Desperate Remedies and Vital Lies: Art, Literature, and Escapism, 1840-1914

Harry George Daniels

Balliol College,

University of Oxford



Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of English Language and Literature

Michaelmas Term, 2022

Abstract

In response to a pervasive pessimism that saw little 'help for pain' in facing reality, writers of the late nineteenth century recuperated escapism, the use of art to avoid reality for the sake of relief, as a viable remedy for discontent. This thesis uncovers a specifically ambivalent escapist tradition across genres in the writing of the art and social critic John Ruskin (1819-1900), the novelist and poet Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), and the memoirist and man of letters Edmund Gosse (1849-1928). Their ambivalent rehabilitation of avoidance provides a necessary corrective to dominant trends in Victorian studies, which instrumentalise literature as an aid to cognitive clarification, ethical commitment, and emotional containment. Ruskin, Hardy, and Gosse envisage ambivalently escapist conceptions of art that paradoxically retain the disquietude they ostensibly seek to elude. The pleasures their texts offer are distinctly guilty pleasures, and this cultivation of ambivalence allows them to fundamentally challenge the escapist predicament even as they appear to accept its terms. In their writing, simplistic dichotomies, such as confrontation and evasion, or contentment and discontentment, give way to more nuanced negotiations of the uses of disillusionment and reillusionment, and the place of ambivalence as both an obstructive and motivational force in psychological development. While Ruskin finds in diminished consciousness a space for dreaming new political and psychological realities into being, Hardy conceptualises cathartic relief as uncontainment to explore the embodied nature of the ethical problem of tragic pleasure in a way that overcomes narrow moralistic didacticism, and Gosse finds in escapism a way of exploring homoerotic and sadomasochistic desire, as well as a method of detaching himself from the circumstances of his upbringing. Engaging critically with insights from psychoanalysis, the eudaimonic tradition in ethics, and queer theory, this thesis proposes new accounts of the function of art in Victorian and Edwardian self-culture, the utopian character of Ruskin's moralism, Hardy's satirical engagements with the Aristotelian tradition in his tragic fiction, and Gosse's initiation of the modern memoir as an essentially escapist fiction.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to my grandmother June Mary Davies, née Stone (10th June, 1937 - 13th August, 2021), who read to me as a child. The thesis was generously funded by a Wolfson Postgraduate Scholarship in the Humanities; I cannot thank the Wolfson Foundation enough for all they enabled me to do. Without the tactful insight of my supervisor David Russell, this thesis would not exist. The writing of this thesis has also been aided and abetted by the care and encouragement of friends, many of whom have read and commented upon chapters of this thesis. I thank the ever-wise Jacob Wiseman, for all times on the Heath and in the Manor; Rosalind Jana, for walks, teas, and talks about lit and life on the Parkland Walk; Christopher Lu, for all our Saturday evenings in galleries and more; Leah Veronese, for play readings, poetry nights, and the occasional A&E visit; my fellow convenor Lauren Cullen, for her camaraderie; Cynthia Gamble, for her Ruskinian largesse; Colton Valentine, for his perspicuity; Camille Stallings, for her enthusiasm; Zhao Ng, for urging me to dream again about sleep in art; Sean Ketteringham, for his curiosity; Ben Sims, Caitlin Hazell, Nandan Mani Ratnam, Matthew Herdman, Ashling Giblin, Ana Carretero Resino, Ben Galyas, Eleanor Stead, and Laura Thomas, for their friendship; the attendees of the Ruskin Reading Group, for their unflagging attendance; Father Bruce, Mother Mitzi, and Nina Saint of Hornsey Parish Church, for their many benevolences; and Sarah Miller for her seemingly limitless patience and generosity. I am ever indebted to the love and encouragement of my mother Elaine, my sister Annie, and my father George. I would also like to thank the staff of Balliol College Library, the Bodleian Library, the English Faculty Library of the University of Oxford, and the London Library; this thesis was written within their walls.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

Ruskin

Ruskin, John. *The Library Edition of the Works of John Ruskin*. Edited by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn. London: George Allen, 1903-1912. 34 volumes.

EY

Hilton, Timothy. *John Ruskin: The Early Years*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.

LY

Hilton, Timothy. *John Ruskin: The Later Years*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.

Landow

Landow, George. *The Aesthetic and Critical Theory of John Ruskin*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971.

DR

Hardy, Thomas. *Desperate Remedies*. Edited by Patricia Ingham. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [1871].

UTGT

Hardy, Thomas. *Under the Greenwood Tree*. Edited by Simon Gatrell and Phillip Mallett. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013 [1872].

APOBE

Hardy, Thomas. *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. Edited by Tim Dolin and Alan Manford. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [1873].

FFTMC

Hardy, Thomas. *Far From the Madding Crowd*. Edited by Suzanne B. Falck-Yi. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 [1874].

TROTN

Hardy, Thomas. *The Return of the Native*. Edited by Simon Gatrell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [1878].

TOAT

Hardy, Thomas. *Two on a Tower*. Edited by Suleiman M. Ahmad. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998 [1882].

TMOC

Hardy, Thomas. *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Edited by Pamela Dalziel and Dale Kramer. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 [1886].

Woodlanders

Hardy, Thomas. *The Woodlanders*. Edited Dale Kramer and Penny Boumelha. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [1887].

Tess

Hardy, Thomas. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Edited by Simon Gatrell and Juliet Grindle. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 [1891].

Jude

Hardy, Thomas. *Jude the Obscure*. Edited by Patricia Ingham. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 [1895].

CSS

Hardy, Thomas. *Collected Short Stories*. Edited by Desmond Hawkins and F. B. Pinion. London: Macmillan, 1988.

CPW

Hardy, Thomas. *The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hardy*. Edited by Samuel Hynes. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982–1995. 5 vols.

L&W

Hardy, Thomas [and Hardy, Florence], *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*. Edited by Michael Millgate. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984 [1928, 1930].

PV

Hardy, Thomas. *Thomas Hardy's Public Voice: The Essays, Speeches and Miscellaneous Prose*. Edited by Michael Millgate. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001.

CL

Purdy, Richard Little, and Millgate, Michael, eds. *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978. 7 vols.

BR

Millgate, Michael. *Thomas Hardy: A Biography Revisited*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Madrigals

Blaikie, John Arthur, and Gosse, Edmund. *Madrigals, Songs and Sonnets*. London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1870.

OV&F

Gosse, Edmund. *On Viol and Flute*. London: Henry S. King & Co., 1873.

NP

Gosse, Edmund. *New Poems*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1879.

Gray

Gosse, Edmund. *Gray*. London: Macmillan & Co., 1882.

Reynolds

The Discourses of Sir Joshua Reynolds. Edited by Edmund Gosse. London: Kegan Paul, 1884.

Firdausi

Gosse, Edmund. *Firdausi in Exile and Other Poems*. London: C. Kegan Paul, & Co., 1885.

Raleigh

Gosse, Edmund. *Raleigh*. London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1886.

XVIICS

Gosse, Edmund. *Seventeenth Century Studies*. 3rd ed. London: William Heinemann, 1897 [1883].

NS

Gosse, Edmund. *Northern Studies*. London: Walter Scott, 1890.

LPHG

Gosse, Edmund. *The Life of Philip Henry Gosse, F.R.S*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, and Trübner, 1890.

Gossip

Gosse, Edmund. *Gossip in a Library*. London: William Heinemann, 1891.

Questions

Gosse, Edmund. *Questions at Issue*. London: William Heinemann, 1893.

Kit-Kats

Gosse, Edmund. *Critical Kit-Kats*. London: William Heinemann, 1896.

SHMEL

Gosse, Edmund. *A Short History of Modern English Literature*. England: William Heinemann, 1898.

Donne

Gosse, Edmund. *The Life and Letters of John Donne*. London: William Heinemann, 1899. 2 volumes.

ELIR

Garnett, Richard, and Gosse, Edmund. *English Literature: An Illustrated Record*. London: William Heinemann, 1903. 3 volumes.

Browne

Gosse, Edmund. *Sir Thomas Browne*. London: Macmillan, 1905.

F&S

Gosse, Edmund. *Father and Son*. Edited by Michael Newton. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [1907].

Ibsen

Gosse, Edmund. *Ibsen*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907.

Poems

Gosse, Edmund. *The Collected Poems of Edmund Gosse*. London: William Heinemann, 1911.

P&S

Gosse, Edmund. *Portraits and Sketches*. London: William Heinemann, 1913.

TFM

Gosse, Edmund. *Three French Moralists and The Gallantry of France*. London: William Heinemann, 1918.

Diversions

Gosse, Edmund. *Some Diversions of a Man of Letters*. London: William Heinemann, 1920.

Aspects

Gosse, Edmund. *Aspects and Impressions*. London: Cassell Limited, 1922.

L&F

Gosse, Edmund. *Leaves and Fruit*. London: William Heinemann, 1927.

PFL

Gosse, Edmund. *Portraits from Life*. Edited by Ann Thwaite. Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1991.

TD

Matthiesen, Paul F., and Millgate, Michael. *Transatlantic Dialogue: Selected American Correspondence of Edmund Gosse*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965.

AG-ED

Brugmans, L. F., ed. *The Correspondence of André Gide and Edmund Gosse 1904-1928*. London: Peter Owen, 1960.

Charteris

Charteris, Evan. *The Life and Letters of Sir Edmund Gosse*. London: William Heinemann, 1931.

Woolf

Woolf, James D. *Sir Edmund Gosse*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972.

Thwaite

Thwaite, Ann. *Edmund Gosse: A Literary Landscape 1849-1928*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

WD

Ibsen, Henrik. *The Wild Duck* in vol. VIII of *The Collected Works of Henrik Ibsen*. Translated by Frances E. Archer. London: William Heinemann, 1907 [1884].

Hedda

Ibsen, Henrik. *Hedda Gabler* in vol. X of *The Collected Works of Henrik Ibsen*. Translated by Edmund Gosse and William Archer. London: William Heinemann, 1922 [1891].

Poetics

Aristotle. *Poetics*. Edited and translated by Stephen Halliwell. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995.

NE

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by David Ross. Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2009.

Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard, Søren. *Kierkegaard's Writings*. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992-2000. 26 volumes.

Freud

Freud, Sigmund. *The Standard Edition of the Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Translated by James Strachey and Anna Freud. London: Vintage, 1999. 24 volumes.

LG&R

Klein, Melanie. *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works 1921-1945*. London: Hogarth, 1975.

E&G

Klein, Melanie. *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946-1963*. London: Hogarth, 1975.

Winnicott

Winnicott, Donald. *The Collected Works of D. W. Winnicott*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Bion

Bion, Wilfred. *The Complete Works of Wilfred Bion*. Edited by Chris Mason. London: Karnac, 2014. 16 volumes.

Contents

Abstract **1**

Acronyms and Abbreviations **3**

Contents **7**

Introduction: Sweetness or Light? **10**

The Avoidance of Evasion in Victorian Studies *15*

Escapism as Desperate Remedy and Vital Lie *19*

Art and the Cure of Souls: The Temptations to Idealism and Reductivism *33*

The Arguments *43*

Sleeping on it: Ruskin Dreams of the Active Contemplative Life **47**

Introduction *47*

Facing Faults: The Problem with Perfectionistic Thinking *50*

Contemplation and its Discontents in Modern Painters vol. II *58*

The 'Promise of Rest': Pacifying Anxiety *67*

Self-Composure: Silencing the Laocoon *71*

The 'Venom' in the Cure: Ruskin on Michelangelo's 'Plague of Fiery Serpents' *76*

'Not death nor sleep, but the pure image of both': Dream Thinking at Ilaria's Tomb *81*

Dreaming with Dante: Ruskin's Active Contemplative Lives *91*

Consolation Anxiety: Turner's Worm *98*

Ruskin's 'Habit of Harmony' and the Uses of Ambivalence *102*

Dreaming of St Ursula *106*

Catharsis Uncontained: 'Certain Cathartic, Aristotelian Qualities' in the Fiction of Thomas Hardy **111**

Introduction *111*

Reflection and Relief: Hardy on the 'Mental Profit' of 'Weak Minds' *117*

Cheap Fixes in Desperate Remedies *121*

The 'Gurgoyle' and its Spewings in Far from the Madding Crowd *128*

'Tis an old remedy': Pity, Fear, and the Homeopathic Conception of Catharsis *134*

Catharsis in Crude Relief in The Mayor of Casterbridge and Jude the Obscure *141*

Reductivism, Polysemic Excess, and the 'Cathartic, Aristotelian Qualities' of Jude the Obscure *154*

The Books of Jude: Hardy's Tragic Puns *169*

'Vital Lies' and 'Savage Treatment': the Uses and Abuses of Suspending the Ethical and Escaping Reality for Edmund Gosse **177**

Introduction *177*

Clashing Spheres: Gosse's Philosophical Modernity and the Kierkegaardian Inheritance *178*

'Savage Treatment': Gosse's Plea Against Pain *182*

'Literary Anodynes' and the Avoidance of Life *191*

Gosse on Swinburne and the Sadomasochistic Self-Cure *197*

Insulation and Confrontation in Gosse's 'Faddling' Hedonism *199*

The Hysterical Life of the 'Hamo-sexual' *202*

The Desire for Disembodiment: Maiming the Beast in the Jungle *207*

Antinomian Tendencies *214*

Cutting Ties: Gosse on the Omphalos *220*

Pleased as Punch: Sadism in the Aesthetic Life *223*

The Sad Boy in the Garret: The Uses of Escapism for Life *229*

A Fairy's Tales: Evading Heteronormativity *236*

Fugitive Virtue: Gosse's 'Anticolonialism' *238*

Conclusion *240*

Coda: Sublimation and the Future of an Elusion **241**

Bibliography **255**

Strange enough how creatures of the human-kind shut their eyes to plainest facts; and, by the mere inertia of Oblivion and Stupidity, live at ease in the midst of Wonders and Terrors.[1]

Thomas Carlyle

I used to wish the Arabian Tales were true: my imagination ran on unknown influences, on magical powers, and talismans.[2]

John Henry Newman

The more materialistic science becomes, the more angels shall I paint: their wings are my protest in favour of the immortality of the soul.[3]

Edward Burne-Jones to Oscar Wilde

Dupery for dupery, what proof is there that dupery through hope is so much worse than dupery through fear?[4]

William James

[1] Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, ed. Kerry McSweeney and Peter Sabor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987 [1834]), 45.
[2] John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, ed. Ian Ker (London: Penguin, 2004 [1864]), 23.
[3] Edward Burne-Jones quoted in Oscar Wilde, *Miscellanies*, ed. Robert Baldwin Ross (London: Methuen, 1908), 259.
[4] William James, "The Will to Believe," in *Pragmatism and Other Writings*, ed. Giles Gunn (London: Penguin, 2000), 198-218, (125).

Introduction: Sweetness or Light?

> No doubt there is in our literature an immense amount of conventional blinking, and it may be questioned whether pessimistic representation […] adheres to the lines of the world we ourselves know.[5]
>
> Henry James

Escapism won't get us anywhere. That's what we're told. If a 'way to the Better there be,' the poet and novelist Thomas Hardy sternly counsels us, 'it exacts a full look at the Worst'. (14, "In Tenebris II," *CPW*, I.207-8) Or does he? This snippet from Hardy's poem, 'In Tenebris II', the second in a sequence published in *Poems of the Past and Present* (1901), is often cited in criticism as a neat encapsulation of the author's life philosophy.[6] No wonder: Hardy himself quotes the relevant line in the 'Apology' he prefixed to his *Late Lyrics and Earlier* (1922) to illustrate his 'evolutionary meliorism'. (*CPW*, "Apology," II.319) Only 'by the exploration of reality, and its frank recognition stage by stage along the survey,' Hardy warns us, can we hope to mitigate the mostly unavoidable sufferings that make up a life on earth. (*CPW*, "Apology," II.319) The 'full

[5] Henry James, "Guy de Maupassant," in *Literary Criticism: French Writers, Other European Writers, the Prefaces to the New York Edition* (New York: Library of America, 1984), 521-548, (540).
[6] For Hardy as 'pessimistic meliorist', see Millgate, *BR*, 379. For a few select examples, see Peter Robinson, "Thomas Hardy," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Poets*, ed. Claude Rawson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 439-456, (442); Adam Matz, *Satire in an Age of Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 65; Geoffrey Harvey, *The Complete Critical Guide to Thomas Hardy* (London: Routledge, 2003), 42; F. B. Pinion, *Thomas Hardy: His Life and Friends* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), 81; Katherine Kearney Maynard, *Thomas Hardy's Tragic Poetry* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991), 13-14; Susan Dean, *Hardy's Poetic Vision in* The Dynasts*: The Diorama of a Dream* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 127.

look at the Worst' aphorism is thus usually understood as a condemnation of optimism as a form of unhelpful escapism.[7] Upon such a basis, Hardy's gloomy plots and bleak pronouncements are vindicated because they inoculate us against the 'Worst' there is to know.[8] Pessimism is the 'only view of life in which you can never be disappointed', Hardy reflected in 1902. (*L&W*, 333) Shutting our eyes to the fact that we live on a 'blighted star', in the phrase of little Abraham Durbeyfield in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), isn't going to help. (*Tess*, 39) Indeed, not long after the conversation quoted, Tess and her little brother fall asleep while riding along a road in the moonlight, and their horse is impaled by an oncoming vehicle. (*Tess*, 39) The point is made all too sharply.

Yet Hardy the apologist of 'evolutionary meliorism' in 1922 sings quite a different song to the pessimistic speaker of 'In Tenebris II' itself, who demonstrates how Hardy's pessimism is undercut by his scepticism. If one takes a 'full look' at the stanza from which the aphorism is taken, one registers that its speaker is more uncertain than is usually realised by past criticism. The poem stages a clash of temperaments in a manner typical ('fashionable', Wilde would quip) of fin de siècle culture.[9] Insufficiently well-wadded with insensitivity, Hardy's speaker is a 'Sick Soul' who is 'congenitally fated' to comprehend 'the evil aspects of our life [as] of its very essence', in the terms of William James's near contemporaneous *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902).[10]

---

[7] George William Sherman, *The Pessimism of Thomas Hardy* (Rutherford, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976), 24. For optimism seen as a denial of reality in Hardy's work, see K. M. Newton, *Modern Literature and the Tragic* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 69.

[8] For an early complaint about Hardy's 'fashionable pessimism', see Richard Holt Hutton, *Spectator* (5 June 1886), excerpted in *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, ed. R. G. Cox (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), 136-140, (138).

[9] In Wilde's Sir Robert Chiltern calls optimism and pessimism the 'only fashionable religions left to us these days'. Oscar Wilde, *An Ideal Husband* (London: Lane and Smithers, 1899 [1895]), 13 Cf. Nicholas Shrimpton, "'Lane, You're A Perfect Pessimist': Pessimism and the English 'Fin De Siècle'", *The Yearbook of English Studies* 37 no. 1 (2007), 41-5, 46.

[10] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, ed. Martin E. Marty (Penguin: London, 1982 [1902]), 127, 134,

In the *Varieties*, James remarks upon how the 'optimism' of the 'healthy-minded' usually strikes the temperamental pessimist as 'a shallow dodge or mean evasion'.[11] But the speaker of 'In Tenebris II' worries that *he* might be the one on whom the 'full' nature of reality is lost. The Hardyean pessimist contrasts himself with the 'many' who claim: 'All's well with us: ruers have nought to rue!' ('In Tenebris: II', 5) The speaker laments that the 'blot seems straightaway in me alone'. ('In Tenebris: II', 4)

Because it's easy to read the lines as expressive of bad faith, it's often forgotten that the final stanza of 'In Tenebris: II' ostensibly voices the view that we *shouldn't* take a 'full look at the Worst':

> Let him in whose ears the low-voiced Best is killed by the clash of the First,
> Who holds that if way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst,
> Who feels that delight is a delicate growth cramped by crookedness, custom, and fear,
> Get him up and be gone as one shaped awry; he disturbs the order here.
> ('In Tenebris: II', 13-16)

The stanza is, of course, ventriloquizing the 'many and strong' in a satirical manner. Could the 'stout upstanders' really be so eloquent in appreciating the sick soul's sense that 'delight is a delicate growth cramped by crookedness, custom, and fear' given their supposed fatuousness? But Hardy's poem nonetheless refuses to establish its pessimism with any certainty. We cannot sit comfortably in our fallen-hero-worship of the Hardyean speaker because we cannot forget just how thoroughly he has stressed the

[11] Ibid., 131, 88, 363.

possibly warped nature of his own perspective. When the speaker thinks to himself that 'what is the matter is I', it's not clear why we shouldn't take him at his word. ('In Tenebris: II', 12)

If, as Adam Phillips claims in his meditation upon escapism in *Houdini's Box: On the Arts of Escape* (2001), the 'notion of escapism depends upon there being a reliable account somewhere of what it is necessary for us to face up to' and 'a further account of what that facing up to can do for us: what kind of better life it has in store for us', Hardy's poem provides us with neither: he gives no real grounding for the evasion-confrontation dichotomy.[12] One does not need to be a philosophical pragmatist who understands truth as 'what works' in the manner of William James (or Phillips, for that matter) to see that the Hardyean speaker's 'full look at the Worst' is vexed by doubts about its own eudaimonic and epistemological value.[13] The speaker of Hardy's 'Our Old Friend Old Dualism', written two decades later in 1920, calls James a 'pragmatic cheat'.[14] All the same, 'In Tenebris II' expresses a disenchantment with disillusionment that connects Hardy to James and other writers and thinkers of the late nineteenth century. Hardy accepts the possibility that the demand we face reality in all its fullness might be animated by yet another deluded fantasy. In so doing, Hardy's poem counterintuitively empowers an ambivalent recovery of the value of what is usually called escapism, which I demonstrate in this thesis to be a central preoccupation of his corpus from its earliest days, as well as of late Victorian and Edwardian culture more broadly.

---

[12] Adam Phillips, *Houdini's Box: On the Arts of Escape* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), 27.
[13] William James, *Pragmatism* (1907) in *Pragmatism and Other Writings*, ed. Giles Gunn (London: Penguin, 2000), 1-132, (40).
[14] 'Our Old Friend Dualism' (written 1920) describes James and other philosophers as 'pragmatic cheats'. Hardy, *CPW*, III.233. For Hardy's rejection of James, see also Harold Orel, "*The Dynasts*: Hardy's Contribution to the Epic Tradition," *The Ashgate Research Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. Rosmarie Morgan (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 355-370, (359).

In addition to Hardy, this thesis studies the ambivalent recuperations of evasion and illusion to be found in the sage writing of the art and social critic John Ruskin (1819-1900), one of Hardy's principal influences; and in the poetry and life writing of Edmund Gosse (1849-1928), the memoirist and man of letters who was one of Hardy's good friends.[15] Their reflections upon the value of avoidance constitute an ambivalent escapist tradition in Victorian and Edwardian literature hitherto neglected in scholarship. Criticism has tended to misdiagnose the ambivalently evasive texture of their writings as psychopathological symptom, dilettantish failure, and/or character fault. Henry James characterises Ruskin, for instance, as one too easily 'scared back by the grim face of reality into [a] world of unreason & illusion' [sic].[16] Vernon Lee reads Ruskin's work as 'an obstinate refusal to compromise with the reality of things'.[17] Virginia Woolf characterises Hardy as an 'unconscious' artist.[18] T. S. Eliot criticises him, on the other hand, for writing as if 'solely to provide a satisfaction for some morbid emotion'—a claim echoed in cooler terms in later feminist criticism similarly disturbed by a sadomasochistic strain in Hardy's writing.[19] Woolf joined Ezra Pound and others in reprimanding Gosse for using literature as a crudely 'self-serving' 'escape-route'—for using art as the quickest way out of Calvinism, in other words, and the 'almost insane religious mania' of his father.[20] All three authors have been commonly accused of using

---

[15] For Gosse and Hardy's friendship, see Ann Thwaite, "'My Dear Gosse': The Friendship Between Edmund Gosse and Thomas Hardy," *The Thomas Hardy Journal* 20, no. 3 (October 2004): 34-53, (36); Thwaite, 149.
[16] Henry James to Mary Walsh James, 26th March 1869, in *The Complete Letters of Henry James*, ed. Pierre A. Walker and Greg W. Zacharias (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), I.255-260, (256).
[17] Vernon Lee, "Ruskinism," in *Belcaro: Being Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions* (London: W. Satchell, 1881), 197-229, (201).
[18] Virginia Woolf, "The Novels of Thomas Hardy," in *The Second Common Reader* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1932), 222-233, (224).
[19] T.S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934), 58. Patricia Ingham, *Thomas Hardy* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 2.
[20] Harold Orel, *Victorian Literary Critics* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 177, 200. John Gross, *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1967), 197. Virginia Woolf, "Edmund

art for mere 'therapy', rather than for purposes more substantial.[21] These critics fail to realise how Ruskin, Hardy, and Gosse purposefully cultivate ambivalent avoidance as an orientation towards the world that carries political, ethical, and aesthetic potential. This thesis will explore how they do so.

The Avoidance of Evasion in Victorian Studies

This thesis challenges dominant assumptions about the value of art and literature in Victorian studies. Scholars have tended to praise Victorian and Edwardian literature, and specifically the literary realism of the period, as an aid to facing reality; reading helps us 'recommit' ourselves to our troubles, Philip Davis has argued in *Why Victorian Literature Still Matters* (2008).[22] David Russell aligns the force of Ruskin's writing in particular with the workings of the Freudian reality principle.[23] In an essay on George Eliot, Freud, and trans embodiment, Grace Lavery similarly locates the 'therapeutic power' of Eliot's fiction in its capacity to help us relinquish the 'pleasure that beautiful but damaging fantasies provide', and substitute 'that pleasure with the deeper sense of wellbeing that comes from having grown into the ugly world'.[24]

In these interventions, literature is often pictured as a psychological container for troublesome emotion. In *The Victorians* (2002), *Reading and the Reader* (2013), and *Reading for Life* (2020), Davis envisages Victorian literature as a 'holding ground for the contemplation of experience'.[25] The language of containment is echoed by Alicia Mireles

---

Gosse," *Fortnightly Review* 129 (June 1931): 766-773, 768. A. O. J. Cockshut, "Introduction," to Edmund Gosse, *Father and Son: A Study of Two Temperaments*, ed. A. O. J. Cockshut (Keele: Keele University Press, 1994), 7-25, (8). For suspicion of Gosse as belletrist and dilettante, see Thwaite, 2, 277.

[21] Robert Gittings, *Thomas Hardy's Later Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978), 67.

[22] Philip Davis, *The Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); *Why Victorian Literature Still Matters* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 11; *Reading for Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 208.

[23] David Russell, "Facing Reality," *Raritan* 40, no. 3 (2021): 119-139, 134-9.

[24] Grace Lavery, "Trans Realism, Psychoanalytic Practice, and the Rhetoric of Technique," *Critical Inquiry* 46 (Summer 2020): 719-744, 720.

[25] Philip Davis, *Reading and the Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 16, 4, 74.

Christoff in *Novel Relations: Victorian Fiction and British Psychoanalysis* (2019), which claims that *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* facilitates a Winnicottian 'holding environment'.[26] In *Is Literature Healthy?* (2016), Josie Billington argues that literature 'can "think" reality when ordinary human thought falls short', and 'hold thoughts which humans feel it would almost kill them to contain in themselves.'[27]

In *Rethinking Therapeutic Reading* (2020), Kelda Green describes how George Eliot 'intervene[s]' in the mental life of her characters by way of free indirect discourse when they are 'unable to think the necessary and saving thoughts for themselves'; implicitly, the reader's capacity to think 'saving thoughts' is also strengthened by Eliot's interventions.[28] Amanda Anderson makes a similar pitch in 'Thinking with Character' (2019) when she claims that literary narratives 'engage us in forms of life' and 'present us with ways of being,'

> …through complex formal means, one of which involves the presentation of ordinary thought processes, both momentary and sustained. It is precisely through the presentation of thinking and forms of consciousness that the phenomenology of reading coincides with, and is activated by, the form of thought represented.[29]

Anderson's cognitive emphasis resonates with arguments in both contemporary psychoanalysis and other psychological traditions that explore how literature can

---

[26] Alicia Mireles Christoff, *Novel Relations: Victorian Fiction and British Psychoanalysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 29.
[27] Josie Billington, *Is Literature Healthy?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 13, 44, 31.
[28] Kelda Green, *Rethinking Therapeutic Reading* (London: Anthem Press, 2020), 83.
[29] Amanda Anderson, "Thinking With Character," in Amanda Anderson, Rita Felski, and Toril Moi, *Character: Three Inquiries in Literary Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 127-170, (132).

facilitate self-conscious 'thinking about thinking', which enables us to identify damaging thought patterns, help us change our minds, and help us better appreciate the interiority of others.[30] While these critics do not naïvely align Victorian realisms with "the real," their emphasis on cognitive clarification, ethical commitment, the renunciation of damaging fantasies, the containment of emotion, and the comprehension of both alterity and interiority underappreciates how substantially Victorian and Edwardian writers used art to avoid reality, dissolve the self, indulge in solipsistic and sadomasochistic fantasies, empty themselves of thought, suspend ethical reflection, and avoid others.

Three interventions have prepared the ground, however, for my attempt to bring questions of escape back into the critical picture. Audrey Jaffe's *The Victorian Novel Dreams of the Real* (2016) usefully reveals both the weaknesses and the productive tensions of an escapism-realism (or evasion-confrontation) dichotomy by exploring how the realist desire to face reality, which makes the real 'an object of desire', necessarily takes place within the realm of fantasy.[31] Jaffe concerns herself with the desire to face reality in the novel exclusively, however, and does not enter into questions of escape. In *The Burdens of Perfection: On Ethics and Reading in Nineteenth Century Literature* (2008), on the other hand, Andrew H. Miller explores how solipsistic expressions of scepticism vexed the interpsychic ethical commitments of Victorian moral perfectionism.[32] Miller chiefly understands the temptations to solipsism as crises

[30] For mentalisation as 'thinking about thinking', see Elisa Galgut, "Literary Form and Mentalization," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Richard G.T. Gipps and Michael Lacewing (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 495-510, (497). For the view that reading helps us understand the minds of others, see Rhiannon Corcoran and Keith Oatley, "Reading Minds: Fiction and its Relation to the Mental Worlds of Self and Others," in *Reading and Mental Health*, ed. Josie Billington (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 331-344.
[31] Audrey Jaffe, *The Victorian Novel: Dreams of the Real* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 2.
[32] Andrew H. Miller, *The Burdens of Perfection: On Ethics and Reading in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 5, 36.

to be overcome, however, rather than resources to be enlisted. In *Still Life: Suspended Development in the Victorian Novel* (2016), Elisha Cohn similarly identifies an anti-instrumentalist lyrical strain in the Victorian novel, which suspends the 'arduous framework of self-culture' characteristic of the nineteenth century.[33] Cohn's account fails to register, however, that escapism does not merely stall schemes of improvement in Victorian literature, but provides an alternative fantasy of improvement (a 'way to the Better') of its own that instrumentalises literature for its own purposes.

This thesis takes escapism seriously in recognition that the demand to face reality can itself become a warped fantasy; not all escapisms constitute 'mean evasions', in James's phrase. It is the tyrannical Mr Murdstone, you'll remember, who says to the eponymous hero of Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1849): 'Don't take refuge in a lie, sir!'[34] A century later, J. R. R. Tolkien would note that the 'class of men' most commonly 'hostile' towards the 'idea of escape' are 'jailors'.[35] The psychoanalytic tradition, with which this thesis is in critical but appreciative conversation, posits escapism as an ineluctable element of our mental life. Any 'form of life will tend to generate a fantasy of what it is to get outside of that life', the psychoanalyst and philosopher Jonathan Lear argues, 'because life is experienced, consciously and unconsciously, as being lived under pressure—and that is correlative to the experience of a fantasy of relief.'[36] That 'humankind cannot bear very much reality', as T. S. Eliot would later famously remark, however, does not necessitate a sadistic demand that we

---

[33] Elisha Cohn, *Still Life: Suspended Development in the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 3, 184.
[34] Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, ed. Nina Burgis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 [1849]), 114.
[35] J. R. R. Tolkien quoted in C. S. Lewis, "On Science Fiction," in *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature* (Orlando: Harvest, 1982 [1966]), 55-68, (63).
[36] Jonathan Lear, *Happiness, Death, and the Remainder of Life* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2007), 47-8.

punish ourselves *more* than we can bear.[37] In *Houdini's Box*, Phillips similarly warns against privileging 'what we are escaping from as more real—or in one way or another more valuable—than what we are escaping to'; for if we do so, 'we are preferring what we fear to what we seem to desire.'[38] This thesis, which explores a rich history of thinking upon escapism that either unconsciously anticipated or flourished in contemporaneous ignorance of Freud's 'Copernican revolution', shows how Ruskin, Hardy, and Gosse came to recuperate evasion in similar terms.[39] Though E. T. Cook once criticised Ruskin's cotton-wrapped childhood as solely conducive to 'fugitive and cloistered virtue', echoing John Milton's famous complaint in the *Areopagitica* (1644), for Ruskin "fugitive virtue" was no simple oxymoron; nor was it one for Hardy, or Gosse.[40] These three writers found forms of elusion conducive to psychological development, the exploration of non-normative sexual desire, the formation of liberal and radical politics, and the therapy of discontent.

Escapism as Desperate Remedy and Vital Lie

The fugitive virtues of the ambivalent escapist tradition are nonetheless not easy virtues. David Copperfield might claim confidently, if defensively, that his reading of 'the Arabian Nights, and the Tales of the Genii,' among other tales, 'did me no harm; for whatever harm was in some of them was not there for me; I knew nothing of it.'[41] But Ruskin, Hardy and Gosse cultivate ambivalence as a guard against complacency: they

[37] T. S. Eliot, I.42-43, "Burnt Norton," in *Four Quartets* (1943) in *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2015), I.180.
[38] Phillips, *Houdini's Box*, 26-7.
[39] Freud, XVI.285.
[40] E. T. Cook, *The Life of John Ruskin* (London: George Allen, 1911), I.13. John Milton, *Areopagitica; A Speech of Mr. John Milton* in *John Milton: Prose*, ed. David Lowenstein (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), 181-213, (193). Gosse quotes Milton's complaint in *Seventeenth Century Studies*. Gosse, *XVIICS*, 167.
[41] Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 53.

attempt to formulate a paradoxically self-conscious escapism by stressing that the pleasure of their texts is a distinctly guilty pleasure.

The trio cultivate ambivalence in response to what I call the late nineteenth-century escapist predicament, which suggested that human happiness was incompatible with a clear recognition of truth. Material, intellectual, cultural, and spiritual developments in Victorian and Edwardian modernity, such as the ravages of industrial capitalism, scientific materialism, the loss of faith, and growing *Weltschmerz*, make a keen appreciation of reality, a 'full look at the Worst', appear increasingly at odds with human contentment.[42] Upon the 'darkling plain' of the late nineteenth century, in the famous image of Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach', there appeared neither 'certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain' that squared easily with an honest assessment of reality.[43] A 'contradiction' began to be felt, as William James recorded in 'Is Life Worth Living?' (1895), 'between the phenomena of nature' and the 'craving[s] of the [human] heart'.[44] When Hardy wrote to H. Rider Haggard upon the death of Haggard's ten-year-old son in 1891 that 'to be candid, I think the death of a child is never really to be regretted, when one reflects on what he has escaped', he was being more than merely wonderfully insensitive to the grief of his friend.[45] (*CL*, I.325) He was expressing a feeling pervasive in the fin de siècle that life might be best avoided. Hardy named this perception 'the ache of modernism' while describing his heroine Tess's sense that reality is fundamentally menacing. (*Tess*, 140)

---

[42] For pessimism in the long nineteenth century, Jeffrey Paul von Arx, *Progress and Pessimism: Religion, Politics, and History in Late Nineteenth Century Britain* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), vii; Davis, *The Victorians*, 540-48; Frederick C. Beiser, *Weltschmerz: Pessimism in German Philosophy, 1860–1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 2-7.
[43] Matthew Arnold, 35, 33-4, "Dover Beach," in *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, ed. Kenneth Allott and Miriam Allott (London: Longman, 1979), 239-243.
[44] William James, "Is Life Worth Living?" in *Pragmatism and Other Writings*, ed. Giles Gunn (London: Penguin, 2000), 219-241, (225).
[45] Hardy agreed with Sophocles that 'not to be born is best[.]' Hardy quoted in William Archer, *Real Conversations* (1904) quoted in Millgate, *BR*, 379.

In the first half of the century, the temptations to avoidance were given classic expression in the desire of Tennyson's opiated 'Lotos-Eaters' (1832) for 'death, dark death, or dreamful ease'.[46] But it was Henrik Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* (1884), a known influence upon both Hardy and Gosse that expressed the predicament later in the century. In the play, the cynical Dr Relling prescribes 'life illusions' or 'vital lies'—lies and illusions which make life appear worth living—to his patients and neighbours with a view to preventing them from perishing of the ugly truth.[47] We at first wince to hear him talk, and yet by the end of Ibsen's play, we are not so thoroughly convinced of the doctor's error, having witnessed the destruction wrought by the deluded idealist Gregers Werle's attempts to get the same characters to face the truth.[48] 'Society may be built on a framework of lies', as Gosse wrote in his *Ibsen* of 1907 in summary of the bleak moral of Ibsen's drama, but

> …it is nevertheless prudent to consider whether the ideal advantages of disturbing it overweigh the practical disadvantages, and above all to bear in mind that if you rob the average man of his illusions, you are almost sure to rob him of his happiness.[49] (Gosse, *Ibsen*, 174)

Though doubts about the value of facing reality often appear in the mouths and minds of less reputable characters in fiction, as Dr Relling and the Lotos-eaters illustrate, their

---

[46] Alfred Lord Tennyson, 98, "The Lotos Eaters," in *Tennyson: A Selected Edition*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Routledge, 2007), 70-79.
[47] Ibsen, V, *WD*, 361. For the latter translation, see Vernon Lee, *Vital Lies: Studies of Some Varieties of Recent Obscurantism* (London: John Lane, 1912), viii.
[48] For a recent expansive treatment of the vital lie theme in (tragic) literature and philosophy, see Terry Eagleton, "Fruitful Falsehoods," in *Tragedy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 99-154.
[49] For the Romantic origins of the idea, see Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Sonnet ('Lift not the painted veil')," in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Reiman and Powers (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 312.

provocations nonetheless posed a significant philosophical challenge to the period. In *Vital Lies: Studies of Some Varieties of Recent Obscurantism* (1912), Vernon Lee used Ibsen's notion—as well as its ancestor concept, the Platonic noble lie—to critique William James's pragmatic, therapeutic conception of truth in texts like 'The Will to Believe' (1896), as well as other thinkers 'reluctantly shaken in their religious habits' whom Lee considered to be 'making excuses to disbelieve whatever has made them unbelievers'.[50]

The pessimism raised the stakes for the use of art for escapism because it made evasion look at once a natural response and a cowardly retreat. 'Truth is ugly', as Friedrich Nietzsche aphorised in 1888: 'We possess *art* lest we *perish of the truth*.'[51] Hardy is sympathetic to the plea of his heroine, Tess, when she cries after giving vent to her 'ache' to the harp-playing Angel Clare—'But *you*, sir, can raise up dreams with your music, and drive all such horrid fancies away!'—but he is not sure her horrors are mere 'fancies'. (*Tess*, 140) Hardy is typical of the ambivalent escapism tradition I explore here in worrying throughout his writings whether escaping the 'horrid' is a legitimate use of art or life, even while he demonstrates an escapist desire to offer 'relaxation and relief' to the 'mind[s]' of his readers who feel 'overstrained', as he put it in 'The Profitable Reading of Fiction' (1888). (*PV*, 75-6)

In response to this predicament, Ruskin, Hardy and Gosse characterise art as a "vital lie," in the Ibsenite phrase, or a "desperate remedy," to riff on the term with which

---

[50] Lee, *Vital Lies*, vii.

[51] Nietzsche, §822, *The Will to Power*, 435. Notably, this aphorism can be interpreted less cynically: Bernard Williams reads Nietzsche as claiming that 'we possess art so that we can possess the truth and not perish of it'. Yet the very ambiguity of the aphorism flirts with reductivism in a telling, representative manner. Bernard Williams, "Introduction to *The Gay Science*," in *The Sense of the Past: Essays in the History of Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 311-324, (322). For a discussion of some of the possible ways we can take the maxim, including Williams's interpretation, see Aaron Ridley, "Perishing of the Truth: Nietzsche's Aesthetic Prophylactics," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 50, no. 4 (October 2010): 427–437.

Hardy would denominate dubious cures and suspect solutions in his novel *Desperate Remedies* (1871). While appearing to accept the terms of the predicament, their ambivalently escapist conceptions of art paradoxically retain the disquietude they ostensibly seek to elude. This cultivation of ambivalence challenges simplistic dichotomies—such as confrontation and evasion, fantasy and reality, and contentment and discontentment—to work through to more nuanced negotiations of the uses of disillusionment and reillusionment. In *Desperate Remedies*, for instance, Hardy's hero Edward Springrove disparages his earlier hobby of writing poems while courting his beloved Cytherea Graye: 'Writing rhymes is a stage people of my sort pass through, as they pass through the stage of shaving for a beard, or thinking they are ill-used, or saying there's nothing in the world worth living for.' (*DR*, 45) To this remark, Cytherea responds: 'Then the difference between the common man and a recognised poet is, that one has been deluded and cured of his delusion, and the other continues deluded all his days.' (*DR*, 45) In this proto-Freudian picture, the poet is self-condemned to a perpetual adolescence. Art is identified with an avoidance of maturation. Springrove in turn responds: 'Well there's just enough truth in what you say to make the remark unbearable.' (*DR*, 45) The dialogue, however, reveals both Hardy's tendency to denigrate himself as a fiction writer *and* his characteristically sly sleights of hand as regards questions of avoidance. If the passage at first appears to reduce art to mere illusion, the very existence of the conversation *within the novel* allows for a level of critical distance about illusion internal to the literary text that is denied by the poet-as-delusional line taken up by Hardy's characters. In this manner, Hardy appears to reduce art to a "vital lie" and yet actually pushes beyond the constraints of the predicament.

Gosse achieves a comparable feat in his 1919 characterisation of George Eliot's realism as anti-escapist. Gosse would write of Eliot that she 'felt a longing to spread her

wings and fly up and out to some dim Cloud-Cuckoo Land the confines of which were utterly vague to her':

> The romantic method of Dumas, for instance, and even of Walter Scott, appealed to her as a mode of escaping to dreamland from the flatness and vulgarity of life under the 'miserable reign of Mammon.' But she could not achieve such flights; her literary character was of a totally different formation. What was fabulous, what was artificial, did not so much strike her with disgust as render her paralysed. Her only escape from mediocrity, she found, was to give a philosophical interest to common themes. (*Aspects*, 6)

Gosse's portrait of Eliot as a regretful anti-Icarus appears to be characterising her realism as a rejection of the more escapist yearnings of Romanticism. In the 'Limits of Realism in Fiction (1890), Gosse had earlier said of Zola that his realism 'starts from the negation of fancy': 'It starts with the exclusion of all that is "ideal," all that is not firmly based on the actual life of human beings'. (*Questions*, 142) But Gosse presents Eliot's attempts at 'escape' as both compatible *and* incompatible with her own variation of literary realism: she does not escape to a 'dreamland' in her fiction in the manner of Scott, but she does find *another* kind of escapism, Gosse thinks, in the philosophical treatment of everyday life. The escapism-realism dichotomy is evoked only to be denied.

In his portrait of Eliot as both realist and escapist, Gosse does not confine escapism to any set of genres or modes, such as the fairy tale, orientalism, sensation fiction, or romance. In this spirit, I use escapism in this thesis to refer to a *fantasy* of evasion in the psychoanalytic sense of the term, i.e., an imaginative construction that

serves to alleviate frustration.[52] This thesis studies fantasies of evasion in ostensibly anti-escapist genres and modes: in Ruskin's sage writing and criticism, in Hardy's tragedies, and in Gosse's life writing.[53] The productive tension between their commitments to representing the actual, the tragic, or the exemplary, and their recognition of the value of evasion, is what generates the specifically ambivalent character of their escapisms.

The charge of willed blindness, for instance, is so much more devastating for Ruskin than for various other writers (such as Pater, for instance, who was famously more at ease with subjectivism) because his authority as a sage writer and art critic is dependent upon him being recognised as a 'master of experience', in the phrase of George P. Landow.[54] His famous defence of J.M.W. Turner in the first volume of *Modern Painters* (1843) against 'accusations of want of *truth* [sic]' relies upon the authority of the critic's eye to substantiate 'that Turner is like nature, and paints more of nature than any man who ever lived.'[55] (Ruskin, III.51-2) We find his commitment to truth epitomised in his famous advice to the young artist that 'he' should, like Turner, 'go to

---

[52] Cf. Salman Akhtar, "Fantasy," in *Comprehensive Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (London: Karnac, 2009), 105. For Freud, Hanna Segal explains, the fantasy is chiefly a 'wish-fulfilling idea which comes into play when external reality is frustrating'. Since Freud, the concept of unconscious fantasy (termed *phantasy* in the British tradition) has undergone substantial elaboration by later theorists, particularly in the Kleinian tradition of Segal. Hanna Segal, *Dream, Phantasy and Art* (London: Routledge, 1991), 16. Charles Rycroft has noted that the psychoanalytic use of the term 'fantasy' often corresponds with the way we use 'fantasy' in ordinary language to speak of 'visionary notions' and other products of the imagination, e.g., works of art and literature. "Fantasy and phantasy," in Charles Rycroft, *A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin, 1995 [1968]), 55-6.

[53] Franco Moretti notes how the Victorian novel tends to be 'strewn with fairy-tale ingredients', thus suggesting how realism and escapism interanimate rather than merely conflict with each other in the period. Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 2000), 187.

[54] George P. Landow, *Elegant Jeremiahs: The Sage from Carlyle to Mailer* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1986), 132.

[55] In his *Greek Studies* (1894), Pater demonstrates his lack of anxiety about illusion and evasion when he values the 'traces of the old-temper' of antiquity in the modern individual that allows them to speak of the 'return of Kore to Demeter' not merely as using 'rhetorical language, but yielding to a real illusion'. The final oxymoron would never pass in Ruskin's prose. Walter Pater, *Greek Studies* (London: Macmillan, 1901 [1894]), 100. For Pater's subjectivism, see Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, ed. Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010 [1873]), 3.

Nature in all singleness of heart, […]; rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing; believing all things to be right and good, and rejoicing always in the truth.' (III.624) Fullness of vision here appears chiefly as a full look at the Best, rather than a full look at the Worst. But all the same, Ruskin is setting the stakes of his own possible evasiveness—any possible 'rejecting[s]' and 'scorning[s] on his own part'—extremely high. In her review of *Modern Painters* vol. III, George Eliot would stake Ruskin's reputation on his capacity to register the real:

> The truth of infinite value that [Ruskin] teaches is *realism*—the doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble and faithful study of nature, and not by substituting vague forms, bred by imagination on the mists of feeling, in place of definite, substantial reality. (*CHJR*, 180)

Contra Eliot (and much of contemporary Ruskinian scholarship), my first chapter will reveal how Ruskin does in fact enlist 'vague forms, bred by the imagination on the mists of feeling' in his writings to cultivate states of dreaminess in his readers; the value I find in Ruskin's work is chiefly therapeutic rather than epistemic. All the same, Eliot is right to identify an anti-escapist drive in Ruskin, a clear striving of the reality principle, which makes his appreciation for the affordances of the indistinct and idealistic feel all the more embattled.

Gosse, on the other hand, expresses his anxieties about his credibility as a biographical truth-teller in the 'Preface' to his memoir *Father and Son: A Study of Two Temperaments* (1907):

> …at the present hour, when fiction takes forms so ingenious and so specious, it is perhaps necessary to say that the following narrative, in all its parts, and so far as the punctilious attention of the writer has been able to keep it so, is scrupulously true. (*F&S*, 42)

While characteristic of the epistemological anxieties that tend to plague all life writing, the passage also exposes a sore spot specific to Gosse.[56] In 1886, rival critic John Churton Collins, once a friend, savagely reviewed Gosse's *From Shakespeare to Pope* (1885) by ridiculing its many (and occasionally egregious) factual errors. The affair turned into a bruising spat and, though the literary establishment sided with Gosse as one of their own, he was nonetheless afterwards branded as one with a 'genius for inaccuracy', in the dry appraisal of Henry James, and saddled with a reputation for being an author of little authority, even an 'enemy of truth' in the phrase of James D. Woolf.[57]

But more importantly for the preoccupations of this thesis, Gosse puts the 'ingenuous[ness]' of fiction at odds with scrupulous truth in the 'Preface', which reflects an ambivalence about art that derives from a deeper source: the extreme Calvinism of his parents, which he diagnoses as a 'dying Puritanism' in the memoir itself. (*F&S*, 3) Though Gosse spent his life attempting to overcome the impoverished view of earthly life he found in Evangelical religion, echoes of the Puritan disapproval of beauty, art and fiction tend to trouble his writing, as here. His mother, the tract writer and religious poet Emily Bowes Gosse (1806-1857), 'sternly excluded' all 'fiction of any kind' from his

---

[56] Lionel Trilling claims that the subject of an autobiography is most characteristically a self 'bent on revealing himself in all his truth'. Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 25.

[57] Thwaite, 277-297; Woolf, 17. John David Palmer, *The Rise of English Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 87-8. James quoted in Thwaite, 352. Thwaite claims that this talent for misconstruction extends to *Father and Son* itself. Thwaite quoted in Saunders, *Self-Impression*, 156.

childhood under the belief that 'to "tell a story", that is, to compose fictitious narrative of any kind, was a sin'. (*F&S*, 15-16) In practice, Gosse committed himself to the appreciation of literature in all its forms, but it is telling that his major successes were always outside fiction, in biography and criticism. His hedonism was haunted by lingering doubts towards (secular) artistic culture as sinful, harmful, somehow connected to *lying*, though critics keen to view him as merely complacent about the value of art and aesthetic pleasure often fail to register this.[58]

In his responses to the escapist predicament, Gosse reworks, rather than disavows, the ambivalence about art that his parents attempted to induce in him as a child. In the memoir, for instance, Gosse narrates a conversation with his father, the naturalist Philip Henry Gosse, FRS (1810-1888) who was a minister to the Plymouth Brethren, a fanatical Calvinist sect. Gosse's account of the conversation demonstrates the son's ironic distance from, and fraught proximity to, the Puritanism of his father. Upon finding engravings of the Greek Gods—'Apollo with his proud gesture, Venus in her undulations,'—the young Gosse asks his father to tell him more about the pagan divinities. (*F&S*, 146) In response, his father 'blaze[s] white with Puritan fury', Gosse tells us, as if 'he had himself escaped with horror from some Hellenic hippodrome.' (*F&S*, 146) While the episode dramatizes a moment of rupture between father and son, Gosse's hedonism remains animated by the 'Puritan fury' it ostensibly shrugs off. Gosse tells us that, at this 'æsthetic juncture', the 'dangerous and pagan notion that beauty palliates evil budded in my mind'. (*F&S*, 146) Gosse is not writing in earnest here: he is savouring the deliciousness of his transgression in typical decadent style. But the Puritan denunciation is retained within, even as it is transformed by, Gosse's irony.

---

[58] For a classic discussion of the Victorian/Evangelical 'fear of art', see Jerome Hamilton Buckley, *The Victorian Temper* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969), 161-184.

The simile of 'escape' that he uses to describe his father's reaction to the sensuous statues is telling. Elsewhere in his corpus, Gosse more obviously recasts the Puritan fear that art might make badness beautiful, and sinfulness sexy, as an anxiety about escapism, about the value of illusion as elusion. His subtly ironic valuation of the literary achievements of Ruskin in *A Short History of Modern English Literature* (1897), for example, shows how the Puritan angst over idolatry survives incognito into Gosse's mature reflections on art:

> The happy life being that in which illusion is most prevalent, and Mr Ruskin's enthusiasm having fired more minds to the instinctive quest of beauty than that of any other man who ever lived, we are guilty of no exaggeration if we hail him as the first of benefactors. (*SHMEL*, 357)

Are we really meant to sit comfortably in the belief that the 'happy life' is one in which 'illusion is most prevalent', and clap the sage on the back for his efforts? By virtue of the suspect nature of its negation, Gosse's apophatic mannerism ('guilty of no exaggeration') makes us almost sure that he *is* guilty of exaggeration. Should Ruskin be named a 'benefactor' at all? The passage demonstrates how Gosse, like Hardy in 'In Tenebris', enlists the convolutions of sceptical reflection both to explore and vex the terms that underpin the escapist predicament. But Gosse's ironic deprecation of Ruskin also suggests how Puritan doubts about art nonetheless persist, albeit transformed, into his writing—with 'illusion' becoming the polite word for 'idol'.

Rather sneakily, Gosse's portrait of Ruskin as a useful but deluded naïf obscures the fact that the older writer's reaction to his Puritan heritage is the younger writer's most obvious precedent; this is one of the grounds for my presenting their respective

ambivalent escapisms as interventions within a tradition. Ruskin received from his mother Margaret Ruskin (1781-1871), whose Evangelical religiosity he calls 'Puritan' in *Praeterita* (1885–89), a wariness about the dangers of secular culture as spiritually harmful. (Ruskin, XXXV.142-3) The Ruskins were more establishment and less extreme than the Gosses: they read Byron together, and Ruskin stresses at a late point in his autobiography that his mother was *not* 'in any wise like Esther's religious aunt in *Bleak House*', as some people had insinuated.[59] (Ruskin, XXXV.143) All the same, Ruskin describes how his mother made a 'monastic poverty' of his childhood playroom, which prompted a sympathetic 'Croydon aunt' to buy him a Punch and Judy set for his birthday, 'thinking to overcome my mother's resolution by splendour of temptation[.]' (Ruskin, XXXV.20) Ruskin's 'mother was obliged to accept' the present, but afterwards told her son that it was not right that he should have them and took the dolls away. (Ruskin, XXXV.20) The maternal prohibition came to haunt the dreams of Ruskin as an adult. In later life, Ruskin dreamt that the Judy puppet actually 'bruise[d] under [Punch's] blows, so as to make the whole thing as horrible and nasty as possible.'[60] In blurring the boundary between the real and the illusory, Ruskin's dream suggests how his mother's prohibition left him with an anxiety that virtual violence might turn into actual violence, that aesthetic satisfactions more generally might induce moral laxity, even cruelty. Like Gosse after him, however, Ruskin was not merely stultified by this inheritance. As Marcel Proust and Vernon Lee, among others, have realised, idolatry is the central problematic of Ruskin's work.[61] Ruskin reworks the Puritan logic of idolatry in his famous critique of the social function of art as a 'luxury'. (Ruskin, VIII.423) Much

[59] Michael Wheeler, *Ruskin's God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 4-7.
[60] Ruskin quoted in Sharon Aronofsky Weltman, *Performing the Victorian* (Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 2007), 5, 19n.1.
[61] Stephen Cheeke, *Transfiguration: The Religion of Art in Nineteenth-Century Literature Before Aestheticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1-19.

as the idol distracts the believer from God, the luxury of the wealthy prevents them from recognising and therefore remedying the ills outside their window. (Ruskin, VIII.423, IV.8)

While I see this conversion as a success, Proust attempted to use Ruskin's definition of idolatry—'the serving with the best of our hearts and minds some dear and sad fantasy we have made for ourselves'—against him.[62] (Ruskin, XX.66) Proust characterises Ruskin as a man blighted with 'intellectual and moral [in]sincerity': 'the doctrines he professed were moral doctrines and not aesthetic doctrines, and yet he chose them for their beauty.'[63] While clever, Proust's charge of insincerity, like Gosse's portrait of Ruskin as a dupe, convicts him on grounds he cannot defend: it is notable that Proust finds Ruskin's self-betrayal not in certain paragraphs of his writing, nor even at 'certain hours of his life', but 'at every moment, in those profound, secret regions almost unknown to us,' which decide the 'fate of our spiritual and moral life.'[64] It is an argument that no amount of close reading of Ruskin's work can convincingly contradict because it is a claim not about his work, nor even his biography, but his unconscious. Confining myself to Ruskin's pages, I'm more interested in Ruskin's self-conscious escapism: the moments in his work where he registers (what he calls in his reflections on idolatry) the 'deadly function of art' as an enervating luxury and yet seeks to value aesthetic experience even while holding these regrets in mind. (Ruskin, XX.66) 'I would have tried here to enter into some examination of the right and worthy effect of beauty in Art upon the human mind,' Ruskin laments in vol. V of *Modern Painters* (1860), 'if I had myself been able to come to demonstrable conclusions. But the question is so

---

[62] Marcel Proust, "Preface to *La Bible d'Amiens*," in *On Reading Ruskin*, ed. and trans. Jean Autret, William Burford, and Phillip J. Wolfe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 5-62, (50).
[63] Proust, "Preface to *La Bible d'Amiens*," 49-50.
[64] Ibid. 50.

complicated with that of the enervating influence of all luxury, that I cannot get it put into any tractable compass.' (VIII.423) In spite of what he states in the depths of his despair, my first chapter reveals how the ambivalent escapism Ruskin formulates in response to this insight ultimately *does* manage to find a 'tractable compass' for his ambivalence, a conception of art neither excessively idealised nor denigrated.

Admittedly, Ruskin's earliest work does not have this ambivalent texture. As yet untouched by the escapist predicament, Ruskin's defence of Turner in *Modern Painters* vol. I relies upon him idealising the painting as

> …sent as a prophet of God to reveal to men the mysteries of His universe, standing, like the great angel of the Apocalypse, clothed with a cloud, and a rainbow upon his head, and with the sun and stars given into his hand. (Ruskin, III.254)

In his mature works, Ruskin allows himself to express more ambivalence towards the sumptuousness of Turner's painting, and by extension his own ekphrastic descriptions of it.[65] Ruskin will find a 'worm in the rose' of his earlier Romanticism, as James Sherborne has put it, when he begins to suspect that art might prove mere idle 'escapism', rather than a ladder to higher truths.[66] Ruskin comes to fear the beauty might insulate one from reality, rather than merely reveal it. In his mature years, this

---

[65] Ruskin tends to conflate writer and painter. In vol. I *Modern Painters* (1843), Ruskin argues that 'we should call a man a great painter only as he excelled in precision and force in the language of lines, and a great versifier, as he excelled in precision and force in the language of words. A great poet would then be a term strictly, and in precisely the same sense, applicable to both, if warranted by the character of the images or thoughts which each in their respective languages conveyed.' Ruskin, III.88. Landow, 43. But other Victorians were more alive to the *paragone* between text and image. In *Middlemarch*, for example, Ladislaw says to Naumann: 'Your painting and Plastik [sic] are poor stuff after all. They perturb and dull conceptions instead of raising them. Language is a finer medium.' Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 178.

