixed with the presupposition of indecency:

> Treated in the grave and chaste manner as a serious "thing of beauty", to be for ever applauded and enjoyed, it can give no offence but to the purblind and the prurient.[40]

A reader who comes to Swinburne's poem hoping for sensationalistic pleasure will surely be disappointed. The Swinburnian emphasis on form, complexity of language, syntax and imagery, remove it from that orbit; the achievement is poetic and not sensationalist, *risqué*, or hedonistic. Bulwer- Lytton is on the right track - if latterly off-set - when he remarks of *Poems and Ballads I* in August 1866 that

> the beauty of diction and masterpiece of craft in melodies really at first so dazzled me, that I did not

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

see the naughtiness till pointed out.[41]

The other translation mentioned in the defence is akin to the transposition from form to sound Gautier described. Swinburne is of course describing the move from statue to poem.

A reader might very well wonder just how important *is* the statue to Swinburne's poem. In terms of concrete reference it would seem – not very much. It would be quite possible to make a first reading of the poem without knowing that it is inspired by the statue. There are very few allusions to sculptural detail. The moments when the poem does seem to be touching on sculptural feature –

> Of all things tired thy lips look weariest,
> Save the long smile that they are wearied of
> (I.3-4),
>
> Thy gracious eyes that never made a tear
> (IV.5),

– can also be construed as winsome conceit, the sophisticated love-language of the sonneteer in address to an impassive object of desire. Certainly the combination of sonneteering convention and covert reference to the statue is archly ingenious, making the texture of the poem exceedingly rich, and helps contribute, as we shall see, to the increasingly fraught question of identity.

Randolph Hughes, however, is so convinced of the statue's unimportance as to say

> Of course, the inspiration from Gautier and Latouche may have been reinforced by the piece of sculpture in the Louvre; but the influence of the latter is no more than secondary.[42]

There are problems with this position. Although Hughes implies the appended note "*Au Musée de Louvre*" (he quotes it without the

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[41] Edward Bulwer-Lytton, letter of 20 August 1866 to his son Robert, reprinted in Hyder, *Swinburne: The Critical Heritage*, p. 125.
[42] Hughes, note 1, p. 412.

date) is simply an afterthought, it does form part of the poem. Swinburne wishes to indicate a definite time and place which can only point towards the famous statue. Secondly, while Swinburne revered Gautier and other French masters, it is significant that he does not mention them directly in his essay. When he does mention a literary source, it is, as will be shown, from quite another tradition. This is not to deny the influence of 'Contralto' upon Swinburne's poem. Swinburne appears to make deliberate and graceful allusion to Gautier's piece. For example:

> *On dirait ce corps indécis*
> *Fondu, dans l'eau de la fontaine,*
> *Sous les baisers de Salmacis*
> (5.22-24)

compares very closely with

> Beneath the woman's and the water's kiss
> Thy moist limbs melted into Salmacis
> (IV.10-11),

but the general form, movement and tendency of the two poems seem quite distinct. Gautier's poem is much lighter than 'Hermaphroditus', which is a far more densely worked piece of writing. Futhermore, evident, self-conscious or complimentary indebtedness is most often a far less crucial factor in determining a poem's significance than those debts of influence which remain more obscure. These are all the more to be reckoned with because of the way they have been so successfully assimilated.

A third reason for refuting Hughes is that – as I shall show – Swinburne makes much of the hermaphrodite as statue in his essay. Finally, it should be noted that Hughes reads 'Hermaphroditus' as just another entry in the general catalogue of sexual ambiguity with which he glosses *Lesbia Brandon*. In such a catalogue the particularity of the statue isn't likely to count for much. This present

study attempts to make clear why the poem should not be read in this way.

ii. The Hermaphrodite as Sculpture and Translation

In the essay Swinburne uses the device of the sculpture and the sculpture's relation to his poem in a number of very suggestive ways. The statue is important because as material, representational form it is the most literal "incarnation" of the idea. ("But the idea thus incarnate, literal or symbolic, is merely beautiful.") The statue, famed as a work of art, seems to be the embodiment of the æsthetic impulse: "the delicate divinity of this work has always drawn towards it the eyes of artists and poets."[43] Swinburne's sacramental language remakes incarnational doctrine:

> Sculpture I knew was a dead art, buried centuries deep out of sight, with no angel keeping watch over the sepulchre; its very grave-clothes divided by wrangling and impotent sectaries, and no chance anywhere visible of a resurrection. I knew that belief in the body was the secret of sculpture[44].

Swinburne, in a typically art for art's sake gesture, translates religious language and concepts into æsthetic usage. Translation itself can be a religious concept denoting the movement of the saint's body from one sphere to another – that is the earthly to the heavenly – without death. The word specifically treats the body, that is, the preservation and endurance of the body, throughout the movement of passage. In an era which fights shy of bodily matters, Swinburne cunningly plays on embodiment and the sanctity of the body by using the very language that vindicates interest in the corporeal, namely sacramental language. Also, he daringly invokes

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[43] 'Notes on Poems and Reviews', *Swinburne Replies*, p. 27.
[44] *Ibid.*

another kind of translation which has a religious correlate: the materialising of an idea into concrete form which thus parallels the Christic Word being made flesh. The hermaphrodite as "delicate divinity"[45] becomes the ultimate figure of this supreme translation being both the æsthetic impulse and the æsthetic end, a translation and the figure of and for translation: that is, a figure which promotes further translating. The work of art which is the statue ensures the continuance of the hermaphroditic figure in its influence on artists and poets who translate it into their own media and designs. The generative effect of the hermaphrodite is found in this endurance and continuance across a series of transformations. Ovid, we may presume with a recollection of the scuptural form, writes a narrative which then includes a statuary metaphor. Whether a statue does or does not, in fact, lie behind at least part of the narrative, the story alludes to another kind of æsthetic depiction in its mention of the sculpture. We move from one æsthetic form to another in what could be deemed an alternating pattern of translation. Furthermore, Hermaphroditus' inauspicious last speech, triggers off another series of effects as future bathers in the pool come to share in something of his condition.

In Swinburne's case, so his defence reads, the statue inspires artists and poets and is translated by them. These translations then influence other artists. Swinburne, himself influenced by a statue and various literary sources, produces a poem, translates it into the critical prose of his vindication, and promises the possibility of more production: "I cannot see why this statue should not be the text for yet another poem."[46] Whether he refers to a future work of his own or that of a fellow writer is not clear. But, by this statement, he leaves the way open for the hermaphrodite to continue exerting its power.

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[45] *Ibid.*

[46] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

The persuasive and pervading force of the figure is felt most strongly in the defence at that moment when Swinburne himself directly invokes the terminology of translation. He has already in an earlier part of the essay alluded to translation, and in such a way as to demonstrate he had a subtle understanding of the problems involved. Discussing the difficulties of a translation from one language to another, in this case Greek to English, he employs the synonym "traduce" on two occasions:

> Catullus "translated" – or as his countrymen would now say "traduced" – the Ode to Anactoria – Εἰς Ἔρωμέναν: a more beautiful translation there never was and never will be[47].

> Now the ode Εἰς Ἔρωμέναν – the "Ode to Anactoria" (as it is named by tradition) . . . has been twice at least translated or "traduced".[48]

The synonym, itself emphasised as a translation from Latin – and the effects of the process tend to multiply as can be seen in the irresistible urge to render back into Greek the English title – means 'to translate', and yet also, 'to misrepresent'. In this instance of translation in particular, Swinburne implies that misrepresentation is a lamentable necessity: Sappho's poem, however admirable the translator's craft, is only its authentic self and true in its effects in its original and unmediated form. But in a wider context 'misrepresentation' is also an acknowledgement of the inevitability – lamentable or otherwise – of creative distortion and alteration in any translative pattern. To return to the specific discussion of 'Hermaphroditus', consider the complexities of the following statement:

> I am not the first who has translated into written verse this sculptured poem: another before me, as he says, has more than once "caressed it with a sculptor's love."[49]

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[47] *Ibid.*, p. 20.
[48] *Ibid.*

The crossings here are many. Swinburne, anticipating Pater, makes us think of the *Anders-streben* of poetry and sculpture.[50] But this relation is not just confined to a projected mapping from one domain to another. The language Swinburne uses reveals as already acknowledged the grounds for analogy and exchange. "Written verse" is crossed with the phrase "this sculptured poem" representing the statue. Swinburne's terms of description should not be dismissed as fanciful. Not only does "sculptured poem" insist on the relation between the arts and the notion of translation, but in this specific instance it is an extremely apt way of describing the statue's complex literary status. For the statue is already literary at the same time as it is concrete. The phrase refers us to Swinburne's poetic precursors without whose poems the statue and his own poem would not exist. Relations between literature and the statue are so intricate that the very idea of the statue is innately textual, and the statue cannot appear without evoking its literary treatment; a phenomenon which reminds us of the series of correspondences in Ovid's account. The phrase "sculptured poem" points to an awareness of how the statue is incorporated in a structure of translation that precedes any further initiative to translate on Swinburne's behalf. (As he says: "I am not the first . . . .") Swinburne, in impressing the implicit nature of the translation - he takes for granted the Paterian position - makes a linguistic translation of the order of synonymy; "verse" is set against "poem" where the difference - between a written and a sculpted artefact - has been traduced as coincidence by the poetic means of metaphor. Complete coincidence is of course a conceit that Swinburne employs to stress what he regards as evident: the

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[49] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

[50] Swinburne's essay appeared in 1866 and may have influenced Pater's thought. 'The School of Giorgione' was first published in the *Fortnightly Review* 1877, and was not included in *The Renaissance* until the third edition of 1888.

prior and pre-emptive crossing between writing and sculpture, or rather the "written" and the "sculptured".

The cross-referencing induces for the reader Swinburne's powerful perception in which contraries or divergent elements are realised as a simultaneity. Likewise, the strangely alternating genealogy that Swinburne, after Ovid, ascribes to his subject ends in a typically hermaphroditic moment of double perspective. The poet indicates the backward view over the past which has led us to the present moment as well as making plain the potential for future translation. Randolph Hughes' remarks about the statue show him to be completely unaware of its innate relevance to Swinburne's idiosyncratic powers of vision. For Hughes the statue is simply a literary device of the most limited kind; as a sculpture, its "influence . . . is no more than secondary." But the idea of the statue as statue is certainly important to Swinburne, as his essay and the appended note to the poem make clear. While it is true to say that the poem can only come into being because of a lineage of statue poems, the complication of statue with poem leading to a fused focus is precisely what engages this poet. Swinburne emphasises that, in this instance, writing and sculpture are so thoroughly convolved that it would be extremely difficult to split them into separate influences. The hermaphrodite, caught between the sexes, being, as Ovid said, "both and neither", seems caught also between the arts.[51] It becomes the perfect figure for a way of looking that is Swinburne's own. The effects produced by this figure lodged at the heart of poem and prose, cause us not only to look in different directions, but to see two highly diverse things or forms superimposed, even in the process of translating into each other. At this point we touch on that kind of perception glossed in the two quotations which head this

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[51] *Metamorphoses*, IV. 378-9. The Latin text reads: "*nec duo sunt et forma duplex, nec femina dici/ nec puer ut possit, neutrumque et utrumque videntur.*" *Metamorphoses*, tr. Frank Justus Miller, Loeb Classical Library, 2 vols (London and Cambridge Mass., 1916-84), I (3rd ed. rev. G. P. Gould , 1977), 204.

chapter. We encounter the overlay of "phantasmata" Hopkins spoke of, and the " 'or-or' structure of low-level vision" Ehrenzweig proposes; a vision "not forced to make a choice between contradicting patterns but which holds them in a single glance." The tenor of the two quotations demonstrates the different way in which this kind of perception is itself perceived. Hopkins is an acute critic and a difficult poet in his own right, who learnt much, in spite of his stated reservations, from Swinburne. His perception of what is happening in Swinburne's poetry is quite accurate even though his tone is one of censure and disapproval. Swinburne certainly does not "see nature"; he isn't at all interested in the faithful depiction of the natural world, the verisimilitude of particularised detail. And so there is no picture as such; or at least nothing that Hopkins will let himself identify as picture. For we deal not so much with the concise outlines of determinate images, but with that stage when outline cannot clearly be deduced, when the image is in the very process of emergence and fusion. Swinburne intensifies concentration on this stage, which in another poet might be fleeting, by letting free multiple energies of more than one possible image to focus on. This suggestion of several potentialities emerging from essentially inchoate form, ensures that readerly attention is not directed to any specific detail, but is spaced out and scattered. One attends not to the identification of complete images but to the process of their generation. It is this lack of definition that Hopkins resists. He refuses to take part in the kind of reading Swinburne's poetry offers; for him the irresolution of picture does not or is not allowed to satisfy. The absorption into the suspenseful process of emergence, the play of the mind over potentiality and suggestion, and the release of the mind from judgement: the necessity to apprise, define, quantify, is not understood as a valid alternative to the formal strictures of classical representation. Ehrenzweig's

response however, although made in relation to the visual arts and not literature, both recognises and is in sympathy with this quality exerted by Swinburne's poetry.

The pressure of all this is that Swinburne's poetry demands a fairly strenuous engagement in a critical and æsthetic process; one is not simply asked to admire a finished product but to actively submit one's mind to prolonged involvement in a process it may normally by-pass or elide in the straightforward impulse to impose coherency and order. One is challenged to set aside this impulse and to discover another type of pleasure, that accorded the reader who participates in the very shaping and evolution of an æsthetic creation. It should be stressed that *in essence* there is nothing particularly revolutionary about such a prescription; it is doubtless that, solicited in different ways, by the assiduous reading of any demanding poet. The distinction here is the especial stress accorded to characteristics which in Swinburne's work are exaggerated or emphasised to an unusual degree. But the pleasure and intellectual enjoyment do not differ in kind from the sorts of satisfaction described by Francis Jeffrey and Coleridge respectively:

> The higheſt delight which poetry produces, does not ariſe from the mere paſſive perception of the images or ſentiments which it preſents to the mind, but from the excitement which is given to its own eternal activity[52].
>
> The grandest efforts of poetry are where the imagination is called forth, not to produce a distinct form, but a strong working of the mind[53].

Coleridge's "strong working of the mind" is important; the activity required is a critical one, not self-indulgent or wilfully subjective.

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[52] Francis Jeffrey, *Edinburgh Review*, XIV (1809), 2, cited in Roy Park's excellent article '*Ut Pictura Poesis*: The Nineteenth Century Aftermath',*JAAC* 28, pp. 155-164; 158. Reference expanded and original typography restored.

[53] S. T. Coleridge, *Shakespearean Criticism*, ed. T. M. Raysor, 2 vols (London, 1930), II, 138, cited in Park, p. 159.

The type of reading is not an invitation to do away with meaning; it is an alternative discipline. The mind might be given wider range and less restriction, but only so it can devote more attention to the collection of discoveries it makes.

These pronouncements concerning Swinburne and the need for critical reading could equally well be made about his precursor, the poet whose influence he alludes to in 'Notes on Poems and Reviews'. For while Swinburne's commentators cite the importance of the French tradition, a tradition that he loved and did much to further, he himself implies that a substantial influence is to be found on home-ground. In somewhat surprising contradistinction to names associated with the Æsthetic and Decadent Movements, we are given that of Shelley: "another before me, as he says, has more than once 'caressed it with a sculptor's love.'" Clyde K. Hyder, the editor of this essay, remarks that the citation has not been found in Shelley although both 'The Witch of Atlas' and 'Lines Connected with Epipsychidion' contain references to the hermaphrodite; "that sweet marble monster of both sexes" as Shelley has it in the later source.[54] Swinburne quotes a complete stanza of Shelley's 'The Witch of Atlas' in his own footnotes with the ironic comment that begins: "But Shelley had not studied purity in the school of reviewers".[55]

Swinburne, as we know, revered Shelley and was always flattered by any comparison drawn between their work. But there are some particular things about 'The Witch of Atlas' that may have interested him. Shelley does not follow Ovid, but uses the image of the hermaphrodite to make his own myth of artistic creation. The Witch fashions the hermaphrodite as a companion and helmsman for her boat. In his description of her modelling the form, Shelley does however allude to Ovid in a mention of the story of Pygmalion.[56]

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[54] *Swinburne Replies*, note 28 , pp. 108-9.
[55] *Ibid.*, p. 28.
[56] *Metamorphoses*, pp. 252-253.

The metamorphosis related in that story is an intriguing parallel: a beautiful statue is brought to life by the desire of the sculptor. Once more it is a myth of artistic creation which uses a sculptural figure. The artist uses the statue to incorporate and vivify his desire.

> Then by strange art she kneaded fire and snow
> Together, . . .
> And a fair Shape out of her hands did flow–
> A living Image, which did far surpass
> In beauty that bright shape of vital stone
> Which drew the heart out of Pygmalion.
> (XXXV.321-22, 325-28.)[57]

In this allusion to the Pygmalion myth, and in the next stanza I shall quote – the one Swinburne himself cites – it is, significantly, the Shape which exerts a pressure on its creator. Shelley indicates that it is the Shape as form or conception which affects the artist; he reverses the normal order of things. In this stanza "that bright shape" is completed form; Pygmalion falls in love with the finished work which exercises its power over him. However, the following stanza, in its ambiguity of syntax, is the more unusual in its reversal. I quote the last three lines:

> The countenance was such as might select
> Some artist, that his skill should never die,
> Imaging forth such perfect purity.
> (XXXVI.334-36.)[58]

Because both "artist" and "countenance" can be the subject of "select", there is suggested a tension and complication in the creative process. What comes first or is pre-existent? Even if one privileges "artist" as subject, there is still the slight oddity of "select", as if the "countenance" chosen were already an entity before its manufacture. This reading, the less radical one, still ensures the primacy of the conceptual and the ideal in Shelleyan

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[57] 'The Witch of Atlas', *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 357.
[58] *Ibid.*, p. 358.

æsthetics. If one chooses "countenance" as subject – and such a choice seems the preferred one because of its heading position in the sentence – the effect is much more uncanny. We are back to the strangeness of Shelleyan "countenance": a dynamic space which pre-exists its features and could be limned variously. According to both readings, countenance is temporally in position before its subsequent treatment by the artist, who then translates it into form. Furthermore, the effects of the countenance transformed into image, images, or a process of "imaging forth", are serial and continuous. Encountered once more is the motif of the hermaphrodite who ensures its own continuance; it is the hermaphrodite, or here more specifically the hermaphroditic countenance (something, we recall, which can't perfectly be construed as either male or female, being indeterminate) that has primacy. It is the hermaphrodite who incarnates and perpetuates the skill of the artist, and to whom the artist owes his enduring reputation.

Shelley's version of the hermaphrodite story is also a myth of genesis occurring, as it does, within the wider context of a creation narrative, with the witch as presiding 'deity' or power. This genesis is one that again disturbs normative conceptions of time. In his description of its nascence, Shelley uses words that imply an ageing process, like "growth" and "developed"; and yet, this maturation is somehow simultaneous with the creature's coming into being. The phrase "full youth" pinpoints this oddness. The hermaphrodite's age can be only an assigned quality, an attribute of design and not of experience. It seems likely that Shelley is thinking of representational sculpture where narrative is subsumed into the essential body and identity of the statue. One characteristic 'frame' is the summation of a previous history and narrative. In the case of the hermaphrodite we know this to be especially apt as the marks of his

fate are intrinsically part of his body. The hermaphrodite as statue is his own story, and implicitly bespeaks a myth of genesis and origins. The history of his coming-into-being cannot be separated from what we now see before us. One thinks of the plea of Salmacis that the two shall not be divided.

Swinburne can be seen to use Shelley's myth of genesis as a genetic source for his own poem. He becomes in his turn the Shelleyan artist who translates the hermaphrodite once more, and his creation owes its birth-pangs to an earlier Shelleyan labour. Both poets describe the hermaphrodite with very little specific detail. There are various reasons for this. Neither poet is given to extensive use of referential detail. Shelley, especially, leans towards an abstract vocabulary concerned with essence. The hermaphrodite can very easily be added to that list of Shelleyan shapes (like the "shape all light" in 'The Triumph of Life'), which are, in point of fact, shapeless or lacking definition. Shelley's vision of the hermaphrodite, rather than homing-in on finer details of form, deals with essential qualities. Only the "wings" crucial to the piloting of the Witch's boat, and apparently Shelley's own invention, are discussed at any length. Shelley's reference to the sexual nature of the hermaphrodite is brief, and hardly explicit:

> A sexless thing it was, and in its growth
> It seemed to have developed no defect
> Of either sex, yet all the grace of both
> (XXXVI.329-331).

Whilst we cannot tell precisely how Shelley understood the creature to be composed, the implication of asexuality, which runs through Swinburne's poem also, seems clearly marked. Both poems resist strongly the debates upon homosexuality and bisexuality that critics wish upon Swinburne's 'Hermaphroditus'.[59]

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[59] Morse Peckham, *Beyond the Tragic Vision* (New York,1962); *Victorian Revolutionaries* (New York, 1970); ed. *Poems and Ballads* (Indianapolis and New York, 1970); Douglas C. Fricke, 'Swinburne and the Plastic Arts in *Poems and Ballads I* (1866)', in *Pre-Raphaelite Review* (Nov. 1977), I, 57-79.

Notably, the few physical details Swinburne alludes to in his poem are those mentioned also by Shelley: eyes, lips, limbs, and the expressions – sighs, tears, and smiles. In fact Swinburne is even less descriptive than Shelley. "I knew that belief in the body was the secret of sculpture": it does, at first, seem strange that after a statement of this kind there should be so little physical description. And yet, and this is once more to see where twentieth century critics have erred in their reading of the poem, such a view discounts the aims of Hellenistic sculpture, and both poets' recognition of those aims.

Shelley, we know, was familiar with Winckelmann and the main tenets of his neo-classical theory of Greek sculpture.[60] He would have sympathised with its essentialist bias: the presentation of ideal form without idiosyncrasy, without the quotidian and peculiar real.

> The ideality of the art of sculpture – each object presenting beauty or passion in an immortal abstraction from all that is temporary and accidental – appealed in a peculiar degree to Shelley's imagination.[61]

Here is Pater, a year after the publication of *Poems and Ballads I*, in his essay 'Winckelmann' (1867).

> In proportion as the art of sculpture ceased to be merely decorative, and subordinate to architecture, it threw itself upon pure form.[62]

Pater adds later that in choosing

> from a select number of types intrinsically interesting . . . Sculpture finds the secret of its power in presenting these types, in their broad, central, incisive lines. This it effects not by an

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[60] Frederic S. Colwell, 'Shelley on Sculpture: The Uffizi Notes', *Keats-Shelley Journal* 28 (1979), 59-77.

[61] Edward Dowden ,*The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2 vols (London,1886), II, 283.

[62] Pater, 'Winckelmann', *The Renaissance*, pp. 177-232; 212.

> accumulation of detail, but by abstracting from it. All that is accidental, all that distracts the simple effect upon us of the supreme types of humanity, all traces in them of the commonness of the world, it gradually purges away.[63]

One deduces that the further translation from sculpture into poetry, requiring another refinement of form under a very different set of coordinates and directives, is to blur even those "broad, central, incisive lines".[64] It also becomes apparent that the body represented as ideal, a perfected composite of types, not real, not properly mimetic, has extreme consquences for any notion of sexuality. Here is Pater again:

> The beauty of the Greek statues was a sexless beauty: the statues of the gods had the least traces of sex. Here there is a moral sexlessness, a kind of ineffectual wholeness of nature, yet with a true beauty and significance of its own.[65]

Winckelmann himself says that the effect of compounding the refined forms of several types or models to make an ideal gives the body a superhuman quality:

> for beauties as great as any of those which art has ever produced can be found singly in nature, but, in the entire figure, nature must yield the palm to art.[66]

The body itself becomes removed from sexuality, though not, of course, necessarily from the *desire* of the onlooker. The creation of hermaphroditic statues is therefore understood not to be an overloading of a figure with sexual traits, but a further abstraction and idealisation. The most lovely characteristics of both sexes are

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63 *Ibid.*, pp. 215-6.

64 We might usefully refer to Frederic S. Colwell's remarks in his article 'Shelley on Sculpture', p. 72: "it is in this crucial aspect . . . that Shelley's apostasy from Neoclassicism asserts itself: his unwillingness to affirm the rigid doctrine of clean outline and linear contour."

65 *Ibid.*, pp. 220-21.

66 Johann Winckelmann, 'Art among the Greeks', in *Winckelmann: Writings on Art*, ed. David Irwin (London, 1972), p. 121.

combined to give a supreme ideal:

> In this respect the ancient artists have risen to the ideal, not only in the conformation of the face, but also in the youthful figures of certain gods, as Apollo and Bacchus. This ideal consists in the incorporation of the forms of prolonged youth in the female sex with the masculine forms of a beautiful young man, which they consequently made plumper, rounder, and softer in admirable conformity with their ideas of their deities. For to some of these the ancients gave both sexes, blended with a mystic significance in one.[67]

Hermaphroditism as a high ideal is ultimate æsthetic form, and its removal from the forms of the real world gives it added allure and mystery. Swinburne is thoroughly at one with Winckelmann when he declares "the idea thus incarnate, literal or symbolic, is merely beautiful." The hermaphrodite is sculptural form at its most ideal.

John D. Rosenberg in his 1967 article on Swinburne says of him, "At times he is nearly a blind poet"[68]. Rosenberg doesn't intend this as denigration, adding:

> His poetry moves away from the art of painting and toward the art of music: after reading Swinburne one retains not an image but a tonality and a rhythm.[69]

This is an echo of the Paterian claim that "*All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music.*"[70] Yet Rosenberg's assertion comes dangerously near to that kind of critical judgement that reduces Swinburne to a monotonously sweet singer. "He is a reed through which all things blow into music", said Tennyson.[71] It is possible to avoid this reduction by considering carefully Rosenberg's initial charge of 'blindness' as something constitutive in Swinburne's

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[67] *Ibid.*, p. 121.
[68] John D. Rosenberg, 'Swinburne', in *VS* 11 (December1967), 131-152; 131.
[69] *Ibid.*, p. 131.
[70] Pater, 'The School of Giorgione', *The Renaissance*, p. 135.
[71] Hallam Tennyson,*Alfred, Lord Tennyson: AMemoir by His Son*, 2 vols (London, 1897), II, 285.

poetic practice.

Rosenberg uses the idea of blindness in opposition to what he recognises as fidelity to detail. Drawing an analogy with painting, and specifically with the exactitude of much Pre-Raphaelite art, he sees the other major Victorian poets illustrate what Swinburne does not, namely the impulse "to etch in words."[72] But Rosenberg's conception of painting and its relation to poetry is very literal-minded. This kind of painterly representation is only one kind among many others, just as in poetry imagistic mimesis is only one device among others. Rosenberg doesn't acknowledge other qualities involved in picture-making – such as the way space is mapped – or consider types of art-work wherein perception is constructed by its attempts to engage with what is barely perceptible, namely, the emergence of the image. If one is not trained or alert to this kind of movement, it will seem like a sort of blindness; indeed next to the gratifications of a recuperative vision concerned with verisimilar picture, it will, in its refusal and denial of familiar scene, be a blindness. To see 'what is going on' in Swinburne's verse is to adopt a positive blindness. One will not see with that kind of sight that confers easy recognitions and identifications; indeed, one will not see very much according to the sights of conventional perception at all. One is positively blind because, in a sense, the poetry asks one not to see. This asking, in part a deprivation of normative vision, is simultaneously endorsement of what happens in this kind of reading. Blindness becomes involved in the construction of what is registered. The reader meets with and sees blind spots, inexplicable moments when it is impossible to deduce clearly what is taking place. He is confronted with blindness.

In Chapter I, we were arrested by Shelley's use of the term "unsculptured image". The "unsculptured image" pre-exists

[72] Rosenberg, p. 131.

defined image, and, as something in the process of becoming, it is complicit with the rawer energies of poetic space. Perception in Shelley is formed as process. What we must survey in Shelley's poetry is the passage of the perception process as it is constructed by the perceptible, where the perceptible is not specifically a 'thing', but the locus and generative source of perception. The "unsculptured image" is the indefinable, scarcely perceptible core or ground that helps construct perception in Shelley and Swinburne's poetry. It can be thought of in the way I have described, as a shaping process, but it can also be localised, in that certain discrete images depend on a hidden ground, on a power at a further remove, which generates what is received by sight but can't itself be conclusively traced. And to the extent that Shelley and Swinburne draw on this power, their images remain unassimilable to a mimetic æsthetic. In the projection of the image, there is a shifting from unsculpture to sculpture, as contour and feature are to some degree generated by what is not itself strictly imaginable but "images forth". There is then a point in this focus which baffles the eye. One is concentrated upon something which cannot wholly be seen, and this not-seeing it, this seeing of blindness, is part of the reading.

Certain of Shelley's hall-mark images, that is, his reflexive images, make contact with this properly non-visible ground. These images have the curious appearance of originating from themselves: there is no clear referent. Such an image as the following, taken from 'Alastor', seems concentred on itself:

> at the sound he turned
> And saw by the warm light of their own life
> Her glowing limbs beneath the sinuous veil
> (*ll.*174-76)[73].

Yet it can be postulated that these images, which are not dependent

[73] 'Alastor', in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, pp. 74-75.

on a referent outside themselves, directly partake of contact with the productive force I have just described. Once such a force is posited, what appeared self-generative and *ex nihilo* is suddenly seen to be, in fact, rather more nakedly in communion with the very generative powers of imaging than more regular images. A primary veiling of sight – the enigma of origin in self-reference – gives way to clarification through the realised directness of the relation. Shelley's lyric 'To a Sky-lark' is a commentary, almost a parody, of this process of generation.[74] The bird, like each of the main correlates in the series of analogies Shelley draws, is out of sight; it can only be heard. It is the effects and qualities, the productions of the hidden producers, that are accessible. The "poet", "maiden", "glow-worm" and "rose" are themselves off-limits and cannot be seen, but generate something of themselves which can actually be apprised:

> Like a glow-worm golden
> In a dell of dew,
> Scattering unbeholden
> Its aerial hue
> Among the flowers and grass which screen it from the view
> (*ll.*46-50).

Whilst it would be foolhardy to make in passing some generalised statement that is supposedly applicable to every instance of Shelley's reflexive imagery – it's a wide topic that needs very careful treatment in its own right – it is nonetheless possible to regard certain examples as being produced by the process described above. Such reflexive images indicate moments of extreme energy and concentration in both writing and perception. Created without the mediation of any referent save itself, the reflexive image celebrates poetic energy in its purest assertive force. It is peculiarly poetic in that it stresses the image-as-image and not as mimesis. Through this is revealed imaging as process, not the image as finite

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[74] 'To a Sky-Lark', in *Ibid.*, pp. 226-29.

product. In an image that refers to itself *as image* can be traced the indeterminate form of an unsculpture offering a refined passage of perception between itself and the eye. This passage of perception is the one that the reader experiences, and, as emphasised before, it is a creative experience. The readerly perception- passage rearticulates the initial passage of artistic creation. This is why Shelley's stanza on the artistic effect of the hermaphrodite covers both kinds of passage. Whilst describing the artist's act of perception and creation, the extrordinary contract made between design and designer, the language Shelley uses makes his reader experience exactly the same tension.

> The countenance was such as might select
> Some artist that his skill should never die,
> Imaging forth such perfect purity.
> (XXXVI.334-36.)

There is a dual selection going on between "countenance" and "artist", with "countenance" gaining priority. This pattern replicates the interchange between image and eye in the poems studied so far. Both elements make claims on the other, but the image has a certain priority in that its constituent ground and factors are already there, lie waiting upon the activity of the eye. Needing the eye to realise itself as image, the image directs that activity into a process wherein the type, scope, and manner of perception is formed. The image both holds and stays the eye and utilises its skill, and as such, there is an exchange between them. This is the passage of perception, made by the crossing of mutual selection, of demand and activity. Swinburne's defence picks up on the radical reading of Shelley's stanza, which he quotes in a footnote. In the main text he writes: "At Paris, at Florence, at Naples, the delicate divinity of this work has always drawn towards it the eyes of artists and poets."[75] Here is the emphasis on the priority of the image. Swinburne's

[75] 'Notes on Poems and Reviews',*Swinburne Replies*, p. 27.

vindication in fact stresses what can happen when the solicitation of the image is not heeded. The charge of obscenity made by his reviewers can only be made because they have not allowed themselves to experience the image's true power. They have not read his work but imposed instead a prejudicial pre-made conception of their own: "it can give no offence but to the purblind and the prurient." 'Purblindness' is the opposite of the type of required blindness described above: it is the blindness of the dull and obtuse; it sees what is not present; it imposes. Adds Swinburne ironically in a footnote,

> We might even, in time, come to think it possible to enjoy the naked beauty of a statue or a picture without any virtuous vision behind it of a filthy fancy: which would be immoral.[76]

John D. Rosenberg, commenting on several of Swinburne's "flawless minor lyrics", a selection which includes 'Hermaphroditus', propounds that in these poems

> language takes on a life independent of any ostensible subject. Words, severed from the soil of things, send out aerial roots of their own. One seems to be over-hearing an exquisitely beautiful voice singing at a distance; the melody carries, but the words come muffled, as if in a foreign tongue[77].

Rosenberg is of course writing a variation on Eliot's pronouncements on Swinburne:

> Language in a healthy state presents the object, is so close to the object that the two are identified.
>
> They are identified in the case of Swinburne solely because the object has ceased to exist, because the meaning is merely the hallucination of meaning, because language, uprooted, has adapted itself to an independent life of atmospheric nourishment.[78]

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[76] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

[77] Rosenberg, p. 135.

[78] T. S. Eliot, 'Swinburne as Poet' (1920), in *Selected Essays*, 2nd ed., rev. and enl. (London, 1934), p. 149.

Eliot's essay on Swinburne, in its entirety, has the effect of a back-handed compliment. However, the Swinburnian independence of language has, by the time Rosenberg writes, become a critical dictum, and he testifies to its persuasiveness in a much less ambiguous way than does Eliot. Rosenberg is warm about Swinburne, and his critique has suave and suggestive things to say about him, reminding one at times of Swinburne's own impressionistic prose at its best. Unfortunately, even such an analogue as the one in the passage just cited – the "beautiful voice"– can inadvertently convey the impression that the sense of the poetry is not important. To avoid falling into this trap one needs to question what is meant by 'independence', and whether it is correct to see what Rosenberg specifies as "words" as constituting the motivating force for this type of poetry.

The kind of analysis I have done up to this point should indicate that such a view is, in fact, insufficient. It is not words alone that matter, whether in their acoustic or graphic quality, or in their ability to evoke or suggest (if not mean or designate). It is not words in themselves that make poetry, but their organisation and the forces that orient them. Rosenberg makes no reference to the rhetorical organisation of language and to identifiable tropes and figures, yet rhetorical analysis most obviously provides a through-going mapping of language. It is not particularly difficult to deduce that certain poets do not draw upon those modes of language-use that are commonly understood as representational or referential. Mimesis is one linguistic or rhetorical strategy among many. But just as different figures separately or in combination distinguish different types of mimesis, so do a variety of other figures organise verse whose imaging faculty isn't based on a construed fidelity to natural objects. Yet, whilst the rhetorical properties of poetry to a great extent define it as poetry, the conceptions of poetic space and vision

already described cannot be reduced to rhetorical function. Rhetoric, fielding language, will map space but doesn't account for it. The image, for example, as we encounter it in poetry, whilst it cannot be perceived without language and rhetoric, is not a purely linguistic matter, nor wholly rhetorically constructed, but is a complication of both language and rhetoric as they are involved with poetic space in its interception with vision. In the discussion that follows, it will therefore be important to locate what rhetorical figure is working here, its relation to language, and how it interacts with the space it covers and which permeates *it*.

iii. Swinburne, Boundaries and Crossings

> He is obsessed by the moment when one thing shades off into its opposite, or when contraries fuse, as in 'Hermaphroditus,' one of his earliest and finest poems.
>
> John D. Rosenberg, 'Swinburne', *VS* 11, 149.

Swinburne's preference for boundaries, crossings, transitions, and 'betweenness' is well-established. Jerome McGann, following on from Rosenberg, gives a short catalogue of boundary moments in Swinburne's work.[79] All of the citations he employs use the preposition "between", which is always a heavy marker in Swinburne's writing that a boundary is in play: "Where between sleep and life some brief space is" ('Hermaphroditus' II.1). As will become apparent, it is this "brief space" that will be of interest to us.

McGann's critical mouth-piece, Clara Watts-Dunton, identifies the boundary as "this peculiarly Swinburnian place" and comments: "The place is important for the obvious advantages it offers for seeing into two worlds at once."[80] But it becomes

[79] McGann, p. 171.
[80] *Ibid.*, pp. 171, 172.

apparent that even *two* worlds is something of a limitation: "The lands of the unknown always seem to be stretching out from him in all directions, dropping away on every side."[81] The boundary line or transition point is, as McGann's page headings suggest, a place for "Multiplying Perceptions", and the criticism scrupulously attends to this as a phenomenon of Swinburne's poetic language.

> I find here as well an explanation for much of the difficulty of Swinburne's poetry as it seeks its ambiguous position along the boundary. Ideally Swinburne would like his every word and line to locate another boundary. In some of the passages we have already looked at, where ambiguities multiply in a dizzying fashion, we get some sense not only of the relative poverty of ordinary perception, but of the extraordinary demands of Swinburne's aestheticism. Patterns of meaning spread like colonies of bacteria where life develops so rapidly that one has difficulty focusing on individual microbes. But the process sometimes seems even more rapid in Swinburne, for each point which terminates some lexical or grammatic movement instantly becomes a world of limits itself, a boundary line whose essential "meaning" aims elsewhere, driven by a momentum which can only be recognized when it has been shifted from the point where it was originally located. Proliferation occurs not in a single direction, in a "development", but in every direction at once, like a process of crystallization. Swinburne insures the result by mixing metaphors repeatedly and elaborating complex synesthetic systems.[82]

McGann's analysis astutely recognises the heightened powers of perception demanded by reading Swinburne and "the relative poverty of ordinary perception", but it is also significant in that it pays tribute to a system of organisation and not just "words in themselves". Terms like "pattern" and "process" make this a much more sophisticated account than Rosenberg's. Towards the end of this passage, McGann is coming near to using a rhetorical terminology, a vocabulary of figuration. The mixing of metaphors

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[81] *Ibid.*, p. 174.
[82] *Ibid.*, pp. 174-5.

(something that Swinburne does "repeatedly") is better known as 'catachresis'. In instances where the effect is paradoxical in that two qualities logically conflict or are in opposition, a mixed metaphor would be an 'oxymoron'. 'Synæsthesia', when used as a literary term, is a particular type of figurative language in which there is a mingling of sense-impressions; one kind of sense-impression is described in the language more properly belonging to another. Shelley, and Swinburne after him, are generally understood to be advanced practitioners of synæsthesia. Interestingly, it is only really from the beginning of this century that synæsthesia has been studied as a legitimate poetic device in its own right and attention given to its far-ranging effects. Critics who observed its use previous to this time, regarded it as an unfortunate aberrancy, a misuse of language which indicated a failing of accurate conceptualisation on the poet's behalf.[83] These three types of figurative language: catachresis, oxymoron, and synæsthesia, can be discovered at many levels throughout Swinburne's work. It is noticeable that they all involve some kind of crossing in which two diverse, or even antithetical, categories are brought together. However, it's my contention that these figures are generated, and that they are generically related, by the use of a more dominant figure that underpins them. This figure is the figure of *chiasmus*, which is also the Greek word for 'crossing'. I cite the discussion given in R. A. Lanham's *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*:

> The term is derived from the Greek letter X (chi) whose shape, if the two halves of the construction are rendered in separate verses, it resembles[84].

Lanham also indicates that the term is synonymous with the Greek term *antimetabole* ('turning about') which is:

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[83] For an interesting account of this, see Glenn O' Malley, *Shelley and Synesthesia* (Evanston, 1964).

[84] Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms: A Guide for Students of English Literature* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968), p. 22.

> In English inverting the order of repeated words to sharpen their sense or to contrast the ideas they convey or both (AB:BA); chiasmus and commutatio sometimes imply a more precise balance and reversal, antimetabole a looser, but they are virtual synonyms.[85]

And, citing Quintilian, Lanham writes:

> Antithesis may also be effected by using that *figure*, known as [antimetabole], by which words are repeated in different cases, tenses, moods, etc.[86].

The influential Renaissance rhetorician Julius Cæsar Scaliger gives a brief definition of chiasmus which, translated, runs accordingly:

> When the first element and the fourth, the second and the third are conjoined giving a scissor formation[87].

The motif of the scissors mirrors the Greek X (chi) with its notion of crossing.

Swinburne is plentiful in classic examples of this figure, and 'Hermaphroditus' is a beautifully chiasmatic poem. Every sonnet in this short sequence contains an example of chiasmus which could easily be identified by the classic definitions given above. In fact, Swinburne tends to go for a very full and elegant kind of chiasmus which is the sort where elements 1 and 4 are a perfect match in likeness, and elements 2 and 3 are a perfect match in likeness. This is by far from being the general rule with chiasmus, where the elements can associate by semantic ties only, as in the example Lanham gives from Addison's 'The Campaign':

1 2
Polish'd in courts, and harden'd in the field
3 4

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[85] *Ibid.*, p. 10.
[86] *Ibid.*
[87] Julius Cæsar Scaliger, *Poetices libri septem*(1561), IV, 38. I am endebted to Dr. Avril Bruten for this reference.

Renown'd for conquest, and in council skill'd.[88]

The Swinburnian 'complete' chiasmus is a singular achievement because with such a mode of repetition the practitioner has to be extremely careful not to sound as if he has merely reversed his terms for the sake of effect: that is, the figure has no logic to it and is reversal for sake the sake of reversal. But the two examples I shall quote show that Swinburne does not fall into this trap, as the central paradox of hermaphroditism makes his use of the repetition and reversal supremely logical and apposite:

> A strong desire begot on great despair,
> A great despair cast out by strong desire.
> (I.13-14.)

> Shall make thee man and ease a woman's sighs,
> Or make thee woman for a man's delight.
> (III.7-8.)

In one instance Swinburne produces a super-added version of a full chiasmus when there are more than four elements in play. The last sonnet in his sequence opens with the lines:

> Yea, love, I see; it is not love but fear.
> Nay, sweet, it is not fear but love, I know
> (IV.1-2).

Here the four main elements are love and fear and their repetitions, and added to this is the extra reversive contrast of "Nay, sweet, . . . I know" for "Yea, love, I see". Alternatively, Swinburne can produce something which is rather less than a regular chiasmus, where a simple contrast or antithesis is involved and where the terms don't identify in pairs - although there may still be four of them.

> But on the one hand sat a man like death,
> And on the other a woman sat like sin.
> (II.11-12.)

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[88] Lanham, p. 23.

From this exposition it should be gauged that there are various ways of considering the effect of the figure. The technical Scaligerian explanation seems to put the emphasis on those pairs of terms which match in likeness, yet the force of the figure upon the reader is one of contrast and reversal. One thinks more of an exchange of elements where one term is substituted for its opposite, and, in a Swinburnian reading, this view is reinforced by any other elements in the sentence that, in addition to the main figure, are contrasted. One might say that the reader is more challenged by the *contrastive pairing* of element 1 with element 3, and element 2 with element 4. However, this implicit conflict between likeness and unlikeness can be comprehended by concentrating on the point of intersection where the line that maps 1 to 4 (or A to A) crosses its opposite, the line that maps 2 to 3 (or B to B). For in reading Swinburne's poem, the elements themselves are of secondary importance; it is the moment where a crossing occurs that has the first claim.

Glancing through the copious scholarly equipment Randolph Hughes provides in his edition of *Lesbia Brandon*, one encounters the following note which gives unexpected authority to the idea of Swinburne as a chiasmatic poet.

> Swinburne was fond of chiasmus. One gets the impression that he fell into it naturally under the impulse of an idiosyncrasy of his mental structure; perhaps it was because there is a certain subtlety about it, a departure from the straightforward obvious, that satisfied his tendency towards complexity. Saintsbury, talking of Swinburne in his essay on *Modern English Prose*, opines that 'the . . . dangerous licence of the figure called chiasmus has been to him even as a siren, from whose clutches he has been hardly saved.' There is more ineptitude than justice in this ill-written remark.[89]

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[89] Hughes, note 57, p. 501. Hughes quotes from George Saintsbury, 'Modern English Prose' (1876), in *Miscellaneous Essays* (London, 1892), pp. 81-113; 105.

Hughes is quite right to stress the attraction of the figure's complexity for Swinburne. Considered in cognitive terms, the figure can present the resolution in *form* of what cannot truly be resolved. It presents the very marks of the insoluble problem, divide or debate even while it takes place, as a finished form, and yet, as such, is still dynamic. It pinpoints the moment of absolute crisis in which the elements in play are themselves, their other, both and neither. Considered thus it is a figure of negative knowledge; negative knowledge of the processes that constuct cognitive perception. It traces the shape of a cognitive movement, presenting the observed pattern of the struggle for knowledge and determination in lieu of that determined knowledge. In its own right it demands a multiple and diffuse perception for both the effects it produces and for its own identification.

This kind of perception is necessary for the following reasons. Swinburne, we have seen, is a conspicuously chiasmatic poet. However, a poet's use of a rhetorical figure is rarely straightforward, and may very likely not adhere to what is described in the rhetorical handbooks, being adapted to his own particular purposes. Any competent poet who uses a particular figure extensively will almost certainly develop its rhetorical potential. Therefore rhetorical figures are always undergoing a process of rhetoricisation. We saw how Swinburne refined the classical chiasmus and increased its range, and also how he employed variant forms. Chiasmus is attractive to Swinburne as a siren, or more properly a hermaphrodite – this being the symbol that fleshes the figure – because it offers precisely that potent moment of transition, suspension, or 'betweenness', the boundary line McGann writes of, which provides the opportunity for multiple vision. It gives the "brief space", the punctuation of poetic language by the forces that determine its efficacy. In this space – a blind spot to conventional

assimilative vision – may be glimpsed the image in emergence but without determination, a shaping and unfolding from unsculpture to sculpture with many different potentialities. Whilst oxymoron, catachresis, and synæsthesia – figures and linguistic devices I claim as genetically derived from chiasmus – do not in themselves quite so clearly reveal a suspensive moment, they nonetheless do so in their effect, as the reader, pondering the amalgam and conflictual combination, has to suspend the rational judgement of incongruity and project a new state of affairs which can allow for this resolution of antithesis. The resolution consists of the suspension of that which in both elements would normally conflict with the other to the point where synthesis would be impossible; the opposition is still observable, but the inevitable division has been obviated.

Once Swinburne's use of chiasmus is understood to be thoroughly implicated in his writing, it is possible to see its wider rhetoricised effects: that is, the most salient features of chiasmus transfer more diffusely to the quality of his writing. Crossings which would not be recognised as chiasmatic in a rigorously orthodox sense, but which partake of the Swinburnian development, occur between various parts of the poem. Thus the "brief space" or boundary can't merely be attributed to one or two isolable citations, for the poem keeps making crossings and spaces. During reading, a broad structure of repetition, reversal, and antithesis ensures that lines and language are constantly in a series of fluctuating relations. These relations can take place according either to the principle of a match in likeness or contrastedness. But the crucial intervention of space in between like elements means that while they may provide a complete linguistic match, they will not have exactly the same meaning. As chiasmus is a figure of translation, the repeated word or phrase has been subjected to a critical process. Swinburne's poems employ a highly refined, almost synthetic vocabulary, in which the

same words are constantly reworked and repatterned in different configurations and contexts. The repeated word evokes its first calling, or perhaps its synonym (or even antonym), and so overlaps and borders with itself but is not coincident: the very gesture of repetition prevents this. In such a way is the classical principle of chiasmus, which operates by a predominantly semantic mechanism, unsettled. Whilst the Swinburnian chiasmus does not deny semantic affinity, it qualifies the degree of likeness: similarity is translation and therefore difference; recognition is of familiarity estranged. Additionally, crossing can take place between the poem's other formal qualities: between sonnets, between question and answer, between the octet and sestet, between rhymes. Swinburne not only reuses some of the *a* rhymes of Sonnet II and the *b* rhymes of Sonnet III, but he recombines them as *c* and *d* rhymes in Sonnet IV. The effect of this recombination is, as in formal chiasmus, to give the sense of balance, coherency, and resolution: things have been pulled together; and yet the implicit suspension negates the possibility of clear settlement. Traditionally, the sonnet is often used to frame an enquiry or pose a problem which it then solves. Again, Swinburne uses the form to give the appearance of something coherent and finished to something which is insoluble and lacking in clarification. Chiasmus is a refusal of clear identification and definition. Just so the hermaphrodite cannot be fitted into natural or real categories of description, disturbs the most fundamental basis of identity, but is presented as a beautiful and finished *objet d'art*, a form complete in itself. (It is, of course, the *idea* of this artistic resolution of paradox that occupies the poet, for in the poem not even the sculpted lines of the hermaphrodite emerge with any clarity. The basic ambiguity the poem preserves and exploits: is it a person or a statue who is addressed? introduces another suspension and prevents definite engagement with the sculptural form. As his

vindication evidenced, Swinburne very emphatically stresses the importance of the statue to the poem, but the poem prevents the reader seizing upon a coherent shape - however enigmatic - by disturbing the limits of a sculptural identity. The tenor of address goes beyond the conceit of remarks to a statue; a personage is involved, with a history that receives its fullest treatment in Sonnet IV. The poem establishes the idea of an artefact whose edges blur off into another metaphysical and mythological identity, and the reader sees the range of the poem shifting between these poles. One might describe this movement as a type of *Anders-streben* that operates not between æsthetic forms, but between form and imaginative conceptualisation, between sculpture and an unsculpture-as-movement which undoes the rigours of formalism and offers the image up to alternative modes of vision.)

Swinburne's rhetoricisation, his development of chiasmus, is not then a movement that privileges figure and rhetoric for its own sake. Rhetoricisation, in this case, empties rhetoric of priority. Development pushes the figure to its limits where it reveals its dependence on an underlying energy. "The brief space" of the crossing is the place where language and rhetoric are crossed by the very space they border on. It is these crucial spaces that chiasmus locates and is constructed around, and the formal qualities of the chiasmatic opposition alert the reader to these spaces, as well as deriving their structure and mechanism from them. Space dominates and constructs the figure. This is another reason why it was true to say that chiasmus demands a multiple and diffuse perception, not only for its effects, but for its own identification. Incidentally, the passage that takes chiasmus from its most classical guise to its extended usage is itself of a chiasmatic nature: that is, there is a reversal and recombination of the elements of rhetorical figure and space as traditionally perceived.

In 'Hermaphroditus', the chiasmatic pattern of question and response illustrates some of the above points particularly well, adding a 'finish' to what is actually unresolved. Questions are posed; they are answered, but never satisfactorily. Exampling this, McGann cites the first few lines of Sonnet III:

> Love, is it love or sleep or shadow or light
> That lies between thine eyelids and thine eyes?
> Like a flower laid upon a flower it lies . . . .

Instead of an answer we encounter a simile which only tells us how this undefined "it" lies. McGann's Kernahan comments: "Grammatically the line has no right to the pronoun 'it' since 'it' has no specific referent."[90] When Swinburne does give the appearance of answering, the answer is bewilderingly chiasmatic:

> Yea, love, I see; it is not love but fear.
> Nay, sweet, it is not fear but love, I know
> (IV.1-2).

This double response gives not a cancellation but a suspension as one hovers uncertainly between the two declarations. For the balanced, equivalated stucture of the chiasmus ensures that one cannot deal in straight substitutions; all elements are held in play.

> The fact that his last choice is love rules out nothing. Fear is in some sense true as well, and the others have not even been taken up. One is left with at least this certainty, that many alternative answers are not only possible but necessary.[91]

Chiasmus, as Swinburne uses it, problematises affirmation and assertion. The structures of question and response are set up but are not fulfilled in a way acceptable to cognition. Cognition is thwarted not simply because language fails to affirm, or undoes what has been stated; it is not a matter of a random linguistic aberrancy. It is a genuine poetic disturbance, a disturbance essential to the

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[90] McGann, p. 150.
[91] *Ibid.*

power of poetry; it is the upheaval of space through language and its rhetorical patterning, under the gaze of the reader.

In the lines just selected the undefined "it" could be said to be specific marker of the chiasmatic interspace, between question and answer, between options such as love, sleep, shadow, and light, and between conflicting predications. This neutral "it" which lies between oppositions and is "both and neither" to borrow Ovid's phrase, is, for all its lack of definition, a reality whose elusive nature is sought as a key to the creature's irresistible and mysterious appeal. As such, "it" is the perfect indicator of an undetermined yet indubitable spatial force. Swinburne's hermaphrodite, continually in this poem, keeps reproducing its qualities in a diverse scattering of allied textual effects.

With the figure of the hermaphrodite and its complex ambiguities that so challenge normative vision we are already familiar. But the idea of its sculpted form carries further connotations of stoniness, impenetrability, indifference, and the resistance of æsthetic form to straightforward cognition. The hermaphrodite establishes itself as that which resists seduction. Hermaphroditism – in the myth – is the result of a seduction, resists further seduction, and thwarts appropriation. This flesh cannot be possessed, cannot be *known* in either its fullest carnal or cognitive sense. The figure is an erotic combination – the conjunction of love and what shuns it – which then seems to defend against all future combination and synthesis. Further synthesis does occur, as I shall show, but is of a kind that makes no clearer the identity of the hermaphrodite, blurring its definition even more.

As mentioned earlier, Swinburne's poetic vocabulary both in this poem and his corpus as a whole, is limited in a select and deliberate way. This results in a fair amount of repetition of key

words. However, as I indicated, the chiasmatic structure that relates like elements, also subjects them to a shift or translation. The repeated word or element does not perfectly coincide with its first use but overlaps, throwing out the defining limits of the term. The edges blur, and the identity of the word as it occurs in the poem becomes the harder to specify. In 'Hermaphroditus', this phenomenon has crucial significance for the wider possibility of identity in the poem.

If one were to compile a list of the major words in this poem and their rate of occurrence, the word that would be most prominent is "love", which appears, in all, nineteen times in a fifty six line poem. It appears capitalised as "Love" five times, in lower case as "love" eleven times, and pluralised lower case as "loves" three times. In every instance the word is a noun. On a first reading, the apportioning of these uses seems easy enough. One identifies Love as agent, a personification, with a hint from Sonnet III of the mythological God of Love (*l.*9), and then, separately, love as the abstract virtue, essence or quality. Similarly, the plural "loves" are either two choices of love-object (I.6-7), or, the lesser spirits attendant on the Love-God (II.10). But a closer reading begins to upset this attribution. For the speaker also addresses the hermaphrodite as "love" in Sonnets III and IV, although, as I shall demonstrate, the first of these examples is highly ambiguous. Furthermore, it is not easy to discriminate those moments when Love is agent or object ("love"). In Sonnet I, Swinburne refers to "Blind love" (*l.*2). The hermaphrodite is urged to

> look back for love,
> Blind love that comes by night and casts out rest
> (*ll.*1-2).

This sounds like Love in his *rôle* as god-agent, and we recall the traditional representation of Cupid as blind. But Swinburne refuses

the capitalisation of "love" which he nonetheless gives to the creative agent in Sonnet II (*l.*9). Perhaps then "Blind love" is not the Love-God but one of the lesser "loves his kin" ? However a problem arises with such an interpretation as the last line of the poem seems explicitly to contradict it. Here "Love" appears as the the traditional blind Cupid:

> But Love being blind, how should he know of this?

Apparently there has been a change in identity between this first appearance of "Blind love" that occurs so early in the poem and the ultimate last-minute manifestation of "Love being blind". During the course of the poem something has intervened between one showing and the other. The change could be explained in different ways. For example, there has been a shift from essence to agent, if "Blind love" is determined as abstract. Or, alternatively, there has been a change in the the status of the agent; an aspect of love or a scion of the God's assumes the supreme nature of godhead. "Blind love" is proved and recognised by the speaker as the deity, and it becomes clear that blindness is being seen and recognised as the essential determining characteristic, and is therefore privileged. The poem is thematically declaring the inevitable constituent of blindness in reading, and its confusion of processes of cognition and recognition. One recognises not definite characters, but rather blindness itself. As the effects of this permeate the entire poem, we might remark the way they also begin to unsettle the identity of the hermaphrodite. The speaker seems to address the creature with the endearment "love" on two occasions; in the first line of Sonnet III, and the first line of Sonnet IV. But the first occasion follows on immediately after the conclusion of Sonnet II where "Love" has appeared in the guise of agent: "Love turned himself" (*l.*14). At once there is a tension in the nature of the addressee. As Swinburne in Sonnets II and III consistently places the word "Love" at the

beginning of the line and thus necessitates its capitalisation, it becomes extremely difficult to tell just who is being spoken or alluded to: is it the titled Love-god, or merely the hermaphrodite addressed with fondness? Swinburne capitalises on the coventions of language to conceal aberrancy. He introduces a blind for the reader who cannot tell which attribution is intended. Additionally, if "Love" in Sonnet III, (*l.*1) seems to be the hermaphrodite, this impression is then made unsteady by the repetition that comes in the same line: "Love, is it love or sleep . . . ?" If the second word designates love as essence or abstraction, then, retrogressively, the first word might be this also, and the repetition a repetition for the sake of emphasis; the second word differing by its stressed note of enquiry. This reading does not undo the first interpretation, but latterly cuts across it, disturbing the assumption made. Chiasmatic crossings involve not only reading forwards to discover matching like and unlike elements, but also a reading backwards, as progress makes one reassess first judgement. In this example, the reader swings between readings of "Love" as the god, the hermaphrodite, or the abstract virtue. And the second capitalised use of "Love" in this Sonnet, beginning the fifth line, by parallelism adds to this quandary, for in this instance it is much more obviously the god, described in his capacity as agent: "Love stands . . . /Shall make" (*ll.*5-7). It may be argued that this is unnecessary obfuscation, for while "thine" (III.2) could refer to the god, it is much more likely to belong to the hermaphrodite, as the logic of the ensuing lines implies a continuation of the same subject, a subject who is not the god (for he but stands in attendance). However, this objection, although strictly correct in terms of grammatical coherency, misses the point, which is not that Swinburne makes his subject or subjects either one thing or the other or both simultaneously, but rather that

his language perpetually offers the possibility of blurring such distinctions, of suggesting overlap and extension. The example I have chosen is highly pertinent because it explicitly deals with a confusion of identity:

> Love, is it love or sleep or shadow or light
> That lies between thine eyelids and thine eyes?

The string of alternatives implies that the speaker cannot see with real confidence or that the various possibilities shade into each other. This obscuring is of a double nature. For, if the speaker and the reader have their capacity to discriminate impeded, then this almost filmic something, "That lies between thine eyelids and thine eyes", must also obscure the sight of the addressee. This suggestion advances the poem's hints at a crossing of identity. Just before this question is asked, the Love-god has been observed with "veiled eyes" (II.13), and veiling – as intervention that does not wholly blot out, but instead blurs outlines and makes things opaque – may be construed as another refusal to see or be seen with definition. And, as noted previously, we have the two other instances of "Blind love" and "Love being blind" which begin and end, and therefore enclose, the action of the poem. While it is essential not to read the poem as a predication – the hermaphrodite is not the Love-god, nor has Swinburne absolutely merged them – the pattern of combination and crossing that occurs at so many different levels in the writing allows, through the metaphors of blindness and obscured vision and through the linguistic translations of the word "love", a partial blurring and extension of identity. The hermaphrodite and the Love-god exist in a kind of chiasmatic relation to each other, in this instance through likeness rather than unlikeness. The opposition of their *rôles* as agent and object constitutes the antithesis which is nonetheless, at various moments, suspended by co-identification.

There are underlying reasons for Swinburne to make this

connection. Hermaphroditus is the son of Hermes and Aphrodite; Eros or Cupid is the son of Aphrodite and, in some accounts, Hermes. Cupid, we know, is often represented as blind. This blindness can mean variously in allied ways: love can strike without discrimination – unlikely subjects can fall for unlikely objects of desire; love does not see or comprehend the true character – faults can be elided; or the passion and intensity of love is all-absorbing and other concerns are negated. The story of Hermaphroditus evidences most of these types of love-blindness in the person of Salmacis. The boy himself is blind in a different way, that is, he is blind *to* love, resisting it both before, and in another sense after, seduction. The statue, in its resistance to enquiry and to clear representation, also suggests the sort of blindness which is defence, aloofness, self-containedness. This view is borne out by comparing 'Hermaphroditus' with its companion poem 'Fragoletta', which follows it in *Poems and Ballads Series I.*[92] Here the dual-sexed being addressed by a pattern of enquiry similar to that of 'Hermaphroditus' is called "sightless". It is again not at all clear from the first stanza quite whom is being addressed. Who once more is "Love" ? For the rest of the poem develops to reveal another extremely complicated pattern of identity. We find that Fragoletta and Love are related to each other. Is not Fragoletta

> Love's sister, by the same
> Mother as Love ?
>
> (8.39-40.)

In the same way, we might think that Hermaphoditus is Love's brother, as they share the same mother. But Swinburne, at this point, collapses the two identities into one another. Here is the first stanza:

> O Love ! what shall be said of thee?
> The son of grief begot by joy?

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92 'Fragoletta', *Swinburne's Collected Poetical Works*, I, 82-4.

Being sightless, wilt thou see?
Being sexless, wilt thou be
Maiden or boy?

If "Love" is a Cupid figure and therefore "sightless", he is also a hermaphrodite who has affinity with Fragoletta, the ambiguous creature the speaker celebrates:

O mysterious flower,
O double rose of Love's
(3.12-13).

Bizarrely, it seems that the co-identification Swinburne was making in 'Hermaphroditus' becomes concrete in 'Fragoletta'. Futhermore, although there is not time to explore this here, there is obviously a specific set of crossings between the poems. They exist in chiasmatic relation to each other. Jean Overton Fuller, Swinburne's biographer, suggests that Swinburne retained in 'Fragoletta' a notion of the unseeing statue.[93] Her argument is couched wholly in empirical terms, and the complex play of identity already linking hermaphrodite to Love-god has gone unnoticed. Nonetheless, as I have suggested, the statue does incorporate the theme of sightlessness. One thinks of Pater's definition of classical statues in the essay on Winckelmann:

> The eyes are wide and directionless, not fixing anything with their gaze, nor riveting the brain to any special external object[94].

One of the few places in the poem where Swinburne does seem to be alluding to the statue in a relatively concrete way, is a reference to the unresponsive eyes of the hermaphrodite: "Thy gracious eyes that never made a tear" (IV.5). The line plays on the creature's literal and symbolic blindness to human passion. Swinburne crosses continually between statue and myth, between the immutability of

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[93] Overton Fuller, p. 84.
[94] Pater, p. 217.

the art-object and the unmoved *lusus naturae*. However, as will be seen later, in the fourth and final sonnet he actually effects some kind of reversal.

By the process of translation Swinburne instigates, Love partakes of the ambiguities of a hermaphroditic nature, and conversely the hermaphrodite bears the marks of Love (though, at the same time, is properly outside of Love). This marking is realised in the creature's fairness which the "strange god" imparts:

> To what strange end hath some strange god made fair
> The double blossom of two fruitless flowers ?
> Hid love in all the folds of all thy hair
> (III.9-11).

The ambiguous translation I have been documenting, receives some allusive thematic treatment in the poem in the myth of genesis of Sonnet II. Like Shelley's Witch, the Love-god is a creator, but it is hard to see what is created and from what:

> Love made himself of flesh that perisheth
> A pleasure-house for all the loves his kin
> (*ll*.9-10).

The phrase "made himself of flesh" can mean either that Love fashioned by or for himself a pleasure-house out of some exterior fleshly material; or that he made it from himself, that is, he turns himself into perishable flesh. This alternative reading, the more complex one, has priority in that Swinburne here, as in his vindication, deliberately seems to be employing scriptural language and allusion. He parallels the central Christian mystery of the Incarnation, in which the Christ-logos, as the embodiment of love, puts on "flesh that perisheth" as a sign of that love.[95] St. John's Gospel describes the alienation and rejection suffered by the Word:

> He was in the world, and the world was made by

[95] St. John, I, v.1-14.

> him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not.[96]

In the poem "his own" is supplied by "his kin", but Love's alienation stems more from his own disappointment which makes him withdraw from the scene he beholds. What is the nature of this scene ? One can construe some kind of interpretation for it, but the very way Swinburne sets it up would seem to indicate that no precise moral or meaning is intended. The figures that sit on either side have an allegorical cast to them: "a man like death", "a woman sat like sin", but they are not true allegories; they are only like them.[97] Swinburne achieves the forbidding air of those gloomy sculptural images that guard the entrances of tombs, but he refuses to make this more than a suggestion and avoids the unmistakable representational gestures of formal allegory. Love's aversion to what he sees is also a turning-away from the limitations of choice, the straight antithesis and its prescribed determinism. Love's self-exemption from the arena of carnal desire relieves him of the burden of morality and classified meaning. Roland Barthes comments:

> Being the figure of opposition, the exasperated form of binarism, Antithesis is the very spectacle of meaning.[98]

A little later he writes:

> the fear is that we fall into opposition, aggression i.e., into meaning (since meaning is never anything but the trip lever of a counter term), i.e., again: into that semantic solidarity which unites simple contraries.[99]

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[96] St. John, I, v.10-11. Swinburne, the product of pious Anglo-Catholic stock, was more than familiar with the Authorised Version of the Bible, which he loved.

[97] It is possible Swinburne recalls Milton's male and female allegories of Death and Sin at the gates of Hell, in *Paradise Lost*, II. 648-73. 'Paradise Lost', ed. Alastair Fowler, in *The Poems of John Milton*, eds. John Carey and Alastair Fowler (London and Harlow, 1968), pp.457-1060. My thanks to Richard Major for this connection.

[98] *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, tr. Richard Howard (New York, 1982), p. 138. I have emended the missing final bracket, but the rest of the punctuation is as given.

[99] *Ibid.* , p. 140.

But chiasmus, by space, by translation and repetition, avoids the replacing of one option by a contrary one. It is observable that in presenting the constraints of the dilemma, Swinburne uses the weaker form of the chiasmus which most approximates to antithesis: there is no real repetition; no translation of terms. One guesses that the suspension lies in simply refusing the choice of "one side" or "the other" and involving a suspensive alternative – "Love turned himself and would not enter in" – that is, Love would not enter into the realms of the experiential world, its narrow choices and limited oppositions, but instead "turns himself". Trope is Latin for 'turn', and, by the trope of chiasmus, "Love" does "turn himself", translate himself into another guise – the shadowy lineaments of the hermaphrodite who does not and cannot enter into the real world and its choices. The whole poem is a turning away from experiential wisdom, empirical reality and the cognitive processes that reveal it, and is a troping or turning of common expectation into the perceptional complexities demanded by æsthetic form. According to the varying ways of reading, Love can refuse to enter the "pleasure house" or, being that pleasure house, he can "turn himself" and refuse choice and determinism. Either way there is a resistance to the inevitability and regularisation of lived experience. Swinburne explains the distinction in his essay:

> The sad and subtle moral of this myth, which I have desired to indicate in verse, is that perfection once attained on all sides is a thing thenceforward barren of use or fruit; whereas the divided beauty of separate woman and man – a thing inferior and imperfect – can serve all turns of life.[100]

All turns of life perhaps, but the hermaphrodite serves all turns of art and the turning of art from life, from hardened value and meaning. It is the turn of art – that is, art's turn or opportunity – to

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[100] 'Notes on Poems and Reviews', *Swinburne Replies*, p. 28.

get away from prescription. 'Use' and 'fruit' are terms that belong to life and ensure its continuance, but, although the account Swinburne gives sounds wistful, it is obvious that life, its use and fruit, are not what truly interest him. For he then declares

> Ideal beauty, like ideal genius, dwells apart, as though by compulsion; supremacy is solitude.[101]

He seems here to echo Shelley in 'Mont Blanc':

> Power dwells apart in its tranquillity
> Remote, serene, and inaccessible
> (IV.96-97)[102].

This allusion, and Swinburne's awed language, reveals his true affinity. While the hermaphrodite's

> Turning the fruitful feud of hers and his
> To the waste wedlock of a sterile kiss
> (II.4-5)

is a death-knell to humanism, it is a triumph for art which has no interest in "wedlock". Swinburne indicates a restitution:

> Yet from them something like as fire is shed
> That shall not be assuaged till death be dead
> (II.6-7),

which, occurring between sleep and life in the brief space, ensures that "neither sleep nor life can find out this." (II.8.) Neither of the categories of life nor sleep (life's temporary cessation) – categories synonymous with day and night and the passing of lived experience – have any purchase on what eludes exacting exposition. Again, as with the seeming allegory, Swinburne qualifies his image: it is not fire but "something like as fire". That "like as", a protraction of normal simile, removes the possibility of an image hardening into definition. One catches just a glimpse or a glimmer of suggestion,

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[101] *Ibid.*, p. 28.
[102] 'Mont Blanc', *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p.92.

the fleeting visitation of an image that occurs in the twilight dream-space between obliterating sleep and cold consciousness.

The idea of Time is additionally complicated by the poem. The meditative address which constitutes over three quarters of the poem suffers a change of tenor in the sestet of the final sonnet. That Swinburne wanted this change to be registered, is underlined by the corresponding change in the rhyme scheme: c d c c d c for the usual c d c d c d, and, as already noted, the reworking and recombination of rhyming words from previous sonnets. Swinburne, in the sestet, moves from æsthetic object to mythic narrative. Although narrative has already occurred in various snatches of the poem, notably in Sonnet II which I have just examined, a much greater degree of specific detail occurs in this final example. Rather than citing an account that has about it a generalised and somewhat apocryphal air, the speaker turns eye-witness: "I saw in what swift wise" (IV.9). Indeed the whole sonnet is distinguished by the appearance of an ostensible first person. Up to this point the speaker has not used personal pronouns, but here "I" occurs four times. This sonnet seems to attempt slightly different things from its predecessors. It is relatively more defined in its details, though I stress the 'relatively'. An actual event, part of a history that involves the speaker, takes place. We encounter a proper name – that of Salmacis. Leaving aside the title and subscription, all the other proper names in the poem have done allegorical-type duty. They have hovered on the edges of impersonation without ever becoming appreciable personæ. The story is much more specific than the first and major part of the poem, and the nature of what is recounted contrasts with what has gone before. The first myth of genesis in Sonnet II set aside, in Love's sudden aversion, such matters as the gratification of sensual pleasure. But this second story of origination seems to reinstate an erotic quality. Against the grain of Ovid's myth,

Swinburne's version of the boy's seduction hints of acquiesence and enjoyment:

> I saw in what swift wise
> Beneath the woman's and the water's kiss
> Thy moist limbs melted into Salmacis,
> And the large light turned tender in thine eyes,
> And all thy boy's breath softened into sighs
> (IV.9-13).

None of this undoes the earlier part of the poem or disproves it; rather, in the final stages of the poem's close, Swinburne activates another tension. This version that overlaps with the rest of the poem, but not entirely, has the effect of making the ultimate disturbance. By a partial reinstatement of some of the qualities displaced earlier, Swinburne adds yet another turn to his poem and unsettles his reader's attempts to predict a pattern.

When does this witnessed spectacle happen? This question may very well cross the reader's mind. For while many of the poem's queries and statements have been in the present, this scene is set in the past, and, in chronology, precedes the time of asking and stating. Here knowing and seeing are represented as happening at a temporal remove from each other. According to the poem's logic, one has to see in order to know; the first must precede the second.

> Yea, sweet, I know; I saw in what swift wise
> (IV.7).

> But Love being blind, how should he know of this?
> (IV.14.)

There appears to be a gap – with knowledge conferred only latterly. While knowledge gains priority over seeing, sight has to be temporally prior: one cannot know unless one has seen. But what is knowing and what is seeing? Evidently they are not the same things as operate in an empirical sphere. The poem has demanded

abandonment of conventional sight and knowledge. The chiasmus that opens Sonnet IV is pertinent. As mentioned earlier, the double response is not a cancellation, but a suspension. Both the answers given in the first and second lines could be 'true', but we should also consider the middle ground where they cross, where something occurs between sight and knowledge. The declarations and affirmations of this sonnet parody the idea of assertion because of their double and unverifiable nature. The poet brings together the two notions of knowing and seeing as if clinching the implication of their relatedness made by the shape of that initial chiasmus. We are then launched into the eye-witness account. Yet at the end of that account, one asks what is it exactly that is seen or known? Certainly the speaker has narrated the scene of seduction, but what in this is the sight that leads to knowledge? of what is blinded Love ignorant? what is the obscure "of this" with which the poem ends? The "of this" is as shadowy as the earlier "something like as fire". It cannot be elucidated. One might say that a covert erotic pleasure is advocated; and that Love cannot see that this apparently resistant figure, in fact, celebrates a former rapture accruing as much to the seduced as the seducer. But this is too limited. Furthermore, which of the poem's questions does it answer? Is it the question posed in the octet of Sonnet III, or the questions posed in the following sestet? None of these questions appears to match closely the scene of supposed revelation, the scene of seeing and knowing. Moreover, Love cannot be discounted so easily as the poem's ultimate gesture of exclusion would have it. The poem is supported by a network of links, crossings and transferrals that make such a final severance impossible. Throughout, the quality of blindness, obscure, veiled or averted sight is implicated in the poem's dynamics of vision as necessary constituent, and as something that breaks down conventional parameters of definition and characterisation. In fact,

the last line of the poem tacitly endorses this by elevating the earlier "Blind love" (species) to "Love being blind" (genus). The half-blent, indistinct figure of Love/Hermaphroditus becomes the central figure as, at certain points, it becomes difficult to see characters separately, or to assert the predominance of one over the other. Through the moments of blindness that the poem establishes linguistically, figuratively, thematically and spatially, Love 'turns himself' into his 'brother'. But he is himself also. The two *rôles* do not conflate. As such, Love remains both on the inside and the outside of that last scene. He himself may be blind to it, but that blindness is not just ignorance of what happens to the boy, but a blindness to his own involvement and incorporation. Love cannot see or know himself. It is only the reader who can attempt more thorough vision by the recognition of blindness and what it reveals.

One should also guard against imputing too much to the "I" figure who speaks. Although the move to the explicit first person in this sonnet is made as an apparent concession to greater particularity, it would be unwise to read this voice in any way as that of a character or determinable subjectivity. Attempts such as Douglas C. Fricke's to construct a psychology for the speaker seem oddly misguided. Characterisations like "The brooding, internalizing state of the speaker's mind"[103] bear little relation to a poem that is sheer of any touches of personality, and austerely refuses easy notions of shared or sympathetic emotion. That "I" voice is gracefully disembodied and empty of identifying character. It exists purely for the purposes of the poem's enquiry – the suave and eloquent serial structure of question, statement, narrative – and for its teasing manipulation of the terms of sight and knowledge. It is a very elegant and beautifully modulated conceit, and utterly bereft of all real humanising quality. The poem possesses no enveloping

[103] Fricke, p. 72.

dramatic consciousness. In the final sonnet, Swinburne's gesture at particularity is not much more than a useful cover. The very purity of those claims - "I see", "I know" - uncontaminated by the intrusion of a specific identity, lifts them to a level where they can be contemplated disinterestedly.

The final subscription, "*Au Musée du Louvre, Mars*1863", should not pass unregarded. If, in the last sonnet, Swinburne has introduced an increased degree of specific detail, the particularity of the subscription outweighs this by far. In between poem and subscription there is a crossing of relatively generalised language, between the mythic and the real. The temporality of the sonnets is extremely casual. There are insouciant, stylised allusions to "sunset" and "moonrise", "night", "life", and "sleep". There is a poetic disregard for the passage of everyday life. Time, in so far as it figures, is as a set of poetic coordinates or contrasts, evocative only. Additionally, the time of things as they occur within the poem is hard to gauge, because they seem to occupy both past and present simultaneously:

> And whosoever hath seen thee, being so fair,
> Two things turn all his life and blood to fire;
> A strong desire begot on great despair,
> A great despair cast out by strong desire.
> (I.10-14.)

The first verb is perfect, the following participle is present, the verb "turn" is either present or imperfect, and the ensuing participles are perfect with a present sense also. For it is quite possible to say 'it is begot' or 'it is cast out', as indeed Donne, in 'The Nocturnall upon S. Lucies Day', says, "I am re-begot"[104].

But the subscription gives us a definite time lodged in a definite chronology and a specific location. And, as if to accentuate the difference further, it is in a different language. As we have seen,

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[104] John Donne, 'The Nocturnall upon S. Lucies Day, being the Shortest Day', *The Elegies and the Songs and Sonnets*, ed. Helen Gardner (Oxford, 1965), p. 85.

the subscription is very important in strengthening the idea of the statue – an important factor in a poem so much concerned with æsthetics. The French form posits the link with the French culture and literary tradition Swinburne loved, which while it does not provide the crucial force of influence on this poem, nonetheless is invoked, as the subscription functions as a sign for an æsthetics *alien* to mainstream English criticism. The subscription also occupies an interesting position in relation to the poem. It is outside of the poetic text proper, and yet still is part of the whole. It occupies a boundary or liminal position with relation to both the realms of the æsthetic and the material phenomenal world. The material world bears on the subscription assigning place and history. But writing, even of a factual nature, already begins to produce other import, such as the French cultural affiliation which cannot be apprised by mere semantics. And then there is the relay and exchange which take place between poem and subscription: the subsumption of a referent into a textual idea; the contrasting of the time of art – a contrast of æsthetic contemplation and a particular chronological time in which it can be initiated. The process of translation of referent into poetic idea is rather different from the example given in the first chapter. In Shelley's 'On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery', the referent is alluded to in the title of the poem, and the poem might then be understood as a subsequent translation. In Swinburne's case, the subscription follows the poem; the referent gets introduced afterwards. A reader who read the poem for the first time in ignorance of the statue, would only discover it as the poem wound to a close. A re-reading would then be immediately necessary. But chiasmus, as a figure of translation, is implicitly the figure of a certain kind of reading. To translate one needs to know both the languages, relative positions or entities to be involved in the translation process. Whilst chiasmus

can work in a limited sequential sense as the reader marks antitheses, reversals and matches as they occur in his linear progress, in the fullest and most powerful sense it is a reading in which all elements are discovered and are seen to be in a network of relation which is non-linear. Reading is not just a process of scanning, but a series of relations and connections which are not strictly sequential. As suggested above, the empirical time of an actual reading and what happens in it, might be markedly different from the time of interpretation and the various movements that comprise it. Suspension can only really be effective when all the elements are known and a connection is traced between them. The non-linear reading promoted by Swinburne's poetry and its complex pattern of linguistic and syntactic filiations and linkages, is what brings space to the fore and gives it impact.

iv. Swinburne, Keats, and Chiasmus

In assessing the influential roots of 'Hermaphroditus' as planted squarely in the English tradition rather than the French, namely in Shelley's 'Witch of Atlas', I have nonetheless omitted another source which may well have corroborated, if not inspired the chiasmatic tendency in Swinburne's work. Swinburne refers to this poet in his vindication via allusion and direct tribute. The name of Keats surfaces first in the form of a comparison. Of the statue Swinburne writes:

> No one would compare it with the greatest works of Greek sculpture. No one would want to lift Keats on a level with Shakespeare. But the Fates have allowed us to possess at once Othello and Hyperion, Theseus and Hermaph roditus.[105]

In those typically Swinburnian gestures of matching and contrast,

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105 'Notes on Poems and Reviews', *Swinburne Replies*, p. 27.

Keats is aligned with the statue. Somewhat later Swinburne declares

> I cannot see why this statue should not be the text for yet another poem. Treated in the grave and chaste manner as a serious "thing of beauty" to be for ever applauded and enjoyed, it can give no offence but to the purblind and the prurient.[106]

The quoted phrase "thing of beauty" comes, of course, from the opening line of Keats 'Endymion', but the following words, as Swinburne's editor C. K. Hyder suggests,

> sound like a reminiscence from the "Ode to a Grecian Urn", line 26: "For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd."[107]

Swinburne was very fond of this Ode and alludes to it twice in his essay on his friend, the painter Simeon Solomon - 'Simeon Solomon: Notes on His "Vision of Love" and Other Studies'.[108]

The essay on Solomon is itself pertinent, firstly because of the subject matter of the painter's work (Solomon consistently depicted androgynously beautiful beings in evanescent visionary landscapes), but also because of the intensely chiasmatic language Swinburne uses in his descriptions. For example, he records of Solomon's designs,

> Many of these, as the figure bearing the eucharist of love, have a supersexual beauty, in which the lineaments of woman and of man seem blended as the lines of sky and landscape melt in burning mist of heat and light.[109]

This is not a formal classic chiasmus, but it has, as does much of Swinburne's prose, a chiasmatic structure to it. In fact, in this essay

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[106] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

[107] *Swinburne Replies*, p. 109.

[108] 'Simeon Solomon: Notes on his 'Vision of Love' and Other Studies', Bonchurch, XV, 443-58; 443, 444. The latter allusion runs thus: 'The 'unheard melodies' which Keats with a sense beyond the senses, perceived and enjoyed in the forms of his Grecian Urn, vibrate in the forms of this artist's handiwork; and all their lines and colours, 'Not to the sensual ear but more endeared,/Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone.' "

[109] *Ibid.*, p. 453.

Swinburne seems to be struggling towards a definition of his dominating figure. The following citation is a startling vindication of McGann's recognition of "boundaries", and another neat anticipation of the Paterian *Anders-streben*:

> Upon men in whom there is, so to speak, a compound genius, an intermixture of spiritual forces, a confluence of separate yet conspiring influences diverse in source yet congruous in result – upon men in whose eyes the boundary lines of the several conterminous arts appear less as lines of mere distinction than of lines of mutual alliance – the impression of the mystery in all beauty, and in all defects that fall short of it, and in all excesses that overbear it, is likely to have a special hold.[110]

Swinburne admired men such as Rossetti and Solomon, who had artistic talents in more than one field, say, in both painting and poetry. In the opening lines of his essay on Rossetti, he uses the image of the hermaphrodite to gloss the "double-gifted nature", rejecting the notion of sterility.[111]

But to return to Keats: it is not surprising that this Ode should have entranced Swinburne so much. It is undoubtedly the most famous tribute to the æsthetic object in English poetry. And, although 'Hermaphroditus' and the Ode are in style and temper very different, there are also strong similarities. The series of questions addressed to the hermaphrodite, recalls the enqiring tones of the speaker in the Ode who tries to fathom the complexities of æsthetic representation from an object that cannot and does not reply, and which is characterised as resisting his interrogation.[112] Moreover, the "leaf- fring'd legend" (1.5) which McGann, in his essay on Keats,[113] points out can be both inscription and mythic narrative,

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[110] *Ibid.*, p. 443.

[111] 'The Poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti', *Ibid.* pp. 3-49. 'The haters of either light or of any may say that there cannot be sunlight and moonlight in the same sky; that a double-gifted nature must be powerless to beget as to bear, sterile by excess of organs as by defect, 'Like that sweet marble monster of both sexes' beloved of Shelley as of Gautier (p. 3).

[112] *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. Jack Stillinger (London, 1978), pp. 372-73.

[113] Jerome J. McGann, Ch. I, *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in*

taken as narrative, shares with 'Hermaphroditus' an origin in the Ovidian text. "Tempe" and "Arcady" (1.7), are the domains of Pan and Apollo, where Ovid portrays them in pursuit of the nymphs Syrinx and Daphne. Here is the "mad pursuit", the "struggle to escape" (1.9). In Swinburne, the given myth depicts, unusually, a male tracked by a female; and, against the grain of the Ovidian account, Swinburne suggests in those images of melting and light-turning-tender, an erotic rapture which aligns more properly with Keats's "wild ecstasy" (1.10). The image of the hermaphrodite seems to draw on the complex and ambivalent nature of Keats's Ode. The Keatsian scene is fixed forever – a state of affairs that both fascinates and troubles the speaker. His hyperbolic tribute in the third stanza is double-edged, as for him the real attraction of "breathing human passion" (3.28), is manifestly plain. Both this love-scene and the urn itself have an air of sterility. Neither can be in the consummate possession of lover or gazer. This situation is mirrored by the hermaphrodite, but the conflict is made germane to the creature's very being, which provokes desire, and despair in the possibility of satisfying that desire. In his portrayal of the urn, Keats uses sexual imagery. Famously a "still unravish'd bride of quietness" (1.1), the urn is also an alluring but icy-hearted maiden who will not yield to the speaker's entreaties. She, like the hermaphrodite in the major part of Swinburne's poem, resists seduction:

> O Attic shape ! Fair attitude ! with brede
> Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
> With forest branches and the trodden weed;
> Thou, silent form, does tease us out of thought
> As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
>
> (5.41-45).

Swinburne combines the tension of the thwarted lover and the provoking, coolly austere repulsion of the urn in his figure of the

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Historical Method (Oxford, 1985), pp. 17-65; p. 44-5.

hermaphrodite. Both hermaphrodite and urn incite their respective observers into meditative yet urgent enquiry; they solicit and trouble the processes of cognition and understanding; and, overturning conventional rationale, "tease" their observers "out of thought". Swinburne's troping of Keats results in a harder poem. There is less ambivalence; no covert longing for "breathing human passion". The poem is much more committedly an æsthetic view-point. The focus remains squarely on the ambiguous identity of the hermaphrodite, and Keats's speaker, shorn of anxiety, desire, frustration, becomes the discarnate refined voice of the narrating persona. However, both poems attempt to make some sort of conclusion to the problem in hand. Keats's Ode is understood to resolve its dilemma in its famous last two lines, which are the speaker's imagined projection of the urn's response. But it is an imaginary response, a response supplied by the speaker. The urn does not really 'say' any more than the hermaphrodite does. In 'Hermaphroditus', the irresolution is more obvious, as the speaker 'answers' his questions by supplying his own vision. Like 'Hermaphroditus', the conclusion to the Ode ends with reference to knowing:

> "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," - that is all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.
> (5.49-50.)

But like 'Hermaphroditus', this knowing is not easy to substantiate. The ending occurs formulaically, almost as palliative. It seems to substitute for lack of knowledge, to act as cover for what cannot be discovered. The speaker manufactures a response which cannot adequate his questions, but has the appearance of resolution. And this resolution is cast, of course, in the figure of chiasmus. Diverse categories are crossed and equivalated in an axiomatic way that nonetheless goes nowhere towards explanation, nor, as the terse rejoinder of the last line indicates, even intends to do so. The

chiasmus marks a problem that is not solved, save in appearance. In Keats, its purpose seems not to convince, but rather to cover: it is a response to a difficult situation. In Swinburne, the device becomes far more integral. It dramatises a series of paradoxes that are intimately related to the nature of the subject discussed. The hermaphrodite is itself a chiasmatic crux that teases and tries seeing and knowing. Swinburne alludes to Keats's chiasmus in his essay on Solomon, reworking it thus: "beauty is the only truth, and nothing not beautiful is true"[114]. It is possible that the Keatsian chiasmus, coming as it does in a poem about æsthetics, seeing and knowing, may have contributed to Swinburne's extensive use of the figure in 'Hermaphroditus'. As a figure which expresses debate and paradox, it is particularly well-suited to the problems of æstheticism, a fact Swinburne exploits to the full.

Swinburne demonstrates an acute awareness of chiasmatic potential and its consequence for indentity and perception. Of Solomon's designs, he writes:

> In almost all of these there is perceptible the same profound suggestion of unity between opposites, the same recognition of the identity of contraries.[115]

And more specifically he notes:

> In the features of these groups which move and make music before us in the dumb show of lines and colours, we see the latent relations of pain and pleasure, the subtle conspiracies of good with evil, the deep alliances of death and life, of love and hate, of attraction and abhorrence.[116]

While Swinburne, in this last instance, concentrates more on the elements in their antithesis and opposition, rather than suspension and the mediating point of translation, even so his apprisal of

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[114] 'Simeon Solomon: Notes on his "Vision of Love" and Other Studies', Bonchurch, XV, p. 443.
[115] *Ibid.*, p. 455.
[116] *Ibid.*

"relations", "alliances" and "conspiracies" is astute and impressive. The simple contrary, occurring as the phantasm or secondary image to which Hopkins objects, so overlays and borders on the prior element that there is no recognisable *gestalt*; no picture – as Hopkins would have it. But the kind of vision Swinburne's work trains us to exercise, gives us another picture: the unpicture behind and beyond representationalism, the picturing process that makes identity possible, as well as refusing to let it set without revocation and revision.

CHAPTER IV

HARDY'S POETRY

An artist must be able to persuade himself either that he is carrying to completion something begun by his forerunner, or that it is his to denounce the fraud of his predecessors, and to discover afresh the secret of art. . . .

D. S. M. on Turner, *Saturday Review* LXXXVI (12 Nov. 1898), quoted by Hardy in *Literary Notebooks* II, ed. Lennart A. Björk (London and Basingstoke, 1985), entry 1976.

There is no new poetry; but the new poet – if he carry the flame on further (and if not he is no new poet) – comes with a new note. And that new note it is that troubles the critical waters.

Hardy, quoted in Florence Emily Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1928*, (London, 1962), p. 300.

I fear I have always been considered the Dark Horse of contemporary English Literature.

Hardy, quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 378.

i. Hardy and Twentieth Century Criticism

If, at first sight, Hardy seems "a strange continuator"[1] in the poetic line that stems from Shelley and passes through Browning, Rossetti and Swinburne, then this is due mainly to the way he has been perceived by twentieth century critics. A pervasive characterisation of his work, intended as affirmative, has nonetheless blocked other types of appraisal, and the terms of this characterisation, emptied of their positive implication, have been reused by other critics almost to the point of caricature. To attempt

[1] 'Wessex Heights', *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, (l.15), p. 319.

a new analysis of Hardy's poetry is impossible without first trying to understand the reasons for his critical reception this century. Only after these have been disentangled do the motives for certain suppressions become clear.

The major factor in establishing Hardy's twentieth century critical status was his adoption by that group of 1950s poets known as the Movement. Their work was marked by a reaction against certain poetic traits they identified with Romantic and Post-Romantic poetry – for example:

> the Romantic tendency to submit weakly to the 'awesome', the 'sublime', the 'unknown'. This tendency was thought to be especially pronounced in Shelley, whom Leavis had criticized in *Revaluation*, for 'surrendering to a kind of hypnotic rush of favourite images, associations and words'.[2]

Blake Morrison's study of the Movement shows how this parody of Romanticism – a parody exemplified in Kingsley Amis's poem 'Against Romanticism'[3] – accompanied a wholesale rejection of the Romantic tradition. Donald Davie commented that:

> "Romantic" was for me and my friends the ugliest imputation that could be thrown at any one or anything, a sentence of death from which there was no appeal.[4]

Furthermore, the Movement poets saw Modernism – the poetry of T. S. Eliot, the work of Joyce, Virginia Woolf, for instance – not as a break with Romantic values, but as a continuation and development. In this, of course, they were quite correct: one does not escape one's precursors that easily, and only now are we beginning to appreciate what Perry Meisel has called "the myth of the

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[2] Blake Morrison, *The Movement* (Oxford, 1980), p. 168.

[3] Kingsley Amis, *Collected Poems 1944-79* (London, 1979), pp. 35-6.

[4] Donald Davie, 'Eliot in One Poet's Life', *Mosaic* 6 (Fall 1972), 231, cited in Morrison, p. 154.