[66] James Sherborne, *John Ruskin, or The Ambiguities of Abundance: A Study in Social and Economic Criticism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1972), 68.

kind of flight of fancy can never quite take off with the same ease. It is the more turbulent flight of the later Ruskin, in which he is also more troubled by 'the dangers of his own eloquence', in J. H. Buckley's phrase, that chiefly exercises me in this thesis, and similar moods about art in the writings of Hardy and Gosse.[67]

Hardy's escapist anxieties do not centre, as one might expect of a Victorian novelist, upon questions of the fantastic versus the realistic. 'Art is a disproportioning […] of realities', Hardy would claim in a note of 1890: 'Hence "realism" is not Art.' (*L&W*, 239) He identifies 'the just aim of Art' as 'being more truthful than truth'. (*PV*, 107) Instead, Hardy is vexed by the tensions between the demands for authentic representation—that is, being true to the horrors of life—and his ethical responsibility to provide his readers with relief from those same horrors. In the next section, I will suggest how this manifestation of the escapist predicament arose from the decline of faith in the period, and the desire that the artist or novelist might replace the priest as a dispenser of the cure of souls.

Art and the Cure of Souls: The Temptations to Idealism and Reductivism

Hardy's writing speaks of the burden put on art in the modern period. On the one hand, Hardy thought that literature should give a 'comprehensive and accurate' representation of reality in an authentic and 'conscientious' manner. (*PV*, 107, 96, 97) Yet he also recognised the justice of Matthew Arnold's stipulation in his 'Preface' to the First Edition of *Poems* (1853) that art offer its readers a 'forgetfulness of evils, and a truce from cares'.[68] With its insinuation that a gain of consolation necessarily entails a loss of reality, the escapist predicament made the curative power of visual art and

[67] Buckley, *Victorian Temper*, 149.
[68] Matthew Arnold, "Preface," to *Poems* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longman, 1853), v-xxxi, (vii).

imaginative literature appear far less a case of 'sweetness and light', to quote Arnold's earlier collocation in defence of intellectual and aesthetic culture from *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), than sweetness *or* light, pleasure *or* truth.[69]

Before the rise of psychoanalysis, which would make a modern confessional out of the Freudian couch, and the development of the modern therapeutic practices more broadly throughout the twentieth century, the anxieties of the Victorian age resolved themselves in a demand, sometimes tacit and sometimes explicit, that the poet and artist should take over the pastoral functions of the priest; that art should dispense the *cura animarium*, the *cure* or *care of souls*, by which I mean the theological tradition and pastoral practice in which caring for the soul is comprehended as therapeutic, i.e., in terms analogous to curing the physical body of sickness.[70] From *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857) onwards, George Eliot would formulate the ethical and spiritual value of her literary realism against the more or less bumbling or ineffective attempts at pastoral care by the clerical characters of her novels. Though the Reverend Amos Barton is said to understand 'the 'cure of souls' in something more than [a merely] official sense', Eliot's narrator notes that his style of 'oratory' told of 'praiseworthy intentions inadequately fulfilled': implicitly, we get the sense that we're in better hands with Eliot's narrator.[71] The failure of Mr Irwine, the Rector of *Adam Bede* (1859), to care for the souls of Arthur Donnithorne and Hetty Sorrel, the young girl Arthur will soon seduce, is another case where Eliot seems to be suggesting that the humanist novel should

---

[69] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. Jane Garnett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006 [1869]), 41. For the resonances of 'sweetness and light', see Helen Small, *The Value of the Humanities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 78-86.

[70] For the *cura animarium* tradition in Christianity, see John T. McNeill, *A History of the Cure of Souls* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), vii, *passim*. Stanley W. Jackson, *Care of the Psyche: A History of Psychological Healing* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 146, *passim*. Thomas Szasz, *The Myth of Psychotherapy: Mental Healing as Religion, Rhetoric and Repression* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1988), xii.

[71] George Eliot, *Scenes from Clerical Life*, ed. Thomas A. Noble (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015 [1857]), 20. For Eliot's use of characters as 'heavily or lightly disguised surrogates of their author' to reflect on 'the force or efficacy of fiction', see Hertz, *George Eliot's Pulse*, 2.

attempt to pick up the parson's slack; this is why so many modern critics often see Eliot's fiction as anticipating the therapeutic ambitions of the psychoanalyst.[72] Both attempt to envisage secular alternatives to the *cura animarium* tradition.

In this way, Eliot was building upon the common association of the work of the poet with that of the priest and physician. In the first half of the century, John Keble had claimed that 'the glorious art of Poetry' is 'a kind of medicine divinely bestowed upon man: which gives healing relief to secret mental emotion'; he calls it a 'safety-valve, saving men from real madness'.[73] M. H. Abrams has characterized Keble's notion as a 'radical, proto-Freudian theory, which conceives literature as disguised wish-fulfilment,' but we are a long way yet from Freud's disparagement of faith and art as merely comforting illusions.[74] When decades later the priest's place in this triumvirate came to be more in question, it was Arnold, the Tractarian priest and poet's godson, who in 'The Study of Poetry' (1880) would claim most explicitly that the decline of faith would mean we would need more and more to 'turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us'.[75]

But one of the temptations inherent in transferring the power (and pastoral responsibility) from priest to artist and novelist is the temptation to idealise art as a magically reparative substitution for religious consolation. The idealisation behind salvific instrumentalizations of art is all too easily punctured.[76] John Carey's relishing

---

[72] Green situates Eliot similarly between priest and analyst, see Green, *Rethinking Therapeutic Reading*, 75. Margot Waddell, "On Ideas of "the Good" and "the Ideal" in George Eliot's Novels and Post-Kleinian Psychoanalysis," *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 59 (1999): 271–286, 272.
[73] John Keble, *Lectures on Poetry*, trans. Edward K. Francis (Oxford: James Parker, 1912), I.59, 22. John R. Griffin, *John Keble: Saint of Anglicanism* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1987), 46.
[74] Meyer Howard Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Feeling and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), 147.
[75] Matthew Arnold, "The Study of Poetry," in *Selected Prose*, ed. P. J. Keating (London: Penguin, 1987), 340-365, (341).
[76] Though interested in a different notion of art as 'redemptive replication of damaged or worthless experience' within literary modernism, both of which are not my concern here, Leo Bersani's

dismissal of 'extravagant' views on art from German Idealism onwards in *What Good Are the Arts?* (2005) makes this clear when he quotes what he calls a 'plainly sickening' passage from an essay by the broad church priest, writer and reformer Charles Kingsley, who was a friend of Gosse's father, in which the author blithely asks an imaginary long-suffering labourer: 'Pictures raise blessed thoughts in me—why not in you, my brother?'[77] Thinking about the deficiencies of the passage with a little more patience than Carey can reveal the problem with demanding the cure of souls from aesthetic culture. Kingsley proceeds to list all the reasons why the labourer might not taste the same sweetness and see the same light that the middleclass critic finds in the National Gallery: the labourer is 'toil-worn'; he lives in a 'crowded lodging' in a 'foul alley'; his wife is ill; one of his children has died, and his remaining offspring are hungry, 'deformed', and 'pining'.[78] Yet Kingsley thinks the labourer should find solace in the 'baby cherubs' of an 'old Italian painting'.[79] Why? Not out of complete perversity, but under the assumption—this Carey fails to mention—that the cherubs will remind him of the life to come, in which he will be united with his lost child. Kingsley imagines the painting will perform the cure of souls. Carey demonstrates how such an aggrandized view of art's power invites cynical critique.

In Hardy's writing—which again and again dramatizes the failure of the earlier Victorian humanism of the likes of Eliot and Arnold, as Philip Davis has claimed, while also paying mournful homage to it—the failed therapeutic responsibilities of priest,

---

interpretation of the Proustian conception of art as an 'annihilating salvation', which 'erases, repeats and redeems life', is preoccupied with a tension comparable to that which I study here. Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990), 20, 11.

[77] John Carey, *What Good Are the Arts?* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), xi. Charles Kingsley, "Picture Galleries," in *True Words for Brave Men* (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1886), 230-233, (233), quoted in Carey, *What Good Are the Arts?*, 97-8.

[78] Kingsley, "Picture Galleries," 232.

[79] Ibid., 233.

physician, and poet all seem *unhelpfully* tangled up in each other, which suggests his sensitivity to the deficiencies of this tradition of idealisation.[80] After the infamous murder-suicide of Little Father Time in *Jude the Obscure* (1895), the doctor 'can give no consolation' to the grieving couple and the nearby priests fail to heed their sufferings; they are, instead, arguing about whether the celebrant of the Eucharist should face eastwards (*ad orientem*) with his back to his congregation, or westward facing towards them. Hardy is satirising the aspects of earthly life that, in his view, Keble and the broader Oxford Movement cannot *face* up to. 'Good God—the eastward position, and all creation groaning!' as Jude exclaims to Sue. (*Jude*, 327) Like his medical and priestly counterparts, Hardy seems unable to honestly offer his readers any consolation, or 'cure' for their troubles. The burden put upon art to offer cure and consolation after the decline of faith becomes a load heavier than art can bear.

For the later generation of Victorians, aesthetic consolation risked becoming a kind of quackery, if it relied upon an insincere representation of life. When he writes of the 'literature of quackery' in 'Candour in English Fiction' (1890), Hardy is chiefly speaking of the reluctance to represent sexual desire 'unvarnished'. (*PV*, 96, 101) But sexual frankness and general pessimism are revealingly bound up together in the period: Hardy lists *Oedipus Rex* and the *Agamemnon* as '"unpleasant subjects"' that would be censured by the 'Grundyist' in the 'Candour' essay. (*PV*, 100, 100n.15) Henry James claims in a more patronising manner that the 'optimism of [English] literature is partly the optimism of women and spinsters', which similarly identifies a presumed 'ignorance' of sexuality with an optimistic worldview.[81]

[80] Davis, *The Victorians*, 546.
[81] James, "Guy de Maupassant," 540.

Ostensibly, Hardy attempts to free himself from what James calls the 'conventional blinking' of English Fiction as regards both sexuality and tragedy.[82] But the temptation to literary 'quackery' remains more live in his corpus than his 'full look at the Worst' reputation lets on: the only other medical representative in *Jude* is the 'quack-doctor' Physician Vilbert, who unscrupulously dispenses placebo 'life-drops' to Wessex cottagers. (*Jude*, 21-2) The name of Vilbert's 'life-drops' recalls the 'life lies' of the more savagely and self-consciously cynical Dr Relling in *The Wild Duck*, a widely acknowledged influence upon Hardy's treatment of child-suicide in *Jude*.[83] In the play, Relling fills the heads of his patients with delusions of grandeur that give their life a promise of worth and meaning—all the while knowing he is lying to them and only helping them lie to themselves. As a dispenser of therapeutic illusions, Hardy found a worrying reflection of the fictioneer in the person of the quack physician.

Notwithstanding the threat of quackery, Hardy and Gosse both register the lure of thinking about art as a medicine. In the nineteenth century as now, the medical metaphor is liable to invite reductively instrumentalised conceptions of art much as the spiritual analogy invites idealisation. The medical metaphors of Hardy and Gosse are always more ambivalent than the 'medicine' for the mind found in John Stuart Mill's account in his *Autobiography* (1873) of how William Wordsworth's poems helped rouse him from a 'habitual depression'. Mill tells us he gained from Wordsworth a 'source of inward joy, of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure, which could be shared in by all human beings; which had no connection with struggle or imperfection'.[84] Importantly, Mill's account still sets the rosy tone for contemporary theorisations of bibliotherapy,

---

[82] Ibid.
[83] Ralph Pite, *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life* (London: Picador, 2006), 360-1. Frank B. Pinion, *Thomas Hardy: Life and Thought* (London: Macmillan, 1978), 51.
[84] John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, ed. by Mark Philp (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2018), 85.

the increasingly popular medical practice of prescribing courses of reading in order to target specific mental health conditions, e.g., clinical depression and chronic pain.[85] Gosse, by contrast, calls Ibsen's plays a strong 'dose for a sick world' and Hardy describes a novel as a 'pill' that must be 'swallowed whole', leaving us with the uncomfortable image of a tome stuck in an oesophagus. (*Ibsen*, 260; *PV*, 76)

We tend, George Eliot has reflected, to 'get our thoughts entangled in metaphors, and act fatally on the strength of them.'[86] The chief problem with the medical metaphor is that it invites reductive conceptions of art as a narcotic. 'Who will ever relate the whole history of narcotica?' Nietzsche asks in *The Gay Science* (1882): 'It is almost the history of "culture," of our so-called higher culture.'[87] While Nietzsche's qualifying 'almost' is worth noticing, his hyperbole risks bulldozing the little crawlspace he allows for more sophisticated uses of culture, which would save *all* culture from being reduced to mere narcotica— including, one presumes, the Nietzschean aphorism. Inspired by Nietzsche's formulations, Freud in *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1930) would similarly claim that 'the mild narcosis induced in us by art can do no more than bring about a transient withdrawal from the pressure of vital needs[:] it is not strong enough

---

[85] Helen Small notes how Mill's appreciation of Wordsworth is more 'ambivalent' than is implied by this oft-quoted piece of rhetorical flourish(ing), but it is important to note this ambivalence does not tend to transfer into the bibliotherapeutic discourse so often influenced by it. Small, *The Value of the Humanities*, 111. It's also important to note that the term 'bibliotherapy' was coined by Samuel McChord Crothers (1857-1927) in 1916—a fact which naturally speaks to the history I'm charting here. For the history and origins of bibliotherapy, see Jesse Miller, "Medicines of the Soul: Reparative Reading and the History of Bibliotherapy," *Mosaic (Winnipeg)* 5, no. .2 (2018): 17–34; Liz Brewster, "Bibliotherapy: A Critical History," in *Bibliotherapy*, ed. by Sarah McNicol and Liz Brewster (London: Facet, 2018), 4. Grace Farrington, Philip Davis and Josie Billington, "The Victorian Novel: Laying the Foundations for 'Bibliotherapy'," in *Reading and Mental Health*, ed. Josie Billington (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 47-70; Brittany Pladek, *The Poetics of Palliation: Romantic Literary Therapy, 1790-1850* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), 3, *passim*. For the therapeutic function of contemporary fiction, see Timothy Aubry, *Reading as Therapy: What Contemporary Fiction Does for Middle-Class Americans* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011). For Mill's influence, see Pladek, *The Poetics of Palliation*, 65-95. Davis, *Why Victorian Literature Still Matters*, 136, 46-7.

[86] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 79.

[87] Friedrich Nietzsche, §86, *The Gay Science*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974 [1882]), 142.

to make us forget real misery.' (Freud, XXI.81) While we might bemoan the limitations of the narcotic metaphor, Freud was not being unnecessarily pessimistic but making a very basic point that seems lost on the likes of Kingsley: we cannot live on art alone. Yet as Freud's critics have noted, the choice of metaphor reflects the impoverished imagination that characterises approaches to culture in Freudian psychoanalysis. For Lionel Trilling, the weakness of Freud's vision of art as a poor man's therapy for the discontents of civilisation—whether formulated as a 'narcosis', as a 'substitutive satisfaction', or as a cathartic release of libido or aggression akin to 'blowing off steam'—lay in its only being able to comprehend the worth of art as a hedonistic instrument aimed either at the attainment of gratification or the ease of unpleasure (cf. Freud, XXI.81, 75; VII.305).[88]

The pessimism about the transformative possibility of aesthetic experience implied in Freud's characterisation of aesthetic experience as a 'mild narcosis' was 'foreshadowed', as Richard Adelman has claimed, in the 'pessimistic conception of aesthetic consciousness that was constructed across the second half of the nineteenth century' in Britain.[89] It is this pessimism, which I call the escapist predicament, that Hardy, Ruskin, and Gosse attempt to challenge even as they seem to accept its terms. These writers allow us to question whether the bewitching pictures of art used by medical metaphors, whether as narcotic drug or cathartic medicine, are useful fantasies of amelioration. 'Prose is not Prozac', as Patricia Waugh usefully reminds those invested

[88] Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978 [1940]), 37, 40, 44. For another critique of the Freudian view, see Walter Kaufmann, *Freud, Adler, and Jung*, vol. III of *Discovering the Mind* (London: Routledge, 2017 [1980]), 159-60. For Freud's view of art as an overly anodyne in the banal sense, see Paul Ricoeur, "Psychoanalysis and the Movement of Contemporary Culture," trans. Willis Domingo in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, ed. Don Idhe (London: Continuum, 2005), 119-156, (153).

[89] Richard Adelman, *Idleness and Aesthetic Consciousness, 1815-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 200.

in bibliotherapy.[90] As the later chapters will show, Hardy and Gosse evoke crude conceptions of art as a cathartic medicine or narcotic drug, only to complicate and counteract their simplifications. Gosse will take from his friend Andrew Lang the notion of a soothing 'literary anodyne', and make it sound anything but anodyne; instead, the desire for narcosis is presented as a desire for death.[91] Hardy will similarly take from the German classicist Jakob Bernays and other commentators in the Aristotelian model a medical conception of tragic catharsis as an alleviating purgation of an emotional excess, only to overwork the metaphors of purgation to such a degree that catharsis no longer operates simply as a therapy. Instead, catharsis becomes identifiable with an intense experience of emotional *un*containment that feels both alleviating and exacerbating in equal measure. In their investigations into the possible beneficial impact of reading serious literature upon mental health, Josie Billington and Philip Davis have stressed that the 'therapeutic effect' of poetry is precisely dependent upon poetry always being *more* than mere therapy.[92] Gosse and Hardy's ambivalent use of the medical metaphor forces a similar recognition. 'We have all in our time been subjected to the magic of this epileptic monster', as Gosse wrote of Dostoyevsky to André Gide in 1926: 'He is the cocaine and morphine of modern literature.'[93] The narcotic metaphor operates in Gosse not merely as cure, but ill. Their more ambivalent sense of the curative power of culture—not as a saving angel, nor as a salvific instrument, but as a

---

[90] Patricia Waugh, "The Novel as Therapy: Ministrations of Voice in an Age of Risk," *Journal of the British Academy* 3 (2015): 35–68, 39.
[91] Edmund Gosse quoted in *Current Literature* 2, no. 4 (April 1889): 277-278. Cf. "Mr. Edmund Gosse," *The Critic*, 14 (1889): 45. Andrew Lang, "Literary Anodynes," in *The Edinburgh Critical Edition of the Selected Writings of Andrew Lang*, ed. Andrew Teverson, Alexandra Warwick and Leigh Wilson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), II.108.
[92] Philip Davis and Josie Billington, "The Very Grief a Cure of the Disease," *Changing English* 23, no. 4 (2016): 396-408, 406. For the medical metaphor of 'cure', as a misleading, even coercive conception of improvement in the psychoanalytic tradition, see Szasz, *The Myth of Psychotherapy*, xii. Adam Phillips, *On Getting Better* (London: Penguin, 2021), 12.
[93] Edmund Gosse to André Gide, 22 August 1926, in *AG-ED*, 183. Thwaite, 305.

desperate, dangerous, or compromised remedy—proves valuable because, in the same swoop, it takes much of the force out of both idealised and cynical conceptions of art by admitting the half-truth they share between them.

This thesis proposes that the escapist predicament is not a done and dusted debate of the late nineteenth century, but a not-so-distant ancestor of our current political and scholarly debates about the value of the arts. My engagements with Carey, Nietzsche and Freud—hermeneuticists of suspicion as they all in their own way are—might seem superannuated in light of the postcritical, reparative turn of the Humanities in recent years.[94] But it's important to stress that the basic threat of cynical, reductive critique has remained a live *external* challenge for both the arts and the academy, politically, practically, and theoretically.[95] In acknowledging the 'therapeutic' power of the novel form in particular in 2015, Patricia Waugh has asked how we 'protect' the complexities of aesthetic experience from simpleminded 'reductionist practices of therapeutic appropriation or charges of inwardness, introversion or narcissism?'[96] The question remains a good one, and touches upon some of the central fault lines of the study of English literature as a discipline, which has faced charges of self-indulgence and amateurism from its earliest history. 'I feel as if I had no message about literature', a depressed A. C. Bradley wrote in 1900 to Gilbert Murray in anticipation of his election to the Professor of Poetry at Oxford, 'and as if all the talk about it were mere idle

[94] For the postcritical turn, see Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski, "Introduction," *Critique and Postcritique*, ed. Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 1-28, (1, 3, 16). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is about You," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 123-151.
[95] Helen Small, *The Function of Cynicism at the Present Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 192.
[96] Waugh, "The Novel as Therapy," 41-2. For the risk of crude (therapeutic) instrumentalism, see Rylance, *Literature and the Public Good*, 40-41.

voluptuousness.'[97] If the appreciation of literature is *not* 'mere chatter about Shelley', as Edward Augustus Freeman, the Regius Professor of History at Oxford, claimed in 1887 when advising against the establishment of English literature as a discipline distinct from Philology, what is it?[98]

I turn to Ruskin, Hardy, and Gosse because they are each in their own way representative of the amateur, autodidact, dilettante, belle-lettres tradition in English literature, and this relates to their reputations for self-indulgence. Now that the study of English literature is once again facing charges of becoming 'increasingly 'literary', increasingly belle-lettristic', in the complaint of Peter Boxall (note the literary scholar's use of 'literary' as a pejorative), I propose that to return to these authors can help us draw closer to what Ruskin called a 'tractable compass' to thinking about literary and cultural value, though their own efforts show how difficult a task it is.[99] (Ruskin, VIII.423)

The Arguments

The chapters of this thesis uncover the ways in which Ruskin, Hardy and Gosse ambivalently recuperate the uses of art for evasion. The first chapter, 'Sleeping on it: Ruskin Dreams of the Active Contemplative Life', charts how Ruskin grows to distrust the Aristotelian claim that human perfection can be reached through contemplative leisure; he comes to think the philosophy a narcotic fantasy, an excuse for idle solipsism. He also realises, however, that the perfectionistic demand that we constantly

[97] A. C. Bradley quoted in Katherine Cooke, *A. C. Bradley and His Influence in Twentieth Century Shakespeare Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 38. Robert Shaughnessy, "Introduction to the Fourth Edition," A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007 [1904]), xii-xlvi, (xv).
[98] Edward Augustus Freeman quoted in Alvin B. Kernan, *The Death of Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 38.
[99] Peter Boxall, *The Value of the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 5.

face facts in all their unpleasantness is animated by yet another damaging fantasy. Ruskin uses dreaming to get out of this deadlock and envisage a more flexuous and forgiving model of improvement, which allows him to transform his ambivalences into more psychically productive ambiguities. Yet precisely because he identifies fulfilment with the inactivity of sleep, he subsequently provokes in himself anxieties about moral and psychological enervation. Happily, however, Ruskin eventually finds that instinctual conflict can be usefully redeployed as a spur to activism. This recognition leads him to actively reinscribe ambivalence into his later dream visions, and thereby develop a more provocative form of escapism. Ruskin finds a way of dreaming new psychical and political realities into being, and a model of aesthetic contemplation neither sated to complacence by wish-fulfilment, nor overly persecuted by the crippling demands of conscience.

The second chapter, 'Catharsis Uncontained: 'Certain Cathartic, Aristotelian Qualities' in the Fiction of Thomas Hardy', proceeds to examine the fate of another major concept in the Aristotelian bequest to Victorian modernity, that of catharsis. I analyse cathartic metaphors in Hardy's tragic works to revise the anodyne account of the therapeutic power of fiction that he gives us in his non-fiction prose. Hardy reconceptualises of Aristotelian catharsis as an experience of intense emotional uncontainment, which is neither straightforwardly moral nor alleviatory in nature. Hardy clears space for this ambivalent therapeutic by parodying aggrandized, idealised and disembodied notions of catharsis that have been proposed over the centuries in the Aristotelian tradition; most especially, he satirises models of catharsis that instrumentalise tragedy as a tool of ethical improvement or emotional moderation. He does so because he is concerned that they obscure the morally vexed character of tragic

pleasure, whereby a reader feels delight at the representation of suffering. While he draws on the medical model of catharsis, which was particularly associated with the reductive interpretation of Jakob Bernays in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Hardy overloads the purgative metaphors of his text to such a degree that the cathartic function of his texts becomes identifiable not with contentment, but with a wasteful abortive aesthetic, which empties his texts of their former playfulness. In late Hardy, tragic pleasure no longer appears either clearly tragic or pleasurable. The chapter thus demonstrates that Hardy's response to the escapist predicament is to collapse the distinctions between confrontation and avoidance, exacerbation and alleviation, and pleasure and pain, through overworking to exhaustion the cathartic fantasies of relief traditionally associated with tragedy.

While the second chapter in part plots Hardy's decent into pessimism, the final chapter, '"Vital Lies' and 'Savage Treatment': the Uses and Abuses of Suspending the Ethical and Escaping Reality for Edmund Gosse', charts Gosse's ascent out of it. I demonstrate how Gosse overcomes impoverished valuations of both art and life, as voiced in the narcotic tropes of his early poetry and in the treatment of illusion in *The Wild Duck* of Henrik Ibsen, in order to reach a more optimistic account of the use of art for human flourishing, and the development of queer subjectivity specifically. In *Father and Son*, Gosse suggests that his avoidant retreats into fantasy as a child allowed him to construct a secular, liberal, queer subjectivity for himself detachable from the customary circumstances of his upbringing, and the heteronormativity of Victorian culture more broadly. Gosse figures child development as a perilous 'escape' from the 'narrowness' of familial, religious, and/or societal constrains, which necessitates making a virtue of evasion. (*F&S*, 119) Escapism, fiction, and art become for Gosse the ground of both queer futurity and liberal subjectivity by giving 'fortitude to [his]

individuality'. (*F&S*, 199) The chapters of the thesis thus demonstrate how Ruskin, Hardy and Gosse recognise that, if escapism is all but inescapable, we should strive to recover better forms of avoidance.

Sleeping on it: Ruskin Dreams of the Active Contemplative Life

Introduction

It is often assumed that the characteristically spiky 'oscillations of temper' that we find in the writings of John Ruskin, as the sage himself described them, rarely overcome fraught polarisation. (Ruskin, VIII.9) Rather tragically, Ruskin himself considered the Biblical curse 'Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel' as a just judgement of his corpus and a fit epitaph for himself.[100] (XXVIII.275; Genesis 49:4) When made by critics, the charge often surfaces implicitly in disparagements of Ruskin as a simple-minded moralist who fails to grasp the genuine complexities of political, ethical, and aesthetic phenomena. In 1881, for instance, Vernon Lee would speak of Ruskin's writing as riveted by two 'irreconcilable' but 'very noble missions'—'the creation of beauty and the destruction of evil'—and suggest that each one 'warped' the other.[101] In 1964, Kenneth Clark would confess to switching off whenever he saw a 'biblical quotation in the offing' under the assumption that Ruskin would now be on the religious equivalent to autopilot—that is, 'rely[ing] on holy writ to save him further thought.'[102] Reflecting on Ruskin's therapeutic use of art, Adrian Stokes similarly thought that art only ever 'saved' Ruskin from himself as a 'tortured unappeased visionary, entranced by the utterly good, [and] imprisoned without warning by an unutterable bad'.[103] Stokes thereby implied that Ruskin never substantially or consistently reached what the

[100] Hilton, *LY*, 154. John Rosenburg, *The Genius of John Ruskin* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998 [1964]), 315. Weltman, *Performing the Victorian*, 5.
[101] Lee, "Ruskinism," 200-1.
[102] Kenneth Clark, "Introduction," to *Ruskin Today* (London: John Murray, 1964), xiii-xxi, (xv). Cf. Kenneth Clark, "Introduction," to Walter Pater, *The Renaissance* (Cleveland and New York: Meridan Books, 1961), 11-26, (25).
[103] Stokes, "Some Connections," 46.

psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, who was Stokes's analyst, called the depressive position, the stage of psychological development at which the world is no longer viewed as a stark drama of sinless Goodies and diabolical Baddies as in the early days of infancy, but as a fallen yet salvageable world of nuance and compromise.[104] (cf. Klein, *E&G*, 14)

Yet this chapter will complicate the received picture of Ruskin in two ways. First of all, I will not rehearse the famous moment of aesthetic awakening recounted in *Praeterita* (1885–89) which Ruskin describes experiencing upon drawing an aspen tree in Fontainebleau after a long neurasthenic illness; this being a moment which Stokes, Marion Milner, and other commentators have tended to focus upon to the neglect of the rest of his corpus.[105] (XXXV.313-5) Instead, I will attend to the dreaminess, even drowsiness, of Ruskin's ekphrastic encounters with representations of sleep and rest in sculpture and painting from *Modern Painters* vol. II (1846) onwards to show another side to Ruskin's therapeutic use of art, which allowed him to tolerate uncertainty. I will demonstrate how Ruskin found in dreams a psychic freedom, which allowed him to transform obstructive ambivalence into psychologically and politically generative ambiguities. Ruskin finds in dreams a way of evading harsh, perfectionistic modes of relating to himself, the world, and others, which narrowly identify facing reality with obsessive fault-finding. In 'the restlessness of the dreaming mind', Ruskin found a model for psychological development neither punishingly perfectionistic, nor over-optimistically voluntaristic. (X.214) In his ekphrastic dream visions, Ruskin finds

[104] Janet Sayers, *Kleinians: Psychoanalysis Inside Out* (Padstow: Polity, 2000), 73. Hanna Segal, *Introduction to Work of Melanie Klein* (London: William Heinemann, 1964), 54-7.
[105] Marion Milner, "The Concentration of the Body," in *The Suppressed Madness of Sane Men* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1987), 234-240, (236-8). Stephen Bann, "The Colour in the Text: Ruskin's Basket of Strawberries," in *The Ruskin Polygon: Essays on the Imagination of John Ruskin*, ed. Dixon Hunt and Holland (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), 122-136, (129-30). Clive Wilmer, "Creativity," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Ruskin*, ed. Francis O'Gorman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 230-245, (233-4).

himself able to play with, as opposed to merely anxiously reinstate, the conceptual problemata that most plagued him throughout his life, such as whether the good life is more active than contemplative, or vice versa; whether one should chiefly cultivate passivity or self-assertion as a moral agent; and whether the rigours of asceticism can be in any way unified with the pleasures of hedonism, and so on.[106]

My challenge to the inherited portrait of Ruskin as a man thwarted by his instinctual conflicts does not rest here, however. Ruskin's use of the dream vision develops as his political radicalism intensifies from the 1850s onwards: he comes to use representations of sleep to dream new political sensibilities into being. To appreciate the political, ethical, and aesthetic importance of Ruskin's rhetoric of dreaminess is to thus undo the lazy contrast often made between Ruskin the beautiful 'word painter' and Ruskin the cajoling moralist and political 'thinker', a contrast which Ruskin himself first complained about.[107] (XXXVII.136)

Crucially, Ruskin also came to recognise that ambivalence can be politically, even psychologically generative; that instinctual conflict, in other words, can be put to creative, rather than merely destructive, purposes; and that disquietude, even internal strife, can be a useful spur to political action. Ruskin does not abandon escapism but comes to reinscribe ambivalence into his later ekphrastic dream visions of the 1870s in a manner that self-consciously cultivates the ambivalence he had once sought to elude. This new model of ambivalent escapism helps Ruskin ground and temper his

---

[106] I am taking cue in part from Jeremy Melius's recent search for a 'self-reflective' mediatory middle-space in Ruskin's ekphrastic encounters, which seeks a mode of attention neither breezily and solipsistically unobservant of particularity nor maniacally 'possessive' in its attempted grip of the art object. Jeremy Melius, "Ruskin's Broken Middle," *Nonsite* 35. May 9, 2021. https://nonsite.org/ruskins-broken-middle/.

[107] For Marcus Waithe's useful attempt to trouble this distinction, which I build on, see Marcus Waithe, "Ruskin's Style of Thought," in *Thinking Through Style: Non-fiction Prose of the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Marcus Waithe and Michael Hurley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 183-200. For one endorsement of the distinction, see Kenneth Clark, "Preface," to *Ruskin Today* (London: John Murray, 1964), ix-xi, (ix).

utopianism by implying that a notion of transcending ambivalence altogether by means cultural, political, or spiritual is an unsustainable, unhelpful fantasy. Ruskin implies that some useful degree of discontent would necessarily remain with us even in an earthly paradise. In addition, this shift also helps him to defend his vision of aesthetic culture from charges of solipsism and wish-fulfilment. Throughout the following pages, I will chart these roughly chronological developments as they influence his readings of artworks and his visions of what human flourishing chiefly consists of.

Facing Faults: The Problem with Perfectionistic Thinking

To understand Ruskin's need for escape, we first need to appreciate his continual struggle with the obstructive ambivalence that characterises punishingly perfectionistic thinking, which assumes that reality testing can be reduced to fault finding. In his famous chapter on the 'Nature of Gothic' in *The Stones of Venice*, vol. II *The Sea Stories* (1853), Ruskin praises the medieval Gothic as superior to Ancient Greek, Ninevite, and Egyptian architecture on the grounds that the Gothic allows for greater indulgence of fault. (X.190) The 'principal admirableness of the Gothic schools of architecture', Ruskin claims, lies in their capacity to appreciate and encourage 'the labour of inferior minds' without embarrassment: 'out of fragments full of imperfection, and betraying that imperfection in every touch,' the Gothic 'indulgently raise[s] up a stately and unaccusable whole.' (X.190) The Ancient Greek and Assyrian systems of architecture, on the other hand, were warped by an overweening *perfectionistic* desire for the 'utmost completion or perfection' in 'all things'; in ornamental sculpture, superficial conceptions of perfection were desired at the expense of the genuine and thoughtful expression of a workman's talents. (X.190) The demand for perfection, though 'noble […] in the abstract', degraded in practice. (X.190) The Greek felt the 'admission of lost power and fallen nature' to be 'intensely painful', and so 'gave to the lower workman no subject

which he could not perfectly execute'; the workman was a 'slave', for his master could not bear him any free play of mind or hand, which might risk eccentricity. (X.189) Enslaved in its own way to the ideal, perfectionistic thinking finds its metaphorical complement in the material servitude of slavery. Ruskin thought we should break free.

But how, we might ask? Usefully, Ruskin reminds us throughout his corpus of the older sense of *perfectionism* as a moral philosophy oriented towards drawing out what is most human in human nature, howsoever that is conceived.[108] Vernon Lee was in this sense completely correct to describe Ruskin's corpus as a 'counsel of perfection' in *Gospels of Anarchy* (1908); she helpfully situates Ruskin within the Christian tradition of what has been called moral perfectionism.[109] The term *counsel of perfection* originally referred to Christ's instruction in the Sermon on the Mount: 'Be ye perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect.' (Matthew 5:48) Ruskin himself quotes the relevant verse in 'The Relation of National Ethics to National Arts', an address given as the Rede Lecture for 1867 at Senate House, Cambridge, when he speaks of the 'right conception of the whole humanity' which 'belongs to men as Sons of God'. (XIX.168) The Greek word used in the New Testament, which translates as 'perfect', is *τέλειος*, an adjective used to describe completion or maturation in mental and moral character.[110] In this sense of the term, moral perfectionism is a *teleo*logical tradition in ethics, which orients the moral life towards a vision of the most ideal *τέλος*, or end state, towards which a human life could aim. Ruskin roots his moral writings in 'an account of the good human life, or the

[108] Thomas Hurka, *Perfectionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3-5.
[109] Vernon Lee, "Ruskin as Reformer," *Gospels of Anarchy* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1908), 199-322, (315).
[110] "τέλειος," G5046 in *The New Strong's Concordance of the Bible*, ed. James Strong (Nashville: T Nelson, 1985 [1890]). Ruskin's writing often tells of a tension in the Christian tradition as regards human perfectibility, however. Passmore tells of how ancient Christian theologians, like Clement of Alexandria, utterly denied the possibility of attaining perfection in one work, but then adopted a very different tone in another. The perfectibility of the believer was simultaneously denounced and proposed; both had basis in scripture. John Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man* (London: Duckworth, 1970), 94-96.

intrinsically desirable life', to quote Thomas Hurka's definition of the moral theory in *Perfectionism* (1993), often understood as the best life liveable.[111]

Ruskinian perfectionism sits somewhere uneasily, however, between the creaking teleology of the medieval and early modern Christianised Aristotelian tradition, which was foremost represented to him by the Elizabethan divine Richard Hooker, and a more pragmatic, non-teleological modern strain of perfectionist thinking in literature of the nineteenth century, most notably represented by Ruskin's American contemporary Ralph Waldo Emerson.[112] Ditching the teleological baggage of the tradition as unworkable and unconvincing in philosophical modernity, the philosopher Stanley Cavell understands what he calls Emersonian moral perfectionism as a 'dimension of moral thought directed less to restraining the bad than releasing the good', which concerns itself with 'what used to be called the state of one's soul'.[113] The affinities with Ruskin's anti-perfection*istic* notions of artistic excellence and moral development are obvious, and yet Ruskin, unlike Emerson, shows little embarrassment in making clunky Aristotelian teleological claims in his writing, as will become apparent.[114] Ruskin tends to look a better bedfellow of Emerson and Cavell when he implies that having a too fixed (or *perfectionistic*) idea of what human development consists in can constrain the process or possibilities of development.

---

[111] Hurka, *Perfectionism*, 3-5. For Ruskin's belief in intrinsic value more generally, see Geoffrey Hill, "Rhetorics of Value and Intrinsic Value," in *Collected Critical Writings*, ed. Kenneth Haynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 465-477, (466); "Poetry and Value," in *Collected Critical Writings*, 478-489, (468, 488).

[112] For Ruskin's debt to Hooker, see Ruskin, IV.92. Landow, 145. Craig, *The Ethics of Consumption*, 51-5.

[113] Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 48, 2.

[114] We can hopefully agree with Jeffrey L. Spear that Ruskin was essentially 'a teleological thinker', but we can also stress he was an often confused and ambivalent one. Jeffrey L. Spear, "'*These* are the Furies of Phlegethon': Ruskin's Set of Mind and the Creation of *Fors Clavigera*," in *The Ruskin Polygon: Essays on the Imagination of John Ruskin*, ed. Dixon Hunt and Holland (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), 137-158, (144).

By speaking of Ruskin's perfectionism in this chapter, then, I merely mean to speak of his set of answers to the questions which Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1818 said were of 'deepest concern to all,'

> …and which every rational creature, who has arrived at the age of reflection, must be presumed, at some period or other, to have put to his own thoughts:—What, and *for* what am I made? What *can* I, and what *ought* I to, make of myself? and in what relations do I stand to the world and my fellow men?[115] [sic]

Ruskin's answers to these questions would drift and develop over the course of his life, as we shall see, but in the second volume of *Modern Painters* he would claim outright that 'the purposes of existence' lay in 'Sight, Thought, and Admiration'. (IV.29) Ruskin accepted Aristotle's identification of 'perfect happiness [*τελεία εὐδαιμονία*]' with 'some sort of energy of Contemplation', though he later added the proviso that thoughtful flourishing extends beyond the 'refined raptures of contemplation attained to by philosophers' and can be grasped by 'any creature' that can 'exult in its sense of life', whether dogs or children.[116] (IV.7, 145n**) This extension is important because it allows Ruskin to identify philosophical contemplation with reverie, which provides him with a bridge between intensely thoughtful deliberation and more ostensibly escapist forms of mental activity.

Against merely perfection*istic* standards of judgement, Ruskin sets out this vision of the good life—what I call his *eudaimonic perfectionism*, which stresses the

---

[115] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Philosophical Lectures, 1818-1819*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (London: Pilot Press, 1949), 66, quoted in Keith Thomas, *The Ends of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1.
[116] David Ross translates the passage as 'perfect happiness [τελεία εὐδαιμονία] is a contemplative activity'. Aristotle, *NE*, 197.

importance of genuine flourishing, or *eudaimonia* as the Aristotelian terminology Ruskin would himself enlist in vol. II of *Modern Painters* in 1846 has it, over superficial markers of high achievement. (IV.7, 145*) Constant throughout his life was Ruskin's insistence that the chief human virtue to be cultivated in both art and life was *thoughtfulness*. We are at our most complete, most flourishing, and most human when we contemplate. 'The picture which has the nobler and more numerous ideas, however awkwardly expressed,' Ruskin writes in *Modern Painters* vol. I (1842), 'is a greater and a better picture than that which has the less noble and less numerous ideas, however beautifully expressed.' (III.91) No 'beauty of execution', Ruskin argues, 'can outweigh one grain or fragment of thought'; genuine improvements lie in '"drawing out" the human soul.' (III.91, VII.429)

In our dealings with artists, craftsman, and others more generally, we need to throw off 'Censure', which Ruskin calls 'the spirit which desires to blame rather than praise; false, base, unhelpful […] judgement'. (VIII.301) We need 'to look for the thoughtful part' of the persons we meet, 'and get that out of them, whatever we lose for it, whatever faults and errors we are obliged to take with it.' (X.191) *Thoughtfulness* is a term that comes under much conceptual pressure in his work in its attempt to unite intellectual and imaginative ponderous curiosity with a capacity for moral concern towards others ("How thoughtful of you!"), as it does for the century more generally: both the deathly ponderousness of Casaubon in Eliot's *Middlemarch* and the parallel fate of Ruskin's own studious pursuits in the neglect of his wife in Venice while working on *The Stones* suggests that the practice of aesthetic or scholarly contemplation and the cultivation of a loving concern for others are less allied than Ruskin would often like

them to be.[117] This is one way in which the escapist predicament rears its ugly head in his biography. All the same, the capacity for '"drawing out"' thoughtfulness becomes for Ruskin a pragmatic measure against which to judge schemes of improvement. Merely perfectionistic judgements are *un*thoughtful in their inability to comprehend the human cost of their demands, and therefore make for perversely counterproductive instruments of human development. The perfectionistic critic stifles the very potential for excellence, whether moral or creative, which they supposedly seek to nurture and draw out.

If Ruskin idealises thoughtfulness, he also gives us a sense, like Hardy, of how we can become 'ill with thinking'—or at the very least bad forms of thinking. (Hardy, *Tess*, 262) One of the foremost ambitions of this chapter is to outline how Ruskin's writing attempts to ease perfection*istic* thinking, the destructive habit of thought animated by the fantasy that human powers can (and *should*) be perfected in the manner that a knife can be sharpened, that is, by mere relentless force of judgement, criticism, or violence, as if human beings were but 'animated tool[s]', to use one of Ruskin's guiding images.[118] (X.190, 192) Ruskin proposed that 'helpful' aesthetic experiences could help liberate us from such cramped patterns of thought and judgement. (XVIII.61)

To 'use books rightly', Ruskin would claim in *Sesame and Lilies* (1865), is 'to go to them for help: to appeal to them'; his own books accordingly attempt to help his readers in such a manner.[119] (XVIII.61) Ruskin's writings offer a therapy for perfectionistic

---

[117] Phyllis Rose makes the same comparison. Phyllis Rose, *Parallel Lives: Five Victorian Marriages* (London: Vintage, 1984), 70. Hilton, *Early Years*, 144.

[118] I speak in terms of fantasy here to avoid unnecessary pathologizing, but I'm of course talking about the patterns of thought now commonly associated with clinical perfectionism, the mental health problem caused by 'excessively high personal standards and overly critical self-evaluations' that severely curtail one's ability to live and enjoy one's life. Thomas Curran and Andrew P. Hill, "Perfectionism Is Increasing Over Time: A Meta-Analysis of Birth Cohort Differences From 1989 to 2016," *Psychological Bulletin* 145 no. 4 (April 2019): 410-429, 410.

[119] For Ruskin and bibliotherapy, see Farrington, Davis and Billington, "The Victorian Novel," 48.

thinking by way of attempting to weaken the authority and persuasiveness of any perfectionistic demands internalized by his readers. 'Do what you can,' Ruskin counsels in the 'Nature of Gothic', 'and confess frankly what you are unable to do; neither let your effort be shortened for fear of failure, nor your confession silenced for fear of shame.' (X.190) Ruskin's rhetoric here is 'helpfully beautiful'—to quote again from his vision of the eudaimonic power of literature in *Sesame and Lilies*—in helping us accept the shakier, messier parts of ourselves: our 'tottering steps of thought' are taken in hand; we become better able to recognize and accept our 'honourable defeat[s]' for what they are: human inevitabilities. (XVIII.61, X.191) At least there *is* thought in 'tottering steps of thought', after all, and that's good enough.

Many will be turned-off by the implicit paternalism of such statements and the attendant threat of an indulgent infantilisation as equally unconducive to psychological development as perfectionistic criticism: if our thoughts totter, are we not toddlers?[120] But it's important to stress that Ruskin is never wholly master of his own house when he is thinking through these problems: he is attempting to convince himself as much as us. His writing cannot thus be completely reduced to any simple-minded cure for perfectionistic thinking because his prose is liable to the very ill which he is attempting to diagnose and deal with.[121] Though Philip Davis has argued Ruskin was 'a man always ready to risk inadequacy' and, as such, more tolerant of imperfection, unfinishedness, and failure, than his contemporary Matthew Arnold, it would be wrong to pass over just how much Ruskin himself struggled with a punishing fantasy of human perfectibility.[122]

---

[120] For Ruskin's paternalism, see John D. Rosenberg, *The Darkening Glass: A Portrait of Ruskin's Genius* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 139. David Melville Craig, *John Ruskin and the Ethics of Consumption* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 221-2.

[121] Wihl has suggests how Ruskin's 'search for truth is often contaminated by the very modes of error he condemns.' Gary Wihl, *Ruskin and the Rhetoric of Infallibility* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), xii.

[122] Philip Davis, "Arnold or Ruskin?" *Literature and Theology* (December 1992) 6 no. 4, 320-344, 324.

For all his love of the generosity of the Gothic spirit, which recognized the 'individual value of every soul', Ruskin himself struggled with the temptations to perfectionistic thinking (or what he called 'thoughtless severity'), which manifests in his work as a hatred of the susceptible, animal character of the human body, an inability to tolerate failure, or simply as an excessive moral demandingness.[123] (X.190, III.50-51) In Ruskin's writing, we do not find a mere tonic for perfectionism, but instead a mind battling with its own 'tottering steps of thought' in its attempt to imagine a more generous expansion of our moral and critical 'repertoire', to use a phrase of Adam Phillips, and not always or ever completely succeeding.[124]

As Andrew H. Miller has observed of Victorian culture more broadly, the generous aspirations of Ruskin's perfectionism always risk reducing to something more crudely and violently perfectionistic—less concerned with drawing out the good, than stamping out perceived badness no matter the collateral damage.[125] In the subsequent sections I will suggest how Ruskin is liable to such obstructive ambivalence when he attempts to grapple with the respective virtues of the contemplative life, which has been identified throughout history with prayer, theoretical study, aesthetic contemplation,

---

[123] What is now called the problem of moral demandingness by philosophers was in the nineteenth century a concern shared by thinkers of diverse philosophical and denominational persuasions. Henry Sidgwick noted that Utilitarians could be 'plausibly charged with setting up too high a standard of unselfishness and making exaggerated demands on human nature.' Charlotte Brontë's St John Rivers, who expects Jane to martyr herself as a missionary, reflects a comparable concern about the possible excessive cost of certain (Christian) moral demands. In a more blasé fashion, Nietzsche counsels in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883): 'Do not be virtuous beyond your strengths! And will nothing of yourselves that is contrary to probability!' And the philosopher John Cottingham attributes to Swinburne a comparable view that (Victorian) Judeo-Christian morality is overly demanding and quotes the following line from the 'Hymn to Proserpine' in support of his claim: 'Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has grown grey from thy breath.' Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (London: Macmillan, 1884), 81. John Cottingham, "Demandingness, Moral Development and Moral Philosophy," in *The Problem of Moral Demandingness: New Philosophical Essays* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 90. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Adrian del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1006 [1883]), 237.

[124] Adam Phillips, *Unforbidden Pleasures*, 85. For an earlier—and, in my opinion, less rewarding—exploration of the stakes behind perfectionistic (self-)criticism by the same author, see Adam Phillips, *On Balance* (London: Penguin, 2011), 159-167.

[125] Miller, *Burdens*, 3, cf. 176-77.

and leisure more broadly, and the active life, which has been identified with political activism, charitable works, and manual labour, more obviously oriented towards worldly concerns.[126] At first, Ruskin perceives the question as a rigid either/or of the perfectionist tradition—Is the happy, ethical life contemplative, or active?—which tempts him into a trap of unconvincingly denigrating the latter for the sake of idealising the former. Though at first praised for its peaceful stillness, the inactivity of contemplation comes back to haunt him: aesthetic contemplation becomes allied in his work not merely (and paradoxically) with the diminished sensory perceptions of sleep, but with death; and the perfect life becomes paradoxically identified with the peace of the grave. I will suggest, however, that Ruskin dwells on the activity of dreaming in order to dissolve and overcome these emotional and conceptual rigidities; to find mental activity in apparent passivity, and political vision even in apparent quietism; and to save art from being reduced to mere diversion.

Contemplation and its Discontents in *Modern Painters* vol. II

Ruskin turns to visions of restful contentment in paint and sculpture to smooth out conceptual creases in his eudaimonic perfectionism: the convincingness, in other words, of his vision of what a 'blessed' life consists of; his sense of whether this life is chiefly spent in contemplation, or more active pursuits.[127] (V.278, XXVII.342) Unlike one of his great poetic heroes John Keats, another devotee of the 'drowsy hour', Ruskin never appears to be *consciously* looking to the 'lulling charities' of sleep to save him from the

[126]After Augustine, the active life came to signify 'all kinds of active engagement in the world': the work of the craftsman and the labour of the servant, as much as the political deed of a politician. For a fuller elaboration of their distinct differences, see Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7-9, 12-13. Nicholas Lobkowicz, *Theory and Practice: History of a Concept from Aristotle to Marx* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1983), 4.

[127] Ruskin's talk of 'life […] under blessing' suggests both a conventional translation of *eudaimonia* as *blessedness* and the Christian Beatitudes: 'Blessed are the peacemakers…' and so on. Matthew 5:3-12. Ruskin, XXVII.342.

persecutions of 'Conscience'; the holiday from perfectionistic thinking often emerges in Ruskin's writing as a welcome side effect.[128] Depictions of repose in painting and sculpture prove helpfully beautiful to Ruskin because they make an aesthetic case for his defence of the importance of aesthetic contemplation to religious duty, moral virtue, and the well-lived life in *Modern Painters* vol. II (1846).

Before demonstrating how sleep proves a solution to Ruskin then, I'll outline his problems. On the face of things, the vision of the good life in the second volume of *Modern Painters* is a religious justification of leisure class values, a moral justification of escapism as a ladder to the divine.[129] In the volume, Ruskin idealises the contemplative life, which he conceives as a life spent chiefly in 'comprehension and contemplation of the Beautiful as a gift of God'; Ruskin envisions such a life as fulfilling the 'function' of human existence—that of being 'witness to the glory of God'—and therefore as a life of 'resultant happiness'. (IV.28-29) Ruskin's praise of contemplation over that of action has considerable precedent, theological and otherwise. Traditionally, the contemplative life had been valued over the active by both ancient philosophers and Christian theologians.[130] Ruskin, indeed, follows Aristotle in identifying happiness with contemplative activity, as we have seen; but Ruskin also finds support from the New Testament: Jesus praises Mary's life of prayer over Martha's preoccupation with

---

[128] John Keats, 15 'Ode to Indolence', in *Complete Poems*, ed. Jack Stillinger (Harvard, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982), 284-186; 8, 11, "Sonnet to Sleep," in *Complete Poems,* 275. For Ruskin's admiration for Keats, see Ruskin, V.221.

[129] Not that Ruskin makes this claim explicitly, but a 'moral philosophy characteristically presupposes a sociology', as Alasdair MacIntyre has argued. That said, Linda Dowling has claimed of Ruskin's work more generally that his 'biblically toned prose' translates the 'social discriminations of taste' into a 'common code of universal Christian aspiration', which offers us some justification to seek out more utopian visions of the possible sociology being supposed here; such an assessment would stress continuity, rather than rupture, with the social critique that animates his later work. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 27. Linda Dowling, *The Vulgarization of Art: The Victorians and Aesthetic Democracy* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 30. For Ruskin's growing ambivalence towards leisure class values, see Robert Simpson McLean, "Altruistic Ideals versus Leisure Class Values: An Irreconcilable Conflict in John Ruskin," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 31 no. 3 (1973): 347-356.

[130] Ibid. 15.

practical considerations.[131] (Luke 10.38-42) While all this sounds permissibly conventional (albeit, as we shall see, out of sync with Victorian culture more generally), Ruskin's overwrought prose pushes the matter to an absurd degree: he claims that 'Useless' theoretical pursuits of knowledge in art and science should be respected above practical, 'useful' applications of knowledge, which he rather severely calls 'ignoble', 'selfish', and 'servile' for the way in which they 'minister' to 'bodily comforts'; and argues that 'surgery [does] better in investigating organization than in setting limbs'. (IV. 33) The setting of broken limbs has, in other words, become absurdly redescribed as 'minister[ing]' to bodily comforts as if it were but a backrub. On the face of things, this is a result of his attempt to fend off the charges of hedonism. Ruskin was no doubt worried that 'worship of the beautiful always ends in an orgy', as Disraeli later put it.[132] Ruskin attempts to distance himself from 'Epicurean'-ism, which he automatically and inaccurately associates with 'the vileness of gluttony and lust' that he associates with 'men [who] insolently call themselves Utilitarians,'

> …who would turn […] themselves and their race into vegetables; men who think, […] that the meat is more than the life, […] who look to the earth as a stable, and to its fruit as fodder; […] who love the corn they grind […] better than the gardens of the angels upon the slopes of Eden[.] (IV.50, 43, 29)

This rant against philosophical hedonism, which deteriorates into a mere hatred of the body and its sustenance, throws out sense in its attempt to distance itself from sensuality. Ruskin is close to claiming that we can and should live on heavenly bread

---

[131] Ibid. 21.
[132] Benjamin Disraeli, *Lothair* (London: Longmans, Green, 1870), 410.

alone. The rant sounds particularly tone deaf in a decade that saw famine in Ireland, the Scottish Highlands, and on the Continent. Significantly, Edward Alexander notes with irony that Ruskin does a good job in 'the "hungry forties" […] in keeping his mind hermetically sealed against awareness of the poor'; it would only be later, in 'the prosperous, complacent fifties', that he would 'begin to take an interest in economic questions.'[133] We see here how Ruskin's eudaimonic perfectionism can degenerate into something merely violently perfectionistic, a fortification of violent certainties: this is what he will find a possible escape from in dreams.

The intensity of denial in *Modern Painters* vol. II was no doubt necessitated by Ruskin's sense that he was wading against the tide of 'this working age', as he contemptuously names his century, in which he claims the majority act as if 'Sight, Thought, and Admiration were all profitless'. (IV.29) Ruskin here responds to what Hannah Arendt has called the 'reversal of the hierarchical order between the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa*' in modernity.[134] It is telling to compare Ruskin's vision of fulfilment with the restless, practical drift of his close contemporaries. Asa Briggs gives us a representative instance in the 'aristocratic Lord Granville's refusal to be a 'gentleman at ease' and his willingness 'to postpone everything to public business'[.]'[135] In *The Professor*, a novel written but not published at the same time as *Modern Painters* vol. II, Charlotte Brontë's allegory of Protestant virtue, the Anglophile student teacher Frances, says that she likes 'a contemplative life, but [likes] an active life better' when declining to be a restrict herself to being a housewife upon her

[133] Edward Alexander, *Matthew Arnold, John Ruskin, and the Modern Temper* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1973), 81-2.
[134] Arendt, *Human Condition*, 262.
[135] Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement* (London: Routledge, 2014 [1959]), 392.

engagement to Crimsworth.[136] The refusal of the contemplative life is here bound up with a feminist protest that women should be able to enter the workplace, which suggests how Ruskin's attachment to contemplation can easily ally with his other protests against modernity. In *Adam Bede*, George Eliot's narrator asks her mid-century audience not to be 'severe' upon 'old Leisure', whom she pictures as a 'contemplative, rather stout gentleman', for never having read *Sartor Resartus*, which similarly identifies Victorian modernity with the transvaluation of contemplation and action that Arendt claims characterise modernity more broadly.[137]

Eliot's reference to Thomas Carlyle is particularly instructive because Ruskin would soon be won over by the Carlylean 'Gospel of Work' (or 'enthusiastic gospel of action', in W. G. Collingwood's words); later, under the influence of Carlyle, Ruskin would attempt to change the world, rather than merely contemplate it.[138] In 1826, Carlyle would quote the following line from Goethe approvingly in his notebook: 'There is just one man unhappy; he who is possessed by some *idea* which he cannot convert into *action* [sic], or still more which restrains him and withdraws him from action.'[139] For Carlyle, as Richard Adelman notes, 'meditative passivity is only the first step towards fully realized human behaviour'.[140] In *Sartor Resartus*, Carlyle's Editor proclaims to the absent Teufelsdröckh: 'Hadst thou not Greek enough to understand thus much*: The end of Man is an Action, and not a Thought*, though it were the

[136] Charlotte Brontë, *The Professor*, ed. Margaret Smith and Herbert Rosengarten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 189.
[137] Eliot, *Adam Bede*, 459.
[138] W. G. Collingwood, *The Life of John Ruskin* 7th ed. (London: Methuen, 1912), 67. Allan Cate, "Ruskin's Discipleship to Carlyle," in *Carlyle and his Contemporaries*, ed. John Clubbe (United States of America: Duke University Press, 1976), 227-256, (233).
[139] Goethe quoted in Thomas Carlyle, 7th December 1826, *Two Note Books of Thomas Carlyle: From 23rd March 1822 to 16th May 1832*, ed. Charles Eliot Norton (New York: The Grolier Club, 1898), 81.
[140] Adelman, *Idleness*, 85.

noblest?'[141] Throughout his life, even after the influence of Carlyle, Ruskin would be critical of deadened forms of worldly labour that seemed to abnegate thought, spirit and feeling: 'it is only by labour that thought can be made healthy,' Ruskin would claim after his volte-face in the 'Nature of Gothic', 'and only by thought that labour can be made happy, and the two cannot be separated with impunity.' (X.201) But throughout his career Ruskin remained unsure of how vision and thought can inspire and become infused into right action, in the manner Carlyle stipulates in *Sartor*.