Modern".[5] The irony is that the Movement poets thought that they themselves could succeed where others had failed, and that they could escape the Post-Romantic legacy. Their method of escape was by a stated repudiation of all those despised aspects of Romanticism, and by the promotion of a set of values believed to be antithetical. Hence such statements as this one from a poem by D. J. Enright: "ordinariness has much to be said for it,/Is reasonably precious even"[6]. This privileging of ordinariness becomes a treatment of the values of simple empiricism as against, not only the transports of Shelley, but also the esoteric difficulties of Eliot.

> The Movement poet is, as A. Alvarez put it, 'just like the man next door – in fact, he probably *is* the man next door'. His work is aimed at the Common Reader because he is himself a Common Man – an ordinary person whose feelings and experiences are those of 'everyone else'.[7]

This is the point at which Hardy comes in, for, interestingly, rather than trying to break completely with tradition, the Movement poets decide to reinvent it, albeit in a limited fashion; a historical precursor is useful both to authenticate and to support their project. Hardy is selected as the poet whose work enshrines and preserves the values the Movement poets wish to manifest in their work. Larkin, in one of his reviews, details the symbolic moment in his life when he substituted Hardy for Yeats. Donald Davie devoted a book to the topic, *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry*, which concentrates on Hardy and his successors, or "the Hardyesque tradition" as Davie himself styles it.[8] This tradition begins with Hardy, and very little attention is given to Hardy's own relation to the preceding poetic tradition. Larkin's characterisation of the English poetic tradition is

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[5] Perry Meisel, *The Myth of the Modern*(New Haven and London, 1987).

[6] D. J. Enright, 'After the Dinner', *Unlawful Assembly* (London,1968), p. 63, cited in Morrison, p. 174. Morrison does not give the reference.

[7] A. Alvarez, Introduction to*The New Poetry* (Harmondsworth, 1962), p. 25, cited by Morrison, p. 174.

[8] Davie, *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry* (London, 1973), p. 12.

vague about other nineteenth century contributors.

> I had in my mind a notion that there might have been what I'll call, for want of a better phrase, an English tradition coming from the nineteenth century with people like Hardy, which was interrupted partly by the Great War, when many English poets were killed off, and partly by the really tremendous impact of Yeats, whom I think of as Celtic, and Eliot, whom I think of as American.[9]

What then are the characteristics of the Hardyesque tradition? Davie defines them for us: "an apparent meanness of spirit, a painful modesty of intention, extremely limited objectives"[10]. They do not sound very winning, but then they are not supposed to: the virtue of these qualities is that they are not glamorous or self-aggrandising. Davie wishes to celebrate simplicity and reserve and to confound the 'élitist' perception of them as second-rate. The values he selects achieve the Movement ideal of ordinariness. The resulting problem for Hardy is that his poetry, thus characterised by so influential a critical corpus, cannot easily be extricated from the values it is said to embody. Moreover, although ordinariness may have seemed an achievement for the Movement poets who valorised the term, the associated critical vocabulary has been picked up in relation to Hardy by other critics who have retained it, whilst supplying the more usual estimation it suggests, so that ordinariness is once more linked to the second-rate, the banal, the cosy and unthreatening self-evidences of day-to-day life. Unfortunately "meanness of spirit, painful modesty of intention, extremely limited objectives" all too easily convert back into deprecation rather than praise. This may go some way to explaining the massive patronage of Hardy's poetry which one finds continually

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[9] Philip Larkin,'A Great Parade of Single Poems: Interview with Anthony Thwaite', *Listener*, 12 April 1973, p. 473, cited by Morrison, p. 203.
[10] Davie,*Thomas Hardy and British Poetry*, p. 11.

in the criticism, where, at best, Hardy is perceived as a minor poet, sensitive, observant, but not vastly distinguished.

Hardy's status as poet as defined by the Movement poets could only come about by means of a suppression. This suppression involves his strong alliances with Romantic and Victorian poets, indicated both in his poems and directly in his reading as recorded in his letters and *Life*. These sources also record Hardy's meetings and correspondences with many important literary figures, revealing him not as thinking or writing in isolation, but as part of the social and intellectual network organised by men and women of letters at that time. We might say that what is elided is Hardy's own sense of his belonging to a tradition. More generally, Hardy's intellectual history is misrepresented by ignoring much evidence about his resourceful self-education. The *Life* has often been used selectively as a situational or biographical gloss on the poems, but information concerning books studied and literary influences has, until quite recently, been neglected. This neglect could well be strategic, for evidence of strenuous engagement with other writers would look incongruous in a poet who is simply meant to be a man speaking to men. Cutting a poet out of his literary lineage destroys the web of his covert and unacknowledged implication of other poets, as well as that which he *has* acknowledged. It fails to account for the developmental moves by which a poet struggles to differentiate his work from all others. Thus the exclusion of intellectual activity necessary for the appearance of ordinariness can only be maintained to the detriment and limitation of the poetry. Fortunately the recent publication of Hardy's notebooks has begun to swing the balance. Lennart Björk's inclusion of Hardy's '1867' Notebook, a record of early reading, in the *Literary Notebooks* is of particular value. Björk comments:

> there is additional confirmation of his familiarity

> with, especially, Carlyle, Ossian, Spencer, Swinburne, and the romantic poets. Of particular interest is the rare documentation of Hardy's reading in foreign literature, from France, Germany, Italy, and Norway: there are excerpts from Baudelaire, Victor Hugo, Emile Zola, Jean Paul Richter, Giacomo Leopardi and Bjørn Bjørnson. Some of the passages from French sources are Hardy's own translations.[11]

Whilst Hardy did not receive a formal public school education, or private tuition, his own educational *régime* scarcely seems the amateurish business it is portrayed as being. The *Life* tells us that Hardy in 1860-1 "would be reading the *Iliad*, the *Aeneid*, or the Greek Testament from six to eight in the morning"[12]. Tom Paulin's recent study of Hardy's poetry has an excellent first chapter in which is documented Hardy's careful absorption of Shelley, Ruskin and the British empiricist philosophers.[13]

Limitation of Hardy's poetic *œuvre* by a misrepresentation of its range also ensures that his full scope as a poet is not respected. Poems that don't accord with certain prescriptions are passed over. What is more irritating is when Hardy is criticised for omissions when none exist. Samuel Hynes claims that: "Art, politics, urban life – all common themes among his successors – he ignored."[14] Such a view ignores the *Poems of War and of Patriotism*, the poems on St. Paul's and Oxford Street, the many railway poems, the famous 'Snow in the Suburbs', and much verse that concerns architecture. The charge that Hardy ignored art is perhaps the oddest, for there have been several studies published on the subject of Hardy's passion for the arts, especially painting. This present chapter will itself show how Hardy's interest in the visual

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[11] *The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Lennart A. Björk, 2 vols (London and Basingstoke, 1985), II, 455.
[12] *Life*, p. 32.
[13] Tom Paulin, *Thomas Hardy:The Poetry of Perception*, 2nd ed. (London and Basingstoke, 1986), pp. 13-44.
[14] Samuel Hynes, *The Pattern of Hardy's Poetry* (Chapel Hill, 1961), p. 73.

arts informs his poetry. Yet Hynes also complains that Hardy's *œuvre* is too long, a state of affairs he seems to have remedied by the above deletions.

To this last criticism Larkin retorts in his now famous review 'Wanted Good Hardy Critic' (1966):

> may I trumpet the assurance that one reader at least would not want Hardy's *Collected Poems* a single page shorter, and regards it as many times over the best body of poetic work this century so far has to show?[15]

This is good praise, though other of Larkin's remarks are less welcome by anyone who wants to rescue Hardy from the tyranny of the ordinary. In a companion essay 'The Poetry of Hardy' (1968), Larkin writes:

> When I came to Hardy it was with a sense of relief that I didn't have to try and jack myself up to a concept of poetry that lay outside my own life . . . . One could simply relapse back into one's own life and write from it.[16]

If Larkin established that the simple or the ordinary was as much an artificial construction as any other literary convention, then there might be some usefulness in what he says. As it is, his anti-intellectual characterisation implies that life can convert into literature with little or no disruption, and that anything the least speculative or anything opaque to the common wisdom of everyday experience disturbs a poem's efficacy.[17] To maintain this position one has to do away with all those elements in Hardy's poetry that are other than touchstones of common lived experience. In Larkin's

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[15] Philip Larkin, *Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-1982* (London and Boston, 1983), p. 174.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 175.

[17] What Lindsay Anderson said of Amis can be applied generally to the Movement poet, who "will rather pose as a Philistine than run the risk of being despised as an intellectual". *Declaration*, ed. Tom Maschler (London,1957), p. 166, cited by Morrison, p. 140.

promotion of the experiential, what disappears is not only those factors unassimilable to common denomination, say, the supernatural and phantasmatic, but also, paradoxically, the stuff of poetry itself, its formal qualities such as the artifice of rhyme and metre that remove it from simple reportage, and the particularities of a specific poet's imagery, register and diction. Larkin's remark crucially simplifies and impoverishes the notion of poetry and of Hardy's poetry in particular.

Other critics, while not diminishing a central concept of poetry in this way, nonetheless see Hardy's work as essentially non-poetic and literalist. Removed from the arena of Movement approbation, this criticism suggests a failure of poetic technique. Samuel Hynes chooses to read Hardy in this literalist fashion whereby his poetry aligns itself staunchly with materiality.

> He is neither a symbolic or a metaphorical writer; in his poems things remain intransigently things.[18]

Do they? What happens to all those poems touched by fantasy, the world of ghosts and spectres? What also of those many poems that assert the shaping pressure of emotion on what the spectator sees? And what of Hardy's idiosyncratic and intensely figurative vocabulary? At this point we run into a paradox which is, although the Movement poets and those influenced by them praise or deprecate Hardy for his supposedly seamless presentation of things and concrete phenomena, another group of critics complain endlessly about the oddity and mannerisms of his style, a feature which presumably impedes an unproblematic relay of content to reader. Whilst the complaints aren't in themselves very illuminating – arising, one suspects, from the disappointed realisation that the plain man's Hardy does not exist – this critical response at least has the merit of recognising that Hardy does have a poetic style.

[18] Hynes, p. 66.

However, Hynes's view has been very influential and is possibly behind the more recent statement of John Bayley, who, speaking more generally of Hardy's writing, says:

> Things matter to him more than the words which describe them, the latter being treated absent-mindedly[19].

Bayley then goes on to substantiate his point with prose examples, but as his view of Hardy as poet is essentially that of a prose writer in verse, the poetry is implicated. Later he writes of the poem 'The New Boots':

> The effectiveness of the poem is that it is written by a novelist. In various ways all Hardy's poems are.[20]

This could potentially open an interesting discussion of what the 'novelistic' in poetry might involve, drawing on conceptual ideas about genre, structure, figuration, narrative and narrative voice. With such a critical framework, a reader could formulate some genuinely illuminating arguments for the novelistic as a poetic device, or at least comment on the particularity of poetic narrative. Unfortunately this debate does not take place and, as Bayley doesn't assert his critical principles, it must be assumed that he is referring us to the stock categories of plot, character, and action as they are conventionally understood. The question is whether the assimilation of poetry and prose in this manner does anything to explicate what is specifically poetic in a poem. The rather limited ideas which apparently characterise the form of the novel do not make an effective basis of comparison for the poem. There are practical difficulties in comparing poems of a few stanzas, or even, at most, several hundred lines, with the gradual development of plot and

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[19] John Bayley, *An Essay on Hardy* (Cambridge, 1978), p. 18.
[20] *Ibid.*, p. 57.

character as expressed in the classic realist novel. And how does the reader account for those elements in the poems that seem at an obvious remove from the nineteenth century novel? Apart from obvious concerns such as rhyme and metre, such topics arise as the lyrical and impersonal ego, the informing echo-chamber of earlier poetic voices, the heightened conflict between the imagination and the natural world which it inhabits. If such concerns are effaced, then Hardy's poems are in fact damaged by this comparison with the novel, for inevitably they can only look derivative, thin vignettes of a form that is only properly and substantially represented in Hardy's novels themselves.

Yet Hardy himself made a clear distinction between his novelistic and poetic work. An entry in the *Life* reads:

> Poetry. Perhaps I can express more fully in verse ideas and emotions which run counter to the inert crystallized opinion – hard as a rock – which the vast body of men have vested interests in supporting.[21]

Hardy's earliest critics did not, in fact, understand the distinction he was making, and yet interestingly enough did recognise, albeit in a negative sense, that the poems were no substitute for the novels:

> some critics [were] not without umbrage at Hardy's having taken the liberty to adopt another vehicle of expression than prose-fiction without consulting them. . . .
>
> Almost all the fault-finding was, in fact, based on the one great antecedent conclusion that an author who has published prose first, and that largely, must necessarily express himself badly in verse[22].

Mistakenly imagining that he had changed his writing habits mid-life, the critics felt he had misplaced his true strengths; for them at

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[21] *Life*, p. 284.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 299.

least there was no comparison. But the novelistic analogy suits those readers who feel that the novel – by which one assumes they mean a particular conception of the classic realist novel – is altogether a safer, more reliable form of writing: one that dispenses information with a minimum of interpretive inconvenience, and which transmits the texture of reality and everyday objects with faithful regularity. The view of Hardy as a poet who gives us the object merges with that which sees him as chronicler or recorder, jotting down his personal observations in a versified country journal. This is Paul Zietlow's opinion: "His poems frequently resemble 'records', direct accounts of something witnessed."[23]

While Zietlow's wording here does show an awareness of what is, after all, an contrived effect of writing – the poems *resemble* "records" but are indisputably poems – he nonetheless seems to succumb to his analogy. Hardy's raw material is the texture of experience itself: "He can record how things look 'At this point of time, at this point in space.'"[24] Zietlow does make a distinction between the form of novel and poetry, although he sees both in their different ways as mediating the nature of experience.

> I have suggested elsewhere that Hardy may have turned exclusively to poetry in part because in brief lyrics he could be more faithful to the everchanging nature of experience than he could in the novel, which required a more sustained coherency of vision.[25]

And yet, at the same time the poetry is qualified in such a way as to make it less than itself, or not poetic:

> An unreasoned conviction of a poetry in unpoeticalness – this is a central experience that grows upon the attentive and persistent reader of Hardy's poems.[26]

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[23] Paul Zietlow, 'Thomas Hardy–Poet', in *The Victorian Experience: The Poets*, ed. Richard A. Levine (Ohio, 1982), pp. 178-202; p. 182.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 186.

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 199.

Zietlow tends to treat Hardy's poetry as purely reflective, and, in spite of the claim for a poetic diversification of experience, another unity is implied – the observer as poetic persona who records variously according to time and circumstance.

While Hardy's poetry does draw on a vocabulary of recording or documentation, this by no means implies a simple process of transcription – "a direct account of something witnessed" – but rather, involved movements of mediation. He maintains a suspicion of the natural world and the immediate consolidating appearances of objects and events:

> *December* 21 [1885]. The Hypocrisy of things. Nature is an arch-dissembler. A child is deceived completely; the older members of society more or less according to their penetration; though even they seldom get to realize that *nothing* is as it appears.[27]

Hardy very carefully qualifies the idea of record. His poem 'Alike and Unlike' describes how the two onlookers of "the self-same scene" (that is, sharers of the "same point in time, the same point in space") retain quite different impressions. The poem is sufficiently short to be quoted entire:

> We watched the selfsame scene on that long drive,
> Saw the magnificent purples, as one eye,
> Of those near mountains; saw the storm arrive;
> Laid up the scene in memory, you and I,
> As for joint recallings by and by.
>
> But our eye-records, like in hue and line,
> Had superimposed on them, that very day,
> Gravings on your side deep, but slight on mine! –
> Tending to sever us henceforth alway;
> Mine commonplace; yours tragic, gruesome, gray.[28]

The record of the physical eye is overlaid by superimposition of a

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[27] *Life*, p. 176.

[28] 'Alike and Unlike', *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, p. 788.

patterning: marks that reshape what is retained. The scene witnessed becomes subject to entirely different methods of translation. Hardy literalises the metaphor of 'impression' to suggest two highly various mnemonic spaces. It is important to notice that the superimposed gravings that give such different characters to the recallings are themselves a picture or separate pattern that have no necessary relation with the physical sights seen. All of this controverts Zietlow's vocabulary of simple transmission. Furthermore, the notion of a controlling consciousness located in an all-seeing observer seems untenable. Superimposition suggests that the observer is in that state of perception described by Shelley, and observable in so many of the poets he influenced, in which the thing perceived makes a complex negotiation with its perceiver in the circuit of the perception process. Whilst this process is not actively controlled, it is not passive either. Tom Paulin, who is interested in Hardy's empiricist philosophy, seems to be reading the poem too literally in terms of its images when he says:

> The treatment of memory here is very similar to Locke's comparison of the mind to a sheet of 'white paper, void of all characters', that passively receives the simple ideas experience prints on it.[29]

For Hardy undoes the Lockeian conceit he uses. The point is that the couple register the scene differently; there is a discrepancy. If their minds really were like white paper, then they would have corresponding views – but they don't. They cannot receive stimulus passively. Superimposition is very much part of their own work. Hardy seems to be expressing what will become all-important to his poetry: an idea of character which is his shaping contribution to the tradition of Shelleyan perception. The character of what is viewed is dependent on the character of the perceiver. But this character –

[29] Paulin, p. 33.

not to be confused with ideas of personality – is something quite refined and specific, as will be defined in this chapter. For the moment, it is enough to say that it determines Hardy's famous statement:

> *Aug.* 23 [1865]. The poetry of a scene varies with the minds of the perceivers. Indeed, it does not lie in the scene at all.[30]

In 'Alike and Unlike' the use of the Lockeian conceit at first belies the division already existing between the couple. They are far from being 'white paper, void of characters', and an astute reckoning of superimposition realises this. Superimposition, in line with the irony of the poem, suggests that divergence is somehow pressed upon the participants from outside – this being congruent with the speaker's dramatised surprise and disquietude. But the way one accounts for the divergence means that, although the figure is accurate in its implication of a repatterning, it is also a partial and dramatic disingenuity. On the space which represents the receptive mind of the beholder there is certainly an imposition, a process of characterisation; only it would be more correct to describe this as a permeation. Onto the paper the obscured character comes through, redetermining the look of the transcription. The paper is not void of character at all; the character is always there, permeating the design and making its own unique modifications. As I will show, Hardy was to use this image himself to great effect. What happens in 'Alike and Unlike' is that the dramatised sorrow of the speaker, at one level, is still defensive of the essential difference that severs him from his partner. Nonetheless, the image of superimposition still suffices to qualify the notion of recording, and to describe a version of the perception process not governed by an overriding consciousness – one in which perception's picture does not

[30] *Life*, p. 50.

correspond to some authenticating reality, but has its own contours.

If, as Paulin says, Hardy is using Locke's simile, combined with a contemporary idea of photogravure, then we must recognise that he is doing something quite paradoxical to the images. Critics often fail to read Hardy well because they ignore his prose writings on art and literature which provide valuable insights and corroborations. Few poets have had their poetry so isolated from their prose criticism. Critics who do use the *Life* use only the more conventional remarks – the ones that endorse their rather tame views of Hardy – and not the more unusual or provoking thought. In the instance of this poem, it is useful to cite Hardy's scornful deprecation of the photograph as ideal, and of the desire to replicate with more attention to detail than to essence or character. Hardy is speaking of his creation of Casterbridge:

> At any rate, it is not a photograph in words, that inartistic species of literary produce, particularly in respect of personages.[31]

The praise of realistic documentation and 'word for thing' correspondences favoured by so many of Hardy's critics, is here completely rejected by him. If he does use imagery taken from the photographic process in 'Alike and Unlike', it is to defamiliarise. Eschewing the reductive commonality of the photograph with its tendency to universalise, the scenes manufactured by photographically reminiscent techniques are divergent, their discrepancy making strange and uncanny the initial experience.

It seems likely that Hardy was influenced by Pater. F. B. Pinion in his book *Thomas Hardy: Art and Thought* adds an appendix in which he details the appeal of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* for Hardy, singling out the essay on Winckelmann and the famous 'Conclusion':

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[31] *Ibid.* p. 351.

> Pater's 'Conclusion' . . . stresses the isolation of the individual, 'each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world'. The thought was not new to Hardy (it occurs in the second 'She, to Him' sonnet, written in 1866), but I doubt if he ever found it more beautifully and analytically expressed.[32]

Hardy would probably have been struck by the following citation, which could aptly apply to his own work.

> At first sight experience seems to bury us under a flood of external objects, pressing upon us with a sharp and importunate reality, calling us out of ourselves into a thousand forms of action. But when reflection begins to play upon those objects they are dissipated under its influence[33].

Although Hardy has often been thought of as a poet of immediate experience, it should become clear that, in fact, any notion of experience that he held was of the Paterian variety, involving "reflection" as mediation. The contents list of Hardy's *Complete Poems* gives title after title suggestive of particular objects, events and places – 'The Cheval-Glass, 'The Work-box', 'At The Draper's', 'At the Wicket-Gate', 'At a House in Hampstead', 'Last Look round St. Martin's Fair' – as Hardy takes somewhat banal and prosaic subjects, or, apparently, specific, limited, concrete objects, and then transfigures them through "reflection" and defamiliarisation. In contradistinction to the expectations set up by the titles, and by the received wisdom of Hardy's poetry as a gloss on nature, there is little direct description in his poems. In terms of 'realistic pictures', they are decidedly sparse. In the main, there are one or two suggestive details, and these may very well not be drawn from any direct observation. For example, in 'Alike and Unlike' the all-important scene doesn't figure in any real particularity. The one definite allusion is to the "magnificent purples", a term which

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[32] F. B. Pinion, *Thomas Hardy: Art and Thought* (London and Basingstoke, 1977), p. 181.
[33] Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, p. 208.

Donald Davie in his famous essay 'Hardy's Virgilian Purples' discovers is a condensation of imagery from Virgil's *Æneid*, and has a metaphysical meaning for Hardy, being connotative of remembered love.[34] In the poem, the image thus resonates with a sad irony.

My point is not that Hardy isn't a visual poet, but that his visual qualities have been misconstrued. They certainly have little to do with "the photograph in words", or even subtler word painting. For Hardy, the shape of an object or a scene is delineated by the points where the beholder's emotions, evocations, or fantasies touch on it. An object has no inherent value in itself, only in its encounter with a perceiver. In this, he shows himself to be a true inheritor of both Shelley and Swinburne. We might recall Swinburne's words on Shelley, that he sought

> to render the effect of a thing rather than the thing itself; the soul and spirit of life rather than the living form, the growth rather than the thing grown.[35]

All these poets reveal a rarefied form of vision which abstracts essence from the objects that present themselves to view, that attempts to localise the core of what is seen, and to concern itself with the encounter with focus and the space it occupies. Hardy would have heard Swinburne echoed in Pater's 'Preface' to *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, in the 'correction' of Matthew Arnold:

> the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's impression as it really is, ... What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book to *me*? What effect does it really produce on me?[36]

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[34] Donald Davie, 'Hardy's Virgilian Purples', in *Agenda* (Thomas Hardy Special Issue) 10, nos. 2-3 (Spring/Summer, 1972), 138-56.

[35] Swinburne, 'Notes on the Text of Shelley', Bonchurch, XV, 380. The essay was first published in 1869.

[36] Pater, p. viii.

In Hardy, the "effect of a thing" may be, as in Shelley and in Swinburne, an evocation, a quality or impression, but it can also be a nebula of associations composed of an object's influences, and its real or imagined history as revealed to the perceiver which thereby establishes a dynamic or temporal relation to memory.

ii. Hardy and his Poetic Influences

Because Hardy's relation with his poetic forebears has been so little considered, it is necessary at this point to give it attention even to the extent of supplying historical fact and conspicuous correspondences hitherto unregarded. Samuel Hynes thought that, in Hardy's poetry, William Barnes

> is the only poet, with the obvious exception of Shakespeare, whose influence is demonstrable.[37]

Hardy undoubtedly had a very warm and sincere regard for Barnes, who was a personal friend. He wrote the Preface for Barnes's *Selected Poems*, and, later, Barnes's obituary.[38] But it is absurd to suggest no other influences are determinable, or indeed that Barnes was a major influence. Hynes does grudgingly admit Hardy's interest in Swinburne, but states, rather eccentrically, in the face of all the evidence: "the influence, if any, was ideological rather than poetical"[39]. He calls Hardy's beautiful memorial tribute to Swinburne "a weak, conventional elegy"[40], although the poem is a triumphant blend of wit, mime, lament, and technical brilliance. It's hard to see how Hynes could find these lines "conventional"; they startle, miming the way Hardy must have thought Swinburne

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[37] Hynes, p. 31.

[38] Both the obituary 'The Rev. William Barnes, B.D.' originally published in the *Athenaeum*, 16 October 1886, pp. 501-2, and the Preface are reprinted in*Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings: Prefaces, Literary Opinions, Reminiscences*, ed. Harold Orel (London and Melbourne, 1967), pp. 100-106 and pp. 76-82 respectively.

[39] Hynes, p. 31.

[40] *Ibid.*

startled his Victorian readers.

> – It was as though a garland of red roses
> Had fallen about the hood of some smug nun
> (*ll.*6-7).[41]

Hardy first read Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads I* in 1867, a year after its publication.

> I used to walk from my lodgings near Hyde Park to the draughting office every morning, never without a copy of the first edition of *Poems and Ballads* sticking out of my pocket.[42]

The influence of Swinburne is certainly detectable in Hardy's own early work. John Bayley thinks that Hardy's very fine poem 'Neutral Tones', usually considered to be his best early work, has debts to Browning's 'Two in the Campagna' and Rossetti's 'The Woodspurge',[43] and Pinion thinks it has its roots in Shelley's 'When the lamp is shattered',[44] but it seems to me closer to Swinburne. That famous uncanny image of the lover's dead smile is surely linked to the equally curious smile of the hermaphrodite in 'Hermaphroditus'. The contorted involution of the sentence structure, and the touch of paradox, are translated from the first sonnet of Swinburne's poem.

> The smile on your mouth was the deadest thing
> Alive enough to have strength to die.[45]
>
> Of all things tired thy lips look weariest,
> Save the long smile that they are wearied of.[46]

If Hardy is recalling Swinburne, then he seems to draw on other qualities of that poem: the marmoreal coldness and impenetrability

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[41] 'A Singer Asleep', *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, pp. 323-4; 323.
[42] Ernest Brennecke, Jr., *The Life of Thomas Hardy*(New York, 1925), p. 5, cited by Hynes, p. 22.
[43] Bayley, p. 72
[44] Pinion, p. 92.
[45] 'Neutral Tones', *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, p. 12.
[46] *Swinburne's Complete Poetical Works*, I, 79.

of the statue, its thwarting of Love. The riddle of the hermaphrodite becomes the tired and "tedious riddles" of the present moment's desuetude. The pool of transformation that ends Swinburne's poem becomes, starkly, just a banal "pond", that, all the same, etches itself into the speaker's mind as a mnemonic image, part of a landscape of disappointment.

Poems and Ballads I is a fascinating volume of poetry. Far from being limited to a particular kind of poem, it experiments with a huge variety of types and forms. As a style source book for a young poet, it must have made absorbing study. R. C. Murfin has speculated on the influence of Swinburne on Hardy,[47] but the volume provides many other patterns than those he suggests. While some of Swinburne's themes were taken over by Hardy - past love, lovers parting, the march of Time - other elements may have had deeper effect. A poem like 'The Sundew' - a title that seems oddly Hardyesque, and, rather an unusual poem in Swinburne's *œuvre* - may well have provided a cue for those poems by Hardy that use a natural object for meditation or association. Certainly we know from the *Life* that Hardy plainly saw himself following in Swinburne's footsteps. The two poets were personal friends, each holding the other in high regard. They felt themselves allied by the fact that *Poems and Ballads I* and *Jude the Obscure* had made them "the two most abused of living writers"[48], and derived a certain amount of gleeful satisfaction from Swinburne's discovery in a Scottish newspaper of the sentiment "Swinburne planteth, Hardy watereth, and Satan giveth the increase."[49]

Browning, too, was a personal friend. Tom Paulin makes some interesting connections between both poets' use of metre,

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[47] Ross C. Murfin, *Swinburne, Hardy, Lawrence and the Burden of Belief* (Chicago and London, 1978).
[48] *Life*, p. 325.
[49] *Ibid.*

showing how Hardy was often consciously influenced by Browning's metrical experiments.[50] Hardy's choice of metre in 'The Chapel Organist' is a deliberate one, as it mimes the rhythm of Browning's 'Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha'. Hardy records his fascination with Browning's 'The Statue and the Bust', a poem he returned to throughout his life, and it was Browning's 'Rabbi Ben Ezra' that he had read to him on his death-bed. The texture of Hardy's poetic language has most often been compared with that of Browning. Tom Paulin devotes the Introduction to the second edition of *The Poetry of Perception* to an examination of what he, seemingly inspired by Ruskin, identifies as a 'Gothic' style in English poetry, which he contrasts against the type of poetry represented by Tennyson – a poetry that he finds artificial and overly-melodious.[51] Browning's poetic relation with Hardy seems, on the whole, more on the level of conscious or complimentary parallel than defensive or tactical manœuvre. Hardy will occasionally write poems that seem to be variations on pieces by Browning; the short poem 'Once at Swanage' is clearly a re-rendering of Browning's 'Meeting at Night'.[52] But the major figure behind his poetic development, and the figure that stands behind both Browning and Swinburne themselves, is Shelley. No other poet is quoted so much in his work, and Hardy very often makes allusion to Shelley's poetry in the novels. But Shelley is implicated in more than just allusion, because it is his mode of perception that is the basis of Hardy's own vision.

During the last ten years, Shelley's influence on Hardy has gradually been recognised. F. B. Pinion corrects Hynes's choice of William Barnes when he writes

> It is no exaggeration to say that Shelley's influence on Hardy's thought and basic outlook was greater

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[50] Paulin, Chapter III: 'Sounds and Voices', pp. 68-90; See, in particular, pp. 69-74.
[51] Paulin, pp. 3-11.
[52] 'Once at Swanage',*The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, pp. 753-4; 'Meeting at Night', *Robert Browning: The Poems*, I, 451.

than that of any other writer.[53]

Tom Paulin also admits Shelley's influence on Hardy, though with a certain amount of disapproval and misgiving, as Shelley seems to be another one of Paulin's *bêtes noires*.

> Though there can scarcely be two more dissimilar poets, Shelley's influence on Hardy's work was vast – a fact which may seem surprising as Shelley's Romanticism has been largely discredited nowadays.[54]

Walter Bagehot's *Estimates*, which contains a seminal essay on Shelley, impressed Hardy very much when he read it in 1862.[55] Dowden's famous *Life of Shelley* (1886) he read much later on – there is a reference to it in a letter to Mrs. Henniker of 1897.[56] The poetry and the prose seem to have been with him since the beginning. Paulin identifies the "high singer" in 'Her Initials' (an early poem of 1869) as Shelley, and, if one must force an autobiographical or semi-autobiographical reading, the verse suggests that the regard had been a long-lasting one.[57] Paulin, Pinion, J. B. Bullen, and Hardy's biographer Michael Millgate, have all noted the attraction of Shelley's theory of the epipsyche for the similarly named Fitzpiers and Pierston in *The Woodlanders* and

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[53] Pinion, p. 148.

[54] Paulin, p. 45. It's not clear what Paulin means by the "discrediting of Shelley's Romanticism". Possibly he is referring to Shelley's reputatation as it existed before 1959 and the initial recuperations of Harold Bloom and other scholars. Shelley's "Romanticism" – by which category one assumes Paulin intends both to denote and to historicise the poet's views on poetry and his political and metaphysical speculations – seems as powerful as ever, and has begun to attract the critical attention it deserves.

[55] Walter Bagehot, *Estimates of Some Englishmen and Scotchmen* (London, 1858), pp. 274-339. This essay, 'Percy Bysshe Shelley', is reprinted in *The Collected Works of Walter Bagehot*, ed. Norman, St John-Stevas, 15 vols (London, 1965-86), Vols I and II:*The Literary Essays*,with an introduction by Sir William Haley (1965), I, 432-6.

[56] Edward Dowden's *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley* is mentioned in a letter dated 3 June [July] 1897, in *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, 7 vols (Oxford, 1978-88), Vol II: *1893-1901*(1980), 196. See also Hardy's citations from Dowden in 'Literary Notes II', *The Literary Notebooks*, II, entries 1926-31,1964, and Björk's notes on these entries.

[57] Paulin, p. 45.

The Well-Beloved respectively.[58] Various poems – 'The Well-Beloved, 'Rome: The Vatican', and 'The Chosen' – explore this theme.[59] Direct reference to Shelley's own life occurs in Hardy's work. Pinion writes:

> In the story 'An Imaginative Woman' he compares a poet's scribbling on the wallpaper to Shelley's manuscript scraps; in the Apology to *Late Lyrics and Earlier* he refers to his love of sailing paper boats. His visit to the graves of Shelley and Keats in Rome inspired one poem, and the knowledge that Shelley composed 'To a Skylark' at Leghorn led him to write 'Shelley's Skylark' when he was near Leghorn in March 1887.[60]

This circumstantial data is cited merely to show that there is well-documented evidence of Hardy's interest in other poets, particularly Shelley. Although different writers on different occasions have indicated sources and affiliations, it seemed necessary to summarise the information and present it together, as Hardy's influences are not so familiar that they can be taken for granted. The real force of Shelley and his followers in terms of looking and perception forms the basis of Hardy's writings, but, in order to discuss this, the circumstantial evidences of Hardy's poetic descent do require explanation and commentary to establish the grounds for the poet's genuine engagement with his precursors. The more significant marks of Shelleyan influence, diffused more widely, cannot be categorised in this manner, but emerge as a shaping pattern in Hardy's critical thought and practice of his poetics. In examining Hardy's work, it is this general tendency of Shelley's influence, rather than a configuration of interrelated poems, that will be my central concern.

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[58] Paulin, pp. 55-57; Pinion, pp. 153-57, 163-66; J. B. Bullen, *The Expressive Eye: Fiction and Perception in the Work of Thomas Hardy* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 223, 227-8; Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: A Biography* (Oxford and New York, 1985), p. 330.

[59] 'The Well-Beloved', pp. 133-5; 'Rome: The Vatican, pp. 103-4; 'The Chosen', pp. 676-8, in *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*.

[60] Pinion, p. 149.

iii. Hardy's Æsthetic Thought

The greater part of Hardy's reflections on art and literature are to be found in the *Life*, which amply repays a closer reading than is usually its portion. There various popular critical views such those which concern Hardy's 'simplicity' are immediately troubled by Hardy's own subtle understanding of the artifice of the simple:

> *Easter Sunday*[1885]. Evidences of art in Bible narratives. They are written with watchful attention (though disguised) as to their effect on the reader. Their so-called simplicity is, in fact, the simplicity of the highest cunning[61].

Hardy's style, apart from moments of mime, parody, or conscious imitation, is very different from that of his precursor Swinburne. Of Swinburne, Arthur Temple Lyttelton remarked in his essay 'Modern Pagan Poetry',

> Mr. Swinburne is at the head of that class of English poets who seem to have for their motto *Ars est ostentare artem.*[62]

Hardy is not thought of as an ostentatious poet; in fact it is his concealment of his art that has been taken all too literally. The *Life* reveals that this concealment was a deliberate policy:

> Am more and more confirmed in an idea I have long held, as a matter of common sense, long before I heard of any old aphorism bearing on the subject: "Ars est celare artem". The whole subject of a living style and the difference between it and a dead style, lies in not having too much style – being, in fact, a little careless, or rather seeming to be, here and there . . . . Otherwise your style is like worn half-pence – all the fresh images rounded off by rubbing, and no crispness or movement at all.[63]

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[61] *Life*, p. 170.

[62] Arthur Temple-Lyttelton, 'Modern Pagan Poetry' (1882), in *Modern Poets of Faith Doubt & Paganism and Other Essays* (London, 1904), p. 213.

[63] *Life*, p. 105. Sir Philip Sidney deprecates the professor of learning who "using art to show art, and not to hide art (as in these cases he should do), flieth from nature,

Of course Hardy's style isn't so low-key as never to have struck his readers; those objections to its oddness would never have occurred had that been true, and, if Hardy is referring to an abstention from a 'high' style for a relatively 'low' one, this claim cannot pass unqualified. He evidently does use traditional poetic diction, albeit in an admixture of his own making, as well as classical imagery, and, on occasions, a high-styled rhetoric. But what is interesting about the above extract is that it shows Hardy believed that effective art depends on a reaction – a reaction against what goes before and can thus be considered 'dead' with regard to his own 'living' style. It could be suggested that what is being hidden is what is being covered over as 'dead': not the style of the present poet, but the style of his predecessor which is obscured or alienated through a concerted "carelessness", a disregard, a disrespect. The achievement of art is to hide art, especially where it is the art of one's predecessors. In such a way does the poet persuade himself that he denounces his predecessor's fraud while he discovers afresh the secret of art. But the secret is the knowledge of what has been secreted; the present poet owes the strength of his "new note" to those many anterior notes he has obscured and distorted.

The gesture of distortion, of altering the look of things, of making unfamiliar in order to recreate, was perfectly familiar to Hardy.

> Art is a disproportioning – (*i.e.* distorting, throwing out of proportion) – of realities, to show clearly the features that matter in those realities, which, if merely copied or reported inventorially, might possibly be observed but would more probably be overlooked.[64]

This statement is significant as a general principle of Hardy's artistic

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and indeed abuseth art." *A Defence of Poetry*, corr. ed., edited by Jan Van Dorsten, (Oxford, 1973), p. 72.

[64] *Life*, p. 229.

practice, but it is also possible to read it as another perspective on the subject of creative influence. It accords with a modified version of Bloom's view of influence: the more aggressively a belated poet disfigures his precursor's work, the more clearly the discriminating reader will understand the degree of motivating influence and the pressure to escape; the greater the attempt at obfuscation, the greater the essence of resemblance. Those metaphors of likeness, of imputed physical, even *facial* similarity, are, we shall see of immense importance to Hardy and vital to the expression of his poetry of perception. For the moment it is worth calling one's attention to Hardy's all-pervasive imagery of faces and facial aspect. Metaphors and images presenting faces or half-buried fragments of faces occur continually, even in his discursive prose. The reasons for this will be explained later.

Hardy's "carelessness" emerges as part of a careful process of disproportioning – a process much more revelatory than mere copying or imitation (these being the provenance of the despised "photograph in words"). This stress on revelation is very common to Hardy's writings: one finds perpetual reference to the bringing out of some secret essence or truth, achieved the better, not by simple representation, but by a stategic distortion that reconstitutes the focus of perception. His philosophy works on the ruse of a concealment or hiding that affords a truly startling revelation of identity. Hardy's disdain for the photographic realism his critics wish to attribute to him is underlined by the following extract, in which he implies that uniform exactitude fails to provide any genuine point of interest for the observer.

> *June* 3 [1882]. . . . As, in looking at a carpet, by following one colour a certain pattern is suggested, by following another colour, another; so in life the seer should watch that pattern among general things which his idiosyncrasy moves him to observe, and describe that alone. This is, quite

> accurately, a going to Nature; yet the result is no mere photograph, but purely the product of the writer's own mind.[65]

It is the "pattern", the æsthetic shaping that a good writer brings to bear on his material, that makes it authentic and that makes genuine identities for the reader. Hardy shows a well-developed post-Romantic understanding of art's relation to nature. Art may occur in the "going to Nature", but this is by no means a simple mirroring which would be banal and superfluous.

> The "simply natural" is interesting no longer. The much decried, mad, late–Turner rendering is now necessary to create my interest. The exact truth as to material fact ceases to be of importance in art – it is a student's style – the style of a period where the mind is serene and unawakened to the tragical mysteries of life; when it does not bring anything to the object that coalesces with and translates the qualities that are already there – half hidden, it may be – and the two united are depicted as the All.[66]

Here the work of mature art is the individual's solicitation of "the qualities that are already there", through coalescence and translation. The passage is illuminating in the way it explicates the mind's engagement with the object of its interest. While this engagement occurs in a totally cerebral orbit, the object does presumably attract perception and impinge upon it by presenting qualities which perception discriminates and wishes to extract. The metaphor of coalescence suggests the complex exchange between perception and its stimulus – the object of perception; it implies a movement of reciprocity rather than a stasis or fixation for either looker or the thing looked-at. In this, Hardy replays what I have described as the passage of perception embodied in the Shelleyan statement: "All things exist as they are perceived: at least in relation

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[65] *Ibid.*, p. 153.
[66] *Ibid.*, p. 185.

to the percipient" where the emphasis is on a relation, on the "as", the dynamic realisation of the process in its occurence. Bagehot cites allied words of Shelley's in his essay,[67] and we might well have expected Hardy to have read the 'Speculations on Metaphysics' – as Mary Shelley called them – as these essays were available in an edition of 1840, and in Buxton Forman's edition of 1880, reprinted in1882 and 1892.[68]

Hardy is sometimes associated with the onset of Impressionism in painting, a phenomenon he, at once, astutely related to his literary theory.

> *December* 7 [1886]. . . . The impressionist school is strong. It is even more suggestive in the direction of literature than in that of art. As usual it is pushed to absurdity by some. But their principle is, as I understand it, that what you carry away with you from a scene is the true feature to grasp; or in other words, *what appeals to your own individual eye and heart in particular* amid much that does not so appeal, and which you therefore omit to record.[69]

There is a long-established link between this extract and a passage in *The Woodlanders* that describes Marty South's glorious hair as observed by Percomb the barber, who wishes to buy it from her.

> In her present beholder's mind the scene framed by the girlish spar-maker composed itself into an impression-picture of extremest type, wherein the girl's hair alone, as the focus of observation, was depicted with intensity and distinctness, while her face, shoulders, hands and figure in general were a blurred mass of unimportant detail lost in haze and obscurity.[70]

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[67] *The Collected Works of Walter Bagehot*, ed. Norman St John-Stevas, I, 452: "I confess that I am one of those who am unable to refuse my assent to the conclusions of those philosophers who assert that nothing exists but as it is perceived."

[68] *Prose Works*, 4 vols (London,1880); corrected texts, without notes, 2 vols (1882); 5 vols (1892). We know that Hardy was familiar with the 1882 edition. For evidence of this, see Paulin, p. 45.

[69] *Life*, p. 184.

[70] *The Woodlanders*, intr. David Lodge (London and Basingstoke, 1974), p. 41. All references to Hardy's novels are taken from the New Wessex Edition as first published in 1974-5. The general editor for the series is P. N. Furbank. In the case of some of the novels, format and introductions were altered in subseqent reissues.

In this instance, Hardy parodies his own impressionist impulse, for his beholder is motivated not by æsthetic inclination, but by sheer pragmatism. Marty's 'essence' as revealed by the sympathetic narrative voice is much more properly descried in other appearances, although it is one of the novel's tragic elements that it remains almost completely unperceived and unvalued by the other characters.

Hardy's language does often include the vocabulary of Impressionism; his portraits and portrayals are impressions rather than photographs. The Shelleyan pronouncement cited earlier – "All things exist as they are perceived: at least in relation to the percipient" – is behind Hardy's view that the poetry of a scene depends on the mind of its beholder. And when Shelley says "I always seek in what I see something beyond the present and tangible object", Hardy would doubtless agree but with a qualification of his own. For while Shelley's "beyond" is very often a vista at a distance from the object which is by-passed, the Hardyesque "beyond" is still a location of quality in relation to what is initially seen. This is the thrust of the next extract – a famous one – in which Hardy this time engages with Wordsworth. Certainly, he does distort him, but not aggressively, so that the total effect is, in fact, Wordsworth's endorsement of Hardy. Hardy, who as we know was not attracted by literary reproduction, makes that reproduction something quite other.

> *January* 1881. . . . Style – Consider the Wordsworthian dictum (the more perfectly the natural object is reproduced, the more truly poetic the picture). This reproduction is achieved by seeing into the *heart of a thing* (as rain, wind, for instance), and is realism, in fact, though through being pursued by means of the imagination it is confounded with invention, which is pursued by the same means. It is, in short, reached by what M. Arnold calls "the imaginative reason".[71]

We will return to Hardy and Wordsworth at a later point, but it is quite clear from this example that Hardy's discussion of the imagination is, whether by means straight or circuitous, coming from the Romantics and the notion of an imaginative transfiguring vision. Seeing the "heart of a thing" is not to be confused with what Hardy calls the "optical" – that which appears to the physical eye and is only a preliminary to vision.

> After looking at the landscape ascribed to Bonnington in our drawing-room I feel that Nature is played out as a Beauty, but not as a Mystery. I don't want to see landscapes *i.e.*, scenic paintings of them, because I don't want to see the original realities – as optical effects, that is. I want to see the deeper reality underlying the scenic, the expression of what are sometimes called abstract imaginings.[72]

Hardy makes a distinction between what – taking the cue from the volume *Moments of Vision* – we may call 'vision' (which is the selective transforming work of the artist's perception of a scene, person or object) and quotidian physical reality. This work is imaginative, but not imaginary: that is, a visual relation is created which is founded on an actual exchange (coalescence) between looker and looked-at; the work abstracts an imaginatively visual correlate for the deeper reality which thus forces itself upon and into vision. Hardy reverses the conceptions of normality and actuality in his understanding of the "deeper reality" as something which requires a different perceptual orientation; one which eludes most people in their everyday lives. Nonetheless, it is this deeper reality which is the essence of being:

> I was thinking a night or two ago that most people are somnambulists – that the material is not the real – only the visible, the real being invisible

[71] *Life*, p. 147.
[72] *Ibid.*, p. 185.

> optically. That it is because we are in a somnambulistic hallucination that we think the real to be what we see as real.[73]

Hardy's vision or imaginative perception is what breaks the hallucination of perfunctoriness and the convention of material reality as the only reality. When the over-literal 'child' speaker in the poem 'The House of Silence' says that he cannot see the phantom claimed to haunt the place, his interlocutor replies

> – Ah, that's because you do not bear
> The visioning powers of souls who dare
> To pierce the material screen.[74]
>
> (*ll.*11-12)

It is a magnificent response, and what should be a legend for a reform of Hardy studies, as should a later snatch of the same poem

> Figures dance to a mind with sight
>
> (*l.*16).

Hardy offers guidance on the circumstances in which this piercing can best take place. It occurs when a heightened pressure is experienced. The next extract – one very often quoted – is usually cited in evidence of Hardy's fine powers of material observation. While the concrete phenomena he describes are finely observed, the whole process of *revelation under distortion* is very much in tune with his general æsthetic ideas. It is simply that in this instance he uses very graphic material examples to express something practically metaphysical – the emergence of character.

> 1886. – *January* 2, ... Cold weather brings out upon the faces of the people the written marks of their habits, vices, passions, and memories, as warmth brings out on paper a writing in sympathetic ink. The drunkard looks still more a drunkard when the splotches have margins made distinct by frost, the hectic blush becomes a stain now, the cadaverous complexion reveals the bone

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[73] *Ibid.*, p. 186.

[74] The House of Silence', *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy* p. 474.

> under, the quality of handsomeness is reduced to its lowest terms.[75]

This releasing of characteristic expression or essence happens in contexts of great pressure or extremity. But Hardy elides the all-important detail that, while it is "Cold weather that brings out" character on peoples' faces, they are only legible to the extent that they are read by a discriminating observer. Chance provides the extremity of circumstance, but extremity must also be present in the intensity of the onlooker's regard. On this matter Hardy is tacitly in line with Ruskin:

> the virtue of the Imagination is its reaching, by intuition and intensity of gaze (not by reasoning, but by its authoritative opening and revealing power), a more essential truth than is seen at the surface of things.[76]
>
> Met an Englishman who said 'he had been staring at things'. I said I was glad to hear it – to stare was the right thing, to *look* only was no use.[77]

The language of intensification – a special kind of distortion – is actually echoed by Hardy in an adjoining journal entry. Intensification is identified with the activity of the artist and writer.

> *January* 3 [1886]. My art is to intensify the expression of things, as is done by Crivelli, Bellini etc., so that the heart and inner meaning is made vividly visible.[78]

Hardy brings together both these quotations in his prose description of Angel Clare returned from South America.

> You could see the skeleton behind the man, and almost the ghost behind the skeleton. He matched Crivelli's dead *Christus*. His sunken eyes-pits were of morbid hue, and the light in his eyes had

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[75] *Life*, p. 177.

[76] Ruskin, *Works*, IV: *Modern Painters*, II, 284.

[77] *The Diaries of John Ruskin*, eds. Joan Evans and John Howard Whitehouse, 3 vols (Oxford, 1956-9), II: *1848-1873* (1958), 685.

[78] *Life*, p. 177.

waned.[79]

In Clare's case, the extremity is suffering coupled with Crivelli's intensity of representation. He is reduced to the point where his whole body bespeaks his agony, whittled down to a core of excruciated crisis. While the images are physical, the religious motif carries spiritual and moral weight: Clare has been stripped down, in an emotional *ascesis*, to the depths of his nature. The reduction of the body is only one reduction in a series. Behind his bodily subliming, we are invited to glimpse his "ghost", as if the borders between life and death were on the verge of being crossed.

But Hardy's allusion to "ghost" here is not just a reference to the urgency of Angel Clare's plight; it is part of a general descrying of ghosts that is the final subtilisation of Hardy's essentialising, and his ultimate challenge to the "optical" in his æsthetic vision.

> *March* 4 [1886]. Novel-writing as an art cannot go backward. Having reached the analytic stage, it must transcend it by going still further in the same direction. Why not by rendering as visible essences, spectres, etc., the abstract thoughts of the analytic school?[80]

Hardy added underneath this entry as later commentary:

> This notion was approximately carried out, not in a novel, but in the much more appropriate medium of poetry, in the supernatural framework of *The Dynasts* as also in smaller poems.[81]

A further note firmly identifies the ghosts – "Spirits, Spectral figures, etc." – as the "deeper realities" referred to previously:

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[79] *Tess of the d'Urbevilles*, intr. P. N. Furbank (London and Basingstoke, 1974), p. 417. Hardy uses the same image in a poem 'In a Former Resort after many Years' where the painter specified – El Greco – is Crivelli in an earlier version. *The Variorum Edition of the Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, ed. James Gibson (London and Basingstoke, 1979), p. 702.

[80] *Life*, p. 177.

[81] *Ibid.*

> The Realities to be the true realities of life, hitherto called abstractions. The old material realities to be placed behind the former as shadowy accessories.[82]

There has been much debate over the status of Hardy's 'ghosts' – a debate which seems redundant if the *Life* is read with any care. Perhaps the most famous antagonists in the struggle are J. Hillis Miller and Donald Davie. The quarrel concerns in particular Hardy's *Poems of 1912-13*, which marks his mourning for his first wife, Emma.

Davie's reading of 'At Castle Boterel' insists that Hardy's vision is not merely psychological, but metaphysical. This is in opposition to Miller who thinks that this series of poems

> moves by way of the poet's gradual recognition, recorded explicitly in 'At Castle Boterel' and in 'The Phantom Horsewoman', that Emma exists not as an objective ghost which any man might see, but in the poet's mind.[83]

Davie says "I repudiate such a reading totally, and with a sort of fury."[84] Davie is right to have reservations, if we bear in mind Hardy's assertion of the real behind the material. Miller's reading is questionable, as he does show a tendency, here and in later work, to read in a way that reverses Hardy's values. Davie especially censures the reading of 'At Castle Boterel'.

> Miller with bland audacity writes a minus for every plus in the poem, and a plus for every minus. When he speaks of "this imprint of the transitory on the permanent," he takes as self-evidently transitory what the poem takes to be permanent – that is quality; and he takes as permanent what the poem thinks of as comparatively transient – that is to say, the primaeval rocks, long-lasting though they are.[85]

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[82] *Ibid.*

[83] J. Hillis Miller, *Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire* (Cam., Mass., and London, 1970), p. 251.

[84] Davie, 'Hardy's Virgilian Purples', p. 154.

It would have been useful if Davie had aligned the terms "permanent" and "transitory" with Hardy's own terminology of "deeper reality" and "material reality" to show how he is activating the paradox that Miller misses. Davie is possessed of strong conviction that this ghost is not just a psychological fancy, but his rationale seems to falter a little towards his conclusion.

> If Hardy is concerned only with psychological reality, as Miller and most other readers assume, then he is only saying that he will remember Emma, and the quality of the moment he shared with her, until the day he dies. Which is touching; but hardly worth saying at such length. But if the "time of such quality" persists indestructible in a metaphysical reality, then it *truly* is indestructible – because a man's mind survives the death of his body, or because quality exists as perceived by a Divine Mind, or . . . The poet does not have to decide these matters; he does not have to decide the mode in which the quality will persist after his death, it is enough for him to affirm his conviction that persist it will.[86]

Davie is correct that the ghost *is* much more than just a subjective imagining or fantasy, but he gets himself tangled or embarrassed trying to prove the metaphysical as indestructible. The error of Miller, and to a lesser extent, Davie, consists in a misappropriation of what Hardy was doing. To begin with, the questions as to whether the ghost exists objectively or subjectively, seem to depend on biographical evidence that can't be verified. After all, in the final analysis, we can't know what Hardy's beliefs about his dead wife were. Davie appears to be steering close to biography by his insistent named identification of the ghost with Emma. This identification is not one the poem makes; the poem is bare of any exacting biographical detail. While we know, from other sources of information, that Hardy was drawing on a real bereavement in these

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[85]*Ibid.*, p. 155.
[86]*Ibid.*

poems, the poems don't present themselves as biographical records. But both Miller's and Davie's accounts do, at moments, seem to be a psychologising of Hardy, of the mind of the poet-as-bereaved, rather than an exploration of the poems in their own right. For the question should be not 'does the ghost exist objectively or subjectively?' but 'what is the function of the ghost in the poem *as* a poem?'

Hardy, we have seen, declares poetry as the most appropriate territory for ghosts. Why is there this affinity? Poems have always had a special *rôle* as fitting forms for elegy and memorial tribute to the dead, but this is not Hardy's reason. Besides, ghosts occur in many poems of Hardy's other than those that have a formal memorial function. If, following the *Life*, ghosts are understood to be the deeper realities and the visible forms of essence, then poetry, as the place of essentialisation through intensity, or through revelation in distortion, is the optimal literary medium. 'Spirit', another word Hardy uses, is a pertinent term because it implies both ghost and essence. The spirit is thus the visible essence of a person, his impression – in character – upon a particular scene. A spirit offers the distinctive trace of character, an essential organising focus that gives a scene its interest for the beholder. Hardy declared firmly:

> *September* 28 [1876]. An object or mark raised or made by man on a scene is worth ten times any such formed by unconscious Nature. Hence clouds, mists, and mountains are unimportant beside the wear on a threshold, or the print of a hand.[87]

Unless one knew the wider context of Hardy's æsthetic ideas in the *Life*, it would be easy to read this as Hardy asserting some sort of warm humanism. But the emphasis is not on man but his mark. The focus falls not on a body or a hand, but on the spatial print, the

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[87] *Life*, p. 116.

characterful print they leave. It is these prints and wearings – the marks of the deeper reality – that the intensity of perception registers. Again, Hardy shows himself at one with Shelley and Romantic thought in privileging the work of the creative imagination over Nature. Nature is in thrall to the sight of the seer, and is not the subject of an unqualified reverence, or a series of respectful reports. Writing on Nature's failings, Hardy affirms the transforming powers of literary art:

> So, then, if Nature's defects must be looked in the face and transcribed, whence arises the *art* in poetry and novel-writing? which must certainly show art, or it becomes merely mechanical reporting. I think the art lies in making these defects the basis of hitherto unperceived beauty, by irradiating them with "the light that never was" on their surface, but is to be seen latent in them by the spiritual eye.[88]

Both Wordsworth and Shelley are present here. The metaphor of irradiation comes from Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* in a passage similarly concerned with æsthetic transformation.

> Poetry turns all things to loveliness; it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed . . . . It transmutes all that it touches, and every form moving within the radiance of its presence is changed by wondrous sympathy to an incarnation of the spirit which it breathes; . . . it strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty which is the spirit of its forms.[89]

Shelley's concerns: trancendence or transformation, defamiliarisation, revelation of essential spirit, are those we have seen dominating Hardy's æsthetics. Wordsworth is indicated by allusion as well – this time in a formal quotation from his 'Elegiac Stanzas suggested by a picture of Peele Castle'. In Wordsworth's

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[88] *Ibid.*, p. 114.

[89] 'Defence', *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 505.

poem, a speaker, viewing Sir George Beaumont's picture of Peele Castle, realises how much it differs from his own strong but serene perception of the scene formed during a four weeks stay in the neighbourhood. The realisation is not just of varying perceptions, but the fact that the perceiver adds something in his looking which is not of Nature. The expressive imagination illumines the scene with "the light that never was" - the constituent work of poetic perception.

> Ah! then, if mine had been the Painter's hand,
> To express what then I saw; and add the gleam,
> The light that never was, on sea or land,
> The consecration, and the Poet's dream[90].

Like Shelley's poetry which changes everything "moving within the radiance of its presence", Wordsworth's expressive perception is specifically limited to æsthetic practice - "the Poet's dream". But when Hardy quotes Wordsworth, he brings out more forcibly the distinction between a material surface and a latent beauty detectable by the spiritual eye. The latent beauty takes over the place formerly dominated by mere physical apprehension. Hardy noticeably makes Wordsworth more of a Shelleyan. He distorts the sense of "the light that never was" to mean 'the light that is beyond the immediate surface or within the object'. Æsthetic perception is not just a superaddition, but a negotiation between perceiver and the object of perception.

The French critic Maurice Blanchot has written tellingly of the relation that exists between the artist and the object in reality. He criticises a certain view of the æsthetic process which he calls an over-simplification:

> we tend to say that art does not reproduce 'reality' or copy it, that art is to be found where the artist, having abandoned the ordinary world, has gradually

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[90] 'Elegaic Stanzas', *Wordsworth: Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, A New Edition, rev. by Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford, 1969), pp. 452-3; 452.

> eliminated all that is serviceable, imitable and related to active life.[91]

Blanchot offers a corrective which does not simply reinstate reproduction, but gives a much more subtle account of the artist's negotiation with the object of representation.

> No artist ever proceeds from the use to which he puts an object in reality to the canvas on which the object has become a painting; it is never enough for him to ignore an object's use, to neutralise the object so as to achieve the freedom of a painting. Indeed, it is because, by a basic inversion, he is already at one with the painting's requirements, that, when considering a given object, he is not content with *seeing* it as it might be as if it were obsolete, but makes the object the point of intersection with the work's requirements, and thus the point at which choices decrease, notions of value and utility vanish and the world dissolves. It is because he is already in a different time-scale – in the otherness of time, outside the process of time, exposed to the ordeal of essential solitude and under its spell – it is because he has ventured up to this 'point' that, submitting to the work's demands, wholly possessed by it, he sees the objects of everyday life in a different perspective, deprived of their everyday utility, unadulterated and raised through a series of stylisations to that instant of delicate balance where they become paintings. In other words we cannot proceed from 'reality' to art either by way of the process of refutation and resistance described above, nor in any other way. We always proceed from art towards what seems to be a neutralised semblance of reality – and which, in fact, only appears such to the conventionally conditioned eye of the inadequate beholder who is riveted to the world of purpose and capable, at best, of proceeding from reality to the painting.[92]

I have quoted this passage at length because it seems to me to be a perfect gloss on what it is that Hardy does in his poetry. To reiterate Blanchot:

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[91] Maurice Blanchot, 'Mallarmé and Literary Space', in*The Siren's Song* , pp. 110-19; 118.

[92] *Ibid.*, pp. 118-9.

> When considering a given object, he is not content with seeing it as it might be if it were obsolete, but makes the object the point of intersection of the work's requirements.

And one might well say of Hardy's objects that they are 'deprived of their everyday utility, unadulterated and raised through a series of stylisations where they become *poems*'.

As this chapter has shown, stylisation and intersection take place through essentialisation. The artistic or spiritual eye shows a partiality which is nonetheless truer than quotidian observation. Although partial, it selects the essential truth of what is viewed so that the transformations of poetry paradoxically provide a fullness that is otherwise unappreciated. Thus a ghost is the essential idea or print of a person and is more 'real', more powerful, than any direct description or documentary portrait of the actual person in their material presence. If it is paradoxical to say that this spectral presentation is both partial yet complete, paradox increases with the fact that it is both personal and impersonal: personal, in that it pays attention to the individual powers of the constructive mind, varying according to the perceiver; impersonal, in that, because there is a purging or refinement of much extraneous detail, the end product is not marked (unless talismanically) by idiosyncratic or specific features. Any quirks of detail seem rather to signify the specificity of the perceiver's own vision: that is, they don't function as in a formal portraiture.

Such relative austerity corroborates the points I made earlier with reference to the debate between Miller and Davie. Even if a ghost can be found to have a strong autobiographical connection, that autobiography is less important than the fact that he is a ghost, a powerfully essentialised *poetic* force, a character. It's actually not important to know more than the sparse information Hardy's poems choose to give us. The poems tell us anything we need to know about

the "dear dead woman".

> You were she who abode
> By those red-veined rocks far West,
> You were the swan-necked one who rode
> Along the beetling Beeny Crest
>
> (*ll.*22-25).[93]

Because of the austerity of portraiture, there is no sense with the *Poems of 1912-13* that the reader intrudes or is made a voyeur. While, undoubtedly, notes of a personal tenderness or intimacy are struck, there's a distance in these presentations which remain uncluttered by overly private or domestic properties. The poetry can be read as poetry of mourning, but a mourning that intersects with the work's requirements – as must be the case with all elegy. For if this is not so, poems of mourning remain simply vehicles for expression, which may be poignant, but is more therapeutic than truly poetic. Hardy is sometimes caricatured as only finding his wife interesting after her death, when her loss provides him with the prime topic for his poetry. Such a view is crude, although it is not *altogether* an easy task to distinguish what might be thought opportunism from circumstances that might very well lend themselves to Hardy's poetics. While the crisis is contingent, full mourning is an extremity that reveals: the dead person is essentialised, and trivial, often irritating details expunged. Hardy does seem to make ghosts of persons close to him, because, in that way, their essence is preserved. This spirit-making does not exclude even his own self.[94] In this, he is at one with the speaker in the moving short poem 'When Dead' who remarks in a manner at once startling and matter-of-fact

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[93] 'The Going', *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, pp. 338-9; 338.

[94] *Life*, pp. 209-10: "For my part, if there is any way of getting a melancholy satisfaction out of life it lies in dying, so to speak, before one is out of the flesh; by which I mean putting on the manners of ghosts, wandering in their haunts, and taking their views of surrounding things."

> It will be much better when
> I am under the bough;
> I shall be more myself, Dear, then,
> Than I am now.
>
> (*ll.*1-4.)[95]

In the *Life*, Hardy describes himself as the ghost-as-observer, but the *Life* itself may be regarded as a ghost-work. We are to suppose it written by another – Florence, Hardy's second wife – as what will eventually be a memorial, when, in fact, it was written, or for the most part dictated, by Hardy himself. The *Life* is, of course, selective: as a biography, it gives us the essential Hardy, as Hardy wanted it to be known. It is his own epitaph. But the business of making the *Life*, gives us not just one, but two, ghosts. Florence, also, becomes a ghost, though not in the Hardyesque sense, or even, in the modern understanding of a 'ghost-writer': a person who writes the autobiography for someone himself unequal to the task. The only task Hardy is not equal to is appearing in his own name; and so, he takes hers, which is the one that occurs on the title-page. Florence's name thus seems to become ghostly, belying her presence. She is a ghost in a less recuperative sense, being a diminishment, a reduction. Hardy makes both his wives ghosts, though in very different ways.

Hardy's novels reveal a powerful interest in the supernatural and the power of the dead, but they don't seem to form any unified treatment as the poems – with their stress on essence – do. On a very literal level, it's easy to see why, in terms of form and possible content, the poems have the advantage, because the novels' use of classic realist narratives means they have to effect a continual relation with more regular types of material description, and adhere to more rigid time-schemes and courses of developmental action. Having said this, Hardy's novels have their own methods of relaying their author's prefigured modes of perception. The same interests

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95 'When Dead', *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, p. 721.

are there, but developed in a different way. Hardy's discursive prose style makes it possible for his novels to express his æsthetic views:

> In making even horizontal and clear inspections we colour and mould according to the wants within us whatever our eyes bring in.[96]

(The word *mould* here – a recurring word of Hardy's – does the work of the word "coalescence" cited earlier.)

> The scene to him was not the material environment of his person, but a tragic vision that travelled with him like an envelope. Through this vision the incidents of the moment but gleamed confusedly here and there, as an outer landscape through the high-coloured scenes of a stained window.[97]

The metaphors of colouring that characterise both these extracts most likely come from Shelley:

> Poets . . . can colour all that they combine with the evanescent hues of this etherial world.[98]

> Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
> Stains the white radiance of Eternity
> (52.462-3).[99]

Colouring and moulding both convey the transformative work of æsthetic perception. The second extract differs from the first in that Hardy suggests that, for this protagonist, there is not enough negotiation with what is originally seen. The imposition is a little too over-powering: rather than the perceiver making a contract or engagement with the objects he views, these objects are already predetermined by the index of tragedy, which completely overwhelms them. In the first citation, the eyes do actually 'bring in' what they see; in the second, the landscape remains indistinct

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[96] *Far From the Madding Crowd*, intr. John Bayley, with notes by Christine Wingfield (London and Basingstoke, 1974), p. 52.
[97] *The Woodlanders*, p. 259.
[98] 'Defence', *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 505.
[99] 'Adonais', *Ibid.*, p. 405.

outside the stained glass window. Hardy does, in various poems and novels, indicate moments when a force like the emotions overly dominates vision, so that there is little transaction with what is viewed. On other occasions, he uses imagery such as screens or veils to intercept the objects of sight and obscure them. In certain instances, this is done so that the observer can concentrate more on his interior sight which consists of images that are specifically drawn from memory, and which may only have a tangential link with the observer's environs. This is the case with a famous poem – 'In Front of the Landscape' – where the speaker's visions are so strong they screen out the "customed landscape". Hardy uses, as above, the image of the obscured features occasionally breaking through but making small impact.

> Forward I pushed my way as amid waste waters
> Stretching around,
> Through whose eddies there glimmered the customed landscape
> Yonder and near
>
> Blotted to feeble mist.
>
> (*ll.*4-7.)[100]

Sometimes Hardy will suggest that a certain vision is too dependent on solipsism, on the emotions, on the imagination or memory solely, and is harmful and even morally wrong. This judgement, we will see, is true of Fitzpiers in *The Woodlanders* and Pierston in *The Well-Beloved.*

Qualifications aside, the use of the word "scene" in the passage from *The Woodlanders* quoted above, is significant as it is a marked term in Hardy's æsthetic vocabulary, and is widely used in both the novels and the poems. It occurs, too, of course, in that famous statement beginning "The poetry of a scene. . .". The word has important associations for Hardy through its links with painting

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[100] 'In Front of the Landscape', *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, p. 303.

and the theatre. Hardy, as several recent studies have showed, was a passionate art-lover whose novels, especially the early works, are studded with references to particular paintings. In his youth, he took time to make an amateur study of the subject, visiting the National Gallery every day, and compiling a collection of short notes on the topic, now known as *The Schools of Painting Notebook*(1863).[101] Joan Grundy devotes a chapter of her book *Hardy and the Sister Arts* to what she sees as the influence of the theatre on Hardy as regards plot, melodrama, and other factors.[102] In both these art forms, the "scene" suggests the fundamental organisation of view-point; choice and selection as opposed to arbitrariness. Nature, as witnessed by the individual, is always and already to a greater or lesser degree, "scene" – an edited version of a total scope of panorama. The scene is therefore what the individual frames as a pre-ground, before a focus of engagement is made with any defining features. It is the arena in which the full force of imaginative perception will play. Significantly, *The Woodlanders* quotation implies in the first sentence: "The scene . . . was not the material environment of his person, but a tragic vision", that "material environment" is no less a version of scene – a physical, scientific or political one – than that made by tragic vision. Both are constructed; both are examples of scene-*making*.

Concepts of poetic scene-making predate Hardy by a long stretch. The pictorialism of contemporary painting influenced the Neoclassical and Sensibility Poets writing in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Phenomena like *tableaux* and amateur and professional theatricals, themselves influenced both in movement and in scenery by painting, provided poets with a variety of *mises-en-scène*. Poets such as Collins are constantly referring to scene in

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101 *The Personal Notebooks of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Richard H. Taylor (London and Basingstoke, 1979), pp. 105-114.

102 See Ch. III: 'Theatrical Arts', in Joan Grundy, *Hardy and The Sister Arts* (London and Basingstoke, 1979), pp. 70-105

their poems, often as a visual stage prepared for action.[103] By the time Shelley comes to employ the term, it is well-established in literary usage. Of poetry, Shelley says,

> it spreads its own figured curtain or withdraws life's dark veil from before the scene of things[104].

Joan Grundy has made interesting links between Hardy's use of veils and the Victorian use of theatrical gauzes to obscure outline on stage. The image of the gauze or veil as screen recurs consistently in Hardy's work, coupled with the mention of scene, as one of his distorting or blocking effects.

> Gauzes are for Hardy an intrinsic part of the human stage. Physically, in the form of mist or rain, they obscure or diminish vision. Mentally, through time, forgetfulness, or incomprehension, they may do the same.[105]

Hardy, she recounts,

> recommends them at the end of his Preface to *The Dynasts* as suitable to be used to "blur outlines" and thus to "shut off the actual" in the 'plays of poesy and dream' he surmises may be produced in the future[106].

Joan Grundy deduces that Hardy may have been influenced by various specific theatrical productions and goes on to speculate along these lines, and yet, the image could just as easily have come from Shelley's *Defence* where it is already a theatrical metaphor. As Jerome McGann has shown, the metaphor of the veil or curtain is a recurrent one in the *Defence*, and in a thoughtful essay, he explores Shelley's different uses of a figure, which, after all, is accepted as a

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103 *The Works of William Collins*, eds. Richard Wendorf and Charles Ryskamp (Oxford, 1979). For specific references to 'scene', see as examples 'Oriental Eclogues', pp. 2-14; 'Ode on the Poetic Character' (*l.*76), p. 34; 'Ode to a Friend on his Return' (*ll.*187, 204), pp. 62, 63.

104 'Defence', *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 505.

105 Grundy, p. 105.

106 *Ibid.*, p. 103.

common Romantic device.[107] As we shall see, Hardy's recourse to the figure of the veil or gauze is not always to "shut out the actual", but to make ghosts of figures by wiping out what may be considered irrelevant detail.

Before we proceed in full to examination of Hardy's poetic treatment of figures as ghosts and essences, it seems pertinent to see how he explores similar ideas in his novels. We might well begin with what is probably his most formal novelistic portrait of a particular character. Hardy's description of Eustacia Vye in *The Return of The Native* - which in its pictorial detail is probably influenced by Pre-Raphaelite art, notably the paintings of Rossetti - has been identifed by first David J. De Laura, and then J. B. Bullen, as containing

> the reminiscence of another famous 'presence' - the one Pater conjured up in his book *The Renaissance* of 1873.[108]

The reference is to the famous description of the Mona Lisa in the essay 'Notes on Lionardo da Vinci' which I discussed in Chapter I. De Laura and Bullen draw out a series of parallels, the most important of which is that both Hardy and Pater stress the female soul. In his description of Eustacia, Hardy uses the phrase quoted earlier from the *Life*.[109]

> Assuming that the souls of men and women were *visible essences*, you could fancy the colour of Eustacia's soul to be flame-like.[110]

Pater comments of the Mona Lisa that she has a beauty into which "the soul with all its maladies has passed."[111] Thus, even in such full

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107 'Shelley's Veils', in *Romantic and Victorian: Studies in Memory of William H. Marshall*, eds. W. Paul Elledge and Richard L. Hoffman (Rutherford, Madison, and Teaneck, 1971), pp. 198-218.

108 David J. De Laura, 'The Ache of Modernism in Thomas Hardy's Novels', *ELH* 34 (September 1964), 380-99; 382-3; Bullen, p. 103.

109 *Life*, p. 177.

110 *The Return of the Native*, intr. Derwent May (London and Basingstoke, 1974), p. 93. (My italics.)

pictorial descriptions, there is a strain of writing that aligns itself to character as essence. This is not surprising in that Pater, like Hardy, is heavily influenced by Shelley. The Shelleyan relations are complicated, but revealing.[112] Pater admitted that his impressionistic prose descriptions of paintings were inspired by those of Swinburne: in particular, Swinburne's 'Notes on the Designs of the Old Masters at Florence' (1867), and 'Notes on the Royal Academy Exhibition' (1868), the latter published just a year before Pater's 'Notes on Lionardo da Vinci'. R. M. Seiler quotes an interesting piece of correspondence between Rossetti and Swinburne

> In a letter dated 26 November 1869 to Swinburne, Rossetti wrote: 'What a remarkable article that is of Pater's on Leonardo! Something of *you* perhaps, but a great deal of himself too to good purpose.' Two days later Swinburne replied: 'I liked Pater's article on Leonardo very much. I did confess there was a little spice of my own style as you say, but much good stuff of his own, and much of interest.'[113]

Along with Pater, Swinburne comes clearly into the Hardy passage, in that almost parodic semi-chiasmus: "The mouth seemed formed less to speak than to quiver, less to quiver than to kiss."[114]

Thus, in this extract, Hardy gestures towards two other Shelleyans, while Shelley himself is shadowed into the informing shade of Pater. But Shelley assumes more obvious prominence, if one seeks an early analogue for this kind of impressionistic prose. Although Shelley is not considered to be a poet who concerns himself with the visual arts, there are some much ignored writings

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[111] Pater, p. 118.

[112] We recall that Shelley gets tangled up in Pater's essay in the subsequently deleted reference to his poem on Leonardo's supposed Medusa, but he is indicated also in the later appearance of Pater's famous Mona Lisa, who is a recasting of the Medusa.

[113] *Walter Pater: The Critical Heritage*, ed. R. M. Seiler (London, Boston, and Henley, 1980), p. 1. Seiler cites from Letter 896, *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, II, 765, and Letter 324, *The Swinburne Letters*, II (1959), 58.

[114] *The Return of the Native*, p. 94.

of his in addition to the 'Medusa' that would suggest otherwise: I think of the series of reflections on sculptures in the Uffizi Gallery, and his many letters on Italian paintings which reflect fairly accurately the tastes of his day.[115] Shelley's preface to his drama 'The Cenci' proves an unexpected source for an extremely early piece of impressionistic prose about a painting. Shelley is arrested by a portrait of Beatrice Cenci, whose true character he believes he can read in her face, independent of her historical actions. He uses again theatrical metaphors:

> The crimes and miseries in which she was an actor and a sufferer are as the mask and mantle in which circumstances clothed her for her impersonation on the scene of the world.[116]

Shelley's drama aims to correct the common perception of Beatrice, by releasing that wronged spirit through an artistic presentation, which succeeds where mere historical record could not. Swinburne was magnetised by Shelley's play; he wrote an essay on it in French called '*Les Cenci*', as well as referring to it on a number of other occasions. Additionally, there are moments in his own art reviews that heavily resemble Shelley's pathos of description as he surveys Beatrice's portrait. His treatment of Rossetti's La Pia in the 1868 essay is a case in point.[117]

It is intriguing that a set of writers, all motivated to express the characterful or visible essence of the women whose portraits they describe, should, in fact, be partially reinscribing those portraits after a pattern, altering the features with each new edition, yet constantly adding to what becomes a corporate ghost which retains a family likeness.

This networking of association and chronological

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[115] Frederic S. Colwell, 'Shelley and Italian Painting', *KSJ* 29 (1980), 43-66.
[116] Preface to 'The Cenci', *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 242.
[117] See Bonchurch, XV, 214-215.

translation is a theme that absorbed Hardy, and which he registered in different ways. In *The Well-Beloved*, the sculptor-protagonist Pierston (who himself recasts Shelley's image of Pygmalion in 'The Witch of Atlas') pursues the various incarnations of his ideal woman, and sees her renew herself with the same likeness in three successive generations of the same family. In this novel, Hardy makes the process of reincarnation simply physical: the girls' personal characters, as opposed to their appearances, are distinct, but it is the physical replication that fascinates and allures. Hardy made this clear when he noted:

> *February* 19 [1889]. The story of a face which goes through three generations or more, would make a fine novel or poem of the passage of Time. The differences in personality to be ignored.[118]

A bracketted comment on this reads:

> This idea was to some extent carried out in the novel *The Well-Beloved*, the poem entitled 'Heredity', etc.[119]

The *Life* gives a seemingly similar, but much later note, which makes an important distinction:

> *February* 26 [1923]. A story (rather than a poem) might be written in the first person, in which "I" am supposed to live through the centuries, in my ancestors, in one person, the particular line of descent chosen being that in which *qualities* are most continuous.[120]

Hardy adds, again in brackets: "From an old note." But we do not know *how* old.

While the first projected story depends on a purely

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[118] *Life*, p. 217.

[119] The dates of *The Well-Beloved* are 1892 and 1897: there are two rather different versions with different endings. See J. Hillis Miller's comments on this in his essay on the novel in *Fiction and Repetition*(Oxford, 1982), pp. 147-75, and J. B. Bullen's response in *The Expressive Eye*, pp. 231-2.

[120] *Life*, p. 418-9.

physical likeness, in the second, which looks like a corrective, it is the inherited qualities that are significant. Hardy's idea of ghost or visible essence effectively weds the two kinds of character; essence has its own visual character, which does not rely on straight physical apprehension alone, as was the case in *The Well-Beloved*. Certainly Hardy is fascinated by material likeness in its own right, by the fact that two women may be overwhelmingly alike in appearance and yet totally different in their qualities, but he ultimately tends to a view that tries to deduce character through a complementary visual notation. If, as Lorna Sage says, the short poem 'Heredity' is "about pattern without value"[121], then the work of imaginative perception at its best, is to discover 'pattern with value'; to make the visual a full sign and not an empty one, or, more accurately, to distinguish what is only sight and what is vision. An apparition or visual appearance that lacks this kind of definable quality is not a true ghost in the Hardyesque sense. Imaginative perception should not be swayed by the mere allure of appearance, but should gauge quality and essence. *The Well-Beloved* provides a moral fable in vision: the hero, like so many of Hardy's male heroes, trusts too much to surface impression and the force of his desire; the all-important sense of quality is either improperly deduced or missing:

> When she glanced up her lineaments *seemed* to have all the soul and heart that had characterized her mother's, and had been with her a true index of the spirit within. . . . He could not read her individual character, owing to the confusing effect of her likeness to a woman he had valued too late.[122]

This is pattern without value.

To recapitulate: Hardy does not make a simple divide

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121 'Hardy, Yeats and Tradition', in *Victorian Poetry*, eds. Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer, Stratford-Upon-Avon Studies 15 (London, 1972), pp. 255-75; p. 262.

122 *The Well-Beloved*, intr. J. Hillis Miller, with notes by Edward Mendelson (London and Basingstoke, 1975), pp. 101, 102. (My italics)

between the look of a thing or person and its abstract value; the spiritual or essential has an implicit visual character which is at one with the quality it manifests or communicates. Error occurs when a visual character is assumed and a corresponding essence postulated by an inaccurate survey.

The notion of the family face gripped Hardy as it has done many other writers, including Petrarch and Shakespeare. A prevailing conceit in writing has been that a family likeness can be the outward sign of the deeper family character or temperament which it accompanies. Thus parents are adjured to pass on their 'worth' or 'value' to their children. This is a particularly strong theme in Shakepeare's Sonnets. The idea that essential character has a visual correlate is present in many words to do with the face which also indicate temper, quality, or disposition, such as aspect, countenance, or air – this last being the one that Shakespeare employs so beautifully in 'The Winter's Tale'

> Your fathers image is so hit in you
> (His very air) that I should call you brother
> (V. i. 127-8).[123]

Hardy reverses the expectations of this conceit in *The Well-Beloved*. Pierston's looking is promiscuous and unguarded; it does not respect or solicit the individual characters of the many women he pursues. In pursuit of his ideal, he tries to thrust it upon them, to see it only in them without any attention to their own qualities. Pierston's epipsyche lodges in a succession of different women who give her fleeting incarnation; or rather, that is how *he* sees things working. The following quotation gives Pierston's rationalisation: it is the epipsyche that is the "she" discussed, not any of the series of women inhabited, who become merely adjectival, a succession of physical attributes or types:

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[123] William Shakespeare, 'The Winter's Tale',*The Riverside Shakespeare*, p. 1599.

> She was a blonde, a brunette, tall, *petite*, *svelte*, straight-featured, full, curvilinear. Only one quality remained unalterable: her instability of tenure. In Börne's phrase nothing was permanent in her but change.[124]

The hero's 'punishment' is an extremely clever one. A physical constant is given in the enduring likeness to be found in three generations of women from the same family, but any expectation of deeper likeness is disappointed. Pierston's history is punctuated by a series of perceptual lessons which prove his reading and powers of deduction are too slight; sheer desire overcomes perception, which fails because there is no authentic exchange between the perceiver and what he perceives.

iv. Hardy, Faces, and Revelation

The family face also fascinated Hardy for other reasons. He was excited by the way a recognised likeness can unveil the secret of an otherwise hidden relation. Recognition of such likeness is often a powerful dramatic factor in the stories and novels. In these instances, there is not necessarily any suggestion of deeper shared character; the revelation and deeper reality consist purely in the descrying of connection hitherto unobserved. True to form, Hardy uses crisis or extremity of circumstance to facilitate revelation. Expression surfaces as the emotional temperature peaks or falls.

In the short story 'For Conscience' Sake', Hardy employs a semi-comic crisis. The violence of a bout of sea-sickness brings out the facial resemblance between a father and his unwitting daughter to the girl's *fiançé*.

> Nausea in such circumstances, like midnight watching, fatigue, trouble, fright, has this marked effect upon the countenance, that it often brings

[124] *The Well Beloved*, p. 68.

> out strongly the divergences of the individual from the norm of his race, accentuating the superficial peculiarities to radical distinctions. Unexpected physiognomies will uncover themselves at these times in well-known faces; the aspect becomes invested with the presence of entombed and forgotten ancestors; and family lineaments of special or exclusive cast, which in ordinary moments are masked by a stereotyped expression or mien, start up with a crude insistence to the view.[125]

Readers will recall Hardy's statement on the disproportioning of art "to show clearly the features that matter in those realities", and the link made between precursor and belated poets which can be described after the manner of a hidden family likeness. The above passage, magnificently resonant in its own right, becomes even more so if read as a description of creative influence.

In the story, as the ill-effects of the voyage wear off, Hardy's narrative includes an almost equally magical account of a restoration to normal appearances. Once out of extremity, the deeper realities are once more submerged.

> As they went homeward, and recovered their complexions and contours, the similarities one by one disappeared, and Frances and Mr. Millborne were again masked by the commonplace differences of sex and age. It was as if, during the voyage, a mysterious veil had been lifted, temporarily revealing a strange pantomime of the past.[126]

In very different circumstances, and yet ones no less extreme, does Miss Aldclyffe recognise Cytherea's likeness to her father in Hardy's *Desperate Remedies*. Cytherea has been moved by passionate anger.

> She usually bore a much stronger likeness to her mother than to her father, but now, looking with a

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125 'Life's Little Ironies', now in *Collected Short Stories*, intr. Desmond Hawkins, with notes by F. B. Pinion (London and Basingstoke, 1988), p. 425.
126 *Ibid.*, p. 426.

> grave, reckless and angered expression of countenance . . . her father's features were distinct in her. It was the first time Miss Aldclyffe had seen her in a passionate mood, and wearing that expression which was invariably its concomitant.[127]

In antithesis to this, Hardy presents the extremity of complete passivity as revealing hidden likeness. Henchard sees in the features of the sleeping Elizabeth Jane that he is *not* her father.

> In sleep there come to the surface buried genealogical facts, ancestral curves, dead men's traits, which the mobility of daytime animation screens and overwhelms: in the present statuesque repose of the young girl's countenance Richard Newson's was unmistakably reflected. He could not endure the sight of her and hastened away.[128]

But in all these states, whether those of great activity in, say, strong emotion, or passivity where the observed person is vulnerable to natural events, there is a loss of self-control and the constraints exercised by convention.

The imagery Hardy uses to show the emergence of family likeness; images of 'bringing out', of 'coming to the surface', recall the beautifully telling image of invisible or "sympathetic ink" that Hardy employed in the journal entry quoted in the *Life*.

> Cold weather brings out upon the faces of people the written marks of their habits, vices, passions and memories, as warmth brings out on paper a writing in sympathetic ink.[129]

For Hardy, obsessed with images of faces and what those faces reveal and betoken, the figure of sympathetic ink is potent, in that it marvellously conveys the power of a just-made-visible essence that looks through the face, or is deduced in it. The image involves two spaces in an intricate relation with each other; one eventually

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127 *Desperate Remedies*, intr. C. J. P. Beatty (London and Basingstoke, 1975), p. 107.
128 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, intr. Ian Gregor, with notes by Bryn Caless (London and Basingstoke, 1974), p. 154.
129 *Life*, p. 177.

permeating the other, breaking through it, and disturbing its space to make it read otherwise. The force of what is normally known as 'invisible ink', which Hardy so delicately terms "sympathetic", is that it can be made visible, just as Hardy's essences become visible to an attuned perception. Invisible ink made visible, *in* its new-found visibility, can substantially alter, correct or reemphasise what was on view, be it writing or design. Such an ink may, in fact, reveal the traces of a totally different picture imposed on another, or a massive alteration, or revision. In a message, there might be revealed a wholly other import, a contradiction or added turn; parts could be obliterated, glossed, or ironised; different styles could be used. The ink is called "sympathetic" because it responds to warmth – that extremity of circumstance sufficient to promote emergence and revelation. But it is sympathetic also, because one can imagine the soliciting interest of the gaze as it comes into relation with the responsiveness, the give of a certain power in writing and design. Sympathetic ink gives us what Shelley so brilliantly called "a writing within writing" in the Seventh Canto of *The Revolt of Islam.*

Cythna, imprisoned and alone, creates her own expressive alphabet:

> And on the sand would I make signs to range
> These woofs, as they were woven, of my thought;
> Clear, elemental shapes, whose smallest change
> A subtler language within language wrought
> (XXXII.3109-12).[130]

Hardy's and Shelley's metaphors aren't precise analogies, but are extremely important in that they identify both poets understanding of their writing. In writing, both Shelley and Hardy recognise, another writing takes place, which is not a matter of a particular set of words, or a specific message to be unscrambled. This writing within writing, or, permeating writing in sympathetic ink, is

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[130] 'The Revolt of Islam', *Shelley: Poetical Works*, p. 113.

writing-as-character: the individual print of power a poet's poem makes on his reader, by the pressure of the visual and spatial forces that inform his poetic practice. If, as I have suggested elsewhere, poems do have a coexistent poetic space which is not reducible to linguistic feature, then character is the shaping force of that space as it permeates through into the poem. Character is thus deducible in the formation of certain identifiable linguistic, rhythmic, or figurative patterns and devices in the poem, without being altogether assimilated by them. It is not the visual representations of a poem, though it is strongly implicated in their manufacture; it is itself the picture of the poem, its marks and features.

What is particularly interesting about the Shelleyan poets is that their work evidences a keen perception of this picture, and this perception becomes an integral part of their poetry. Thus the poets may claim essence and essentialising as the work of poetry because, in looking into the heart of a thing, they look to poetry's own heart or core. The transaction between sight and vision, between perceiver and perceived, partakes of the constructive forces that underpin the poem: the dynamic contact between space and language, as space becomes character within the poem, and as it figures and takes place in writing. Thus it can be said, that there is a relation between character as I have just described it, and character in a more limited and conventional sense of script - the words actually written. There is a coalescence and a shaping presence exerted by the first type on the second, but the larger character is by no means, to be identified purely as a given set of words. 'Character', although it runs the risk of confusion, is an extremely useful term as it embraces and relates various ideas, matching specific feature to determining essence, elaborating writing in its interpretations as style, either a form inhabited by a specific genius, or a simple linguistic artefact.

In the visual arts, the portrait or design based on the human form, has a primary place. Portraits seem to demand an extremely high degree or concentration and perception, for to be effective, their revelation of character must be united with that specific print of the artist's rendering which "brings a new note". Character is not just the revealing look released by the painted subject, but the innovation of the painter. The portrait's appeal has other grounds too: the partially narcissistic one of humanity's paramount interest in itself, which kindles the individual's curiosity in his fellow beings, and the need for a memorial of the deceased – a testament to virtue, beauty, or other qualities made beautiful, and thus preserved. The eyes and face of another – the place in which essential character most strongly resides – in themselves provide an unequalled point of attraction and lure as focus. The face as object of survey or scrutiny is the focus *par excellence* for intense perception. For the perceiver not only brings his own perception to bear on that of the human object, but he can see in that person's face, the perception or formative grounds of perception the looked-at would himself exercise. One recalls Hopkins's axiom: "What you look hard at seems to look hard at you"[131]. This must be more so with portraits than any other phenomena. Hardy removes the face from the formalities and frame of orthodox portraiture, and yet retains its impact and æsthetic implications. When Hardy observes faces, they aren't usually in paintings, although, as I shall show, the metaphors of depiction and design are very important to him, and may be implied in the manner of looking. In many poems Hardy does directly refer to such formal portraiture as painting, sketch, or even occasionally photograph. Faces and bodily form secure looking in a way nothing else does: they reflect, give it out, and seem to be shaped by it. They are the most motivated and motivating zone for

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[131] *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, eds. Humphrey House and Graham Storey (London, New York, Toronto, 1959), p. 204.

the gaze, the ultimate place of reaction, the point to which looking irresistibly tends, the inscription for the supreme efforts of interpretation.

The manner in which Hardy treats faces in the novels is a clear indicator of their power for him and the way they mobilise perception. A striking passage in *The Woodlanders*, which looks at the face of Marty South, one of Hardy's favourite heroines, implies that the indiscriminate gaze of the crowd vitiates a face's vitality and speciality. A face's abstention from general regard helps preserve its essence.

> Her face had the usual fulness of expression which is developed by a life of solitude. Where the eyes of the multitude beat like waves upon a countenance they seem to wear away its mobile power; but in the still water of privacy every feeling and sentiment unfolds in visible luxuriance, to be interpreted as readily as a printed word by an intruder. In years she was no more than nineteen or twenty, but necessity of taking thought at a too early period of life had forced the provisional curves of her childhood's face to a premature finality.[132]

True to form, solitude is here the form that pronounces Marty's looks, and her visible expression reads like a "printed word". Hardy again links expression with writing or language, and signals an act of interpretation. Hardy's presentation of faces in the novels, which would require an extensive study in itself, indicates that the faces of his *dramatis personæ* have a double determination, being formed either by the pressure of inner substance or spirit made manifest, or by the pressure of externality, circumstance, fate, or an amalgam of both. As we have seen, these forces will fuse together, when external circumstance applies a pressure that delivers up, in startling clarity, the inner expression. Hardy often uses the ambiguous word "mould" to signify the cast of a face: ambiguous, because it sums this double

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[132] *The Woodlanders*, p. 41.

process. A mould can either be the active shaper that transfers its form to another object or substance, or the object so shaped. With regard to the shaped object, there are different kinds of moulds. The mould of a face could be something predetermined: a prestructure that, taking on some of my first definition of *shaper*, impresses itself upon the grain of reality, and aligns it with that predisposition; or, it could be what is moulded: the combinative selection of factors shaped by a lifetime's living, an arbitrariness that might have been otherwise. In the Marty South passage, a prestructure is implied, but also, the secondary moulding of circumstance, which has its own part to play.