Even in vol. II *Modern Painters* Ruskin rails against a view he attributes to Schiller—that 'the sense of beauty never farthered [sic] the performance of a single duty'—as a 'gross and inconceivable falsity'; and we should note the unconscious pun upon the *fathering* children here, one form of (re)productivity Ruskin always rejected in spite of the Biblical injunction to multiply. (IV.215) The slip in Ruskin's rant against Schiller suggests how troublesome sexuality tends to warp his vision of the good life. Ruskin's distance from the active life, though against the tide of his time, is motivated by his equation of worldliness with a dangerous sensuousness—and his fear that art 'gives only a kind of pleasure analogous to that derived from eating by the palate', as he will come to state the problem in vol. III in 1856, which he finds a too uncomfortable approximation to merely sexual pleasure.[142] (V.96) This anxiety might strike us now as redolent of the worst excesses of Evangelical piety, but the contempt for practicality in fact sits uneasily with the Evangelical tradition, which often stressed the distinction between 'nominal and practical, or true Christianity' as Landow has noted.[143]

---

[141] Ironically, Carlyle is here creatively misusing a line from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, which otherwise favours the contemplative life over the action. The relevant passage suggests young men are unfit for the study of moral philosophy because they tend to follow their passions, which would make their 'his study vain and unprofitable, because the end aimed at is not knowledge but action.' Aristotle, *NE*, 5. Carlyle, *Sartor*, 120.
[142] Landow, 54.
[143] Landow, 423.

In an attempt to shore up the wall he wants to place between the contemplation of the beautiful and sensual pleasure, Ruskin distinguishes in vol. II between what he calls 'Theoria' and 'Æsthesis'.[144] (IV.42) The latter term he defines in the volume as the 'mere sensual perception of the outward qualities and necessary effects of bodies', though he would later think that employing the Greek term was merely giving 'pigs' flavouring' to 'pigs'-wash'. (IV.42, xlviii) Unrealistically, Ruskin denies that 'impressions of beauty are in any way sensual': 'they are neither sensual nor intellectual, but moral'. (IV.42) The 'mere animal consciousness of the pleasantness,' Ruskin calls 'Æsthesis; but the exulting, reverent, and grateful perception' he calls 'Theoria'. (IV.47)

But in spite of this opposition, Ruskin's anxieties about sensuality do not go away. He worries that aesthetic contemplation might be mere misspent sensual idleness, both enervating and feminising in its passivity. The 'worthy effect of beauty in Art upon [the] human mind' is already entangled in what he will call the 'enervating influence of all luxury' in *Modern Painters* vol. V in 1860. (VIII.423) Earlier, Ruskin had stressed that art should not be thought the 'relief of the ennui of boudoirs'; aesthetic pleasure is always dangerously close to sexual release in the volume, and the boudoir as a site of enervating sensual expenditure is one of the chief psychic spaces—one might say, one of the primal scenes—of the volume. (IV.26) As will be true of Hardy and Gosse, Ruskin's fretting over escapism becomes overlaid with his anxieties about his sexual embodiment. Ruskin claims that art which merely appeals to physical sensation, as opposed to spiritual contemplation, 'sink[s] into […] mere amusement, ministers to morbid sensibilities'; artists who make such works are 'ticklers and fanners of the soul's

[144] Ruskin's investment in allying art with the contemplative, as opposed to the aesthetic, attempts to avoid a central problem of modernity: a sense that the religious, the aesthetic, and the ethical are distinct, even fractured forms of life that are in rivalry, as opposed to harmony, with each other. In the final chapter, I will suggest how Gosse accepts this Kierkegaardian view of separate spheres of existence to a degree that would be completely unacceptable to Ruskin.

sleep.' (IV.36) As we shall see, the body's sleep will ironically prove useful to Ruskin in dulling the sleeper's awareness of their body, and therefore distancing them from the sensual interferences he here describes.

As Ruskin's choices of metaphors show, his protests against practicality in vol. II, which attempt to conflate the practical with the selfish, sensual, or worldly, ring tellingly shrill. The tone of the volume has been described by one commentator as 'slightly hysterical'. [145] The false notes we often hear in the volume suggest how Ruskin is haunted by the return of the side to life he attempts to repress; we can understand this haunting as an inevitable consequence of his idealisation of perfect happiness.[146] A standard of 'perfect' or complete happiness, as Jonathan Lear has said of Aristotelian *eudaimonia*, 'creates its own discontent.'[147] It does so because 'any form of life will tend to generate a fantasy of what it is to get outside of that life.'[148] In so thoroughly insisting on one form of life, Ruskin's ideal ends up being haunted by the merits of the unlived life it cannot live: the life of work and action, or what he will later call 'happy industry'.[149]

---

[145] Frederick Kirschoff, *John Ruskin* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), 40. For Ruskin's possible struggles with conversion hysteria, or neurasthenia, see Andrew Scull, *Hysteria: the Disturbing History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 95. Mark S. Micale, *Hysterical Men: The Hidden History of Male Nervous Illness* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008), 6.

[146] In 1840, Ruskin valued aesthetic contemplation, but did not over-idealise it. As a result, Ruskin fears only the risk of frivolity, not sin. Ruskin writes the following to his friend, Edward Clayton, in letter dated from Rome, December 3, 1840: 'I am quite certain, that neither time nor expense, within certain limits, can be employed with greater certainty of redounding in the end to your own usefulness and happiness than in raising your feeling and your taste–that is, your perception of the Beautiful. For the end of study in us who are not to be artists is not to be able to bring home from Wales or Derbyshire outlines of cottages […] to occupy the quarter of an hour before dinner with chit-chat, but to receive, what I am persuaded God means to be the *second* [sic] source of happiness to man––the impression of that mystery which, in our total ignorance of its nature, we call "beauty." It is the θεωρία [contemplation] of Aristotle', the young scholar continues, making use of his reading of Aristotle during his Undergraduate years at Christchurch. Ruskin, I.424-5. In an earlier letter, Ruskin had written to Clayton that the Oxford tradition of reading Aristotelian philosophy 'as if it were all gospel' has had a corrosive effect on the moral and intellectual culture of the country, but that 'what is good of the "Ethics" is very good'. Ruskin, I.418-419. For Ruskin's reading of Aristotle at Oxford, see Ruskin, I.xxxv.

[147] Lear, *Happiness, Death, and the Remainder of Life*, 60

[148] Ibid. 47-8.

[149] The unlived life has become a rich topic of exploration in studies that have influenced by preoccupations here, see Adam Phillips, *Missing Out: In Praise of the Unlived Life* (London: Penguin, 2012), *passim*; Andrew H. Miller, *On Not Being Someone Else: Tales of Our Unled Lives* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2020), 10-14.

(XXVII.346) Ruskin's misgivings find unwitting but obvious expression in the adolescent levels of 'anxiety' that pass for Evangelical piety in the volume: 'it would be better that we should not exist,' Ruskin claims at one point, 'than that we should guiltily disappoint the purposes of existence.' (IV. 27, 29) If the purpose ('function') of existence is happiness, why speak of guilt and disappointment? Ruskin's vision of enforced flourishing ends up sounding about as joyful as "organised fun." Ruskin's false notes suggest how he is attempting to unhelpfully disavow instinctual conflict, rather than put it to genuinely constructive uses.

Ruskin's ambivalence reveals that his static contemplative 'ideal of Ethical perfectness,' to use a phrase from later in his career, is unworkable when understood as a static state of accomplishment, as opposed to a shifting 'unattained but attainable self', in the Emersonian phrase Cavell so treasures.[150] (XIX.171) Arnold will make a comparable point when he writes in *Culture and Anarchy*: 'Not a having and a resting, but a growing and a becoming, is the character of perfection as culture conceives it.'[151] Yet it will be to representations of rest that Ruskin turns in an attempt to strain against this insight and its implied lack of finality about life's achievements as too dispiriting. In the second volume, Ruskin claims that our 'love of change' is 'a weakness and imperfection of our nature' because it 'implies in it the state of probation'. (IV.98) Later, Ruskin will praise the Gothic *for* its very 'disquietude' and 'changefulness', which will suggest how he will later edge closer to his contemporaries in conceiving perfection in more restless terms. (X.214, 242) What's more, in a note from 1883 to a revised edition of vol. II, Ruskin reflects critically on the sentiment previously quoted and suggests that 'Heaven itself may be as changeful as a kaleidoscope, for aught we know.' (IV.98*) Later

[150] Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, 12.
[151] Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 36.

even within the bounds of the second volume, Ruskin will use dreaming to find activity in apparent stasis, though not before—as I demonstrate in the next section—paradoxically allying his ideal form of life with the peace of death.

The 'Promise of Rest': Pacifying Anxiety

Before Ruskin gives himself full permission to dream, he uses representations of rest to provide himself with a tenuous solution for the ambivalence he feels towards his embodiment, which disrupts his contemplative ideal. In attempting to distance the contemplation of beauty from bodily pleasure ('Æsthesis'), Ruskin finds representations of sleep, rest, and death useful as states of existence in which our embodiment is conditioned and our sensory awareness to external stimuli lessened: our vigilance is relaxed in a state of rest, even more so in the state of sleep, and negated absolutely in the state of death. Ruskin might fret over what he calls 'the soul's sleep', a drowsiness that leads us drunkenly on to damnation, but he nonetheless finds in the body's sleep an unlikely ally for his desire for disembodiment. (IV.36) Gosse will, we shall see later, put sleep to similar purposes.

Ruskin is supported in his glorification of contemplative leisure by a wealth of Christian thought that uses rest as a figure for the afterlife: 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest'. (Matthew 11:28) The 'desire of rest planted in the heart is no sensual nor unworthy one', Ruskin argues:

> …but a longing for renovation and for escape from a state whose every phase is mere preparation for another equally transitory, to one in which permanence shall have become possible through perfection. Hence the great call of Christ to men, that call on which St. Augustine fixed as the essential expression of Christian hope, is accompanied by the promise of rest; and the death bequest of

> Christ to men is peace. (IV.114)

Sleep here provides Ruskin with spiritual escapism ('escape from a state') from the chaos of earthly, bodily life ('no sensual one'), and yet the stillness of the contemplative life is vindicated through a comparison with the 'permanence' of death, which is barely more favourable on real reflection. In identifying release with a freedom from labour and activity, Ruskin makes the Christian afterlife sound more like a useful cover story for a desire for total non-existence.

Further tensions present themselves in the ambiguity as to whether we will have attained 'permanence' in the afterlife through first perfecting ourselves as moral agents on earth, or whether dying and passing out of the world of the transitory, is in fact the process which confers perfection. Ruskin's use of the future perfect tense ('shall have become possible through perfection') intensifies the association between perfection and *all* life being finished. In many ways, Ruskin inherits a problem in the Aristotelian tradition as Jonathan Lear has exposed it, in which the most flourishing life is valorised as 'the one that comes closest to a fantasy of being in a deathlike state':

> [Contemplation] is an image of an escape from the pressures of ordinary practical life. It is what we would do in our best leisure time, and as such it is the ideal of what one does in a kind of existential Sabbath. It is a higher form of activity than that of the non-leisurely practical life—and thus it is what we would do when we have got beyond life (as it is ordinarily lived). [It] is the activity of the gods; thus it is in itself a deathless activity. But deathless activity is precisely

> what the dead do; only the living engage in activities which come to an end.[152]

The 'deathlike' character of contemplative flourishing shows itself in Ruskin's Christianised repurposing of Aristotle's 'Theoria' when he praises the perfect deathless life of God as 'incapable of labour'. (IV.113)

In the same chapter concerned with 'Repose', Ruskin celebrates the appearance of quietness, permanence, and stillness in material objects for the way in which these qualities call to mind an aspect of the essence of God. Such quietude recalls 'the "I am" of the Creator opposed to the "I become" of all creatures':

> …it is a sign alike of the supreme knowledge which is incapable of surprise, the supreme power which is *incapable of labour* [my italicisation], and the supreme volition which is incapable of change; it is the stillness of the beams of the eternal chambers laid upon the variable waters of ministering creatures. (IV.113)

That God is 'incapable of labour', and yet morally perfect, implicitly supports Ruskin's claim that contemplation constitutes the chief way to prove 'witness to the glory of God'. (IV.28-29) And the image of divine rest does not merely support his argument about the nature of the well-lived life, but also quells his fears about sensuality: the symbol of the 'boudoir' that surfaced in Ruskin's complaint that art should not be identified with the 'relief of the ennui of boudoirs', i.e., moral enervation by sensual indulgence, here

[152] Lear, *Happiness, Death, and the Remainder of Life*, 53-4.

finds itself transfigured into an 'eternal chamber' in the passage. It is an image of rest made good.

In spite of this respite, however, Ruskin cannot quite sleep the night through. For in using deathly images of sleep as a solution for his anxieties about the body, he must grapple with his corresponding fantasy of enervation. Elsewhere in the same volume, the spectre of excessive 'peace', rest and leisure is exactly what troubles him. Ruskin is vexed by the possibility of becoming enervated, or deadened, by the leisure which comes of excessive 'peace', or passivity. In 1898, J. A. Hobson came to wonder how the 'refined emotional analysis' of Ruskin's earliest work, however 'mature' it was, seemed to contain no 'inkling of that work which in middle life he came to recognise as his supreme mission'.[153] But contra Hobson, we can suggest that we do find intimations of his later political turn in the discontent he already feels towards leisure as apathetic, however muffled. In a manuscript to *Modern Painters* vol. III, Ruskin later reflected that 'Theoria' is an essentially 'passive power', but passivity becomes from Ruskin both a problem and a solution in the second volume. (V.438) Ruskin reflects upon the 'continuance of national power and peace' that Britain had secured since the defeat of Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. Ruskin worries that the country's 'dependence on God may be forgotten, because the bread is given and the water sure'. 'Let us beware that our rest become not the rest of stones', Ruskin warns, for apathy can 'ossify' the heart, even if it does not 'torture' it. Signs of 'mortal decay' need be 'watched with anxiety, in all matters trivial, in all directions however distant'. (IV.30-31) After this talk of ossification, it is notable that the supporting instances of repose in art which Ruskin gives in this chapter are in stone sculpture. Ruskin attempts to avail himself of

[153] J. A. Hobson, *John Ruskin: Social Reformer* (London: James Nisbet, 1898), 21.

the stillness of sculptural depictions of rest to bolster his contemplative ideal; the hardness of the marble will help him defend his ideal from charges of lazy, fleshly escapism, but his admiration for these stony sleepers will also provoke anxiety about the deathliness of his vision of the good life.

Self-Composure: Silencing the Laocoon

Ruskin's subsequent investments in the chapter concern 'the rest of stones' in another sense: stone sculptures of resting figures. Beautiful representations of rest afford Ruskin the opportunity to stress the value of contemplative rest in a restless 'working age,' which values industry, productivity, and progress over stillness, contemplation, and leisure. (IV.29) In best being able to represent objects in space, as opposed to time, as Gotthold Ephraim Lessing famously argues in the *Laocoon* (1767), the works of visual art that Ruskin describes possess a frozen stillness about them that allows him to slow the drive of his onward pushing prose.[154] Yet the therapy Ruskin finds in his attempt to root himself in still points in a moving world is bound up with a more troubling fantasy of tranquilizing, rather than negotiating, turbulent emotion.[155] On the face of things, these depictions of sleep, rest, and death in marble and paint prove 'helpfully beautiful' to Ruskin. Yet in the same breath (or lack of it), Ruskin makes the solace he finds in stone sound like a more dangerous self-cure for discontent, which expresses a 'hatred of emotion' of the kind that Bion has related to the hatred 'of life itself'.[156] Through his desire for the peace he sees in 'the rest of stones', Ruskin risks ossifying his emotional life. Ruskin is as yet unable to make his instinctual conflicts, his 'disquietude' (to use the

[154] Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoon*, trans. Sir Robert Phillimore (London: Macmillan, 1874), 315.
[155] Patricia Pulham makes the case that sculpture was used by members of the Victorian aesthetic tradition, including Ruskin, to 'en-crypt' queer desires. Patricia Pulham, *The Sculptural Body in Victorian Literature: Encrypted Sexualities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 190.
[156] 'It is a short step from hatred of the emotions to hatred of life itself.' Bion, IV.150.

turbulence praised as the 'greatness' of the Gothic in *Stones*), work for him. (X.214) His ambivalence is as yet obstructive, rather than generative.

Stone sculptures at first appear to afford Ruskin moments to pause in contemplation and ease, and yet the same figures encourage him to express a hatred of emotional 'convulsions' and liveliness more generally, which all too easily slips into an idealisation of death that makes life appear as a fitful fever which one would best be rid of. (IV.199) Ruskin's disdain for disquietude tends to tell of the emotion it condemns. When Ruskin comes to discuss the supporting instances of repose in sculpture, his judgements are stonily severe. Ruskin argues that 'no work of art can be great' without the presence of repose and contrasts two statues: the 'Elgin Theseus' **(*Fig*. 1)** meaning the statue by the ancient sculptor Pheidias of a reclining figure, taken from the East pediment of the Parthenon, but now in the British Museum; and the famous Hellenistic sculpture of 'Laocoon and his Sons' now in the Vatican Museum, though Ruskin could have seen a plaster cast in the Royal Academy from 1816. **(*Fig*. 2)** Ruskin contrasts the noble 'calmness' of the former figure with the disgusting, as he sees it, 'convulsions' of the latter. (IV.199)

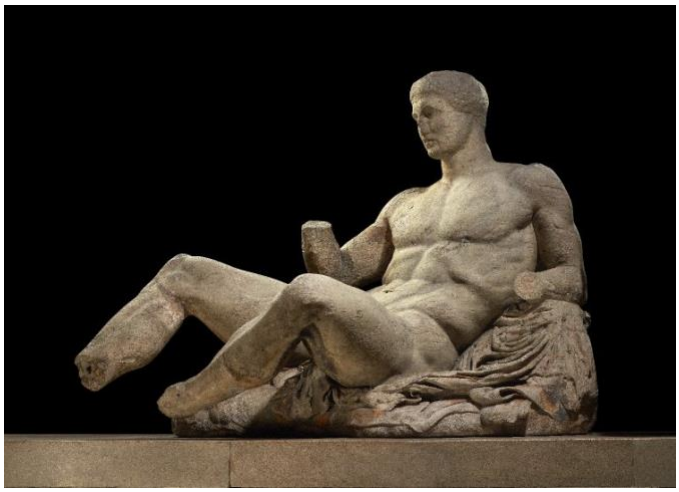


Fig. 1 Pheidias, *Reclining Figure*, Marble, 438BC-432BC, British Museum, London https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1816-0610-93.

That Ruskin is liable to perfectionistic thinking, as well as critical of it, is evident in the severity of his judgement against the Laocoon group, which he calls 'a subject ill-chosen, meanly conceived, and unnaturally treated'. (IV.120) The severity of Ruskin's opinion can be better comprehended by following up his reference to Johann Joachim Winckelmann's *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture* (1755), which he cites as an example of an opposingly positive assessment of the sculpture. (IV.120-121*) For Winckelmann, the 'distinctive characteristic' of an Ancient Greek masterpiece such as the Laocoon is the 'quiet grandeur' it possesses in 'posture and expression': 'Just as the depths of the sea always remain calm, however much the surface may rage, so does the expression of the Greeks reveal a great and composed soul even in the midst of passion'.[157] Winckelmann finds this exemplified in the way in which Laocoon is depicted as sighing, as opposed to crying out.[158] There is 'no sign of rage' on his face, though 'pain is revealed in all the muscles and sinews of his body,' most of all in the 'painful contraction of the abdomen'.[159]

[157] Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture* (1755) quoted in Stephen Cheeke, *Writing for Art: The Aesthetics of Ekphrasis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 163.
[158] Winckelmann, in Cheeke, 164.
[159] Ibid.



Fig. 2 *Cast of Laocoön and his Sons (Roman version of a lost Greek original),* Plaster cast, 1816, Royal Academy, London, https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/art-artists/work-of-art/laocoon-and-his-sons-roman-version-of-a-lost-greek-original.

Ruskin's rejection of Winckelmann's reading of the statue can be best understood in relation to his judgements in chap. XIV of vol. II, concerned with 'Vital Beauty', or the beauty of the human form. Here Ruskin claims that an artist's character can be best judged in the 'expressions' chosen in the depiction of the 'features and forms of men in fierce strife'; he further argues that 'expressions of fear and ferocity' are the most 'foul and detestable' in artistic depiction, though beloved most by 'minds cowardly and base'. (IV.200) Even though Laocoon shows not rage, his face expresses, even in Winckelmann's terms, 'an anxious [i.e. fearful] and troubled sighing'; Ruskin implicitly denies that the howl-sigh distinction matters.[160] A noble artist will represent calmed features: 'distress not agitated nor unworthy, though mortal', whereas an ignoble one

[160] Ibid. Cheeke discusses Ruskin later in the same chapter but not on the subject of the 'Laocoon' group; instead, he reads Ruskin on Turner's *The Slave Ship* (1840). Cheeke, 171-177.

will represent 'butchered agony'.[161] (IV.201) That Laocoon falls short of Ruskin's criterion, though the full representation of the Trojan priest's pain is somewhat stifled, should alert us to the extremity of Ruskin's predisposition towards the stillness of rest. Ruskin cannot yet comprehend 'laborious exertion' as anything but 'disgusting' in a way that will distinctly contrast with Hardy and Gosse's greater toleration of the acknowledgement and expression of ugly feelings. (IV.113)

The contrast between the 'Elgin Theseus' and the Laocoon group reveals how Ruskin finds both peace and severity in 'the rest of stones'. On the one hand, Ruskin finds self-composure ('self-command and self-possession') in the form of the 'Theseus', which shows a 'human soul | Consistent in self-rule', to requote the lines Ruskin takes from Wordsworth's *Excursion*. (IV.117*) In his 'meditation' on the statue's 'quietness', Ruskin finds 'heaven revealed' within himself. (IV.117*) At the same time, Ruskin's sense of the therapeutic potential of the experience, which depends upon internalising the wholeness and peace of the object he gazes upon, is undercut by his hatred of the emotion he wants to pacify.[162] In the antipathy he shows towards the unconstrained expression of fear, Ruskin betrays a fear of vulnerability and weakness. Ruskin wants to silence the Laocoon inside himself.

Ruskin's oscillation between severity and softness, between a perfectionistic hatred of vulnerability and a more generous tolerance towards 'tardy imagination, torpid capacity of emotion, [and] tottering steps of thought', gives credence to the criticisms I outlined at the start of this chapter, which bemoaned Ruskin's inability to

---

[161] Ruskin here gives the example of the famous sculpture of the Dying Gaul (or 'dying gladiator', as Ruskin calls it) a Roman copy of a Hellenistic bronze figure, in the Capitoline Museum, Rome. The Dying Gaul was originally going to be Ruskin's contrast with the 'Laocoon' statue, as Cook mentions in his notes to the Library Edition. Ruskin, IV.199n.3.

[162] This Kleinian language is used by Stokes in his reading of Ruskin's therapeutic experience of drawing the famous Aspen Tree episode in Ruskin's autobiography *Praeterita*: 'in the forms of an exterior perception Ruskin regained the measure of a good incorporated object'. Stokes, *Three Essays*, 45.

reach a nuanced middle-space in his work. (X.190, 191) The supposed relaxation of the 'Theseus' becomes too poised in its repose to be convincing. But before moving on to discuss Ruskin's liberatory use of dreaming to undo ambivalence, rather than merely repress it, I will first suggest how this primitive, repressive model of therapy reduces itself to absurdity in Ruskin's comments on Michelangelo in a footnote to the same chapter. In his interpretation of Michelangelo's 'Plague of the Fiery Serpents' (1511), Ruskin conflates poison with cure.

The 'Venom' in the Cure: Ruskin on Michelangelo's 'Plague of Fiery Serpents'

Ruskin's comments on Michelangelo's depiction of the 'Brazen Serpent' in the Sistine Chapel of the Vatican, suggest how the confusion between ill and remedy can be merely damaging, as opposed to productive, in a way that runs counter to much critical theory in the wake of Jacques Derrida, which has usually taken the conceptual ambiguity between cure and poison in literature and philosophy to be politically, morally, or intellectually useful. Derrida reflects on Socrates's description of the written word in Plato's *Phaedrus* as a *pharmakon*, which can mean both 'remedy and poison'—both aid to memory and an amnesiac philtre—which allows us to forget the knowledge which we would have otherwise had to keep in our own memory.[163] 'This charm,' Derrida writes,' this spellbinding virtue, this power of fascination, can be—alternately or simultaneously—beneficent or maleficent.'[164] Though Derrida is preoccupied with the fraught relationship between memory, meaningfulness and the written word, rather than the therapeutic power of visual art and literature in an emotional sense and the

[163] Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: The Athlone Press, 1981), 6-172, (70).
[164] Ibid. 105.

avoidance of reality, the spirit of his discussion has been useful to my formulation of the escapist predicament. But I diverge from the Derrideans in suggesting that it is only when Ruskin manages to *overcome* this unhelpful conflation of cure with poison that he comes closer to something approaching a sustainable therapy for discontent.

In his comments on Michelangelo, Ruskin finds a suggestive emblem for his therapeutic aspirations in the Old Testament story of the Nehushtan, or the Brazen Serpent, in the desensitizing effects (or 'numbness') induced by 'serpent venom'. (IV.120*) Ruskin contrasts the serpents in the Laocoon with the depiction of the Nehushtan, or the 'Plague of the Fiery Serpents' **(*Fig. 3*)** as he refers to it, which Michelangelo painted on the roof of the Sistine Chapel. Before setting out the stakes of Ruskin's contrast, it's worth reminding ourselves of the Biblical story, which is a religious vision of the curative potential of art. The Israelites are wandering in the desert and begin to complain of their situation:

> …the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. (Numbers 21.5)

God then punishes them for their complaints by sending 'fiery serpents' to plague them. (Numbers 21.6) The snakes bite the people, and many die from the venom, which causes the remaining Israelites to repent. Moses prays, and God instructs him to make a 'fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.' (Numbers 21.8) Moses follows these instructions, and makes a 'serpent of brass,' which cures the sufferers that look upon it. (Numbers 21.9) In the story, the representation of the ill—the snakes—is thus awarded

the homeopathic power to cure the ill; this fantasy of cure (and its failure) will be important to Hardy also. In representing image as antidote, the story becomes a possible allegory of art's therapeutic power to heal, which resonates with Ruskin's central preoccupations in *Modern Painters* vol. II.

Decades later in *The Queen of the Air* (1869), Ruskin reflects on ambivalent associations of the serpent as a poisonous horror and a 'worm of corruption', as well as 'a healing spirit,—the representative of Æsculapius, and of Hygieia'. (XIX.363-4) Both of these associations, curative and poisonous, bleed into each other in his gloss on Michelangelo's painting when Ruskin implies one can find 'repose' in his depiction of the strangulated, poisoned victims of the 'Fiery Serpents'. Ruskin claims that Michelangelo's painting possesses 'sources of sublimity entirely absent' in the sculpture of the frenzied 'death of the Dardan priest', for Michelangelo 'reaches after repose, and truthfully finds it' in his depiction of the limp hand of the constricted figure whose feet are closest to the foreground. (IV.120*) Michelangelo's snakes are slowly coiled around the bodies, Ruskin notes, rather than flailing around like 'pieces of tape' as in the Laocoon. (IV.120*)

Ruskin claims that Michelangelo better understands that a 'large serpent never wants to bite, it wants to hold':

> …it seizes once and for ever, and that before it coils; following up the seizure with a cast of its body round the victim […]: […] if the prey has any power of struggling left, it throws round another coil, without quitting the hold with the jaws. (IV.120*)

The pleasure Ruskin takes in his description is dependent upon a sadistic identification with the snakes over their victims. The 'repose' Ruskin finds in Michelangelo's painting is dependent upon his victims being less able to resist the serpents than in the Laocoon. 'If Laocoon had had to do with real serpents, […] he would have been held still,' Ruskin claims, 'and not allowed to throw his arms or legs about.' (IV.120*) Michelangelo manages to achieve the appearance of repose, which Ruskin so values, in rendering 'the binding of the arms to the body, and the knotting of the whole mass of agony together, until we hear the crashing of the bones beneath the grisly sliding of the engine folds.' (IV.120*) Michelangelo's painting thus becomes for Ruskin an allegory of his desire to strangulate unregulated affect, which the Laocoon fails to achieve to its discredit in Ruskin's view.[165]

[165] The strangulation of affect was Freud's first theory of the psychogenesis of conversion hysteria, see Freud and Breuer, II.17, 255.



Fig. 3 Michelangelo, *The Brazen Serpent*, Print, c. 1550, Royal Academy of Arts, London, https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/art-artists/work-of-art/the-brazen-serpent.

To top it all off, Ruskin further suggests that one can find repose in 'the torpor and cold numbness of the limbs induced by the serpent venom' in Michelangelo's painting. (IV.120*) The hatred of hedonism and sensuality that we find throughout the second volume of *Modern Painters*, which is clear in the disdainful tone in which Ruskin describes '*Æ*sthesis' as the 'mere animal consciousness of the pleasantness', has here become an investment in deadly *an*-aesthesia, for narcosis, for 'torpor and cold numbness'[166]. (IV.47, 120*) That Ruskin can find medicine for the mind in 'venom' shows how the conceptual pressure behind his idealisation of the contemplative life warps his interpretations of artworks in the volume. In the next section, however, I will

[166] Patricia Pulham has described the 'negat[ory]' effect of the Niobe statue on Lee, as described in 'The Child in the Vatican', as a kind of 'anaesthesia'. Patricia Pulham, *Art and the Transitional Object in Vernon Lee's Supernatural Tales* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 38.

suggest how Ruskin proceeds to find in depictions of sleep in particular, as opposed to rest or death, intimations of the workings of the dreaming mind, in which he will find a more generative therapy for discontent, which transforms ambivalence into ambiguity in a more helpful manner.

'Not death nor sleep, but the pure image of both': Dream Thinking at Ilaria's Tomb

In his reading of the 'Elgin Theseus', Ruskin paradoxically identifies repose with strenuous self-restraint; in his admiration for Michelangelo's 'Fiery Serpents', Ruskin entertains a fantasy of strangulating unwelcome affect. Now, however, I would like to turn to a point at which Ruskin loosens his grip a little, though not wholly—and thereby finds an opportunity for what I have termed *dream thinking* at the foot of a different stony sleeper. The example proves to be a more liberatory therapeutic use of art and literature. Turning to Jacopo della Quercia's marble sarcophagus of Ilaria del Carretto (c. 1406), which he visited many times in Lucca Cathedral throughout his life, Ruskin finds in the funereal sarcophagus the 'Sculpture of a Dream', as he later calls it. (XXXIV.172) In the sculpture, Ruskin finds power in passivity, and 'repose, not of inanition,' to use a distinction he makes elsewhere in vol. II *Modern Painters*, 'nor of luxury, nor of irresolution, but the repose of magnificent energy and being'. (IV.173) In his descriptions of the sculpture (***Fig. 4***), as well as of other dreamy artworks I will soon discuss, Ruskin implies that aesthetic contemplation is a state of passive power which allows for a kind of dream thinking while awake; in his encounter with the sculptural 'Dream' he also finds a way of converting his ambivalence into more generative ambiguity.



Fig. 4 Jacopo della Quercia, *Tomb of Ilaria del Carretto*, Marble, c. 1406, Lucca Cathedral, Lucca, Italy, in Ruskin, IV.122.

The notion that dreams are conducive to the psychological healing and development of the dreamer has a long history stretching back to antiquity, a fact Pater would later show himself sensitive to in *Marius the Epicurean* (1885).[167] Byron, who was a family favourite with the Ruskins (as I have already noted in the Introduction), thought dreams 'take [the] weight off our waking toils'.[168] The transformational character of dreams was testified to in such statements as that of Cathy in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, published the year after *Modern Painters* vol. II in 1847: 'I've dreamt in my life dreams that have stayed with me ever after, and changed my ideas; they've gone through and through me, like wine through water, and altered the colour of my mind.'[169] Ruskin finds dreams comparably psychically generative and allies dreaming with creativity.[170] In *Modern Painters* vol. III, Ruskin would call the 'pictorial

[167] Jennifer Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 9-10. Walter Pater, *Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas* (London: Macmillan, 1900[(1886]), I.42.
[168] Byron, 'The Dream' quoted in Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming*, 9.
[169] That the dream in question does not sufficiently influence Cathy to marry Heathcliffe is an irony which Ruskin's own doubts about the relationship between dreaming and acting will soon speak to. Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. John Bugg (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2020 [1847]), 69.
[170] For Victorian dream-writing as a 'generative matrix of imaginative self-discovery and invention', see Ankhi Mukherjee, "To Write Like a Dream: Nineteenth-Century Legacies," *Criticism* 61, no. 4 (Fall 2019): 509-526, 510.

art' the 'Art of Dreaming'. (VI.437) On using dreamy states to overcome ambivalence, however, Ruskin edges nearer to the vision of the psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion, notably influenced by the same Romantic passion for reverie, who puts dreaming at the centre of his conception of mental development:

> It used once to be said that a man had a nightmare because he had indigestion and that is why he woke up in a panic. My version is: The sleeping patient is panicked; because he cannot have a nightmare, he cannot wake up or go to sleep; he has had mental indigestion ever since.[171]

To the extent that an individual is unable to 'dream his emotional experience,' and thus 'unable to do unconscious psychological work,' claims Thomas Ogden in elaboration upon Bion, 'the individual is unable to change, or to grow, or to become anything other than he who he has been.'[172] Why? Because dreaming is 'the process by which we attribute personal symbolic meaning to our lived experience, and, in this sense, we dream ourselves and others into existence.'[173] The individual who cannot dream suffers from 'mental indigestion', in Bion's phrase, which stops them from making meaning of their experiences.

Ruskin also cultivates a capacity for dreaminess to overcome mental obstruction. In his descriptions of sleep and rest, I will claim Ruskin finds a more accommodating pattern of thought, which I call *dream thinking*, that allows him to evade the harsher

---

[171] Bion, XV.76 quoted in Thomas Ogden, *This Art of Psychoanalysis: Dreaming the Undreamt Dream and Interrupted Cries* (London: Routledge, 2005), 48-9. For Romantic influences upon Bion and the Object Relations tradition more generally, see Mary Jacobus, *The Poetics of Psychoanalysis: in the Wake of Klein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 148, 258.
[172] Ogden, *Art of Psychoanalysis*, 1-2.
[173] Thomas Ogden, *Rediscovering Psychoanalysis: Thinking and Dreaming, Learning and Forgetting* (London: Routledge, 2009), 28.

demands of perfectionistic self-censoring and the obstructive effects of ambivalence. Before I proceed to think about how this is achieved in Ruskin's prose, however, it's worth stopping to consider whether my phrase dream thinking is not a contradiction in terms. Jacqueline Rose notes that Freud vacillated on the degree to which he thought the mental process called dreaming could be accurately described as a form of thinking.[174] Freud claimed that the 'dream-work':

> …is not simply more careless, more irrational, more forgetful and more incomplete than waking thought; it is completely different from it qualitatively and for that reason not immediately comparable with it. It does not think, calculate or judge in any way at all; it restricts itself to giving things a new form. (Freud, V.507)

Yet Freud also called dreaming a 'peculiar *form* [sic] of thinking made possible by the conditions of the state of sleep.'[175] (Freud, V.506n) It is this second, more expansive use of the term *thinking,* as *the happening of mental life*, rather than deliberative ratiocination or conscious consideration, which I use here.[176] In fact, it is the very distance of dream thinking from conscious calculation and reasoned judgement which Ruskin finds valuable.[177]

---

[174] Jacqueline Rose, "'On Not Being Able to Sleep': Rereading *The Interpretation of Dreams*," in *On Not Being Able to Sleep: Psychoanalysis and the Modern World* (London: Vintage, 2003), 105-124, (105).
[175] Freud attributes to Aristotle the 'accurate but bald definition,' that 'a dream is thinking that persists (in so far as we are asleep) in the state of sleep.' Freud, V.550.
[176] Similarly, Donald Meltzer argues that 'the dreamer is a thinker'. Donald Meltzer, *Dream Life: A Re-examination of the Psychoanalytical Theory and Technique* (London: Karnac, 2009), 52.
[177] Mukherjee has explored how Victorian dream-writing 'invents itself a psychological curiosity, using dreaming as a modality of unintentional or even reluctant authorship.' Mukherjee, "To Write Like a Dream," 510.

Dream thinking proves corrective for the perfectionistic mindset on the following grounds. Andrew H. Miller has usefully described the severer forms of Victorian moralism as suffering from a kind of insomnia of the moral life, which requires individuals to 'sleeplessly monitor and correct' themselves.[178] In contemporary psychological studies, the hypervigilance of the perfectionist has been correlated with 'all-or-nothing', 'black-and-white dichotomous thinking', and the inability to tolerate uncertainty.[179] But in dreams, as Freud recognized, the Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction is on the contrary suspended: something can be both *x* and *not x* at the same time.

> Dreams are disconnected, they accept the most violent contradictions without the least objection, they admit impossibilities, they disregard knowledge which carries great weight with us in the daytime, they reveal us as ethical and moral imbeciles. (Freud, V.54)

Dream thinking is thus comparable to what Keats called 'Negative Capability', the ability to tolerate 'uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason', or we might say *certainty*.[180] Dream thinking thus deprives the perfectionistic of the mental armoury—dichotomous thinking, definite conceptions of good and bad, excessive self-censorship—that they use against themselves and others.

---

[178] Miller, *Burdens of Perfection*, 3.
[179] Andrew P. Hill, "Conceptualising Perfectionism: An Overview and Unresolved Issues," in *The Psychology of Perfectionism in Sport, Dance, and Exercise*, ed. Andrew P. Hill (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 3-30, (5). Nicholas W. Affrunti and Janet Woodruff-Borden, "Perfectionism and Anxiety in Children," in *The Psychology of Perfectionism: Theory, Research, Applications* ed. Joachim Stoeber (London: Routledge, 2018), 113-113, (126). M. M. Smith et al, "The Perniciousness of Perfectionism: A Meta-Analytic Review of the Perfectionism–Suicide Relationship," *Journal of Personalised Medicine* 86 (2018): 522–542, 523.
[180] John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats 1814–1821*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), I.193.

A willingness to be ignorant, rather than omniscient, becomes a virtue here. Ruskin planned to write an essay on 'The Uses of Ignorance', though he later abandoned it, and his dream depictions stress the uses of ignorance by submerging his readers in a cloud of unknowing, where contraries bind and blend together.[181] In such a hypnagogic state, resolution cannot be willed on towards completion in the manner the perfectionistic superego characteristically desires. Much in the spirit of the folk wisdom that claims that one should first "sleep on" a problem, rather than attempt to resolve it immediately, Ruskin finds in the experience of dreaminess a way of allowing the unconscious to shift, sort, and sift through psychological conflict in a passive, rather than an active fashion. Ruskin thereby finds a model of human development as an unconscious and unwilled process of unfolding, which cannot be deliberately willed on in the manner the perfectionistic thinker desires and therefore cannot be subject to tyrannical moral demands.

We find a use for our ignorance in Ruskin's description of della Quercia's Ilaria. Ruskin suggests we might find a 'lesson' if we contemplate the 'monument' in an 'exulting, reverent, and grateful' spirit: a 'lesson in love'. (IV.124, 113) However gentle sounds a 'lesson in love', we might be sceptical that an escape from perfectionistic thinking could come in the form of a 'lesson' at all. That Ruskin calls the experience a 'lesson', however, should not lead us into thinking that the experience is therefore narrowly didactic. John Holloway's canonical study *The Victorian Sage* (1953) can help us here. Though he does not include Ruskin in his study, Holloway claims that the genre of sage-writing to which Ruskin belongs cannot be reduced to any 'narrowly

[181] Cf. Ruskin, XI.xxiii, XXXV.561. Dinah Birch, *Our Victorian Education* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2008), 68.

paraphrasable meaning'; instead, sagely prose requires consideration of its 'whole texture' to determine its value.[182]

If one considers the 'whole texture' of Ruskin's description of Ilaria, one finds more than a simple didactic 'lesson', in which a moral of the sculpture is simply swallowed whole. This is no severe 'schooling of the stubborn mind', to quote a phrase from one of Arnold's poems.[183] Instead, one gets an opportunity to dream, and this requires a relaxation of the will to know. Ruskin's tone sounds more maternal than teacherly. Earlier in the volume, Ruskin had described one of the 'healthy and beneficial operation[s]' of art as lying in its capacity to sing a spectator 'to sleep with baby murmurings', and here he verges on lulling his readers to sleep. (IV.28) Ekprasis thus becomes for Ruskin a dream vision inspired by a maternal reverie. 'She is lying on a simple couch with a hound at her feet', Ruskin begins, 'not on one side, but with the head laid straight and simply on the hard pillow':

> The hair is bound in a flat braid over the fair brow, the sweet and arched eyes are closed, the tenderness of the loving lips is set and quiet: there is that about them which forbids breath; something which is not death nor sleep, but the pure image of both. The hands are not lifted in prayer, neither folded, but the arms are laid at length upon the body, and the hands cross as they fall. The feet are hidden by the drapery, and the forms of the limbs concealed, but not their tenderness. (IV.123)

[182] John Holloway, *The Victorian Sage* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1965), 10.
[183] Matthew Arnold, 26, "Resignation: To Fausta," in *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, ed. Kenneth Allott and Miriam Allott (London: Longman, 1979), 12-20, (13).

It is first worth noting how the ekphrastic encounter supports Ruskin's vision of the contemplative life. In 'staying for a time beside this tomb', one does not idle, but 'receive[s] such a lesson of love as no coldness could refuse', Ruskin claims. The spectator does not idle by awarding the tomb their 'Theoretic' attention; their rest is justified, as it assists their moral education. Staying awhile by the sculpture, Ruskin carves a place for contemplation in the 'working age' of the industrious nineteenth century, in which the majority act as if 'Sight, Thought, and Admiration were all profitless' (IV.29); moral progress happens, even while the rest of life is put on hold, in a moment of leisure.

What is more, our anxieties about deadening enervation are quelled because life, sleep, and death blend together in the passage, which helps support Ruskin's claims for the 'perfect happiness' of a contemplative life. For Ilaria's rest is 'something which is not death nor sleep, but the pure image of both.' Yet dreams, in showing the *activity* of a seemingly *inactive* state such as sleep, becomes a figure for the contemplative life, which though *inactive* and *unenergetic* in a physical sense, is nonetheless an *energeia*, an *activity*, in the Aristotelian sense.[184] Depictions of dreaming sleepers, physically passive and yet mentally active, are useful to Ruskin because they suggest the possibility of productive activity within apparent passivity. Like dreaming, Ruskin wants to claim that 'Theoria', the contemplation of natural and artistic beauty, though apparently idle and profitless, is in fact similarly *generative* of moral virtue and an *activity* that fulfils the 'function' of human life: that of being a 'witness to the glory of God'.[185] (IV.28-29) Dreaming supports his attempt to do so.

---

[184] Cf. Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man*, 48.

[185] Though Ruskin's terminology is neo-Aristotelian, the ancient philosopher distinguishes between the 'levels of activity' in conscious contemplation and dreaming, as Lear elucidates: 'When one is contemplating, one's knowledge is active, whereas when one is not, one's knowledge is an ability to

But how does Ruskin's prose cultivate reverie in his readers, and help them dream? Earlier in the volume, Ruskin claimed that 'the keenness of our vision is to be tested by the expansiveness of our love' and it would be right to say that his description of the tomb is accordingly patient and loving in the attention it awards. (IV.75) Yet, at the same time, there is something in the passage that challenges the common understanding that attention ('keenness of […] vision') is in its essence *wakeful*. For to be awake to Ruskin's paradoxes—that 'something' can be neither 'death nor sleep, but the pure image of both'; that 'limbs' can be 'concealed, but not their tenderness'— is to be asleep to the principle of non-contradiction. The closeness we're invited to replicate here is clearly not the immediacy of an intense interrogation, but the proximity of intimacy.[186] The airy vagueness of Ruskin's phrase 'there is that about them',––which seems to just stop from tripping over itself with its syllabic preponderance of *th*s,––is not elucidated by the following clause, which can only describe in terms of the negative: 'something which is not death nor sleep'. This echoes Ruskin's prior apophatic description of God as a being supreme and sublime but 'incapable' of 'surprise', 'labour', and 'volition' for that very reason. Nor does the following clause clarify, which paradoxically argues that though it neither represents sleep nor death, it is the 'pure image' of them both.

In his description of Ilaria, Ruskin attempts to induce a state of dreaminess in his readers which weakens their ability to discern good from bad in harsh contrast. Because Ruskin finds this dreaminess in the patient observation of artworks, the concept of attention, whether critical or contemplative, comes under pressure in this

become active – to contemplate – if one wishes. By analogy, organisms live at differing levels of activity. When awake they are actively living, when asleep they remain alive but are only minimally exercising the powers of life.' Jonathan Lear, *Aristotle: the Desire to Understand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 96-97.

[186] Cf. Eagleton quoted in Boxall, *Value of the Novel*, 4.

manoeuvre. Can one be attentive to drowsiness, and awake to dreaminess? In his descriptions of Ilaria, Ruskin teasingly half-satisfies and half-frustrates the perfectionistic striving after certainty and exactitude. Before, Ruskin claimed that the statue 'furnish[es] an instance of the exact and right mean between the rigidity and rudeness of the earlier monumental effigies, and the morbid imitation of life, sleep, or death, of which the fashion has taken place in modern times.' (IV.122) Is Ilaria dead (bad), or merely resting (good)? Ruskin's soothing response is that she is the 'pure image' of both, and this paradox allows for a kind of mental liberation from the ambivalent dichotomies that have marked the second volume of *Modern Painters* thus far: ideal versus denigrated, contemplative versus active, spiritual versus bodily. If her purity would seem to play into a perfectionistic scheme of values, the dreamy atmosphere works against harsh judgements.

Ruskin manages to overcome his anxieties about sexual embodiment by way of the muted eroticism of the description, in which spirit, flesh and stone associatively intertwine with one another. The satisfying frustrations, or frustrating satisfactions, that Ruskin offers his readers take on an erotic character, which the dreaminess of the passage affords him moral latitude enough to explore. Dreaminess has its use for Ruskin in moving his readers into a virtual play space, which decreases moral urgency and therefore psychic tension.[187] Contradictory desires, sensual and spiritual, become confused and conflated in the passage: on the one hand the 'tenderness of the loving lips' would seem to call out for a kiss; on the other hand, 'there is that about them which forbids [even] breath'. Ruskin leaves it open as to whether the lips forbid Ilaria from breathing, or whether *our* lips are forbidden from breathing. Unlike the confusion

[187] For virtuality in Victorian literature, see Tim Gao, *Virtual Play and the Victorian Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 2-4, *passim*.

between cure and poison in the Michelangelo footnote, these ambiguities are gentler in character. The dreaminess of the passage allows Ruskin to have his kiss and keep it.

In undoing rigidly dichotomous, perfectionistic patterns of thought, Ruskin's dream thinking will eventually undermine the contemplative ideal it here supports: the inflexible active-contemplative dichotomy of *Modern Painters* vol. II will give way to more nuanced negotiations in his later works. In the next section, I will chart how Ruskin theoretically integrates the virtues of the active life with those of the contemplative, and uses the generative ambiguities of dreaming to do so.

Dreaming with Dante: Ruskin's Active Contemplative Lives

In 1900, Vernon Lee praised Ruskin as having possessed in his maturity an 'attitude towards life' that was 'active' but at the same time 'contemplative.'[188] The terms reverse Lee's earlier characterisation of Ruskin's corpus as chiefly marked by conflict, rather than harmony, which I quoted earlier. Lee's maturer judgement reflects a process of hard-won maturation in Ruskin's own life and thought.[189] In this section, I will chart how one depiction of dreaming, Dante Alighieri's dream of Leah and Rachel in Canto XXVII of the *Purgatorio*, helped Ruskin envisage an integration of the virtues of the contemplative life and active life and overcome the obstructive ambivalence he felt towards both activity and passivity. To paint the episode, Ruskin commissioned Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who went on to produce the painting that we now know as *Dante's*

[188] Vernon Lee, "Ruskin as Reformer," 303.
[189] Lee likely found precedent for her own characterisation in Robert de la Sizeranne's depiction of Ruskin as a 'dreamer' but also 'a man of action'. Robert de la Sizeranne, *Ruskin and the Religion of Beauty* trans. the Countess of Galloway (London: George Allen, 1899 [1897]), 24. Robert de la Sizeranne, *Ruskin et la religion de la beauté* (Paris: Hachette, 1897), 11-57. Cf. Richard A. Macksey, "Proust on the Margins of Ruskin," in *The Ruskin Polygon* ed. John Dixon Hunt and Faith M. Holland (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), 172-197, (173). Cheeke, *Transfiguration*, 7.

Vision of Rachel and Leah (1855; ***Fig.*** 6).[190] Scholars have tended to look to Ruskin's time teaching with Rossetti at the Working Men's College in Fifties as inspiring Ruskin's move towards better considering the relations between leisurely learning and manual labour, and intellectual and aesthetic contemplation and political activism—though, as David M. Craig has argued, it's important to remember that Ruskin began turning from 'theoretic contemplation to practical activity,' even as early as *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849), in its consideration of human 'effort'.[191] I will demonstrate in this section, however, how Ruskin used Dante's dream to self-consciously generate this shift in his own vision of what a well-lived life consists of.

Ruskin reflects on Dante's dream in vol. III of *Modern Painters*, which was published in 1856, and uses the poem to suggest that one can find different forms of 'felicity' in the 'Active life' and the 'Contemplative life', as well as different forms of discontent and 'imperfect happiness' in both too. (V.278) Before Dante enters the terrestrial paradise, he rests 'on a step of shelving rock' and watches the stars before falling asleep, and dreams the following dream:

> "A lady, young and beautiful, I dreamed,
> Was passing o'er a lea; and, as she came,
> Methought I saw her ever and anon
> Bending to cull the flowers; and thus she sang:
> 'Know ye, whoever of my name would ask,

[190] Virginia Surtees, *The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828- 1882): a Catalogue Raisonné* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 74. Maggie Berg, "John Ruskin's Definition of D. G. Rossetti's Art," *Victorian Poetry* 20, no. 3 (Fall 1982): 103-112, 104.
[191] William Henderson, *John Ruskin's Political Economy* (London: Routledge, 2000), 9. Craig, *Ethics of Consumption*, 72. Hilton, however, argues that Ruskin was unencumbered by the practical problems of the architectural profession in writing *Seven Lamps*. Hilton, *EY*, 105.

> That I am Leah; for my brow to weave
> A garland, these fair hands unwearied ply;
> To please me at the crystal mirror, here
> I decked me. But my sister Rachel, she
> Before her glass abides the livelong day,
> Her radiant eyes beholding, charmed no less
> That I with this delightful task. Her joy
> In contemplation, as in labour mine.'"[192]

Ruskin recognises that 'the vision of Rachel and Leah has been always, and with unquestionable truth, received as a type of the Active and Contemplative life', but proceeds to compare and contrast them with two other representatives of the virtues of the active and contemplative lives in the *Divine Comedy*: 'the unwearied spirit of Matilda,' that is the Countess Matilda of Tuscany, who was famed for her 'ceaseless activity, her brilliant political genius, her perfect piety, and her deep reverence for the see of Rome' in the eleventh century; and 'Beatrice,' Dante's beloved and his allegory for theology in the poem. (V.278, 277)

While the two pairs are often compared with each other, Ruskin says Dante introduces a crucial distinction in the dream:

> Leah gathers the flowers to decorate *herself*, and delights in *Her Own* Labour. Rachel sits silent, contemplating herself, and delights in *Her Own* Image. These are the types of the Unglorified Active and Contemplative powers of Man. But

[192] Dante, 97-110, XXVII*, Purgatorio*, trans. Henry Francis Carey, quoted in Ruskin, V.277-8

> Beatrice and Matilda are the same powers, Glorified. And how are they Glorified? Leah took delight in her own labour; but Matilda—"in operibus *manuum Tuarum*"—*in God's labour*: Rachel in the sight of her own face; Beatrice in the sight of *God's face*. [Ruskin's italicisations] (V.278)

Ruskin manages to negotiate his earlier idealisation of contemplation and disparagement of action by distinguishing between anthropocentric, narcissistic ways of living and a theocentric life lived in relation to God. 'Dante distinguishes in both cases,' Ruskin tells us, 'not between earth and heaven,'—nor really between the active and contemplative over severely, we can add—'but between perfect and imperfect happiness, whether in earth or heaven.' (V.278)

If this new settlement seems to resolve Ruskin's conceptual discontents in vol. II, it does not at first seem to correspond with the dream thinking I have already identified and valued in Ruskin's writing. Has Ruskin not merely swapped over one rigid either/or (contemplation or action) for another (self-centred or religiously orientated)? I would argue no—for Ruskin stresses how Matilda's 'ceaseless activity' is not thoughtless, but prayerful, which shows how the contemplative life imbues the active life for both the Victorian sage and the medieval poet. Matilda's 'first address to Dante', Ruskin reminds us, 'is to prevent him from wondering at her, saying "if he will remember the verse of the ninety-second Psalm, beginning 'Delectasti,' he will know why she is so happy."' (V.277) The relevant lines run: 'Thou, Lord, hast made me glad *through Thy works*. I will triumph *in the works of Thy hands*[.]' [Ruskin's italicisation] (V.277; Psalm 92:4) Dante needs to have reflected on the Psalm to comprehend Matilda's actions, which suggests how the contemplative and active mutually sustain each other.



Fig. 5 Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Dante's Vision of Rachel and Leah*, Watercolour on paper, 1855, Tate Britain, London https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/rossetti-dantes-vision-of-rachel-and-leah-n05228.

We feel another misgiving, however, when Ruskin claims that the active life is 'not perfectly' happy because 'it has only the happiness of the dream, belonging essentially to the dream of human life, and passing away with it'; Ruskin uses 'dream' in the disparaging sense as something futile and transitory, a move which seems strange given Dante's dream has just given Ruskin what he takes to be genuine knowledge about the nature of life on earth and heaven. (V.279) This contraction suggests again, as with the Ilaria description, why we cannot comprehend the import of Ruskin's prose in terms of a mere 'lesson' with a clear teachable moral—that we must love God, and refrain from selfishness; or that 'all perfect active life [is] "the expression of man's delight in God's work;"'—we need instead to think about what escapes such a narrow paraphrasable reduction: its dreaminess. (V.279) Matilda is 'first seen gathering flower

from flower,' Ruskin tells us, '"passing continually the multitudinous through her hands,"'—what to make of this detail? (V.277) The motions of Matilda's hands allegorise a kind of psychic sifting, an interweaving of unconscious associations, which recalls a person turning the leaves of a book.[193] Matilda gathers '*flower* from *flower* [my italics]', Ruskin tells us, and uses the same word to refer to the flower specifically, and the plant metonymically. Matilda takes flowers, i.e., the petalled part and its stem, from the plants, which we often call "flowers" when referring to the whole plant. This difference in sameness, or sameness in difference, acts like Ilaria's state of being neither dead nor asleep, but the 'pure image' of both. Ruskin transforms an ambivalence into an ambiguity.

Matilda offers Dante in the poem, as Ruskin offers us in his prose, maternal preoccupation in the form of reverie, whereby psychic materials are sifted and transformed. (cf. Winnciott, V.186; Bion, IV.303) Ruskin was infamously derided as a 'mad governess' by critics of his economic interventions, but we should not let that prevent us from seeing the strength and value of his maternal identifications, which come through in this passage.[194] Ruskin's paternalism is often implicitly a queer *maternalism*. In attempting to capture a child's 'sense of his thoughts being "sorted" by a mind capable of understanding and holding his mental states', the psychoanalyst Margot Waddell looked to J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1911), in which Mrs Darling is said to tidy 'up her children's minds' overnight while they are sleeping.[195] 'If you could keep

[193] Cf. Christopher Bollas, "Dissemination," *Cracking Up: The Work of Unconscious Experience* (London: Routledge, 1995), 48-70.
[194] For the 'mad governess' comment, see Dinah Birch and Francis O'Gorman, "Introduction," to *Ruskin and Gender*, ed. Dinah Birch and Francis O'Gorman (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 1-9, (3).
[195] Margot Waddell, *Inside Lives: Psychoanalysis and the Growth of the Personality* (London: Routledge, 2019), 35.

awake,' Barrie's narrator says to his child readership in the quoted passage, 'you would see your mother doing this':

> It is quite like tidying drawers. […] When you wake in the morning, the naughtiness and evil passions with which you went to bed have been folded-up small and placed at the bottom of your mind; and on the top, beautifully aired, are spread out your prettier thoughts, ready for you to put on.[196]

Ruskin offers us his own allegory in the floral rearrangements of Matilda, as well as in Dante's second baptism by her hands in 'the stream of Lethe,'

> …so as to make him forget all sin, and all sorrow; throwing her arms around him, she plunges his head under the waves of it; then draws him through, crying to him, "hold me, hold me" (*tiemmi, tiemmi*), and so presents him, thus bathed, free from all painful memory, at the feet of the spirit of the more heavenly contemplation. (V.279)

The spiritual transformation cannot but recall the ordinary bath times of the infant and mother dyad. Though Dante is the one made vulnerable, it is Matilda who cries *to him* "hold me, hold me," which translates his need for her presence and assistance into a containing command of her own.