If the novels are full of these small cameos – brief summations of looking at its most powerful – facial imagery isn't simply confined to portraits of the novels' actors.

> *February* 10 [1897]. In spite of myself I cannot help noticing countenances and tempers in objects of scenery, *e.g.* trees, hills, houses.[133]

In Hardy's writing inanimate objects are perpetually anthropomorphised or personified, given characters, given faces. The affective strength of the facial aspect is transferred to all manner of other objects to bring to bear the intensity of survey on what otherwise might be regarded as commonplace. In seeing faces all around, one is also drawing attention to and intensifying the very powers of perception itself. If so many faces and fragments of faces begin to appear, then the stress on sight and vision begins to escalate in turn. Hardy's landscapes not only have "the mark of man" upon them, but, literally, man's bodily characteristics. Roads, rooms, buildings, the elements and all other kinds of things are spoken of in terms of facial appearance. Hence Hardy will allude to:

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133 *Life*, p. 285. Compare with this statement of Shelley's: "We see trees, fields, living beings in our own shape, and in shapes more or less analogous to our own. These are perpetually changing the mode of their existence relatively to us." 'Speculations on Metaphysics I: The Mind', in *Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, VII, 61.

> The physiognomy of a deserted highway[134],
>
> The features of the town[135],
>
> the bleared white visage of a sunless winter's day[136].

Most often, these faces are eloqent demanding interpretation.

> These bridges had speaking countenances.[137]
>
> Her own bedroom wore at once a look more familiar than when she had left it, and yet a face estranged.[138]
>
> The smooth surfaces of glossy plants came out like weak lidless eyes: there were strange faces and figures from expiring lights[139].

It is at this point that it is useful to consider Hardy's attitude towards what Ruskin called the pathetic fallacy. While Hardy endorsed Ruskin on the intensity of the gaze, his total relation to Ruskin is not so clear-cut. In sum, it is Pater, a Shelleyan critic who seems more of a pervasive influence, though, at this point, the network of affiliation complicates, as Pater himself is thought to owe much to Ruskin. Furthermore, Ruskin is a notoriously difficult writer to quantify, as his own work is rich with creative contradictions: his own relation to Shelley, for example, is extremely hard to grasp. He mentions an early passion for Shelley's poetry which is replaced by dissatisfaction and antipathy[140] – it is normally assumed that his major poetic influence is Wordsworth – and yet certain moments in his writing are very obviously influenced by Shelley. While various critics have quite rightly pointed out certain linkages between Hardy

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134 *The Woodlanders*, p. 35.
135 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 60.
136 *The Woodlanders*, p. 54.
137 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 247.
138 *The Woodlanders*, p. 77.
139 *Ibid.*, p. 326.
140 For Ruskin on Shelley, see the lengthy note on his developing views given by his editors in *Works*, I:*Early Prose Writings 1843-1843* (1903), 253-4.

and Ruskin, only Paulin has indicated Hardy's divergence from Ruskin over the matter of pathetic fallacy.[141] J. D. Thomas's article 'Poetic Truth and Pathetic Fallacy' is valuable in that it corrects the prevalent misreading of pathetic fallacy as the imputation of human character and feeling to inanimate natural objects, for while this may be an effect of the fallacy, its true definition lies in that it is "a deceptive appearance caused by emotion."[142] Thomas would go as far to say that critics are wrong in so far as they believe Ruskin to condemn the pathetic fallacy as a poetic device; he thinks that Ruskin does not deprecate the fallacy in this way. Thomas is right in that he picks up Ruskin's ambivalence about the fallacy, and his admission that the fallacy is a source of pleasure, and valid in so far as its truth to emotion overcomes the deception of sight it induces. He is wrong in that Ruskin is, at other moments, overcome by a misgiving that however elevated the emotion may be, the pathetic fallacy is always, in the last instance, to be considered as some kind of weakness. Here is such an instance:

> The temperament which admits the pathetic fallacy, is as I have said above, that of a mind or body in some sort too weak to deal fully with what is before them or upon them; borne away, or over-clouded, or over-dazzled by emotion; and it is a more or less noble state, according to the force of the emotion which has induced it.[143]

That Hardy plainly disagreed with this deprecation is apparent from those many of his poems that treat scenes and objects as shaped by emotional vision. Indeed one of these poems, 'The Seasons of the Year', was originally titled 'The Pathetic Fallacy'. Furthermore he would have disagreed with that element in Ruskin's argument that assumes the priority of the external object over the observer:

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141 For Paulin on the pathetic fallacy, see pp. 18-19.
142 J. D. Thomas in *Texas Studies in Literature*, III, 3 (Autumn 1961), 342-7; 343.
143 Ruskin, *Works*,V:*Modern Painters*, III, 208.

> we may . . . examine the point in question, - namely, the difference between the ordinary, proper, and true appearances of things to us; and the extraordinary, or false appearances, when we are under the influence of emotion, or contemplative fancy; false appearances, I say, as being entirely unconnected with any real power or character in the object, and only imputed to it by us.[144]

Ruskin presupposes that it is essentially the object in its own peculiar nature which is of interest, and that any method of perception which misrepresents that nature thus falsifies the moral truth, inherent in His Creation, of the Divinity's revelation of Himself to humanity. Ruskin approves of Scott because "instead of making Nature anywise subordinate to himself, he makes himself subordinate to *her*."[145] Evidently this is not likely to appeal to Hardy. On the other hand, the many small instances of anthropomorphism which crowd Hardy's works cannot always be said to occur in an emotional context. Although these occurrences would very often been called pathetic fallacies, under the incorrect definition concerning the imputation of human characteristics, they cannot strictly be thought of as such according to Ruskin proper. Are they then simply a device to vivify? Or are they, in fact, part of a way of looking that not only has little to do with Ruskin's fallacy, but challenges its assumptions about what has priority in vision?

When Hardy saw faces in things, they appeared as the marks of an intensity of heightened perception which is refracted in the most unexpected of places. It is hard to know quite what those of Hardy's critics who read him as a communicator of natural appearances make of this strain of figurative language. Presumably it

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144 *Ibid.*, p. 204 It is possible that this passage might have influenced Arnold's proposition "to see the object as in itself it really is." Of *Modern Painters*, when it first appeared, Arnold commented to his sister Jane Forster, 31 March 1856: "Full of excellent *aperçus*, as usual, but the man and character too febrile, irritable, and weak to allow him to possess the *ordo concatenatioque veri*." *Letters of Matthew Arnold 1848-88*, collected and arranged by George W. E. Russell, 2 vols (London and New York, 1895), I, 51.

145 Ruskin, *Works*,V:*Modern Painters*, III, 341.

must be glossed as a form of primitivism or throw-back to Wordsworthian 'pantheism', or, perhaps, seeing faces in things could be rationalised as an incisive way of observing aspects of appearance that might otherwise pass unnoticed, such as "The smooth surfaces of glossy plants" in the extract from *The Woodlanders* cited above. However, all these interpretations seem beside the point, which is, surely, that Hardy fills his landscapes with regarding eyes because doing so makes scrutiny and perception the prevalent energy. What Hardy is seeing is sight itself; this is what shows him so effectively as one of Shelley's inheritors. It is not then simply a question of reversing Ruskin on the fallacy to make the perceiver all-important; the priority goes to perception itself. The landscapes look back at whoever looks at them; they glass, gloss, and register the action of the novels, continually sharpening focus, and reminding one of the preeminence of perception. Furthermore, Hardy adds to this imagery of faces a sort of general idiom. Commonplace phrases begin to acquire a new guise.

> In the face of this[146],
>
> she . . . would never countenance[147],
>
> how could she look him in the face[148],
>
> I don't like the looks of her at all[149],
>
> I hadn't the face.[150]

The narratives and the protagonists continually refer to the face as an index of emotion, spiritual health or well-being.

> The first look that possessed her face was relief[151],

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[146] *The Woodlanders*, p. 351.
[147] *Ibid.*, p. 175.
[148] *Ibid.*, p. 315.
[149] *Ibid.*, p. 277.
[150] *Ibid.*, p. 151.
[151] *Ibid.*, p. 346.

> She bloomed again in the face[152],
>
> Lucetta's face became – as a woman's face becomes when the man she loves rises upon her gaze like an apparition[153],
>
> Elizabeth's face, as soon as she recognised her friend, shaped itself into affectionate lines while yet beyond speaking distance[154],
>
> The nettled, clouded aspect which had possession of his face[155],
>
> A sort of fret in her face, as if she chid her own soul.[156]

Because this facial language comes very easily to Hardy, he is apt to convert other phenomena into facial terms through analogy in metaphor and simile:

> as the momentary strangeness of a face from which we have for years been separated insensibly passes off with renewed intercourse and tones itself down into identity with the lineaments of the past[157].
>
> Voices were borne over to them . . . each sentence being disorganized by the gusts like a face in a cracked mirror.[158]

Hardy's extensive use of faces in the novels should inform our reading of the poems. As the poems are the site of refining, ghosting, and essentialising, the poetry doesn't give such detailed coverage in discursive terms. But, if the novels establish the all-pervasiveness of the face and the look, the poems are the place where they are made to function as an integral part of the literary form. As the poems rely less on detail, it is necessary to know the

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[152] *Ibid.*, p. 306.
[153] *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 203.
[154] *Ibid.*, p. 229
[155] *Ibid.*, p. 70
[156] *The Woodlanders*, p. 275.
[157] *Ibid.*, p. 115.
[158] *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, p. 171.

breadth of the novels' more informative approach, so that we know what accompanies Hardy's more austere outlining of face and form in the poetry. In the poems, the barest delineation will suffice. This abstention from detail can make the novels look more 'lyrical' in their eloquent and intricate descriptions than does the poetry. But to identify this 'lyricism' as poetry is to short-change Hardy's poetic work. To repeat what was said earlier: Hardy's poetry deliberately cuts down what is seen, especially faces, to all but essential detail. However, although partial, the selection of essence provides a fullness that would otherwise be missed. Showing how difficult he is to categorise, in a chapter of *Modern Painters*, III entitled 'Of the Use of Pictures', Ruskin expounds something very similar when he writes:

> if the imagination is to be called to take delight in any object, it will not always be well, if we can help it, to put the *real* object there, before it. The imagination would on the whole rather have it *not* there; – the reality and substance are rather in the imagination's way; it would think a great deal more of the thing if it could not see it. Hence, that strange and sometimes fatal charm, which there is in all things as long as we wait for them, and the moment we have lost them; but which fades while we possess them; that sweet bloom of all that is far away, which perishes under our touch.[159]

What Hardy does is to make the character of a thing, particularly that of a human face or figure, appear in its *fullest translation*. The phrase is taken from Hardy's poem 'In Front of the Landscape', where the ghost-like *revenants*

> now show hourly before the intenser
> Stare of the mind
> As they were ghosts
> . . . with fuller translation than rested upon them
> As living kind.
>
> (*ll*.61- 66.)[160]

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[159] Ruskin, *Works*, V: *Modern Painters*, III, 181-2

[160] *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, p. 304.

Rather than filling in detail, Hardy's poems do the reverse of this: they empty space. They do not cover the space of the face or figure with description; they void it, leaving an outline. Space, highly-charged space, is left with few particulars; it is demarcated, apportioned, delimited, but it is not filled. The intensity of attention and concentration aroused by the face and human form are brought to bear on this tantalisingly powerful blind spot. Hardy suggests this outline in several ways: through the line of an actual drawing, through silhouette, through the evanescent shape of a ghost. Alternatively, there are also substitutions, things that stand in for or cover the body: old clothes or items of apparel, and – more macabre – shrouds, tombstones and memorial tablets. All these things suggest what that outlined space implies: something is missing or lost; the space is also a gap. Here is Ruskin once more:

> And thus it is, that, for the most part, imperfect sketches, engravings, outlines, rude sculptures, and other forms of abstraction, possess a charm which the most finished picture frequently wants. For not only does the finished picture excite the imagination less, but, like nature itself, it *taxes* it more.[161]

Why does this gap, this potent outline which so concentrates vision, appear? Because we are meant to look into it for what permeates through; because, in looking into the gap, we look into the heart of Hardy's poetry.

Regarding this gap, it is helpful to draw on what William James has to say about the gap of consciousness:

> The state of our consciousness is peculiar. There is a sort of gap therein; but no mere gap. It is a gap that is intensely active. A sort of the wraith of the name is in it, beckoning us in a given direction, making us at moments tingle with the sense of our closeness, and then letting us sink back without the longed-for term. If wrong names are proposed to us, this singularly definite gap acts immediately

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[161] Ruskin, *Works*, V:*Modern Painters*, III, 186.

> so as to negate them. They do not fit into its mould. And the gap of one word is not like the gap of another, all empty of content as both might seem necessarily to be when described as gaps . . . .The rhythm of a lost word may be there without a sound to clothe it; or the evanescent sense of something which is the initial vowel or consonant may mock us fitfully without growing more distinct. Everyone must know the tantalizing effect of the blank rhythm of some forgotten verse, restlessly dancing in one's mind, striving to be filled out with words.[162]

Hardy does not have a particular word that appears in his gaps, but, instead, we are meant to construe the legibility of writing-as-character. Hardy's faces, forms and ghosts are images that are directly dependent on character as a motivating energy. Through them access is given to what is more generally diluted or dispersed throughout the poem. The gaps of Hardy's faces allow for glimpses of his writing-within-writing, the emergences of a previously invisible spatial script.

We know that Hardy had, even on what looks like a mere physical level, a strong sense of the space of his poems. Samuel Hynes draws attention to the comments on verse skeletons noted in the *Life*.

> The notion of the empty poetic mold, waiting to be filled with words, may seem naïve . . . but they do show Hardy's lively interest in the technical aspects of his chosen art.[163]

Hynes's incidental patronage apart, the use of the phrase "empty poetic mold waiting to be filled with words" is fascinating, linking excellently to James's use of the term "mould", and as well, of course, to Hardy's own. The verse skeletons indicate Hardy's sense, when making poetry, of manipulating the structure of a space.

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[162] William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (London, 1901), pp. 251, 252, cited by Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Psychoanalysis of Artistic Vision and Hearing*, 3rd ed. (London, 1975), pp. 9-10.
[163] Hynes, p. 20.

Rather than simply regarding the skeletons – those perfect essentialising outlines – as Hardy's opportunism and his valuation of rhythm over sense, it is more illuminating to regard them according to the exploration of space Maurice Blanchot describes beautifully in 'The Book to Come'.

> Nothing is created and no discourse can be creative except through the preliminary exploration of the totally vacant region where language, before it is a set of given words, is a silent process of correspondences, or a rhythmic scansion of life. Words exist only to signify the area of correspondence, the space onto which they are projected[164].

Hardy's metrical markings do not, in themselves, constitute what is truly of interest here, but rather, the fact that they designate poetic space as it is made visible by rhythm or pattern alone – a dance of the wraiths of the right words. Interestingly, there is a Latin phrase *nominis umbra* which means the ghost or shadow of a name, and signifies 'a faintly surviving renown'. The idea is, of course, linked to ideas of character as *impressive*, as reputation; to the function of portraiture as memorial or testimony. The right words will be the amalgam of character described earlier: the union of space and language. These are what will replace the mere metrical notation which is a skeleton, a skeleton nonetheless accompanied by a set of ghostly petitions, the fundamental energies of poetic space. Substitute 'poem' for "man" in Hardy's portrayal of Angel Clare, and you have an accurate summation of the meaning of the verse skeletons: 'You could see the skeleton behind the poem, and almost the ghost behind the skeleton.' The gaps demarcated by Hardy's *representations* of faces and figures, real, drawn, or phantasmal, have an allied *rôle*. If the original poem-space can be thought of as

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[164] Blanchot, in *The Siren's Song*, pp. 237-8.

ghostly, striving to preserve its character in the character of the written poem, making its figuration, that is, its organising capacity and energy, part of that poem, the poem's representations become gaps and ghostings which focus attention back onto that original space, which in its essence is the deeper underlying reality.

v. Hardy and Synecdochic Vision

Hardy's gaps have an important synecdochic function: they reveal a glimpse of space, the heart of the poetry, and make it stand in for a whole. This replicates the partial for full phenomenon of essence noted earlier. Moreover, as seems common with synecdoche, accumulations of such part for whole structures proliferate. The gaps themselves are represented by face and form; face and form themselves, we know, 'stand in for' character. Similarly clothes or monuments stand in for the human form. The poems I will examine shortly reveal complicated synecdochic structures of imagery.

Hardy in his notebooks and novels shows a tendency to think and work in a substitutive, and especially synecdochic, way. His philosophy of essence, as hinted above, is one manifestation of this: a partial detail or outline recalls the whole object as essence. A related family of tropes and figures dominate his writing: synecdoche, metonymy, anthropomorphism and personification. Hardy showed that he was perfectly aware of these rhetorical manœuvres in his bitter response to the critics of *Tess*, and the fierce criticism of the novel's famous last line. He commented with regard to one reviewer who presumed to claim for him a belief in a malign god:

> I find that the writer of the estimate has harked back to a passage in a novel of mine, printed many years ago, in which the forces opposed to the heroine were allegorized as a personality (a method not unusual in imaginative prose or poetry) by the

> use of a well-known trope, explained in that venerable work, Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, as "one in which life, perception, activity, design passion, or any property of sentient beings, is attributed to things inanimate."
>
> Under this species of criticism if an author were to say "Aeolus maliciously tugged at her garments, and tore her hair in his wrath", the sapient critic would no doubt announce that author's evil creed to be that the wind is "a powerful being endowed with the baser human passions", etc., etc.[165]

The *Life* reveals many instances of Hardy envisioning scenes and objects by means of the substitutive tropes and figures listed above. The linking theme is usually the stressing of essence. Hence Hardy's celebrated reminiscence of J. S. Mill orating to the crowd:

> The picture of him as personified earnestness surrounded for the most part by careless curiosity[166].

A larger discursive passage seems specifically to treat the idea of synecdochic vision:

> The art of observation . . . consists in this: the seeing of great things in little things, the whole in the part – even the infinitesimal part. For instance, you are abroad: you see an English flag on a ship-mast from the windows of your hotel: you realize the English navy. Or, at home, in a soldier you see the British Army; in a bishop at your club, the Church of England; and in a steam hooter you see Industry.[167]

Hardy also notes how a particular telescoping of narrative made a strong impression on him at an early age.

> He could recall what his mother had said about the

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165 *Life*, p. 244. The citation Hardy gives from Campbell is from the first edition, and not one of the susequent popular abridged editions. See George Campbell, *The Philosphy of Rhetoric*, 2 vols (London, 1776), II, 204-5. Hardy is quoting from Section IV, which is entitled 'Things animate for things lifeleſs'.

166 *Ibid.*, p. 330.

167 *Ibid.*, p. 248.

> Rush murder when he was about the age of six: 'The governess hanged him'. He was puzzled, and wondered how a governess could hang a man.[168]

This kind of synecdochic narrative is extensively used in the novels, and is responsible for organising what has been called Hardy's view of Fate or Will, sometimes, it is suggested, to an over-determined degree. Readers have often complained about the accumulation of symbolic value in Hardy's work, especially in a late novel such as *Jude the Obscure*. Jude's small son, the allegorically named Time, centres one of the most heavily freighted and powerful uses of synecdoche. In the boy's death by hanging, (a death which coincidentally draws on that early fascination with substitution in "The governess hanged him") the child, and what he stands for, are explictly acknowledged by Hardy. Jude and Sue discover the dead Time:

> The boy's face expressed the whole tale of the situation. On that little shape had converged all the inauspiciousness, and shadow which had darkened the first union of Jude, and all the accidents, mistakes, fears, errors of the last. He was their nodal point, their focus, their expression in a single term. For the rashness of these parents he had groaned, for their ill-assortment he had quaked, and for the misfortunes of these he had died.[169]

Here most graphically and movingly does Hardy make the boy in his status as child of ill-assorted parents, in his forboding name, in his melancholic type, in his dead body, and most importantly in the characterising expression of his face, the expressive part for whole. The homing-in of the narrative on this point of focus, followed by the outward movement of expansive interpretation, is immensely effective in its concentration and controlled release of attention.

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168 *Ibid.*, p. 440.

169 *Jude the Obscure*, intr. Terry Eagleton, with notes by P. N. Furbank (London and Basingstoke, 1974), pp. 356-7.

Nonetheless, Hardy's intensity here is almost unbearable for some of his readers. What we should notice from this and the previous example is the way that Hardy's substitutions do concentrate on human figures and forms. This is scarcely surprising as these figures and forms, standing in for character as part for whole, are easily the most effective synecdochic means for focussing the reader's attention on to the heart of the poetry.

I mentioned earlier that Hardy uses veils and gauzes, not just to "shut out the actual", but to make ghosts of figures by wiping out inessential detail. This statement, too, may be advanced; screening occurs very often in Hardy's poetry, and is most definitely implicated in his working of synecdoche. Screening is involved as a way of representing the whole when the whole could not possibly appear as itself. Concurrent with the part that is presented, say, an outline, there is a deliberate staying or occlusion of the whole; it is set back, distanced, and covered. But that little bit which one is allowed to glimpse transmits the whole more effectively than the whole could itself, were it able. If this occlusion is described in terms of what it does to space, then we once more return to the paradox that space is only really visible as space when it is delimited. A very powerful illustration of this mapping of space is found in a major poem by the nineteenth century Italian poet Giacomo Leopardi – a poet known to Hardy, who possessed the volume *Poésies et Œuvres Morales de Leopardi* (1880) translated by F. A. Aulard, and Leopardi's *Essays, Dialogues and Thoughts* (1893) translated by P. Maxwell.[170] He quotes from the first of these in the '1867' Notebook. The poem I refer to is Leopardi's justly famous '*L'Infinito*' ('The Infinite'), written in 1819 which, incidentally, is the same year as Shelley composed his 'Medusa'. I cite the first few lines, followed by a translation by John Heath-Stubbs.

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[170] See *The Literary Notebooks*, II, '1867' Notebook, note on entry 172.

Sempre caro mi fu quest'ermo colle,
E questa siepe, che da tanta parte
Dell'ultimo orrizonte il guardo esclude.
Ma sedendo e mirando, interminati
Spazi di là quella, e sovrumani
Silenzi, e profondissima quiete
Io nel pensier mi fingo; . . . .

This lonely hill was always dear to me,
And this hedgerow, that hides so large a part
Of the far sky-line from my view. Sitting and gazing,
I fashion in my mind what lies beyond–
Unearthly silences, and endless space,
And the very deepest quiet; . . .[171].

The speaker imagines the infinite stretching away on the other side of the hedgerow, but he can only imagine it – that is, the infinite can only exist – because the hedgerow is there. Where there is no hedgerow to delimit, there would be no space for such thoughts. The infinite, or the idea of the infinite, depends on an occlusion in the form of a block or barrier. The hedgerow forms the hinge in an anomalous sort of diptych, one side of which is temporal, and the other, seen not with the physical but the spiritual eye, is infinite. Leopardi's poem isn't properly synecdochic in that the nature of the space on the one side of the hedge isn't of a type with that on the other; the first does not invoke or summon the second. Hardy's poetry is synecdochic, but the device of the screen or occlusion, as in Leopardi, makes an imaginative breakthrough or seizure possible. The difference is that the screen works with a synecdochic relation. I remarked earlier that Hardy's poems void space in that they delimit it, but deprive it of detail. They do not cover the space of the face or figure with description. But this voiding often takes the form of a peculiar kind of cover, albeit a non-descriptive one. It acts like a blank sheet or blind spot on which attention is expectantly focussed,

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171 Giacomo Leopardi, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed., introduced and translated by Iris Origo and John Heath-Stubbs (London, Toronto, and Melbourne, 1966), pp. 212-213. This is a parallel text with the poetry translated by Heath-Stubbs.

awaiting permeation. This is the primary sort of screening: the look of the face as silhouette or outline. But secondary screening effects can occur by means of the intervention of some object or entity between the observer and the figure observed. Finally, screening can occur in the gesture or mode of looking the speaker adopts towards the figure.

Before I go on to examine some poems of Hardy's more closely, it seems important to specify why synecdochic perception is significant, apart from its usefulness to Hardy in encapsulating so many of his æsthetic ideas. As throughout this study I have been linking particular modes of looking with modes of reading - pictorial with poetic space - it is vital to stress what difference synecdochic perception makes to conventional ways of reading poetry. An illuminating set of example taken from art criticism will help clarify what I want to say.

Leonardo da Vinci in his *Paragone*, a discussion concerning comparison of the arts, devotes a large section of his thesis to the relations between poetry and painting. Leonardo, keen to prove poetry a poor second to painting, declares painting's superiority is evident in its ability to give us a totally coherent visual impression at a single glance, while a poem is limited to part-by-part revelation.

> But a poem which aims at the representation of perfect beauty has to describe separately each particular part that makes up the harmony of a picture; and its charm is no greater than that which would arise if in music each voice were to be heard separately at different times without producing any concord, or if a face were to be revealed bit by bit with the part previously shown covered up, so that we are prevented by our forgetfulness from composing any harmony of proportions because the eye cannot embrace the whole simultaneously in its field of vision.
>
> The same is the case with all beautiful things described by the poet. They are all revealed in

> separate parts, and at different times, so that memory does not receive any harmony therefrom.[172]

From a modern standpoint Leonardo's argument rests on very evident assumptions: that reading is linear; that the time of reading is simply the serial time of articulating the sequential sense of a passage (that is, it is not reflective or interpretive); that the imagination or the mind's eye works like a physical eye and a rather inferior one, as the mind seems to have no capacity to recall features or combine or assemble them; that a painting really is read simultaneously by physical sight, and by physical sight alone. Innocent though these assumptions may sound, they nonetheless have influenced a thinker as significant as Lessing who, in the concise phrasing of Jean Hagstrum, claimed that "poetry requires temporal sequence and painting, spatial coexistence."[173]

A passage from Lessing's famous essay on the *Laokoon* shows how close he is to Leonardo.

> The beauty of a body comes from the harmonious effect produced when the various parts are viewed simultaneously. These parts must, therefore, be situated side by side; and as things situated side by side are the especial concern of painting, it alone can imitate the beauty of the body. The poet who would only be able to describe the component parts of beauty one after another thereby misses completely the representation of formal beauty as such. He feels that those elements, when arranged one after another cannot possibly produce the same effect when placed side by side.[174]

Jean Hagstrum cites Coleridge, and then Croce, disputing Lessing's division between temporal and spatial. Croce he represents thus:

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[172] *Paragone: A Comparison of the Arts*, p. 59.

[173] Jean H. Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism from Dryden to Gray* (Chicago and London, 1958), p. 160.

[174] Gotthold Lessing, *Laokoon*, xx, cited by Richter, p. 49. For an alternative translation, see *German Æsthetic and Literary Criticism: Winckelmann, Lessing, Hamann, Herder, Schiller and Goethe*, ed. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge, 1985), p. 114.

> What happens in reading a good poem – at least a *sonnetto pittorico*– is essentially what happens in viewing a good painting: we begin by observing particulars, moving from detail to visual detail, and end by seeing the whole. We begin in "circumvision" and end in vision.[175]

Interestingly, both Leonardo, and Lessing after him, in their discussions of pictorial and poetic representation, select as prime focus the human figure. Now the classic realist literary description does, on first sight, seem to be an elaborate documentation of parts from which the reader makes the deduction of a vitalising character. But the reading of these parts does not follow Leonardo's prescription, nor, with respect to Croce, is it simply a matter of scanning all the parts, combining them, and then stepping back to look at the finished whole. (This is not even a wholly satisfactory description of viewing an actual painting, because it leaves out the notion of pictorial space, which "has nothing to do with traditional perspective and its realistic illusion of depth. . . . the picture plane has its own life"[176].) Something takes place in the reading of the literary portrait which is much more complex than a simple matter of combination. Leonardo, Lessing, and Croce transpose their somewhat deficient painterly model too rigidly. They do not study the range of specific literary effects, except, in the case of the first two writers, in a negative way; they do not ask what it is that the literary portrait *does* do. It should be stressed that these literary effects do not relate merely to instances of language and language-use, but to the notion of an informing poetic space analogous to the pictorial space indicated above.

When Roland Barthes discusses the realistic literary portrait, he indicates that it is not a "copy"; for, in a copy, the

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[175] Hagstrum, p. 160. We are referred to *La letteratura italiana del settecento* (Bari, 1949), p. 179.
[176] Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art*, p. 58.

portrait would remain wholly subject to a linguistic structure. The point that Barthes is trying to make is that the literary effect includes a spatial effect that is neither 'pictorial' in the strict mimetic sense, or linguistic in that it can be traced in language alone.

> The portrait . . . is not a realistic representation, a related copy, an idea such as we might get from figurative painting; it is a scene made up by blocks of meaning, at once varied, repeated, and discontinuous (outlined); out of the arrangement of these blocks comes a diagram of the body, not its copy (in which the portrait remains totally subject to a linguistic structure, language recognizing only diagrammatical analogies: analogies in the etymological sense: proportions): the old man's body is not "detached" like a real referent from the background of the words or of the salon; it is itself the semantic space – becoming meaning, it becomes space. In other words, the reading of the "realistic" portrait is not a realistic reading: it is a cubist reading: the meanings are cubes, piled up, altered, juxtaposed, and yet feeding on each other, whose shift produces the entire space of a painting and makes this very space into a *supplementary* meaning (accessory and atopical): that of the human body: the figure is not the sum, the frame, or the support of the meanings; it is an additional meaning, a kind of diacritical paradigm.[177]

This residual "accessory" space of the body is similar in kind to the character-space Hardy deals with. In fact, Hardy, in keeping to a minimal outline, shorn of particulars, seems to be invoking this space from the onset. The "blocks of meaning" that make up Hardy's portraits – at least in terms of descriptive presentation – are fairly few in number, and the "diagram" becomes visible very easily. Hardy seems to have a firm conception of the body's ultimate space as signification: what Barthes calls accessory, Hardy sees as essential. If conventional critical views on reading representational poetry are deeply flawed, depending too much on ideas of linear sequence and temporal delay, Hardy's choice of an

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[177] *S/Z: An Essay*, p. 61.

accentuated kind of synecdochic vision provides a good corrective. Leonardo's model is faulty in that it assumes a part-by-part construction rather than a part-for-whole. He does not see how the image of the veil that he uses: "if a face were to be revealed bit by bit with the part previously shown covered up" immediately implies an already existent whole. If all literary portraits have a synecdochic link between their parts and a governing body space, then, in Hardy, because of the way in which that link is emphasised, synecdoche becomes a reading technique, a type of readerly perception that takes specific account of space. If every writer does extend the use of his dominant tropes or figures for his own purposes – this rhetoricising of rhetoric being an integral part of the work of poetry – then, in Hardy, synecdoche is the figure that leads sight to vision, that tutors perception, not just to register or document, but to deduce and make emerge or visible the unseen from the seen.

vi. Four Poems

> It follows evidently from the first of these characters of the imagination, its dislike of substance and presence, that a picture has in some measure even an advantage with us in not being real. The imagination rejoices in having something to do, springs up with all its willing power, flattered and happy; and ready with its fairest colours and most tender pencilling, to prove itself worthy of the trust, and exalt into sweet supremacy *the shadow that has been confided to its fondness.* And thus, so far from its being at all an object to the painter to make his work look real, he ought to dread such a consummation as the loss of one of its precious claims upon the heart. So far from striving to convince the beholder that what he see is substance, his mind should be to what he paints as the fire to the body on the pile, burning away the ashes, leaving *the unconquerable shade* – an immortal dream.
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> Ruskin, *Works*, V (*Modern Painters*, III), 184-5. (My Italics.)

In discussing Hardy's poetry more closely I have chosen four poems from his later work which exemplify the remarks I have been making. All the poems appear to have been written in the early part of this century, although in the case of three of them Hardy indicated on the manuscript "from an old note" or "from old notes", which implies they had some sort of shape, at least as ideas, long before the actual dates of composition. However, all the poems treated are compatible with Hardy's æsthetic thought, most of which was formulated during the second part of the nineteenth century. It is a somewhat artificial process to categorise poets according to strict chronologies, and while I think it true to say with Harold Bloom, that Hardy is one of this century's greatest poets, his poetry seems to me to be classed best with that of the nineteenth century, in particular the work produced by other Shelleyans.[178] (Hardy himself no doubt would have found hard and fast divisions between centuries rather odd, as he tended to mix his verse, often including in late volumes early work: hence such titles as *Late Lyrics and Earlier*. Some of his poems are impossible to date accurately.) The poems I have selected are: 'The Figure in the Scene', 'Why Did I Sketch', and 'The Shadow on the Stone' from *Moments of Vision* (1917), and 'The Whitewashed Wall' from *Late Lyrics and Earlier* (1922).[179] All these poems deal with shades and silhouettes which relate to the forms of lost loved ones. In the poems from *Moments of Vision*, biographical commentators, matching the poems to circumstances in Hardy's life, declare that the lost woman is Emma, his first wife. While this identification produces some interesting

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[178] "Strong poets are infrequent; our own century, in my judgment, shows only Hardy and Stevens writing in English." *A Map of Misreading* (Oxford, New York, Toronto, and Melbourne, 1975), p. 9.

[179] 'The Figure in the Scene', p. 476; 'Why Did I Sketch', p. 477; 'The Shadow on the Stone', p. 530; 'The Whitewashed Wall, pp. 685-6, in*The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*. As all of these poems are fairly short, I have restricted the use of line references, using them only where clarity demands it.

(but not essential) information on the historical contexts of these poems, it tends to block interpretations of the poems in their own right as poems, rather than versified biography. The fourth poem, 'The Whitewashed Wall', concerns the enduring love of a woman for her lost son. And this poem, along with the earlier 'The Figure in the Scene' and *its* companion piece 'Why Did I Sketch' depict the actual drawing and preservation of the loved one's form as silhouette. Another connection can be established in that 'The Whitewashed Wall' itself looks like a pendant poem to the earlier 'The Shadow on the Stone', in that it seems to take on many of the first poem's ideas and subject them to variation.

None of these poems refers specifically to death as the cause of the loss or absence of the beloved; the nearest one gets to this is the assertion of the speaker in 'Why Did I Sketch' who protests that he will never paint into any future drawing, a woman accompanying him "who may/Be called hence in my time". And yet the force of these poems is that death has occurred, and that the portraits, ghosts and imaginings are poignant memorials that essentialise the departed. It is the essence of these portrayals in their affirmed resemblance to the lost one (even when detail is extremely sparse) that makes these poems so compelling. The peculiar and haunting energy of the reminiscent images does seem to derive from a postulated death. The sketch of the woman in 'The Figure in the Scene' and 'Why Did I Sketch' presumably gains its disturbing power most fully after her decease, when the affective appeal of the resemblance suddenly increases. Although what we see isn't strictly a corpse, these resemblances and likenesses in their essentialising and idealism have a quality that connects them to an extraordinary passage by Maurice Blanchot called 'The Resemblance of Cadavers'.[180] Like Hardy, Blanchot's description doesn't depend

[180] See the essay 'Two Versions of the Imaginary', in Maurice Blanchot, *The Gaze of Orpheus*, pp. 79-89.

on stipulated physical particulars, but an essence. The passage is also an unexpected literalisation of the claim that when dead – "I shall be more myself, Dear, then/Than I am now."[181]

Blanchot proposes that at the moment which follows after death,

> when the presence of the cadaver before us is the presence of the unknown, it is also now that the lamented dead person begins to *resemble himself.*
>
> Himself: isn't that an incorrect expression? Shouldn't we say: the person he was, when he was alive? Himself is nevertheless the right word. Himself designates the impersonal, distant and inaccessible being that resemblance, in order to be able to be resemblance to someone, also draws towards the day. Yes, it really is he, the dear loving one; but all the same it is more than him, he is more beautiful, more imposing, already momumental and so absolutely himself that he is in some sense *doubled* by himself, united to the solemn impersonality of himself by resemblance and by image. This large-scale being, important and superb, who impresses the living as the apparition of the original – until then unknown – sentence of the last Judgment inscribed in the depths of the being and triumphantly expressing itself with the help of the distance: he may recall, because of his sovereign appearance, the great images of classic art. . . .
>
> If we look at him again, this splendid being who radiates beauty: he is, I can see, perfectly like himself; he resembles *himself.* The cadaver is its own image. He no longer has any relations with this world, in which he still appears, except those of an image, an obscure possibility, a shadow which is constantly present behind the living form and which now, far from separating itself from that form, completely transforms itself into a shadow.[182]

Blanchot's beautiful description of the deceased's self-resemblance has an antithesis, as we shall see, in other literary sources. However, for the moment, it is enough to speculate that essential memorial portraits, portraits that strive to preserve the

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[181] 'When Dead', *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, p. 721.
[182] Blanchot, *The Gaze of Orpheus*, pp. 82-3.

essential character of the dead, must somehow figure death in them for their impact to be felt. Especially, if as Blanchot suggests, death is the intensifying force that makes resemblance truly like and truly compelling. This is doubtless true of portraiture in writers other than Hardy; one thinks of the extraordinary power of the Bronzino portrait described by Henry James in *The Wings of the Dove*:

> The lady in question at all events . . . was a very great personage - only unaccompanied by a joy. And she was dead, dead, dead.[183]

In all the poems by Hardy I shall examine, death as intensifier is what makes these figures and images so haunting because so like; they are more than themselves - a whole that overwhelms the part. Blanchot's formulation is wonderfully close to Hardy's when he describes "the apparition of the original . . . sentence of the last Judgment inscribed in the depths of the being", which recalls Hardy's "sympathetic ink" and a character which makes itself visible. It is death that makes this character appear. This process of appearance is made even stranger in several of the poems I shall now discuss, because the drawings of the deceased were originally made in all innocence, with no conscious intention to monumentalise the figure once departed. What happens is that after death the regard of the beholder changes, as death makes the pictures more resemblant, more characterful. In the first two poems 'The Figure in the Scene' and 'Why Did I Sketch', the strangeness of this phenomenon is accentuated as the speaker is the original artist, who is therefore made an agent in a process over which he has no ultimate control.

It is difficult to date these poems successfully, although, if we assume that they were both written after the first Mrs. Hardy's death in 1912, then they were obviously composed sometime during

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[183] Henry James, *The Wings of the Dove*, p. 157.

the next five years before the publication of *Moments of Vision* in November 1917. The poems have suffered in their reading the constraints of a particular biographical context. Hardy appends to both of them the subscription "From an old note". We do not know the form of these 'old notes', but they probably came into existence after 1870 – the date a biographical reading gives to a specific piece of 'evidence' – or the 'evidence' may actually constitute the notes themselves. This consists of a sketch with the following words written underneath it:

> Beeny Cliffs in the rain – Aug. 22, 1870. "It never looks like summer." E. L. G. (on Beeny).[184]

The sketch depicts a cliff scene in the rain and contains a woman's figure. However, critics who have relied on the relation between sketch and poem have rather worsted the latter, which is read, peculiarly, as some sort of verbal illustration of the sketch. Such is the degree of primacy accorded the sketch by overly biographical readings, that the poem is distorted, made to say what it does not, in fact, say, in order to harmonise with the drawing. J. O. Bailey, in his *Commentary*, describing the drawing, says:

> The picture, showing the cliff edge, the ocean beyond, and the rain slanting down is somewhat dark; Emma's figure is only an outline in a corner, where she seems almost a part of the landscape, as suggested in the second stanza of the poem.[185]

But surely this runs counter to the force of the poem, which, in fact, shows the figure's preeminence in the landscape she comes to dominate? In the poem, the figure most certainly isn't tucked away in a corner, but centres the stage. This poem and the next seem to

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184 Reproduced in *Some Recollections by Emma Hardy*, eds. Evelyn Hardy and Robert Gittings (Oxford, 1979), p. 82. Emma's words become the title for another poem in *Moments of Vision*. For this, see *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, pp. 507-8.

185 J. O. Bailey, *The Poetry of Thomas Hardy: A Handbook and Commentary* (Chapel Hill, 1970), p. 379.

take as points of departure Hardy's statement about the mark made by man on a scene being worth ten times that made by Unconscious Nature. It is explicitly the figure in the scene to which our attention is directed, and "scene" as I have previously suggested, refers in Hardy's writing to an already edited view-point: that which is framed as pre-ground for a more definite focus. Hardy, in 'The Schools of Painting Notebook', records laconically his unfavourable opinion of the great landscape painter Claude Lorraine, who, in mainstream art-criticism at least, is understood to have very little real interest in the small human figures he depicts in his paintings of the Italian countryside. Under the headings "French School Claude Lorraine 1600", Hardy writes "went to nature – nothing at figures"[186], which besides endorsing Ruskin's much vaunted hatred of Claude, looks like a very firm indictment, when read in conjunction with the "mark of man" statement.[187]

The poem's representations then, aren't those of the 1870 drawing, and have a wholly different set of emphases. Tom Paulin calls 'The Figure in the Scene' "an unremarkable poem", which seems to be a short-sighted thing to say about a piece of writing so fraught with imaginative energy.[188] Paulin notices the odd spelling "draught", a word he recognises is used in Hardy's longer poem 'The Abbey Mason', but he does not comment on its possible significance. The word occurs also, as we shall see, in 'The Whitewashed Wall'. In both of these instances, it seems to relate to a preliminary etching or design which contains important characteristics or potentialities that only become visible at a later time, and through another kind of intervention. Paulin comprehends the temporal factor:

> it's only by looking far back down the perspective of the years that memory can recover and visualise the distinct shapes of the past. . . . It's the lapse of

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[186] Taylor, p. 111.

[187] For Ruskin on Claude, see, as one example among many, his comments on that painter's *Moses and the Burning Bush*, in *Works*, V:*Modern Painters*, III, 403-4.

[188] Paulin, p. 116.

> time which crystallises them into their distinctive shapes.[189]

But his formulation of this temporal lapse in terms of a process of memory is banal and bland. 'The Figure in the Scene' isn't predominantly a poem about memory, although memory might well be described in terms more interesting than Paulin's; it's a poem about death, essence, and likeness. It's not simply "the lapse of time" that shapes what now appeals to the mind's eye, but death and loss, which turn the figure into an essential ghost. The speaker regards a drawing made by himself in which the impact of the drafted figure and scene is now doubled after the woman's demise. Tendencies implicit in the original draft now permeate through in renovated energy.

The poem, like the picture distorted by the rainfall, is crossed with a particular tension. It's as if the speaker is trying to sort out what was actually apparent to him at the time of the drawing and what strikes him now. The stated intention was that he draw "With her amid the scene", but can we tell, or can he, just how much he realised at the time the figure actually dominated his view? The poem opens with the lines

> It pleased her to step in front and sit
> Where the cragged slope was green . . . .

The figure is made to sound as if she took the decision, which thus shaped the design and made her the central focus. But how strongly should we read "It pleased her" ? As the gracious will of a personage whose rule holds sway, or as a simple whim of preference? And is the statement a remembrance or a rationalisation? Moreover, the statement's assertion "in front" contradicts the speaker's "amid", but just when did that contradiction take place? Was it an implicit one that has only now in this survey of picture-turned-*memento mori*

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189 *Ibid.*

become truly obvious? It is as if, in the present time of looking, the speaker realises the extent of his absorption at the past time of looking, or again, is it that his present gaze begins to reshape that first looking in the light of what has since come to pass? The language of the poem that should separate one strata of consciousness from another, is blurred, just as the draft is blotted by the rain, so that the whole business of the speaker's and the reader's interrogation is governed by the "curious quizzing" of something illegible.

What is clear, however, in spite of the screening of moisture\ and hood, is the likeness of the woman. By the second stanza, she has emerged so strongly in her own right that the speaker can say: "And thus I drew her there alone." Adding to the difficult question of quite what is meant by the "thus", which covers the still-tangled matter of the contradiction, the peculiar doubling of language becomes increasingly apparent as it negotiates between two possible impressions of the same scene. Is consciousness being imputed to the drawer as he drew, or is that drawing reflected upon? Did he make a decision, or was it simply a matter of how things fell out? The word "alone" has rather different connotations, depending on how consciousness is attributed to the speaker, and it also contains, as it were, two different views: a view of the woman as a solitary figure in a landscape, or a view in which she is the single focus of attention – that is, a view in which the speaker only has eyes for her alone. The picture flickers between these possibilities, the figure magnifying as it is brought into the present, and the speaker's immediate concentration. The two views, like the two uses of "alone", are related, but the shift is from a partial focus to a complete one – to one that includes the former perspective as part of its completion. An intensification, here most likely death, has brought out or accentuated the lines of the draught – its deeper

reality – while, at the same time, the process of realisation has been blurred so that we cannot tell whether it was there in some innate form in the first instance.

But whether the poem does give a true picture of that first instance of perception or not, the language Hardy uses shows how, from the onset, the artist's engagement with what he sees is mediated by modes of selection and combination already in place, and how interpretation is a constructive movement rather a terminal judgement. I have already identified Hardy's use of 'scene' in this context; additionally, the phrase "in front" implies the actor or actress who presides before the backdrop, but who may yet be blurred by an intervening gauze between herself and the audience. Hardy uses the phrase "in front" crucially in his major poem 'In Front of the Landscape', when, as in this poem, the speaker's fullest attention is given to his haunting ghosts and not to the scenery beyond. Furthermore, even the raw elemental materiality of the rain, by a cunning conceit, is made subject to an æsthetic transformation. The "rainfall", incidental and arbitrary and outside the speaker's proper focus, touches the paper and the fabric of the sketch, and is made one with it. This transformation is also made to function symbolically, as a blurring that affects reading and intellection, and so is literal and figurative all at once. The woman's form becomes a "rainy form", and we do not know whether this "rainy" aspect is due to the fact that she is pictured "Seated amid the gauze of moisture", or to the incidental blots of the "rainfall marked across". Is it the draft or the blurring that is implicated, or both? The irresolution of such an enquiry emphasises the speaker's uncertainty as to both what he saw, and sees now, and its timing as the present seeps back into the past and confuses the precise degree of consciousness then held.