The therapy Ruskin finds in this dream scene allows him to harmonise the virtues of the active and contemplative life, as well as mostly overcome his former

[196] J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan* (London: Everyman, 1911), 12, quoted in Waddell, *Inside Lives*, 35.

ambivalence. Dante's 'stream of Lethe' offers a fantasy of leaving 'all sin, and all sorrow' behind. Ruskin attempts to suggest that this flight from sorrow is not a narcissistic retreat into futile fantasy, however, by stressing that all modes of life need to be lived *in relation* to God. All the same, the Lethe-cure is notably a preparation for heaven, not imagined as a route for the earthly happiness, and in the subsequent sections I will demonstrate how Ruskin, in reapproaching these themes in *Modern Painters* vol. V and later in *Fors Clavigera*, does not want to rid himself of all ambivalence because he acknowledges the political uses of internal disharmony as a spur to activism. In Ruskin's later works, he makes himself into an ambivalent escapist.

Consolation Anxiety: Turner's Worm

Ruskin's investment in dreaming naturally leads to a preoccupation with the perils of an 'ineffective dreaming', which 'disdain[s] ordinary truth, and seek[s] to alter it so as to fit the fancy of the beholder,' as he put it in vol. III *Modern Painters*, and an anxiety that an overreliance upon wish-fulfilment might not help us face life. (V.100) Ruskin's response to this problem is to develop a form of aesthetic reflection that combines the affordances of reverie with those of the frustrations of rumination. In the final volume of *Modern Painters* (1860), Ruskin reflects on the ways in which Turner, though a 'dream-gifted' painter in the phrase from the penultimate volume, withholds the immediate gratifications of wish-fulfilment from the spectator in his painting of the contest of 'Apollo and Python', exhibited in 1811. (VII.42; ***Fig. 5***) The painting offers us another allegory of the curative, consoling power of art, like the Nehushtan, but Ruskin is clearer this time as to as its limitations. In the painting, Python, whose name Ruskin glosses as meaning '"THE CORRUPTER"', curls vanquished about a tree trunk. (VIII.420) Apollo has won the contest, which Ruskin interprets as allegorically as 'the strife of

purity with pollution; of life, with forgetfulness; of love, with the grave':

> I believe this great battle stood, in the Greek mind, for the type of the struggle of youth and manhood with deadly sin—venomous, infectious, irrecoverable sin. In virtue over this corruption, Apollo becomes thenceforth the guide; the witness; the purifying and helpful God; the other gods help waywardly, whom they choose. But Apollo helps always: he is by name not only Pythian, the conqueror of death; but Pæan—the healer of the people. (VIII.420)

In representing Apollo's victory over the Python, then, Turner could have painted us an 'imaginary state, in which pain and imperfection' no longer exist, to quote a passage from much earlier in *Modern Painters*. (V.104) We could have savoured the destruction of our enemy, and bathed in the glorious light of Apollo, our 'helpful God', who has made all right with us in Eden now. But Turner refuses us the full relish of our fantastic gratification, Ruskin registers with regretful respect, for he paints 'a smaller serpent-worm rising out' of the slain dragon's carcass. (VIII.420) 'Alas, for Turner!' Ruskin cries, for he was ultimately 'without hope.' (VIII.420-1) But Ruskin might as well have cried the same for himself and us: for the 'death-worm' acts as a memento mori to us all, even as it gnaws away at a vanquished enemy: 'This smaller serpent-worm, it seemed, he could not conceive to be slain. In the midst of all the power and beauty of nature, he still saw this death-worm writhing among the weeds.' (VIII.420) Turner has refused to be our saving angel. For all the hopes of panacea that Apollo conjures up for us, our fantasies of total cure are ultimately confounded. Turner's surviving serpent thus serves Ruskin as a useful symbol for the ways in which art can never be wholly reduced to wish-fulfilment, nor should be.



Fig. 6 Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Apollo and Python*, 1811, Oil paint on canvas, Tate Britain, London, https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-apollo-and-python-n00488.

But that Turner and Ruskin both flirt with the notion that the painter *might* have seemingly offered us a fantastic panacea suggests the strength of the desire for total hallucinatory satisfaction in both. In Ruskin, the disappointment of this desire throws him yet again into a state of ambivalence, and, crucially, he cannot yet tell just how productive this ambivalence is going to be for him or us, whether psychologically, morally, or politically. The smallness of the worm in relation to the slain dragon might support the homeopathic conception of art as the small dose of truth within a sweet cordial of illusion. But the sharpness of the shock which Ruskin experiences upon realising evil in fact remains unvanquished in the painting suggests death is still having the last laugh. We have been given a dose of reality along with our fantasy, but it still risks aggravating us more than it aids us. We feel the disappointment all the more bitterly because our hopes of a panacea have been raised and crushed. It might have been better to have never hoped at all.

Ruskin's uncertainty as to the therapeutic potential of this shock is evident in his description of Turner's being 'without hope' as his being without 'cruel Pandora's gift'. (VIII.421) In Hesiod, Zeus punishes humanity by giving Pandora a jar which, if opened will release various evils into the world; Pandora does so, and all escapes out the jar apart from hope; later in the century, Nietzsche would claim that Christians could only misunderstand Hesiod's bleaker meaning—that hope is 'blind and deceitful', and so was an evil like the other evils that escaped the jar.[197] Turner, as Ruskin would recall, wrote a poem called 'The Fallacies of Hope'. (cf. Ruskin, XIII.159) If hope is a 'cruel' gift, why *should* anyone want it? As both gift and punishment, 'Pandora's gift' encapsulates in antitype the possibly 'cruel' gift that Turner gives to us, that of hopelessness.

It seems like we're back in the Derridean hinterland in which cure and ill, curse and blessing, gift and injury, have all become one. But in vol. V of *Modern Painters* at least, Ruskin is more open about his reaching aporia than he allows himself to be in vol. II: 'I would have tried here to enter into some examination of the right and worthy effect of beauty in Art upon human mind,' Ruskin writes, 'if I had myself been able to come to demonstrable conclusions. But the question is so complicated with that of the enervating influence of all luxury, that I cannot get it put into any tractable compass.' (VIII.423) Ruskin is *self-conscious* about the limitations of aesthetic culture not in the embarrassed, defensive manner of vol. II—which protested too much in its claim that art is not 'relief of the ennui of boudoirs', and so on—but in the more intellectually capacious sense of that word as *self-aware*. The dubious pleasures of idealisation have been denied, and Ruskin is able to air his ambivalence in a frank manner.

[197] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982 [1881]), 27.

What comes of this? Ruskin's greater frankness allows him to work through his ambivalence towards the contemplative life (which we might call with greater ease*, the contemplative-aesthetic life*, were we to ignore Ruskin's 'Theoretic' / '*Æ*sthetic' distinction) and the active life to greater progress from around 1860 onwards. When Ruskin returns to scenes of dreaming after this point, he finds a psychic space free from excessive wish fulfilment and yet sufficiently liberated from the principle of non-contradiction that he can work through his ambivalences about the contemplative-active dichotomy, and the satisfactions of culture more broadly.

Ruskin's 'Habit of Harmony' and the Uses of Ambivalence

In *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain* (1871-1878, 1880-1884), Ruskin's use of dream thinking to transform ambivalence into ambiguity faces a clear crisis when he perceives that ambivalence can have politically productive, as opposed to merely psychically obstructive, consequences. The settlement he reaches in vol. III of *Modern Painters* as regards the relative virtues of the active and contemplative lives also comes under considerable strain. Ruskin subsequently attempts to live a more useful life of political action directed against the ills of the world; he devises plans to irrigate rivers, build roads, and clean streets.[198] In *Fors*, as Francis O'Gorman has argued, 'committed labour' becomes identified with the 'foundation for moral health' and the 'reason for living'.[199] As Ruskin becomes increasingly animated by political and social failings, which he thinks require urgent redress, he also becomes more anxious that theory necessitate practice. Linda M. Austin

[198] Hilton, *LY*, 164-5, 265-7, 271-2, 291-4. Francis O'Gorman, *Late Ruskin: New Contexts* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 66-70. Dinah Birch, "Introduction," to *John Ruskin, Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain* ed. Birch (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), xxxiii-xlix, (xxxv-xxxvii, xxxviii-xl). Robert Hewison, *Ruskin and Oxford: The Art of Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 18, 24-26.
[199] O'Gorman, *Late Ruskin*, 88.

finds a radical shift in Ruskin's writing after 1869, which she reads as arising from a new 'effort to be practical' and 'rupture language into some kind of action.'[200] What role can dream thinking have in all this?

In 'The Abbot's Chapel,' being Letter 11 of *Fors*, Ruskin sardonically echoes his earlier complaint in vol. II *Modern Painters* about the 'working age' of the nineteenth century, in which most act as if 'Sight, Thought, and Admiration were all profitless' when he declares that 'nearly every problem of State policy and economy, […] consists in some device for persuading […] labourers to go and dig-up dinner for us reflective and æsthetical persons, who like to sit still, and think, or admire.' (IV.29; XXVII.184) Ruskin then proceeds to recount the fruits of our inaction. While waiting on a railway station platform, after spending the day in admiring contemplation of Furness Abbey with friends, Ruskin sees 'a party of workmen' scurry drunkenly onto a train 'in brown rags':

> [We] were all in a very virtuous and charitable temper: we had had an excellent dinner at the new inn, and had earned that portion of our daily bread in admiring the Abbey all the morning. So we pitied the workmen doubly––first, for being so wicked as to get drunk at four in the afternoon; and secondly for being employed in work so disgraceful as throwing up clods of earth into an embankment, instead of spending the day, like us, in admiring the Abbey… (XXVII.182-3)

Ruskin's self-ironizing tone is telling of an inability to criticise the drunken 'wicked'-ness of the workers from a standpoint of moral superiority, in greater awareness of how

[200] Austin, *Practical Ruskin*, xi, 1.

the comfortable means required for the bourgeois contemplative life requires one to live off the labour of others. Ruskin's discontent with the inactivity of contemplation prefigures the Marxist tradition's problem with aesthetics tout court. Contemplation might induce feelings of a 'very virtuous and charitable temper', but it does not seem to lead to any practical action.

Ruskin attempts to enlist his ambivalence in order to force theory into praxis, however. Ruskin declares in the first letter of *Fors*, 'I will put up with this state of things, passively, not an hour longer'. (XXVII.13) Ruskin proclaims himself unable to carry on a leisurely contemplative life in light of these evils:

> I am not an unselfish person, nor an Evangelical one; I have no particular pleasure in doing good; neither do I dislike doing it so much as to expect to be rewarded for it in another world. But I simply cannot paint, nor read, nor look at minerals, nor do anything else that I like, […] because of the misery that I know of, and see signs of, where I know it not, which no imagination can interpret too bitterly. (XXVII.13)

The life of a 'retiring romantic dreamer', in the words of Judith Stoddart, is no longer morally or psychologically viable for him.[201] Ruskin's 'habit of harmony', which 'feels distant evil as discordant with good at hand' as an aesthetic as well as a moral offence, is the 'deepest basis of Ruskin's hopes for social improvement', Lee convincingly argues in 'Ruskin as a Reformer'; the letter substantiates her claim.[202] Ruskin cannot harmoniously relate himself to the world, nor can he harmonise the perfection of one's

[201] Judith Stoddart, *Ruskin's Culture Wars: Fors Clavigera and the Crisis of Victorian Liberalism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 23.
[202] Lee, "Ruskin as Reformer,"314.

theoretical faculties achieved through study with Christian service to others, or stewardship of the natural environment. Ruskin resorts to would-be performative speech acts to attempt to will a greater perfection out of chaos. Ruskin's excessive repetition of the first-person pronoun––*I… I… I…*––creates a sense of egocentric absorption that performs the sense that he is not an 'unselfish person'. Ruskin makes his proposed political action all the more persuasive to his readership, for he demands no saintliness from them. Selfishness is no longer disavowed, but self-confessed. Ruskin frames the crisis in personal terms in a manner that provokes the reader to reflect upon their own shortcomings all the more profoundly. One asks oneself: *Am I not as equally complicit in negligent passivity in the face of the same 'misery', while sitting here reading this letter?* With productive provocation, Ruskin makes his readers feel the guiltiness of their guilty pleasures in a way that (ideally) spurs them into action.



Fig. 7 Vittore Carpaccio, *The Dream of St Ursula*, c. 1460, Oil on canvas, Gallerie Accademia, Venice, https://www.gallerieaccademia.it/en/dream-ursula.

Dreaming of St Ursula

With all these wakeful calls to action, it is perhaps striking to subsequently find that Ruskin *does* return to representations of contemplative fulfilment later in *Fors*. The good life becomes again identified with the dream vision of a saintly sleeper. But whereas in vol. III, Ruskin's investment in dream thinking risks entertaining a fantasy of Lethe-like escapism, Ruskin's description of Vittore Carpaccio's *Dream of St Ursula* (c. 1460; ***Fig. 7***) finds a space for necessary ambivalence even among a scene of restful dreaming. Ruskin's letter is a call to action as well as a call to prayer. In 'Benediction,' Letter 20 of *Fors*, published August 1872, Ruskin is at pains to envisage a 'blessed' form of the contemplative life, which is free from accusations of 'self-indulgence'. (XXVII.345) 'Carpaccio has taken pains to explain to us,' Ruskin writes of St Ursula, 'the kind of life she leads, by completely painting her little bedroom in the light of dawn, so that you can see everything in it':

> The bed is a broad four-poster, the posts being beautifully wrought golden or gilded rods, variously wreathed and branched, carrying a canopy of warm red. […] The coverlid is scarlet, the white sheet folded half-way back over it; the young girl lies straight, bending neither at waist nor knee, the sheet rising and falling over her in a narrow unbroken wave, like the shape of the coverlid of the last sleep, when the turf scarcely rises. She is some seventeen or eighteen years old, her head is turned towards us on the pillow, the cheek resting on her hand, as if she were thinking, yet utterly calm in sleep, and almost colourless. (XXVII.345)

The contemplative life is again praised here by way of a sleeping beauty—thought and sleep edge ever close together when we hear Ursula looks 'as if she were thinking,' and yet is in fact 'utterly calm in sleep'. (XXVII.342-4) But as was not the case with Ilaria, Ruskin integrates the virtues of the active life into Carpaccio's picture. Though he refers to 'another picture of her, not asleep' but at her 'needlework' in a (supposedly) 'plain housewifely dress' (***Fig. 8***), Ruskin more interestingly speaks of the 'happy industry' which he finds displayed in 'the trim state of her room,—[in] the hour-glass on the table,—[and in] the evident use of all the books she has' in *The Dream of St Ursula*. (XXVII.347, 346-7) 'A work-woman, friends, she,' Ruskin claims with no small amount of hyperbole, 'no less than a princess; and princess most in being so.' (XXVII.347)



Fig. 8 Detail from Vittore Carpaccio, *Arrival of the Ambassadors*, c. 1460, Oil on canvas, Gallerie Accademia, Venice, https://www.gallerieaccademia.it/arrivo-degli-ambasciatori.

Ruskin is straining here, but his condensation (less generously, we might say *confusion*) of concepts is aided by the dreaminess of his prose. As with the Ilaria

passage, Ruskin's ekphrasis of *The Dream of St Ursula* ebbs in and out of vigilant specificity ('tied with a narrow riband, and divided into two wreaths'; 'the arm raised on the pillow, down to the wrist') and airy vagueness ('golden or gilded', 'some seventeen or eighteen') in a manner that echoes his own metaphor when he describes the bedsheet as 'rising and falling over her in a narrow unbroken wave, like the shape of the coverlid of the last sleep, when the turf scarcely rises', which itself blends land and sea, life with death. (XXVII.345) The dreamlike ambiguity is intensified when we attempt to comprehend whose 'eyes' we are looking through in the painting, as Ruskin's makes clear when considering the angelic guest:

> At the door of the room an angel enters (the little dog, though lying awake, vigilant, takes no notice). He is a very small angel, his head just rises a little above the shelf round the room, and would only reach as high as the princess's chin, if she were standing up. He has soft grey wings, lustreless; and his dress, of subdued blue, has violet sleeves, open above the elbow, and showing white sleeves below. He comes in without haste, his body, like a mortal one, casting shadow from the light through the door behind, his face perfectly quiet; a palm-branch in his right hand—a scroll in his left. So dreams the princess, with blessed eyes, that need no earthly dawn. (XXVII.347)

The dog is 'vigilant', and yet cannot (or does not) notice the guest. Is there not a hint here as to the state in which we need to approach the artwork ourselves? If we try too hard to see what is already before our eyes, we're likely to miss the wood for the trees.

Ursula has her eyes distinctly closed, and yet somehow sees while sleeping without any 'earthly dawn'. Ursula's unwilled attention becomes a model for our own receptivity.

But for all the 'blessed' peace of the painting—which we find in the angel's 'lustreless' 'grey wings'; his entry 'without haste'; the 'subdued blue' of his dress; and his 'perfectly quiet' face—this vision of a life perfected is haunted by promises of pain and death. In the angel's 'right hand he bears the martyr's palm', as Ruskin will later make more explicit in 'The Feudal Ranks', being Letter 71 of *Fors*, and dated 4th October 1876. (XXVIII.745) In the legendary account of the saint's life, she is martyred for refusing to abandon her Christian faith. (XXVIII.743) When the angel appears in her dream, he 'comes to her, [as] the Angel of Death'. (XXVIII.745) Ruskin's more punishing stress on her martyrdom suggests how he attempted to reenvisage the ways in which his 'oscillations of temper', harsh and soft, would work upon his readers. (VIII.9) Though Ruskin recognized the poverties of 'sermonizing', as David Russell has noted, he 'never gave up the jeremiad as a rhetorical mode'.[203] In his writing on St Ursula, it is as if Ruskin is trying to dream into greater union his own inclinations towards leniency and severity, consolation and desolation. Though he stresses how the saint's dream-work has knitted together conceptual contraries in a more harmonious fashion, Ruskin refuses to leave us overly comfortable, knowing that ambivalence has its place in stirring action. Upon reading the Ursula letters of *Fors*, we are left with a sense, characteristically Christian in its paradox, that whosoever wills to defend his rest will lose it, and whoever wills to lose his peace will find it. (cf. Matthew 16:25, Luke 17:33)

Conclusion

In conclusion then, Ruskin uses representations of dreaming throughout his corpus to

[203] Russell, "Facing Reality," 134.

envision what constitutes genuine human flourishing, and the degree to which it can be identified with contemplation. Ruskin cultivates a sense of dreaminess in his readers to weaken punishingly perfectionistic patterns of thought, transform his own ambivalence into more psychically productive ambiguity, and harmonise the virtues of the contemplative life with the active. Because Ruskin roots his visions of contentment in the inactivity of sleep, however, he provokes in himself anxieties about moral and psychological enervation. But Ruskin later finds that ambivalence has its uses, if put to work properly, and his anxiety about the dangers of excessive self-satisfaction and the futility of mere fantasizing prevents him from reducing art to mere wish fulfilment. In the sleep of the dreamer, Ruskin finds a model for dreaming new psychical and political realities into being.

Catharsis Uncontained: 'Certain Cathartic, Aristotelian Qualities' in the Fiction of Thomas Hardy

Introduction

The previous chapter explored Ruskin's eccentric reimagining of Aristotelian contemplation as a form of dreaming in his art and social criticism. I now turn to consider the perilous fate of another major concept in the belated Aristotelian bequest to Victorian modernity, that of catharsis in the writings of Thomas Hardy. When, in a Postscript of 1912, Hardy claimed that his novel *Jude the Obscure* (1895) contained 'certain cathartic, Aristotelian qualities', he implied these 'qualities' align with his defence of his novel as a 'moral work'. (*Jude*, xlv, xliv) Yet this implicit commitment to a straightforwardly ethical conception of the cathartic function of tragedy chafes against the cathartic imagery used in *Jude* itself and his corpus more widely, which resists easy moralism.

The metaphorical texture of Hardy's works paints a far more complex and embattled picture of the cathartic function of tragedy (and the therapeutic power of fiction more broadly) than is conceived in the sanitised accounts one finds in Hardy's non-fiction prose pieces like 'The Profitable Reading of Fiction' (1888) and the Postscript of 1912—both of which were presumably written with the censoring earshot of Mrs Grundy in mind. In his tragic fiction, Hardy reconceptualises catharsis as an experience of intense emotional uncontainment (dissolution, overspilling), which cannot be easily categorised as either alleviation or exacerbation, as trauma or cure.[204] Hardy uses messy, cathartic metaphors, whose undirected outflowing exceeds the

[204] In coining 'uncontainment', I have been inspired by the quintessentially Hardyean negative formulations of his poetic vocabulary, e.g., 'unhope', 'unbe', and so on. Cf. Hardy, 24, "In Tenebris I," I.206-7; 44, "Tess's Lament," in *CPW*, I.217. For 'falling to pieces', see Klein, *E&G*, 5.

standard therapeutic fantasies of purgation, which identify relief with a feeling of riddance. Hardy expresses his dissatisfaction with aggrandized, idealised, and disembodied conceptions of catharsis in the Aristotelian tradition, which instrumentalise tragedy as a straightforward tool of moral improvement or emotional moderation, because they obscure the morally vexed character of tragic pleasure, whereby a spectator or reader feels pleasure upon witnessing the suffering of an imaginary character in a tragedy. His reconception of catharsis as uncontainment allows him to stress the embodied, sadomasochistic, morally compromised nature of tragedy without slipping into moralised didacticism. While he offers his readers an outlet for their 'carking care[s]', Hardy does so in a richly ambivalent fashion that challenges any simple opposition between evading and confronting unpleasurable feelings. (*PV*, 76-77)

Hardy first read the *Poetics* in Theodore Buckley's English translation of 1850, published as part of Bohn's Classical Series, which translated Aristotle's definition of the function of tragedy as 'an imitation of a worthy or illustrious action, possessing magnitude, […], by men acting, and not through narration, through pity and fear effecting a purification [κάθαρσις] from such like passions.'[205] Though Hardy's friend and classical mentor, Horace Moule, was 'always ready to act the tutor [to him] in any classical difficulty' until the time of his death by suicide in 1873, the exact meaning of catharsis remained an aporia to even the most seasoned scholar. (*L&W*, 38) The elusive Aristotelian notion would have conjured up a dissonant mixture of vitality and decay, flourishing and decadence, in the minds of Hardy and his contemporaries. The concept of catharsis appeared to promise essential insight into the relationship between art and

[205] Jeremy Steele, "Classics," in *Oxford Reader's Companion to Hardy*, ed. Norman Page (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 57. Aristotle, 6, $144^{9b}22$-28, *Poetics*, in *Aristotle's Treatise on Rhetoric Literally Translated from the Greek; Also the Poetic of Aristotle Literally Translated*, trans. Theodore Buckley (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1850), 416-7.

human flourishing, ethics and aesthetics.[206] By the Victorian mid-century, however, the scholarly debate over catharsis had long lost its pulse and purchase. Much as the obscurities of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* had left Ruskin at times dumbfounded (he once referred to it as 'a mere glittering bog of mud'), κάθαρσις caused comparable hermeneutical headaches for other writers and scholars in the century, who were repeatedly frustrated in their attempts to determine what the ancient philosopher had *really* meant by his account of the function of tragic drama in the *Poetics*.[207] In 1878, John Morley bemoaned the scholarly decadence of the 'immense controversy,'

> …carried on in books, pamphlets, sheets and flying articles, mostly German, as to what it was that Aristotle really meant by the famous words in the sixth chapter of the *Poetics*, about tragedy accomplishing the purification of our moods of pity and sympathetic fear[.]

Morley called the scholarly controversy 'one of the disgraces of human intelligence, a grotesque monument to sterility.'[208] The cathartic question had become a 'wearisome question,' John Pentland Mahaffy complained in vol. II of his *History of Classical Greek*

---

[206] For explicit interest in the connection between catharsis and eudaimonia, see John Channing Briggs, "Happiness, Catharsis, and the Literary Cure," in *The Eudaimonic Turn: Well-Being in Literary Studies*, ed. James O. Pawelski and D. J. Moores (Madison, Taeneck: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012), 115-134, (116).

[207] Ruskin, X.374. Katherine Gilbert, "Ruskin's Relation to Aristotle," *The Philosophical Review* 49, no. 1 (1940): 52-62, 52. Aristotle, 6, 1449b22-28, *Poetics*, 47. For histories of the reception of the *Poetics* in the British long nineteenth century, see Carol Poster, "Pedagogy and Bibliography: Aristotle's "Rhetoric" in Nineteenth-Century England," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (Spring, 2001): 5-35, 7n.9, 15. Elder Olson, *Aristotle's "Poetics" and English Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), xxiv. Marvin Theodore Herrick, *The Poetics of Aristotle in England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930), 146-186.

[208] John Morley, *Diderot and the Encyclopaedists* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1878), 332. Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, 184.

Literature (1880), which he would 'leave to the Germans, and to those who have time and patience [enough] to wade through their eighty works on the subject'.[209]

Though Hardy's autodidacticism has been met with condescension from the likes of Virginia Woolf, who called him 'book-learned in a home-made way', this chapter uncovers the irreverent erudition—typical of the ambivalent amateur tradition I am exploring in this thesis—that underlies Hardy's engagement with Aristotelian tragic theory.[210] Hardy knew and read Morley and Mahaffy, as well as various other commentators on the cathartic controversy, such as Matthew Arnold and Samuel Henry Butcher, whom I will discuss forthwith.[211] Hardy's novels intervene in the scholarly conversation of his milieu by way of subtly parodying conceptions of cure and relief that have passed for the cathartic function of tragedy in the Aristotelian tradition throughout the centuries. Though the ironic character of Hardy's engagement with the Aristotelian tragic tradition has failed to register with his modern critics, one of his earliest appreciators, the poet Lionel Johnson, wrote of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) that the novel does 'indeed rouse in us 'pity and fear': it does indeed purge us of 'pity and fear': but with what a parody of Aristotle!'[212] Hardy parodies notions of catharsis as ethical

---

[209] John Pentland Mahaffy, *A History of Classical Greek Literature: the Prose Writers* (London: Longman, Green, and Company 1880), II:198. For other discussions, see Eduard Zeller, *Aristotle and the Earlier Peripatetics* trans. Benjamin Francis Conn Costelloe and John H. Muirhead (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1897), II:316. John Addington Symonds, *Studies of the Greek Poets* 2nd edition (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1877), 302-3. We have records of Hardy reading other classical studies by Mahaffy and Symonds. Ralph Pite, "Thomas Hardy," in *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature, Volume 4: 1790-1880*, ed. Norman Vance and Jennifer Wallace (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 601-618, (603). The rhetoric of complaint recalls transformation of the popular conception of the scholar from energized truth-teller to 'desiccated walking corpse' in the nineteenth century, to quote A. D. Nuttall's memorable description of George Eliot's Casaubon, which I have already cited. Nuttall, *Dead From the Waist Down*, 26.

[210] Woolf, "The Novels of Thomas Hardy," 223. Ralph Pite notes of Hardy's allusions to Virgil that his use of the classical tradition tend to have a wry, rather than reverential character. Pite, *Guarded Life*, 162.

[211] For these relationships, see Hardy, *L&W*, 61, 271, 112, 137, 369.

[212] For Johnson, it was Hardy's attachment to scientific determinism in the novel that disqualified *Tess* being cathartic in the Aristotelian sense. Yet, as Morley noted in 1891, the 'cause and effect' of modern scientific determinism could be understood to merely reintroduce the τύχη, or *luck*, of the Greeks under a new guise. Lionel Johnson, *The Art of Thomas Hardy* (London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane, 1894), 264. John Morley, "Victor Hugo's *Ninety-Three*," in *Studies in Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1891), 241.

transformation, spiritual purification, or homeopathic cures for emotional excess. Characterising catharsis as a desperate remedy, his parodies depict failed or morally vexed attempts at cathartic cure, which stress the embodied character of aesthetic experience. Disillusioned with aggrandized ethical and spiritual conceptions of tragedy, Hardy either gently ironizes or, as is often the case in the later works, rides roughshod over the delicate qualitive questions in scholarship regarding pity and fear. Hardy suggests that these questions tend to occlude the morally dubious, essentially sadomasochistic character of tragic pleasure, which relies upon a person finding relief and enjoyment in the depiction of grievous suffering.[213] This chapter demonstrates how Hardy employs these richly ambivalent cathartic metaphors to intimate the moral problem of tragic pleasure without descending into the moralised didacticism that the Aristotelian tradition was also associated with.[214]

Through his engagement with questions of tragic pleasure, Hardy becomes a player in debates about the sublimation of sexuality and aggression *avant la lettre* by virtue of the later psychoanalytic term inheriting the aporias of the Victorian cathartic controversy. In 'Psychopathological Characters on Stage' (1905 or 1906), Freud identified Aristotelian catharsis with the reductive medical outlet theory of Jakob Bernays (who was his wife's uncle), which reduces catharsis to a quantative reduction rather than a qualitive transformation of instinctual energy.[215] Sublimation therefore fills the conceptual gap that was filled by more elaborate, improving conceptions of

---

[213] A. D. Nuttall, *Why Does Tragedy Give Pleasure?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1. Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: the Idea of the Tragic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), 54, 174. For the related issue of the irrationality of desiring feel grief, see Rana Saadi Liebert, *Tragic Pleasure from Homer to Plato* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 5. For the difficulty of understanding how catharsis relates to tragic pleasure in the Aristotelian tradition, see Stephen Halliwell, *Between Ecstasy and Truth: Interpretations of Greek Poetics from Homer to Longinus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 247, 252.

[214] Cf. Bernard Bosquanet, *A History of the Aesthetic* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1892), 19, 199.

[215] Lear, *Love and its Place in Nature*, 54. Momigliano, "Bernays," 133.

catharsis over the ages. Freud famously struggled to define in what sublimation actually consists.[216] Later scholars, however, have attempted to suggest that sublimation refers to the process that 'diverts the flow of instinctual energy from its immediate sexual aim and subordinates it to cultural endeavours.'[217] In 1944, Ernest Kris would complain that sublimation had become a 'bookish idea', and other analysts would also echo the Victorian Aristotelians in similarly complaining about the incoherence of the concept.[218] Closer to the sceptics in both traditions, Hardy's stress upon the sadomasochistic character of tragic pleasure disabuses us of the notion that aesthetic experience transforms the quality of the untender passions. Hardyean uncontainment entails an outpouring of sexuality and aggression, rather than a transmutation of them.

In exploring tragic pleasure, this chapter challenges the direction of travel in Hardy criticism. Alicia Mireles Christoff, for instance, has attempted to move away from the image of Hardy as a 'punishing author' and underplays the presence of 'lust' and 'cruelty' in his texts to explore the ways in which Hardy's work is 'supportive' and containing, rather than merely 'persecutory'. [219] This chapter, however, stresses that one must attend to the presence of 'lust' and 'cruelty' in Hardy's texts to comprehend fully his sense of the role of aesthetic experience in psychological development. Even the therapeutic power of Hardy's fiction tends to be 'characteristically tough', as Philip Davis has observed, rather than soothingly consoling.[220] Hardy's help, if it comes at all, comes in the form of testing and tempering our capacity for containment, rather than soothing and cradling us.

---

[216] Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption*, 33-5.
[217] Sophie De Mijolla-Mellor, "Sublimation," in *The International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (London: Thomson Gale, 2005) III.1678-9, (1678).
[218] Ernest Kris quoted in Lawrence S. Kubie, "The Fallacious Misuse of the Concept of Sublimation," *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (1962): 73-79, 77.
[219] Christoff, *Novel Relations*, 29, 37.
[220] Davis, *Reading and the Reader*, 140.

Hardy's interventions in these debates about art's therapeutic power have been missed by earlier critics, who have hitherto diagnosed the cathartic aspirations of Hardy's texts as either failed or pathologically self-indulgent. T.S. Eliot famously claimed Hardy wrote as if 'solely to provide a satisfaction for some morbid emotion'.[221] Jeanette King argued that Hardy's novels outright fail to be cathartic.[222] This chapter plots a more complex story. I demonstrate how Hardy's reconception of catharsis as uncontainment offers bittersweet forms of relief, which defy categorisation as moralist or escapist, as therapeutic failure or as therapeutic relief.[223] In his later work, Hardy uses increasingly crude cathartic metaphors that construct a harrowing, even abortive aesthetic. These metaphors identify the disburdenment of emotion stimulated by tragic relief with the purgation in bloodletting, the evacuation of an abortion, and other forms of messy, wasteful expungement. Rather, Hardy pushes tragic pleasure to such an extreme limit that it is no longer self-evidently tragic or pleasurable. Hardy uses uncontainment as an ambivalent form of escapism that engenders a dissonant form of ethical reflection, reliant upon ambivalence rather than contentment. Hardyean tragedy thereby induces a state of moral provocation, even panic, which would have been otherwise foreclosed by more anodyne, idealised conceptions of art as a clear instrument of moral or spiritual improvement.

Reflection and Relief: Hardy on the 'Mental Profit' of 'Weak Minds'

To understand why Hardy comes to formulate such an ambivalent therapeutic in his novels, one must first understand that the escapist predicament surfaces in his work as

---

[221] Eliot, *After Strange Gods*, 58.
[222] Jeanette King, *Tragedy and the Novel: Theory and Practice in the Novels of George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and Henry James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 124-125.
[223] Jaffe claims that 'Hardy's simultaneous use and exposure of the structure of realist conventions renders his texts simultaneously realist and non-realist'; her conception of 'realist fantasy' essentially comes at what I term Hardy's *ambivalent escapism* from a different angle. Jaffe, *Victorian Dreams of the Real*, 101.

a recognition that one's capacity for reflection is often endangered by feelings of relief —cathartic or otherwise. In 'The Profitable Reading of Fiction', an article first published in the American journal *Forum* in March 1888, Hardy envisages how a 'course of imaginative reading' can 'alleviat[e] the effects of over-work and carking care' but encounters difficulty when attempting to fix the degree to which the reader's absorption should be 'slavish' and uncritical on the one hand, and yet 'active and undulled' and vigilant against 'moral injury' on the other. (*PV*, 76-77, 75, 80) 'In reading for such hygienic purposes it is,' Hardy writes, 'of the first consequence that the reader be not too critical': 'the author should be swallowed whole, like any other alterative pill' and 'be believed in slavishly, implicitly'. (*PV*, 76) Hardy will call the 'pleasure' of imaginative reading 'the kind of pleasure […] which, while doing no moral injury, affords relaxation'. (*PV*, 75) But there is already an only slightly muted eroticism to this slavish swallowing which flirts with the spectre of a 'moral injury' that seems likely if we relax our guard and 'be not too critical'. Escapism, as Rita Felski has suggested elsewhere, seems dependent upon 'self-surrender'.[224]

Hardy downplays our sense of risk by using anodyne analogies for the 'tonic purpose' of fiction in the article, which appear comically at odds with the bleak representations of healing that are obsessively depicted again and again in the variations upon the "desperate remedy" motif in his fiction. (*PV*, 76) 'A sudden shifting of the mental perspective into a fictitious world, combined with the rest,' Hardy first suggests, comparing the benefit of reading novels to that of the Victorian rest cure, 'is well known to be often as efficacious for renovation as a corporeal journey afar.' (*PV*,

[224] Felski, *Uses of Literature*, 62.

75-6) Hardy thereby risks reducing his own fiction to a set of weekend getaways in Wessex.

Thankfully, Hardy doesn't confine himself to this bland analogy. His trouble lies in his suggesting that imaginative reading is both harmless (free from 'moral injury') *and* transformative. When he then proceeds to consider the 'intellectual or moral profit' of imaginative reading, as opposed to its 'alleviating' effects (note their distinction), problems arise. (*PV*, 77) In spite of the moralistic aspirations he dubiously ascribes to *Jude* in the 1912 Postscript, Hardy here recognises that 'a tract in disguise' will prove ineffective as art. (*PV*, 80) The novels 'most condu[cive] to moral profit are likely to be among those written without a moral purpose', he claims: novels 'which impress the reader with the inevitableness of character and environment in working out destiny, whether that destiny be just or unjust, enviable or cruel, must have a sound effect, if not what is called a good effect, upon a healthy mind.' (*PV*, 81-2) Hardy's equivocation between 'good' and 'sound' here (what can be good and not sound?), and his raising the qualification that the mind must now be 'healthy'—when at the beginning of the article he claimed that fiction *helps* the mind that is 'sick of itself'—are telling points of weakness. (*PV*, 81-2, 75) Hardy, though, shirks the threat of causing moral injury when he claims that the effect of what such 'sincere presentation' would have on 'weak minds' need not concern us 'too closely'. (Hardy, *PV*, 82) The spectre of the weak-minded cannot help but remind us of the slavish swallower, who was praised as the ideal reader of fiction only a few pages ago. Though Hardy does not make this explicit, the 'tonic' and the 'intellectual or moral' purposes of fiction start to look less allied than the title of '*The* Profitable Reading of Fiction' would suggest.

Earlier, Hardy had claimed that 'an intellectual stir' is not to be desired of the 'tonic purpose' of fiction. Rather; he argues, it sets a reader's 'serious thoughts at work'

'and he does not want them stimulated just now; he wants [them] to dream.' (*PV*, 77) Apropos, we should remember Freud's contention that our dreams make 'ethical and moral imbeciles' of us all, for now a tension suddenly emerges in Hardy's article that addresses the very question of our moral imbecility. (Freud, V.54) Near the article's end, Hardy deposits with imagined 'imbeciles' amongst his readership any responsibility for the possible 'moral injury' that imaginative reading might do. He writes: 'A novel which does moral injury to a dozen imbeciles, and has bracing results upon a thousand intellects of normal vigor [sic], can justify its existence; and probably a novel was never written by the purest-minded author for which there could not be found some moral invalid or other whom it was capable of harming.' (*PV*, 82) While Hardy's point is not wholly unconvincing, a telling disingenuousness reveals itself in his elaborations. 'It is unfortunately quite possible to read the most elevating works of imagination', Hardy regrets, 'and, by fixing the regard on the wrong sides of the subject, to gather not a grain of wisdom from them, nay, sometimes positive harm':

> What author has not had his experience of such readers?—the mentally and morally warped ones of both sexes, who will, when practicable, so twist plain and obvious meanings as to see in an honest picture of human nature an attack on religion, morals, or institutions. Truly has it been observed that 'the eye sees that which it brings with it the means of seeing'. (Hardy, *PV*, 88)

Hardy's bad faith is more than evident in his comment about 'attack[s] on religion, morals, [and] institutions'. Indeed, what will *Jude* and *Tess* prove but attacks on the same? Since his abandoned first novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady* (which he later discarded after John Morley considered it too incendiary in its satire of the aristocracy),

Hardy's novels have interrogated class and gender relations with an eye to the way in which deadened 'custom' can cramp natural human 'delight', in the words of 'In Tenebris II'.[225]

The disingenuousness of Hardy's self-defensiveness, however, highlights the dubious role that the fantasy of the 'mentally and morally warped' imbecile plays in his argument. Though he ends with a rhetorical flourish that grasps at a sense of case-closed finality ('Truly'), questions persist. First and foremost is the following question: How 'critical' or 'slavish', really, *is* a profitable reading of fiction? In the following sections, I will demonstrate how the cathartic satisfactions of his fiction risk making moral imbeciles of us all. Remembering that the novel that became *Jude* was first entitled *The Simpletons*, I suggest that weak-mindedness is the rule, not the exception, in the moral universe of Wessex.[226] It is precisely Hardy's 'honest picture of human nature' that convinces us that the mind in Hardy's fiction is always a potentially 'weak' mind—that is, prey to dangerous fantasies liable to 'moral injury'.

Cheap Fixes in *Desperate Remedies*

Hardy's first published novel, *Desperate Remedies* (1871), dramatizes the vulnerabilities of weak-mindedness in relation to the lure of the cathartic satisfaction. Because the ambivalent character of Hardyean tragedy is, in part, derived from its generic impurity, we need to first return to *Desperate Remedies* to understand his later Aristotelian parodies. Hardy's novels are a ragbag of generic modes—comedy, tragedy, melodrama, pastoral, satire, sensation fiction, and the grotesque—as is characteristic of the Victorian realist novel, which as Carolyn Williams has noted, tends to 'internaliz[e] and

[225] Millgate, *BR*, 102-3.
[226] For Jude and Sue as simpletons, see Harvey, *Complete Critical Guide*, 89.

parod[y] prior genres and modes'.[227] The sense of returning to a sensational precedent in his later tragic fiction is quite literal in Hardy's case: *Desperate Remedies*, the novel he first cut his teeth on as an author, was a sensation novel. Hardy was attempting to write a novel of substantial 'plot' on the advice of George Meredith after the rejection of *The Poor Man and the Lady* (written 1867)—advice which, as Hardy later reflected, he took up a little too enthusiastically.[228] In the later tragic novels, he always toys with the possibility of a generic regression, in which the cathartic qualities of his mature works will collapse back into the cheap thrills of the sensation plot.[229] *Desperate Remedies* thus makes for a necessary entryway into thinking about the tragic uncontainments of Hardy's later career.

Hardy's investment in exposing the tension between thought and feeling, or in this case entertainment and reflection, begins here. An assistant to Hardy's publisher at Tinsley had thought *Desperate Remedies* was 'almost a joke', which speaks to how the novel seems both trivial and yet to have some point, or punchline, hiding behind its apparent unseriousness.[230] The reviewer for *The Spectator* jokingly characterized the novel as a desperate remedy for 'an emaciated purse'.[231] The two comments in fact strike at the heart of the novel's concerns: Hardy's criticism of cathartic thinking in *Desperate Remedies* depends upon acknowledging the false economy, if also the substantial attractions, of opting for the quick fix. The novel's title is derived from the Latin *extremis malis extrema remedia* ('extreme remedies for extreme ills'), a well-

---

[227] Carolyn Williams, "Melodrama and the Realist Novel," in *The Cambridge Companion to Melodrama*, ed. Carolyn Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 209-223, (210).
[228] Hardy, *L&W*, 66. Millgate, *BR*, 108, 129.
[229] In allying Aristotelian catharsis with cruder forms of cultural production, Hardy anticipates Theodore Adorno's claim in the twentieth century that 'the doctrine of catharsis imputes to art the principle that ultimately the culture industry appropriates and administers.' Theodore Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullor-Kentor (London: Continuum, 1997), 311.
[230] Edmund Downey quoted in Joe Fisher, *The Hidden Hardy* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), 20.
[231] John Hutton quoted in Nemesvari, "Introduction," xliii.

known and oft-quoted maxim of the period.[232] In this work, Hardy is preoccupied with the dubious tendency to call a 'remedy' something that in fact harms more than it helps; we have already read in the Introduction how the devilish Manston justifies murder as a 'remedy' for his problems. (*DR*, 366, 368) Manston's cheap rhetorical moves fall in with many other sham solutions depicted in the novel. In such moments, Hardy is reflecting doubtfully, albeit cheekily rather than sombrely, upon the cheap thrills he offers his readers by way of the sensational plot. From the beginning, Hardy's escapism is self-conscious about its own deficiencies, even as its promised forms of relief appear fatal to thoughtfulness.

Critics have suggested that the 'joke' of *Desperate Remedies* lies in the way in which Hardy parodies or pastiches his own generic choice, but I seek to develop this line of interpretation by suggesting how the pleasures represented *within* the text reflect uneasily upon the pleasures offered *by* the text.[233] Characters tempt other characters to cathartic satisfactions which resemble the cheap thrills that Hardy offers his readers by way of his sensational plot, which shows how Hardy's novel is implicated in the cathartic thinking it ostensibly condemns. Miss Aldclyffe, for instance, the tyrannical mistress of Knapwater House, attempts to manipulate the young penniless heroine, Cytherea Gray, by encouraging her to think in cathartic metaphors while in distress. (*DR*, 92-93) Cytherea has been deeply wounded upon learning from Aldclyffe that her beloved, Edward Springrove, has previously engaged himself to another woman. Cytherea resolves to quit Knapwater House, as she associates the place with Edward, whose father lives as a tenant on the estate. She discovers, however, that Miss Aldclyffe

[232] Ibid., xxxiv.
[233] Fisher, *Hidden Hardy*, 20, 41.

is a tyrannical and cruel employer. When Miss Aldclyffe rejects the suggestion, Cytherea appeals: 'Do let me go?' In an attempt to pacify the girl, Miss Aldclyffe responds:

> As to hindering you, if you are determined to go, of course that's absurd. But you are not now in a state of mind fit for deciding upon any such proceeding, and I shall not listen to what you have to say. Now, Cythie, come with me; we'll let this volcano burst and spend itself, and after that we'll see what had better be done. (*DR*, 92-93)

Just before, Miss Aldclyffe had regretted 'indulg[ing] in the womanly luxury of making confidences and giving way to emotions' for how dependent they make her upon Cytherea's discretion. (*DR*, 89) In Miss Aldclyffe's own terms, Cytherea giving way to her emotions would make her more vulnerable to her; the temptation to think in cathartic metaphors—metaphors that promise relief through outburst—reads as manipulative.[234] The volcano metaphor tells of the compromised character of the lady's care for Cytherea. The financial connotations of 'spend' remind the girl of the dire straits and financial necessity that drove her to Knapwater originally. Both subtly and unsubtly, the metaphor goads Cytherea to stay on. (*DR*, 50) The eruptive 'volcano' further savours of Miss Aldclyffe's erotic desire for Cytherea and thus gestures towards the lady's tendency to erotic coercion elsewhere in the plot.[235] Miss Aldclyffe twice requests that Cytherea kiss her, to which the girl struggles to consent. (*DR*, 79)

---

[234] We are reminded of Winnicott's claim that 'instinctual gratifications' become 'seductions [to the infant] unless based on a well-established capacity in the individual person for total experience'. Winnicott, VII.432

[235] For the erotic character of the lady's attachment to Cytherea, see P. Roberts, "Patterns of Relationship in *Desperate Remedies*," *Thomas Hardy Journal* 8, no. 2 (1992): 52.

Later on, the lady will attempt to make Cytherea accept Manston, her unscrupulous son. When her brother Owen falls ill, Cythera faces a forking path, each option open to her a desperate remedy. To 'combat the misfortune' of Owen falling ill when the siblings are too poor to afford medical care, Cytherea finds herself with two options: either become betrothed to Manston, whom she does not love but who will pay her brother's medical bill; or send her brother to the County Hospital. To endeavour to coerce Cytherea to accept her son when she is 'shrinking from the idea of being Manston's wife', Miss Aldclyffe describes the hospital in the following terms:

> Why it is only another name for Slaughter House—in surgical cases at any rate. Certainly if anything about your body is snapt in two they do join you together in a fashion, but 'tis so askew and ugly, that you may as well be apart again. (*DR*, 215)

The ugly image of forced fusion, however, ironically betrays Aldclyffe's desire to 'join' her son and Cytherea as one flesh in matrimonial 'fashion'.

Miss Aldclyffe's efforts to tempt Cytherea to cathartic thinking raises the question of whether we as readers are not being emotionally manipulated in a similar fashion by the machinations of Hardy's plot. That Hardy associates cathartic relief with coercion winks at the suggestion that escapism, including that offered by his own novel, might act only as a 'psychological safety-valve' (as Eagleton has said of tragic catharsis), which distracts an audience from the 'unsavoury aspects of the regimes under which they live.'[236] Though Miss Aldclyffe is Cytherea's employer, this political resonance is more

[236] Eagleton, *Tragedy,* 4.

understated: the possibility of the cathartic satisfaction causing what Hardy will later call 'moral injury' in 'The Profitable Reading' essay being more explicit within the work. (*PV*, 75-6)

A later point in the novel encourages this kind of self-reflection. The rector Mr Raunham confronts Miss Aldclyffe with his suspicions that Manston, her son and steward, is passing off an 'improper woman' as his dead wife. (*DR*, 335) Miss Aldclyffe exclaims in return: 'Mr. Raunham, your story is monstrous, and I don't believe it!' (*DR*, 335-6) After agreeing to ask Manston to his face whether his wife is truly his wife, Miss Aldclyffe agrees and announces that she 'always let[s] these things die of wholesome ventilation, as every fungus does.' (*DR*, 331) Later, when Manston tells her the truth, Miss Aldclyffe will exclaim: 'Heavens! the truth will leak out in a day or two!' (*DR*, 339) The 'monstrous story' of fungal properties told by Mr Raunham is, of course, none other than Hardy's plot, the revelations of which are conceived in terms of leaks and vents. If more playfully than searchingly, the moment nonetheless suggests that the escapism in *Desperate Remedies* is un-'wholesome': that reading the novel somehow risks compromising our virtue. The satire prepares the ground for Hardy's parodies of Aristotelian relief in his mature novels.

Hardy's reader is thus put in the same compromised position as his heroine. Morley, who rejected the manuscript, said in his reader's report for Macmillan that 'the book shows *power* [sic]' but 'at present of a violent and undisciplined kind'.[237] The novel's power thus seems best identified with the more unscrupulous outbursts of its villains, Manston and Miss Aldclyffe, rather than the tested patience of its chief heroes, Cytherea and Springrove. The novel requests the 'unreasoning heat' of its readers, even while the

[237] John Morley quoted in Millgate, *BR*, 116.

narrator suggests that we degrade ourselves by giving in to desperate states. (*DR*, 78) Indeed, Suzanne Keen has likewise argued that, in *DR*, 'motive passions drive the plot without much interference from reflection', but that the reflective interferences that do arise in the novel must not be underplayed.[238] These moments significantly prefigure the more substantial attempts at ironic self-reflection in Hardy's later corpus. Consider, for example, the narrator's comparison of Miss Aldclyffe on the morning after with Miss Aldclyffe as the 'passionate creature who had asked [Cytherea] for kisses' during the darkness of the night before:

> It is both painful and satisfactory to think how often these antitheses are to be observed in the individual most open to our observation—ourselves. We pass the evening with faces lit up by some flaring illumination or other: we get up the next morning—the fiery jets have all gone out, and nothing confronts us but a few crinkled pipes and sooty wirework, hardly even recalling the outline of the blazing picture that arrested our eyes before bedtime. (*DR*, 89-90)

Hardy's picture of postcoital tristesse risks pouring cold water over its own plot.

Hardy's uncertainty as to the 'moral profit'—to use again that phrase from the 'Profitable Reading' essay—of his book gets a further airing at the end of the book when Farmer Springrove spies an empty coffin being born through the streets of Froominster and remarks to his friend Farmer Baker: 'I always feel a satisfaction at being breasted by such a sight as that': 'I call it a sort of medicine.' (*DR*, 362) The farmers do not at this

[238] Suzanne Keen, *Thomas Hardy's Brains: Psychology, Neurology and Hardy's Imagination* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2014),27.

moment guess that the coffin is destined for Manston, who has killed himself in the county gaol. Given that the novel has thus far disturbed our sense of what is truly medicinal and remedial, one cannot help but hear in the farmer's words a faint irony: is such a sight a wholesome 'satisfaction'? Such moments confirm our belief that *Desperate Remedies* is a joke upon its own behalf, but they also more seriously reveal Hardy's doubts about the therapeutic instrumentalization of art. If Hardy attempts to redeem his racy plot with these moments of self-awareness, he seems rather unbothered that the joke might be lost on his readers. The spectre of the 'imbecile' of 'The Profitable Reading', who gets him so completely wrong (and yet so right), does not seem to haunt him at this early point in his career. (*PV*, 82)

The 'Gurgoyle' and its Spewings in *Far from the Madding Crowd*

In *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), however, Hardy invests in a salvific conception of catharsis, which unites spiritual uplift with physiological release, only to undo, subsequently, his own idealism later in the novel. In fact, this work is where he first begins his practice of using cathartic metaphors to reflect self-consciously upon the limitations of tragedy as an instrument of ethical improvement. From its beginnings, Hardyean tragedy is 'stagy'—to use Joan Grundy's description of his theatrical borrowings—in more than one sense: Hardy reinterprets the preoccupations of Ancient Greek tragedy, particularly as interpreted by the Aristotelian tradition, for the novel form, and he does so in a self-theatricalising manner.[239] Hardy's narrator often casts his characters as manifestations of the Tragic Muse: in *FFTMC*, Bathsheba is said to look 'calm and nearly rigid, like a slightly animated bust of Melpomene', after Boldwood shoots Troy; in *Jude*, Sue will similarly compare Little Father Time's face with the 'tragic

[239] Grundy is discussing other moments drawn from melodrama. Joan Grundy, *Hardy and the Sister Arts* (London: Macmillan, 1979), 75, 81.

mask of Melpomene', which makes for a similarly self-conscious reference to tragedy in that novel. (*FFTMC*, 370; *Jude*, 270) In these moments, Hardy's novels draw attention to their own artifice and reflect on their own tragic aspirations in a manner that allows them to critically reflect upon claims made for the cathartic power of tragedy.

In Chapter 21 of *FFTMC*, Gabriel Oak saves Bathsheba's flock of sheep, who have strayed from their proper place and eaten more fresh clover than they can digest and are dropping like flies as a result. 'Swol'n with wind', the sheep are 'pierced in the side' by Gabriel:

> Gabriel was already among the turgid prostrate forms. He had […] taken from his pocket the instrument of salvation. It was a small tube […], with a lance passing down the inside, and Gabriel began to use it with a dexterity that would have graced a hospital surgeon. Passing his hand over the sheep's left flank, and selecting the proper point, he punctured the skin and rumen with the lance as it stood in the tube; then he suddenly withdrew the lance, retaining the tube in its place. A current of air rushed up the tube forcible enough to have extinguished a candle held at the orifice.
>
> (*FFTMC*, 137, 141)

While the cathartic resonances of this scene might at first appear accidental, Hardy's narrator proceeds to comment: 'It has been said that mere ease after torment is delight for a time: and the countenances of these poor creatures expressed it now.' (*FFTMC*,

141) The comment nods in part towards Edmund Burke's definition of 'Delight' as 'the sensation which accompanies the removal of pain' in his *Philosophical Enquiry Into the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757).[240] Scholars have traced one half of the allusion, but have missed a later passage from the *Enquiry* of central importance to the episode, in which Burke writes of the cathartic effects of 'pain and terror', which 'clear the parts, whether fine or gross, of a dangerous and troublesome incumbrance, and [thereby] produc[e] delight'.[241] The allusion suggests a self-conscious reflection on the cathartic power of the novel.[242] The relief the sheep find in a physiological outlet for pent-up tension (trapped wind, essentially) suggests the possible cathartic relief we as readers will feel after the suspenseful 'torment' of reading Hardy's tragic plot ends.

With the good shepherd Gabriel as an allegory for the novel's therapeutic ambitions, this is the closest Hardy will come in his tragic fiction to conforming to George Eliot's pastoral model for the realist novel, in which it takes over the function of the care of souls. The physiological process of cathartic relief is endowed with spiritual significance: the lance is an 'instrument of salvation'. Oak tends to Bathsheba's flock in an act of loving-kindness; Hardy encourages us to think of art, by extension, as endowed with the pastoral function of caring for the reader's soul. Hardy makes the correspondence with the *cura animarum* tradition explicit in his quotation from the section from Milton's 'Lycidas' (1637), which concerns the failure of priests (pastors) to care properly for the souls of their flock: 'The hungry Sheep look up, and are not fed, |

[240] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Paul Guyer (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2015 [1757]), 32.
[241] Burke, *Enquiry*, 108. Anna West, *Thomas Hardy and Animals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 143. James T. Boulton, "Editor's Introduction," to Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. James T. Boulton (London: Routledge, 2008), xi-cxxiii, (cxix).
[242] For a reading of Burke's theory of the sublime in terms of Aristotelian catharsis, see Bosquanet, *A History of the Aesthetic*, 203.

But, swolln with wind, and the rank mist they draw, | Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread'.[243] (*FFMC*, 137) Here, the physiological release is, on the whole, sincerely united to spiritual uplift. The seeds of Hardy's doubts about the instrumentalization of catharsis, as well as his anxieties about embodiment, however, are already present in his implicit comparison of his audience to a flatulent herd—a comparison that becomes rather unflattering upon further reflection.

These ambivalences are drawn out into the open in Chapter 46 of *FFTMC*, entitled 'The Gurgoyle: its Doings'. In this chapter, Hardy unsettles his picture of art as a salvific 'instrument' by further emphasizing the embodied, rather than spiritual, nature of aesthetic experience as an uncontrollable uncontainment. The chapter stresses how art can provide an outlet to aggression ('vengeance'), rather than merely agape. (*FFMC*, 307) Here, Fanny Robin, Sargent Troy's dead love, lies buried in Weatherby churchyard. Troy has been tending to her grave and prettifying it with flowers, but – exhausted – has fallen asleep in the church porch sheltered from the rain. Atop the church tower are 'gurgoyles' [sic] designed to spout water from the church's 'lead roof' out of the 'gaping' mouths. (*FFTMC*, 306) From one of the mouths, the rain falls in a 'steady and ceaseless torrent' upon Fanny's grave. (*FFTMC*, 306) The statue is personified as a vengeful spirit: 'The persistent torrent from the gurgoyle's jaws directed all its vengeance', we are told, 'into the grave.' (*FFTMC*, 307) The significance of the 'gurgoyle' is overdetermined: a Biblical flood in miniature, its 'torrent' suggests divine wrath directed at Troy's wrongdoing, but also the destructive character of Troy's own sexuality, which penetrated Fanny's body while she was alive and ruined her in the eyes of the world. The grotesque sexuality of the episode is evident in the following detail, which is grimly,

[243] John Milton, 125-7, "Lycidas," in *The Complete Works of John Milton*, ed. Barbara Kiefer Lewalski and Estelle Haan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), III.55.

even repulsively sensuous: 'The rich tawny mould' on the grave, we are told, is 'stirred into motion, and boil[s] like chocolate.'[244] (*FFTMC*, 307) Hardy, though, also uses the rainfall to envisage art as a powerful cathartic outlet for unwanted and unpleasant feelings ('vengeance'): the personified 'gurgoyle' appears to find relief in spitting out its spite.

The allegory would appear to give credence to T.S. Eliot's censure of Hardy's writing as crudely 'expressive'.[245] However, the episode invites this interpretation only to complicate matters. We are intended to find substitutive satisfaction in this outpouring. Equally remarkable is the way in which the gurgoyle's torrent, in concentrating its force upon the grave, stresses art's contrary capacity to make us keep the mess of our lives in mind, to make us take a 'full look at the Worst', in other words. For, by the end of the rainfall, the pretty veil of flowers which Troy planted over the grave has been torn away: he is forced to face the grave of the woman to whose suffering he had contributed. Hardy thus proposes how anti-cathartic uncontainment can destroy one's illusions about oneself, as well as merely flatter them.

Hardy explicitly frames his gurgoyle's wreckage of the grave as a destruction of Troy's tendency towards the evasion of disagreeable feelings about himself. 'Sanguine by nature,' we are told, 'Troy had a power of *eluding* grief by simply adjourning it': 'The planting of flowers on Fanny's grave had been perhaps but a species of *elusion* [my emphases] of the primary prick of conscience, and now it was as if his intention had been known and circumvented.' (*FFTMC*, 308-9) It is Troy's narcissism that is wrecked to pieces. Upon seeing the 'dismantled grave,' Troy, almost 'for the first time, […]

[244] For the Ruskinian resonances of Hardy's grotesque, see Isabelle Gadoine, "Of Gargoyles and Men: Creative Vitality in *Far From the Madding Crowd*," *Fathom* 3 (2016): https://doi.org/10.4000/fathom.577.
[245] Eliot, *After Strange Gods*, 58.

wishe[s] himself another man.' (*FFTMC*, 309) Troy had previously loved himself so much that he could never imagine wanting to be anyone else:

> He had not minded the peculiarities of his birth […] because these appertained to the hero of his story, without whom there would have been no story at all for him; and it seemed to be only in the nature of things that matters would right themselves […] and wind up well. This very morning the *illusion* [my emphasis] completed its disappearance, and, as it were all of a sudden, Troy hated himself. (*FFTMC*, 309)

Significantly, it is not merely Troy's 'illusion' that is punctured here. Troy had thought himself 'the hero of a story'. Readers are prevented from retreating into their own narcissistic 'illusion[s]' because the depiction of Troy's disillusionment is accompanied by a self-conscious disillusionment of the fictive nature of Hardy's own text, which disturbs readerly immersion. This is a move characteristically Hardyean; indeed, we will soon find it repeated in the case of Michael Henchard later in this chapter. In his representations of disillusionment, Hardy always flirts with depreciating the illusory nature of fiction itself; it is an essential expression of what Aaron Matz has called his 'suspicion of books'.[246] Hardy's subtle pun upon 'illusion'/ 'elusion' in the passage insinuates that art might be yet another 'species of elusion', that is, escapism, like the prettifying flowers that Troy used to circumvent his grief. Hardy, though, draws upon this binary of simplistic reality versus fantasy to transform it. In fact, he overcomes the

[246] Matz, *Satire*, 66.

escapist predicament by engaging a dialectic that pits cathartic satisfactions (*the feeling of a good riddance*), against a demand that we attend to what we would rather get rid of (*an uncomfortable retention, a sort of sickness in your stomach you need sit with*). The former is symbolised by the gurgoyle's torrent, while the latter is symbolised by Troy's having to face what remains of the gurgoyle's wreckage.

Throughout *FFTMC*, Hardy progresses from a salvific conception of art as an instrument of the Christian cure of souls, to a cruder, grotesque uncontained vision of art's effects. The later vision rejects the adept 'dexterity' with which Gabriel wielded his 'instrument of salvation' earlier in the novel as belonging to the idealism of an earlier literary generation. Virginia Woolf criticised Hardy for lacking the control and poise of a Flaubert or Henry James.[247] One of the unintuitive insights of his corpus that Woolf fails to register, lies in the recognition that this movement from the dexterous handling to violent crudity is a progression, rather than a regression, because it is conducive to the toleration, rather than to the repression, of ambivalence—of the mess of our emotional lives.

'Tis an old remedy': Pity, Fear, and the Homeopathic Conception of Catharsis

In his first major tragic novel, *The Return of the Native* (1878), Hardy demonstrates how he makes room for his conception of catharsis as uncontainment by parodying other theories in the Aristotelian tradition, which he perceived to be too neat, too restrictive, or too idealistic in their conception of what tragedy is and does. In *TROTN*, Hardy specifically satirises the conception of catharsis as a homeopathic remedy that takes

[247] Woolf, "The Novels of Thomas Hardy," 224.

pity and fear as its ingredients. The theory was famously propounded by Milton in his Preface to *Samson Agonistes* (1671), a copy of which Hardy owned from 1865:

> Tragedy [was] said by Aristotle to be of power by raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those and such like passions, that is to temper and reduce them to just measure with a kind of delight, stirr'd up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated[;] for so, in Physic, things of melancholic hue and quality are used against melancholy, sour against sour, salt to remove salt humours.[248]

The spectator's experience of pity and fear upon watching or reading a tragedy was often imagined as purifying the same emotions by a 'sort of spiritual homeopathy', as one nineteenth-century commentator put it.[249] Hardy, however, remained unconvinced; in a letter to John Addington Symonds in 1889, he fretted over whether he was not merely bringing more 'sadness' into the world by writing tragedies.[250] *TROTN* expresses Hardy's longstanding worry that like might not cure like, as the homeopathic principle promises, that his tragedies might further exacerbate, or fail in their attempts to remedy, the 'carking care[s]' of his readers. (*PV*, 76-7)

In *TROTN*, Hardy's scepticism regarding the ameliorative instrumentalization of tragedy upon homeopathic principles finds allegorical expression in the death of Mrs Yeobright, who dies after being 'stung by an adder' despite the application of an attempted homeopathic cure. (*TROTN*, 284) Sam, one of the 'heath-folk', proposes a

---

[248] Millgate, *Biography Revisited*, 84. For his annotations of *Samson*, see Dennis Taylor, "Hardy's Missing Poem and His Copy of Milton," *The Thomas Hardy Journal* 6, no. 1 (February 1990): 50-60, 51. John Milton, "Samson Agonistes," in *The Complete Works of John Milton*, ed. Laura Lunger Knoppers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), II.66.
[249] Mahaffy, *A History of Classical Greek Literature*, II:198. Adolf Stahr, *The Life and Works of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing*, trans. E. P. Evans (Boston: William V. Spenser, 1859), I.371.
[250] Thomas Hardy to John Addington Symonds, April 14, 1889, in *CL*, I.190-191, (I.190).

homeopathic folk-remedy: 'You must rub the place with the fat of other adders'. (*TROTN*, 92, 284) Clym expresses his doubts about the 'old remedy' but accepts it as a desperate remedy in lieu of other options.[251] Olly Dowden responds that it's 'a sure cure', which she used to use when she went out 'nursing'. (*TROTN*, 284) When the doctor arrives and tells the group surrounding Mrs Yeobright that they have 'much to fear', however, Clym asks again: 'Do you think we did well in using the adders' fat?' (*TROTN*, 292) The doctor responds:

> Well, it is a very ancient remedy[.] It is mentioned as an infallible ointment by Hoffman, Mead, and I think the Abbé Fontana. Undoubtedly it was as good a thing as you could do; though I question if some other oils would not have been equally efficacious. (*TROTN*, 292)

Yet this dance between 'sure cure' and failed cure, 'infallible ointment' and a remedy merely as good as much else, is in fact beside the point: Mrs Yeobright dies not of the bite, but of heat exhaustion. (*TROTN*, 292) The episode reveals how an attachment to a mistaken fantasy of cure can distract us from what we really need to remedy.

If Hardy reflects doubtfully on the claims that tragedy might provide its readers with a 'sure cure' upon homeopathic lines, Elisha Cohn nonetheless exaggerates when she claims that Hardy rids his fiction of any sense of the 'instrumental' vision of

---

[251] In the nineteenth century, homeopathic medicine was both revered and ridiculed. Hardy's own views are not recorded but the wife of his good friend Edmund Gosse, Nellie Gosse née Epps, came from a family of prominent homeopathic practitioners. Gosse started courting Nellie just after he met Hardy in 1874, four years before the publication of *The Return of the Native*. In a letter to Dr John Chapman, an allopathic doctor and editor of the *Westminster Review,* the social theorist Harriet Martineau wrote: 'Ah! If you knew [the patient's] life before and since the change of the principle of treatment you wd avoid scoff [sic] homeopathy.' Harriet Martineau to John Chapman, June 11, 1857, in *The Collected Letters of Harriet Martineau*, ed. Deborah Anna Logan (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2007), 33-36, (IV.35). Thwaite, 149; "'My Dear Gosse'," 36

literature.[252] Hardy's parody attempts to break through into a tempered conception of art's therapeutic power, which is free from unhelpful idealisations, moral complacency, and distracting fantasies. Hardy's depictions of the desperate remedy motif seem to suggest and overcome the deficiency of our therapeutic fantasies as they stand. The value of literature for Hardy here lies, paradoxically, in the way in which it stresses that the fulfilment it can help us toward can only ever be a partial fulfilment; it is always haunted by an excess or deficiency that cannot be easily recuperated into a wholly self-satisfied sense of solution, resolution, cure, or relief.[253]

Throughout his fiction, Hardy gives us characters who are inadequate spectators or faulty representatives of tragedy as imagined by Aristotle and his interpreters. In so doing, he ironizes claims that tragedy accomplishes a catharsis of pity and fear in this manner. When Johnny Nunsuch finds a panting Mrs Yeobright on Egdon Heath, for instance, she tells him she is 'a broken-hearted woman cast off by her son'. (*TROTN*, 277) The child abandons Mrs Yeobright, though, because he is unsure how to read or react to her suffering:

> Before quite leaving her he threw upon her face a wistful glance, as if he had misgivings on the generosity of forsaking her thus. He gazed into her face in a vague wondering manner, like that of one examining some strange old manuscript, the key to whose characters is undiscoverable. He was not so young as to be absolutely without a sense that sympathy was demanded, he was not old enough to be free from the terror felt in childhood at beholding misery in adult quarters hitherto deemed impregnable; and whether she were in a position to

[252] Cohn, *Still Life*, 153.
[253] Cf. Davis and Billington, "The Very Grief a Cure of the Disease," 406.

> cause trouble or to suffer from it, whether she and her affliction were something to pity or something to fear, it was beyond him to decide. (*TROTN*, 277-278)

The 'old manuscript' foremost evoked in the passage is that of the *Poetics*. Johnny cannot decide whether the parched and wearied old woman is 'something to pity or something to fear', the narrator tells us, severing the famous collocation in Aristotle's definition of tragedy into an either/or. Critics have strangely neglected this explicit allusion to the *Poetics* in their discussions of Hardyean tragedy, but it says much about Hardy's ironic engagement with the Aristotelian tradition. It is as if the dead language of Hardy's 'manuscript', in seeking to convey tragedy by the written word, as opposed to the spoken spectacle of the stage, has somehow imperilled the eudaimonic, characterological ambitions of the Aristotelian tradition.[254]

In a manner characteristic of his irreverent erudition, Hardy turns one of the coagulated questions of Aristotelian scholarship—the question of how pity and fear relate to each other in the *Poetics*—into an anxiety in the mind of a scared provincial child. While we might resolve the issue by making a neat little Aristotelian point about young boys lacking the full developmental capacity for appropriate ethical responses ('he was not old enough', etc.), to do so would be to miss Hardy's investment in the child's 'vague wondering' and its resistance to the cathartic logic of the Aristotelian tradition.[255] Childish bewilderment was an orientation towards the world with which Hardy identified as an adult author. In response to a friend objecting to what he called his 'philosophy', Hardy claimed he had no 'philosophy', saying that his work constituted

---

[254] Hardy's metaphor of baffled textual hermeneutics associates writing with a lack of immediacy or 'presence', as Derrida would say. Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," 114. For an excellent discussion of a comparable thematic in *Middlemarch*, see Hertz, *George Eliot's Pulse*, 41.
[255] Cf. Aristotle, *NE*, 5.

'merely a confused heap of impressions, like those of a bewildered child at a conjuring-show'. (*L&W*, 441) As was the case with the phantom 'imbecile' of 'The Profitable Reading', Johnny may be a special case, but Hardy uses the child to express his doubts as to whether tragedy ever really does any good and whether art ever really guarantees genuine transformations of behaviour. Hardy's novel leaves us in an uncontained state like the child's 'vague wonderings'—'a confused heap of impressions'.

Hardy's investment in representing the child's incomprehension is hard to understand unless one realises that his concerns about the cathartic satisfaction is twofold. He is not merely worried that tragedy might not merely fail to inspire moral action; he worries it might even 'injur[e]' the minds of his readers by encouraging *self*-pity and complacency. (*PV*, 82) Hardy makes this point at an earlier time in *TROTN* in which Eustacia is compared to the tragic muse. When represented in the act of sighing at the beginning of the novel, Eustacia becomes an allegory of tragedy by way of the narrator comparing her with the actress 'Mrs Siddons' in recollection of the latter's depiction as the 'Tragic Muse' (1783-84), flanked by Pity and Fear, in Sir Joshua Reynolds's famous painting.[256] (*TROTN*, 56) That Hardy has catharsis as the end of tragedy in mind here is suggested by Eustacia's finding ventilation in 'lengthened sighing' in the episode; Arnold's talk of a cathartic 'vent' might have suggested the respiratory metaphor. (*TROTN*, 56, 60) If Eustacia becomes an allegory of tragedy, her sigh comes to symbolise the vent tragedy offers. Yet Eustacia's relief in sighing appears uncontrollable, uncontained, and even dangerous: 'There was a spasmodic abandonment about it as if, in allowing herself to utter the sound, the woman's brain had authorized what it could not regulate.' (*TROTN*, 56) We hear prejudicial overtones

[256] J. B. Bullen, *The Expressive Eye: Fiction and Perception in the Work of Thomas Hardy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 106.

in his description of the weakness of the 'woman's brain', which throws distance between the male creator and his female character—though, notably, Eustacia is at this point unnamed by the narrator, and so is but a 'woman' against the night sky. However, the prejudicial tone is complicated by the way in which Eustacia here acts as an allegory of Hardy's own creation—note the pun upon *author* in 'authorize'.

Hardy uses Eustacia, like Johnny, as a vent for his own anxieties about tragedy. For tragedy aspires in the Aristotelian tradition 'to temper and reduce them to just measure with a kind of delight', in Milton's phrase; even outside the narrow confines of Aristotelian scholarship, there was a sense that poetry, in the words of Charlotte Brontë, could 'allay emotions when their strength threatens harm.'[257] Eustacia's sigh, though, allays nothing: it neither 'regulate[s]' nor moderates excess, but further provokes it.[258] Hardy invites us to engage in self-reflection about the dangers of tragic literature comparable to the Platonic critique of the arts put into the mouth of Socrates in the *Republic*.[259] His discomfort with the tragic tradition is suggested by way of Eustacia being in various ways an ill fit for an allegory of the catharsis of pity and fear. Although Stephen Halliwell has suggested that there is a 'strong self-regarding element' to the Aristotelian conception of pity that depends upon the pitier's realisation that comparable misfortune could happen to themselves, Eustacia's self-indulgence sits uneasily under the allegorical weight Hardy foists upon her because her 'sigh' is not expended in pity for others, but in self-pity.[260]

---

[257] Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley*, ed. Margaret Smith and Herbert Rosengarten (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2008 [1849]), 190.
[258] Milton, "Samson Agonistes," II.66.
[259] Plato, *Republic*, trans. Tom Griffith and ed. G. R. F. Ferrari (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 313.
[260] Halliwell, *Poetics*, 175. Though not an Aristotelian critic of drama per se, George Henry Lewes considered a protagonist's self-pity to be irreconcilable with tragedy. In 1875, Lewes argued: 'Instead of being made to feel that the sufferer is giving himself up to self-pity, we should be made to see in his anguish the expression of a general sorrow. The tragic passion identifies passion with the suffering of

Catharsis in Crude Relief in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Jude the Obscure*

In his mature tragedies, Hardy heightens the stakes of the escapist predicament by recasting the problem of self-indulgence more clearly in terms of the morally dubious nature of tragic pleasure, whereby a reader finds relief in witnessing the torment of an imaginary character.[261] Hardy's doubts about accomplishing tragic catharsis though pity and fear lead him to reconceive tragic pleasure as a distinctly guilty pleasure and to thereby ironize aggrandized curative conceptions of catharsis in the Aristotelian tradition.

Hardy does so by playing off two rival conceptions of catharsis in the Aristotelian tradition against each other. One set of cathartic metaphors in the text encourages us to view tragic catharsis as a quantitative reduction of 'emotive fluid' (to use a hydraulic metaphor from *The Woodlanders*), not essentially related to pity and fear, which offers temporary relief. (cf. *Woodlanders*, 105-6) Another set of metaphors point towards a higher conception of catharsis as a qualitative refinement of emotional dispositions relating to pity and fear, which effect substantial moral or spiritual transformation of the psyche. Cruder images of uncontained physiological outflowing vie with rarefied ideas of spiritual purification in the text. Hardy first needs to rehearse the failure of the latter as simple-minded idealisations to work through to his own more dissonant vision of the ethical power of tragedy as uncontainment.

If *TROTN* dangles the prospect of a homeopathic cure by pity and fear in front of its readers, *TMOC* begins with a promise of purification: Donald Farfrae has a 'plan

---

mankind. The hero is presented less as moaning over his lot, exclaiming: 'I am so miserable!' than as moaning over his and the common lot, exclaiming: 'O, this misery!'' George Henry Lewes "First Impressions of Salvini," (1875) in *On Actors and the Art of Acting* (London: Smith, Elder, 1875), 264-278, (272). Cf. Morris Greenhut, "G. H. Lewes's Criticism of the Drama," *PMLA* 64, no. 3 (June 1949): 350-368, (355).

[261] A. D. Nuttall speaks of the 'basic collision' between the representation of 'terrible matter' and a tragic audience's 'delighted response'. Nuttall, *Why Does Tragedy Give Pleasure?*, 1.

for purifying' the bad 'growed wheat' that Henchard has provided to the disgruntled bakers of the city that produces loaves 'as flat as toads'. (*TMOC*, 100, 30) 'I never see such unprincipled bread in Casterbridge as this before', the baker tells Susan and Elizabeth-Jane upon their first entry to the city. (*TMOC*, 30) Farfrae, though, by merely passing through the city demonstrates to Henchard an operation that transforms the bad wheat into something more edible: 'complete!—quite restored, or—well—nearly', as the Mayor reacts upon tasting the grains. (*TMOC*, 45) Much to Hardy's annoyance, the anonymous reviewer of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* for the *Saturday Review* casts doubt upon Farfrae's 'secret recipe for turning 'grown' wheat into good wholesome bread stuff'.[262] In a letter to Gosse on Christmas Eve, 1886, Hardy protested against being 'sneered at by the Saturday [sic] because of a sentence describing a rather unlikely way of improving bad flour, which had scarcely anything to do with the story.'[263] However, Hardy misrepresents both his critic and his story. For the critic had taken Hardy to task for it being improbable that one would find such a story as that of Michael Henchard in 'Nature'—and had used Farfrae's 'secret recipe' as a humorous example of some of the more fantastic parts of the plot.[264] The critic no doubt touched a nerve because Farfrae's 'plan for purifying' has much to do with Hardy's plot. The baker's talk of bread as 'unprincipled' suggests the significance of the bad wheat as an analogy for human badness. The desire to make the bread rise encourages us to consider ideas of moral uplift. Henchard attempts to repair the past in his remarriage to his old wife Susan, and later by attempting the same with his former lover Lucetta. Henchard's plans for 'rude

[262] Anonymous, *Saturday Review* lvi (29 May 1886), excerpted in *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, ed. R. G. Cox (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), 134-136, (135).
[263] Thomas Hardy to Edmund Gosse, December 24, 1886, in *CL*, I.159.
[264] Ibid.

reparation', as R. H. Hutton described them in his review of the novel for the *Spectator*, attempt to make good old faults and promises.[265]

Hardy uses Henchard's desire to heal old wounds, which will soon be frustrated, to reflect upon the reparative power of the novel itself. His texts warrant our rejecting a too clear distinction between the transformations undergone by his characters and the therapeutic experiences he envisages his novel offering its readers.[266] In speaking of 'purifying', Hardy reflects upon the possible forms of catharsis the plot stimulates (or fails to stimulate) in his readers. (*TMOC*, 100, 283) Farfrae's plan for 'purifying' recalls the interpretation of catharsis as a 'purification of the passions', chiefly associated with the German writer and critic, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, among others in the century.[267] Hardy did not read German, but a translation of the *Dramaturgy* was published in 1879 by Helen Zimmern.[268] As early as 1884, Hardy had already met Zimmern through Gosse.[269] In his *Sensation and Intuition: Studies in Psychology and Aesthetics* (1874), James Sully had similarly given an account of Lessing's interpretation of Aristotle.[270] Hardy likely read Zimmern and Sully, who both wrote important works for the English reception of the philosophy of Schopenhauer, German culture, and philosophical

---

[265] Richard Holt Hutton, *Spectator* (5 June 1886), excerpted in *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*, 136-140, (138).
[266] Goethe had suggested that the catharsis of a tragedy refers to the catharsis of the passions of the characters within a tragic plot, as opposed to the emotions of the spectators of a tragedy. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 'Gleanings from Aristotle's Poetics' (1826) trans. Elizabeth Wenning quoted in Walter Watson, *The Lost Second Book of Aristotle's "Poetics"* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 147-148.
[267] Stahr, *Life and Works of Lessing*, I.371. James Sully, "Lessing's Hamburg Dramaturgy," in *Sensation and Intuition: Studies in Psychology and Aesthetics* (London: Henry S. King, 1874), 312-335, (330).
[268] Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, "Dramatic Notes," trans. Helen Zimmern in *Selected Prose Works of G.E. Lessing*, ed. Edward Bell (London: George Bell, 1879), 227-493. Sydney H. Kenwood, "Lessing in England," *The Modern Language Review* 9, no. 2 (April, 1914): 197-212, (211).
[269] The guestbook of Edmund Gosse covering the years 1876-1920 called 'The Book of Gosse, Vol. I', GBR/0012/MS Add.7034, Gosse family papers, University of Cambridge Library, Cambridge, England. For a discussion of the Gosse-Zimmern friendship in 1881, see Thwaite, 215.
[270] Sully, "Lessing's Hamburg Dramaturgy," 330.

pessimism more generally.[271] Lessing claimed that the 'purification of the passions' of the spectator, which Aristotle imagined effected by tragedy, 'rests in nothing else than in the transformation of passions into virtuous habits' along the lines of the Aristotelian conception of virtue as a mean between two extremes:

> Tragic pity must not only purify the soul of him who has too much pity, but also him who has too little; tragic fear must not alone purify the soul of him who does not fear any manner of misfortune but also of him who is terrified by every misfortune, even the most distant and improbable.[272]

Lessing awards tragedy practical value: it attunes us to events with the appropriate level of pity and fear, neither too much nor too little.[273] We go about our lives better after watching an Aristotelian tragedy, as Lessing sees it.[274]

Hardy, though, is sceptical of Lessing's moderating purification, and implies that the theory is immoderately idealistic in its conception of what tragedy can do. In his denial that Henchard finds any practical use in the tragic events of his life, Hardy expresses his scepticism within the novel. R. H. Hutton's review of *TMOC* helps us understand Hardy's rejection of this form of practical instrumentalization because it addresses the question of whether Henchard is ever allowed to improve as a character—and, analogously, whether his readers can hope to expect any kind of ethical improvement by way of reading Hardy's novel. Hutton objects to the gloomy 'pagan

---

[271] Asquith, "Hardy's Philosophy," 289; *Thomas Hardy, Metaphysics and Music* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 37-38, 80, 99.
[272] Lessing, "Dramatic Notes," 421.
[273] In *TROTN*, Christian strikes us as a representative example of a person too much 'afeard [sic]': one in need of a good purgation of excessive fearfulness. *TROTN*, 51
[274] Bosanquet would characterise Lessing's 'presupposition of the moral aim of poetry' as 'painful to [the] consciousness [of] today'. Bosanquet, *A History of the Aesthetic*, 238.

reflections' of Hardy's narrator, and quotes the following passage from near the end of the novel, which describes Henchard's state of mind after the failure of all his financial, filial, and romantic prospects:

> Externally there was nothing to hinder his making another start on the upward slope, and by his new lights achieving higher things than his soul in its half-formed state had been able to accomplish. But the ingenious machinery contrived by the gods for reducing human possibilities of amelioration to a minimum—which arranges that wisdom to do shall come *pari passu* with the departure of zest for doing—stood in the way of all that. He had no wish to make an arena, a second time, of a world that had become a mere painted scene to him.[275] (*TMOC*, 297)

Hutton objects to Hardy's 'philosophy', which he calls 'intrinsically false', on the grounds that wisdom—in Henchard's case, the attainment of 'a better and humbler mind'—is its own reward, whether implemented in practice or not.[276] Hutton proposes that the 'moral wisdom which overrules our fate' does not intend that we use 'character' and wisdom to 'mould circumstance, but rather that it is the use of circumstance to chasten and purify character.'[277] The disagreement between author and critic is significant because it suggests how the value of experience is bound up with the value of reading about experience and reveals how Hardy's sympathies with fatalism imperil 'the possibility of purposive literature', much as Elisha Cohn has argued of his evolutionary

[275] Ibid.
[276] Ibid.
[277] Ibid, 138-139.

determinism.[278] Relevantly, Hutton awarded literature the same purificatory potential that he did adverse circumstance. In a later essay on George Eliot, Hutton would cite approvingly 'Aristotle's fine definition of tragedy', which suggests tragedy '"purifies" by pity and by fear.'[279] Hutton's hopes for the improvement of the characters within the literary work, and his notion that a reader should undergo a comparable improvement, mirror one another. Yet Hardy, in suggesting that there is a tendency in the universe towards 'reducing human possibilities of amelioration to a minimum', risks withholding the comfort and 'amelioration' *from his readers* which he blames 'the gods' for withholding from humanity in general. Daniel R. Schwarz has claimed that the fatalistic endings of Hardy's novels 'reject the notion that experience brings wisdom and maturity'—and we can appreciate how this insight troubles any sense of what a reader is to gain from the experience of reading his novels.[280] Hardy defended himself against charges of 'fashionable pessimism', in Hutton's disparaging phrase, by stressing the 'distinctly meliorist' character of his 'practical philosophy'; Hardy claimed he believed that the world could be made better by the remedy of 'remedia[ble] ills'.[281] The passage Hutton cites, however, suggests how Hardy risks losing sight of the amelioration he might do his readers by allowing his characters so little room for growth and renovation.

As with the depiction of Troy's crisis in *FFTMC*, Hardy's representation of Henchard's disillusionment with life makes for a disillusionment with art. When the disillusioned Henchard refuses to 'make an arena, a second time, of a world that had

---

[278] Cohn, *Still Life*, 150.
[279] Richard Holt Hutton, "George Eliot as Author," in *Essays on Some of the Modern Guides of English Thought in Matters of Faith* (London: Macmillan, 1887), 145-258, (240).
[280] Daniel R. Schwarz, "Beginnings and Endings in Hardy's Major Fiction," in *Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Dale Kramer (London: Macmillan, 1979), 17-35, (18).
[281] Hutton in *Critical Heritage*, 138. Hardy quoted in Millgate, *BR*, 379.

become a mere painted scene to him', his perspective on the universe compares to the disinterest of an aesthetic spectator looking upon a 'painted scene'; he has become a spectator where he used to be an actor in the 'arena' of life, or what will later be called in the final sentence of the novel, the 'general drama of pain.' (*TMOC*, 297, 310) In comparing Henchard's sense of futility with the gazer upon an artwork, Hardy deflates any expectation that we as readers are going to undergo any worthy improvement in reading the novel. After first dangling a promise of purification in front of his readers, Hardy makes us doubt the good to be gained from this life, and by natural extension his depiction of it. But why does he do so? Hardy is invested in an unidealised picture of what art does to and for us in *TMOC*. The anodyne claims of 'The Profitable Reading of Fiction' were published two years after the novel, as if in anxious denial of the bleaker and more far-reaching insights about the 'profit' we gain from art explored in *TMOC*.

Hardy cultivates this ambivalent mood about art in reaction to his doubts about the value of catharsis; it derives from a clear look at the morally compromised nature of tragic pleasure. Hardy uses another cathartic metaphor in the text—that of 'winnowing', a process referred to in Ancient Greek in terms etymologically related to Aristotelian catharsis—to stress how the cathartic experience offered by the novel is bound up in an ambivalently sadomasochistic delight in, as opposed to merely piteous sympathy with, Henchard's 'self-alienat[ion]'.[282] (*TMOC*, 305) When Henchard suspects that Elizabeth-Jane is again becoming involved with Farfrae and fears that her 'passion for Farfrae […] should entirely displace her mild filial sympathy with himself,' he notices that his stepdaughter's walks coincide with Farfrae's 'emergence from Corn Street', where the latter pauses on that 'windy highway—just to winnow the seeds and chaff out of him

[282] Nussbaum, *Fragility*, 389.

before sitting down to tea, as he said.' (*TMOC*, 283) To winnow, per the OED, is to 'expose (grain or other substances) to the wind or to a current of air so that the lighter particles (as chaff or other refuse matter) are separated or blown away; to clear of refuse material by this method.'[283] Farfrae's use of the metaphor for the wind clearing the chaff from his clothes is light-hearted and jovial. Given that it comes at the end point of the novel, the imagery takes on bleaker resonances: Henchard fears he will be 'displaced', and he eventually, like the chaff, will be borne away from her.

The cathartic associations of winnowing persisted into the English imagination thanks to the Gospel of Matthew, which uses winnowing as a metaphor for the separation of the saved and the damned. With his 'fan in his hand' God will 'thoroughly purge [διακαθαριεῖ] his floor,' the evangelist tells us, 'and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.' (Matthew 3:12) The chaff is the waste that will not be saved—and neither will Henchard, who asks when Lucetta says she cannot marry him: 'That's the way the wind blows is it?' (*TMOC*, 165) Indeed, Henchard becomes waste: he wastes away, unable to eat on his death bed, much like the little goldfinch he buys Elizabeth-Jane as a wedding present that starves after being left in its cage under a hedge. (*TMOC*, 308, 304-5)

Upon finishing the novel, the reader is left with feelings comparable to those of Elizabeth-Jane, whose 'youth', that is, the years of her life that coincide with the plot of the novel, 'teach[es] that happiness was but the occasional episode in a general drama of pain.' (*TMOC*, 310) Hardy uses this 'drama of pain' metaphor not to moderate the pity and fear of his reader in a careful, contained fashion, but to force his reader to confront the partially sadomasochistic character of tragic pleasure. Indeed, Hardy's ending

[283] "Winnow," v.1.a, OED.

recalls his earlier description of the 'sanguinary […] games' once played at the Casterbridge Ring, the old Roman amphitheatre once used for gladiatorial sport. (*TMOC*, 68) In the imagery used in narrating one of the 'old tragedies' associated with the Ring, where Henchard first meets his wife Susan, Hardy depicts catharsis as a crude, overspilling, uncontainment and tragic pleasure as fundamentally sadomasochistic:

> …in 1705 a woman who had murdered her husband was half strangled and then burnt there in the presence of ten thousand spectators. Tradition reports that at a certain stage of the burning her heart burst and leapt out of her body to the terror of them all, and that not one of those ten thousand people ever cared particularly for hot roast after that. (*TMOC*, 68)

Victorian tragic drama often tried to distinguish its depictions of suffering from the entertainment found at actual public executions.[284] However, Hardy, in calling this piece of sadomasochistic butchery an 'old traged[y]', however ironically, shines a lurid light upon the genre in which he is writing. The catharsis on offer in the Ring vignette is a sloppy ('half-strangled') sacrifice and a bodily explosion—the 'terror' of which possesses only emetic potential, assuring no substantial moral improvement but merely a bit of butchery that will put you off your dinner.

Throughout his fiction, Hardy pushes the question of tragic pleasure in a way that makes the texts seem less and less obviously morally acceptable. Hardy's stress upon physiological affect (terror, disgust) roots tragic catharsis firmly within the body, rather than the soul; the burning woman's exploding heart even parodies iconography

[284] Jan-Melissa Schramm, *Censorship and the Representation of the Sacred in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 232.

of the flaming heart of Jesus, usually associated with agapeic love. That Hardy's tragedies are deeply infused with troubling, sexual pleasures is of course an old story in criticism.[285] The violent delights of the episode recall the 'strong sexual component' of Hardy's reaction to the hanging of a young woman called Martha Brown for the murder of her husband in Dorchester on 9th August 1856, which inspired the ending of *Tess*.[286] Yet if the scene cannot be reduced to sadistic indulgence, it is because his stress upon the moral dubiousness of tragic pleasure makes a reader self-conscious about their own place at the execution. Hardy's description of the butchery as a tragedy means the reader is drawn to compare themselves as a reader of tragedy with the vulgar herd entertained by the brutal execution. Readers also come away with a strange taste in their mouth.

The actual cathartic 'winnowing' occurring in the novel appears less a moral purification, and more an ambivalent identification, both piteous and sadomasochistic. Readers feel both pleasure and pain in seeing Henchard being put 'to the blush' (as the organisers of the skimmity-ride put it), that is, being made to feel despised and humiliated. (*TMOC*, 279) He is separated off from the other characters in the novel, as chaff is winnowed from wheat. The dissonance Hardy attempts to induce in us lies in the sense that the novel is bound up with the cathartic thought patterns it critiques, which identify relief with riddance. We are invited to disapprove of Henchard's act of selling his wife Susan at Weydon Fair at the beginning of the novel because he saw her as an 'irksome obstacle' that he wished to be rid of. At the novel's end, after his secret shame in selling his wife has come to light, Henchard can only conceive of himself as the kind of burden he once thought Susan. (*TMOC*, 297) The novel refuses to get over its

[285] T. R. Wright, *Hardy and the Erotic* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1989), 1.
[286] Millgate, *BR*, 63.

baggage. Hardy refuses us any fantasy that we have undergone a purification, and our aggression has been clearly separated from our sympathy.

In *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy insists with even greater clarity upon the sadomasochistic nature of the 'cathartic, Aristotelian qualities' of his fiction in the infamous pig-killing episode. Hardy had consciously intended the episode as a protestation against cruelty to animals, but his early readers were horrified by the episode, which they thought sordid and gratuitous.[287] The misalignment of intention and reception here tells of the uneasy relationship between the tragically piteous and the merely grotesque in Hardy's work, as well as the way in which his willingness to ally tragic art with aggression can even undo his own articulated political and moral ambitions. The episode constitutes a tragicomic *mise en abyme* reflection upon the tragic action of the novel in its anticipation of the sordid death of its eponymous protagonist. Jude is encouraged to kill the '[p]oor creature' by Arabella. (*Jude*, 58) The woes of the 'House of Atreus' are evoked throughout *Jude the Obscure*, and Jude's killing of the porcine 'victim' parodies Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia to appease Artemis in the events preceding those depicted in the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus, a central text for Hardy.[288] (*Jude*, 273, 58)

> The blood flowed out in a torrent instead of in the trickling stream she had desired. The dying animal's cry assumed its third and final tone, the shriek of agony; his glazing eyes riveting themselves on Arabella with the eloquently keen reproach of a creature recognizing at last the treachery of those who had seemed his only friends. (*Jude*, 59)

[287] West, *Hardy and Animals*, 130, 133.
[288] Millgate, 176.

Jude tries to kill the pig mercifully, but the butchery is botched—a 'messy job'; the pig has not been 'well bled', to Arabella's dissatisfaction, and Jude subsequently 'kick[s] over the vessel in which the blood had been caught' after he tries to recover himself. (*Jude*, 58, 59) The botched butchery reflects uneasily on the tragedy of *Jude* itself. The 'messy job' suggests how Hardy will not offer us a simple alleviatory purgation, but an uncontained form of relief in which exacerbation and alleviation are intermixed. In his depiction of the pig-killing as mock-tragic, Hardy induces in his readers a dissonance that he considers an instructive response to the problem of tragic pleasure.

The reader will be haunted by remembrances of this bloodletting when Sue later grasps after cathartic metaphors in a desperate attempt to deal with her grief upon the miscarriage and the death of her children by Little Father Time's hand. Like Lady Macbeth, Sue fantasizes about what she sees as a moral stain being taken *out* of her, and she uses the grimly physiological metaphor of bloodletting to do so. 'What are you thinking of, little woman?' Jude asks her sometime after the death of their children, to which she responds:

> We ought to be continually sacrificing ourselves on the altar of duty. But I have always striven to do what has pleased me. I well deserved the scourging I have got! I wish something would take the evil right out of me, and all my monstrous errors, and all my sinful ways! […] I wish my every fearless word and thought could be rooted out of my history. […] I should like to prick myself all over with pins and bleed out the badness that's in me!
>
> (*Jude*, 333-4)

Earlier, Arabella had called religious resignation bad 'physic' before throwing a Methodist tract in the hedge, but now Sue seems to avail herself of comparably bad medicine: a psychological equivalent of bloodletting dressed up in religious clichés. (*Jude*, 304) Sue's metaphor reminds us of the primitive magical thinking behind Susan Nonsuch's attempt to prick Eustacia with a 'long stocking-needle' to ward off what she supposes to be Eustacia's bewitchment of her children in *TROTN*. (*TROTN*, 174) Also, and more disturbingly, it reminds us of the pig's blood in *Jude*, and thus the cathartic operation of the tragic genre parodied there. Sue's masochistic attempt to deal with her grief by way of catharsis makes us wary of our own potential sadistic spectatorship here. Her guilty conscience overspills into ours. The cathartic metaphors upset our stomach in a manner that disrupts our immersion in the novel: it makes our tragic pleasure feel like an ill-gotten gain, and we do not feel helpfully purged, so much as messily bled.

Importantly, Jude attempts to remain playful in calling Sue, tenderly but patronisingly, 'little woman'. However, his failure to find a register that can match Sue's mental state suggests the novel's rejection of its own guilty playfulness as somehow complicit or complacent. This dearth of playfulness is embodied in the murder-suicide of Little Father Time, the child who cannot play, the child who cannot find containment for his distress in the environment around him. His murder-suicide acts as yet another bleak parody of Aristotelian tragedy. He thinks that it 'would be better to be out o' the world than in it, wouldn't it?' and then hangs himself and his siblings in an attempt to disburden his parents of an excess, an excess of hungry mouths, in which he includes himself. (*Jude*, 232) The boy's suicide note famously reads: '*Done because we are too meny* [sic].' (*Jude*, 235) While critics have traditionally stressed the way in which the scene reflects Malthusian anxieties about excess population and resource scarcity,

Malthus is not the only tragic muse on scene.[289] The major crisis in Hardy's novel thus invites interpretation as a mock-Aristotelian allegory of cathartic relief along these lines—as an allegory of the disburdenment of an excess.[290]

Reductivism, Polysemic Excess, and the 'Cathartic, Aristotelian Qualities' of *Jude the Obscure*

In describing the murder-suicide in cathartic overtones, Hardy raises the question of whether the novel can reach a more expansive perspective than is entertained by Little Father Time, or whether his bleak interpretation of his lot—that it'd be better if he were out of the world, than in it—is the correct one. Little Father Time suggests how Hardy's concern with aggression was also a preoccupation with the violence of crude interpretation itself. 'The letter killeth', declares the epigraph to *Jude the Obscure*, taken from the second Epistle to the Corinthians, and withholding the happier ending of the sentence: 'but the spirit giveth life.' (2 Corinthians 3:6) The epigraph is usually understood as a reflection upon the deadening effect of the marriage laws upon romantic love.[291] After Sue returns to Phillotson and Jude has remarried Arabella, Jude cries out to Sue: 'we are acting by the letter; and "the letter killeth".' (*Jude*, 376) But because Hardy often enlists reductive interpretations to attack idealisations, he often flirts with a correspondingly warped reductive fantasy, which threatens to reduce aesthetic, ethical, and psychological phenomena to *less* than the sum of its parts.[292]

---

[289] Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 240.
[290] Bernays had described catharsis as 'the relief of disburdening the emotional tendencies', to quote a quotation that got an airing in English scholarship while Hardy was writing *Jude*. Jacob Bernays, *Grundzüge der verlorenen Abhandlung des Aristoteles über Wirkung der Tragödie* [*Outlines of Aristotle's Lost Work on the Effects of Tragedy*] (1857) quoted and translated in Franz Susemihl and R. D. Hicks, "Note on *κάθαρσις*," in *The Politics of Aristotle*, 651.
[291] W. R. Goetz, "The Felicity and Infelicity of Marriage in *Jude the Obscure*," *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 38 (1983): 189-313, 211. Patricia Ingham, "Introduction," to *Jude the Obscure*, ed. Patricia Ingham. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), xi-xii, (xii).
[292] For an analysis of contemporary 'reductive passion', see Rowan Williams, *Being Humans: Bodies, Minds, Persons* (London: SPCK, 2018), 16.

Hardy's concern with catharsis, which intimates a close link between the psychological and physiological processes, leads him to reflect upon how the mental and physical relate to each other. Though often imagined a strict determinist, Hardy seems to have kept asking himself whether the spiritual/mental can be reduced to the physiological, or whether the spirit or the mental transcends our embodiment.[293] Baxter Hathaway has noted how each age finds in its conception of Aristotelian catharsis a mirror for 'contemporary states of mind'—we might add, conceptions of mind and body.[294] In *Jude*, Hardy uses cathartic metaphors to think through questions of embodiment, which naturally arise out of Hardy's investment in a vision of culture, in which naked aggression and sadomasochistic sexuality are admitted as motivations to creativity. While Hardy is alive to the deadening effects of reductivism, he is also wary of the idealising impulse that attempts to evade our embodiment as human animals. A promiscuous polysemy characterises the cathartic metaphors of his texts that allow for the sexual and the spiritual, the physiological and the psychological, to intercourse with one another in a psychically generative fashion. This polysemy allows him to flirt with reductive materialist approaches to embodiment without wholly giving way to them. The profusion of meaning created by these punning metaphors toys with our desire for cathartic conclusions. In *Jude*, there is a recurrent strain between Hardy's desire for cathartic conclusions and dramatic closure, and his attempt to force his readers to keep the mess of life in mind by giving his protagonists characteristically uncontained messy ends—the pig's tragicomic bloodbath and Jude's own death at the end of the novel being representative instances.

---

[293] Cohn, *Still Life*, 149. Keen, *Hardy's Brains*, 5.
[294] Baxter Harroway quoted in Adnan K. Abdulla, *Catharsis in Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 13.

William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), published seven years after *Jude*, gives a memorable account of the physiological reductivism, or 'medical materialism', which became increasingly popular in the later decades of the nineteenth century.[295] There was a common tendency to diminish spiritual experiences ('exalted soul-flights') by 'calling them "nothing but" expressions of our organic disposition', e.g., 'William's melancholy about the universe is due to bad digestion—probably his liver is torpid.'[296] The cathartic controversy was influenced by this reductive passion. In the pig-killing and Sue's own desire for bloodletting, Hardy alludes to the 'outlet' theory of catharsis, which was then as now foremost associated with Jacob Bernays (1824-1881), a German Jewish scholar who influenced the intellectual life of Oxford in the latter half of the nineteenth century through his friendships with Mark Pattison, Max Müller, and others.[297] While writing *Jude*, Hardy would have had in mind the interpretation of catharsis and critique of Bernays published by his good friend, the Anglo-Irish classical scholar Samuel Henry Butcher (1850-1910). In *Jude*, Hardy is in critical dialogue with Butcher, as well as Bernays mediated through Butcher. Hardy criticises his friend's suggestion that the cathartic power of tragedy does not involve the body, but only the mind. In thinking about Butcher's criticisms of Bernays, however, Hardy is forced to review the deficiencies with the narrow reductive passion which often animates his own work.

The interpretation that Bernays put forth in his *Fundamentals of Aristotle's Lost Essay on the "Effect of Tragedy"* (1857) is now best remembered for its influence upon

---

[295] James, *Varieties*, 12-13.
[296] James, *Varieties*, 10, 12-13.
[297] Halliwell, *Poetics*, 353. James I. Porter, "Jacob Bernays and the Catharsis of Modernity," in *Tragedy and the Idea of Modernity*, ed. Joshua Billings and Miriam Leonard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 14-41, (16). Arnaldo Momigliano, "Jacob Bernays," in *Studies on Modern Scholarship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 128, 142, 151.

Sigmund Freud, whose wife, Martha Freud née Bernays, was the classical scholar's niece.[298] As Halliwell notes, Bernays conceives of catharsis as a 'pleasurable means of expending pent-up or excessive emotions' which have become 'pathological'; though he is not alone in conceiving tragic catharsis upon an analogy with cathartic medicine (e.g., a laxative), Bernays stresses the medical analogy in order to 'rule out any question of an ethical dimension to the experience', which is instead exclusively imagined in terms of 'quasi-therapeutic *relief*'.[299] Bernays's conception of catharsis more generally was in fact much more complex than his popular reception gave him credit for.[300] But in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, his reductive reading of the Aristotelian conception of catharsis as an 'alleviating discharge' and, in the words of Porter, a 'physiological event, pure and simple', proved seductive to Freud among many others.[301]

Porter characterises the common understanding of Bernays's interpretation in the following terms: that Aristotle's notion of tragic catharsis was 'a process that was closer to an orgiastic reaction, to vomiting, or to evacuation'; that tragic catharsis 'in contrast to popular and academic belief' could therefore 'serve no higher purpose, be it moral or pedagogical,' or even aesthetic.[302] The seductive crudity of Bernays's theory no doubt struck a chord with the growing scepticism about metaphysical realities such as the immaterial soul which troubled the century. James Sully compared the Bernaysian conception of catharsis with Herbert Spencer's Darwinian understanding of the relief to

---

[298] Lear, *Love and its Place in Nature*, 54. Momigliano, "Bernays," 133.
[299] Halliwell, *Poetics*, 353.
[300] Porter, "Catharsis of Modernity," 16.
[301] Jacob Bernays, *Grundzüge der verlorenen Abhandlung des Aristoteles über Wirkung der Tragödie* (1857) trans. Peter L. Rudnytsky and excerpted in "On Catharsis: from *Fundamentals of Aristotle's Lost Essay on the "Effect of Tragedy"* (1857)," *American Imago*, 61.23 (2004): 319-341, 329. Porter, "Catharsis of Modernity," 16. Friedrich Nietzsche's borrowings from Bernays were more complex. Bernays was known to have remarked that Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* contained his own 'views, only strongly exaggerated.' See Robert C. Holub, *Nietzsche's Jewish Problem: Between Anti-Semitism and Anti-Judaism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 82.
[302] Porter, "Catharsis of Modernity," 16.

be found in play in terms of the 'discharge' of aggression in *Principles of Psychology* (1855).[303] Spencer's notion of aesthetic play offering 'ideal satisfaction for the destructive instincts in absence of real satisfaction of them' is not at all far from Freud's later conception of art in terms of substitutive satisfaction.[304] Given the sadomasochistic erotics with which tragic pleasure becomes associated in *TMOC*, we can see why such a theory would find fertile ground in Hardy's imagination.

Porter suggests how Bernays's contemporaries thought his interpretation heralded the triumph of modern science, 'materialism, and rationality' over 'bourgeois sentimentality'.[305] In the *Fundamentals*, Bernays bemoaned Lessing's attempt to turn tragedy into a 'moral house of correction that must keep in readiness the remedial method conducive for every irregular turning of pity and fear'.[306] Having a similar inclination towards illusion-puncturing, Hardy would have been naturally sympathetic to Bernays's style of assault. Bernays cites Aristotle's remarks on the cathartic function of music in the *Politics* (more of which shortly), in order to debunk the insinuation that the ancient philosopher would consider the theatre 'a subsidiary and rival institution of the church, a sanatorium of ethical improvement'.[307] Bernays recommends we look on catharsis not as a hedonistic phenomenon, which turns tragic pain into tragic pleasure, nor an ethical phenomenon, which imagines tragedy in the service of moral improvement, but from a '*pathological* point of view'.[308] For Bernays, Aristotle considers tragedy akin to a therapeutic treatment, like an enema, for a somatic problem,

---

[303] Sully, "Lessing's Hamburg Dramaturgy," 331. Herbert Spenser, *The Principles of Psychology* (London: William and Norgate, 1872), II.630. For a discussion of Spenser, see Benjamin Morgan, *The Outward Mind: Materialist Aesthetics in Victorian Science and Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 102-3.
[304] Spencer, II.631.
[305] Porter, "Catharsis of Modernity," 16.
[306] Bernays, "On Catharsis," 321.
[307] Ibid. 325.
[308] Ibid.

such as would be traditionally cured by a cathartic medicine; emotions, such as pity and fear, are the 'pathogenic material' of the mental realm, which require expulsion via a process of 'draining'.[309]

In Butcher's essay 'Aristotle's Conception of Fine Art and Poetry', published in *Some Aspects of the Greek Genius* (1891), Hardy would have read Butcher's appreciation and critique of Bernays before writing *Jude the Obscure*. Butcher says Bernays 'reopened the whole question' of the cathartic controversy, and 'gave a new direction to the argument': 'Tragedy, [Bernays] would say, is a vent for the particular emotions of pity and fear. […] In the pleasurable calm, which follows when passion is spent, an emotional cure has been wrought.'[310] Though admiring his erudition, Butcher expresses his dissatisfaction with Bernays's reduction of tragic catharsis to 'the simple idea of an emotional relief, a pleasurable vent for overcharged feeling'—mere escapism, in other words.[311] Butcher claims that the emotions of pity and fear undergo a qualitive change, as opposed to a mere quantitative reduction:

> As the tragic action progresses, when the tumult of the mind, first roused, has afterwards subsided, the lower forms of emotion—the fear and pity of reality—are found to have been transmuted into higher and more refined forms. The emotions are not so much *purged away* as *purged*. [sic] The curative and tranquilising influence that tragedy exercises follows as an immediate accompaniment of the transformation of feeling.

[309] Ibid. 327, 331.
[310] Butcher, "Aristotle's Conception of Fine Art and Poetry," 350-352.
[311] Ibid. 357-8.

'Its function on this view is not merely to provide an outlet for pity or fear, but also to purge the emotions themselves,' Butcher claims, 'to purify and clarify them through the medium of art.'[312] Though Hardy had already satirised the promise of purification in *TMOC*, Butcher's argument would have provoked him to reconsider his position.

Although Bernays distanced himself from the solely hedonistic theory, Butcher's critique of his conception of catharsis as 'passion […] spent' resonates with the latter's awareness elsewhere in the essay of how 'sensuous gratification' can be substituted for 'genuine' tragic pleasure.[313] Freud's Bernaysian conception of catharsis connected the pleasurable feeling of 'thorough discharge' to an 'accompanying sexual excitation' which appears 'as a by-product whenever an affect is aroused'.[314] Though neither Hardy nor Butcher could have read this text a decade before it was written and many decades before it was published, Hardy's texts play with the idea that tragic catharsis might be identified with uncontainable sexual pleasure in a way that speaks to the reductivism that was already in the air. As such, Hardy's novels lend themselves to discussions of sublimation *avant la lettre*.

One reviewer called *Jude the Obscure* a novel 'steeped in sex'.[315] Hardy was riled by the idea precisely because it was so true. In the 'Postscript' of 1911, Hardy attempted to dismiss the idea that the 'cathartic, Aristotelian qualities' of *Jude* could include sexual pleasure.' (*Jude*, xlv) But Hardy protests too much. He complained of the critics who characterised his work as merely an obscene treatment of 'the marriage theme' (euphemistically, sexuality more broadly) at the expense of appreciating the more essential 'moral' qualities of the work. (*Jude*, xlv, xliv) In his defence, he relates the story

[312] Ibid. 358-9.
[313] Ibid. 322.
[314] Ibid.
[315] R. Y. Tyrrell, "Jude the Obscure," *Fortnightly Review* LXV (1896): 857-64, (858).

of one frustrated 'American gentleman' who had bought the book in eager anticipation of a seamy story, only to subsequently find that he had been 'induced by the rascally reviewers to waste a dollar and a half' on a 'religious and ethical treatise', which wasn't going to provide him with the kind of satisfaction he was after. (*Jude*, xliv-xlv) As so often with Hardy, however, his novels imply what he cannot openly admit in his non-fiction prose under the watchful eye of Mrs Grundy; indeed, his novels often imply what he cannot consciously admit to himself. It would have been more honest of him to suggest how the cathartic, erotic, and ethical elements of his fiction depend upon each other for their dissonant power.

Hardy mounts his defence against his critics by stressing how he wrote the story as a 'tragedy, told for its own sake as a presentation of particulars containing a good deal that was universal, and not without a hope that certain cathartic, Aristotelian qualities might be found therein.' (*Jude*, xlv) When Hardy expressed this hope in his Postscript of 1912, he would have had in mind the interpretation of catharsis published by Butcher who had died two years before. 'Hardy had a great liking for him,' as the *L&W* records, 'and was drawn to him for the added reason that he and his family had been warm friends of Hardy's dead friend Horace Moule'. (*L&W*, 369) Butcher sent Hardy a presentation copy of his 1902 edition of Aristotle's *Poetics*.[316] But the Moule connection suggests that Hardy would have known of Butcher and his studies long before this date.[317] Butcher was well-placed to support such a rhetorical move, having stressed how the 'universality' of poetry in the Aristotelian schema 'abstracts' and

[316] Steele, "Classics," 57.
[317] in 1886 Hardy sent Andrew Lang a copy of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* in 'admiration for the "infinite variety" of [his] literary achievements'—one of which Hardy would have been his 1879 prose translation of Homer's *Odyssey*, a collaboration with Butcher. *The Odyssey of Homer: Done Into English Prose* trans. Alexander Lang and Samuel Henry Butcher (London: Macmillan, 1879).

'disengages' us from the world of 'sense,'—of 'material needs and animal longings'.[318] Yet in the text of *Jude* itself, Hardy rejects this idealisation not merely by rooting Jude's tragedy in a firm sociological reality, but also by stressing the embodied nature of tragic pleasure. Hardyean tragedy is rooted in our 'animal longings'.

Hardy in his fiction and private correspondence is more playful about the ways in which the spiritual relates to the sexual. In a letter from the 17th of July, 1893 to Florence Henniker, one of his most significant frustrated love interests toward the end of the century and one of the inspirations for Sue Brideshead, Hardy writes that he 'had regret in reading' Shelley's *Epipsychidion* (1821), which advocates for free love, while Henniker, whose father was a devotee of Shelley, remained tied to conventional Christian views on monogamy ('enfeebled to a belief in ritualistic eclecticism'): 'Depend upon it there are more valves for feeling than the ordinances of Mother Church—my Mother Church no less than yours.[319] The letter is impudent and patronising: the 'valves for feeling' which he mentions pun upon other outlets that the pair might have found together, had Henniker been what Hardy calls in the same letter a more 'enfranchised woman'. (*CL*, II. 24) The 'valves for feeling' suggest the valves of the heart, the valves of a church organ, more secular outlets for passion, as well as intimate parts of the lower body, which might be made available for other kind of 'feeling'. The pun allows Hardy to get away with insinuating the sexual by way of the spiritual.

Hardy uses the same technique of paronomasic play to traffic between different 'valves for feeling'—sexual, religious, cultural—in *Jude* itself, which reveals the disingenuity of the Postscript in distancing the novel from the sexuality of the seamy American gentleman. When Jude first comes to Christminster after his failed marriage

[318] Butcher, "Aristotle's Conception of Fine Art and Poetry," 290.
[319] Thomas Hardy to Florence Henniker, July 17, 1893 in *CL*, II.23-24, (II.23). Millgate, *BR*, 311.

to Arabella, he attempts to spy his cousin Sue at the 'morning service in the Cathedral-church of Cardinal College':

> He had not long discovered the exact seat that she occupied when the chanting of the 119th Psalm in which the choir was engaged reached its second part, *In quo corriget*, the organ changing to a pathetic Gregorian tune as the singers gave forth:
>
> 'Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?'
>
> It was the very question that was engaging Jude's attention at this moment. What a wicked worthless fellow he had been to give vent as he had done to an animal passion for a woman and allow it to lead to such disastrous consequences; then to think of putting an end to himself; then to go recklessly and get drunk. (*Jude*, 86-87)

In his quotation from the Psalmist, who seeks to know how 'a young man [can] cleanse his way', Hardy raises the question of the role that art might play in helping us on our way, and whether this might be figured in terms of cathartic 'cleans[ing]'.

Hardy awards cathartic power to the music in the passage, recalling Bernays's particular contribution to the controversy over tragic catharsis. In his *History of Classical Greek Literature* (1880), Mahaffy, whom Hardy met in 1893, praised both Bernays and Eduard Müller for drawing scholarly attention towards the reference to catharsis in Aristotle's *Politics*, 'in which we find it compared to musical cures attempted by playing very exciting flute music as a palliative for morbid excitement for

the mind.'[320] Butcher also cited Bernays's redirection of the debate towards the relevant passage in the *Politics* with comparable approval.[321] The poetry of the Psalms seems to respond to Jude's innermost need, the question most engaging his attention. In its use of the cathartic metaphor, the passage reflects upon the possibly cathartic operation of art—in this case, through the form of music—which might be one way by which we can 'cleanse [our] way', i.e., find solace and guidance in art.