This is why Paulin's description of the memory process

will not do. For while time may 'crystallise' things into distinct shapes, this is not necessarily a recovery of the earlier impression, which, while it may have carried strong coordinates within as to how it will eventually appear, is nonetheless subject to the negotiation between a perceiver and a draught. What he sees that is of importance to him, certainly has a distinctive outline; a distinctiveness that may strangely be owing to a constitutive obscurity or screening. And something like a blotting or blurring may take place – the intrusion of other marks – that confuses the idea of transcribing a particular event seen in the past into the clarity of the present. We are not able to say exactly whether what the perceiver sees is what he saw; the poem moves between several levels of perception: the actual scene (already a construct), the sketch then altered by blurring, and the present moment of the speaker's survey.

As the poem moves towards its conclusion, it performs yet another odd turn of reading. The woman's form, declares the speaker, "is the Genius still of the spot". At first, this sounds like some sort of memorial tribute, as if the speaker were to say: 'I imagine her still haunting that place, so closely is she identified with it in my mind.' But is this in fact the case? It seems to me that there is a discrepancy between the speaker's use of the word "spot" and his use of "place". The woman, he makes clear, has never been to the place of the drawing since the day the sketch was made. Does this mean that so strong is the identification that he can imagine her in that place regardless? This is a possible reading, but not, I think, the best one. If one reads spot as quite other than place, then it can mean something more like spot of time, the place of perception as intimated in the sketch, which has little to do with an actual locale. The woman's figure doesn't form any permanent link

with the place, but is "Immutable" as an organising figure which takes over the site of looking.

This reading is helped by a strong interpretation of the word "Genius", a word that can be used as a synonym for character or spirit. Hardy presumably thinks of the Latin phrase *genius loci*, the spirit of a place, often understood as a personification in the form of a presiding spirit or deity whose character is assumed to give that of the spot. In eighteenth century art, the *genius loci* is often depicted as a statue or representation of the god situated in his territory which the traveller comes upon, often unexpectedly. In such pictures there is, then, a determinable figure present, who stands out and commands attention in that particular scene. When J. O. Bailey reads this poem, he must assume "Genius" simply means that the woman mingles into the character of the scene portrayed – that she is, in his words, "almost a part of the landscape". But the speaker places such stress on the woman constituting the focus of the scene that such a view can't be correct. This "Genius" stands out in the manner of an eighteenth century representation. Her "rainy form", the form made on that particular occasion of perception, absolutely overwhelms everything else with its assertion of character. She becomes the Genius of the speaker's looking. If one of the main tendencies in this poem is the impulse towards origins (however illegible they may be), the woman's outline outlines the tendency of a look towards an original space that shapes poetry and art. This spot is the moment of Hardy's inspiration as it moves into creativity, something firmly marked, and yet almost out of view, and all the stronger because of it. In delineating Genius in outline, space as it permeates through into character, one taps in also to the creative moment to see the way inspiration structures a poem and is figured in it. The end picture – the one we read – is a picture of the poem which looks toward its own inspiration and finds it "still", that

is, still a force implicit in the poem, with a detectable trace.

The companion poem to 'The Figure in the Scene' is 'Why Did I Sketch', which concentrates on the same draft and yet manifests what looks like a completely divergent reaction. This poem 'accompanies' its predecessor by a type of seeming reversal: the tone is disconsonant, that of a disclaimer, as the speaker shies away from the appeal of the draught expressed so forcibly in 'The Figure in the Scene', and tries both to erase the figure from view, and to cross out the work of the earlier poem. It assumes a blunt, almost aggressive attitude towards figure and sketch that is in opposition to the meditative confirmation given in 'The Figure in the Scene'. But this attempt at a bluff discrediting is revealed as precisely that: an attempt. 'Why Did I Sketch' is a poem that talks in opposites, and is a deliberate ironisation of the position it seems to support. The total effect of the whole poem is to make the reader realise that the figure cannot be erased, and that trying to erase it only increases its claim. 'The Figure in the Scene', apparently repudiated, is, in fact, endorsed. 'Why Did I Sketch' shows itself to be a mock defence against what cannot be denied: the energy of character in essence and resemblance. It stages its defence through a type of hyperbole, which, though proportionate to the speaker's discomforture, is also in proportion to the dominating power of the figure which he cannot escape.

While the poem makes its emphatic gestures of erasure, it paradoxically tells us a great deal. Through the negating lines of the drawing-prescription in the second stanza, comes a print of the picture one is not supposed to draw. Euphemism announces the woman's death, but not only that, for phrases like "ceased to be seen" set up the grounds for the dynamic of sight versus vision and vision's deeper reality. All the things that this poem is 'meant' to blot out are actually very heavily inscribed: the woman's death, the

speaker's affinity with her, her immediate domination as "figure" of any landscape in which the faintest lines of her aspect should happen to appear.

'Why Did I Sketch', like 'The Figure in the Scene' which it corrects and strengthens, involves a suppressed pun – one much used by Hardy – on the word 'shade'. Silhouette portraits or profiles which were most fashionable in the period 1750–1850, were often, so the second edition of the *OED* informs us, referred to as 'shades', a word which also, as mentioned earlier, means ghost. The *Dictionary* gives, among others, this example:

> 1979. *Jrnl. R. Soc. Arts*. July 513/1 Anything but an average shade, it is none-the-less, a competent head-and-shoulders in strict profile.

The poem's silhouette or outline-draught is where a drawing is a ghost and *vice versa*, and so is the shade of a shade. This shade is what haunts the speaker; he tries to lose it through a kind of violence, a disfiguring, but only succeeds in invoking it the more.

The opening lines of the poem at once chime oddly:

> Why did I sketch an upland green,
> And put the figure in
> Of one on the spot with me?

The sentiment runs counter to Hardy's firmly held belief of the importance of the mark of man on a landscape. We immediately know why the speaker drew the figure, and the lines seem to confirm this belief rather than weaken it. The unaccommodating directness of the tone tries to slash through the twistings of consciousness in 'The Figure in the Scene'. It takes terms from that poem and tries to minimise or stay their effectiveness. The word "spot", used so particularly in 'The Figure in the Scene', is demoted to mean something more like locale: the poem is straining to make

clear breaks between scene and draught, and to reduce the impact of the draught. The phrase "put the figure in" tries to trivialise the figure's power by suggesting its secondariness, and so contradict the earlier poem. But not only do the somewhat over-rhetoricised shifts in the speaker's argument and complaint belie what he says in his protesting too much, the poem also includes other moments where its language seems to affirm more directly what is truly in view. In a beautiful and chilling parallel to the Blanchot passage cited earlier, Hardy tells us that now the woman "has ceased to be seen", that is, now that she is dead, "The picture waxes akin".

This 'waxing akin' or 'growing more like' sounds peculiarly analogous to the cadaver that resembles itself, or the shade which projects even more emphatically the essential likeness of the dead woman. Hardy declares "The picture waxes akin/To a wordless irony", and irony without words must be another picture, and, in this case, a portrait. This portrait of the woman is ironic, not simply because it is there when she is not (that is, it doesn't just depend on a disjunction between an absence and a presence); it is the irony of Hardy's 'When Dead', that once departed, the woman is 'more herself' than she is when the original incident took place. Resemblance is greater, more affecting after death, bringing out the hidden inscription. Furthermore, it is an æsthetic process: the image of the dead person, says Blanchot, reminds one of the great images of classic art. The speaker's draught doesn't induce that kind of reminiscence, but the idea of the shade *does*, in its unifying of picture and ghost. The shade pictures that shadow which is constantly present behind the living form and which now, far from separating itself from that form, completely transforms itself into a shadow.[190]

The poem's second stanza tries to make an impossible correction by making what is obviously a very personal directive into

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[190] Blanchot, *The Gaze of Orpheus*, p. 83.

a piece of general counsel, unlikely in its very particularity. The unconvincing "you" shows immediately as a disguise for 'I', unequal to the task of blocking it recommends. The marks of deliberate and undesired repression are too obvious to be credible. It is evident that the scene is other than the required depiction. The "escarpments" – it is an interesting choice of word, implying fortification and defence – aren't *necessarily* "stark and stiff", otherwise the speaker's command would be superfluous, nor by the same token, are they or the speaker "in utter solitude" as that pointed "as if" makes plain. The futility of this defensiveness is borne out by: "So shall you half forget" – the speaker's admission that, do what he can, memory still retains the impression of the draught which thus seems to etch itself over or into every future impression. The poem poses absolute gestures which it flaws, or damages, or compromises. To "half-forget" is to half-preserve: to leave an outline or some marks unerased; and in Hardy's poetry, the sparser the marks of definition, the greater the picture's impact. While 'Why Did I Sketch' does not, then, manifest the same kind of doubled consciousness as 'The Figure in the Scene'; it has its own crisis of perception. The speaker, in spite of an attitude of aversion or turning away, can't keep his eyes off the image in the draft which continually permeates everything he sees.

The last stanza makes an exhortation against repetition: 'may this scene not happen again.' But, in articulating this forbidden repetition with a supposedly hypothetical woman, the speaker gives us the scene of the first sketching: that is, he redraws, resembles what it is he wants to forget. Such a day was or would be (depending on how one reads) "thoughtless"; the speaker disclaims ultimate responsibity for the uncanny shade drawing – it was a chance production. But other parts of the stanza's phrasing seem to unsettle this position. How does one read

> Limn, laugh, and sing, and rhyme
> With a woman sitting near
>
> (*ll.*15-16)?

The "with" can be read so that the woman sounds merely in attendance and happens to be included in the sketch, or it can very much implicate her in what the speaker does, so that she is an essential part of his activity. "Limn" is a synonym for 'paint', and has heavy connotations of portraiture. A "limner", says the *OED*, is "A painter, esp[ecially] a portrait painter." Laughing and singing are shared activities, as is rhyming, in the sense of swapping or capping rhymes, or making a jointly composed poem. The speaker suggests rather after the manner of 'putting in the figure' in the first stanza, that he "paint[s] in" the woman out of simple affection, and because she's conveniently close at hand. But, in fact, she's wholly necessary to what he's doing. He's already drawing with her as subject, just as he's already rhyming with her; poetry gets figured in redrawing the original scene, and to "rhyme with" someone may also be (as in 'limning with' someone) to make a rhyme or poem of them. Once one picks up this disturbance in the poem, it's possible to give an almost antithetical reading of the phrase "Paint in for love", which could then mean 'paint into the picture to represent or stand in for love'. The figure thus assumes the character of love or symbolises it for the speaker; her outline becomes the lodging shape for an abstraction or essence made one with her own; the sketch becomes a picture of love for the beloved in its supreme form, but a love that can only be recognised after the intervention of death and the renovations of resemblance. And so, all the time, in surveying this sketch, the speaker must move from "sight of the sky", as, having once depicted the woman, he becomes inextricably caught up in a process whereby death insists he progress from sight to vision.

Euphemism may attempt to remove the sting of death, but the resemblance death bestows is still so strong that even through the cloak of expression its characterising shapes are visible.

'Why Did I Sketch' is an important companion for 'The Figure in the Scene', because, although, initially, it seems to counter the earlier poem, it actually makes the first poem stronger. 'Why Did I Sketch' gives the definitive import of the woman's death, and it is this knowledge that makes the first poem effective as the work of ghostly resemblance, and the sketch a shade. Alternatively, 'Why Did I Sketch' needs the earlier poem in order that it may itself be read correctly. If one could not remark the degree of divergence the second poem pretends to strike, one could misconstrue the irony. The second poem looks like an additional writing that inscribes itself palimpsestically on earlier work in an effort to change or swerve sense, but in actuality it takes its energy from the picture in the first poem which permeates through, and whose lines it constantly retraces even as it attempts to disfigure. The poems should be regarded as inseparable companions which rely on each other for their own individual expressions of power.

A subscription appended to Hardy's 'The Shadow on the Stone' tells us it was begun in 1913 and finished in 1916, which means that the initial composition started approximately about the time when 'The Figure in the Scene' and 'Why Did I Sketch' were written. Its affiliation is conspicuous in its shared imagery; in this poem, the suppressed pun on 'shade' is brought out into the open and intensified by its additional substitution for the word 'shadow'. While this poem doesn't directly refer to artistic delineation, it seems to be relying on barely submerged ideas of portraiture. Here, paradoxically, where a vocabulary of drawing is not self-evident, appears that clear reference in the first stanza to the "well-known head and shoulders" of the typical shade portrait. The poem is as

carefully composed in its setting and select layering of detail as any competent picture. Anton Ehrenzweig, in describing the work of Van Gogh and other modern painters, discusses how, by a use of colour and tone, the artist creates for the viewer trails for the eye which are not representational.[191] This is what Hardy does in this poem, where the reader is led very deftly through a series of transformations and patternings that eventually face him with something quite unlike straight representation. This 'trailing' retraces what, for the speaker, is "this old track", a previous perceptual print that surfaces through the reality of the present scene in which he finds himself. To recapture that once familiar "track" (and "track" here functions in a similar way to "spot" in 'The Figure in the Scene'), Hardy depicts the scene with a collage of mixed but sympathetic toning taken from highly divergent sources: the classical, the primitive, literary elegy, domestic reminiscence.

The poem deals with another speaker who meditates the loss of a woman dear to him. That she is most likely a wife is emphasised by the familiarity of the garden scene and the small domestic detail of her gardening. Although the poem has a deeply personal aura in that it relates a moving circumstance, linking it to the life of Hardy and Emma doesn't add very much to the interpretation. There is scarcely any particular biographical data in the poem, save that of the mysterious Druid Stone, which can perfectly well be understood within the poetic context. This stone is the poem's first focus and receives some of the most precise description given; more than anything else in the poem, it is pictured with a perceptible visual appearance: it "broods in the garden white and lone". But even this is suggestive rather than properly reproductive. The stone's whiteness and faintly ominous presence make it stand out in the poem, but it is obviously as a symbolic device than otherwise. In the first instance, the Druidic

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191 Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art*, pp. 161-3.

association serves to dislodge the poem from any importation of Christian thought, which means that the "belief" of line sixteen cannot be recuperated in terms of Christian doctrine. But there are other reasons for this alignment with the primitive or 'barbaric'. The stone, made animate, or vivified in its brooding and loneness, is not only in key with the animism of those original Druids who made it, but is a reification of the superstition Hardy sympathetically notes in the *Life*.

> *December* 18 [1890]. Mr. E. Clodd this morning gives an excellently neat answer to my question why the superstitions of a remote Asiatic and a Dorset labourer are the same: "The attitude of man", he says, "at corresponding levels of culture, before like phenomena, is pretty much the same, your Dorset peasant representing the persistence of the barbaric idea which confuses persons and things, and founds generalisations on the slenderest analogies."
>
> (This "barbaric idea which confuses persons and things" is, by the way, also common to the highest imaginative genius – that of the poet.)[192]

Hardy clearly dissociates himself from Ruskin's ambivalence regarding the pathetic fallacy. For him the pathetic fallacy, whether as emotional vision or misconstrued as anthropomorphism, forms a significant part of æsthetic perception, and, in the poem, the stone serves as a monument to the imagination and its shaping of sight to vision. The stone is also a powerful, almost primæval, mark before all marks of man on a landscape. As Hardy comes to incorporate it into the specific scene of the poem, it accumulates energy and significance in its implicit indication of the imprinting of a scene as it is first selectively composed by an observer. The stone also implies a halo of associations, concerned with burial, sacrifice and regeneration.

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[192] *Life*, p. 230. One could usefully compare this view with what Anton Ehrenzweig says about eidetic vision in *The Psychoanalysis of Artistic Vision and Hearing*: "What is called 'Eidetic' vision is the flexible vision of children, primitives, of artists, and significantly also of twilight vision." (P. 207.)

These primitive beliefs become poetic, relating to the imagination and its "belief".

Hardy's *Life* speaks of the Druid stone that Hardy found and set up in his garden at Max Gate. It was discovered about three feet underground, and was raised with the greatest of difficulty to a standing position on the lawn in March 1891. Hardy notes:

> Round the stone, which had been lying flat, they had found a quantity of ashes and half charred bones.[193]

In his *Commentary* J. O. Bailey notes Hardy's fascination with the stone, and his correspondence on the subject with his antiquarian friend the Rev. Henry J. Moule, but there is little in Hardy's real-life interest for the stone that does more than corroborate what the poem already expresses. The resurrected stone cannot resurrect, in any accurate documentary way, its own history, no more can the poem clearly transmit biography; both stone and biographical data have wholly other value once transmuted by the poem. In the poem, the stone is set in a landscape of Hardy's own making. It is, as I have said, a kind of monument or memorial for the imagination, but it bears no immediate inscription on its eloquent blankness, which is, nonetheless, charged with extreme resonance. What Hardy does is to use that blankness, and to draw on that charge, to add fuel to his own memorial inscription and design which he imposes on the stone. In this way, the stone functions a little like the railway cutting does for the viewer in 'After a Romantic Day':

> The bald steep cutting, rigid, rough,
> And moon-lit, was enough
> For poetry of place: its weathered face

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[193] *Life*, p. 234. This archeological enigma strikes one rather in the way that the famous conclusion to the tale 'Barbara of the House of Grebe' does: "While digging in the grounds for the new foundations, the broken fragments of a marble statue were unearthed." See 'A Group of Noble Dames', in *Collected Short Stories*, p. 275.

> Formed a convenient sheet whereon
> The visions of his mind were drawn.[194]

The cutting, like the pensive stone, is already figured in terms of body or character space, and thus is a focus for attention. Upon this stone a further drawing or marking takes place, which can owe its success of its communication to a hidden characterisation, not so articulate in its own right but lending the imposed drawing strength.

Hardy may be using one of Druidism's associations more directly when he pictures the stone as the place where shadows fall, which revives the Druidic use of large standing stones as sundials, shadow clocks and calendars. If the stone represents the place of the imagination – its constructive and combinatory skills – it could also be that it indicates the time of the imagination which is outside of ordinary time and keeps its own calendar. The shadows that fall on the stone hearken back to a time that thus mysteriously gets reprinted on the present moment. The short poem that immediately follows on after 'The Shadow on the Stone' in *Moments of Vision* is entitled 'In the Garden', and is dedicated to Hardy's sister Mary.[195] This poem and the garden therein feature a sundial, and the poem uses once more the curious phrase "throwing a shade" (an idiom, which as far as I can tell, is Hardy's own). Bailey comments:

> The poem makes uses of the superstition that when the sun throws a shadow toward one of a group, that one will be the first to die.[196]

In this poem, it is the dial's own shade that is thrown, and the temporality works antithetically to 'The Shadow on the Stone'. On the dial – and "dial" we recall is synonym for face – is read the shape

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[194] 'After a Romantic Day', *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, p. 641.
[195] 'In the Garden', *Ibid.*, p. 531.
[196] Bailey, p. 413.

of things to come, a foreshadowing, the premonitory shade of a woman yet to be ghosted.

One reminiscence about the Max Gate stone is appealing. Clive Holland, visiting Hardy in 1898, took a photograph of Hardy standing talking near the great upright stone. He records that Hardy asked him

> 'Do you believe in ghosts? . . . If you do you ought to see such manifestations here, on a moonlight night.'[197]

The poem shows us the imagination in the process of ghost-making, and the means whereby a shadow is made into a shade. Thus, in the first instance, the speaker looked at the undifferentiated shadows playing on the Druid Stone, and "they shaped in [his] imagining" into the shadow the lost woman was wont to cast. That phrase "shaped in my imagining" is crucial; if it is misread, the poem can simply be read as a plea for indulgent subjectivism. This is something like the view Tom Paulin takes:

> He knows that there is a perfectly natural explanation for the ghostly shadow he sees . . . . Now that she is dead his love for her is intense and – inevitably – platonic or Shelleyan. This necessarily means that it is subjective, that both the ghost and his love are just a shade thrown by his own soul.[198]

But Paulin's assertion of a "perfectly natural explanation" won't do, because it implies that the natural phenomena fall outside of the imagination's range or, at least, its enduring influence. But we know that scene and landscape as it is pictured in Hardy's poetry is always already shaped by the imagination. It's not then merely a matter of pretending that for a few moments that the imagination has control over nature: landscape is perpetually in the grip of æsthetic

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[197] Bailey, p. 412. Perhaps also of interest, though not in any way that affects the poem, is the second Mrs. Hardy's remark to a visitor concerning the stone: "Hardy found his wife burning all his love-letters to her behind that stone, one day." *Ibid.*

[198] Paulin, p. 59.

perception. What the poem does is picture imaginative process and the relative strengths of different kinds of imaginative activity. Additionally, Paulin's attribution of subjectivism, which reminds one of the battle between psychology and metaphysics instigated by Miller and Davie, does nothing to account for the importance of the ghost in and to the poetry, because the ghost is "just a shade thrown by his own soul".

The phrase "shaped in my imagining" is significant because it shows the process of exchange that takes place between the object selected by the imagination and the fuller energies of vision. The shadows themselves "shape" as they are absorbed into the location of the mind's eye; there is a shift from sight to vision during which the shadows solicit a wholly other kind of attention. Paulin makes too harsh a distinction between a supposed actuality and the work of the imagination. He declares:

> the shadow is simply thrown by the branches of the tree and has combined with the shadow thrown by his own imagination or memory.[199]

Such a statement makes oppositions not observable in the poem itself. As I have noted, the setting isn't something that at a particular moment comes under the observation of the speaker; it is always under his gaze. The shadows fall from the tree "with a rhythmic swing"; rhythm is something imposed by hearing and looking which differentiate; the scene is already within the speaker's measure.

In this poem, Hardy illustrates subtly the process which Blanchot describes, whereby an object intersects with the work's requirements. Hardy shows this in its enactment: a selected object, or objects, such as the tree's shadows, become, as they solicit imaginative perception, a "shade", which is then itself surveyed the more intensely as the projection of a being's "shape" (*l.*20). What

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[199] *Ibid.*

Hardy does here and elsewhere is that, rather than concentrate on objects circumscribed by a formal artistic frame such as statues or paintings – objects already under the lens of the art-lover – he extends a whole manner of æsthetic looking to things not immediately apparent of æsthetic value, investing them as such under his prolonged scrutiny. His use of the terminology of painting, engraving, drawing; the topology of scene and landscape as something to be limned or essentially drafted; his limner's eye for face and figure, are the composing and shaping competencies of his poetic art.

If this poem can be read as both an attesting and trial of the relative strengths of the imagination, Hardy's ulterior motive is to try and increase vision at its strongest, and thereby inform the poem with an extremely potent character space. He does this by means of the synecdochic chain whereby shadows stand in for shape, which itself stands in for character. Each element in the chain stands in for something rather more considerable than itself, and the eventual distinction between shade and shape institutes, not one, but two spaces of concentration available to the speaker in the poem. The first is the charged shade-space formed on the Druid stone; the second that of the construed shape behind the speaker, which can only be surmised. In striving to maintain the existence and efficacy of this second space, the speaker has to refuse to look at it directly, and this refusal is the screening that protects the image. Rather than countenance its disappearance, he chooses not to break the power it already holds for him. Discrediting the shape would not only destroy the space it occupies, but it would also destroy the shade he does look upon. Both spaces, before and after, would dissolve. Not to turn, not to look, keeps open the possibilities and thus extends space.

Hardy uses the extremely succinct word "unvision" to

describe the dissolve of the imagination. The word fits perfectly into his vocabulary of looking and perception, and the distinction he makes between sight as the first selection of the imagination and vision. Vision is formed on the cues given by sight, but is not graspable by sight alone: that is why, in this poem, in a chain of visual phenomena that cue each other, sight decreases to the extent that vision gradually supersedes. Nonetheless, this means that the final vision, at several removes from sight, cannot immediately be coordinated with a direct sighting. Hardy's speaker is accurate in his intuition: it is quite true to say that no *body* stands at the back of him; it is not a corporeal presence that is felt, but rather a body space: "A shape which, somehow, there may be."

One notices, scattered across this poem, a smattering of the kind of language used for classical translations, and especially typical of English Neoclassicism: yea, nay, shade, glade, apparition. Hardy was devoted to Dryden's translation of Virgil, which was given to him at the age of eight by his mother.[200] It is possible that this faint classical ring is connected with what looks like a ghostly template on the poem: the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice found in Book X of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Book IV of Virgil's *Georgics*. Pinion, and Paulin after him, notice this link, but they don't point out what Hardy does to the myth, which possibly may influence other of his poems, such as 'Why Did I Sketch', where the woman has been "called hence". In 'The Shadow on the Stone', Hardy makes an important divergence: his speaker quite firmly turns his back on the temptation of Orpheus. Furthermore, Orpheus wants to look back in order to see that Eurydice is there; Hardy's speaker 'wants' to look back in order to see that the woman isn't there. Both looks have the potential for destruction, but only Orpheus brings this destruction about. Hardy shows his speaker swayed between the

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[200] *Life*, p.16.

'want' of sight and the desire for vision, finally giving the vote to vision. His denial is preservative of space, vision and character, and as such, it is, most properly, resolute ignorance and aversion.

The other influence on the poem beside the classical (and both are somewhat less than immediately conspicuous, being shadowed by the Druid Stone and all that signifies) is a contact with the poetry of Tennyson. This may, partly, consist in that, in the most tangential way, Hardy is drawing on Tennyson's 'The Gardener's Daughter', a poem that combines themes of portraiture, garden settings, and elegy.[201] The young woman in that poem, first seen gardening, is described in terms of a composition in light and shade.

> One arm aloft –
> Gowned in pure white, that fitted to the shape
> . . . the shadow of the flowers
> Stole all the golden gloss . . .
> Ah, happy shade . . .
> And mixed with shadows of the common ground!
> (*ll.*126-134.)

> Half light half shade,
> She stood, a sight to make an old man young.
> (*ll.*139-40.)

Tennyson's poem, written 1833-4, although not published till 1842, concludes with the narrator gesturing towards the *veiled* portrait of his beloved

> veiled, for what it holds
> May not be dwelt on by the common day.
> (*ll.*265-6.)

His interlocutor, only now prepared by the fore-going narrative, is instructed to look on the ideal with a spiritual vision:

> Raise thy soul;
> Make thine heart ready with thine eyes: the time
> Is come to raise the veil.
> (*ll.*267-9.)

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201 'The Gardener's Daughter', *The Poems of Tennyson*, 2nd ed., edited by Christopher Ricks (London, 1987), I , 553-69. Subesquent references to this edition are to lines only.

At this point, Tennyson's poem also connects with Browning's 'My Last Duchess', in which the Duke, and only he, is allowed to put by the "curtain" that covers the Duchess's portrait.

> Behold her there,
> As I beheld her ere she knew my heart
> (*ll.*269-70).

cries Tennyson's narrator, oddly prefiguring the altogether different key of the Duke's "there she stands/As if alive." (*ll.*46-7.)[202]

The themes of elegy and likeness in 'The Shadow on the Stone' form another point of comparison with a more central Tennysonian work: *In Memoriam*. The second stanza of Hardy's poem seems to refer to the Eleventh Section of *In Memoriam*.

> And there was no sound but the fall of a leaf
> As a sad response; and to keep down grief . . .
> (*ll.*13-14).

> Calm is the morn without a sound,
> Calm as to suit a calmer grief,
> And only through the faded leaf
> The chestnut pattering to the ground
> (*ll.*1-4).

That Hardy's "belief" (*l.*16) may derive from that of Tennyson seems strange if one maintains the orthodox view of *In Memoriam* as an attempt to combine Christian and secular ideas of the imagination. But what I am interested in is what Tennyson makes for himself out of his bereavement, and what Hardy borrows from him and develops. It's necessary to establish Tennyson's mode of compensatory sight, which needs some careful unravelling, because, at an initial glance, the speaker appears to refuse to visualise or phantomise the dead Hallam; he declares he is unequal to such a task, or, at other moments, he denies the efficacy of the image.

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202 *The Poetical Works of Robert Browning*, III, 188. The editors of this edition comment on the link between the poems in their introduction to 'My Last Duchess', p. 185. Ian Jack first remarked the similarity between the poems in *Browning's Major Poetry* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 92-3.

I cannot see the features right,
When on the gloom I strive to paint
The face I know; the hues are faint
And mix with hollow masks of night
(LXX.1-4).

If any vision should reveal
Thy likeness, I might count it vain
As but the canker of the brain;
Yea, though it spake and made appeal . . .
(XCII.1-4).

Tennyson seems to deny vision, and espouses blindness in an attempt to vindicate the genuine visiting of the Spirit.

No visual shade of someone lost,
But he, the Spirit himself may come
Where all the nerve of sense is numb;
Spirit to Spirit, Ghost to Ghost.
(XCIII.5-8.)

But, having said this, Tennyson partially reinvests the sensuous capacity in the invoked Spirit. The "blindness of the frame" is an emptying of the perceiver, so that his outline may be left for the visiting spirit to fill fully with its own much missed and longed for power. So he addresses the Spirit of his dead friend:

Descend, and touch, and enter; hear
The wish too strong for words to name;
That in this blindness of the frame
My Ghost may feel that thine is near.
(XCIII.13-16.)

Hence, two stanzas later, in what is probably the most crucial stanza of the poem, there is the extraordinary inrush of energy, as that receptive space is flooded by the occupation of the desired visitant. Tennyson shows this visitation, which we may read as the possession of a poem by the full strength of its motivating forces, occurring through reading, through an irruption of essential virtue in "The noble letters of the dead" (*l.*24). The speaker, preparedly

responsive, has been rescanning the deceased man's letters to him. Through these words emanates, inarticulate but supremely eloquent, the Spirit that once inspired them, now revivifying them in another kind of speech:

> And strangely on the silence broke
> The silent-speaking words, and strange
> Was love's dumb cry defying change
> To test his worth; and strangely spoke
>
> The faith, the vigour, bold to dwell
> On doubts that drive the coward back,
> And keen through wordy snares to track
> Suggestion to her inmost cell.
>
> So word by word, and line by line,
> The dead man touch'd me from the past,
> And all at once it seemed at last
> The living soul was flash'd on mine
>
> (XCV.25-36).

Tennyson brilliantly combines the senses of 'translation': just as the message from the past is renewed in a different form, so the "living soul" is displaced onto that of the speaker; and the pun or para-rhyme 'fleshed' tacitly embodied in the visionary "flashed", thus secures the corporeal preservation of sanctified translation.[203] Tennyson, too, plays with outlines, hints and vestiges which await fulfilment in the time of poetry and imagination:

> In words, like weeds, I'll wrap me o'er
> Like coarsest clothes against the cold:
> But that large grief which these enfold
> Is given in outline and no more.
>
> (V.9-12.)

In Tennyson, it is the space of the poetic persona that is empty and in outline; a space identified with "grief", and covered over with the language of mourning. In Hardy, as we have seen, the situation is reversed: it is the represented ghost or shade that is 'empty', thus

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[203] See my remarks on translation in Chapter III. Ann Wordsworth draws attention to the pun flashed/fleshed in her essay 'An Art that will not Abandon the Self to Language: Bloom, Tennyson and the Blind World of the Wish' in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, pp. 207-222; 218.

allowing a look through into the other side of poetry. Both poets invoke the dead as a means of summoning up the forces that vitalise their lyric writing.

Tennyson is explicit that the deceased cannot be recovered by a simple act of willed reconstruction:

> I cannot see the features right,
> When on the gloom I strive to paint
> The face I know . . . .

This kind of depiction, a misplaced striving after detail, fails to capture the essence or "soul" which is the effective communicant of the dead one.

> Till all at once beyond the will
> I hear a wizard music roll,
> And through a lattice on the soul
> Looks thy fair face and makes it still.
> (LXX.13-14.)

Tennyson's preference for blindness or abnegation of *vraisemblance* has certain similarities with Hardy's abstention from detail. His repudiation of "shade"(XCII.1-4), which again he sees as something man-made ("canker of the brain"), is qualified by his acceptance of Spirit. In his eyes, a shade is merely a sensuous remnantlacking the authoritative communication offered by the genuine Spirit – which comes so close, is so coincident, that it is not so much seen as felt, or, if it is seen, is done so only by the soul.

For Hardy, as we have seen, the shade is of another order, present in the subject's life, but strictly observable after death, when its essentialised resemblance increases. Vision is not to be conflated with sight which cues vision; vision is wholly imaginative, and cannot be spoken of as physical or sensuous, although it bears a relation to the initial selections of an imaginatively informed sight. In sum, Hardy's final conception of vision seems to owe a debt to Tennyson's, as does his notion of outline, but he develops it in a way

that allows for more apparent continuity with his own definition of sight and its shaping of reality.

The last poem I shall discuss, 'The Whitewashed Wall', has its own links with Tennyson, in addition to being the pendant poem to 'The Shadow on the Stone'. Furthermore, it unites and performs a variation on the themes of all the poems so far examined. For in this poem, in the most literal way imaginable, a drawing takes place that stays a shadow: that is, it both holds and remains a shadow. Moreover, this shadow is also a shade, the portrait of a loved one deceased, in this case a son. Hardy, we are told, originally wrote the poem, at John Galsworthy's instigation, for *Reveille* (November 1918), which was the Government quarterly for disabled soldiers and sailors.[204] In the first version of the poem, the son is a soldier, so that line nine reads: "Well, her soldier-son cast his shadow there". But when Hardy came to reprint the poem in *Late Lyrics and Earlier*(May, 1922), he took out this detail, as well as making one or two other smaller alterations. The change gives the poem wider appeal, but it also significantly alters the way in which we read it. We no longer know any thing more about the son save his filial relation to his mother; it becomes impossible to age him or be specific about his appearance in even the most incidental of ways.

This poem, like 'The Shadow on the Stone', takes the form of a revelation, but, in this instance, it is a revelation that is reported through a conversational narrative to a questioner by an informant. In 'The Shadow on the Stone', the reader observes the speaker undergoing revelation; in 'The Whitewashed Wall', the protagonist is the mother who makes her own discovery, and the secondary revelation is the retracing or recounting of this to an interested observer. Tom Paulin thinks this poem "fairly average"[205], but to a reader who understands Hardy's "spiritual eye", this poem

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[204] Bailey, p. 494.

[205] Paulin, p. 116. Paulin makes an exception of the last few lines.

most surely be one of his best and most remarkable. Other critics have sensed here something immensely powerful at work here, even if they have not been able to give it name. J. O. Bailey says in his *Commentary*:

> The poem has been much admired. Gorman says of it: "The secret of great poetry, beyond all analysis, is in these verses. The verses are simple enough and so is the phrasing, yet something transforms them into a magic that is Hardy's own."[206]

This poem, like the other poems I have discussed, literally stresses the importance of "the mark of man" on a scene. Here that mark is a circumscribed shadow in a domestic interior, so that what is normally so fleeting and insubstantial is given lasting embodiment. J. O. Bailey directs us to other moments in Hardy's writings where fond relatives preserve marks of loved ones who are absent:

> He had expressed the idea of the poem in various places. In *Two on a Tower*, when Swithin has gone to the Cape, his grandmother refuses to clean his room: "' Here's all his equinoctial lines, and his topics of Capricorn, and I don't know what else besides, ' Mrs. Martin continued, pointing to some charcoal scratches on the wall. 'I shall never rub 'em out; no, though 'tis such untidiness as I was never brought up to, I shall never rub 'em out.'" (Chapter XXXVIII.) In *The Woodlanders*, when Grace has gone away to school, Melbury covers the track of her shoe with a tile to preserve it. (Chapter III.)[207]

But he misses what is the closest parallel. In *Tess of the d'Urbevilles*, Retty teases Izz about Angel Clare: "' I zid you kissing his shade.'" The explanation of this, she gives to Marian, another milkmaid:

> 'Why– he was standing over the whey-tub to let off the whey, and the shade of his face came upon the

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[206] Bailey, p. 494. Bailey's reference is to Herbert S. Gorman, 'Hardy and Housman' in *The Procession of Masks* (Boston, 1923), pp. 171-83; p. 181.

[207] Bailey, p. 494.

> wall behind close to Izz, who was standing there filling a vat. She put her mouth against the wall and kissed the shade of his mouth; I zid her though he didn't.'[208]

Hardy obviously transfers some details from this scene to his poem, where the woman, who is described in a way that pertains more to a coy lover, turns in a "shy soft way" to "kiss to the chimney-corner wall" beneath which lies her son's submerged likeness. It is in this poem that Hardy most conspicuously and successfully brings about uniting the allied themes of shade as shadow, portrait, and spirit with the attendant conceptions of essential character – its value and preservation.

When Petrarch in a beautiful passage ponders the enigma of family likeness, he chooses to express that almost ineffable essence by means of a "certain shadow" (*umbra quaedam*), observable above all in the face and eyes. The analogy he makes has what looks like an ambivalent relation to portrait painting:

> He who imitates must have a care that what he writes be similar, not identical [with his model], and that the similarity should not be of the kind that obtains between a portrait and a sitter, where the artist earns the more praise the greater the likeness, but rather of the kind that obtains between a son and his father. Here, though there may often be a great difference between their individual features, a certain shadow and, as our painters call it, *air* perceptible above all in the face and eyes produces that similarity that reminds us of the father as soon as we see the son, even though if the matter were put to measurement all parts would be found to be different[209].

Petrarch is using the idea of family likeness to gloss a discussion of literary imitation: a fusion of topics that is very common, and one

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208 *Tess of the d'Urbevilles*, p. 175.

209 Francesco Petrarca, *Epistolae de rebus familiaribus* (also known as *Le Familiari*), XXIII, 19. This translation is by E. H. Gombrich, and appears in'The Style *all' antica*', *Norm and Form*, (London and New York, 1966), p. 122. For the Latin text, see *Francesco Petrarca: Le Familiari*, ed. Vittorio Rossi, 4 vols (Florence, 1933-42), IV (1942), 206.

that would have struck a sympathetic chord with Hardy. What is interesting about Petrarch's comparison with portrait painting is that, on the one hand, he identifies the portrait as too overly mimetic or reproductive to be an instructive parallel, and on the other, a few lines later takes from the vocabulary of portraiture a notion of likeness that does not reduce to simple reproduction. The *air* or essential character of a family likeness is not a purely physical matter, but, as in Hardy, a sort of visible essence, "perceptible above all in the face and eyes", but not reducible to them. This implies that there is a kind of portrait painting, or a tendency in portrait painting, that does more than simply duplicate. And if portraits are shadows, then there is another shadow, *umbra quaedam*, that ideally should glance across them and give them a truly compulsive power. This shadow of essential likeness or character is, as I have made clear throughout, the one that Hardy pursues. I have also suggested that it is both a matter of family likeness and self-identity. The poem 'The Whitewashed Wall' seems to touch on both these aspects of the shadow: in the phrase "his familiar look", Hardy beautifully compresses the familial and the idiosyncratic. The poem stages the emergence of the son's "familiar look" through the maternal relation, yet respects, nonetheless, his own 'life-like' semblance.

If family resemblance is acknowledged in the "familiar look", then there is a faintly specular quality about the mother's efforts to view her son. One recalls the image expressed in Shakespeare's third sonnet:

> Thou art thy Mothers glaſſe and ſhe in thee
> Calls backe the louely Aprill of her prime
> (*ll.*10-11)[210].

While Hardy doesn't suggest that the woman's looking has anything

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[210] *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed., with an analytic commentary by Stephen Booth (New York and London, 1977).

to do with recalling lost beauty, there is a sense that her surveillance affirms her, makes her a mother by virtue of the descried relation. It is at that point we touch on a curious enigma: for, if in death, as Blanchot says, the dead person becomes more like himself, then other writers have it that he also becomes more like his forebears.

Hardy's '1867' Notebook contains 245 entries; of these a startling number show his obsession with faces and extremities of facial expression. But perhaps most interesting is the citation from Sir Thomas Browne's 'Letter to a Friend' in the *Religio Medici*, which I reproduce here with Hardy's underlining:

> 216 **(f21r)** . . . In my sad opinion he was not like to behold a grasshopper, much less to pluck another fig; and in no long time after seemed to discover that odd mortal symptom in him not mentioned by Hippocrates, that is, <u>to lose his own face</u>, & look like some of his near relations; for <u>he maintained not his proper countenance</u>, but looked like his uncle, the lines of whose face <u>lay deep and invisible in his healthful visage before</u>: for as from <u>our beginning we run through variety of looks</u>, before <u>we come to consistent & settled faces</u>; so before our end, by <u>sick & languishing alterations</u> we <u>put on new visages</u>: and in our <u>retreat to earth</u> may fall upon such looks which from <u>community of seminal originals</u> were before latent in us.[211]

It is this passage that probably underlies the extract quoted from the short story 'For Conscience' Sake', and possibly it, or something like it, is also behind Section LXXIV of *In Memoriam*:

> As sometimes in a dead man's face,
> To those that watch it more and more,
> A likeness, hardly seen before,
> Comes out – to someone of his race:
>
> So, dearest, now thy brows are cold,
> I see thee what thou art, and know
> Thy likeness to the wise above,
> Thy kindred with the great of old.

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[211] See the'1867' Notebook, in *Literary Notebooks*, II, p. 477. Björk surmises that Hardy quotes from 'Letter to a Friend' in *Religio Medici*(London, 1886), p. 182. (Quotation with slight variations and Hardy's underlinings.)

But there is more than I can see,
And what I see I leave unsaid
Nor speak it, knowing Death has made
His darkness beautiful with thee.[212]

In Tennyson, as in Hardy, the family or ancestral likeness does not erase the integrity of the person's own look or character, but, in fact, makes it what it is: "I see thee what thou art". In Hardy, as we have seen, literary likeness is distorted to allow the difference of a poet's own look, but that distortion is nonetheless a comprising part of a writer's character; his looks rely on those of his ancestors he has thrown into the shade. But, in extremity and crisis, the hidden legacy that supports his own look is revealed. When Blanchot says that the dead person, in resembling himself, also brings to mind the representations of great art, he is perhaps allowing for this possibility. That gallery of shadows and shadows on shadows sounds as if it could be a kind of æsthetic catalogue of character blue-prints, or what Sir Thomas Browne so wonderfully calls a "community of seminal originals". In Tennyson's poems, even as he describes Death's beautiful and ultimate shadowing, he returns, through the literal translation of the dead Hallam, to Petrarch's line on the dead Laura: "Death appeared lovely in that lovely face"[213]. Petrarch – and how interesting that we should come back to him – specifically features Death at one with Laura's deathly beautiful face; Death resembles her, making her aspect so compelling that her lover can claim she has transfigured Death's own forbidding aspect. Tennyson, likewise, makes Death take on Hallam's characterful and brilliant shadow, creating something like Vaughan's "deep, but dazling darkness" found in God.[214]

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[212] *The Poems of Tennyson*, II, 388.

[213] For Hallam's translation of these lines, see his *Oration on the Influence of Italian works of Imagination on the Same Class of Composition in England*, delivered in Trinity College Chapel, December 16, 1831 (Cambridge, 1832), p. 18, and Ricks's note to Section LXXIV of *In Memoriam* (*ll.*11-12), in *The Poems of Tennyson*, II, 388.

[214] *The Works of Henry Vaughan*, 2nd ed., edited by L. C. Martin (Oxford, 1957), p.

This spreading of character, or its absorption by its surroundings or environment, is common to Hardy as well. It belongs to the process of transformation: once character has permeated through, it transforms everything it touches. Hardy puts this succinctly in another poem in *Late Lyrics and Earlier* – 'The Two Houses' – where the Old House says of its spectral inhabitants:

> Where such inbe
> A dwelling's character
> Takes theirs, and a vague semblancy
> To them in all its limbs, and light, and atmosphere.
> (*ll.*41-44.)[215]

To the New House, he confirms

> Such shades will people thee,
> Each in his misery, irk or joy,
> And print on thee their presences as on me.
> (*ll.*55-56.)

The triumph of 'The Whitewashed Wall' is that a humble and prosaic domestic interior is utterly permeated by the strangest phantasmagoria. The wall as the place of inscription or 'draught' is not initially charged or resonant in the way the Druid stone is, but the poem makes it so. The character space is doubly defined, firstly by a shadow, and then by the drawing that captures it. But this portrait isn't simply a banal copy, but preserves something of much more worth: the son's familiar look, his "certain shadow", or air. And just before the drawing is covered up, or perhaps, more significantly, at the very moment it disappears, it becomes "a face". What the whitener does, quite unintentionally, when he paints the wall, is deface the image.

But this defacement is practically simultaneous with the instant where the face is visible, if only to be denied. This accident is a necessary accident for face to be discovered as face. What the

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215 'The Two Houses', *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, p. 596.

whitening does is to suggest the death that makes likeness truly potent. Death is figured in the cited apology of the whitener: the draught is not simply erased or blotted out, but "buried under", that is, it lingers like a cadaver underneath the layering of paint. Hardy strengthens the use of his word "draught" by a covert reference to the first version of the same poem. By homonymy, the word suggests 'draft' which is both the normal spelling and the word for military conscription.[216] The 'draft/draught is buried under' is a beautifully subtle and implicit way of suggesting the son's demise in battle, and also of alluding to the relic of the first *Reveille* version which lies inhearsed in the second *Late Lyrics* poem. It is this incidence of death which casts the son's shade over his shadow, thus increasing its appeal. The face, though removed "from view", becomes through death, a presence: "she knows he's there". The physical obliteration of the face does nothing to decrease its power, either for the mother, or the informed reader. Although even the spare constructive outlines of the draught are no longer apparent, we are left with a space that we know, even in its very blankness and seeming innocence, to be inhabited by an hypnotically demanding focal force. This blankness is no simple emptiness: it contains the grounds and the coordinates of a look within it. The face may have been reabsorbed back into space, but once demarcated, it cannot be disregarded.

For the readers of Hardy's poem there is a peculiar and necessary difficulty. If we visualise the picture, it is without any real detail. We who have never seen the picture cannot know its shape,

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216 Hardy may have derived his spelling and use of the word from Sir Thomas Browne. He quotes this extract from Browne in the'1867' Notebook, *Literary Notebooks*, II. See entry 218 **(f21^{v})** √ – "a mortal [deathly] visage and last face; – A weak physiognomist might say . . . this was a face of earth, and <that> Morta has set her hard seal upon his temples, easily perceiving what caricatura draughts death makes upon pined faces, & unto what an unknown degree a man may live backward." The Browne is quoted from *Religio Medici*, p. 187. (Quotations with slight variations, annotation, Hardy's underlinings and reversed order of the passages.)

and now, when it is blanked from our view, we shall never see it. The actual detail remains, like the look, a family secret or familial property, in the manner of a closely guarded bereavement. What we do see then is something like the picture of a picture, or the shape of a shape; definition as it announces itself before it actually defines. Because Hardy abstains from particulars, a number of possible images flash across the poem's conclusion without any of them being permanently fixed. While the son is dead, we cannot say whether he is child or adult. In the last few lines of the poem, where Hardy delicately fuses eros and mourning, different possibilities present themselves. Birth is figured in the "labouring night", and the form beneath the sheet could as well be that of an infant as it could a corpse, and yet also and most strangely, the body of a lover or mate. Thus in the mother is the woman who tends to her infant, the woman who turns to her lover in the night, and the woman who lifts the shroud of her son in a perpetual 'wake' that is his and her reawakening.

In 'The Whitewashed Wall', Hardy strengthens the "belief" of 'The Shadow on the Stone' by the utter faith and confidence of the mother in her imaginative visualisation. The woman "turns" to her vision (*l.*23) , whereas the speaker in 'The Shadow on the Stone' had to keep "his head unturned/lest [his] dream should fade." The later poem shows the imaginatively selected scene saturated to the utmost by the power of the imagination, so that it cannot be contravened or subject to disproofs. The woman sees the accumulated shades as a genuine presence identified with the person of her son: it is "him" she turns to during the night, not just a memory. In 'The Shadow on the Stone', an ambiguous phrasing, "I left her behind me", puts the experience into the past, if the near past: for the woman is not only behind him, but also "left" behind him – a property that can no longer accompany him. But the later

poem shows the woman's recognition and acknowledgement as continuous, and so bears witness to the enduring capabilities of vision.

Once more, in the last stanza, Hardy seems to be challenging other forms of belief which he finds lacking. The last four lines contain elements which are reminiscent of Evangelical Christian choruses. One can hear this more clearly if one guesses 'Jesus' intended for the "he":

> But she knows he's there. And when she yearns
> For him, deep in the labouring night,
> She sees him close at hand, and turns . . . .

Hardy is deftly parodying the sentiments of Evangelical Salvationism by counterpoint. The sustaining vision of the woman is not Christ but her son; her imagination embraces him wholeheartedly in a totally secular *Pietà*. The other response is to Tennyson. The phrase "She sees him close at hand" seems an answer to that celebrated seventh section of *In Memoriam* in which Tennyson reviews the "Dark House" where he was used to linger "waiting for a hand/A hand that can be clasped no more" (*ll.*4-5). Tennyson's sombre conclusion in this initial stage of mourning is that "He is not here" (*l.*9), in contradistinction to Hardy's "But she knows he's there". But that mourning slowly gives way to the imaginative transfiguration I described earlier. A major task of 'The Whitewashed Wall' is to endorse that secular imaginative work which triumphs in *In Memoriam*, attesting its capacity to preserve and represent anew. Hardy's testimony, even stronger in 1918 than it was two years previously, asserts a miraculous vision that trumps the orthodox Christian rationale, as the painted "sheet" that shrouds the son is permeated, incontrovertibly before our eyes, by the power of his image. It is perhaps Hardy's most successful use of his imagery of space as character, made visible after the manner of sympathetic

ink. The sheet is the screen which blots the draught from view; a page over, rather than under, the draught, but through which the suggestion of definition seeps, portraying visible essence. Hardy does not have to misrepresent this process by an image of superimposition: the apparent paradox is the right one; the design or inscription is prior to the page through which it permeates. And this, after all, is true to the magic of sympathetic ink, which in its gradual appearance on the page, looks as if it is emerging out of the paper, coming through from a 'beyond' on the other side.

What the woman sees is her son; what we see is the outline of an image we cannot truly picture: the image of an image. Through the gap of that outline, we gaze upon the visible essence of Hardy's poetry at its inchoate spatial core.

This essential character space that I have been describing, and which I believe Hardy's poetry acknowledges and celebrates as a constructive force, is what motivates, in various ways, the writings of all those poets who take their lead from Shelley. I have shown how Hardy's ideas and images very often hearken back to Shelley's. Hardy's screened character-space takes us to Shelley's manifesto of perception in 'Mont Blanc', and to the site of the speaker's trance at the Ravine:

> Thine earthly rainbows stretched across the sweep
> Of the etherial waterfall, whose veil
> Robes some unsculptured image
> (*ll.*25-27).[217]

I have, elsewhere, linked the "unsculptured image" to a Shelleyan conception of poetic space, and the place where æsthetic perception is formed through the negotiation between image and perceiver. What Hardy does in exploiting the power of the unsculptured image, is trace through an outline – but without definition or particularity – of the image into his poetry that allows

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217 'Mont Blanc', *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 90.

one to look back into the poem's heart: this is an image of the image which does not specify or sculpture, but gives a space through which to communicate that prior space.

The outline is given by Hardy's own form of ghosting and ghostly portraiture, which, though I have tried to indicate its predominance in his work, is deserving of much greater exposition. Shelley, too, has his ghosts which no doubt influenced Hardy, but the later poet sees his shades as deeper realities, not reflections, as seems to be the case in 'Mont Blanc', where the "wild thoughts" seek

> among the shadows that pass by
> Ghosts of all things that are, some shade of thee,
> Some phantom, some faint image; till the breast
> From which they fled recalls them
> (*ll.*45-48).

Hardy's shades are closer to Shelley's "awful shadow of some unseen Power" in the 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty'. But Shelley shows this shadow at a distance from general perception: "It visits with inconstant glance/Each human heart and countenance" (*ll.*6-7)[218]. The shadow "visits", but it is not a constituting part of what is seen; Hardy's ghosts *are*, and his intensities sharpen perception so that the cues of sight can produce an imaginative vision capable of discerning spectres.

Hardy's achievement as a Shelleyan continuator consists chiefly in this: his painstakingly worked relation between form and visible essence, and his capacity to transform, for æsthetic perception, things that lie beyond the range of the more conventionally æsthetic scene. Perhaps when the critics learn to adjust their sights to the demands of Hardy's vision, they will see him as he really is – one of the strongest poets of this century.

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[218] 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty', *Ibid.*, p. 93.

CHAPTER V

PATER'S PORTRAITS

For, in truth all art does but consist in the removal of surplusage, from the last finish of the gem-engraver blowing away the last particle of invisible dust, back to the earliest divination of the finished work to be, lying somewhere, according to Michelangelo's fancy, in the rough-hewn block of stone.

Walter Pater, 'Style', *Appreciations* (London, 1910), pp. 19-20.

Critics . . . will not have the patience to listen for the undertone of that deeper style which lies beneath the words themselves, 'the soul' as Flaubert said, which gives the words their being . . .

John Middleton Murry, *The Problem of Style* (London, 1912), p. 15.

For soule is forme, and doth the bodie make.

Edmund Spenser, 'An Hymne in Honovr of Beavtie', *l.* 133, *Poetical Works* (London, 1912), p. 591.

i. Pater, his Inheritors, and Shelley

In pursuit of the notion of ideal space figured in Shelley's "unsculptured image" as it re-emerges in a series of poets from Browning to Hardy, we have, frequently, at certain turns in the argument, or, in moments of illustration and corroboration encountered the critical thought of that nineteenth century mind which seems most predisposed to a Shelleyan æsthetic: I refer, of course, to Walter Pater. In that my study is predominantly an

æsthetic one, this is not surprising; for Pater, more than anyone else, made the study of æsthetics, not to mention the term itself in its modern acceptation, a vital one for literary criticism, and this by his stress on the principle of perception.

> Pater meant us always to remember what mostly we have forgotten, that "aesthete" is from the Greek *aisthetes*, "one who perceives." So the "aesthetic critic" is simply the perceptive critic, or literary critic proper, and "aesthetic poetry" is precisely the contemporary poetry that is most perceptive, that is, in one's judgment most truly poetry.[1]

Yet Pater, unlike either Ruskin or Arnold, has not received the attention which is his due; although he has always received the attention of other creative writers. Pater is a writer's writer, but this does not mean that those writers he influenced have clearly acknowledged their debt. Many have, in the light of critical prejudices which represent Pater's work as a period-piece, preserved a careful silence on the topic of affiliation. The relation is usually remarked by somebody else, as Eliot of Joyce: "He is a purely literary writer. He is founded upon Walter Pater with a dash of Newman."[2] Eliot himself is deeply unflattering about Pater. About his novel *Marius the Epicurean*, he observes:

> *Marius* itself is incoherent; its method is a number of fresh starts; its content is a hodge-podge of the learning of the classical don, the impressions of the sensitive holiday visitor to Italy, and a prolonged flirtation with the liturgy.[3]

Such observations veil Eliot's own dependence on Pater's writing, which is a surprisingly strong one. Not only in such obvious references as 'The Lady of the Rocks' in 'The Waste Land', who

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[1] Harold Bloom, Introduction to *Selected Writings of Walter Pater*(New York and Scarborough, Ontario, and London, 1974), p.viii.

[2] Virginia Woolf, Thurs. 26 Sept. 1922, *A Writer's Diary* , ed., Leonard Woolf (London, 1969), p. 50.

[3] T. S. Eliot, 'Arnold and Pater' in *Selected Essays* (London, 1932), pp. 402-3.

derives from Mona Lisa, or the subtler development of the Paterian "moment" in 'Burnt Norton', does Eliot reveal his affiliation, but also in significant purloined images and ideas. Hence, the solipsism of those lines from 'What the Thunder Said'

> I have heard the key
> Turn in the door once and turn once only
> We think of the key, each in his prison
> Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison[4],

which comes from Pater's characterisation of solipsism in the 'Conclusion' to *The Renaissance*:

> Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world.[5]

Eliot's central conception of the writer's impersonality could be shown to be prefigured in Pater's beautifully conceived essay 'Style':

> If style be the man, in all the colour and intensity of a veritable apprehension, it will be in a real sense "impersonal."[6]

Pater's paradox is one that culminates marvellously after a sustained exploration here, and in other of his writings, of notions of personality and its inverse. It is also a paradox whose subtlety was not fully grasped by Eliot. (I will return to this point later.)

Perry Meisel's unravelling of modernism to show it as implicating the Romantic legacy it seemed to deprecate, has treated Eliot's links with Pater (and Arnold) more extensively than I can hope to here.[7] Meisel presaged this study with an earlier book *The Absent Father*, which is a discussion of Pater's considerable

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[4] T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London, 1974), p. 79.

[5] Walter Pater,*The Renaissance* (London, 1910), p. 235. All subsequent citations from Pater are from the 1910 Library Edition of his works, unless otherwise stated.

[6] Walter Pater, *Appreciations with an Essay on Style*, p. 37. Referred to throughout as *Appreciations*.

[7] Perry Meisel, *The Myth of the Modern*, op. cit.

influence on Virginia Woolf.[8] Besides providing a challenging reading of Woolf, *The Absent Father* is a scrupulous reading of Pater, and provides a rare, serious analysis of the leading images in his writing. Meisel shows how Woolf's borrowings and developments of Pater's imagery underpin her work, even at those moments when she most vociferously seems to eschew the literary tradition. Richard Bizot has contributed a valuable article on Yeats's perception of Pater.[9] Bizot carefully corrects prevailing critical views of the relation: that is, he examines all the direct references to Pater made by Yeats, and concludes that Yeats, far from deprecating or 'escaping' Pater's influence in middle and late life - which is the opinion of Wilson, MacNeice and Vendler - redefined his allegiance by widening his view of him. While Bizot does detect in Yeats a period of disinterest for Pater, he sees a reawakening of interest in Yeats's mature age, which, he contends, is based on a new evaluation of Pater's thought.

> Around about the year 1915 Yeats's view of Pater entered a state of renewed, if mellower, receptivity to Pater and his ideas.[10]

Bizot sees Yeats's references to Pater in his 'Introduction' to *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (1936) - a book which, incidentally, "was not published until five years after Wilson wrote"[11] - as the high-point of Yeats's positive reestimation of Pater. Yeats's tribute to Pater in his 'Introduction' remains one of the few clear testimonies to Pater's influence by one of his inheritors, an influence that he nonetheless presents as a hermetic secret known to an *élite* only:

> All these writers were, in the eye of the new generation, in so far as they were known, Victorian, and the new generation was in revolt.

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[8] Perry Meisel, *The Absent Father: Virginia Woolf and Walter Pater*(New Haven and London, 1980). Referred to as Meisel in further footnotes.

[9] Richard Bizot, 'Pater and Yeats', *ELH* 43 (1976), 389-412.

[10] Bizot, p. 397.

[11] *Ibid.* , p. 391.

> But one writer, almost unknown to the general public – I remember somebody saying at his death 'no newspaper has given him an obituary notice' – had its entire uncritical admiration, Walter Pater.[12]

What is interesting about this passage is that Yeats identifies Pater not as Victorian, but as a forerunner of the modern movement. The same stress on modernity is found in another signal tribute in *Autobiographies*:

> Three or four years ago I re-read *Marius the Epicurean*, expecting to find I cared for it no longer, but it seemed to me, as I think it seemed to us all, the only great prose in modern English[13].

Pater's importance was acknowledged openly – and sometimes much to his discomforture – by the small group of writers associated with the Decadent movement, "the new generation in revolt", the most important member of which, before he moved onto other things, was Yeats, but which also included Wilde and Arthur Symons, both of whom praised *The Renaissance* warmly. Symons, like Yeats, called it "the most beautiful book of prose in our literature", and Wilde his "golden book".[14] If Pater's influence on the Decadent Movement is generally acknowledged, then this is not out of critical regard for the Movement which tends to be regarded with the appropriated disdain of the Modernists for *fin de siècle* writing. Yet a proper charting of the links between the Decadent Movement and Modernism would reveal that the one does not exist in isolation of the other; a figure like the critic and poet

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[12] W. B. Yeats, Preface to*The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (New York, 1936), p. viii.

[13] W. B. Yeats, 'The Tragic Generation', in *Autobiographies* (London and Basingstoke, 1955), p. 302.

[14] Arthur Symons, review of Pater's *Imaginary Portraits* for *Time* (Aug. 1887) n.s. vi, 152-62 reprinted in *Walter Pater: The Critical Heritage*, ed. R. M. Seiler (London, Boston and Henley, 1980), pp. 176-81. The citation appears on p. 177, and in Seiler's Introduction, p. 2. Oscar Wilde quoted in Yeats's *Memoirs*, transcribed and ed. Denis Donaghue (London and Basingstoke, 1972), p. 22, cited by Seiler, p. 2. Wilde appears to be quoting from Swinburne's sonnet on Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, which I cited in Ch. III.

Arthur Symons, a passionate admirer of Pater, is admitted by Eliot himself as the author of a book which is "one of those which have affected the whole of my life."[15]

Other of Pater's modern and pre-modern heirs, willing and less so, include Hopkins, Pound, and Stevens, and, as I showed in Chapter IV, Thomas Hardy, who is also a continuator of Shelley's. This brings us back to the question of Pater's own place in the Shelleyan tradition and his formative influences. Arnold, Newman, and Ruskin have all been variously cited as informing Pater, with Bloom claiming Ruskin as the crucial force, whilst acknowledging the Shelleyan Swinburne as Pater's stylistic model:

> Ruskin, despite his irrelevant mania for ferocious moralizing, is the major "aesthetic critic," in Pater's sense, of the nineteenth century. Stylistically, Pater owed more to Swinburne, but stance rather than style is the crucial indebtedness of a poet or imaginative prose writer.[16]

While undoubtedly Pater does struggle with Ruskin – J. B. Bullen implies that Pater's essay on Michelangelo (1871) is "an oblique response to Ruskin's diatribe", 'The Relation between Michel Angelo and Tintoret' (1871)[17] – there are important alliances with both Browning and Rossetti, and with Shelley himself.[18] Shelley is scarcely mentioned by Pater in his writings,

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[15] Eliot refers to Symons's *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (London, 1899) [Delayed publication:1900], when reviewing of Peter Quennell's *Baudelaire and the Symbolists*, in *Criterion* 9 (1930), 357. For additional comments by Eliot on Symons, see 'The Perfect Critic' (1920), in *Selected Prose of T. S . Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (London and Boston, 1975), pp. 51-3.

[16] Bloom, p. xi.

[17] J. B. Bullen, 'Pater and Ruskin on Michelangelo: Two Contrasting Views' in *Walter Pater:An Imaginative Sense of Fact* ed. Philip Dodd (London and Towota, N. J., 1981) pp. 55-73; 67.

[18] Pater said that Browning was "one of my best-loved writers." Letter 103 to Symons, 2 Dec. 1886, *Letters of Walter Pater*, ed. Lawrence Evans (Oxford, 1970), p. 70. It is possible that both Browning's and Rossetti's dramatic monologues lie behind the *Imaginary Portraits*. A number of critics have also pointed out similarities between Browning's long poem 'Sordello', which he called in its 1863 preface – "the development of a soul", and Pater's *Marius* and *Imaginary Portraits*. Symons on *Marius*: "It is somewhat such a soul . . . as that which Browning traced in Sordello." *Walter Pater: The Critical Heritage*, p. 180. "Each [Imaginary Portrait] . . . is the study of a soul, or rather of a consciousness", *Ibid.*, p. 179. See also John Buchan's

although the fact that Pater knew Shelley's unfamiliar short poem 'On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery' well enough to 'recast' it in *The Renaissance* must be significant. It is also intriguing that – as I have previously mentioned – Pater subsequently erases his stated acknowledgement as it first appeared: 'But it is a subject that may well be left to the beautiful verses of Shelley."[19] Shelley, for no apparent reason, is excised. And yet, he is continually present in Pater's imagery and vocabulary, although, as far as I am aware, this has not been noted before. For example, one of Patre's most famous texts – the 'Conclusion' to *The Renaissance* – seems to mime the opening of 'Mont Blanc':

> At first sight experience seems to bury us under a flood of external objects[20].
>
> The everlasting universe of things
> Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves[21].

As 'Mont Blanc' progresses to show the action of specifically *human* thought or mind (*ll.*5, 37), or what Shelley calls "my separate fantasy" (*l.*36) acting on this 'flood', so does Pater show "reflexion" acting on experience. In what looks like a gloss on 'Mont Blanc', Shelley, in his 'Speculations on Metaphysics', prefigures Pater's critical terminology, when he discusses "the passage from sensation to reflection", or "passive perception to voluntary contemplation".[22] It seems to me that sources for the Paterian imagery that Meisel

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praise of *Marius* in his unsigned review of the1910 Library Edition of Pater's *Works*, in *Spectator*, 25 June 1910, pp. 1075-6: "Few more searching and beautiful histories of the soul have been written", cited *Ibid.*, p. 404. Browning's "good minute" ('Two in the Campagna') has obvious affinities with Pater's "moment". See also Rossetti's introductory sonnet to 'The House of Life', *The Works of Dante Gabriel Rosetti*, p. 74, which opens: "A Sonnet is a moment's monument, –/Memorial from the Soul's eternity/To one dead deathless hour."

[19] See the first edition, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, p. 99.

[20] 'Conclusion', *The Renaissance* (1910), p. 234.

[21] 'Mont Blanc', *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 89.

[22] 'Speculations on Metaphysics, III: Difficulty of Analyzing the Human Mind', *Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, VII, 64.

collects: images of the diaphane, the crystal, transparency, the veil, light in the form of flame and brightness, images of fading and transience, the trace or residue, could all be very easily tracked to Shelley, and specifically, to a text like the 'Defence'. What Pater so marvellously calls "the evanescent and delicate region of human language"[23], is saturated in the very language of the 'Defence' which Shelley uses to describe poetry:

> We are aware of evanescent visitations of thought and feeling sometimes associated with place or person, sometimes regarding our own mind alone[24].
>
> Poets . . . colour all that they combine with the evanescent hues of this etherial world[25].

Shelley's "mind in creation" which "is as a burning coal which some invisible influence awakens to transitory brightness"[26]: this must be what Pater assiduously revises into the effort to sustain the ecstasy of "this hard, gemlike flame"[27] The connections between the imageries of Pater and Shelley could be developed more extensively than this, but my real interest in the link between these two writers lies in something which, though it motivates these associated imageries, lies beyond them. It is this which should come clear in my concentration on Pater.

ii. Pater, Portrait, and Character

Pater's critical writing is remarkable for its continuity with the concerns of his imaginative prose. This is not a matter of style alone, but, to borrow the organic model he himself borrowed from Coleridge, a particular body of ideas. Various critics, though

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[23] 'Style', *Appreciations*, p. 36.
[24] 'Defence', *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 504, 505.
[25] *Ibid.*, p. 505.
[26] *Ibid.*, p. 503-2.
[27] 'Conclusion',*The Renaissance*, p. 236.

Monsman chiefly, have noted the heavy patternings of Pater's magnificent *Imaginary Portraits*: the repetitions and cross-associations of myth, plot, and protagonists.[28] It can also be demonstrated that certain key elements of the *Imaginary Portraits* are at the very core of his critical essays. In addition, it has been observed that Pater's imaginative stories do not partake of mainstream nineteenth century novelistic conventions. While many of them present themselves as 'portraits', the actual business of portrayal is unsatisfactory for those who derive their expectations of portraiture from someone like George Eliot. Monsman comments:

> From the start Pater's fiction presents the prospective critic with numerous causes of frustration, not the least of which is a marked lack of both dramatic narration and description. How does the hero really look? How does he sound? What are his specific emotions? What are the details of his actions? Such questions are usually unanswered by Pater, for he is rarely vivid and first-hand, and his fiction always tends toward exposition. Pater talks *about* ideas and sensations and ideas – he summarizes them, one may say – but he never presents them realistically. Like the deaths which in Greek drama take place off-stage, so in Pater we are told, rather than shown, what happened. When Percy Lubbock says there is little drama in Pater's fiction, he points to a real problem, I think.[29]

This is what Lubbock has to say about on *Marius*:

> In Marius probably, if it is to be called a novel, the art of drama is renounced as thoroughly as it has ever occurred to a novelist to dispense with it. I scarcely think that Marius ever speaks or is spoken to audibly in the whole course of the book; such at least is the impression that it leaves.[30]

If we assume that Pater did not comply with novelistic

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[28] Gerald C. Monsman, *Pater's Portraits: Mythic Pattern in the Fiction of Walter Pater* (Baltimore, 1967).

[29] *Ibid.*, pp. xi-xii. I have emended the misprint "happend ".

[30] Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction* Travellers' Library no. 5 (London, 1926), p. 195. Reference cited by Monsman, p. 32 from Lubbock (New York, 1945), p. 195.

convention, not out of failing, but as a deliberate choice, we must ask what is it then that he does do in the imaginative work? what is it that attracts his attention? Consider the title *Imaginary Portraits.* As Monsman and Lubbock show that Pater is uninterested in orthodox methods of character portrayal, it may seem surprising that there is any stress on portraiture at all. But Pater uses the term 'portrait' frequently. What sort of portrayal is it he means? Obviously, Pater, like Hardy, is not only using the term portrait to denote the facts of verisimilar likeness, detailed or articulated feature by feature; his are designs of quite another order. The matter becomes clear if we recall the terminology of Symons, and Buchan after him, in their discussions of Pater's work. Symons is quite aware that Pater has self-consciously departed from dramatic norms.

> Mr Pater, then, has not given in these four portraits any more than in 'Marius the Epicurean', proof that he possesses the genuine dramatic power of creating characters which shall live and move and have a being independent of their creator; at the same time he cannot be said to have fallen short in his aim, for it is not this precisely that he has tried to do. What he has done, and what he doubtless intended to do, is to give a concrete form to abstract ideas; to represent certain types of character, to trace certain developments, in the picturesque and attractive way of narrative. Each also, with perhaps one exception, is the study of a soul[31].

Buchan's interesting review of the Library Edition of Pater's works, picks up on the figure of soul, and uses it tellingly to describe a development. He starts with Pater's founding creation – the essay '-Diaphaneitè':

> Hence he created the 'diaphanous' type – for, like Plato, he always thought in types – the soul which is aloof from the bustle of action, which does not create or construct, but which reflects and transmits the subtleties of beauty which would otherwise be lost to men. . . . But as the years went

[31] Symons in *Walter Pater: The Critical Heritage*, p. 179.

> on Pater's mind turned to something harder and less passive. Instead of the unconscious discrimination between good and evil of a delicately poised soul, he groped after active principles of selection. . . . But the *ascêsis* which Plato taught, and Pater began to emphasise, is the discipline of free men. The soul is master of itself, and will shape the world to its will.[32]

The *Imaginary Portraits* mark Pater's continual effort to delineate the abstract design of a soul or characterising essence. Visual modes of expression, imagery of the face and body, if not specific faces and bodies, are drawn upon to provide a mode of expression for what would otherwise remain hidden or unseen. In Pater, the faculty of visualisation is uppermost, so that very often, while concrete objects are described suggestively rather than documented, abstractions perpetually take on a sort of generalised tone and body of their own. Recently it has been claimed by Jerome Bump that, in fact, there is a corresponding weight on the faculty of hearing in Pater, which is present in *Marius the Epicurean*, and which thus corroborates the statement in the famous essay on 'The School of Giorgione' about the arts aspiring towards the condition of music.[33] While Pater frequently does invoke music in his work, it seems to me that he often does so through visual metaphors. This is apparent even in some of the citations from *Marius* that Bump gives to substantiate his argument:

> The impulse to speak masterfully was visible, before the recitation was well over, in the moving lines about his mouth,
>
> elaborate, curved ivories of speech, drawn, at length out of the rich treasure-house of a memory stored with such[34],
>
> catching therewith a portion of the enthusiasm of

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[32] Buchan in *Ibid.*, p. 404.

[33] 'Seeing and Hearing in *Marius the Epicurean*', *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 37 (1982), 188-206. For 'The School of Giorgione', see *The Renaissance*, and , in particular, p. 135.

[34] Walter Pater, *Marius the Epicurean*, II, 84, 85, cited by Bump, p. 191.

> those beside him, Marius could discern dimly, behind the solemn recitation which now followed, at once a narrative and a prayer, the most touching image truly that had ever come within the scope of his mental or physical gaze.[35]

It seems forced of Bump to comment of this last excerpt: "Of course this 'image' is produced by an appeal not to his 'physical gaze' but to his ears", when this appeal results in such an obvious visualisation. Furthermore, Pater's purpose in the statement on music in 'The School of Giorgione' is not to say that music is chief of the arts in itself, but to use music to signify "the perfect identification of matter and form" (the *condition* of music) which is the perfection of every art.[36] Pater analogises "the ideal instants the School of Giorgione selects" with the "musical intervals in our existence", but picture illustrates music more than music does picture.[37] Seeing everything in terms of visual scene means that Pater strays away from the topic of music pure and simple into the theatre of its production, or a mere set of associations:

> And so, from music, the School of Giorgione passes often to the play which is like music; to those masques in which men avowedly do but play at real life, like children "dressing up," disguised in the strange old Italian dresses, parti-coloured, or fantastic with embroidery and furs, of which the master was so curious a designer, and which, above all the spotless white linen at wrist and throat, he painted so dexterously.[38]

Pater uses the term "musical interval" as a synonym for the "moment" of the 'Conclusion'. In Giorgione's paintings we see "some brief and wholly concrete moment" or

> exquisite pauses in time, in which, arrested thus, we seem to be spectators of all the fulness of existence, and which are like some consummate

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[35] *Ibid.*, p. 138, cited by Bump, p. 197.

[36] 'The School of Giorgione', *The Renaissance*, p. 142.

[37] *Ibid.*, pp. 150, 151.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 152.

extract or quintessence of life.[39]

Music, like painting at its best, appeals to Pater in its capacity to present an idealised essence, and it is this stress on the essence of things which reveals Pater as a Shelleyan.

In what in its own way may be called a critical portrait, the marvellous sixth chapter of *Plato and Platonism*, Pater explores 'The Genius of Plato', or what might be called the 'soul' or characterising spirit of Plato, who in making abstract things visible essences was Pater's own master. Pater says that Plato has "a sort of *visual* power, but causing others also to see what is a matter of original intuition for him."[40] He is

> a seer who has a sort of sensuous love of the unseen. . . . His aptitude for things visible, with the gift of words, empowers him to express, as if for the eyes, what except to the mind is strictly invisible[41].

All of this could equally well apply to Pater himself. Particularly fascinating is Pater's admiration for what he sees as Plato's skill in portraiture, in characterising abstract fact or thought, or even a literary artefact:

> The Dialogue itself . . . becomes in his hands . . . like a single living person; so comprehensive a sense does he bring to bear upon it of the slowly-developing physiognomy of the thing – its organic structure, its symmetry and expression[42].

The abstract thought of the Dialogue coheres and fuses into the emerging image of a human face.[43] Pater uses such images to communicate the immediacy of contact in certain literary works. In

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[39] *Ibid.*, p. 150.
[40] Walter Pater, *Plato and Platonism*, p. 142.
[41] *Ibid.*, p. 143.
[42] *Ibid.*, p. 129.
[43] See also Ch. VII 'The Doctrine of Plato', *Ibid.*, p. 170: "Abstract ideas themselves become animated, living persons, almost corporeal, as if with hands and eyes."

Gaston de Latour he speaks of the hero's demand for "'a poetry as veritable, as intimately near, as corporeal, as the new faces of the hour[44].'" He says that Bruno's abstract theory "was become a visible person talking with you".[45] Knowledge in *Plato and Platonism* becomes a knowledge of "the concrete and the particular, face to face delightfully."[46] All these examples seem to be what Pater calls in the essay on 'Style' "the portraiture of one's sense".[47] Style as the means of portraiture, that is, the means by which it is effected, brings out an expressive likeness which represents both the writer, the topic and the particularity of his writing.

> Style in all its varieties . . . so long as each is really characteristic or expressive, finds thus its justification, the sumptuous good taste of Cicero being as truly the man himself . . . as would have been his portrait by Raffaelle, in full consular splendour, on his ivory chair.[48]

Thus if a literary product has a physiognomy of its own, it also reflects (like a son the father – to revive Petrarch's analogy) that of its maker. By this I mean not that Pater deduces in any biographical way the writer in the works, but rather a kind of characteristic presentation, the marks that reveal the particular shaping forces a specific writer engages with in his work. Two of Pater's most recurrent words are 'personality' and 'character' along with the adjectives 'personal' and 'characteristic'.[49] But Paterian 'character' or 'personality' is a complex and highly qualified concept and is not what it is often assumed to be: a kind of intimately subjective or private being, liable to fanciful, self-indulgent or intensely idiosyncratic perceptions. Pater talks of character, characteristics

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[44] Walter Pater, *Gaston de Latour*, p. 52.
[45] *Ibid.*, p. 155.
[46] *Plato and Platonism*, p. 156.
[47] 'Style', *Appreciations*, p. 35.
[48] *Ibid.*, p. 36.
[49] Meisel, p. 104: 'Throughout our discussion we have seen both Pater and Woolf relying almost exclusively on a notion of art as expression of character or personality, an assumption that seems to lie untroubled at the root of their surprisingly common visions of criticism and art alike."

and personality a great deal, but on close examination, the concepts involved prove to be curiously depersonal, diagrammatic and abstract. Pater does not give specific detail; he does not fill in the outlines of those entities he so continually delineates, in a way that substantially individualises or typifies them as unique wherever they appear. One might say that it is the idea of character, the sketch or design of some sort of formative pattern to which he alludes. Just as that recurrent pattern has been described as a myth or type in the stories, so too do we see in the critical writings, the perpetual reproduction of an abstract outline, the trace of a soul-script. For even when Pater speaks of those secondary characteristics which individualise each character as a particularity, the actual characteristics in themselves are only interesting to him in so far as they signal character and manifest its general essence, making visible what would otherwise go unseen. His is therefore a study of detail as the visible mark or symptom of essence.

> Yet even here, where Plato is dealing with the inmost elements of personality, his eye is on its object, on *character* as seen in *characteristics*, through those details which make character a sensible fact, the changes of colour in the face as of tone in the voice, the gestures, the really physiognomic value, or the mere tricks of gesture and glance and speech.[50]

(This notion of a particularised generality goes someway to explaining the cryptic remark of 'Style': "If style be the man, in all the colour and intensity of a veritable apprehension, it will be in a real sense 'impersonal'.")

To explain Pater's idea of character further, it is useful to look at several examples of its expression and note their prominence in the critical essays.[51] The concept of character is

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[50] *Plato and Platonism*, p. 130.

[51] This prominence is often of a literal quality, as Pater employs his vocabulary of character in assessments that occur either at the very end or at the very beginning of

launched significantly in Pater's first essay 'Diaphaneitè' in which Pater sets up a model or character-type that he finds is worthy of aspiration.

> Such a character is like a relic from the classical age, laid open by accident to our alien modern atmosphere. It has something of the clear ring, the eternal outline of the antique. Perhaps it is nearly always found with a corresponding outward semblance.[52]

There are several things to note here. The first is that Pater sets up the relation we have already seen in Hardy between the past which we inherit and the present which we occupy; secondly, he stresses the visibility of this character in its characteristics – "a corresponding outward semblance"; thirdly, he uses the diagrammatic language of the type – "the eternal outline". Here are in embryo the stated concerns of Pater as he gives them voice in the much later *Plato and Platonism*, where he views his aim as

> locating the particular in the general, mediating between general and particular, between our individual experience and the common experience of our kind[53].

In his essays on various painters and writers in *The Renaissance* and *Appreciations*, Pater uses his idea of character as a means of gauging what is specific to the individual artist; and yet, what happens in his different accounts is more than a straight-forward assessment of trait or tendency. The marks of a detectable character are themselves a criterion of artistic success or efficacy. There may well be parts of a writer's or artist's work which do not show character, are out of touch with it, or have failed to represent it properly, and these pieces are thus æsthetically deficient. This is the case with Wordsworth of whom Pater remarks:

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his essays where it achieves a focal status.

52 Walter Pater, 'Diaphaneitè',*Miscellaneous Studies*, p. 251.

53 *Plato and Platonism*, p. 152.

> For nowhere is there so perplexed a mixture as in Wordsworth's own poetry, of work so touched with intense and individual power, with work of almost no character at all.[54]

Where character is properly present, it is felt as a vitalising energy, as in this description of Montaigne's work in *Gaston de Latour*:

> [Montaigne's *Essays*] were themselves a life, the power that makes them what they are having been accumulated in them imperceptibly by a thousand repeated modifications, like character in a person[55].

In this instance, Pater attributes character to the *Essays* themselves rather than Montaigne, which I think represents a certain kind of valorisation: the strength of certain works is so great that they stand alone as characterisable in themselves, or they become the epitome of value in a writer's œuvre. This is the case with Shakespeare's 'Measure for Measure' of which Pater says

> under his touch certain portions of it rise far above the level of all but his own best poetry, and working out of it a morality so characteristic that the play might well pass for the central expression of his moral judgments.[56]

The motif of the art-work making visible an unseen essence figures frequently:

> this other critical distinction, between wit and humour, finds a sort of visible interpretation and instance in the character and writings of Charles Lamb.[57]

One of the ways Pater subtly de-individualises character is to blunt the edges of the 'personal' by seeing an artist's work as absolutely characteristic of an age, epoch, or genre:

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54 'Wordsworth',*Appreciations*, p. 40.

55 *Gaston de Latour*, pp. 83-4.

56 'Measure for Measure', *Appreciations*, p. 170-1.

57 'Charles Lamb', *Ibid.*, p. 106.

> the spirit of romanticism bore a more really characteristic fruit in the work of a young girl, Emily Bronte[58].
>
> I said that the art of Luca della Robbia possessed in an unusual measure that special characteristic which belongs to all the workmen of his school[59].
>
> In this way he sums up [for his admirers] the whole character of medieval art itself in that which distinguishes it most clearly from classical work, the presence of a convulsive energy in it[60].

Pater, qualifying the idea of Romanticism as a type rather than a period, makes a declaration of the interaction of genre with artist.

> Romanticism, then, although it has its epochs, is in its essential characteristics rather a spirit which shows itself at all times, to various degrees, in individual workmen and their work, and the amount of which criticism has to estimate in them taken one by one, than the particularity of a time or a school.[61]

Pater's own criticism constantly shows the critic engaged in examining that relation between general and particular:

> If in reading Plato, for instance, the philosophic student has to re-construct for himself, as far as possible, the general character of an *age*, he must also, so far as he may, reproduce the portrait of a *person*.[62]

This last comment indicates an anxiety that the "portrait" of the individual should not go disregarded, as if Pater had suddenly become aware of how the notion of the individual could be submerged altogether in epochal or generic survey. This submergence, which must be avoided by a delicate balance between the two categories of context and instance, threatens Pater, as we

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58 'Romanticism', *Ibid.*, p. 242.
59 Luca della Robbia', *The Renaissance*, p. 71.
60 'The Poetry of Michelangelo', *Ibid.*, p. 73.
61 'Romanticism', *Appreciations*, pp. 256-7.
62 *Plato and Platonism*, p. 125.

shall see at certain other moments in his criticism.

Concerning the question of how Pater actually sees the work of those artists he singles out for special attention, it is possible to identify in his accounts of many of them a smaller version of Pater's own interests: that is, certain of these artists themselves are governed by a passion to determine character and individuality:

> To him [Michelangelo], lover and student of Greek sculpture as he was, work which did not bring what was inward to the surface, which was not concerned with individual expression, with individual character and feeling, the special history of the special soul, was not worth doing at all.[63]

This passage on Michelangelo is a fine example of the Paterian paradox that, whenever a sort of personal particularity is cited, it is as part of a much more abstract and generalised program. The actual facts of particularity matter far less than the idea of particularity itself. Pater makes the individual, the "special soul", into a type whom Michelangelo, no less than Pater himself tries to capture. But it is Leonardo who exemplifies this process in Pater's writing, Leonardo who becomes, not only the Paterian quester after character in his work and endeavours, but also the most complete instance in himself of the character of character:

> he plunged also into human personality, and became above all a painter of portraits; faces of a modelling more skilful than has been seen before or since, embodied with a reality which almost amounts to illusion, on the dark air. To take a character as it was, and delicately to sound its stops, suited one so curious in observation, curious in invention.[64]

Pater suggests an almost obsessive typology in Leonardo's pictures; the repetition of certain qualities and aspects which surface in face after face. Discussing Leonardo's "type of womanly beauty"[65], he

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[63] 'Luca della Robbia', *The Renaissance*, ' p. 67.

[64] 'Leonardo da Vinci', *Ibid.*, p. 111.

makes the figures themselves, like Leonardo, susceptible to an energy felt by those of a heightened sensibility, which they then contain for the beholder:

> Nervous, electric, faint always with some inexplicable faintness, these people seem to be subject to exceptional conditions, to feel powers at work in the common air unfelt by others, to become, as it were the receptacle of them, and pass them on to us in a chain of secret influences.[66]

Pater uses the convention of the portrait as that which expresses character and essence. This, it preserves and memorialises by making the represented figures transparent to normally unseen powers which they then manifest. Character and essence are firmly aligned with the expression of an unseen power or energy. The ability to see beyond the obvious (as Shelley does), and then to reiterate what is seen in visual imagery, is perhaps the quality Pater admires most in any artist; this ability Leonardo possesses *par excellence*: "His type of beauty seems more than that of any other artist to reflect ideas and views and some scheme of the world within"[67]. But Botticelli is also singled out for praise in this respect:

> the genius of which Botticelli is the type usurps the data before it as the exponent of ideas, moods, visions of its own; in this respect it plays fast and loose with those data, rejecting some and isolating others, and always combining them anew. To him, as to Dante, the scene, the colour, the outward image or gesture, comes with all its incisive and importunate reality; but awakes in him, moreover, by some subtle law of his own structure, a mood which it awakes in no one else, of which it is the double or repetition, and which it clothes, that all may share it with visible circumstance.[68]

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[65] *Ibid.*, p. 115.
[66] *Ibid.*, p. 116.
[67] *Ibid.*, p. 99.
[68] 'Sandro Botticelli', *Ibid.*, pp. 53-4.

Botticelli also

> if he painted religious incidents, painted them with an under-current of original sentiment, which touches you as the real matter of the picture through the veil of its ostensible subject.[69]

Pater implies that the essence, "the real matter of the picture", need not necessarily be the precise correlating essence of the thing or person portrayed, but something that uses that particular cover through which to become visible. Thus he says also of Leonardo, that he used "incidents of sacred story, not for their own sake, or as mere subjects for pictorial realisation, but as a cryptic language for fancies all his own".[70] Yet while Leonardo's painterly language is described as intensely personal, it is, at the same time, a supreme statement of a general truth, according to the principle that: "all beauty is in the long run only *fineness* of truth, or what we call expression, the finer accommodation to that vision within.[71] Leonardo's perfection of his type in Mona Lisa becomes the ultimate design of character:

> The fancy of a perpetual life, sweeping together ten thousand experiences, is an old one; and modern thought has conceived the idea of humanity as wrought upon by, and summing up in itself, all modes of thought and life. Certainly Lady Lisa might stand as the embodiment of the old fancy, the symbol of the modern idea.[72]

Pater's conception of Leonardo's painting becomes something like the pictorial equivalent of Shelley's "cyclic poem".[73] Pater uses the

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[69] *Ibid.*, p. 50.

[70] 'Leonardo da Vinci', *Ibid.*, p. 123.

[71] 'Style', *Appreciations*, p. 10.

[72] 'Leonardo da Vinci', *The Renaissance*, p. 125.

[73] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, p. 19. "Shelley speculated that poets of all ages contributed to one Great Poem perpetually in progress." I am unable to find a passage in Shelley that corresponds precisely to Bloom's statement, although there are similar ideas expressed in both the 'Defence' and the Preface to 'Prometheus Unbound'. Bloom may be recalling Eliot's Shelley-influenced view in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *Selected Prose of T. S . Eliot*, p. 38, that: "The existing monuments [of art] form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the

conceit of a continuing reincarnation in his description of Mona Lisa, but the point of the passage is not so much that this potent characterisation is an amalgam of different feminine ideals, aspects and types, but rather that she represents that potentiality, that type that lies beyond all other types and from which they are derived: the idea of an absolute expressive image. In Mona Lisa, Pater sees Leonardo come as near as anyone can do to producing a picture of essence as essence, whilst at the same time, showing a myriad possible incarnations that all partake of its central power. Meisel in *The Absent Father* makes a similar comment:

> we might even say that the Mona Lisa is for Pater the trope of tropes, the vessel of vessels, a representation of all the representations – "all modes of thought and life" – of which experience is constituted.[74]

Specifically, and Meisel doesn't precisely acknowledge this, Mona Lisa is the character of character. The diachronic perspective Pater presents in his presentation of the painting constitutes his sense of a chain of artistic influence in which subsequent writers and painters modify or distort the creations of their predecessors. This is why, I think, the passage has been so much commented on and imitated, as other writers have irresistibly been drawn to its covert æsthetic implication of influence. As I showed in Chapter IV, where I indicated the passage's influence on Hardy, Pater's celebration of Mona Lisa is itself heavily implicated with sources in Shelley and, to a lesser extent, Swinburne. This goes some way to accounting for the tremendous density and resonance of the language and images that picture Leonardo's condensation of vision. Pater, throughout the essay on Leonardo, refers obliquely to the idea of influence reaction: "the lost originals have been re-echoed and varied upon again and

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introduction of the new (the really new work) among them."

[74] Meisel, p. 109.

again by Luini and others."[75] In this particular case, Pater proceeds to establish, perhaps rather defensively, that the original – the work of the prior artist – might actually be improved upon, that is, where it exists as comparison, and has not been "lost".

> At other times the original remains, but has been a mere theme or motive, a type of which the accessories might be modified or changed; and these variations have but brought out the more the purpose, or expression of the original.[76]

Throughout his commentary on Leonardo's art, Pater keeps weaving, almost obsessively, tiny exemplary threads of influence into the writing:

> Returning from the latter to the original, we are no longer surprised by Saint John's strange likeness to the *Bacchus* which hangs near it, and which set Theophile Gautier thinking of Heine's notion of the decayed gods, who, to maintain themselves, after the fall of paganism, took employment in the new religion.[77]

In discussing recasting within a painter's own œuvre, Pater connects through to Heine via Gautier, and to Heine's own vision of renovation in which the gods disguise themselves in human form and work among men. The reference to Heine is not a casual one; Pater was deeply influenced by the *Gods in Exile*: "an essay full of that strange blending of sentiment which is characteristic of the middle age concerning the pagan religions"[78]. This "essay" influenced the stories 'Apollo in Picardy' and 'Denys L'Auxerrois', in both of which an archetypal mythic character imposes himself on a medieval setting.[79]

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[75] 'Leonardo da Vinci', *The Renaissance*, p. 118.
[76] *Ibid.*
[77] *Ibid.*
[78] 'Pico della Mirandola', *Ibid.*, p. 31.
[79] See *Miscellaneous Studies* , pp. 142-71 and *Imaginary Portraits*, pp. 45-77, respectively.

iii. Pater and Arnold: Truth and Translation

I shall return later to Pater's sense of the construction of the present in the past, but want first to indicate his more immediate modification of a significant precursor critic. The modification concerns the notion of character; the critic is Matthew Arnold. In his famous essay 'The Study of Poetry', Arnold introduces the term "character", using it in a qualitative sense to denote worth.[80] Seeking to establish criteria for the class of "the truly excellent" – a type of poetry exemplified by his celebrated notion of "touchstones" – he refuses an abstract definition of character.[81] The touchstones – excerpts of poetry in which the critic intuits excellence – will suffice, and should be used as a mnemonic measure against which all subsequent poetry we encounter can be judged:

> Critics give themselves great labour to draw out what in the abstract constitutes the characters of a high quality of poetry. It is much better simply to have recourse to concrete examples; – to take specimens of poetry of the high, the very highest quality, and to say: The characters of a high quality of poetry are expressed *there*. They are far better recognised by being felt in the verse of the master, than by being perused in the prose of the critic.[82]

In Arnold's view, excellence in poetry is thus a matter of intuition; the right-minded critic will recognise what he sees, even though he is unable to formulate what it is. It is the critic's job to record and admire, not to theorise; and even his admiration is to be of a regularised pattern. The notion of a detailed and sensitive impressionistic response does not appeal to Arnold, whose own prose is austerely decorous.[83] Implied in the above excerpt is a

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[80] This essay was first published in 1881 as the General Introduction to the series The English Poets, edited by T. H. Ward, the husband of Arnold's niece, the novelist Mrs. Humphrey Ward. The essay was then later published in *Essays in Criticism: Second Series* in 1888.