But the possible relief offered by the Gregorian tune is ironized by the Psalmist's question, which opens the floor to other 'way[s]' a young man might find relief; the free indirect discourse subsequently lists other forms of escapism: orgasm ('giving vent to animal passion for a woman'), intoxication ('recklessly […] get[ting] drunk'), and suicide ('putting an end to it all'). The passage punningly compares spiritual 'cleans[ing]' to physiological 'vent[s]' in a manner that testifies to the characteristically contranymic quality of cathartic metaphors. In Elizabeth-Jane's intention to read 'histor[ies] of all the philosophies' in *TMOC*, we find a portrait of the novelist as a young girl for Hardy himself read Friedrich Ueberweg's *History of Philosophy* in an edition of 1880, among other texts.[322] (*TMOC*, 91) Ueberweg noted how the term catharsis was used to refer to the 'deliverance (of the soul) *from* lusts', as in Plato.[323] But in the fin de siècle, tragic catharsis often appeared on the verge of collapsing into sexual relief. In 1894, for instance, the classicist R. D. Hicks took issue with Bernays's medical conception of

[320] Mahaffy, *History of Classical Greek Literature*, II:198. Cf. Bernays, "On Catharsis," 323-324. For Hardy and Mahaffy, see *L&W*, 271.
[321] Butcher, "Aristotle's Conception of Fine Art and Poetry," 354-355, 357.
[322] Hardy can be reliably thought familiar with would be Ueberweg's elucidation of Aristotelian philosophy, for we know he plundered other parts of the book for other philosophical material for his novels, see Thomas Hardy, *Thomas Hardy's 'Poetical Matter' Notebook*, ed. Pamela Dalziel and Michael Millgate (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 42n.3, 1034. Hardy, *The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy*, II.94, II.516, II.582.
[323] Friedrich Ueberweg, *History of Philosophy: From Thales to the Present Time* trans. George Sylvester Morris (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1880), I.178*.

catharsis and its pathologization of emotion, by redescribing the process in the following terms:

> Nor is it inconceivable that Aristotle has unduly pressed the medical analogy [too far]. [For how] can the emotions correspond to *materia peccans* [the offending substance that causes an illness]? [Emotions] are never expelled, and to speak of them as 'secreted' is an outrage on language. We more properly regard them as either suppressed or indulged, and in the latter cases as running their course, culminating in a thrill of pity, the shudder of horror, [and] the transports of enthusiasm, until sated with over indulgence [sic] they at length subside.[324]

In attempting to distance it from the medical conception, Hicks makes his fantasy of relief here sound orgasmic.[325]

Yet the way in which cathartic metaphors tend to 'outrage […] language' is precisely why Hardy is drawn to them. As in his letter to Henniker, Cardinal College's organ valves—which represent the cathartic power of art—also open easily to suggestions of sexual passion. In *Jude*, Hardy plays two conceptions of the relationship between the spiritual and sexual against each other in order to stress the ambiguities of embodiment; he does so to stress the sexual character of tragic catharsis. On the one hand, Sue advocates for Platonic love, which is a major preoccupation of the novel.[326]

---

[324] R. D. Hicks, "Note on *κάθαρσις*," in Franz Susemihl, *The Politics of Aristotle: A Revised Text*, trans. R. D. Hicks (London: Macmillan, 1894), 641-65, (652).

[325] Aristotelian scholars in more recent times, however, have taken seriously the idea that tragic catharsis might be best imagined in terms comparable to naturally occurring processes of bodily release, such as menstruation and the ejaculation of semen—and various moments in Hardy's work appear to call for such crude interpretations that conceive of catharsis in terms of such physiological processes as secretion and ejaculation. Jonathan Lear, "Katharsis," 298. Velvet Yates, "A Sexual Model of Catharsis," *Apeiron* 31 no. 1 (2011): 35-57.

[326] For a discussion of the queer resonances, see Jane Thomas, "Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, and 'Comradely Love'," *Literature and History* 16, no. 2 (2007): 1-15.

(*Jude*, 233) The Platonic *scala amoris* (*scale* or *ladder of love*) is given symbolic form earlier in the novel in the ladder Jude must ascend to look at Christminster far off in the distance as a child at Marygreen.[327] (*Jude*, 15) In Plato's *Symposium*, Diotima tells Socrates that the profane erotic love of the body must be transcended and sublimed into intellectual and spiritual love, much in the manner of ascending the rungs of a ladder.[328] While the whole import of Plato's text allows for considerable variance of interpretation, Sue advocates for a version of this view in her critique of conventional sexual morality: 'Their philosophy only recognizes relations based on animal desire. The wide field of strong attachment where desire plays, at least, only a secondary part, is ignored by them—the part of—who is it?—Venus Urania.'[329] (*Jude*, 160)

The reductionist approach of the 'medical materialist', as described by William James, on the other hand, similarly envisages a vertical relationship between the spiritual and the sexual, but instead proposes we race to the bottom. Though they often tend to express themselves 'by innuendo', James notes, the medical materialists 'criticis[e] the religious emotions' as '"nothing but"' covert expressions of 'perverted sexuality', or physiological processes more generally.[330] James notes, however, that:

> Religious life clothes itself in such poor symbols as our life affords, and the whole organism gives overtones of comment whenever the mind is strongly stirred to expression. Language drawn from eating and drinking is probably as common in religious literature as is language drawn from the sexual life. We "hunger and

[327] Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 55. Gregory Vlastos quoted in Nussbaum, *Fragility*, 166.
[328] Plato, *Symposium*, 415. For the importance of Alcibiades's disruption for our understanding of the *Symposium*, see Lear, *Open-Minded*, 156. Nussbaum, *Fragility*, 165-171.
[329] Thomas, "Comradely Love," 5.
[330] James, *Varieties*, 10.

> thirst" after righteousness[.] In fact, one might almost as well interpret religion as a perversion of the respiratory function.[331]

This point is helpful to a discussion of the cathartic metaphor in Hardy because it suggests how literary language—in this case metaphor—tends to gesture towards an uncontainable semantic excess that *cannot* be purged away. Neither the Platonic nor the crude materialist approaches to the sexuality-spirituality problem can thus be said to truly win out at this point in *Jude*. Hardy suggested in his epigraph that the 'letter killeth', which suggests his discomfit with reductionism. But in withholding 'the spirit gives life', he suggests his unease about letting the 'spirit' give us a clear escape from our embodiment. The fluctuations of Jude's mood in the novel instead make one feel that the sliding scale between sexual and spiritual in Hardy's novel is not so much vertical but horizontal—less a ladder and more a seesaw, and an off-balance one at that.

The puns in Hardy's novel facilitate this more playful approach to the psyche-soma, and the sexual-spiritual in a manner not normally registered in criticism.[332] If there is a moment in *Jude* which eludes the limitations of spirit-killing reductivism, it is in such moments of play. Hardy uses the semantic promiscuity of cathartic metaphors in his fiction to imply the embodied nature of aesthetic experience in a way that does not collapse into physiological reductivism in a deadening manner, while still nevertheless emphasizing a lively intercourse between psyche and soma in aesthetic experiences. The uncontainable jouissance refuses to be reduced to either.

Yet what ultimately cramps this playfulness is Hardy's recognition of moral conflict, which makes our embodiment appear a more tragic condition of our being

---

[331] Ibid. 13*.

[332] There is some resonance with Loewald's concept of sublimation here. Cf. Hans W. Loewald, *Sublimation: Inquiries Into Theoretical Psychoanalysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 13.

human. If tragedy is not a homeopathic cure or moral purification, and is firmly in fact rooted in the 'animal needs' that Butcher disowned, tragic pleasure becomes increasingly vexed by its embodied character. If we go back a book, we can see the moral problematic play out in clearly in *Tess*, in which images of 'oozing' propel the course of the tragic action: the 'life-blood' of Prince, the Durbeyfield family's horse, 'spout[s] in a stream' when he is killed by accident upon the road; the death of the horse, which her father rode for his work, propels Tess into the unscrupulous employ of her supposed cousin, Alec Stokes-D'Urberville. (*Tess*, 75, 28, 56) At Tantridge, there is the 'black stream of something oozing', which turns out to be treacle from a broken vessel, that ruins the dress of Car Darch, one of Alec's former lovers in his employ. (*Tess*, 75) When Tess cannot help laughing at Car tearing off her ruined dress, the woman attacks Tess, which allows Alec to whisk Tess off on his horse. (*Tess*, 76-77) The dress-ruining treacle in turn foreshadows Alec's rape of Tess, which is compared to a 'coarse pattern' that stains 'beautiful feminine tissue'. (*Tess*, 82) The 'rush of juices', furthermore, take on an especially sexual character when Hardy describes how 'oozing fatness and warm ferments of the Var Vale, at a season when the rush of juices could almost be heard below the hiss of fertilization,' inspire the growth of Tess and Angel's 'love'. (*Tess*, 164) But later after the pair's parting, the 'oozing' treacle returns in the form of the 'scarlet oozing', which issues from Alec's mouth, when Tess slaps him upon the hayrick at Flintcomb-Ash after he insults her husband for leaving her. (*Tess*, 351) This moment in turn foreshadows the 'blood-stain' that blooms into a 'gigantic ace of hearts' on the ceiling of the boarding house when Tess stabs and kills Alec in the room above; the 'Queen of Spades' having been Car's nickname. (*Tess*, 82, 351, 74) Though Hicks later in the decade would take issue with the idea that tragedy might lie in emotional 'secre[tion]', the metaphorical texture of Hardy's novel suggests the reader of

Tess might have their emotions 'ooz[ed]' out of them. But given that rape and bloodshed propel this uncontainable 'rush of juices' we can see why Hardy's concern with tragic pleasure ultimately causes him to reinscribe ambivalence into the escapism his tragedies offer.

The Books of Jude: Hardy's Tragic Puns

In *Jude*, Hardy's intensified pessimism regarding the therapeutic value of tragic literature is expressed in scenes in which his characters read famous tragic works. Despite trying to console themselves, they only find themselves feeling none the better for it. Instead, they are left feeling uncured, uncared for, and uncontained. They do not feel "held" in mind. Jude often attempts to make therapeutic use of the Book of Job, for instance, which scholars then as now have often read as a Hebrew tragedy.[333] With a 'lump of chalk', Jude writes on the wall of the College he has been rejected from: '*I have understanding as well as you. I am not inferior to you: yea, who knoweth not such things as these?* [sic]' (Job 12.3 quoted in *Jude*, 112) It is piteous to read of Jude's display of learning upon the walls that refuse him. Whatever the reader's tender feelings are, however, Jude himself only finds compromised comfort in writing the words of Job's lament: 'The stroke of scorn relieved his mind, and the next morning he laughed at his self-conceit. But the laugh was not a healthy one.' (*Jude*, 113) Later in the novel, Hardy attempts to exacerbate the cathartic function of his text even further. After Arabella has scampered off to the festivities of Christminster's Remembrance games, Jude again quotes the Book of Job to himself as he dies slowly alone, asking for water, while cheers intrude from outside:

[333] A. B. Davidson, "Introduction," to *The Book of Job* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1886), ix-lxviii, (xxi). Dorothea Krook, *Elements of Tragedy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 254.

> *'Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived.'*
>
> ('Hurrah!')
>
> *'Let that day be darkness; let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it. Lo, let that night be solitary, let no joyful voice come therein.*'
>
> ('Hurrah!')
>
> '*Why died I not from the womb? Why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly? … For now should I have lain still and been quiet. I should have slept: then had I been at rest!'*
>
> ('Hurrah!')
>
> *'There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor…. The small and the great are there; and the servant is free from his master. Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul?'* (*Jude*, 392-393)

Jude's lamentations are interrupted by joyful cries from the festivities without. Job/Jude's request that he would have his life 'unbe' (to use a Hardyean locution) and have his birth undone, is interrupted by the hurrahs of 'joyful voice[s]' (and we are encouraged to identify with the 'voice of the oppressor') that he wishes to cast out. ('Tess's Lament', 44, in *CPW*, I.217) As the novel now reaches its climax, these hurrahs from the street offer the reader jouissance; and so, in the terms of Hardy's tragic text, the reader becomes the very 'oppressor' of Jude's complaint. The moral burden of tragic pleasure is at last too much to bear. In response, Hardy pushes tragic pleasure in his last novel to such extreme limits that it is no longer self-evident that the cathartic relief he offers is either tragic or pleasurable. Rather, it becomes an emotional uncontainment neither clearly identifiable with alleviation nor with exacerbation.

When Jude and Sue come to discuss an Ancient Greek tragedy, Hardy expresses this strain by way of puns that are tragic, even grotesque, rather than comedic. Though the pun characteristically depends upon playful association and pleasant innuendo, Hardy's puns empty themselves of their own playfulness. Jude, for instance, is attempting to resign Sue and himself to the horror of Little Father Time's infamous suicide-homicide in the relevant section. Sue looks upon the clothes of her dead children and breaks down: 'I am a pitiable creature,' she says, 'good neither for earth nor heaven any more! [sic] I am driven out of my mind by things! What ought to be done?' (*Jude*, 328) Jude replies: 'Nothing can be done,' and subsequently quotes from the 'chorus of the *Agamemnon*': 'Things are as they are, and will be brought to their destined issue.' (*Jude*, 329) Jude's translation echoes a that of the American classicist William Seymour Tyler in his *Theology of the Greek Poets* (1857): 'Things are as they are, and *are surely* [my emphasis] brought to their destined issue.'[334] That Hardy chooses to echo Tyler's translation, with its phrase 'destined issue', holds further significance for the novel's 'cathartic, Aristotelian' aspirations. In Hardy's 1855 Paley edition of the *Agamemnon*, the relevant line is translated in a footnote as follows: 'However, matters are where they now are; and will be accomplished according to destiny.'[335] Hardy's choice of Tyler's 'destined *issue* [my emphasis],' however, suggests a rather bleak pun to *Jude*'s reader, albeit not one we can imagine the eponymous protagonist consciously intending to make in his state of grief.[336] The literal sense of 'issue' used in the line of course refers to

---

[334] Aeschylus, 67, *Agamemnon* quoted and translated in William Seymour Tyler, *The Theology of the Greek Poets* (Boston: Draper and Halliday, 1867), 227.
[335] F. A. Paley in *The Tragedies of Aeschylus: Re-Edited with an English Commentary*, ed. F. A. Paley (London: Whittaker, 1855), 308n.67. Steele, "Classics," 57.
[336] Hardy might have also used Theodore Buckley's attempt at a literal translation of the *Agamemnon* in *The Tragedies of Aeschylus* (1876), which Hardy used for the infamous 'President of the Immortals' line at the end of *Tess*, translates the line as follows: 'But things are as they are; and will be brought to the issue doomed.' Aeschylus, 67, *Agamemnon*, in *The Tragedies of Aeschylus, Literally Translated*, trans. Theodore Alois Buckley (London: George Bell, 1878 [Henry G. Bohn, 1849]), 38. Steele directs us confusingly to a

an ineluctable destined *outcome*. In *The Woodlanders*, Lady Charmond wonders, upon finding Fitzpiers at her window and covered in blood, what could have been the 'concatenation of events' that could have led to 'this tragical issue'. (*Woodlanders*, 238) In the Preface to *Merope: A Tragedy* (1858), Arnold had suggested that his 'story issues *tragically* [Arnold's italicisation], as Aristotle has truly said that the best tragic stories ought to issue.'[337] The 'tragical issue' is in this sense the culmination of the plot, which provides a reader with catharsis. In *Jude the Obscure*, however, the phrase 'destined issue' subtly puns upon 'issue' as *progeny, offspring,* and *children*, whom in the case of Jude's family have been 'destined' to die.[338] This sense of the word is used earlier in the novel in describing Jude's reaction to Sue's marriage to Phillotson. Jude projects 'his mind into the future,' and imagines Sue 'with children, more or less in her own likeness, around her.' (*Jude*, 170-1) Yet 'the consolation of regarding them as a continuation of her identity' is denied to Jude, 'by the wilfulness of Nature in not allowing *issue* [my emphasis] from one parent alone', which will mean they also resemble Phillotson. (*Jude*, 171) Though the pun generates associations of this kind, they are not themselves generative but are deathly in their remembrance of Jude and Sue's murdered children. Hardy cultivates a barren aesthetic.

The bleakness of the pun upon 'issue' as offspring is further heightened by the Aeschylean context. The line is spoken, near the play's beginning, by the Chorus, who are reflecting on the misery that the Trojan War has caused both the Greeks and the Trojans. The pun thus points towards the 'doomed issue', as Buckley's translation has it, of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra: Iphigenia, the daughter Agamemnon sacrificed in

---

Bohn edition of 1876, but Hardy used an edition of Buckley's translation republished by George Bell & Sons, in 1876. Steele, "Classics," 57.

[337] Matthew Arnold, "Preface to *Merope*," *On the Classical Tradition*, ed. Robert Henry Super (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), 38-64, (55).

[338] Aeschylus, 67, *Agamemnon*, in *The Tragedies of Aeschylus,* trans. Buckley, 38.

order to appease the goddess Artemis, so that the Greek fleet might sail from Aulis to recapture Troy. Notably, this pun upon 'issue' is not present in the Ancient Greek, but would have been suggested to Hardy, Tyler, and Buckley by a then standard interpretation, now thought a misreading, of the following line spoken by the Chorus: 'Neither by weeping, nor by shedding tears, will he soothe away the intense wrath of fireless rites.'[339] Karl Wilhelm Dindorf, whose *Poetici Scenici Graeci* (1841) Hardy owned, had put forward the view that the lines above relate to Agamemnon.[340] The lines are glossed accordingly in Buckley's translation: 'But the end of all will be as fate decrees. No[t] by any means will Agamemnon avert the unflinching wrath resulting from Iphigenia's death.'[341] Later in the play, Clytemnestra will use the sacrifice of Iphigenia as justification to murder Agamemnon, and so the death of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra's 'doomed issue' will ironically issue in death of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra's hand. Earlier, Sue had voiced worries to Jude that there is a 'tragic doom' that overhangs their 'family, as it did the House of Atreus', which connects the 'doomed issue' of both families. (*Jude*, 273)

The tragic pun is further echoed when Sue frets that her and Jude's outpourings of grief are being overheard, and Jude realises all she can hear is two 'clergymen of different views, arguing about the eastward position', that is whether a priest should face his congregation during the prayer of consecration in the Holy Communion. 'Good God,' Jude cries out, 'the eastward position, and all creation groaning!' (Hardy, *Jude*, 327) Jude, who studies the New Testament in Greek in hopes of training as a priest earlier in the novel, alludes to the Epistle to the Romans: 'For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.' (Romans, 8:22) As Hardy

[339] *Agamemnon*, 68, in *The Tragedies of Aeschylus,* trans. Buckley, 38.
[340] Steele, "Classics," 57. Buckley in *Agamemnon*, in *The Tragedies of Aeschylus,* trans. Buckley, 38n.1.
[341] Buckley, 38n.1.

would have known from his own New Testament studies, the 'metaphor' being employed here 'is of a woman in labour'.[342] The Epistle's apocalyptic metaphor, in which the world groans until it reaches delivery, is deeply ironic, however, for though Sue herself is pregnant at this moment, her birth in tragedy will be no birth: no actual issue will come; no living child will be delivered. Sue's pregnancy will end in miscarriage due to her deep grief, and all the other children will remain dead. (*Jude*, 330) The tragic pun empties itself of its own playfulness, as Hardy purposefully cultivates a barren aesthetic in response to the escapist predicament provoked in him by the problem of tragic pleasure. The uncontainment will not be fruitful, (re)productive but merely a waste.

In *Jude*, Sue's miscarriage is a rather blunt (and insensitive) symbol of the way plans, hopes, and justice tend to miscarry in the Wessex universe, including our hopes for the therapeutic potential of literature. While we might be tempted to relate this to Hardy's abandonment of the novel form, the same problematic (mis)carries over into Hardy's ballad 'A Sunday Morning Tragedy', which was published in *Time's Laughingstocks and Other Verses* (1909). The ballad had its origin in an 1893 plan for a tragedy for the stage called *Birthwort* centred upon an attempted abortion.[343] The ballad's speaker is a mother who searches for an 'herb' that will cause her daughter, pregnant out of wedlock, to miscarry. ('A Sunday Morning Tragedy', 37, in *CPW*, 250-255) The mother applies to a shepherd, who uses such an herb as an abortifacient, another kind of cathartic medicine, on his flock. 'Tis meant to balk ill-motherings', the shepherd tells her, to which she thinks to herself: 'Ill-motherings! Why should they be?'

[342] 'The metaphor is of a woman in labour. The whole human race looks forward anxiously forward to its future state.' Note to Romans 8.22 in Edward Burton, *Η Καινή Διαθήκη: the Greek Testament with English notes* (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1852), 318.
[343] Millgate, *BR*, 306-7.

('A Sunday Morning Tragedy', 53-4) The lines, though, are more foreboding than she realises. Although 'ill-motherings' ostensibly refers to unwanted pregnancies, another sense of 'ill-mothering' as *poor mothering*, or as *nurture that makes one ill*, surfaces in the poem when the young girl dies after the mother's desperate attempt to help her child—by providing her with the supposed abortifacient—instead kills her. ('A Sunday Morning Tragedy', 121-124) In late Hardy, the symbolic uses of miscarriage and abortion are so extreme that it seems a travesty to claim anything recognisably therapeutic at all. The wry self-consciousness that marked Hardy's earlier reflections on catharsis have been drained of their playfulness here in a manner that suggests Hardy can no longer bear the moral burden of tragic pleasure. Hardy's late tragedies do not hold us, as Christoff has argued, but ask us to hold them. The texts do not offer us a container for our ambivalence but instead ask us to contain their discontent.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how an exploration of the cathartic metaphors of Hardy's tragic works helps us revise the anodyne account of the therapeutic power of fiction that he gives us in his non-fiction prose works. Hardy's reconception of Aristotelian catharsis as an experience of intense emotional uncontainment is neither moralised nor straightforwardly alleviatory. We have seen how Hardy clears space for his ambivalent therapeutic by parodying aggrandized, idealised and disembodied notions of catharsis that have been proposed over the centuries in the Aristotelian tradition. Hardy's bitter, satirical of accounts of catharsis that instrumentalise tragedy as a tool of ethical improvement or emotional moderation are rooted in his concern that they obscure the morally vexed character of tragic pleasure. While he draws on the medical model of catharsis, which was particularly associated with the reductivism of Jakob Bernays in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Hardy overworks the

purgative metaphors of his text to such a degree that the cathartic function of his texts becomes identifiable with a wasteful abortive aesthetic, which empties his writing of its former playfulness. Tragic pleasure in later Hardy is no longer either clearly tragic or pleasurable. Rather, Hardy seems to suggest that such an aesthetic is the only authentic and appropriate response to suffering in modernity, and the vexed nature of tragic pleasure more broadly.

‘Vital Lies’ and ‘Savage Treatment’: the Uses and Abuses of Suspending the Ethical and Escaping Reality for Edmund Gosse

Introduction

> …only with respect to childcare does aesthetics receive what it deserves…[344]
>
> Kierkegaard

Edmund Gosse is usually remembered as an unbearably light writer—‘seldom profound’, as his friend Evan Charteris put it.[345] Such titles as *Gossip in the Library* (1891), which make Gosse’s biographer Ann Thwaite ‘shudder’ with embarrassment, recall the worst excesses of the belle-lettres tradition in criticism.[346] Gosse didn’t help matters by joking he was a ‘faddling [sic] hedonist’ in the same book. (*Gossip*, 3) But this chapter demonstrates how it is Gosse’s very willingness to paddle in the shallows that lets him reach further depths, as increasingly recognised by philosophically minded commentators interested in questions of pleasure, authenticity, self-knowledge, and problems of living.[347] The chapter reveals how the common estimation of Gosse as insubstantial is itself superficial, and does so by focusing upon Gosse’s ambivalent recuperation of escapism, which challenges reductive disparagements of art, illusion, and evasion. Gosse uses escapism to explore non-normative homoerotic and

---

[344] Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, quoted and translated in C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 77; for an alternative, less lucid translation (‘justice is done to esthetics [sic] only in the conduct of the nurse-maid’), see Kierkegaard, III.286.
[345] Charteris, 444.
[346] Thwaite, 298
[347] Clark, *Good Lives*, 184-191. David Parker, *The Self in Moral Space: Life Narrative and the Good* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2018), 71 *et seq*.

sadomasochistic sexual desires, and construct an ambiguously gendered, secular identity for himself. This exploration then allows him to detach himself from the customary circumstances of his upbringing and the heteronormativity of his culture more broadly.

In *Father and Son* (1907), Gosse realises that the desire to plumb the depths, to rend away 'the veil of illusion', and face reality, is a desire characteristically warped by sadistic fantasies, and thus less ethically valuable than evasion. (*F&S*, 128) Gosse thereby overturns the evasion-confrontation dichotomy of the late nineteenth century as overly simplistic. In its stead, Gosse formulates an ambivalent escapism that enables him to reconcile authenticity with evasion. Like Ruskin, Gosse develops a therapeutic conception of art out of a model of repression into one of expression. Gosse overcomes the disillusionment with life that characterises his early poetry of narcosis, as well as the disparagement of illusion he found voiced in Henrik Ibsen's *Wild Duck*. The antinomianism of the aesthetic life allows Gosse to redeploy narcissism, magical thinking, and aggression to purposes conducive to queer flourishing.

Clashing Spheres: Gosse's Philosophical Modernity and the Kierkegaardian Inheritance

Though Gosse joked that his hedonism was of a 'faddling' sort, his ruminations upon the place of pleasure in a well-lived life tend to be sensitive to ethical dilemmas, even while they refuse the temptation to earnestness. As an author, Gosse is always keener to risk nodding than plodding. To grasp the philosophical seriousness of Gosse's project, we need to appreciate him as a distinctly post-Kierkegaardian writer in a way neither Ruskin nor Hardy is. Considering in his critical biography *Ibsen* of 1907 the 'vexed question' of whether the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen was influenced by 'the eminent Danish philosopher, Sören Kierkegaard', Gosse questioned Georg Brandes's

assertion that 'Ibsen had aspired to the honor [sic] of being called Kierkegaard's poet'. (*Ibsen*, 244) Modern scholars of Ibsen, no doubt unhappy with the Romantic myth of artistic originality, have been more open to Gosse than Brandes on this question of influence.[348] Reading Gosse contra Gosse, I suggest that not only was Ibsen an inheritor of Kierkegaardian preoccupations, but so was Gosse—in part through Ibsen.[349] In his reflections upon the escapist desire to evade ethical judgement, Gosse engages with a central problematic of philosophical modernity as formulated in the work of both Kierkegaard, whom Brandes recommended Gosse read as early as 1877, and Ibsen, whom Gosse translated and championed for a British audience from 1872: *Does the attainment of excellence in certain forms of life demand we 'suspend' (or merely ignore) the demands of the ethical for the sake of some non-moral good?*[350] Gosse is both troubled and intrigued by how different modes of existence demand we suspend ethical consideration (most especially the abstention from violence and cruelty) for the sake of some good: the hedonistic-aesthetic life, for the sake of beauty, amusement, pleasure and relief; the religious life, for the sake of holiness; and the experimental-scientific life for the sake of knowledge and progress.[351] Scholars claim that for Kierkegaard the aesthetic life is also not reducible to hedonism, but for Gosse it mostly is.

---

[348] Fred Rush, "Two Pistols and Some Papers: Kierkegaard's Seducer and Hedda's Gambit," in *Ibsen's Hedda Gabler: Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Kristin Gjesdal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 295-214, (297). Evert Sprinchorn, *Ibsen's Kingdom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 52.

[349] Jonathan Taylor has suggested that Gosse's 'Preface' to *Father and Son* resonates with Kierkegaard's claim that 'the comic and the tragic are the same' and Peter Caws has already compared Gosse's father to Kierkegaard's Abraham. Both fail to note that Gosse in fact read Kierkegaard, however. Taylor, *Laughter, Literature and Violence*, 90. Peter Caws, *Yorick's World: Science and the Knowing Subject* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 73

[350] Anthony Rudd, *Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 118, 121. For Gosse's first encounter with Ibsen, see Thwaite, 108. For Gosse and Brandes on Ibsen and Kierkegaard, see Julie K. Allen, "Georg Brandes: Kierkegaard's Most Influential Mis-Representative," in *Kierkegaard's Influence on Literature, Criticism and Art*, ed. Jon Stewart (London: Routledge, 2013), II.17-42, (II.17).

[351] The scientific life is considered by Kierkegaard not as a sphere of life in itself, but as part of the aesthetic life; for Gosse, as we shall see, it more clearly sits somewhere uneasily between the aesthetic and the ethical, which is why I portion it off separately here.

To appreciate this aspect of Gosse's work is to recognise how the reception of *Father and Son* has mischaracterised his exploration of ethics, aesthetics, and religion, specifically how the ways in which these separate spheres of life conflict and correspond in his narrative. The memoir is usually read simply as a protest against how the 'dying Puritanism' of his parents, and especially that of his father P. H. Gosse, ethically impinged upon his development as a child: 'an aesthetic critique of non-conformist Protestantism', as Kathy Rees calls it.[352] This account has much to it. In the Epilogue, Gosse claims that he has the 'right to protest against the untruth' that 'evangelical religion, or any religion in violent form,' is either a 'wholesome', 'valuable', or a 'desirable adjunct to human life':

> It divides heart from heart. It sets up a vain, chimerical ideal, in the barren pursuit of which all the tender, indulgent affections, all the genial play of life, all the exquisite pleasures and soft resignations of the body, all that enlarges and calms the soul are exchanged for what is harsh and void and negative. It encourages a stern and ignorant spirit of condemnation; it throws altogether out of gear the healthy movement of the conscience; it invents virtues which are sterile and cruel; it invents sins which are no sins at all, but which darken the heaven of innocent joy with futile clouds of remorse. (*F&S*, 183)

Gosse's instinctual hedonism finds expression in his writing as a protest against the prohibition of innocent pleasures, and as a plea against ethical impingements that cause unnecessary mental and physical pain.

---

[352] Kathy Rees, "'Jesus and Pan Held Sway Together': Christological Resonances in Edmund Gosse's *The Secret of Narcisse: a Romance* (1892)," in *The Figure of Christ in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Elizabeth Ludlow (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 261-273, (262).

Yet an exclusive focus on the ostensive polemical thrust of *F&S* obscures its other aspects. Ethics and aesthetics are always falling in and out of love with each other in Gosse's corpus. The Epilogue implicitly identifies the ethical life ('healthy movement of conscience') with the aesthetic realm ('all the genial play of life'), and religious excesses with ethical impingement ('sterile and cruel'). But in other sections of the memoir, which have been less thoroughly appreciated in criticism, the religious life of the father and the aesthetic life of the son troublingly approximate each other. The secular aesthete remains the son of his ultra-Calvinist father in one crucial respect: the 'dying Puritanism' of the father and the vitalist aestheticism of the son are both marked by a common 'antinomian element'—to take a phrase from Gosse's friend Walter Pater—which depreciates the impingement of ethical norms, especially when narrowly moralistic, upon the life of faith and life of pleasure respectively.[353] Gosse often implies that his own need to 'fashion [an] inner life' for himself, as distinct from that of his father, requires he retreat into the same solipsistic subjectivism that he condemns in his father. (*F&S*, 186) Not all pleasures are innocent, Gosse's ambivalent escapism acknowledges. Both religious belief and aesthetic cultivation are shown to entail solipsism, which entails an avoidance of others, or sadomasochism, which depends upon an individual's capacity to disregard the alterity, interiority, and dignity of others even while (pseudo-)relating to them. But before I procced to demonstrate how Gosse redeploys sadism and narcissism to his own purposes, I want to foreground how vexed this attempt will be by his critique of sadistic modes of relation.

[353] Pater, *Renaissance*, 16.

'Savage Treatment': Gosse's Plea Against Pain

Gosse explores the conflict between the different spheres of life outlined in a therapeutic idiom as a contest of therapies. Gosse critically depicts medical procedures that seek to cure the body, as well as metaphorical attempts to 'cure' or care for the mind or soul. Drawing from the Hardyean "desperate remedy" motif to meditate upon the undercurrents of sadism in 'civilized' life, Gosse scrutinises fantasies of cure for the degree of sensitivity they demonstrate towards their patients. In most cases, Gosse's instinctive hedonism makes him intensely critical of nominally therapeutic efforts that are overly abrasive in their treatment of those they seek to cure. In this regard, Gosse's memoir forms an ethical plea for the reduction of unnecessary pain—a reading which complements the more familiar story that *F&S* is a hedonist polemic that instinctively stresses the importance of aesthetic pleasure for a well-lived life, though I will soon show how the lures of sadomasochism trouble this ethic.[354]

The way in which sadism vexes Gosse's hedonist ethic is evident in his accounts of the attempts of two different medical doctors to care for his mother in her final months, which he witnessed as a young child. Emily Bowes Gosse was treated first by Dr Jesse Weldon Fell (1819-1890), an 'experimental' American surgeon who had moved to London, and then subsequently by Dr John Epps (1805-1869), a homeopathic doctor.[355] Looking back upon his mother's battle with breast cancer as 'one of the most cruel maladies by which our poor mortal nature can be tormented', Gosse comprehended the attempts of the doctors to care for his mother in her final months, as representations of two different models of *treating*—in both the moral and medical sense—the

[354] For Gosse's hedonism, see Woolf, 152-3; Peter Abbs, "Introduction," to Edmund Gosse, *Father and Son*, ed. Peter Abbs (London: Penguin, 1983), 9-31, (12). Peter Allen, "Sir Edmund Gosse and His Modern Readers: The Continued Appeal of Father and Son," *ELH* 55, no. 2 (1988): 487-503, 498.
[355] Thwaite, 149.

(m)other.[356] (*F&S*, 34) Gosse describes Dr Fell as insufficiently careful, neither scrupulous nor gentle enough, in his 'experimental' treatments upon his patient and claims that the sufferings of his mother were exacerbated 'by the violence of the medicaments to which her doctor thought it proper to subject her' through trial of 'a new and fantastic 'cure'[.]' (*F&S*, 39) Fell's treatment involved 'the removal of the skin by nitric acid, the scoring of the tumour,' and then 'pressing' into the wound 'narrow strips of linen rag covered with a purple mucilaginous substance,' Thwaite explains.[357] Gosse describes his mother's 'peculiar sensitiveness to pain', which makes the episode in *F&S* all the more pathetic. (*F&S*, 34)

In his recollections of Fell, Gosse is perturbed by the doctor's possible sadism. In his *Memorial of the Last Days on Earth of Emily Gosse* (1857), P. H. Gosse recalls that the doctor had claimed that the procedure would be painless, which of course it was not.[358] In his earlier biography of his father, *The Life of Philip Henry Gosse, F.R.S.* (1890), Gosse argued: 'It is but charity to hope that in deceiving others [Fell] was himself in some measure deceived.' (*LPHG*, 263) Either Fell's self-deception prevents him from apprehending his limited ability to aid others, or he takes pleasure, whether consciously or unconsciously, in the destruction of his patient's breast. Both possibilities are disturbing, albeit not equally so, and reflect two consistent concerns of Gosse's corpus: first, the way in which 'vanity' (narcissism, self-love) can—somewhat unintuitively—amount to a refusal to know oneself; and second, the way in which narcissism leads on to sadism, in which pleasure is taken in the real or perceived power wielded over others. (*F&S*, 88)

---

[356] Cf. Klein, *E&G*, 64. Julia Kristeva, *Melanie Klein*, trans. Ross Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 86.
[357] Thwaite, 149.
[358] Philip Henry Gosse, *A Memorial of the Last Days on Earth of Emily Gosse, by her Husband* (London: J. Nisbet, 1857), 8.

As in his depictions of other botched attempts at care and cure, Gosse stresses here how a nominally curative cultural practice can become a conduit for sadism. Like Hardy, Gosse was keen to suggest how intense fantasies of cure and care can become agents of harm rather than help. Gosse was specifically troubled by the resemblance between the surgeon and the violent aggressions of the sadist, as were many in the period.[359] In an epigram he wrote for Hamo Thornycroft upon hearing that the sculptor's entry to a competition held by the Royal College of Physicians had been rejected, he wrote: 'Physicians, […]| Still murder genius in the flesh, | But spare it in the marble!'[360] Though jovial, Gosse's light verse speaks to a deep cultural anxiety of his period in a fashion typical of his work. Earlier in the century, Heinrich Heine related the story of a young medical student who would cut the tails of cats and dogs 'out of the pure pleasure of cutting' who went on to be a celebrated surgeon later in his life.[361] This anecdote was later relayed by Freud to others in the psychoanalytic movement, with the wry suggestion that surgical practice might provide occupation for a successfully sublimated sadist.[362] In Britain, such doubts as to the moral character of the surgeon as a character type surfaced with particular potency in debates over vivisection.[363] In fiction, the suspicions found expression in the number of warped or cruel medical experimentalists who came to populate the literature of the fin de siècle, such as the eponymous doctor of Gosse's good friend R. L. Steveson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Dr Raymond in Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan* (1890), and the

---

[359] Peter Gay, *Education of the Senses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 315.
[360] Gosse, "Epigram on the Harvey Statue Sub-Committee," in Edmund Gosse to Hamo Thornycroft, 1 April 1879, in Charteris, 110-1.
[361] The doctor was German surgeon J. F. Dieffenbach (1792-1847). Heinrich Heine, *Ludwig Börne* (1840) quoted in in Jay Geller, "'Of Snips… and Puppy Dog Tails': Freud's Sublimation of 'Judentum'," *American Imago* 66, no. 2 (2009): 169-184, (172). Cf. Donald Capps, ""Your Nose Has Smelled Right": Reflections on the Disputed Origin of Freud's Concept of Sublimation," *American Imago*, 67.2 (2010): 263-292, (267).
[362] Geller, "'Of Snips,'" 170.
[363] A. W. H. Bates, "Vivisection, Virtue Ethics, and the Law in 19th-Century Britain," *Journal of Animal Ethics* 4, no. 2 (2014): 30-44, (30).

mad scientist of H.G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896).[364] Gosse's depiction of Fell is a close relative of these fictions.

Gosse's contempt for the medical experimentalist is counterbalanced, however, by his recognition of the value of scientific experimentation. Gosse is constant in his desire to surpass the narrow punitive vision of illness held by the religious community of his parents. Rather than grappling with disease as a physical condition that might be alleviated therapeutically, Gosse's father's sect, the Plymouth Brethren, held 'fatalistic views of disease' and conceived of illness in terms of divine punishment and a trial to be endured. (*F&S*, 26-27, 164.) 'If anyone was ill,' Gosse relates, the Brethren believed 'that 'the Lord's hand was extended in chastisement', and much prayer was poured forth in order that it might be explained to the sufferer, or to his relations, in what he or they had sinned.' (*F&S*, 27) A devout person would live 'over a cess-pool' and work 'themselves up into an agony [in attempting] to discover how they had incurred the displeasure of the Lord', but never think of moving away from the physical source of their illness. (*F&S*, 27) Gosse is grateful for the 'improvements' and 'alleviations' that have 'lessen[ed] the great burden of suffering' of humankind and singles out Sir James Simpson's discovery of the use of chloroform as an anaesthetic as one of the most favourable innovations of modernity. 'If we were suddenly transplanted into the world of only fifty years ago,' Gosse writes, 'we should be startled and even horror-stricken by the wretchedness to which the step backwards would reintroduce us.' (*F&S*, 39) Yet his praise of scientific progress is complicated by the natural repugnance he feels towards Fell's experimentation on his mother, which forces him to reckon with the possibility that scientific truth-seeking enlists sadism to energise its advance.

---

[364] For the claim that the treatment of secrecy and individuality in Stevenson's story is an influence upon *Father and Son*, see Martin A. Danahay, *A Community of One: Masculine Autobiography and Autonomy in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), 143.

Gosse implicitly compares the scientific and religious outlooks, which are both shown to conflict with the ethical in Gosse's memoir. In a letter to Robbie Ross from 1908, Gosse expressed his fears that 'the hideous new religions of Science' might 'smother all liberty', impinging upon the lives of individuals as much as faith.[365] In the memoir, Gosse suggests that sadism also warps the attempted cure of souls. Gosse accuses his father of 'most pitilessly' 'triumph[ing]' over him while he was ill, supposedly so he might have his 'afflictions […] sanctified': 'If I burned my finger with a sulphur match, or pinched the end of my nose in the door […], my Father would solemnly ejaculate: "Oh may these afflictions be much sanctified to him!" before offering any remedy for my pain.' (*F&S*, 164, 90-91) Gosse's father explicitly compared himself to 'a surgeon, probing into a wound' when justifying his search into the state of his son's soul, an analogy that further cements the association of surgery and cruelty.[366] Gosse would subsequently use the spiritual-medical metaphor himself in *F&S* when he references the Christian 'cure of souls' while problematising the tradition allegorically through the character of Mr Paget, the former Baptist minister and 'lunatic', who gives up the 'cure of souls' because he has become 'convinced that he had committed the Sin against the Holy Ghost'. (*F&S*, 148) Paget concentrates a major theme of the memoir, that is, how one's own mental health and psychological difficulties (in this example, *lunacy*) and one's resultant struggle to control oneself from committing harmful acts (in this case, *Sinning against the Holy Ghost*) interferes with one's attempted care for others. The "Physician, heal thyself" motif is an essential part of the ambivalent ethic Gosse constructs in the memoir, which focuses on the attainment of negative forms of liberty, as opposed to other-orientated schemes of improvement and amelioration. Gosse wards

[365] Edmund Gosse to Robert Ross, 13 March 1908, in Charteris, 313.
[366] Edmund Gosse to Philip Henry Gosse, 4 March 1873, in Charteris, 47.

off would-be curers and missionaries with a request that they get their own psyches in order first.

The Kierkegaardian resonances of Gosse's vision lie in his thoroughly detaching the religious from the ethical. Gosse notes that whereas 'religious persons' of his own generation tend to place practical 'philanthropic activity [and] the objective attitude, in the foreground' of religious life, his father's 'aspirations were individual and metaphysical'. (*F&S*, 176) Gosse's stress upon individuality and subjectivity recalls Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* (1843). In this work, Kierkegaard famously reflects on the story of Abraham in the Old Testament, who must be willing to sacrifice his own beloved son Isaac, at God's command. Kierkegaard uses the example of Abraham to demonstrate that the religious cannot be reduced to, or identified with, the ethical: to kill one's son is an immoral act, and yet holiness demands it of Abraham. (Kierkegaard, VI.57) Religion is distinctly *not* identifiable with other-orientated 'philanthropic activity'. The life of faith in fact requires what Kierkegaard calls 'a teleological suspension of the ethical'. (Kierkegaard, VI.56) Abraham must assert his individual subjective faith against the claims of the universal moral codes he shares with others to fulfil the will of God; from an ethical viewpoint, his willingness to kill his son appears both solipsistic and monstrously cruel.[367] *Father and Son* reads as a retort to Kierkegaard retold from the perspective of Isaac rather than Abraham. Gosse is sceptical of the notion that his father's religiosity merely accidentally expresses itself in emotional and physical violence. Instead, Gosse depicts his father's subjective faith (or what Alexis Harley has called his 'truth-denying intellectual hubris') as a symptom of his narcissism.[368] Gosse portrays his father's assumption that he has 'private knowledge of

[367] Kierkegaard, VI.61-2, 66.
[368] Alexis Harley, "Sexing the Aesthete: the Autobiography and Apostasy of Edmund Gosse," 3, no. 3 (Winter 2007): §2, https://www.ncgsjournal.com/issue33/harley.html.

the Divine Will' as unjustifiably narcissistic, expressive of the 'human weakness of vanity'. (*F&S*, 180, 169, 88)

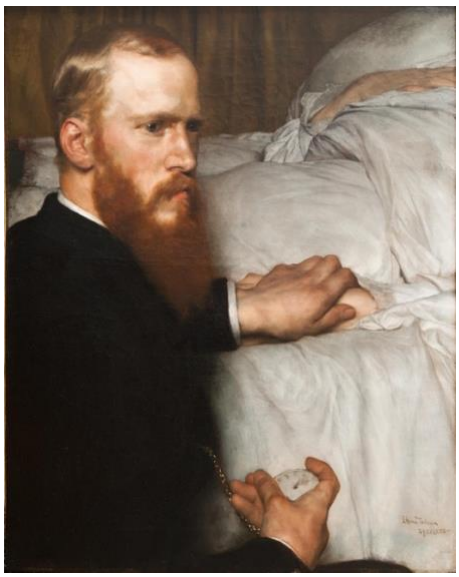


Fig. 9 Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *Dr Washington Epps, My Doctor*, 1885, Oil on canvas, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, *https://collection.cmoa.org/objects/62a956ad-de8a-43f3-91ee-a676c0028f53*.

Gosse's hedonistic plea for less pain is troubled by the question of whether violence and aggression are in any way evadable. Looking to Gosse's depiction of the second doctor to look after Emily Bowes Gosse during her final days, we would be led to believe that a gentle mode of handling others is possible. After reading of Fell's experimentations, we can understand how, even late into the nineteenth century, herbalists and 'quacks' would be preferred over licenced practitioners.[369] If Fell was to play the role of the bad object for Gosse, Dr John Epps plays the role of good object in his depiction of his mother's very last days. Gosse would later marry into the family of the homeopathic doctor who replaced Fell when his experimental cure was deemed to have failed. Ellen "Nellie" Gosse *née* Epps (1850-1929), the painter whom Gosse married in 1875, was daughter, sister, and niece to three prominent homeopathic practitioners, Dr

[369] Gay, *Education*, 313-314.

George Napoleon Epps (1815-1874), Dr Washington Epps (1848-1912), and the already mentioned Dr John Epps, respectively.[370] Her uncle, the most famous of the three, treated Gosse's mother after the failure of the experimental American practitioner. In the earlier *Life* of his father, Gosse relates details of the homeopath's treatment of his mother in a spirit of gratitude, though the doctor did not hope to *cure* for his patient but provides only palliative *care*. For the 'brief remainder' of his mother's life, Gosse tells us, she was put under the 'soothing care of the eminent homeopathic physician', whose 'principle appeared mainly to consist in the alleviating and deadening of pain.' (*LPHG*, 270) In attempting to treat a certain illness, homeopaths prescribe to patients extremely diluted doses of a drug.[371] Homeopathy was thought to have lain greater stress on the 'therapeutical [sic] side of medicine', in the words of one commentator.[372] We sense this in the gentle way Dr Washington Epps, Gosse's father-in-law, feels for the pulse of his patient in the 1885 portrait **(*Fig. 9*)** by Lawrence Alma-Tadema, who was Gosse's brother-in-law.

However unrooted in scientific fact, the restraint of the homeopath must have been attractive to the Gosses after witnessing the effect of Fell's 'savage' experimentations. Yet the two doctors appear to represent to Gosse a disjunction between the desire for cure and the capacity to care. Gosse uses homeopathy as a symbol for curative inefficaciousness, as does Hardy. Significantly, though the homeopath appears in the earlier *Life of Philip Henry Gosse* of 1890, Dr Epps does not reappear in *F&S* seventeen years later. This exclusion is suggestive of the more

---

[370] Thwaite, 149.
[371] Homeopathic medicines were also amongst the possessions of Eliza Gosse, Edmund's stepmother, that were sold after she died in 1900. Thwaite, 383. John Epps, *Homeopathy and its Principles Explained* 2nd ed. (London: W. & J. Piper, 1850), 36.
[372] William Tod Helmuth. "Homeopathy," in *Encyclopædia Britannica* 11th edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), XIII.646. Gosse worked on both the 11th edition, as well as previous editions, of the *Encyclopædia*. Cf. Thwaite, 185, 231, 347, 413.

essentially sadomasochistic psychic economy of the later work, which was notably Gosse's sole work of critical longevity. The aesthetic success of his memoir has been dependent upon what I would call Gosse's *mannered authenticity*, his commitment to the representation of rough, real 'savage' feelings and lonely provincial wastes in polished, urbane, often floral prose. (*F&S*, 34)

In its delicate handling of grotesque subject matter, the memoir functions as a despairing plea for, or frustrated commitment to, the kind of 'tactful' mode of relation that David Russell has recently found articulated in the aesthetic liberalism of the Victorian essay from Lamb to Pater.[373] Though Virginia Woolf complained that he merely 'finger[ed] and falter[ed] upon the surface' of life, Gosse in reality demonstrates how this gentle, tactile mode of relation proves insufficient for dealing with persons of an extremist temperament like his father.[374] Gosse claimed of his father that 'with all his passionate piety, he habitually mistook fear for love.' (*F&S*, 80) But it is testament to Gosse's own philosophical modernity that the 'perfect love' of the Christian tradition, which 'casts out […] fear', appears to him a delusive dream; as a model for filial relations, the idealisation fails. (1 John 4:18) Gosse instead speaks of the 'sad indulgence' and 'mournful satisfaction' he feels towards his father. (*F&*S, 5) Ethical impingement appears regrettable and yet inevitable for Gosse because ambivalence appears an ineluctable facet of intimate relationships. Gosse is a writer of conflict, as well as avoidance, whatever Woolf might snipe. Gosse finds he can *redeploy* ambivalence, narcissism, and the sadomasochistic impulse in *F&S*, rather than disavow them; he finds better uses for his aggression, much as Ruskin found productive uses of his ambivalence. Gosse does so to individuate himself from his father's impingements.

---

[373] David Russell, *Tact: Aesthetic Liberalism and the Essay Form in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 3.
[374] Virginia Woolf, "Edmund Gosse," 769

'Literary Anodynes' and the Avoidance of Life

Various other ways of negotiating ambivalence preceded Gosse's aggressive turn. It is the failure of these fantasies of relief in Gosse's often-neglected poetic corpus to which I now turn. Gosse's 'literary anodynes', to use the term that Andrew Lang associated with Gosse's literary narcotica, expose the problems of attempting to repress, anaesthetize, or kill off unwanted feelings and impulses.[375] The failure of these self-cures will justify Gosse turning from a therapy of repression to one of expression.

As in Ruskin's early works, Gosse's 'literary anodynes' attempt an aesthetics of anaesthesia able to induce in a reader what Keats, one of Gosse's literary heroes, called 'the feel of not to feel it'.[376] As we have seen, Gosse thought the discovery of anaesthetic one of modernity's most favourable and representative successes. In *Jeremy Taylor* (1903), Gosse depicts the titular divine as the Sir James Simpson of religious controversy:

> It would be impossible to estimate the alleviation which Taylor's tolerant theory, in its successive extensions, has brought to the multitudes of men. [….] [A]ll errors which are of the head and not the heart, were to be treated for the future with argument and a meek humility,—the blessed anaesthetics which this great innovator introduced into the practice of religious surgery. (*JT*, 46-7)

[375] Andrew Lang, review of *On Viol and Flute*, by Edmund Gosse, *The Academy and Literature* (January 31, 1874): 108. Lang, "Literary Anodynes," II.108.
[376] John Keats, 21, "In drear knighted December," in *Complete Poems*, ed. Jack Stillinger (Harvard, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982), 163. For Gosse's love of Keats, see Thwaite, 51, 81, 301.

The nature of the comparison implies that Gosse's fantasies of numbing away disagreements interpsychic and intrapsychic were generated by impingements of his father, whose own religious intolerances were marked and severe. (cf. *F&S*, 169)

Gosse's praise of Taylor's theoretical 'anaesthetics' reflects his belief that writing can (and ideally should) offer metaphorical medicines to its readers. Gosse attempts to do in poetry what Simpson achieved in medicine and Taylor in polemic. In 1889, Gosse lamented, for instance, that the younger generations in England were no longer finding 'anodyne in poetry.'[377] Gosse's use of the 'anodyne' metaphor tells of how he was in conversation with Andrew Lang, with whom he had a difficult friendship, upon questions of escape. Lang was a fervid champion of the 'anodyne' conception of literature against novels 'of [ideological] analysis, or of realism, or of religious maundering'.[378] In 'Literary Anodynes' (1888), an article first published in the *New Princeton Review*, Lang argues that literature should provide a reader with 'diversion', 'comfort', and 'oblivion':

> A man wants his novel to be an anodyne. From the romancer he demands what the wife of Thon of Egypt gave Helen, – nepenthe, – the draught magical which puts pain and sorrow out of mind. Is this a selfish, unfeeling demand?

'It seems to me', Lang claims, 'that one might as rationally call the timely tendency to sleep at night unfeeling and selfish.'[379] But Lang's wish to escape from 'everything in real life that saddens and perplexes' betrays a wish to escape reality altogether. We *do* sense something 'unfeeling and selfish', albeit not in the sense Lang consciously intends,

---

[377] Gosse quoted in "Mr. Edmund Gosse," 45.
[378] For their friendship, see Thwaite, 225. Lang, "Literary Anodynes," 108.
[379] Ibid. 105.

in his desire to sink into an anaesthetized state and dull awareness of the world outside the self. Any loss of consciousness, as Helene Deutsch suggests, can come to represent death in the unconscious.[380] Lang's traffic between quotidian visions of the rest found in nightly sleep and darker visions of senselessness ('opium-smoking', 'oblivion', 'unfeeling') suggests how the desire for narcosis, which at first appears a reasonable desire to suffer less pain, can become—most paradoxically—an outlet for phantasies about erasing oneself and thereby evading all frustration. Gosse's narcotica poetry faces the same problem.

Gosse said of Lang that his 'only misfortune was not to be completely in contact with life,' and that he failed to 'reconcile his mind to the consideration of real life; […] he disliked it.' (*P&S*, 211) But we sense a clear case of pot-kettle-black here. The same fantasies of evasion characterise Gosse's work. One of Lang's central conceits in 'Literary Anodynes' indeed echoes a line from Gosse's biography of *Raleigh* (1886), which Lang edited for the *English Worthies* series. In the relevant passage, Gosse describes how Sir Walter 'took refuge' from his 'pain and sorrows […] in the one unfailing Nepenthe, the consolatory self-forgetfulness of [writing] literature.'[381] (*Raleigh*, 161) In a review of Gosse's *On Viol and Flute* (1873) from 1874, Lang claimed to find a 'lotus-land of art' in Gosse's poems, which he thought expressed a 'philosophy of life' that was 'perhaps as useful as any other mental anodyne of our time.'[382] *Both* writers disseminated the notion of a literary anodyne in prose and verse.

In one poem from *New Poems* (1879) entitled 'Euthanasia', the anodyne model of literary therapeutics is literalised through Gosse's allegorical representation of the

[380] Helene Deutsch, "Some Psychoanalytic Observations in Surgery," *Psychosomatic Medicine* 4, no. 1 (January 1942): 105-115, (106).
[381] Thwaite, 263.
[382] Lang, review of *OV&F*, 108.

acceptance of death as a state of near complete anaesthesia. Here the body imitates death before actually dying:

> When age comes by and lays his frosty hands
> So lightly on mine eyes, that, scarce aware
> Of what an endless weight of gloom they bear,
> I pause, unstirred, and wait for his commands;
> What time has bound these limbs of mine with bands,
> And hushed mine ears, and silvered all my hair,
> May sorrow come not, nor a vain despair
> Trouble my soul that meekly girdled stands.
>
> As silent rivers into silent lakes,
> Through hush of reeds that not a murmur breaks,
> Wind, mindful of the poppies whence they came,
> So may my life, and calmly burn away,
> As ceases in a lamp at break of day
> The fragrant remnant of memorial flame. (1-14, 'Euthanasia', *NP*, 96)

The speaker seduces us into insensibility. Although the 'hands' of death-bringing age are 'frosty', the speaker is 'unstirred' by his cold light touch. (1, 4) The 'scarce aware[ness]' (2) of the speaker is induced in the reader of the poem through a series of soporific images of 'silent lakes', hushed 'ears' and 'reeds', and opiating 'poppies', the latter being reminiscent of the 'poppied sleep' of Swinburne, whom Gosse had met two years

previously, among other conventional opiate tropes of the poetry of the period, such as found in Tennyson's 'Lotus-Eaters'.[383] (9, 6, 10, 11)

The speaker's desire to be in such a metaphorically anaesthetic state, in which he becomes numb to the touch, is a conscious fantasy of the poem. Indeed, the aspirations of the poem lie in dying gracefully and achieving the "good death" of the poem's title, a recurrent theme in the therapeutic tradition in ancient philosophy from Socrates onwards.[384] But the speaker's indifference to his state may startle us once we recognise that Gosse was only thirty years old at time of the poem's publication.[385] Gosse himself was aware of the ways in which we can prematurely age ourselves as a way of avoiding life, as the following passage in his biography of the poet Thomas Gray from 1882 reveals:

> At twenty five Gray becomes a middle-aged man, and loses, among the libraries of the University, his last pretensions to physical elasticity. From this time forward we find that his ailments, his melancholy, his reserve, his habit of drowning consciousness in perpetual study, have taken hold upon him, and he begins to plunge into an excess of reading, treating the acquisition of knowledge as a narcotic.
>
> (*Gray*, 67)

---

[383] Algernon Charles Swinburne, 6, "Ilicet," in *Poems and Ballads; Atalanta in Calydon*, ed. Morse Peckham (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merill Company, 1970), 77-81, (77). For the conventionality of Gosse's tropes, see Catherine Maxwell, *Scents & Sensibility: Perfume in Victorian Literary Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 56.

[384] Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 115-116.

[385] Pater comments upon Gosse's preoccupation with 'the forecast, the expression, of the humours, the considerations, that in truth are more proper to old age', and singles out 'Euthanasia' for comment. Walter Pater, "Mr Gosse's Poems," in *Essays from The Guardian* (London: Chiswick Press, 1896 [1890]), 151-163, (159).

Gosse's proposal that Gray used the 'acquisition of knowledge' for the avoidance of reality is a particularly bitter irony (and a word to the unwise reader and writer of this thesis, no doubt). 'Euthanasia' suggests with similar intellectual perversity that death is the cure for life. In Gosse's poems, a more straightforwardly hedonistic desire for anaesthesia, i.e., freedom from painful stimulation, gives way to suicidality as an expression of primary masochism—that is, the desire to be liberated from the tensions, 'turmoils', 'anxious desires', 'manifold pleasures', and 'sorrow and suffering' that Gosse understood to be constitutive of life. *(F&S*, 8) True to its title, another poem from the earlier volume *On Viol and Flute* called 'Encomium Mortis' praises death as the necessary refuge of those persons that 'shrink because the world is bleak'. ('Encomium Mortis', *OV&*F, 82) Similarly, the speaker's anaesthesia in 'Euthanasia' does not mitigate pain so that life might be lived more fully; the speaker desires to reside in a deathly state *before* he dies.

Throughout his corpus, Gosse consistently conflates life and death, health and illness, therapeutic treatment and maltreatment, in a manner that vexes his own hedonist pleas for less pain. Gosse explores such ambiguities in the titular poem of his fifth volume of verse *In Russet and Silver* (1894), in which he revisits the central theme of 'Euthanasia'—that of learning how to die before the likely time of one's actual death—though this time as a man of forty-five. In this poem, Gosse provokes us in a more pointed manner to consider whether such a therapy for pain as described in 'Euthanasia' can be genuinely conceived as curative. 'For this is health, it seems to me,' the speaker tells us:

> And not an ill philosophy,
> To rise from life's rich board before

The host can point me to the door.