[81] *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, IX (1973), 161-188; 168.

[82] *Ibid.*, p. 170.

[83] *Ibid.*, p. 180: "it was impossible that a fit prose should establish itself amongst us

deprecation of the urge of impressionistic criticism to replicate and mime the effects of the æsthetic object, as well as a broader disparagement of theoretical or heuristic criticism in general. Impressionistic and theoretical critical approaches share the goal of wanting to represent, although by quite distinct means, what it is that substantiates the æsthetic object's effectivity. Pater is therefore antithetical to Arnold in critical practice, as what he attempts to do at every stage is to define and substantiate that character which Arnold says we must accept simply and without speculation. Arnold's position does have a rather more interesting implication than is, at first, obvious. He recognises that criticism isn't 'pure' in that it will always mediate between poem and reader; unfortunately, he doesn't see that any reading will involve this impurity, even the type of reading he suggests, which appears to do away with criticism altogether, but instead replaces it with another set of assumptions. Arnold's declaration of objectivity: "to see the object as in itself it really is"[84], is famously revised by Pater in the 'Preface' to *The Renaissance* as "to know one's own impression as it really is"[85]; for Pater, realising that one cannot escape subjectivity, declares it as an essential constituent of criticism, and, by acknowledging its presence, actually seems to achieve a greater accuracy than does Arnold's stated objectivity.

Arnold, nonetheless, does seem self-conscious about his failure to identify what "the characters of a high quality" are; he imagines resistance to his refusal to theorise, and forestalls it by reiteration:

> Nevertheless if we are urgently pressed to give some critical account of them, we may safely,

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without some touch of frost to the imaginative life of the soul. The needful qualities for a fit prose are regularity, uniformity, precision, balance."

[84] Arnold, 'On Translating Homer', *Prose Works*, I, 140; 'The Function of Criticism', III, 258.

[85] Preface, *The Renaissance*, p. viii.

> perhaps, venture on laying down, not indeed how and why the characters arise, but where and in what they arise. They are in the matter and substance of the poetry, and they are in its manner and style. Both of these, the substance and the matter on the one hand, the style and the manner on the other, have an account of high beauty, worth and power. But if we are asked to define this mark and accent in the abstract, our answer must be: No, for we should thereby be darkening the question, not clearing it. The mark and accent are as given by the substance and matter of that poetry, by the style and manner of that poetry, and of all other poetry which is akin to it in quality.[86]

As a concession, Arnold allows himself to venture "Only one thing . . . as to the substance and matter of poetry":

> the substance and matter of the best poetry acquire their special character from possessing, in an eminent degree, truth and seriousness.[87]

What Pater takes from Arnold seems to be this stress on truth, while seriousness, in its Arnoldian sense, is abandoned. Arnold, as does Pater, specifically relates truth to style:

> The superior character of truth and seriousness, in the matter and substance of the best poetry, is inseparable from the superiority of diction and movement marking its style and manner.[88]

In his essay 'Style', Pater æstheticises truth into a stylistic principle which characterises the "highest literature". In doing this, he actually substantiates the cryptic or platitudinous (depending on one's perspective) response of Keats's Urn – that famous non-answer.

> In the highest as in the lowliest literature, then, the one indispensable beauty, is after all, truth: – truth to bare fact in the latter, as to some personal sense of fact, diverted somewhat from men's ordinary sense of it, in the former: truth there as accuracy, truth here as expression, that finest and

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[86] Arnold, *Prose Works*, III, 171.
[87] *Ibid.*
[88] *Ibid.*

> most intimate form of truth, the *vraie vérité*.[89]

And earlier he has said: "all beauty is in the long run only *fineness* of truth, or what we call expression, the finer accommodation of speech to that vision within."[90] Truth for Pater is not a moral vision or a verisimilar likeness to things as in themselves they really are, but an accuracy in representing the "vision within" in a verbal medium. The character of high quality which Arnold develops as "The superior character of truth and seriousness" becomes for Pater a *stylistic* achievement whereby the character of a writer's vision is transposed into his writing's character, or what I called in my study of Hardy, writing-as-character. As we have seen, Pater directly follows through the idea of this permeating character by using an imagistic repertoire of facial and bodily metaphors, and explicitly those of portraiture. His observation of the "physiognomy" of words seems to me a careful modification of Arnold's "the physiognomy and movement of the outward world"[91]. The Arnoldian phrase surfaces in a discussion of the two ways in which poetry should interpret life, an interpretation made

> by expressing with magical felicity the physiognomy and movement of the outward world, and . . . by expressing, with inspired conviction, the ideas and laws of the inward world of man's moral and spiritual nature.[92]

We might observe Pater's careful revision of Arnold's categories of outward and inward: outwardness does not exist in any simple sense; the inward world is the individual's characteristic vision, not an ethical or quasi-religious set of concepts and images. The "physiognomy" of language is that which gives a face to a writer's

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89 'Style',*Appreciations*, p. 34.

90 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

91 *Ibid.*, p. 20. The Arnoldian citation is from 'Maurice de Guérin', *Prose Works*, III, 33. This essay was originally published in 1863, and then in *Essays in Criticism: First Series* in 1865.

92 *Ibid.*

literary character: it is the "portraiture of one's sense" which reproduces "every lineament of the vision within". The writer's style is the artistic embodiment of that vision: "he begets a vocabulary faithful to the colouring of his own spirit"[93].

In the essay 'Style', Pater has constant recourse to images of translation which are further particularised by an imagery of design. Pater discusses the translation of one language to another, the Greek of Plato to the English of the translation, by means of the metaphor of a traced drawing:

> Plato, for instance, being often reproducible by an exact following, with no variation in structure, of word after word, as the pencil follows a drawing under tracing-paper, so only each word or syllable be not of a false colour, to vary my illustration a little.[94]

This model of translation is used as a general illustration for the process of stylistic composition which Pater, evoking the discussion of Leonardo's "originals", sees as the expression of the original vision. The image of tracing remains in his magnificent essay on Rossetti, of whom Pater states: "his primary aim, as regards form or expression in his verse, would be but its exact equivalence to those *data* within." He continues:

> That he had this gift of transparency in language – the control of a style which did but obediently shift and shape itself to the mental notion, as a well-trained hand can follow on the tracing-paper the outline of an original drawing below it, was proved afterwards by a volume of typically perfect translations from the delightful but difficult "early Italian poets": such transparency being indeed the secret of all genuine style, of all such style as can truly belong to one man and not to another.[95]

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[93] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

[94] *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15. The Shelleyan image of colouring, also present in the last citation, seems to have pervaded Pater's illustration here.

[95] 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti', *Ibid.*, pp. 206-7.

Pater's argument here is complex. What I want to allude to first of all is that mention of "outline", which I think must derive from the early essay 'Diaphaneitè' already cited, where Pater states the ideal of character is like a "relic" – "the eternal outline of the antique". In 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti', Pater carries on the sense of a recovery or continuance – a translation from past to present – in the detail of the "outline of an original drawing below". The idea of transparency, of the diaphane, must come from the early text, where Pater says of the ideal character:

> as he comes nearer and nearer to perfection, the veil of an outer life not simply expressive of the inward becomes thinner and thinner.[96]

'Diaphaneitè' thus shares with the essay 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti' a concern both with the inheritance of the past, and also the inward/outward relation of the individual's expressiveness. I think this can help account for some of the complication of movement in 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti', where Pater, praising Rossetti for his truth to inner vision ("data within" or "mental notion") proves his gift of genuine style "as can truly belong to one man and not to another" by his faithful translation of the works of other men – "the early Italian poets". Rossetti is so able to translate his own originality of vision or data, that when he comes to the Italian poets, their poetry as a whole functions for him in a way analogous to his own internal data, and which he can thus perfectly reincarnate in English. Transparency is thus the secret of "genuine style", just as for the gradually perfecting character of 'Diaphaneitè' the veil must grow thinner and thinner. The metaphor of transparency is often deprecated in modern literary critical discussion as a *naïveté*. However, Pater's use of the image is very different from those kinds of critical perception that are being questioned. The modern reaction against transparency is a reaction against certain critical

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96 'Diaphaneitè', *Miscellaneous Studies*, p. 249.

views which can be shown to assume language as transparent to material reality. It could be countered that Pater makes language transparent, not to the world without, but to the world within, which is just as questionable. But his conception of inner vision doesn't correspond to a set of ideas or images that are named and thus transmuted into language; the relation of language to his sense of internality is much more complicated than that, as indeed is his idea of the internal. This will be explained at greater length later.

While Rossetti is shown to transpose the Italian poets as a formal publishable translation exercise, there is implied in Pater's description the related topic of the poetic translation of one's forbears as a phenomenon of poetic creativity. The fact that the question of individual achievement and the question of tradition are so tied up in Pater (as they are in Hardy), shows that he sees them as inextricable and mutually constructive. One forms one's own character through an engagement with one's poetic ancestors. The image of tracing an original might very well apply to say, Rossetti's magnificent rendering of Browning's 'My Last Duchess' which I described in Chapter II, where one picture appears permeating through a later one. If, as Pater implies, the idea of transparency consists in preserving the truth or essence of vision, then that is what Rossetti does metaphorically via his picture of Browning's picture, and implicitly in his drawing on Browning's strength. Paterian transparency thus exists as a fidelity to internal vision or internal data, as a matching, not a precise replication of particulars. After all the very concept of translation acknowledges a similarity that is communicated across a vital difference, this difference being constituted by two completely different languages. Thus the language of written articulation preserves the essence of the vision whilst representing it in another medium; and thus, too, the later poet preserves the essence of his precursor in his own language, and not

that of the precursor. What Pater's allusions to translation tend to elide is the notion of the later poet's distortion of his predecessors: an idea which occurs more obviously in Hardy, and, in Swinburne, whose perceptions of translation are tied up with his understanding of traduction or unavoidable misrepresentation. Swinburne's description of translating Sappho is very different from the much more optimistic one of Pater treating Plato. As we have seen, when Pater discusses Leonardo, he suggests that later work is perfectly adequate to an "original" in its variation or re-echoing, even improving it by developing its "purpose" or "expression". This looks like a defensive reaction, although it need not deny the Hardyesque paradox that the greater the distortion the more the resemblance. Alternatively, it could be argued that a later work can function like a sympathetic *critique*, that it strives, as does the critic, to bring out what it is that constitutes the essence and appeal of the object under surveillance to the surveyor. This view would harmonise with Pater's own assumptions of the critic's *rôle*, and the fact that, in his own repeated search to establish what forms an artist's character, he seems also to be searching for his own – I mean, of course, as a writer.

> What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book, to *me*? What effect does it really produce on me? Does it give me pleasure? and if so, what sort or degree of pleasure? *How is my nature modified by its presence, and under its influence?* The answers to these questions are the original facts with which the æsthetic critic has to do; and, as in the study of light, of morals, of number, one must realise such primary data for oneself, or not at all.[97]

One might note, in passing, that the "original facts" of response displace the originality of the æsthetic object.

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[97] Preface, *The Renaissance*, p. viii. The second emphasis in this excerpt is mine.

iv. Soul, Vision and the Unsculptured Image

Besides the image of translation and transparency, there also occurs the allied image of transcription. The act of transcription very often involves the writing out of one set of characters into another. In examining Rossetti's use of language, Pater comments:

> the term was always, one could see, deliberately chosen from many competitors, as the just transcript of that peculiar phase of soul which he alone knew, precisely as he knew it.[98]

'Soul' is one of Pater's synonyms for character, along with related words such as spirit and genius. In 'Style', the link between soul and transcript is also apparent. However, in this essay, Pater's use of the word "soul" becomes complicated as he shifts his first use of the term to another sense during the course of the piece. The middle section or core of this essay deals with a contrast between what Pater calls "mind" in style, and what he calls "soul" in style – principles which he says are "hard to ascertain philosophically, the distinction is real enough practically, for they often interfere, are sometimes in conflict with each other."[99] However, both "mind" and "soul" as defined in this section of the essay can be read as different expressions of character. In his essay, Pater gives far more attention to mind, which he connects explicitly with those metaphors of design and portraiture I have indicated. In the following citation, which occurs at the point in the essay where he differentiates mind and soul, he tends to make mind sound more perfunctory than, in fact, his previous exposition has proved it: "By mind the literary artist reaches us, through static and objective indications of design in his work, legible to all."[100] But during the

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[98] 'Style', *Appreciations*, p. 207.
[99] *Ibid.*, p. 25.
[100] *Ibid.*

course of his treatment of mind, Pater has talked marvellously of the full creative energy of the literary artist which, superseding the stasis of a first plan, in inspiration, revises it to a new, more compact effectivity – a turn of events which, Pater implies, surprises even the artist himself:

> the literary artist . . . retracing the negligences of his first sketch . . . somewhere before the end comes, is burdened, inspired, by his conclusion, and betimes delivered of it, leaving off, not in wearinesss and because he finds *himself* at an end, but in all the freshness of volition.[101]

Pater thus seems for the moment of the comparison, to diminish the 'mystery' of mind in style in order to qualify the predominantly intuitive qualities of soul in style:

> By soul, [the literary artist] reaches us, somewhat capriciously perhaps, one and not another, through vagrant sympathy and a kind of immediate contact.

Soul is a much more idiosyncratic and subjectively determined quality, a relation between text and reader which is extremely personal and constructed on the reader's receptivity to sympathetic persuasion. Pater suggests a certain kind of reader who is particularly open to this kind of persuasion.

> There are some to whom nothing has any real interest, or real meaning, except as operative in a given person; and it is they who best appreciate the quality of soul in literary art. They seem to know a *person*, in a book, and make way by intuition[102].

Presumably Pater recognised something of this quality in himself, and it seems to link to those moments in his writing where he describes a text as a person. This kind of energy as expressed in soul has a different relation to language from that expressed in mind. In mind, language strives to translate vision; in soul, the

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[101] *Ibid.*, p. 24.
[102] *Ibid.*, p. 27.

relation with language is more arbitrary:

> Ardent religious persuasion may exist, may make its way, without finding any equivalent heat in language: or, again, it may enkindle words to various degrees, and when it really takes hold of them doubles its force.[103]

Pater suggests that the type of soul is simply one possible symptomal manifestation of a force that could be expressed in a multitude of ways and yet never be exhausted:

> it is still a characteristic of soul, in this sense of the word, that it does but suggest what can never be uttered, not as being different from, or more obscure than, what actually gets said, but as containing that plenary substance of which there is only one phase or facet in what is there expressed.[104]

At this point Pater abruptly breaks off his brief treatment of soul in style and turns to a discussion of Flaubert. From this moment on, the essay is centred on mind in style, and especially, Flaubert's extreme version of it: a version which contradicts those writers of soul, by its passionate insistence on adaptive particularity of language: "'Among all the expressions in the world, there is but *one* – one form, one mode – to express what I want to say.'"[105]

Before I consider Pater's treatment of Flaubert, I want to examine Pater's use of "soul" before he adopts that word for his central opposition. The word first occurs as part of a discussion of how even a supposed objective writer such as an historian adjusts "facts" to a mode of expression. Pater, one assumes, is again subtly engaging with Arnold in a critique of the latter's privileging of externality: "The line between fact and something quite different from external fact is, indeed, hard to draw."[106] He alerts us to that

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[103] *Ibid.*, p. 25.
[104] *Ibid.*, p. 27.
[105] *Ibid.*, p. 29. Pater quotes Maupassant, who, in turn , quotes Flaubert.
[106] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

moment in a writer's work where we see

> an expression no longer of fact but of his sense of it, his peculiar intuition of a world, prospective, or discerned beneath the faulty conditions of the present, in either case changed somewhat from the actual world.[107]

So Pater, using a sculptural metaphor that will recur later, says:

> Your historian, for instance, with absolutely truthful intention, amid the multitude of facts presented to him which must needs select, and in selecting assert something that comes not of his own humour, something that comes not of the world without but of a vision within. So Gibbon moulds his unwieldy material to a preconceived view.[108]

Now does the image of transcription arise: the writer's aim is "the transcribing, not of the world, not of mere fact, but of his sense of it", and "The transcript of his sense of fact rather than the fact, as being preferable, pleasanter, more beautiful to the writer himself."[109] Pater then links this transcription with soul: "Literary art . . . is the representation of such fact as connected with soul, of a specific personality, in its preferences, *its volition and power.*"[110] He concludes "It will be good literary art not because it is brilliant or sober, or rich, or impulsive, or severe, but just in proportion as its representation of that sense, that *soul-fact* is true."[111] We might notice that at this early stage in the essay, Pater identifies soul with sense or sense of fact, and that the language of personality and the force of personality have not yet been demarcated under the tighter category made mid-essay. The faculty of design and the impress of a specific personal power are still implicated with each other. I suggest that they remain implicated with each other in Pater's

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[107] *Ibid.*, p. 8-9.
[108] *Ibid.*, p. 9.
[109] *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.
[110] *Ibid.*, p. 10. Emphasis mine.
[111] *Ibid.*, p. 11. Emphasis mine.

mind, even though he re-orientates his vocabulary to provide another distinction mid-way. This distinction does not invalidate what has already been established; rather, in the later instance, Pater seems to be talking about another rarer, more idiosyncratic intuitive writing and reading method which remains impervious to full analysis, partly because of its elusive nature, partly because he devotes comparatively little space to its examination.

Throughout the major part of the essay where he deals with design in style, there are many references to a soul or character which becomes visible in writing. Pater continually uses the image of the writer as artist, calling him explicitly a 'literary artist".[112] Periodically the imagery is that of "literary architecture"[113], Pater, perhaps, being touched by Ruskin here. But the architectural vocabulary is shifted by Pater into an organic metaphor nearer to his own interests: "The house he has built is rather a body he has informed." And with what should a body be informed if not a soul? Pater prefaces this with the words: "all becomes expressive."[114]

One of the dominating motifs of the essay is the picture that the literary artist has for his text and to which that text will conform: "All depends upon the original unity, the vital wholeness and identity, of the initiatory apprehension or view." This "foresight"[115] is specified as

> a single, almost visual, image, vigorously informing an entire, perhaps very intricate, composition, which shall be austere, ornate, argumentative, fanciful, yet true from first to last to that vision within[116].

That almost visual image is reminiscent of the passage from *Marius*

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[112] *Ibid.*, p. 12.
[113] *Ibid.*, p. 23.
[114] *Ibid.*, p. 24.
[115] *Ibid.*, p. 22.
[116] *Ibid.*, p. 23.

quoted earlier in which the protagonist glimpses as backing the liturgical recitation "the most touching image truly that had ever come within the scope of his physical or mental gaze." Pater suggests that the character of that liturgy can be deduced as specified by the character from which it takes its being and force: Marius, we may presume, gazes upon the Christic face and body. The heard utterance or visual reading of text, if properly informed with character, leads the image back to contact with the image. In conjunction with this, we might look at that section of text that forms the epigraph to this chapter, and which treats the image as it exists for the sculptor. In discussing the artist's need to purge away the inessential from his work to recover its integral core, its essence, Pater refers us to Michelangelo: "the earliest divination of the finished work to be, lying somewhere, according to Michelangelo's fancy in the rough-hewn block of stone." Michelangelo's "fancy" has been incorporated in several of his poems and I quote several translations of key examples. Notably, Michelangelo not only produces this conceit, but uses it as a specific analogy of the soul.

> As when, O lady mine,
> With chisell'd touch
> The stone unhewn and cold
> Becomes a living mold,
> The more the marble wastes,
> The more the statue grows;
> So, if the working of my soul be such
> That good is but evolved
> By Time's dread blows,
> That vile shell, day by day,
> Falls like superfluous flesh away.
> Oh! take whatever bond my spirit knows
> For will and power inert within me stay.[117]
>
> My Lady, just as one already sees,
> Concealed in the hard marble of the North,
> The living figure one has to bring forth

[117] Translation by Mrs. Henry Roscoe, in *Michelangelo: A Self Portrait: Texts and Sources*, ed. Robert J. Clements (New York and London, 1968), p. 13.

(The less of stone remains, the more *that* grows);
So does the involucre of our flesh
Hide from the trembling soul,
With its burden of skin, unworked, rough, hard,
Deeds of both light and worth.
These, you alone, my Lady, can bring forth
From the stone that I am, and may be still,
As there's in me no more strength left or will.[118]

The greatest artist has no single concept
Which a rough marble block does not contain
Already in its core[119].

The speaker's soul is compared to the soul of the marble block which Time or the Lady, acting as artist may reveal and bring forth. It seems obvious that Pater's metaphor is his own version of Shelley's unsculptured image – a poetic character which preexists a specific set of words and rhetorical organisation but which emerges through them. In Shelley's case, while the image does come through and assumes a poetic form that identifies it as such, there still persists a dynamic relation between this, the wholly visible work, and the imagistic unsculpture at the heart of the work as it flows into determinable contour. This dynamic relation is observable in reading, as representation, language and rhetoric send the mind's eye beyond them to trace the power that vitalises them back to a barely visible source – the visual unsculpture or unpicture, which itself thus has its own central place within the poem. The image that *is* bodied forth, that appears in the poem, if it takes the form of specific representations, will characterise them in such a way that they will intimate the process of sculpture and unsculpture at work in the poem. Similarly language-use will be heavily determined with regard to, for example, its register of descriptive vocabulary, intertextual echo, paronomasia; rhetoric will yield to a characteristic rhetoricisation or developmental extension of rhetorical effects, as

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[118] Sonnet 84, in *The Complete Poems of Michelangelo*, tr. Joseph Tusiani (London, 1960), p. 77. This is an alternative translation of the poem translated by Mrs. Henry Roscoe.
[119] Sonnet 83 in *The Complete Poems of Michelangelo*, p. 76.

specific rhetorical figures will be matched to the specificity of each poet's vision.

Therefore we may say that the unsculptured image is not then a specific idea or thought or concept that the writer wishes to express in poetry, or, in Pater's case, prose; it is not a matter of meaning or significance. If it were a matter of such things there would be involved discussion of the adequation of thought with language and whether the one has priority over the other. Because the unsculptured image is constituted as poetic space, it is co-existent with language without being either totally coincident with or reducible to it. This is not then the more conventional discussion about the relation of thought to language and of form to meaning. Let us say that a writer's ideas, thoughts and language-use wait attendant on poetic space to motivate them; the ostensible subject of the poem is subsidiary to the power of the unsculptured image which controls its selection and shaping. Poetic character is in search of a poem; the representations of materiality the poem provides are those that intersect with the requirements of poetic character.

We might well speculate that those moments when a poem or poems appear to fail is when the relation between the unsculptured image and poem is weak; where the writer has failed to motivate the poem's language and images effectively so that the 'visualisation' of the unsculptured image is not possible. Hence Pater, as we saw, can describe certain poems of Wordsworth's as "without character". In the essay on Leonardo, he cites Goethe as the case of a writer whose material is not properly transformed by the creative process and which remains surplus to it:

> The name of Goethe himself reminds one how great for the artist may be the danger of over-much science; how Goethe, who, in *Elective Affinities* and the first part of *Faust*, does transmute ideas into images, who wrought many such transmutations, did not invariably find the spell-

> word, and in the second part of *Faust* presents us with a mass of science which has almost no artistic character at all.[120]

Because the force that reveals the unsculptured image as poetic character is the force that makes a strong poem strong, it is at first, difficult to apprise and deduce on account of its very essentiality. Nonetheless, as I have indicated, it can be deduced in every level of the text, specifically in moments of pun, condensation, contradiction, intertextual resonance of word and rhythm, and most clearly in modes of representation which have a strong visual impact: that is, representational modes which directly treat design or æsthetic topics and which centre particularly on face and bodily form. The poets I have studied in this thesis connect with each other by their specific treatment of bodily representations and their accompanying projections of character. They employ types of depiction and portraiture which are extremely effective in that they do not simply project the verisimilar likeness of body, but problematise it by distortion. The portrayed likenesses disconcert by upsetting normal preconceptions, introducing elements of the monstrous or fantastic in, say, the forms of Medusa and Hermaphrodite, and the phantasmal in the ghosts and ghostly likenesses of Browning, Rossetti and Hardy. Furthermore, all these likenesses demand a manner of regard which runs counter to the normal protocols of perception, expressing itself as, for example, confrontation and absorption in Shelley, multiple perspective in Swinburne, part-for-whole assumption in Hardy. In the bodily forms portrayed by this series of poets, identity rests not on the collection of attributes and the sum of their meaning as in the conventional novelistic character-portrait, but in the total significance of that particular body as body. The portrayals most often resist the details of documentation leaving us only with the outline or diagram, the

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120 'Leonardo da Vinci', *The Renaissance*, p. 113.

sketch of a symbolic value. We are left rather with the idea of the particularity of that body rather than the details of that body itself. This stress or accent causes us to ponder the body's essence and what actually produces the effect of essence; thus our attention is drawn in or through the representation to grapple with the forces of the unsculptured image beyond and which motivates the representation as part of the process of poetic characterisation.

In the essay 'The School of Giorgione', Pater predicates æsthetic interest as painting's or poetry's appeal not merely to the intelligence, but to pure perception. In the painting it is drawing and colour "the true pictorial quality" independent of subject-matter, and his words on the design or drawing remind one of the dynamic passage between unsculptured image and the poetic representation:

> It is the *drawing*– the design projected from that peculiar pictorial temperament or constitution, in which, while it may possibly be ignorant of true anatomical proportions, all things whatever, all poetry, all ideas however abstract or obscure, float up as visible scene or image[121].

The drawing or visible design is that which the writer's ideas colour or shape, but they "float up" from another source – the peculiar pictorial temperament, the domain of the unsculptured image as it determines the form of poetic character. Virginia Woolf, one of Pater's most indebted followers, gives her own persuasive testimony to the vision within:

> Nature, in her most irrational mood, has traced in invisible ink on the walls of the mind a premonition which these great artists confirm; a sketch which only needs to be held to the fire of genius to become visible.[122]

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121 'The School of Giorgione', *Ibid.*, p. 132.

122 Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, Uniform Edition (London, 1931), p. 108, cited by Meisel, p. 220. Meisel uses the edition (London, 1929), p. 108.

We might note that Woolf has here combined Pater's "drawing" with Hardy's "sympathetic ink" and thus doubled the sense of 'character' as it permeates through. The "fire of genius" is Woolf's rewrite of the convention of the enkindling poetic urge to pronounce – the "Enthusiast Heat"[123], or inspiration. Woolf also suggests, interestingly, that the reading of significant texts produces an analogous movement for the reader: "There is, to speak metaphorically, some design that has been traced upon our minds which reading brings to light."[124] Woolf situates the design already in the reader's mind rather than in its projection there by the text: in her version, the satisfying text conforms to a kind of textual *gestalt* already in the reader's keeping. This swerve – and could it be a defensive one? – is faintly reminiscent of the kind of "sympathetic contact" Pater attributes to soul in style. Possibly both Pater and Woolf derive this strain in their thinking from Shelley's essay 'Love', where, having specified as existing within each of us "a soul within our soul" – "Not only the portrait of our external being, but an assemblage of the minutest particulars of which our nature is composed", the supreme goal of love is

> The discovery of its antitype: the meeting with an understanding capable of clearly estimating the deductions of our own, an imagination which should enter into and seize upon the subtle and delicate peculiarities which we have delighted to cherish and unfold in secret[125].

In his imaginative writings, Pater provides some marvellous representations of a permeating image: in the citation from *Marius* for example, or in this superb literalisation which occurs in 'Apollo in Picardy'. When the *abbé* is "corrupted" by Apollonian forces, his great work becomes permeable to forces

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123 William Collins, 'Ode to Pity' (l.25), in *The Works of William Collins*, p. 26.

124 Virginia Woolf, 'Phases of Fiction', *Collected Essays*, ed. Leonard Woolf, 4 vols (1966-7), II, 56, cited by Meisel, p. 220.

125 'On Love', *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 474.

which he attempts to delineate:

> And whereas in the earlier volumes you found by way of illustration no more than the simplest indispensable diagrams, the scribe's hand had strayed here into mazy borders, long spaces of hieroglyph, and as it were veritable pictures of the theoretic elements of his subject. Soft wintry auroras seemed to play behind whole pages of crabbed textual writing, line and figure bending, breathing, flaming, into lovely "arrangements" that were like music made visible[126].

Pater in this passage makes a significant revision of his statement in 'The School of Giorgione' concerning the aspiration of all the arts towards music, as here music supposedly the perfect identification of matter and form is improved upon by a reforming - a further visualisation.

When a writer talks about finding the right expression for the exact shapes in his or her mind, one may speculate that the feeling of rightness, of appropriacy and the resultant efficacy, result not merely from the transformation of certain conceptions into written form, but from the exertions of the unsculptured image that has in turn charged the representations, and is itself strongly and successfully present in the eventual written product. Is this what brings Woolf to fruition?

> I think I am about to embody at last the exact shapes my brain holds.[127]

> I have to some extent forced myself to break every mould and find a fresh form of being, that is of expression, for everything I feel or think. So that when it is working I feel the sense of being fully energised - nothing stunted.[128]

I would maintain that the energy that Woolf describes is the result of her discovering the right expressive language, communicating not

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126 'Apollo in Picardy', *Miscellaneous Studies*, p. 144-5.
127 Mon. 16 Nov. 1931, *A Writer's Diary*, p. 176, cited by Meisel, p. 78.
128 Fri. 27 July 1934, *Ibid.*, p. 220, cited by Meisel, p. 78.

just the representations of subjective thought and feeling, but the process that makes her own writerly character. Hence, just as Anton Ehrenzweig, can speak of "the miracle of pictorial space . . . its mighty pulse that heaves through the picture plane" and "which has nothing to do with traditional perspectives and realistic illusion of depth"[129], so, too, can Woolf posit a similar power in Emerson's early work which she calls rhythm. The fascinating thing about Woolf's subtle discrimination here is that she perceives Emerson's early work as somehow inadequate to the pulse which tantalises but which is not properly embodied. It is as if, at this point, in Emerson's development his character is surplus to, is in excess of the actual writing; this, rather than that his writing lacks character.

> [Emerson's] early pages are written to the echo of great prose long before he could fit words that gave his meaning to the rhythm.[130]

However she suggests that the embodiment is later achieved and effectual:

> His sentences are made up of hard fragments each of which has been matched separately with the vision inside his head.[131]

v. Your own sense exactly: The "undertone of that deeper style"

Within the terms of the debate concerning the correspondence of expression to an inner vision, it is important to consider the concluding portion of Pater's essay 'Style' where he treats Flaubert and the search for the *mot juste*. Several critics have examined

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129 Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art*, pp. 59, 58.
130 Virginia Woolf, 'Emerson', *Books and Portraits*, ed. Mary Lyon (London, 1977), p. 68, cited by Meisel, p. 81.
131 'Emerson', *Ibid.*, p. 70, cited by Meisel, p. 81.

Pater's treatment of Flaubert and passed judgement on it, but in ways that seem unsatisfactory. Certain rather crude conceptions about Pater have contributed to a less than strenuous reading of 'Style'. One repeatedly comes up against the charge that Pater logically contradicts himself, or that his only value lies in the beauty of how he says things rather than in the things themselves – a distinction he would have found suspect. Edmund Chandler writes:

> Pater is rarely remarkable for what he actually says: to try a judgment; he had perhaps least to say of any major nineteenth century writer. What he did have to say, however, he said with grace and brilliance, and there is an intense pleasure in observing the sheer intelligence that informed it[132].

Ian Fletcher says:

> We must read *Style*, with its jagged transitions, as a set of related perceptions, or set, even of ultimately isolated perceptions, held together only by their occurrence within a common periphery.[133]

While 'Style' has its own rather subtle contradictions or oddities – I have indicated Pater's reorienting of the term "soul" for example – it seems to me to be a very coherent argument in any formal sense. A conception like character, for all its variation and stress of emphasis in different pieces of work, works like a poetic thread in pulling the fabric of the essay together. Because critics fail to read Pater according to his proper dictates, that is, with respect to his leading figures, they substitute ready-made ideas, say, of personality as raw subjectivity for the ever-refining abstractions intended by the writer himself. It is no surprise then that they fail to read him effectively. Because the intricacies of Pater's thought evade the categories imposed by these critics, there arise falsifications of what the texts actually say. Thus Fletcher declares in flat contradiction of the

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[132] Edmund Chandler, 'Pater on Style', in *Anglistica*, XI, (Copenhagen, 1958), p. 100.
[133] Ian Fletcher, *Walter Pater*, Writers and their Work, no. 114 (London, 1959), p. 34.

statement in 'Style':

> he is forced to reject Flaubert's insistence on the artist's impersonality, since, for Pater, style essentially mirrors the uniqueness of temperament, 'is the man'.[134]

Anyone who had worked out Pater's abstract and decidedly impersonal idea of personality would not be forced into that kind of error.

Having testified, via Maupassant, Flaubert's search for the "unique word", Pater then extends the expressive categories to the limits of expansion.

> The one word for the one thing, the one thought, and the multitude of words, terms, that might just do: the problem of style was there! – the unique word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, essay, or song, absolutely proper to the single mental presentation or vision within.[135]

Pater introduces his own term "vision within", and so makes the larger forms of essay or song equivalent to something more general than a specific thought or mental conception. As 'Style' presents it, Flaubert's search for the one expression does not necessarily clash with the Paterian conception of poetic character which constructs certain ideas or images, gives them expressive form, whilst maintaining an independence from that image-to-word mapping. Flaubert's attempts to adequate "what I want to say" with a way of saying it, need not affect the Paterian idea of a deeper design which motivates the more specific mental presentation. Pater can sympathise with Flaubert's desire for "the word's adjustment to its meaning" whilst retaining a larger vision beyond that. The Paterian modification of Flaubert proceeds with the qualification: "the first condition of this must be, of course, to know yourself, to have

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134 *Ibid.*, p. 33.
135 'Style', *Appreciations*, p. 29.

ascertained your own sense exactly."[136] Fletcher glosses: "For Pater, the process is not so much that of an existent idea in search of expression as of the clarification of the thought itself."[137] However, as I have intimated, Fletcher has a limited sense of what Pater means by the personality or self, and this, in turn, means that he cannot see how Pater's works could be read as swerving away from the notion of specific 'sense' as meaning or import, to an idea of the writer's self as a formative power and the location of a writerly character – "your own sense exactly".[138] Pater's additional remarks at this juncture show his complex understanding of how that character is constituted. If one does not perceive the link between self-knowledge, "your own sense exactly", and the description of the creative process that follows, then indeed, Pater's essay will look like a series of isolated perceptions instead of what it is – an extremely fine meditation on literary character.

> Into the mind sensitive to "form," a flood of random sounds, colours, incidents, is ever penetrating from the world without, to become, by sympathetic selection, a part of its very structure, and, in turn, the visible vesture of that other world it sees so steadily within, nay, already with a partial conformity thereto, to be refined, enlarged, corrected, at a hundred points[139].

This passage which echoes that section of the 'Conclusion' to *The Renaissance* which deals with the flood of external objects, shows how the "reflexion" spoken of there can take place. The perceptual images of the external world are worked over by an inner energy and adapted as a visible means of expression for the inner world. The passage from 'Style' and, as Meisel points out, the 'Conclusion'

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136 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

137 Fletcher, p. 33.

138 One should note also Fletcher's quite erroneous statement that the drift of 'Style' is that "All the laws of good writing aim, thus, at an identity almost of word with object, so that word, phrase, sentence, sequence of cadences seem almost to *become* what it presents." (P. 33.) This is a complete misreading of Pater's "vision" which is not an object, nor objectified in the way Fletcher suggests.

139 'Style', *Appreciations*, p. 31.

passage, both problematise the relation between inward and outward, so that the inward can be at least partially composed of the outward. We return to that aspect of Pater's thought that ensures that while the personal and individual seem to have an isolated value, they are also implied as constituted by forces beyond or outside them. These forces include the spirit of an age or epoch or generation and the accumulated energies of the ages. Thus the artist's character, say, is also characteristic of his age, or as with Leonardo, the ever-transmuting character of all ages. The artist is born into language which, of course, pre-exists him, or to use Pater's recasting of the sculptural metaphor, "is no more a creation of his own than the sculptor's marble."[140] Language is the "product of a myriad minds"[141], and it is the artist's labour in manipulating it that constitutes his linguistic specificity. Pater's sense of the individual, either person or moment existing as part of the generality, expresses itself many times in his image of the web:

> That clear, perpetual outline of face and limb is but an image of ours, under which we group them – a design in a web, the actual threads of which pass out beyond it.[142]

In the image of image that Pater proposes, is a miniature of the poetic process whereby character is projected: an iconic representation is selected but is dependent on lines of energy which throb beyond it; it is "the concurrence of forces parting sooner or later on their ways".[143] Renewing, according to his dictum in 'Style', old root-meanings or etymologies, Pater puns on "analysis" as an undoing or untying of the web which makes up self-hood.

> It is with this movement, with the passage and dissolution of impressions, images, sensations that

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140 *Ibid.*, p. 12.
141 *Ibid.*
142 'Conclusion', *The Renaissance*, p. 234.
143 *Ibid.*, p. 236.

> analysis leaves off – that continual vanishing away, that strange perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves.[144]

So too, thoughts that seem to characterise us, being composed or represented in the web of language, elude us and vanish:

> Words too, language itself, and therewith the more intimate physiognomy of our thought, "slip every day through our fingers."[145]

In both this last citation, and the first web image quoted from the 'Conclusion', what vanishes is the characterisation of face. The notion of character is itself an elusive topic, especially when, as it does in Pater, it leans towards an abstract rather than a concrete definition. The citations with their implicit suggestion of evanescence take what might be thought to be a major, if not *the* major representational mode, that is – the human form – and show how any trust in its permanency and enduringness is misplaced. That image, no less than any other image, is constructed, and is therefore no more reliable. But this fleeting and slipping of the facial character is not enacted, I think, to cancel the idea of character itself, but to manifest in the dissolution of a constructed image, the very characterising forces that lie beyond it, which are abstract and dynamic, and can, at any moment, dissolve the illusion of any coherent static focus which appears as an authoritative significance in itself. Pater shows that that seeming authority is, in fact, founded on a coming-together of energies which are capable of disseverance and fission.

In a moment where Pater movingly attempts to realise some of these forces as the burden of the past which forms the individual, the weave or web is then a vesture or garment which covers the body.

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144 *Ibid.*, p. 236.
145 *Gaston de Latour*, p. 102.

> For in truth we come into the world, each one of us, "not in nakedness," but by the natural course of organic development clothed far more completely than even Pythagoras supposed in a vesture of the past, nay, fatally shrouded, it might seem, in those laws or tricks of heredity which we mistake for our volitions; in the language which is more than one half of our thoughts; in the moral and mental habits, the customs, the literature, the very houses, which we did not make for ourselves; in the vesture of a past, which is (so science would assure us) not ours, but of the race, the species: that *Zeit-geist*, or abstract secular process, in which, as we have had no direct consciousness of it, so we can pretend to no future personal interest. It is humanity itself now - abstract humanity - that figures as the transmigrating soul, accumulating into its "colossal manhood" the experience of ages; making use of, and casting aside in its march, the souls of countless individuals, as Pythagoras supposed the individual soul cast aside again and again its outworn body.[146]

The essay on 'Coleridge' has a similar theme: man is "not . . . simple and isolated; for the mind of the race, the character of the age, sway him this way or that through the medium of language and current ideas" with "remote laws of inheritance, the vibration of long-past acts reaching him in the midst of the new order of things in which he lives."[147]

Even on this topic of indebtedness Pater borrows from Shelley:

> A Poet is the combined product of such internal powers as modify the nature of others, and of such external influences as excite and sustain these powers; he is not one, but both. Every man's mind is in this respect modified by all the objects of nature and art, by every word and every suggestion which he ever admitted to act upon his consciousness; it is the mirror upon which all forms are reflected, and in which they compose one form.[148]

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146 *Plato and Platonism*, pp. 72-3.

147 'Coleridge', *Appreciations*, p. 67 , cited by Meisel, pp. 141-2.

148 Preface to 'Prometheus Unbound', *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 135.

Pater's "relic" of the past, a relic, which in these examples has a distinctly Shelleyan ring, becomes in his later work a shroud-like vestment on which the imprint of the collective character permeates through. The last lines of the passage from *Plato and Platonism* about the accumulating soul remind one of Pater's picturing of this in Leonardo's Mona Lisa. In these passages, Pater also sounds very much like Hardy in the stress on inheritance – save that in Hardy there always appears to be more direct treatment of the idea of distortion. Does Pater undo what he has maintained elsewhere about the individual's own character in this massive reprivileging of historical process? The emphasis is rather, I think, that he is eager to demonstrate his awareness of the complex processes by which the individual mind is composed. These passages act as a counter to an over-concentration of the individual in isolation which they assume is the perfunctory focus. However they do not erase the idea of the individual. While Pater is keen to indicate the misconceptions of solipsism by establishing the individual's reliance on the social and linguistic forms that predate him, this is done as a corrective gesture not as a complete denial. The language may be "more than half our thoughts", but the individual, as in the essay on 'Style' retains his portion which is his specific manipulation, his "own sense of fact".

Meisel thinks that Pater is not always aware of the degree to which he modifies his own solipsism, and cites the 'Conclusion' to *The Renaissance* as evidence. Pater, he thinks, doesn't fully acknowledge the contradiction between inwardness and outwardness as he formulates them.[149] To me, this claim seems curious as Pater seems extremely alert about what he is doing. The way in which he organises the trajectory of his argument, the movement from one area (the outward) to another (the inward)

[149] Meisel, pp. 113-4.

seem replete with a delicate sense of the arbitrariness of the developmental chronology and categories. Thus "Or if we begin with" is followed by a series of careful modifications or qualifications: "At first sight", "But", "And if". Pater is hypothesising: "if we continue to dwell in thought on this world", he says, ("this world" being the inner sphere) then we shall remain in a severe solipsism; but this concentration on solipsism is immediately countered by the option of escape in the guise of the "philosophising" of Novalis. By such a means the human spirit is roused or startled from its solitariness into "constant and eager observation."[150]

However much Pater theorises the inward-outward relation as dynamic, I don't think he ever reaches the point that Meisel envisages: "self and world constituted in the same terms and out of the same fabric."[151] Pater does not yield the inner vision. There *is* something specific to the artist, something that bears his image, his character, which will be deduced in the work in which he shows mastery. Pater cleverly distorts the singularity of Flaubert's "word" (making it a sort of logos or incarnating vision) to show how language can achieve appropriacy, when, what Middleton Murry in my second epigraph calls " the undertone of that deeper style"[152], is current:

> this discovery of the word will be, like all artistic success and felicity, incapable of strict analysis: effect of an intuitive condition of mind, it must be recognised by like intuition on the part of the reader, and a sort of immediate sense. In every one of those masterly sentences of Flaubert there was, below all mere contrivance, shaping and after-thought, by some happy instantaneous concourse of the various faculties of mind with each other, the exact apprehension of what was *needed* to carry

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150 'Conclusion', *The Renaissance*, pp. 235, 236.

151 Meisel, p. 114.

152 John Middleton Murry's "undertone" is itself an echo of Pater's term "under-texture", *Miscellaneous Studies*, p. 84: "Pascal's 'Thoughts' we shall never understand unless we realise the under-texture in them of Montaigne's very phrases . . . Pascal re-echoes Montaigne then in asserting the paradoxical character of man and his experience."

> the meaning.[153]

Meisel has noted Pater and Woolf's use of the word "fitting" or "fit" meaning 'suitable', but also 'to adequate, fill out, match, complement'.[154] Pater continues the above passage:

> And that it fits with absolute justice will be a judgment of immediate sense in the appreciative reader. We all feel this in what may be called inspired translation. Well! all language involves translation from inward to outward.[155]

One might well see this translation as the fitting of form to the characterising energy of the unsculptured image, a fit which so utilises the resources of the image that both author and reader immediately recognise it as right.

In meditating the thought of Pater, of Pater in relation to the other Shelleyans, and in relation to Shelley himself, this chapter in its balancing of personal and generic has tried to accomplish what Pater himself tried to do in his work on Plato:

> locating the particular in the general, meditating between general and particular, between our individual experience and the common experience of our kind.

I have attempted to indicate a strain of poetic vision that proceeds from Shelley and is subjected to variation by his followers who consistently contribute, not simply to the cyclic poem, but to the cyclic debate of what constitutes poetic character. And what constitutes poetic character is partly to be discovered by the poets' very engagement in that debate, in their reactions to Shelley and to each other as they struggle to apprise their own identity. The last word is for the "careful æsthetic observer" Pater spies out in 'Emerald Uthwart', who sees "the result of the older method":

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153 'Style', *Appreciations*, p. 33.
154 Meisel, pp. 154-5.
155 'Style', *Appreciations*, p. 33-4.

It is of such diagonal influences, through complication of influences, that expression comes, in life, in our culture, in the very faces of men and boys[156].

156 'Emerald Uthwart', *Miscellaneous Studies*, p. 205.

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