(25-27, "In Russet and Silver," in *CP*, 235-6)

The speaker claims his 'philosophy' is not an 'ill' one, but the raising of the question makes us wonder if he is protesting too much. As in Hardy, his scepticism undoes his pessimism. It is a characteristic moment in Gosse's writing because his scepticism towards what constitutes a good life or death (and thus what constitutes genuine relief, amelioration, and improvement) is exacerbated by a non-normative desire, that of suicidality. Gosse takes from John Donne, his biographical subject of 1899, the idea that suicide is at once a valid 'remedy' and a 'sickly inclination'.[386]

Gosse on Swinburne and the Sadomasochistic Self-Cure

In his depictions of (what he at first takes to be) psychopathological states or non-normative desires in himself and others, Gosse is characteristically troubled by the question of what differentiates healthy minds from unhealthy ones, as well as what distinguishes treatment from maltreatment and self-indulgence from self-hatred. In his 'Confidential Paper on Swinburne's Moral Irregularities' (c. 1917-19), for instance, a document that was long reserved from public use in the vaults of the British Museum, Gosse anxiously records the masochistic practices of his friend Swinburne in a manner that reveals his own ambivalence towards sadomasochistic fantasies of relief. Gosse attempts to distance himself from his friend's 'irregularities' by professing both his unfamiliarity and his lack of sympathy with masochistic phenomena, which he calls 'disagreeable and unintelligible', 'obscure and unaccountable', 'atrocious' and 'horrible'. (*PFL*, 73-4) But Gosse's disingenuousness is belied not merely the hysterical character

[386] Gosse, *Donne*, I.207; Donne quoted in Gosse, *Donne*, I.260.

of his protestations here, but by the record of his own memoir, which narrates how he was on intimate terms with masochistic desire since childhood. In *F&S*, Gosse tells of how he too sought self-cure in self-harm as a young child suffering under a 'ferment of mind'. (*F&S*, 26) Under the delusion that 'practical magic' could be achieved by pain, he tells us that he 'began, in extreme secrecy, to run pins into [his] flesh and bang [his] joints with books'. (*F&S*, 26) Later in the memoir, when he is taken to a doctor for looking 'delicate', the doctor finds 'nothing the matter' with the child, and the only outcome of the appointment is that the child finds what he takes to be 'valuable hints for [his] magical practices' in the physician's diagnostic actions in stripping and tapping his body. (*F&S*, 26-7) That Gosse sees his childhood masochism as bound up with fantasies of magical cure, which parody actual medical practices, suggests the porous border between health and illness in his imagination. As Sally Shuttleworth points out, Gosse describes himself as a child hysteric in the memoir.[387] Indeed, his corpus interrogates health and illness, physical and mental, in a manner characteristic of conversion hysteria, which unconsciously parodies the symptoms of physical illness. Throughout his career, the question is whether Gosse can put his hysteria to creative, rather than destructive purposes.

Attempting to downplay the 'sexual' character of his friend's masochism in the 'Confidential Paper', moreover, Gosse questions whether Swinburne's desire to be flagellated might be comprehended as a desire for therapeutic relief: 'I cannot help believing that these scourgings [sic] were in some extraordinary way a mode by which the excessive tension of Swinburne's nerves was relieved. I do not know whether the medical authorities would admit this possibility.' (*PFL*, 76-7) Attempting to reassure

[387] Shuttleworth, *Mind of the Child*, 309.

himself that he is not dealing with 'any sexual phenomena', Gosse rationalises his friend's 'mania for suffering pain, or whatever it was' as a therapeutic practice for excessive nervous tension, which provides Swinburne with catharsis of a kind. (*PFL*, 74) But in accepting the masochist's conflation of apparent opposites (pain and pleasure, submission and release, harm and care), Gosse is drawn to a conclusion that nevertheless discomfits him. By consequence of the rationalisation, Gosse finds himself in a state of epistemic helplessness ('I cannot help believing…'), which can only wait, submissively, upon the 'authorities' to 'admit' and approve his tentative suggestion. The phenomenon of sadomasochism vexes Gosse's instinctive hedonism because it implies that pain and pleasure, cure and harm, are not mutually exclusive—a recognition that throws Gosse into an epistemological twilight in which all cures are grey. It is a psychic space comparable to that which we have already witnessed Ruskin lose himself in when dwelling upon his own fantasies of narcosis. Gosse defers to the 'medical authorities' as the masters of those that know, yet even this appeal to the presumed mastery of the specialist feels compromised because of his anxieties concerning the sadism of physicians.

Insulation and Confrontation in Gosse's 'Faddling' Hedonism

Gosse shifts between different techniques of negotiating the sadomasochistic predicament. Throughout his writing, Gosse vacillates between fantasies of avoiding confrontation and contact with the other (and thereby insulating oneself from impingement or contact, pain or pleasure), and fantasies of the relief to be found in sadomasochistic and/or aggressive confrontation (both pleasurable and painful). It is through this back-and-forth that his ambivalent escapism begins to break down the evasion-confrontation dichotomy. We see this clearly in Gosse's ironic self-identification as a 'hedonist' in the Preface to *Gossip in a Library* from 1891, in which impulses

towards insulation and confrontation vie with each other. In the Preface, Gosse tells an anecdote about a 'worshipful lover of books,' who was 'so anxious to fly all outward noise that he built himself a library in his garden':

> I have been told that the books stood there in perfect order, with the rose-spray flapping at the window, and great Japanese vases exhaling such odours as most annoy an insect-nostril. The very bees would come to the window, and sniff, and boom indignantly away again. The silence there was perfect. […] That is the library I should like to have. In my sleep, "where dreams are multitude," I sometimes fancy that one day I shall have a library in a garden. The phrase seems to contain the whole felicity of man—"a library in a garden!" It sounds like having a castle in Spain, or a sheep-walk in Arcadia, and I suppose that merely to wish for it is to be what indignant journalists call "a faddling hedonist." (*Gossip*, 2-3)

This vision of the good life ('the whole felicity of man') depends not only upon the presence of aesthetic pleasure (the 'perfect order' of the books, the perfect silence, 'rose-spray' and 'Japanese vases') but also upon Sully being insulated from the outside world: we can thus see how Gosse's vision of eudaimonia relates to his vision of euthanasia. In in a manner reminiscent of Ruskin's 'Theoria', the contemplative life becomes for Gosse an avoidance of life, autotelic as much as autoerotic. It is a pleasurable solipsism without the political or moral practical value desired by the 'indignant journalist', and without need of anyone else at all.

Or is it? This fantasy of contemplative self-sufficiency, this stress upon solipsistic wish-fulfilment, unravels itself as the passage unfolds: the fantasy of insulation manages

to aggress as well as avoid. Gosse cannot refrain from a bitchy sting at 'indignant journalists' and his ivory bower is subsequently overrun with a full cast of characters by way of his implicit allusion.[388] Gosse's 'faddling hedonist' comment alludes to his friend Robert Louis Stevenson's *Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes* (1879). In this book, Stevenson jokingly fears that he 'must be at bottom, what a cheerful Indian critic has dubbed [him], 'a faddling hedonist,'' referring with similar irony to a reviewer that had claimed his earlier *Inland Voyage* (1878) was guilty of 'a large amount of affectation founded on the faddling hedonism of the day'.[389] Gosse's allusion reaches out into a literary scrap just as he fantasizes that aesthetic contentment might provide purely self-contained pleasure.

However whimsical, the back-and-forth in *Gossip* helps us better understand the characteristic vacillation between the desire to aggress and the desire to avoid in Gosse's work, which speaks to a more fundamental problem in the very nature of pleasure. As Freud recognised, one can aim either at attaining the 'absence of pain and unpleasure,' or 'the experiencing of strong feelings of pleasure', but not, as Jacques Lacan later emphasized, both at once.[390] One can have a hedonism that *minimises pain*, or a hedonism that seeks *extremes of pleasure*, but one cannot consistently desire or achieve both. A similar paradox is true of the narcissistic sadist. In the case of the sadistic mode of narcissistic relation, the presence of the other is required precisely in order to *deny* dependence upon the other. That Gosse cannot sustain Sully's insulation

---

[388] Reino Virtanen claims of Pater's solipsistic statements that he 'expects to be heard.' Reino Virtanen, "The Spectre of Solipsism in Western Literature," *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 59–76, (64).

[389] 'Pioneer' [anonymous pseudonym], "From an Unsigned Review," (27th June 1878) in *Robert Louis Stevenson, the Critical Heritage*, ed. by Paul Maixner (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 56–57. Robert Louis Stevenson, *Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes*, ed. Christopher Maclachlan (London: Penguin, 2004 [1879]), 51.

[390] Freud, XXI.76-77. Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller and trans. Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 1992), 185.

without annoyance and provocation is suggestive of the ways in which the pain-pleasure independence-dependence antinomies play out in his work, though it is typical that Gosse touches these depths by way of being breezily light.

The Hysterical Life of the 'Hamo-sexual'

That the attenuation of pain and the maximisation of pleasure cannot be easily reconciled does not stop Gosse attempting to negotiate these antinomies in 'Euthanasia', in which the desire for narcosis is eroticised in the manner of the 'easeful Death' (of which *euthanasia* is a rough synonym) longed for in his beloved Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' of 1819.[391] But the narcotic erotics of 'Euthanasia' are also specifically a homoerotics, which attempt to work through Gosse's desire for his friend the sculptor Sir William Hamo Thornycroft RA (1850-1925).[392] When Lytton Strachey was asked whether Gosse was homosexual, he replied: 'No, but he's Hamo-sexual.'[393] His erotic desire for the sculptor appears sadly unrequited, though his passionate friendship was not. *New Poems*, the collection in which 'Euthanasia' was first published, was dedicated to Thornycroft. 'In 'Euthanasia', as if in response to his unrequited love, one non-normative desire, homosexuality, is substituted for another, suicidality; sensual pleasure is likewise given expression through its supposed opposite, anaesthesia.[394]

To fully appreciate the treatment of homosexual desire in 'Euthanasia', however, we need to first consider the more explicit, albeit still coded, treatment of homosexuality in Gosse's poem 'Neurasthenia', which was first published in his fifth

---

[391] John Keats, 51, "To a Nightingale," in *English Odes* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1883), ed. Edmund Gosse, 215-18, (217).
[392] For accounts of their relationship, see Thwaite, 184-7, 192-5. Michael Hatt, "Near and Far: Homoeroticism, Labour and Hamo Thornycroft's *Mower*," *Art History* 26, no. 1 (February 2003): 28-29.
[393] Lytton Strachey quoted in Thwaite, 194.
[394] For the practice of (defensively) coding queer desires as 'sexual anaesthesia' at the fin de siècle, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 194.

collection *In Russet and Silver* (1894). Both 'Euthanasia' and 'Neurasthenia' play upon the common associations between homosexuality, hysteria, and neurasthenia at the fin de siècle.[395] The titular condition of 'Neurasthenia' was used to diagnose states of 'nervous prostration' in the nineteenth century; the neurasthenic was identified as a form of male hysteric.[396] In 'Neurasthenia', Gosse plays on the convention of calling hysterical symptoms the 'stigmata' of hysteria in medical texts—a convention he would have found in texts written by his friend Fred Myers, among others—when he uses neurasthenia as a metaphor for the 'stigma', or psychic pain, suffered by consequence of being born erotically 'awry'.[397] I will now quote the poem in full:

> Curs'd from the cradle and awry they come,
> Masking their torment from a world at ease;
> On eyes of dark entreaty, vague and dumb,
> They bear the stigma of their souls' disease.
>
> Bewildered by the shadowy ban of birth,

[395] For an implicit reading of the poem as about homosexuality, see the poem's inclusion in *Nineteenth Century Writings on Homosexuality: A Sourcebook*, ed. Chris White (London: Routledge, 2012), 70. For the association of homosexuality with neurasthenia, see Matt Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 80-81. Freud also posited a connection between homosexuality and hysteria. Freud, VII.60.

[396] Micale, *Hysterical Men*, 129. Janet Oppenheim, *"Shattered Nerves": Doctors, Patients, and Depression in Victorian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 89. Scull, *Hysteria*, 97.

[397] In an article of 1892 in *Brain*, for example, one physician wrote of how 'the discovery of anaesthetic patches in hysterical patients' could elucidate the phenomenon of stigmata diaboli which were historically used to identify 'commerce with Satan' in witch trials: '…when the magistrates who were investigating a case of witchcraft examined the accused, they [attempted] to establish moral proof of demoniacal possession […] by means of pricking him with pins (the accused being blindfolded) or sharp splinters to determine the presence of anaesthetic areas in the skin, which were called stigmata diaboli or witch-marks. […] Today the physician proceeds in the same way as the judges of the middle ages; when he suspects a person of hysteria he begins by trying to obtain moral proof of the neurosis [and] searches for the impairment of the general sensibility or of the special senses, which are now considered as "marks of hysterical possession" or "hysterical stigmata."' J. Mitchell Clarke, "On Hysteria," *Brain* 14 (1892), 548. Frederic William Henry Myers, "Hysteria and Genius," *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 138, VIII (April 1897): 55.

They learn that they are not as others are,

Till some go mad, and some sink prone to earth,

And some push stumbling on without a star;

And some, of sterner mould, set hard their hearts,

To act the dreadful comedy of life,

And wearily grow perfect in their parts;—

But all are wretched and their years are strife.

The common cheer that animates mankind,

The tender general comfort of the race,

To them is colour chattered to the blind,

A book held up against a sightless face.

Like sailors drifting under cliffs of steel,

Whose fluttering magnets leap with lying poles,

They doubt the truth of every law they feel,

And death yawns for them if they trust their souls.

The loneliest creatures in the wash of air,

They search the world for solace but in vain;

No priest rewards their confidence with prayer,

And no physician remedies their pain.

Ah! let us spare our wrath for these, forlorn,

Nor chase a bubble on the intolerant wave;

Let pity quell the gathering storm of scorn,

And God, who made them so, may soothe and save.

(Gosse, 1-28, "Neurasthenia," *CP*, 265-266)

'Neurasthenia' attempts to numb away interpsychic and intrapsychic conflict in its plea for toleration, much in the manner of Gosse's description of Taylor's tolerance theory as a 'blessed anaesthetic'. (*JT*, 47) Gosse attempts to provide consolation for those not born 'as others are' and steps in with a 'sooth[ing]' anodyne for their pain. (6, 28) The final stanza recalls the letter Gosse wrote to Robbie Ross in 1908 about the Wilde case in receipt of a new edition of *De Profundis*: 'Less and less can I endure the idea of punishing a man—who is not cruel—because he is unlike other men.'[398] But Gosse's plea, in claiming *we* need to 'spare *our* [my emphasis] wrath' for the neurasthenic, subtly distances both Gosse and his reader from the neurasthenic/homosexual, even while petitioning on their behalf. (25) This distancing also chimes with the ambivalence Gosse felt towards Wilde and, by extension, being associated with him.[399]

This attempted diversion tells all too clearly of Gosse's uncomfortable proximity to those like Wilde born 'awry'. (1) 'Hysteria', the psychoanalyst Masud Khan has suggested, 'is not so much an illness as a technique of staying blank and absent from oneself, with symptoms as a substitute that screens this absence.'[400] While Khan was writing in a distinctively post-Freudian paradigm, from 1893 onwards Gosse too could have been influenced by Freud and Breuer's case studies in *On Hysteria* (1895) thanks

[398] Gosse to Ross in Charteris, 313.
[399] For Gosse and Wilde, see Thwaite, 362.
[400] M. Masud R. Khan, "Grudge and the Hysteric," in *Hidden Selves: Between Theory and Practice in Psychoanalysis* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1983), 57.

to both the writings of Otto Weininger, whom Gosse greatly admired, and Frederic "Fred" William Henry Myers, who was his friend; the latter writer being the first to disseminate knowledge of a work by Freud in English print.[401] A matter of months after Freud and Breuer published 'On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena' in January 1893, the paper that would serve as the 'Preliminary Communication' to *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), Myers presented a paper which considered their theory of hysteria to the Society of Psychical Research on 21st April 1893; the paper was published in print the subsequent year.[402] Though he might have spoken with Myers on this subject in conversation, Gosse more likely read Myers's later summary of the 'remarkable' case of 'Fraulein O.' in his aptly posthumous publication, *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death* (1903).[403]

Throughout Gosse's poem 'Neurasthenia', published in 1894, we find metaphors of loss of sensation which suggest that sufferers have found their own hysterical self-cure in becoming 'vague and dumb' to themselves. (3) In the poem,

---

[401] In *Ibsen* (1907), Gosse regrets how Weininger 'violently deprived philosophical literature in Europe of by far its most promising and remarkable recruit' when he committed suicide in 1903. Gosse, *Ibsen*, 109. Otto Weininger, *Sex and Character: An Investigation of Fundamental Principles* trans. Ladislaus Löb and ed. Daniel Steuer and Laura Marcus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005 [1903]), 243. For Gosse's interest in hysteria, see Sally Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science, and Medicine, 1840-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 309. For a discussion of Myers's paper 'The Mechanism of Hysteria', which he first gave to the Society for Psychical Research on 21 April 1893, in print, see "The Likeness of a Perfect Man," *The Review of Reviews* 8 (July-December 1893): 265-266. For Gosse's friendship with "Fred" Myers, see Edmund Gosse to Richard Watson Gilder, 7 March 1889 in *TD*, 214. Thwaite, 68, 536. For Myers and the English reception of Freud, see Ernest Jones, "Reminiscent Notes on the Early History of Psycho-Analysis in English-Speaking Countries," *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 26 (January 1945): 8-10, (8). Gregorio Kohon, "Notes on the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement in Great Britain," in *The British School of Psychoanalysis: The Independent Tradition* ed. Gregorio Kohon (London: Free Association, 1988), 25. John Forrester and Laura Cameron, *Freud in Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 228. Though these texts were written after Hardy ended his career as a novelist, he also read Myers, and knew him through the Savile Club, like Gosse. Keen, *Thomas Hardy's Brains*, 39. For Hardy's reading of one of Myers's other writings, see Mark Asquith, "Hardy's Philosophy," in *Thomas Hardy in Context*, ed. Phillip Mallett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 285-295, (288).

[402] Frederic William Henry Myers, "The Mechanism of Hysteria," in *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 24 vol. IX (1894): 12-15.

[403] Frederick William Henry Myers, *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death* (London: Longmans, Green, 1903), I.53.

homosexuality/neurasthenia is figured metaphorically as both a disorder of vision ('a sightless face') comparable to hysterical blindness, as well as a disorder of touch ('doubt the truth of every law they feel') comparable to hysterical anaesthesia, which stops the homosexual understanding the 'truth' of their 'soul'. It is this kind of anaesthesia that Gosse's speaker desires in 'Euthanasia', in which the speaker's acceptance of his deathly state recalls 'la belle indifférence des hystériques'—the hysteric's lack of concern for the enervation of the body.[404] This is important because it suggests how Gosse's writing tends to be characterised by the symptomology it diagnoses; this will also prove true of *Father and Son*.[405]

The Desire for Disembodiment: Maiming the Beast in the Jungle

In his preoccupation with hysteria, Gosse attempts to work through his fraught relationship with sexual embodiment. Gosse's work characteristically dramatizes an embodied enmeshment of self-indulgence and self-hatred. "Still in the body," was Gosse's habitual response to enquiries about his health later in his life.[406] Though jocular, Gosse's use of this phrase, which was once used in the Calvinist home of his childhood, reflects a genuine ambivalence. Gosse tends to envisage the consummation of queer desire as a cathartic annihilation, as if the satisfaction of the body requires or entails its destruction. In a letter to John Addington Symonds from 1890, Gosse described how he had struggled with his 'volcanic' desire for Thornycroft, which he felt was always 'on the verge of destructive ebullition'.[407] Hardy, as we have already heard, claimed of love that it 'lives on propinquity, and dies of contact.' (Hardy, *L&W*, 230) But

[404] Ernest Jones, "Psychoanalysis and Modern Medicine," in *Papers in Psychoanalysis* (London: Masefield, 1948), 343.
[405] Critics have described *F&S* as an 'anxious document' that is 'addicted to [a] language of malaise, both physical and mental', see Saunders, *Self-Impression*, 154; O'Gorman, "Modernism, and a History of Nerves," 3.
[406] Gosse quoted in Charteris, 303.
[407] Edmund Gosse to John Addington Symonds, 24 February 1890, in Thwaite, 195.

for Gosse, the satisfaction of *queer* desire entails not so much the extinction of desire itself, so much as the death of the queer desiring subject.

Jouissance offers Gosse an outlet for self-hatred, for the hatred of the body, in a form masochistically redeemed. But his poems and letters also suggest why we should not romanticise jouissance (so much as it is possible to avoid romanticising jouissance) as in any way *politically* efficacious in the manner of Leo Bersani's investment in 'the human subject's potential for a *jouissance* in which the subject is momentarily undone'.[408] Indeed, Gosse's fantasies of jouissance seem to reinforce existing homophobic power structures in an exaggerated fashion, rather than dissolve them: it is the queer subject that is dissolved and destroyed, while the world goes on without them. Consider a letter Gosse wrote to Thornycroft in 1879. After spotting the sculptor sailing his father's boat the *Waterlily* down the Thames from Richmond Bridge one day in May, Gosse jokes to Thornycroft that he had the 'queerest sensation': '….if the battlements of the bridge had been lower, I don't know but what I might have thrown myself into the river and committed suicide out of sheer companionableness.'[409] Gosse jests that suicide is the solution to frustrated queer desire. As in the last line of the fifth stanza of 'Neurasthenia', death 'yawn[s]' for Gosse if he follows his desire and attempts to make union with Thornycroft. (20, 'Neurasthenia') His phrase 'sheer companionableness' puns upon two senses of 'sheer': the first suggesting that his desire for Thornycroft's company is pure and unmitigated in quality; the second that his desire is dangerous, even fatal, like the *sheer drop* he would face if he actually threw himself off the bridge in an attempt to combine himself with Thornycroft below; the 'battlements of the bridge' stand metaphorically for Gosse's ability to stifle his desire. Gosse's imagined

[408] Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 100.
[409] Edmund Gosse to Hamo Thornycroft, 5 May 1879, in Charteris, *Life*, 111.

solution trades sexual catharsis ('ebullition'), i.e., ejaculation and consummation, for an overflow of violence against the self, the 'destructive ebullition' of suicide.

The weary rejection of the body in the anaesthetic fantasy of 'Euthanasia' attempts to evade the jouissance of 'destructive ebullition', in favour of a lack of stimulation, pleasurable or unpleasurable. Yet because 'Euthanasia' indulges another, albeit a narcotic rather than cathartically explosive, form of suicidal impulse, we are faced with the paradox that Gosse's response to this threat of destruction is to fantasize about alternative ways of destroying himself, of killing off his desiring self. Gosse entertains the notion that the desiring body, and homosexual desire in particular, is best killed off in a letter he wrote to Symonds in 1890. In this letter Gosse envisages his desire as a 'wild beast', anticipating a similar use of the trope in his friend Henry James's novella *The Beast in the Jungle* (1903):

> I know of all you speak of–the solitude, the rebellion, the despair. […] I have had a very fortunate life, but there has been an obstinate twist in it! I have reached a quieter time–some beginnings of that Sophoclean period when the wild beast dies. He is not dead but tamer; I understand him and the trick of his claws.[410]

The letter sheds light on 'Euthanasia' in suggesting that Gosse fantasized that aging might be the cure for desiring; the speaker of 'Euthanasia' similarly desires that 'time' might 'bind' his 'limbs […] with bands'. The poem suggests that the desire to become old before one's time is an escapist fantasy.

[410] Edmund Gosse to John Addington Symonds, 24 February 1890, in Thwaite, 195.

In other moments in which he struggles against—and with—the 'wild beast' of his desire, Gosse finds sadomasochistic relief in the fantasy that consummation will entail extinction. A letter from 1880 explicitly identifies Thornycroft as a wild beast, though Gosse begins by reminiscing about a halcyon boating trip the pair once shared:

> It seems as though it were a very far-away memory of my childhood, that you and I, little tiny boys, paddled up to Uxbridge in a washing-tub, or something of that kind, and got whipped for our pains. I can't believe that anything pleasant will ever happen to me again. Why can't fortune let us alone, when we want so little, just a nest of domestic quietude in which to brood over our two blue eggs, Friendship and Art, till they hatch two fledgling immortalities?[411]

The domestic scene seems cosy in the safest of ways. But, as a fantasy of queer domestic bliss, it is also radically utopian. Gosse subsequently dismisses the fantasy as 'mere jabbering' and then proceeds to claim that 'the only thing that would really quiet me would be to drop my head into the paws of some feline creature—a jaguar for instance—and sleep a dreamless sleep.'[412] The intrusion of beast into the boat-nest-bedroom reflects Gosse's struggle to envisage satisfaction in terms that were not sadomasochistic, even fatal. Even in the more optimistic 'To H. T.', a poem which he sent to Thornycroft by letter in 1879, Gosse imagines himself the 'slave' of the sculptor.[413] The poem begins and ends in envisaging the pair 'hand in hand' by a fireside, but the poem cannot imagine equal terms of fulfilment. (1) While Gosse 'crave[s]' nothing from

---

[411] Edmund Gosse to Hamo Thornycroft, 16 January, 1880, in Charteris, 137.
[412] Ibid.
[413] Edmund Gosse, "To T.H.," in Edmund Gosse to Hamo Thornycroft, 18 December, 1879, Charteris, 125-6.

life but the presence of Hamo, neither the desire nor the fulfilment appears reciprocated: 'I, who love to be your slave' will 'scour the world to bring you what you lack', he tells him. (13, 9, 6)

Gosse's inability to envisage non-sadomasochistic erotic relations between men has starker consequences in 'Euthanasia', which was published the same year as the letter in 1879. Gosse's sense that his falling into the claws of the jaguar will lead to a 'dreamless sleep' reminds us of the easeful death of that poem. The notion that one needs to both tame and kill the desiring body is the implicit motivation behind 'Euthanasia', which finds its own masochistic self-cure for what Symonds called *l'amour de l'impossible*. In 'Euthanasia', the speaker envisions his soul as 'meekly girdled'. (8, 'Euthanasia') To girdle a tree is to cut through its bark in order to either kill the tree or render it more fruitful. In this sense, the speaker's soul would have been 'girdled' in order to be soon removed from his body by death before being transferred to the afterlife. But another sense of 'girdled' is also at play: that of having metaphorical armour defend one's soul as a girdle would one's crotch. In this sense, there's an association to the girdle of chastity, which prevents sexual intercourse by both constraining and "defending" the genital area. In both associations to 'girdled', there is a denial of the body. The wild beast has been tamed.

It is typical of Gosse's attempt to gain from illness, death, and destruction that even this castration is masochistically enjoyed. In subtle reference to the celibacy of his friend, Gosse compares Henry James—another possible homosexual man who identified as neurasthenic in his inner circle—to a 'fountain sealed': 'life stirred his intellect while leaving his senses untouched'.[414] (*PFL*, 135) James's sealed fountain suggests Gosse's

[414] For James as neurasthenic, see Tom Lutz, *American Nervousness, 1903* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 246.

own stifled volcano. A similar lack of stirring touches is at stake in 'Euthanasia'. Age is personified as male in the poem; he is imagined coming and 'lay[ing] his frosty hands | […] lightly on [the speaker's] eyes', which leaves the speaker's anaesthetized body 'unstirred'. (4) The suggestion that the speaker will 'wait for his commands' bristles with erotic submission, which suggests how the evasion of sexuality finds covert outlet in any case. (4) The eroticisation of the 'dreamless sleep' compares to a slip of the pen made by Gosse in his 1884 edition of *The Discourses of Sir Joshua Reynolds*. In the Preface to the volume, Gosse quotes from Sir Thomas Browne's *Urn Burial* (1856) but misremembers the gender of the pronoun in the sentence. 'The iniquity of oblivion hath blindly scattered his poppy over the pompous hexameters of the *De Arte Graphica*…', Gosse quotes in reference to critics that have long since fallen out of fashion. (*Reynolds*, vii) As the American poet and banker Edmund C. Stedman would point out to Gosse in a letter in receipt of receiving the volume, the quotation substitutes Browne's original pronoun *her*, which makes the oblivion a feminine force, with *his*.[415] The slip masculinises the oblivion that will encompass the critic—the critical role being the one Gosse himself adopts in this Preface, of course—much as death-bringing 'age' is similarly allegorised as masculine in 'Euthanasia'. Gosse manages to envisage partial fulfilment even as he puts the wild beast to sleep.

But the 'hushed', masochistic homoerotics of 'Euthanasia' are otherwise obscured by the poem's ostensible concern with a good death and the speaker's protestation that he is 'scarce' aware of the touch. (6, 2) In 'Euthanasia', Gosse thus finds a self-cure for sexual anxieties in a fantasy of numbing the body in a manner analogous to hysterical anaesthesia. Gosse's poetry expresses a desire to evade and anaesthetize

[415] Edmund C. Stedman to Edmund Gosse, 18 September 1884 in *TD*, 150. Gosse would not make the same mistake again when he quoted the same line in his later study of Browne. Gosse, *Browne*, 205.

homosexual desires, comprehended as illicit, in a manner that resonates with conceptions of hysteria in the psychoanalytic tradition, as well as his presentation of himself as a child hysteric in *Father and Son*. Though the speakers of Gosse's poetry attempt to prematurely age themselves, the hysterical strain in Gosse's homoerotic poetry seems conventionally *regressive* in both meanings of the word. The hysteric characteristically cannot bear their own sexual maturity, nor can the speaker of 'Euthanasia'. For Gosse, ageing offers a second childhood, a way of evading genital sexuality. The fantasy is not directed towards maturation, but toward self-infantilisation. This regressive strain in Gosse's reflections on jouissance should make us wary of Bersani's attempt to enlist the subject's capacity for 'self-shattering' into a queer politics of masochism, whereby 'power' is defeated by 'pleasure'.[416] In Gosse's text, the self-shattering 'destructive ebullition' tends to speak more to a self-hatred of the embodied queer subject: it becomes a moment in which conventional power relations are exaggeratedly *reinforced*, rather than broken down. Much as the fantasized confrontation with Hamo as jaguar is followed by a 'dreamless sleep', jouissance is perversely tied to the 'literary andoyne' so valued by Lang for its potential for depoliticization.

The negativity of the narcotica poetry and Gosse's pessimism about the domestication (or what Bersani would call the 'pastora[lization]') of sexuality similarly chimes with the queer politics of the death drive, which resists reproductive futurity in a manner comparable to – though less explicit than - that envisaged by Lee Edelman.[417] But Gosse's whole corpus cannot be reduced to this pessimism: it rather represents a recurrent mood about desire to be found in his work. We can be thankful for this fact:

---

[416] Bersani, *Homos*, 100.
[417] Leo Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 3-30, (22). Edelman, *No Future*, 2-3.

the eroticisation of self-hatred largely constitutes a *failed* self-cure for dealing with sexuality and aggression in Gosse's work more than anything. To say so is to resolve Gosse's scepticism for him, of course: his own poetic corpus allows for far more ambiguity as to what constitutes an 'ill philosophy'. But other moments of his work aid us in our escape out of the stifling opium-den atmosphere of 'Euthanasia'. I now turn again to *F&S* to demonstrate how Gosse came to envisage a more optimistic vision of psychological development and the formation (rather than dissolution) of queer subjectivity.[418] Gosse nevertheless offers us a ruthless, rather than anodyne, optimism here: he once told a friend that he should 'suck at [life] as a wasp drains a peach', which suggests how he thought that aggression, even sadism, had its place in human flourishing.[419] While his narcotica poetry attempts to avoid discontent by masochistically turning aggression inward upon the self, Gosse in *Father and Son* finds a way to redeploy aggression for purposes of development, rather than deterioration, which allows him to overcome the pessimism of his earlier narcotica.

Antinomian Tendencies

In 'Neurasthenia', we are encouraged to think that the doubts the neurasthenic-homosexual feels towards 'the truth of every law they feel' is a curse to be lamented. (19, 'Neurasthenia') But in *F&S*, Gosse finds active value in evading the moral law and thereby wrests himself from his former pessimism. More specifically, he uses aggression, even sadism, for purposes of development and individuation by way of cultivating an ambivalent therapy of escape. As with his father, this necessitates making himself a necessary *exception* to the moral law—a justified sinner, in other words. But

[418] For queer optimism, see Michael D. Snedicker, *Queer Optimism: Lyric Personhood and Other Felicitous Persuasions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 3.
[419] Edmund Gosse to Richard Le Gallienne, 18 October 1892 in Thwaite, 338.

where his father found an antinomianism of the religious life, Gosse finds an antinomianism of the aesthetic life.

But what is antinomianism? In the technical theological sense, antinomianism refers to the belief that 'Christians are by grace set free from the need to observe the moral law'; in a looser metaphorical sense, it refers to the view that one is not bound by the dictates of morality.[420] Gosse was most likely thinking of Pater's use of the term in the *Renaissance* in the latter sense when he recommended in his Wharton Lecture of 1915 that his audience might trace the 'antinomianism' (or 'lawlessness') of the Romantic Movement, with its characteristic 'instinct for insisting that genius is a law unto itself', to the 'hedonist essays' of Wilde, among other works of modern literature. (*Diversions*, 73)

I have claimed that father and son share a common antinomian propensity, but neither Edmund nor Philip Henry Gosse would have *self*-identified as antinomian in the technical Christian sense of the word. In his earlier biography of his father *The Life of Philip Henry Gosse*, Gosse suggested that the Plymouth Brethren, the extreme Calvinist sect to which Philip Henry and Emily Bowes Gosse belonged, did have a clear ethic: 'The Brethren held that it was the duty of the Christian to leave all revenge to God, to bow to injury and insult, and, above all, on no occasion to use any words stronger than affirmation.'[421] (*LPHG*, 214) Gosse proceeds to recount how his father was always opposed to the punishment of criminals. (*LPHG*, 214) All the same, the Brethren were accused of antinomianism by various commentators in tracts throughout the father's

[420] "Antinomianism," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. Andrew Louth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).
[421] For the Plymouth Brethren, see David Hempton, *Evangelical Disenchantment: Nine Portraits of Faith and Doubt* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 142-3, 143n.12.

lifetime, and not without reason.[422] Even if one takes the hyperbole of the theological controversialists with a large dash of salt, the tracts suggest that the beliefs of the Darbyite faction of the Brethren, who splintered off in 1845, can be more justly described as antinomian than Philip Henry Gosse's own circle of believers.[423] Yet, whether *doctrinally* accurate of the Gosses or no, the extent of Philip Henry Gosse's disparagement of good works and moral considerations tells in the eccentricities of Edmund's upbringing, as recorded in *F&S*. The father's disparagement of ethical considerations is often lost upon critics who are keen to contrast the conflict between father and son as an Arnoldian clash of Hebrew and Hellene.[424] Gosse describes how his father's early religious instruction, which he calls 'exclusively doctrinal', lacked the 'moral injunctions' which usually 'form the basis of infantile discipline'.[425] (*F&S*, 53) As David Hempton has claimed, Philip Henry Gosse 'stood in direct succession from the great English divines of the seventeenth century in his insistence that faith was more important than love, charity, or ethics in his hierarchy of Christian virtues.'[426] Gosse notes how his father's 'incessant exhortations always dealt, not with conduct, but with faith'. (*F&S*, 175) If he knew that the son departed from the faith of his father, his friend Charteris also thought that the religion of his childhood enabled Gosse to relegate 'moral preoccupations' to merely a 'secondary position' as a critic of literature, unlike

---

[422] Edward Harley Dewart, *Broken Reeds, Or, The Heresies of the Plymouth Brethren Shown to be Contrary to Scripture & Reason* (Toronto: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1869), 7-9. James Crawford Ledlie Carson, *The Heresies of the Plymouth Brethren* (London: Houlston & Sons, Paternoster Row, 1870), 134-245. James Grant, *The Plymouth Brethren: Their History and Heresies* (London: William Macintosh, 1875), 61. Daniel Steele, *Substitute for Holiness or, Antinomianism Revived, or The Theology of the So-Called Plymouth Brethren Examined and Refuted* (Illinois: Christian Witness Co., 1899 [1887]), *passim*.

[423] For a reference to the Darbyite split, see Edmund Gosse to Philip Henry Gosse, October 24, 1871, in Charteris, 37.

[424] Anthony Arthur, "Gosse's *Father and Son*: Escape from The Prison of Puritanism," *Modern British Literature* 3 (1978): 73-77. Philip Dodd, "The Nature of Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son*," *English Literature in Transition* 22 (1979): 270-79. Harley, "Sexing the Aesthete," §19, 21

[425] For Gosse's childhood as *unrepresentative* of Victorian childhood generally, see O'Gorman, "Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son*, Modernism, and a History of Nerves," 3-17.

[426] Hempton, *Evangelical Disenchantment*, 168.

the generation of Victorian critics immediately prior to Gosse's heyday, such as Arnold, Ruskin, and Hutton: 'If the reaction to a literary work was pleasure, [Gosse] had an adequate basis for criticism without any sizing-up of moral values.'[427] While this overstates matters slightly, it does suggest how father and son both disparaged moral considerations for the sake of some other kind of non-moral good.

Pater had claimed that the antinomian tendency was most likely to surface when a culture was struggling to transform itself.[428] Gosse suggests this is true also of an individual's struggle to grow and develop. In *Seventeenth-Century Studies* (1883), Gosse claims of John Webster's moral universe that 'men are placed by God in various positions,'

> …dependent upon one on another, and usually so hemmed in by the conventions of society that they act with sameness, and more by fashion than by principle. But now and then one and another are called out to take an individual position, and act in ways altogether novel and startling. Then it is that the real nobility of character makes itself apparent. (*XVIICS*, 60)

James D. Woolf claims that Gosse reads the titular heroine of Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1623) in particular as illustrating a belief that an 'extraordinary person' can be immune to 'traditional ethical laws'.[429] We see this play out in the ways in which Gosse draws on his antinomian inheritance to overcome the ethical impingements of his

[427] Charteris, 221, 444.
[428] David DeLaura, *Hebrew and Hellene in Victorian England* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), 241-2.
[429] Woolf, 66.

father. Gosse implies that an antinomian suspension of ethical consideration is required for self-fashioning.

Gosse's aesthetic individuation—his attempt to 'fashion [an] inner life for himself', as opposed to merely succumbing to his father's overbearing spiritual stipulations—draws upon an antinomian undercurrent in his religious heritage. (*F&S*, 186) This is indirectly and humorously brought out in his account of misunderstanding such scriptural passages as 'all things are by the Law purged with blood, and without blood is no remission of sin' while reading with his father as a child. (Hebrews 9:22; Gosse, *F&S*, 54) The Epistle to the Hebrews attempts to warn off Jewish converts to Christianity from a 'dangerous conservatism', Gosse explains, that would consider the observance of the 'the formalities of the Law of Moses' as necessary for Christian salvation. (Gosse, *F&S*, 54) The Plymouth Brethren had their own theory of how the Mosaic Law relates to the Christian era; they believed in what is now called dispensationalism, in which each historical age has its own 'dispensation' from God, with the 'Jewish dispensation' no longer applying to the Christian era.[430] (Gosse, *F&S*,54; cf. *LPHG*, 368) The disregard of the Mosaic Law within their theological tradition is given ironic expression in Gosse's misapprehension of the Epistle to the Hebrews as a child:

> Suddenly by my flushing up with anger and saying, 'Oh how I do hate that Law,' my Father perceived, and paused in amazement to perceive, that I took the Law to be a person of malignant temper from whose cruel bondage, and from whose intolerable tyranny and unfairness, some excellent person was crying out to be

[430] Cf. Massimo Introvigne, *Plymouth Brethren* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 43-5.

> delivered. I wished to hit Law with my fist, for being so mean and unreasonable. (Gosse, *F&S*, 54)

Gosse's childish misconception of the 'Law' as a cruel tyrant strikes us as an unconscious allegory of the father: Gosse will echo the language of cruelty in calling his father's religion 'sterile and cruel'; he says he needs to 'escape' from the 'narrowness' of his 'upbringing' and his '*bondage* to the *Law* [my emphasis] and the Prophets.'[431] (Gosse, *F&S*, 183, 199) To do so, Gosse makes for himself a new dispensation. While *Father and Son* is usually envisaged as a proto-Freudian text, Gosse's account of psychological development differs from the account of the murder of the narcissistic father by the primal horde in Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1913). For Freud, Lacan, and others, it is the murder of the father that *institutes* the symbolic Law, i.e., the prohibition against murder and incest.[432] For Gosse, it is overcoming the narcissistic Father that allows one to overcome the moral law.

But why does Gosse feel the need to throw off the moral law (and not merely the Mosaic Law) in order to individuate himself from his father, given his father's disparagement of moral considerations? It is relevant that ethical commitment is identified with heterosexual marriage in Kierkegaard's *Either/*or. But for much of *F&S*, the Fifth Commandment—'to honour thy father and mother'—is more relevant. (Exodus 20.12) 'Few men have kept the fifth commandment so closely', claims Charteris of his friend in a moment of telling hyperbole.[433] At the beginning of the memoir Gosse

---

[431] For the controversy as to whether Gosse's portrait of his father as cruel tyrant was accurate or overharsh, see Ann Thwaite, *Glimpses of the Wonderful: The Life of Philip Henry Gosse* (London: Faber & Faber, 2002), xvii.
[432] Rosine Jozef Perelberg, "Paternal Function and Thirdness in Psychoanalysis and Legend: Has the Future Been Foretold?" *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 82, no. 3 (2013): 557-585.
[433] Charteris, 42.

himself claims that he finds 'mournful satisfaction, but yet a satisfaction,' in recognising that father and son 'were both of them able to obey the law which says that ties of close family relationship must be honoured and sustained. Had it not been so, this story would never have been told.' (Gosse, *F&S*, 5) But both Gosse and Charteris protest too much. The reviewer of *Father and Son* for the *Times Literary Supplement* reflected disapprovingly that Gosse had 'no doubt settled it with his conscience how far in the interests of popular education and amusement it is legitimate to expose the weaknesses and inconsistencies of a good man who is also one's father.'[434] Rather than for purposes of education or amusement, I suggest that Gosse needed to occupy the space of the thankless child for therapeutic, developmental purposes. Much as William James suggests in the *Varieties of Religious Experience* that the 'antinomian' tendency in the spiritual life characteristically emerges when a 'congenital' optimist 'passionately fling[s] themsel[f] upon their sense of the goodness of life, […] in spite of the sinister theologies into which they may be born', Gosse demonstrates the uses of an antinomian reaction for purposes of development, individuation, and escaping from the impingements of one's upbringing.[435] Gosse's aesthetic liberalism thus owes something to the very religious heritage it necessarily rejects.[436]

Cutting Ties: Gosse on the *Omphalos*

Henry James had warned Gosse that the memoir went too far in its depiction of his father's shortcomings: 'not too far […] for truth,' but 'too far for filiality [and] tenderness'. [437] James no doubt had in mind such moments in the memoir as Gosse's

[434] *TLS* quoted in Charteris, 305.
[435] James, *Varieties*, 79.
[436] For aesthetic and spiritual liberalism, see Russell, *Tact*, 42.
[437] Henry James to Edmund Gosse, 10th November 1907, in *Selected Letters of Henry James to Edmund Gosse 1882-1915: A Literary Friendship*, ed. Rayburn S. Moore (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1988), 230.

account of his father's failure convincingly to refute the findings of modern geological—and by extension evolutionary—science in his infamous *Omphalos: An Attempt to Untie the Geological Knot* (1857). In the episode, Gosse takes a subtle sadistic pleasure in his father's failure. Here we see Gosse redeploy aggression, rather than disavow it. P. H. Gosse had meant for this scriptural interpretation of geology to be an exercise in 'intellectual therapeutics' which would 'heal all the maladies of the age' caused by the broadening rift between new scientific knowledge and the revelatory authority of the Bible. (*F&S*, 64) But the episode is another point in *F&S* in which a contest of therapies is enacted: Gosse's own therapy comes at the expense of his father's failed 'therapeutics'.

In the *Omphalos*, P. H. Gosse attempted to explain away the presence of fossils in the geological record, and the implication that the earth is more ancient than the biblical account would have us believe. The naturalist argued that that 'a sudden act of creation' *ex nihilo* would require a simulation of events that in fact would never have taken place. (*F&S*, 63) Adam would 'display an *omphalos* [sic],' though 'no umbilical cord had ever attached him to a mother.' (*F&S*, 63) Fossils would appear in the geological record, though the animals had never existed in living form. But Gosse's own therapeutics comes in exposing his father's narcissistic identification with the omnipotence and omniscience of God: P. H. Gosse is said to cast the volume 'upon the waters', much as the Spirit of God moves 'upon the face of the waters' in the Book of Genesis. (Genesis 1:7-9; *F&S*, 63) Gosse identifies his father's intellectual perversity as a disavowal as violent as the 'catastrophic act of creation' itself. (*F&S*, 63) An only slightly muffled violence imbues the father's attempt at repair:

> This 'Omphalos' of his, he thought, was to bring all the turmoil of scientific speculation to a close, fling geology into the arms of Scripture, and make the lion

> eat grass with the lamb. It was not surprising, he admitted, that there had been experienced an ever-increasing discord between the facts which geology brings to light and the direct statements of the early chapters of 'Genesis'. Nobody was to blame for that. My Father, and my Father alone, possessed the secret of the enigma; he alone held the key which could smoothly open the lock of geological mystery. He offered it, with a glowing gesture, to atheists and Christians alike. This was to be the universal panacea; this the system of intellectual therapeutics which could not but heal all the maladies of the age. (*F&S*, 63)

Gosse's description of the *Omphalos* as an exercise in 'intellectual therapeutics' echoes, and invites unflattering comparison with, his earlier praise of the 'religious and intellectual […] anaesthetics' of Jeremy Taylor's 'tolerant theory'. (*JT*, 46-7) P.H. Gosse's book is marked by intellectual violence. Geology is flung 'into the arms of Scripture'; the lion is *made* to eat grass with the lamb. Echoing Edmund's own impingements, these subtle images of compelled mating as much as force-feeding, suggest how P. H. Gosse seeks to force peace and resolve 'turmoil'.[438] (*F&S*, 64)

Importantly, however, Gosse is not muffling his own sadistic enjoyment in the failure. Gosse's own relief comes from ridiculing his father's hubris. Gosse describes how his 'Father lived in a fever of suspense, waiting for the tremendous issue.' (*F&S*, 64) 'Never was a book cast upon the waters with greater anticipations of success than this curious, this obstinate, this fanatical volume', Gosse writes: 'But, alas! atheists and Christians alike looked at it, and laughed, and threw it away.' (*F&S*, 64) Gosse's ironic 'alas!', with its ejaculatory exclamation, identifies with the public that rejects his father's

[438] The latter is a conventional reworking of scripture. Cf. Isaiah 65:25.

efforts. The final note of the passage is one of Schadenfreude. The father's book is thrown away, excreted like so much wastepaper. In contradistinction to the comedic release that both reader and author are afforded by the satire, the father's failure congeals around him in the form of 'an 'inspissated' gloom': 'it thickened day by day, as hope and self-confidence evaporated in thin clouds of disappointment.' (*F&S*, 64)

Though Gosse distances himself from his father in the episode, he also invites us to compare their 'therapeutics', and we should be wary of exaggerating the differences between the two. Gosse does not depict his childhood self as free from the magical thinking and fantasies of omnipotence that characterise his father's habits of thought; he depicts his own 'savage and undeveloped little brain' as similarly liable to them. (*F&S*, 34) Gosse describes how as a child he persuaded himself that if only he could 'discover the proper words to say,' he would be able to 'induce the gorgeous birds and butterflies' illustrated in his father's books to 'come to life'. (*F&S*, 24) Similarly, he becomes convinced that if he 'could only count consecutive numbers long enough,' he should suddenly find himself 'in possession of the great secret.' (*F&S*, 24, 26) Gosse quibbles with the Wordsworthian maxim that 'child is father to the man'. (*F&S*, 156) But his own narratorial perspective is so heavily infused with his childhood fantasies that it does not allow us to make a clean break—to cut the cord—between father and son. Importantly, *F&S* does not deny the importance of fantasy, narcissism, or even sadism in its rejection of his father's religion. Rather, it suggests that the aesthetic life gives these operations preferable, if not morally innocent, outlets.

Pleased as Punch: Sadism in the Aesthetic Life

Gosse thus redeploys his aggression by way of the antinomian character of the aesthetic life. Gosse is drawing here from Kierkegaard, for whom the aesthetic life is fundamentally amoral in nature, as well as Ibsen who also explored the idea that sadism

constitutes an essential component, even the natural height, of aesthetic enjoyment. In *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard gives a resonant representation of the highest consummation of the aesthetic life in the 'Diary of a Seducer', in which a cad called "Johannes" seduces a young girl to fall in love with him and deliver herself to him, only to abandon her, for the sake of contriving something aesthetically interesting.[439] The eponymous anti-heroine of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, a play Gosse translated, often resorts to petty cruelty to make her tedious life more interesting, and scholars have interpreted her as a Kierkegaardian aesthete in female form.[440] Like Kierkegaard's seducer, Hedda's machinations suggest that the amoral nature of the aesthetic life has a relationship with cruelty more essential than accidental, with the schemer's manipulation of persons paralleling the artist's manipulation of reality.

In *F&S*, Gosse foregrounds the sadomasochistic character of the aesthetic life in a satirical episode that recounts the violent delights he felt as a child upon watching a Punch and Judy show. Punch becomes here an allegory for the lawless, amoral tendency of the aesthetic life towards sadism. After the death of his mother, Gosse's lonely life as an eight-year-old is relieved only by the amusement he steals from watching the regular traffic of the street outside their house in Islington. Gosse describes the street as his 'theatre' with several grotesque local personages acting as the routine characters of its stage before proceeding to describe the 'tragedy of Mr. Punch' as 'another, and a still greater delight':

> I was never allowed to go out into the street [but] when, by happy chance, the show stopped opposite our door, I saw enough of that ancient drama to be

[439] Kierkegaard, III.301-445.
[440] Rush, "Two Pistols," 199. Cf. Ibsen, *Hedda*, 120, 150.

> thrilled with terror and delight. […] The momentous close, when a figure of shapeless horror appears on the stage, and quells the hitherto undaunted Mr. Punch, was to me the bouquet of the entire performance. When Mr. Punch, losing his nerve, points to this shape and says in an awestruck, squeaking whisper, 'Who's that? Is it the butcher?' and the stern answer comes, 'No, Mr. Punch!' And then, 'Is it the baker?' 'No, Mr. Punch!' 'Who is it then?' (this in a squeak trembling with emotion and terror); and then the full, loud reply, booming like a judgement-bell, 'It is the Devil come to take you down to Hell,' and the form of Punch, with kicking legs, sunken in epilepsy on the floor,—all this was solemn and exquisite to me beyond words. I was not amused—I was deeply moved and exhilarated, 'purged', as the old phrase hath it, 'with pity and terror'.
> (*F&S*, 48-9)

Much in the manner of Hardy's grim allegories of tragedy in *Jude* and *TMOC*, Gosse ironically rejects the distinction between high and low culture, as well as the distinction between tragedy and comedy, in ironically suggesting that his child self could be 'purged' in an Aristotelian manner by the 'ancient drama'. In later decades of the nineteenth century there was a consistent attempt to moralise the Punch show in order to make it more acceptable to middle-class audiences, and it is this trend which Gosse appears to be ironizing with his mock moral ending.[441] The episode stresses the ineluctable presence of aggression in aesthetic experience, the Victorian bourgeois household, and culture more broadly.

[441] Rosalind Crone, "Mr and Mrs Punch in the Nineteenth Century," *The Historical Journal*, 49, no. 4 (2006): 1055–1082, (1056, 1071-72).

Gosse was not the only Edwardian or Victorian author to be provoked by the Punch show to reflect upon the use of aesthetic culture for the sublimation of aggression *avant la lettre*. 'In my opinion', Dickens wrote to a private correspondent in 1849, 'the Street Punch [sic] is one of the extravagant reliefs from the realities of life which would lose its hold upon people if it were made moral and instructive', as it was in other countries.[442] Dickens defended the spectator's 'extravagant reliefs' on the grounds that the Punch show constitutes an 'outrageous joke', which 'no one in existence would think of regarding as an incentive to any course of action, or a model for any kind of conduct.'[443] One 'secret source of pleasure very generally derived from the performance', Dickens thought, was the 'satisfaction that the spectator feels in the circumstances that likenesses of men and women can be so knocked about, without any pain or suffering.'[444]

Gosse couldn't have read Dickens's letter, but he was aware of a comparable argument in the classicist Gilbert Murray's *History of Ancient Greek Literature* (1897), which Gosse edited for Heinemann with a marked conscientiousness.[445] With obvious relevance for the Punch episode, Murray claims in his book that the bawdy 'phallic performances' of Ancient Greek Comedy worked to purge their audiences of 'pent-up force[s]'.[446] Though Murray acknowledges how the sexual frankness of the comedies tend to 'shock' the 'modern imagination', he nonetheless defends the psychological utility of the ancient genre regardless.[447] Apart from 'possible elements of unconscious

[442] Charles Dickens to Mary Taylor, 6th November 1849 in *The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Jenny Hartley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 204.
[443] Ibid. 204.
[444] Ibid.
[445] For Gosse as editor, see Thwaite, 395-6.
[446] Gilbert Murray, *History of Ancient Greek Literature* (London: Heinemann, 1897), 210-211.
[447] Ibid.

hypocrisy on our own part,' Murray reflects, 'there are many things to be borne in mind' when considering the value of such an outlet:

> In dealing with those elements in human nature which are more permanent than respectable, the characteristic Greek method was frank recognition and regulation. A pent-up force becomes dangerous; let all natural impulses be given free play in such ways and on such occasions as will do least damage.[448]

Murray defends 'licences in comedy' by drawing on Aristotle's conception of the cathartic function of tragedy. Comedy allows for a 'frank recognition and regulation' of pent-up sexuality, with 'roughly speaking, no shame and no secrecy'; Murray further suggests that these forces require an even more 'necessary purgation' than that of pity and fear.[449]

Murray's argument allows us to understand how Gosse's Punch satire relates to his attempts to work through queer desire in the face of sexual prohibition. The ironic character of Gosse's delicate language ('the bouquet of the entire performance', 'solemn and exquisite', etc.) in the episode works to puncture a hypocrisy comparable to that which Murray identifies in his late Victorian readership as regards sexual mores. The prettifying euphemisms, so ludicrously applied, show themselves up. Much as Dickens in *Dombey and Son* (1848) uses Punch as a revealing brutish parallel for Mr Dombey's harmful delusions of grandeur, Gosse uses the Punch show to suggest that the impingements of his childhood, physical and psychical, come from a cruder source than

[448] Ibid. 211.
[449] Ibid.

his father realised.[450] We are invited to identify 'the internal troubles of the Punch family' with that of the Gosse family: 'I was much affected by the internal troubles of the Punch family', Gosse relates: 'I thought that with a little more tact on the part of Mrs Punch and some restraint held over a temper, naturally violent, by Mr Punch, a great deal of this sad misunderstanding might have been prevented.' (*F&S*, 48-49) Gosse presents the Punch family drama as a 'struggle between two temperaments' (or 'temper[s]'), like his own narrative. (*F&S*, 5) The recourse to a language of 'tact' and 'restraint' in Edmund's reading of the Punch show is made ironic in light of the way a comparable vocabulary plays out in other recollected episodes in the memoir. Gosse describes his delicate attempts not to provoke confrontation with his father in their religious disputes—'I was docile, I was plausible, I was anything but combative'—as efforts in restraint and 'tact' that eventually fail. (*F&S*, 182)

Because he reveals how as a child he identified with Mr Punch's sadism, Gosse also identifies the 'murderous hatred' in his own breast and helps us see the Punch in ourselves. (*F&S*, 30) It is this stress on 'frank recognition and regulation', on self-conscious escapism, that divides son from father, and further demonstrates how art, rather than religion, offers a better form for the sublimation of aggression. Whereas his father's 'violent' evangelicalism tended towards self-deception, or 'unconscious hypocrisy' to use Murray's term, shows how art can induce self-consciousness. Little Edmund misrecognises his investment in the aesthetic experience: he is not feeling 'pity' for the Punch puppet, at least not wholly, but takes a sadistic delight in the puppet's form 'sunken in epilepsy'. We, however, become self-conscious about the

[450] Dickens, *Dombey*, 473.For a reference to *Dombey and Son* and a comparison of Miss Marks to Mrs Pipchin, see Gosse, *F&S*, 57. For the Dickensian influence on *F&S*, see Kathy Rees, "Reading Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son* (1907) Through a Dickensian Lens," *Dickensian Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (September 2016): 223-243, (233-236).

potentially sadistic character of our own aesthetic enjoyment in recognising the child's misrecognition. Gosse envisages art as regulating aggression in a self-conscious way, which awards to aesthetic culture a degree of purposefulness, though of an ambivalent, hazardous kind.

The Sad Boy in the Garret: The Uses of Escapism for Life

As a result of this challenge to the evasion-confrontation dichotomy, Gosse finds more fruitful forms of avoidance as well as more productive redeployments of aggression. He tacitly recognises that his avoidant retreats into fantasy allow him to construct a secular, liberal—but also implicitly queer, and ambiguously gendered—subjectivity for himself that is detachable from the customary circumstances of his upbringing, and heteronormativity.[451] The twinning of queer desire with the formation of a liberal subject runs counter to much of queer theory, but Gosse invites us to do exactly that. Gosse figures child development as a perilous 'escape' from the 'narrowness' of familial, religious, and/or societal constrains, which necessitates making a virtue of evasion. (*F&S*, 119) In a way that draws out its ancestry in the more overt political resonances of the Platonic noble lie, liberal subjecthood becomes in Gosse's work identifiable with the Ibsenite vital lie as a questionable ideological construct that nonetheless pragmatically achieves eudaimonic ends. Escapism, fiction, and art become for Gosse the ground of both queer futurity and liberal subjectivity by giving 'fortitude to [his] individuality'. (*F&S*, 199)

Gosse's ambivalent optimism about escapism must, however, first overcome the more pessimistic treatment of the value of illusion and evasion to be found in Ibsen's

[451] For a much more pessimistic reading of the *F&S* as 'claiming a mental and psychological liberation it has not fully earned and does not confidently exercise', see Alec Zwerdling, *The Rise of the Memoir* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 33-54.

play *The Wild Duck* (1884), which he discusses in the Epilogue to *F&S*. Gosse describes his father's overbearing excesses as part of a relentless will to truth, a violent epistemophilia, comparable to that found in Gregers Werle in Ibsen's play:

> The peculiar kind of drama in which every sort of social discomfort is welcomed rather than that the characters should be happy when guilty of 'acting a lie', was not invented in those days, and there can hardly be imagined a figure more remote from my Father than Ibsen. Yet when I came, at a far later date, to read *The Wild Duck*, memories of the embarrassing household of my infancy helped me to realize Gregers Werle, with his determination to pull the veil of illusion away from every compromise that makes life bearable.[452] (*F&S*, 127-128)

Here illusion 'makes life bearable': as Gosse reads him, Ibsen does not imagine that illusion will substantially enhance life but will merely make it minimally sufferable to begin with. Gosse is more explicit about Ibsen's pessimism in his reading of the play in his critical biography *Ibsen*, which was published the same year as *F&S* in 1907, in which he summarises the moral of the play as lying in 'the danger of "a sick conscience" and the value of illusion':

> Society may be full of poisonous vapors [sic] and be built on a framework of lies; it is nevertheless prudent to consider whether the ideal advantages of disturbing it overweigh the practical disadvantages, and above all to bear in mind that if you

[452] For epistemophilia, see Klein, *LG&R*, 188.

> rob the average man of his illusions, you are almost sure to rob him of his happiness. (*Ibsen*, 174)

Yet in *F&S* itself, Gosse plays on a trope from *The Wild Duck*, derived from the Norwegian playwright's biography, to reinscribe into Ibsen's vital lie theme a more positive vision of the uses of evasion for development. The trope is that of Ekdal's garret, the physical symbol of psychic retreat in which the eponymous wild duck lives.

In Ibsen's play, the cynical doctor and neighbour Dr Relling describes the garret in pessimistic terms to Gregers in their conversation about the 'life illusion', or vital lie. Relling first tells Gregers that he has deluded Hialmar into thinking he is soon to discover an invention that will revolutionise photography, though all the time knowing that this is false:

> **GREGERS** And what remedy are you applying in Hialmar's case?
>
> **RELLING** My usual one. I'm fostering the life-illusion in him.
>
> **GREGERS** Life—illusion? Is that what you said?
>
> **RELLING** Yes, I said illusion. For illusion, you know, is the stimulating principle. (Ibsen, V, *WD*, 361)

Relling then proceeds to illustrate his point further by discussing Hialmar's father, Lieutenant Ekdal, who, though a disgraced outcast who cannot show his face in society, escapes to the garret to relive his days hunting bears in the forest:

> **RELLING** Just think of the old bear-hunter shutting himself up in that dark garret to shoot rabbits! I tell you there isn't a happier sportsman in the world than that

> old man pottering about in there among all that rubbish. The four or five withered Christmas-trees he has saved up are the same to him as the whole great fresh Höidal forest; and the rabbits that flop about the garret floor are the bears he has to battle with—the mighty hunter of the mountains! (V, *WD*, 361-2)

Relling's contempt for the deluded persons he counts amongst his neighbours and patients shows through in his mention of 'all that rubbish'. Relling considers himself the adult in the room, but this is a fantasy, an impoverishment of reality, in its own way. As with Little Father Time in *Jude*, a central question of Ibsen's play is whether the perspective of the play reduces to Relling's own cynicism, or whether the cynic also deceives himself. Are those who confidently consider themselves undeceived and disillusioned, in other words, fooling themselves in their own way—as much (and if not more so) than the naïfs, dupes, and cuckolds of the world?

Gosse does not suggest this in his reading of *The Wild Duck*, but he nonetheless works his way back to reillusionment by way of his own reflections on the garret. In *Ibsen*, Gosse traces the garret of the 'symbolic bird' of *The Wild Duck* back to the playwright's childhood. (*Ibsen*, 6) After Ibsen's father ran into debt and his business was liquidated, Gosse tells us, the family had to move to 'a little broken-down farmhouse called Venstöb, in the outskirts of Skien'. (*Ibsen, 5*-6) Ibsen imagined that his father's former friends scorned them and he 'believed himself to have been, personally, much mortified by the change in the family status'. (*Ibsen*, 6) Finding reality persecutory, the 'infant Ibsen' retreated to a 'little room near the back entrance' of the house, 'which was sacred to him and into the fastness of which he was accustomed to bolt himself'. (*Ibsen*, 6) This recovers a more positive use of evasion because it finds a space for the garret in Ibsen's own creative and psychological development.

Gosse subsequently compares Ibsen's 'retreat' to the garret that is the 'domain of Hedvig and of [the] symbolic bird' of *The Wild Duck*, which reminds us of how in Ibsen's play, it is Gregers's willingness to sacrifice the wild duck and thus symbolically destroy the playful, imaginative capacity that the garret space represents, that leads to Hedvig's suicide. (*Ibsen*, 6) The bird was gifted to the Ekdals by Old Werle, and thus comes to symbolise Hedvig—who is in fact Old Werle's daughter, though this is a fact unknown to both Hialmar and Hedvig until Gregers's revelations—because she is another vulnerable *human* animal who has been passed from Old Werle to Hialmar. This identification is significant because later in the play, after all has been exposed to the great grief of the family, Gregers suggests that Hedvig prove to Hialmar, her non-biological father that she loves him sincerely by sacrificing something she loves: the wild duck. Attempting to show her complete adoration, however, she ends up killing herself instead. Gregers, in his will to truth, is to a large extent responsible for her death. By forcing the family to face their demons and dredge up their skeletons, Gregers becomes himself a deathly, demonic force. Symbolically, Hedvig's child suicide, much like Little Father Time's suicide in *Jude*, suggests how the determination to face the truth can do more harm than help—and fatally thwart child development.

In *F&S*, Gosse inverts this theme by recounting how another 'garret', another fantasy space, affords him sufficient psychological space to explore alternative ways of living outside of parents' overbearing control. 'The garret was a fairy place', Gosse writes, 'It was a low lean-to, lighted from the roof. It was wholly unfurnished, except for two objects, an ancient hat-box and a still more ancient skin-trunk'. (*F&S*, 25) Gosse finds within the hat box the torn 'sheets of […] a sensational novel', wastepaper that

Relling would have disparaged as 'rubbish'.[453] (*F&S*, 25) But Gosse finds value in the 'fragment', he reads it 'kneeling on the bare floor, with indescribable rapture.' (*F&S*, 25) Because Gosse's mother had forbidden him from reading fiction, claiming that 'to "tell a story", that is, to compose fictitious narrative of any kind, was a sin', little Edmund in his naivety takes the 'deliberately invented story' as a true account of something that really happened. Though the child takes it as fact, the sensational scrap allows him to briefly escape into an alternative life:

> I […] implicitly believed the tale in the lid of the trunk to be a true account of the sorrows of a lady of title, who had to flee the country, and who was pursued into foreign lands by enemies bent upon her ruin. Somebody had an interview with a 'minion' in a 'mask'; I went downstairs and looked up these words in Bailey's 'English Dictionary', but was left in darkness as to what they had to do with the lady of title. This ridiculous fragment filled me with delicious fears; I fancied that my Mother, who was out so much, might be threatened by dangers of the same sort; and the fact that the narrative came abruptly to an end, in the middle of one of its most thrilling sentences, wound me up almost to a disorder of wonder and romance. (*F&S*, 25)

Gosse's description of his feeling quasi-religious 'rapture' at the 'sensational' nature of the novel, a 'ridiculous' genre commonly understood to offer mere cheap thrills, recalls the ironic character of the Punch show. But this passage foregrounds questions of

[453] Fittingly, the 'ancient skin-trunk' recalls the trunk that reveals the secret of the eponymous deviant of Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), amongst other hidden boxes and compartments of the Gothic and sensation genres. There's also an old trunk in the priest hole passage in Audley Court. Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, ed. Lyn Pykett (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2012 [1862]), 9,

sexuality over those of aggression. That the sensational story contains a 'minion' in a 'mask' is suggestive of how the imaginative space of novel and garret allows the child to envisage ways of life and ways of being that are forbidden or foreclosed by the religious worldview of his parents. He finds other masks to try on; he finds other kinds of rapture possible and permissible.

Depending on the edition of Bailey's 'Etymological Dictionary' he consulted, little Edmund would have found 'MINION [*mignon*, F.]' defined as 'a Darling or Favourite' or 'a dependent'.[454] But I believe Gosse's reconstruction is giving us a lexicological wink here: knowing Elizabethan and Jacobean literature as well as he did, Gosse would have been familiar with the queer resonances of 'minion'. The OED notes that the term derives from the French *mignon*, which is first attested as 'a term of abuse, probably with homosexual connotations' in the twelfth century; in English, the term survives in senses that refer to 'a man or woman kept for sexual favours', 'slave, underling', and 'fastidious or effeminate man; a fop, a dandy'.[455] In his reading of Marlowe's *Edward II* (1592), Gosse would have found the king refer to his lover Gaveston as his 'minion'.[456] Though scholars have suggested that Gosse uses Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* and other texts mentioned in *F&S* to 'plac[e] himself within a distinct *fin-de-siècle* homosexual subculture', in Harley's words, they have failed to register how Gosse queers the Ibsenite trope by making the garret a closet.[457] For Gosse, escapism enables not merely child development in general, but the formation of a queer subjectivity in particular.

---

[454] 'Minion' in Nathan Bailey, *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary* (London: J. and J. Knapton, D. Midwinter and A. Ward, A. Bettesworth and C. Hitch, 1731 [1721]); 'Minion' in Nathan Bailey, *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary* (Edinburgh: Neil & Company, 1783).
[455] 'minion', n., OED.
[456] Christopher Marlowe, 30, *Edward the Second*, ed. Osborne William Tanock (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879), 12.
[457] Harley, "Sexing the Aesthete," §24.

A Fairy's Tales: Evading Heteronormativity

Critics have noted how Gosse uses literary allusions to escapist genres throughout *F&S* to explore non-normative formulations of gender and sexuality and to separate himself from the 'embarrassing household of [his] infancy' more generally.[458] In 'The Romance of a Fairyland' (1908), an essay which has been insufficiently commented upon in criticism, Gosse suggests how the allegorical fairy-stories of Spenser and Ariosto, which satisfy the 'desire to escape from the obvious and the commonplace features of life', speak to a 'sensitive' group of modern persons who 'nourish, persistently, a desire to wander forth beyond the possibilities of experience, to enjoy the impossible, and to invade the inaccessible'. (*Aspects*, 263-67) Gosse's portrait of these 'persons of fortunate temperament', which clearly includes himself, demonstrates how he uses escapist genres to rework the crippling sensitivity of the neurasthenic-homosexual into an optimistic vision of queer subjectivity. (*Aspects*, 267)

When Gosse alludes to escapist genres in *F&S*, he always casts his self-development in terms of imprisonment, insulation, and evasion. Gosse first compares himself to Princess Blanchefleur, the heroine of an Old French romance:

> I was most carefully withdrawn, like Princess Blanchefleur in her marble fortress, from every outside influence whatever, yet to me the instinctive life

[458] For Gosse's discovery of a 'gay sensibility through reading', see Martin Goodman, "Nature Versus Naturalist: Paths Diverging and Converging in Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son*," *Life Writing* 11, no. 1 (2014): 85-101, (87). For Gosse's 'self-feminisation', see Harley, "Sexing the Aesthete," §4, 9. For the importance of the romance genre in Gosse's 'formation of an imaginative life,' and his 'withdrawal from the emotional and intellectual demands of life among the Brethren', see Francis O'Gorman, "Romance and Victorian Autobiography: Margaret Oliphant, Edmund Gosse, and John Ruskin's 'Needle to the North'," in *A Companion to Romance from Classical to Contemporary*, ed. Corinne Saunders (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), 360-374, (369).

> came as unexpectedly as her lover came to her in the basket of roses. What came to me was the consciousness of self, as a force and as a companion[.] (*F&S*, 22)

In the passage, as Ruth Hoberman has argued, Gosse eroticises his 'self-consciousness'.[459] It is a moment in which the self comes to the aid of self *as a (male) lover*. Not merely is it suggestive of the way escapist literatures facilitate queer expression, the passage also recuperates a fruitful form of narcissism that tends towards self-development. Gosse's relief contrasts with the masochistic *jouissance* of the narcotic poetry, an autoeroticism which threatened to destroy the queer desiring subject. Gosse has traded metaphors of explosion and implosion for metaphors of imprisonment and rescue. The 'marble fortress' can be understood as another variation upon the garret: a space that Gosse must retreat into in order to evade parental impingement, but also a space from which he has subsequently to rescue himself

Gosse ambiguously genders himself in the passage while imagining art in terms of escape, as he also does later in the memoir, when at last he manages to read a full work of fiction, a colonial adventure story called *Tom Cringle's Log* (1833) by Michael Scott. Gosse compares the state of his soul before reading the 'picaresque romance' to the heroine of the Bluebeard fairy tale:

> My soul was shut up, like Fatima, in a tower to which no external influences could come, and it might really have been starved to death, or have lost the power of recovery and rebound, if my captor, by some freak not yet perfectly accounted for, had not gratuitously opened a little window in it and added a

[459] Ruth Hoberman, "Narrative Duplicity and Women in Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son*," *Biography* 11, no. 4 (Fall 1988): 303-315, (307, 310).

> powerful telescope. The daring chapters of Michael Scott's picaresque romance of the tropics were that telescope and that window. (*F&S*, 119)

Gosse uses the antinomianism of imagination not merely to suspend moral norms in the memoir, but also to evade heteronormativity.

Fugitive Virtue: Gosse's 'Anticolonialism'

I have demonstrated how Gosse recuperates escapism from its pessimistic treatment in Ibsen's *Wild Duck*. But I now want to end this chapter by stressing how Gosse also offers a less straightforwardly amenable, liberatory politics of evasion in *F&S*, which concerns what Ann Thwaite has rather generously called Gosse's 'anti-imperialism'.[460] Gosse's use of Scott's 'picaresque romance of the tropics' for purposes of escape is already suggestive of how escapism might be bound up with imperialist ventures. But I now turn to the ways in which Gosse riffs throughout *F&S* upon the imperial discourse which infantilizes colonial subjects as children in need of the parental guidance of the colonising power. Throughout the memoir, Gosse explicitly compares himself to both Caliban and a 'savage' and, more implicitly, casts his father in the role of coloniser. (*F&S*, 34, 159) These analogies give his narrative anti-imperialist overtones, but the racial and colonial politics of the text are morally and politically convoluted. For Gosse's anti-imperialist politics are not ones of solidarity with the colonial subject, but rather of aversion to impingement in a far vaguer sense. Consider the moment in *F&S*, in which two members of his father's congregation attempt to seal his fate as a missionary. Gosse is lying severely ill in bed as a child while the two women pronounce over him about his life and purpose:

---

[460] Thwaite, 415.

> 'Ah, poor lamb,' Kate said trivially, 'he's not long for this world; going home to Jesus, he is,—in a jiffy, I should say by the look of 'un.' But Susan answered: 'Not so. I dreamed about 'un, and I know for sure that he is to be spared for missionary service.' 'Missionary service?' repeated Kate, impressed. 'Yes,' Susan went on, with solemn emphasis, 'he'll bleed for his Lord in heathen parts, that's what the future have in store for 'im.' When they were gone, I beat upon the coverlid with my fists, and I determined that whatever happened, I would not, not, not, go out to preach the Gospel among horrid, tropical niggers. (*F&S*, 83)

Gosse utterly rejects this scheme. Yet he does not do so because it is a colonial enterprise that would impinge upon the natives of the so-called 'heathen-parts' but rather because it would impinge upon him. Gosse's 'anti-imperialism' here is one of self-interest and aversion, rather than cosmopolitan solidarity or genuine sympathy. His odious language prevents us from glossing the episode as a moment of 'innocent flightiness', to use a phrase elsewhere used in the memoir. (*F&S*, 86) How much are we to identify the use of the racist dysphemism with the voice and perspective of Gosse the adult, as well as Gosse the child? Thwaite quotes Gosse as stating that the Colonies 'add absolutely nothing to that which makes life valuable to [him]'—a statement that sits strangely alongside his championing of Indian poets Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu, however much he draped their achievements in orientalism.[461]

Gosse's rejection of his missionary fate brings to the fore the typically ambivalent nature of what I call *fugitive virtue*. On the one hand, Gosse's reluctance to go and

---

[461] Gosse quoted in Thwaite, 415. Cf. Elleke Boehmer, *Indian Arrivals 1870–1915: Networks of British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 133-4, 160-171.

evangelise the 'heathens' appears a way in which the memoir praises the capacity to 'let well alone', a capacity which Gosse finds so exaggeratedly lacking in his father. On this reading, Gosse's childhood thus offers a latent allegory of the evils of colonialism. But on the other, Gosse's aversion and his self-indulgent racism seem to be a rejection of the wider world and the (racialised) other, which appears less politically or morally desirable.

Conclusion

The dissonant note upon which I have chosen to end is representative of the politically and ethically ambivalent nature of fugitive virtue, as I see it operating in Gosse's work. In *F&S*, Gosse helps us see positive value in avoidance and illusion in a way that Ibsen fails to imagine in *The Wild Duck*; in so doing, Gosse also overcomes the futilities of his earlier work. But as Gosse's presentation of himself as an unwilling evangelist suggests, the value of avoidance and escapism is itself of a flighty, changeable—we might even say *dodgy*—character in the way it dodges responsibility. In some moments of his work, the antinomianism of the aesthetic life appears conducive to flourishing, and in particular the development and expression of queerness. But the vital lie is always prone to vicissitudes, and the entirety of Gosse's corpus suggests how escapism paradoxically facilitates both the formation and the dissolution of selfhood.

Coda: Sublimation and the Future of an Elusion

This thesis has uncovered an ambivalently escapist tradition in English literature across genres that challenged transcendent and reductive pictures of art's therapeutic value, even while testifying to the power and appeal of the mental states and fantasies typical of an escapist. Writings in this tradition cast doubt upon received therapeutic conceptions of art, including notions of catharsis in the Aristotelian tradition and idealised interpretations of sublimation in psychoanalytic theory—both of which promise to transcend, rather than merely negotiate, our instinctual conflicts. In their writings, art is shown to fail us when it suggests that escapism can help us evade our sexual embodiment, our potential for aggression, or even our everyday unhappiness. Instead, all three writers propose a fraught but expressive redeployment of discontent to constructive or usefully provocative ends.

Ruskin transformed his eccentrically neo-Aristotelian contemplative ideal of human flourishing by cultivating a capacity for both reverie and rumination, which enabled him to temper his utopianism and put his instinctual conflict in service of his radical politics. Hardy, on the other hand, formulated a conception of catharsis as an experience of uncontainment, neither clearly categorizable as an alleviation nor an exacerbation. He did so in order to 1) stress the embodied character of aesthetic experience, 2) ironize aggrandized ethical and spiritual conceptions of the function of tragedy, and 3) intimate the moral problem of tragic pleasure without descending into moralised didacticism. Overcoming a pessimism about life and illusion that characterised his early poetic career and the lessons he took from Ibsen, Gosse used escapism in his non-fiction prose to explore non-normative sexualities and mentally liberate himself from the impingements of his upbringing. In their works, the central

achievements of Victorian self-culture—liberal individuation, for instance, or the attainment of a temper of mind conducive to radical activism—are shown to rely upon feats of evasion. Faced with the recognition that the desire for evasion springs eternal in the human mind, that escapism is ultimately inescapable, these authors offer us more valuable forms of avoidance.

In this Coda, I will briefly suggest further how these authors help us reflect critically upon the theories of sublimation that tend to influence conceptions of the eudaimonic power of art in Victorian studies. I will also consider the way in which the themes of this thesis (elusion, illusion, cure, repair) carry over into the twentieth-century psychoanalytic tradition.

***

Victorianists often compare the therapeutic value of art and literature to the therapeutic action of psychoanalysis, and vice versa.[462] The psychoanalytic tradition in Britain was inspired by major works of the English literary canon from Edmund Spenser to Joseph Conrad and Henry James.[463] The literary and psychoanalytic worlds would collide and combine in London in the early decades of the twentieth century, the final decades of the lives of Hardy and Gosse. Though in 1926 Gosse would deride the influence of what he called 'Freudian nonsense' in the literary biographies of his friend R. L. Stevenson, Freud read Gosse's memoir of 1907 with unsurprising interest in an edition of 1912—a fact which speaks to their partly shared milieu.[464] (*L&F*, 239) Gosse's dismissive view of psychoanalysis did not, moreover, stop his daughter Teresa "Tessa" Gosse working with the feminist psychoanalyst Julia Turner in *The Psychology of Self-Consciousness* (1923), a

[462] Adam Phillips in Davis, *Reading and the Reader*, 134n.16.
[463] For the literary character of British psychoanalysis, see Jacobus, *The Poetics of Psychoanalysis*.
[464] Siegbert Salomon Prawer, *A Cultural Citizen of the World: Sigmund Freud's Knowledge and Use of British and American Writings* (London: Legenda, 2009), 89.

study which suggested how the latter's theories of anxiety and sublimation could be used to interpret poetry.[465]

Yet while Turner's collaboration with Tessa Gosse has mostly faded into obscurity, one psychoanalytic interpreter of Ruskin is quickly becoming a relatively influential figure both within the contemporary psychoanalytic tradition and among members of the academy influenced by it—Marion Milner, that is, one of the analysts who became part of the group known as the Independent group in British psychoanalysis because its earlier members chose to side neither with Freud nor Klein in the Controversial Discussions of 1942-44.[466] Milner's reading of the episode in *Praeterita* in which Ruskin recounts how, after a long neurasthenic illness, he was rejuvenated by way of drawing an Aspen tree at Fontainebleau, is therefore worth dwelling upon. In the said account, Ruskin writes:

> Languidly, but not idly, I began to draw it; and as I drew, the languor passed away: the beautiful lines insisted on being traced,—without weariness. More and more beautiful they became, as each rose out of the rest, and took its place in the air. With wonder increasing every instant, I saw that they "composed" themselves, by finer laws than any known of men. At last, the tree was there, and everything that I had thought before about trees, nowhere. (Ruskin, XXXV.314)

---

[465] Elizabeth R. Valentine, "'A Brilliant and Many-Sided Personality': Jessie Margaret Murray, founder of the Medico-Psychological Clinic," in *Philosophy and History of Psychology* (London: Taylor Francis, 2014), 237-255, (250). For another discussion of Turner, see Laura Marcus, *Dreams of Modernity: Psychoanalysis, Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 152-3.

[466] Russell, *Tact*, 142-164. Milner's growing influence upon the (literary) academy is demonstrated by two forthcoming studies: David Russell's *My Reading: Marion Milner* (OUP), and Gail Newman and Mari Ruti's *Against Neoliberal Optimization: Marion Milner, D. W. Winnicott, and Creative Living* (publisher unknown).

For Milner, Ruskin's epiphany is a 'life-enhancing' 'psycho-physical non-symbolic awareness' of his embodiment, or what she calls a 'direct sensory internal experience of the integrating processes that created and go on creating the body.'[467] Milner calls the experience a 'resurrection of the body'.[468] Milner's reading of Ruskin is decidedly 'healthy minded'—to use the term from William James (a psychological thinker whom Milner read) that I used in the Introduction—in a manner typical of the Independent tradition in British psychoanalysis: it privileges integration over conflict, primary relationality over primary narcissism, optimistic affirmation over pessimistic negation, ordinariness over technicism, spontaneity over formula, and holistic internalisation over fragmented instinctual gratification.[469] It is psychoanalysis in this temper that has become increasingly popular in literary and cultural studies of late.[470]

Yet Milner's interpretation of Ruskin's use of art is misleading if taken to be representative of the function of art in his corpus more broadly; as a reading, it compares to Christoff's comparably healthy-minded Winnicottian interpretation of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, which I pushed back against in my chapter on Hardy above.[471] Milner does not stress how this moment in Ruskin's writing is an idealisation of art's power, and thus necessarily unstable and prone to reversal. Ruskin's experience of the Aspen re-enchants the world for him, and yet his prose also threatens to soon take off into the Heavens:

---

[467] Milner, "The Concentration of the Body," 237
[468] Ibid.
[469] This is my own characterisation, but see also Eric Rayner, *The Independent Mind in British Psychoanalysis* (London: Free Association, 1990), 298, *passim*; Gregorio Kohon, "Notes on the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement in Great Britain," 549-50; Christoff, *Novel Relations*, 2-4.
[470] Amanda Anderson, "Therapeutic Criticism," *Novel* (2017) 50, no.3, 321-328: 325. See also Russell, *Tact*, and Christoff, *Novel Relations*.
[471] Milner, "The Concentration of the Body," 237.

> [T]hat all the trees of the wood (for I saw surely that my little aspen was only one of their millions) should be beautiful—more than Gothic tracery, […] or the artfullest painters of the West could limn,—this was indeed an end to all former thoughts with me, an insight into a new silvan world. Not silvan only. The woods, which I had only looked on as wilderness, fulfilled I then saw, in their beauty, the same laws which guided the clouds, divided the light, and balanced the wave. "He hath made everything beautiful, in his time," became for me thenceforward the interpretation of the bond between the human mind and all visible things; and I returned along the wood-road feeling that it had led me far;—Farther than ever fancy had reached, or theodolite measured. (Ruskin, XXXV.315)

As an idealisation, this moment in Ruskin's work reaches an emotional polarity that will eventually actuate its opposite.[472]

Ruskin is essentially one 'of the sick souls,' to stay within the terms of James, 'who must be twice-born in order to be happy'—or, rather, we might suggest, a writer that needs to be reborn again and again and again to escape from an ever-encroaching threat of psychic deadness.[473] In the *Varieties*, James gives the example of Carlyle as a representative man with a 'sick soul', and the tradition I explore in this thesis is fundamentally post-Carlylean.[474] Much in the way that Teufelsdröckh in *Sartor Resartus* needs first to fully inhabit the 'Everlasting No' before he can reach the re-enchantment of life within the 'Everlasting Yea', Ruskin, Hardy and Gosse feel the need to first fully inhabit the disillusioned, impoverished view of art and life as suggested by the escapist

[472] Adrian Stokes appreciated this, though framed the vacillation in merely negative terms. Stokes, "Some Connections," 46.
[473] James, *Varieties*, 166.
[474] Ibid.

predicament in their attempts to move on from it; as is the case with Carlyle, however, their shift from utter negation to enhanced affirmation strikes us as always vulnerable to reversal.[475] In my own chapter on Ruskin, I have drawn attention to the shadows cast by such dazzling sunlight. I have suggested how art does not merely provide Ruskin with reawakening, but also narcosis; not merely integration, but a habit of *dis*harmony, which makes use of discontent rather than contentment.

Though I have often engaged the writings of the Independent Group in this thesis, my own readings of Ruskin, Hardy and Gosse rely upon a more ambivalent approach to art as a "desperate remedy." Winnicott, who analysed Milner, offers a comparably healthy-minded, anti-cathartic account of play, which is similarly at odds with my reading of Hardy's investment in (or obsession with) cathartic metaphors as representative of the relief that art offers. The transitional play phenomena that Winnicott focuses upon have no 'instinctual backing, where the orgiastic element plays an essential part, and where satisfactions are closely linked with climax.' (Winnicott, VII.342) There is a tendency among writers and analysts in the Independent tradition (and critics invested in their project) to want to present life in watercolour, rather than oils.[476] The spikiness of the ambivalent escapist tradition I outline in this thesis, however, demands the chiaroscuro of the Kleinian vision of psychological development, which wrestles with psychological polarisation (mania and melancholia) in a manner comparable to the authors which I study. Notably, Hardy and Gosse were still living and writing in 1926, the year in which the psychoanalyst Klein settled in London.[477] The notion that art might provide only a "desperate remedy" for emotional discontent

[475] Carlyle, *Sartor*, 123-156.
[476] Russell speaks of Milner's scepticism as regards Kleinian 'narrative[s] of aggression, followed by guilt and […] feel-good redemption'; such stories 'obscure', Russell claims that Milner suggests, that life is more often than not a question of feeling 'alive' as opposed to 'forgiven'. Russell, *Tact*, 148.
[477] Kristeva, *Klein*, 31.

carries over, albeit by way of diffuse influence rather than by a direct line of inheritance, into Kleinian theory.

For Kleinians, the coherence of the concept of sublimation—the use of art for reparation, as they see it—depends upon the uncertain success of their attempt to distinguish *genuine* reparation from what they call *manic* reparation.[478] In the Kleinian story, the child's inherent sadism, which prompts the child to attack the (m)other in phantasy, leads to persecutory feelings of guilt, which the child tries to appease by repairing (again, in phantasy) the objects that make up his or her internal world. Or at least ideally. Often the child employs manic defences (fantasies of omnipotence, magical thinking, displacement, and so on) to avoid undertaking genuine reparation, which would entail greater tolerance of guilt and suffering. This manic form of reparation merely frantically mimics reparative practices, as if in parody of them. 'Manic reparation is a defence', Hanna Segal writes, 'in that its aim is to repair the object in such a way that guilt and loss are never experienced'; manic reparation 'is never done to primary objects or internal objects, but always in relation to more remote objects[.][479] A form of evasion, the manic defence denies reality when it is felt to be too painful. Segal gives the example of a charity worker who feels contempt for the people she helps, even while she feels compelled to help them. Secondly, Segal describes the case of a four-year-old patient who aggressively broke a box of paint in play, only to then contemptuously demand the box be magically fixed and immediately restored to use.[480]

[478] For reparation replacing sublimation in the Kleinian tradition, see Rossella Valdre, *On Sublimation: A Path to the Destiny of Desire, Theory, and Treatment*, trans. Flora Capostagno and Caroline Williamson (London: Karnac, 2014), 30. For reparation versus manic reparation, see Segal, *Introduction*, 96-102.
[479] Segal, *Introduction*, 96.
[480] Ibid. 97-8.

The child's attempt at reparation seeks to deny the reality of the breakage (and thus her own violence), rather than acknowledge it.[481]

It is significant that the second of Segal's chosen examples concerns a box of paint. One detects an unconscious anxiety in the Kleinian tradition as to whether reparative uses of art might be ultimately manic in character—that art might be used to avoid real reparation, rather than facilitate it. Consider, for instance, Klein's seminal paper 'Infantile Anxiety-Situations Reflected in a Work of Art and in the Creative Impulse', which was read before the British Psycho-Analytical Society on the 15 May 1929, the year proceeding the year in which Gosse and Hardy both died. In this paper, Klein suggests that artistic creativity is inspired by such a desire for reparation. Klein extensively quotes from an account of the life of the artist Ruth Kjär written by the painter's friend Karin Michaelis, which describes how the painter was beset for much of her life by melancholia, a sense of internal emptiness. Kjär had filled the walls of her house with paintings by her brother-in-law, a famous painter. One day, however, he took away a picture that he lent her. 'This left an empty space on the wall,' Michaelis reflects, 'which in some inexplicable way seemed to coincide with the empty space within her.' (Michaelis in Klein, *LG&R*, 215) After feeling that the 'empty space [was] grinn[ing] hideously down at her', Kjär resolved to fill the blank. In a 'perfect fever', Kjär bought all the necessary paints and equipment and began to 'make strokes at random as they came into her head'. (Michaelis in Klein, *LG&R*, 216) Though having never before painted, the painting proved a brilliant success:

[481] Ibid. 99.

> Towards evening her husband returned, and she ran to meet him with a hectic brilliance in her eyes. She was not going to be ill, was she? […] He could not take his eyes from the sight; could not take it in, did not believe it, *could* not believe it. Ruth threw herself on a sofa in a state of deadly exhaustion: "Do you think it at all possible?" (Michaelis in Klein, *LG&R*, 216)

Her brother-in-law thinks it impossible that she could have painted such a masterpiece on her first attempt. In disbelief, he assumes that an expertly trained, highly experienced male artist must have completed the picture. (Michaelis in Klein, *LG&R*, 216)

Klein does not stress the obvious feminist import of Michaelis's account but instead uses the story of Kjär's career to plot her own vision of feminine psychosexual development and the possible reparative uses of creativity within it. Klein relates Kjär's inner emptiness to what she calls the girl's equivalent to male castration anxiety: the girl's struggle with her sadistic desire to plunder the mother's body of its goodness, which prompts anxieties about the mother subsequently avenging herself on the child. Klein connects this anxiety to the child's 'dread of being alone' because the mother's absence provokes in the child a paranoia which makes them feel constantly on the edge of a persecutory attack; otherwise, the child fears that the mother will forsake her for good. (Klein, *LG&R*, 217) Klein reads Kjär's paintings as responses to this anxiety. Kjär, she notes, had a difficult relationship with her mother, who was a stern, cold woman. Klein remarks upon two pictures by Kjär: the first being a depiction of a haggard looking elderly woman, who has been ravaged by age; the second being a more attractive, if still imposing, portrait of Kjär's mother, which possesses real beauty. (Klein, *LG&R*, 217) 'It

is obvious that the desire to make reparation, to make good the injury psychologically done to the mother and also to restore herself,' Klein writes,

> …was at the bottom of the compelling urge to paint these portraits of her relatives. That of the old woman, on the threshold of death, seems to be the expression of the primary, sadistic desire to destroy. The daughter's wish to destroy her mother, to see her old, worn out, marred, is the cause of the need to represent her in full possession of her strength and beauty. By doing so the daughter can allay her own anxiety and endeavour to restore her mother and make her new through the portrait. (Klein, *LG&R*, 218)

'In the analyses of children, when the representation of destructive wishes is succeeded by an expression of reactive tendencies,' Klein further comments, 'we constantly find that drawing and painting are used as means to restore people.' (Klein, *LG&R*, 218)

In spite of this note of confidence with which Klein ends her paper, however, problems remain. This account of Kjär's career could be read cynically as nothing more than mere manic reparation. The Kleinian conception of the reparative use of art could face the same charge by extension. First of all, Kjär's first experience of artistic inspiration is described by Michaelis as feverish, 'hectic', 'random'—her husband wonders whether she might be ill, and she is said to almost collapse afterwards in a state of 'deadly exhaustion'. The episode has a magical, wish-fulfilling quality, which is reminiscent of manic reparation. We are reminded of Socrates's claim in Plato's *Phaedrus* that poetic inspiration comes from a kind of divine mania.[482] But perhaps

[482] Plato, 245a, *Phaedrus*, ed. and trans. C. J. Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2022), 409.

more significantly, we are prompted to ask the following question: had Kjär not painted her own mother, but a merely beautiful older woman (as she had chosen to do with the elderly woman when in a more sadistic mood), would we be able to distinguish Kjär's displaced reparation from the manic reparation of the frantic charity worker, as mentioned by Segal? If not, does all art have to be directly autobiographical, or does it have to represent actual persons in the artist's own life, to constitute genuine reparation in the Kleinian account? (If so, much of cultural production becomes mere manic reparation, the stuff of wish-fulfilment.) One can see how artistic reparation risks reducing to merely manic reparation in the Kleinian story—a symptom of its being fundamentally preoccupied with intrapsychic, rather than interpsychic, repair. This problem in the Kleinian tradition thus recalls the escapist predicament as I have explored it in this thesis. The Kleinian account of art suggests how generous creation and sadistic destruction, as well as mania and reparation, can coincide in therapeutic visions of literature. We recognise a compromised therapeutic at the heart of the Kleinian vision which is akin to the "desperate remedies" I have analysed in the preceding pages.

Though I'm suggesting that the *tone* of the Kleinians more consistently fits the temper in which Ruskin, Hardy, and Gosse dwell upon questions pertaining to the therapeutic power of art, the Independent tradition does approach the problem in its own way in its notion of symptom as *self-cure*, a term I have occasionally availed myself of in this thesis, i.e., an individual's use of a symptom (or symptomatic behaviour, e.g., anorexia or alcoholism, as a (pseudo-)cure for a conflict in their unconscious. *Self-cure* is the concept by which Independent analysts explore the Derridean hinterland which I have often discussed throughout this thesis—the mental space in which cure and ill can

become both productively and obstructively conflated.[483] The ambivalent notion of self-cure in the Winnicottian tradition in particular is similarly suggestive of an ambiguity as regards what constitutes genuine repair of self and other, and what is merely pseudo-therapeutic—the same problem, in other words, which animates this thesis. 'With the gravely ill person one is rarely dealing, at first, with the authentic illness of the patient', Masud Khan writes,

> What one has to negotiate some sort of alliance with is the patient's *practice of self-cure*, which is rigidly established by the time he reaches us. To treat this *practice of self-cure* merely as resistance is to fail to acknowledge its true value for the person of the patient. It is my belief from my clinical practice that very few illnesses in a person are difficult to handle and cure. What, however, is most difficult to resolve and cure is the patient's practice of self-cure. To cure a cure is the paradox that faces us[.][484]

Khan gives a more pessimistic gloss on what Winnicott considers as the child's use of symptomatology to communicate with his caregivers that something in the environment needs to change.[485] The symptom is not simply disparaged in Winnicott's writings: its creativity in the face of suffering is acknowledged. Optimistically, Winnicott suggests how the very presence of symptomatology is a sign of the patient's eudaimonic aspirations, of their wish to be in some way better: the symptomatic behaviour of the obsessive ceremonial hand-washer, for instance, demonstrates how he would *like* to feel

---

[483] For the porous conceptual border between mental health and mental illness in psychoanalysis, see André Green, *The Tragic Effect: The Oedipus Complex in Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 22.
[484] M. Masud R. Khan, *The Privacy of the Self* (London: Karnac, 1974), 97.
[485] Adam Phillips, *Winnicott* (London: Penguin, 2007), 50. Cf. Winnicott, 2.283.

clean (pure, healthy, happy, better). As is often the case with Hardy's heroes, it is a mistaken fantasy of cure or relief that prevents genuine amelioration. In light of the rich reenvisaging of the symptom in Winnicott's work, the resistance to the "symptomatic" interpretation of literary texts in literary criticism of late might appear to miss the point.[486] In this brighter light, symptoms appear imaginative, communicative, intricate—not merely signals of failure, and as such to be condescended to.

As regards symptomatology textural or otherwise, Winnicott offers us the possibility of what Wittgensteinians call a change of aspect.[487] Take Winnicott's defence of the ordinary uses of the manic defence, for instance:

> …one is at a music-hall and on to the stage come the dancers, trained to liveliness. One can say that here is the primal scene, here is exhibitionism, here is anal control, here is masochistic submission to discipline, here is a defiance of the super-ego. Sooner or later one adds: here is life. […]
>
> What about such things as the wireless that is left on interminably? What about living in a town like London with its noise that never ceases, and lights that are never extinguished? Each illustrates the reassurance through reality against death inside, and a use of manic defence that can be normal. (Winnicott, 1.361)

Winnicott's 'here is life' shifts us from a complacent cynicism to a refreshed sense of the possibilities of ordinary aesthetic experience, here signified by the music hall. It is a move from sceptical reductivism towards revitalised reillusionment—a change of

---

[486] Cf. Christoff, *Novel Relations*, 10.

[487] For an elucidation of Wittgenstein's notion of an aspect-change, see Sholmy Mualem, "Narrative Aspect Change and Alternating Systems of Justice," in *Wittgenstein on Aesthetic Understanding*, ed. Garry L. Hagberg (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 131-152, (139-40).

aspect that mirrors Gosse's own revision of the Ibsenite vital lie motif. It is this possibility of aspect-changes, this capacity to see doubly (if not double), that the British psychoanalytic tradition offers us on questions of art and elusion. In this way, British psychoanalysis inherits and reworks the best insights of the late Victorian ambivalent escapists which I have explored throughout this thesis.

Bibliography

- 'Pioneer' [anonymous pseudonym]. "From an Unsigned Review." In *Robert Louis Stevenson, the Critical Heritage*, edited by Paul Maixner, 56–57. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981.
- ¨Antinomianism." In *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Edited by Andrew Louth. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022.
- "τέλειος." *The New Strong's Concordance of the Bible*. Edited by James Strong. Nashville: T Nelson, 1985 [1890].
- [Anonymous,] "Mr. Edmund Gosse," *The Critic*, 14 (1889): 45.
- [Anonymous,] "The Likeness of a Perfect Man," *The Review of Reviews* 8 (July-December 1893): 265-266.
- [Anonymous,] *Current Literature* 2, no. 4 (April 1889): 277-278.
- Abbs, Peter. "Introduction." To Gosse, Edmund. *Father and Son*, edited by Peter Abbs, 9-31. London: Penguin, 1983.
- Abdulla, Adnan K. *Catharsis in Literature*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.
- Abrams, Meyer Howard. *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Feeling and the Critical Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953.
- Adelman, Richard. *Idleness and Aesthetic Consciousness, 1815-1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Adorno, Theodore. *Aesthetic Theory*. Translated by Robert Hullor-Kentor. London: Continuum, 1997.
- Aeschylus. *The Tragedies of Aeschylus, Literally Translated*. Translated by Theodore Alois Buckley. London: George Bell, 1878 [Henry G. Bohn, 1849].

  The Tragedies of Aeschylus: Re-Edited with an English Commentary. Edited by F. A. Paley. London: Whittaker, 1855.
- Affrunti, Nicholas W., and Woodruff-Borden, Janet. "Perfectionism and Anxiety in Children." In *The Psychology of Perfectionism: Theory, Research, Applications*, edited by Joachim Stoeber, 113-113. London: Routledge, 2018.
- Akhtar, Salman. "Fantasy." In *Comprehensive Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, 105. London: Karnac, 2009.

- Alexander, Edward. *Matthew Arnold, John Ruskin, and the Modern Temper*. Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1973.
- Allen, Julie K. "Georg Brandes: Kierkegaard's Most Influential Mis-Representative." In *Kierkegaard's Influence on Literature, Criticism and Art*, edited by Jon Stewart, II.17-42. London: Routledge, 2013.
- Allen, Peter. "Sir Edmund Gosse and His Modern Readers: The Continued Appeal of Father and Son." *ELH* 55, no. 2 (1988): 487-503.
- Anderson, Amanda, Felski, Rita, and Moi, Toril. *Character: Three Inquiries in Literary Studies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019.
- Anderson, Amanda*. Psyche and Ethos: Moral Life After Psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

  "Therapeutic Criticism," *Novel* (2017) 50 no.3, 321-328.
- Anker, Elizabeth S., and Felski, Rita. "Introduction." In *Critique and Postcritique*, edited by Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski, 1-28. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017.
- Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Aristotle. *Aristotle's Treatise on Rhetoric Literally Translated from the Greek; Also the Poetics of Aristotle Literally Translated*. Translated by Theodore Buckley. London: Henry G. Bohn, 1850.

  Nicomachean Ethics. Translated by David Ross. Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2009.

  Poetics. Edited and translated by Stephen Halliwell. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Arnold, Matthew. "Literature and Science." In *Literature and Science in the Nineteenth Century: An Anthology,* edited by Laura Otis, 6-8. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

  "Preface to *Merope*." In *On the Classical Tradition*, edited by Robert Henry Super, 38-64. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960.

  "Preface." To *Poems*, v-xxxi. London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longman, 1853.

  The Poems of Matthew Arnold. Edited by Kenneth Allott and Miriam Allott. London: Longman, 1979.

  Culture and Anarchy. Edited by Jane Garnett. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006 [1869].

  Selected Prose. Edited by P. J. Keating. London: Penguin, 1987.

- Arthur, Anthony. "Gosse's *Father and Son*: Escape from The Prison of Puritanism." *Modern British Literature* 3 (1978): 73-77.
- Asquith, Mark. "Hardy's Philosophy." In *Hardy in Context*, edited by Phillip Mallett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

  Thomas Hardy, Metaphysics and Music. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Atkinson, Juliette. *Victorian Biography Reconsidered: A Study of Nineteenth-Century 'Hidden' Lives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Aubry, Timothy. *Reading as Therapy: What Contemporary Fiction Does for Middle-Class Americans*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011.
- Austin, Linda. *The Practical Ruskin: Economics and Audience in the Late Work*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.
- Azmanova, Albena. "The Populist Catharsis: On the Revival of the Political." *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 44, no. 4 (2018): 399-411.
- Bailey, Nathan. *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary*. Edinburgh: Neil & Company, 1783.

  An Universal Etymological English Dictionary. London: J. and J. Knapton, D. Midwinter and A. Ward, A. Bettesworth and C. Hitch, 1731 [1721].
- Barrie, J. M. *Peter Pan*. London: Everyman, 1911.
- Bates, A. W. H. "Vivisection, Virtue Ethics, and the Law in 19th-Century Britain." *Journal of Animal Ethics* 4, no. 2 (2014): 30-44.
- Bateson, Frederick Wise. *English Poetry: An Introduction*. London: Longmans, Green, 1950.
- Becker, Ernest. *The Denial of Death*. London: Collier Macmillan, 1973.
- Beer, Gillian. *Darwin's Plots*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Beiser, Frederick C. *Weltschmerz: Pessimism in German Philosophy, 1860–1900*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Berg, Maggie. "John Ruskin's Definition of D. G. Rossetti's Art." *Victorian Poetry* 20, no. 3 (Fall 1982): 103-112.
- Bernays, Jacob. *Grundzüge der verlorenen Abhandlung des Aristoteles über Wirkung der Tragödie*, 1857. Translated by Peter L. Rudnytsky. In "On Catharsis: from *Fundamentals of Aristotle's Lost Essay on the "Effect of Tragedy"* (1857)." *American Imago*, 61.23 (2004): 319-341.

- Bersani, Leo. *Homos*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995.

  Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

  The Culture of Redemption. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990.
- Billington, Josie, ed., *Reading and Mental Health*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

  Is Literature Healthy? Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Birch, Dinah, and O'Gorman, Francis. "Introduction," to *Ruskin and Gender*, edited by Dinah Birch and Francis O'Gorman, 1-9. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002.
- Birch, Dinah. "Introduction." To *John Ruskin, Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain*, edited by Dinah Birch, xxxiii-xlix. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000.

  Our Victorian Education. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2008.
- Blaikie, John Arthur, and Gosse, Edmund. *Madrigals, Songs and Sonnets*. London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1870.
- Bloom, Harold. *How to Read and Why*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001.
- Boehmer, Elleke. *Indian Arrivals 1870–1915: Networks of British Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Bollas, Christopher. *Cracking Up: The Work of Unconscious Experience*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Booth, Wayne. *A Rhetoric of Irony*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974.
- Bosquanet, Bernard. *A History of the Aesthetic*. London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1892.
- Boulton, James T. "Editor's Introduction." To Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed., James T. Boulton, xi-cxxiii. London: Routledge, 2008.
- Boxall, Peter. *The Value of the Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Braddon, Mary Elizabeth. *Lady Audley's Secret*. Edited by Lyn Pykett. Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2012 [1862].
- Brewster, Liz "Bibliotherapy: A Critical History." In *Bibliotherapy*. Edited by Sarah McNicol and Liz Brewster, 3-22. London: Facet, 2018.
- Briggs, Asa. *The Age of Improvement*. London: Routledge, 2014 [1959].

- Briggs, John Channing. “Happiness, Catharsis, and the Literary Cure.” In *The Eudaimonic Turn: Well-Being in Literary Studies*, edited by James O. Pawelski and D. J. Moores, 115- 134. Madison, Taeneck: Farleigh Dickinson University Press.
- Brontë, Charlotte. *Shirley*. Edited by Margaret Smith and Herbert Rosengarten. Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2008 [1849].

  The Professor. Edited by Margaret Smith and Herbert Rosengarten. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Brontë, Emily, *Wuthering Heights*. Edited by John Bugg. Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2020 [1847].
- Brooks-Davies, Douglas. *Fielding, Dickens, Gosse, Iris Murdoch, and Oedipal Hamlet*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989.
- Brugmans, L. F, ed. *The Correspondence of André Gide and Edmund Gosse 1904-1928*. London: Peter Owen, 1960.
- Buckley, Jerome Hamilton. *The Victorian Temper*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969.
- Bullen, J. B. *The Expressive Eye: Fiction and Perception in the Work of Thomas Hardy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986.
- Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Sublime and Beautiful*. Edited by Paul Guyer. Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2015 [1757].
- Burke, Kenneth. “Catharsis, or Resolution.” *The Kenyon Review* 21, no. 3 (Summer, 1959) 337-375.
- Burton, Edward. *Η Καινή Διαθήκη: the Greek Testament with English notes*. Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1852.
- Butcher, Samuel Henry. *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*. London: Macmillan & Co., 1895.
- Campbell, Thomas. “Song.” In *The Poetical Works of Thomas Campbell*, 151. London: Routledge, Warne, and Routledge, 1862.
- Capps, Donald. ‘“Your Nose Has Smelled Right”: Reflections on the Disputed Origin of Freud’s Concept of Sublimation.’ *American Imago*, 67.2 (2010): 263-292.
- Carey, John. *What Good Are the Arts?* London: Faber and Faber, 2005.

- Carlyle, Thomas. *Sartor Resartus*. Edited by Kerry McSweeney and Peter Sabor. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987 [1834].
- Carson, James Crawford Ledlie. *The Heresies of the Plymouth Brethren*. London: Houlston & Sons, Paternoster Row, 1870.
- Cate, Allan. "Ruskin's Discipleship to Carlyle." In *Carlyle and his Contemporaries*, edited by John Clubbe, 227-256. United States of America: Duke University Press, 1976.
- Cavell, Stanley. *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- Caws, Peter. *Yorick's World: Science and the Knowing Subject*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Cheeke, Stephen. *Transfiguration: The Religion of Art in Nineteenth-Century Literature Before Aestheticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

  Writing for Art: The Aesthetics of Ekphrasis. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008.
- Christoff, Alicia Mireles. *Novel Relations: Victorian Fiction and British Psychoanalysis*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019.
- Clark, Kenneth. "Introduction." To *Ruskin Today*, xiii-xxi. London: John Murray, 1964.

  "Introduction." To Pater, Walter. *The Renaissance*, 11-26. Cleveland and New York: Meridan Books, 1961.
- Clark, Samuel. *Good Lives: Autobiography, Self-Knowledge, Narrative, and Self-Realization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.
- Clark, T. J. *Heaven on Earth: Painting and the Life to Come*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2018.
- Clarke, J. Mitchell. "On Hysteria." *Brain* 14 (1892): 548.
- Cockshut, A. O. J. "Introduction." To Edmund Gosse, *Father and Son: A Study of Two Temperaments*, edited by A. O. J. Cockshut, 7-25. Keele: Keele University Press, 1994.

  Truth to Life: The Art of Biography in the Nineteenth Century. London: Collins, 1974
- Cohn, Elisha. *Still Life: Suspended Development in the Victorian Novel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *The Philosophical Lectures, 1818-1819*. Edited by Kathleen Coburn. London: Pilot Press, 1949.

- Collingwood, W. G. *The Life of John Ruskin*. 7th ed. London: Methuen, 1912.
- Cook, E. T. *The Life of John Ruskin*. London: George Allan, 1911. 2 volumes.
- Cook, Matt. *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Cooke, Katherine. *A. C. Bradley and His Influence in Twentieth Century Shakespeare Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972.
- Cottingham, John. "Demandingness, Moral Development and Moral Philosophy." In *The Problem of Moral Demandingness: New Philosophical Essays*, ed. Timothy Chappell. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Cox, R. G., ed. *Thomas Hardy: The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970.
- Craig, David Melville. *John Ruskin and the Ethics of Consumption*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006.
- Crone, Rosalind. "Mr and Mrs Punch in the Nineteenth Century." *The Historical Journal*, 49, no. 4 (2006): 1055–1082.
- Cruikshank, George, and Collier, John Payne. *Punch and Judy*. 6th edition. London: Bell & Daldy, 1873 [1828].
- Curran, Thomas, and Hill, Andrew P. "Perfectionism Is Increasing Over Time: A Meta-Analysis of Birth Cohort Differences From 1989 to 2016." *Psychological Bulletin* 145 no. 4 (April 2019): 410-429.
- Daleski, Hillel Matthew. *Thomas Hardy and the Paradoxes of Love*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997.
- Dällenbach, Lucien. *The Mirror in the Text*. Translated by Jeremy Whitely. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Danahay, Martin A. *A Community of One: Masculine Autobiography and Autonomy in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1993.
- Das, Santanu. *India, Empire, and First World War Culture: Writings, Images, and Songs*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Davidson, A. B. "Introduction." To *The Book of Job*, ix-lxviii. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1886.

- Davis, Philip and Billington, Josie. "The Very Grief a Cure of the Disease." *Changing English* 23, no. 4 (2016): 396-408.
- Davis, Philip. "Arnold or Ruskin?" *Literature and Theology* (December 1992) 6 no. 4, 320-344.

  Reading and the Reader. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

  Reading for Life. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.

  The Transferred Life of George Eliot. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

  The Victorians. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

  Why Victorian Literature Still Matters. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008.
- De la Sizeranne, Robert. *Ruskin et la religion de la beauté.* Paris: Hachette, 1897.

  Ruskin and the Religion of Beauty. Translated by the Countess of Galloway. London: George Allen, 1899 [1897].
- De Mijolla-Mellor, Sophie. "Sublimation." In *The International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, III.1678-9. London: Thomson Gale, 2005.
- De Souza, Eunice. *Nine Indian Women Poets*. Oxford: Oxford University Press,1997.
- Dean, Susan. *Hardy's Poetic Vision in* The Dynasts*: The Diorama of a Dream*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.
- DeLaura, David. *Hebrew and Hellene in Victorian England*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969.

  "'The Ache of Modernism' in Hardy's Later Novels." *ELH* 34, no. 3 (1967): 380-399.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Plato's Pharmacy." In *Dissemination*. Translated by Barbara Johnson, 6-172. London: The Athlone Press, 1981.
- Deutsch, Helene. "Some Psychoanalytic Observations in Surgery." *Psychosomatic Medicine* 4, no. 1 (January 1942): 105-115.
- Dewart, Edward Harley. *Broken Reeds, Or, The Heresies of the Plymouth Brethren Shown to be Contrary to Scripture & Reason*. Toronto: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1869.
- Dickens, Charles. *David Copperfield*. Edited by Nina Burgis. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 [1849].

  Dombey and Son. Edited by Alan Horsman and Dennis Walder. Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2020 [1848].

- Dickens, Charles. To Mary Taylor, 6th November 1849. In *The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens*, edited by Jenny Hartley, 204. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Disraeli, Benjamin. *Lothair*. London: Longmans, Green, 1870.
- Dixon Hunt, John, and Holland, Faith M., eds. *The Ruskin Polygon*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982.
- Dodd, Philip. "The Nature of Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son*." *English Literature in Transition* 22 (1979): 270-79.
- Dowling, Linda. *The Vulgarization of Art: The Victorians and Aesthetic Democracy.* Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996.
- Duval, Sophie. "'Some Dear or Sad Fantasy': Faith, Idolatry, Infidelity'." In *Proust and the Arts*, edited by Christie McDonald and François Proulx, 23-39. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Eagleton, Terry. *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2009.

  Tragedy. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020
- Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2004.

  Eliot, George. *Adam Bede*. Edited by Carol A. Martin. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 [1859].

  Daniel Deronda. Edited by Graham Handley and K. M. Newton. Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2014.

  Middlemarch. Edited by David Carroll. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019 [1872].

  Scenes from Clerical Life. Edited by Thomas A. Noble. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015 [1857].

  The Mill on the Floss. Edited by Gordon S. Haight and Juliette Atkinson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015 [1860].
- Eliot, T. S. *After Strange Gods*. London: Faber and Faber, 1934.

  The Poems of T. S. Eliot. Edited by Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2015.
- Ellmann, Maud. *The Nets of Modernism: Henry James, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Sigmund Freud*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

- Epictetus. *The Discourses of Epictetus*. Translated by George Long. London: George Bell, 1877.
- Epps, John. *Homeopathy and its Principles Explained*. 2nd ed. London: W. & J. Piper, 1850.
- Evans, C. Stephen. *Kierkegaard: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Felski, Rita. *The Uses of Literature* Oxford: Blackwell, 2008
- Fisher, Joe. *The Hidden Hardy*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992.
- Ford, Jennifer. *Coleridge on Dreaming*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Forrester, John, and Cameron, Laura. *Freud in Cambridge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Fox, James. "Peace Pictures: Escapism, Catharsis and Consolation." In *British Art and the First World War, 1914-1924*, 109-132. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Gadoine, Isabelle. "Of Gargoyles and Men: Creative Vitality in *Far From the Madding Crowd*." *Fathom* 3 (2016): https://doi.org/10.4000/fathom.577.
- Galgut, Elisa. "Literary Form and Mentalization." In *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Psychoanalysis*, edited by Richard G.T. Gipps and Michael Lacewing, 495-510. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.
- Gao, Tim. *Virtual Play and the Victorian Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.
- Garnett, Richard, and Gosse, Edmund. *English Literature: An Illustrated Record*. London: William Heinemann, 1903. 3 volumes.
- Gay, Peter. *Education of the Senses*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.
  The Tender Passion, vol. II of *The Bourgeois Experience: From Victoria to Freud*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984.
- Geller, Jay. "'Of Snips… and Puppy Dog Tails': Freud's Sublimation of 'Judentum'." *American Imago* 66, no. 2 (2009):169-184.
- Gide, André. *Journals 1889-1949*. Translated and edited by Justin O'Brien. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967.
- Gilbert, Katherine. "Ruskin's Relation to Aristotle." *The Philosophical Review* 49, no. 1 (1940): 52-62.
- Gittings, Robert. *Thomas Hardy's Later Years*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1978.

- Goetz, W. R. "The Felicity and Infelicity of Marriage in *Jude the Obscure*." *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 38 (1983): 189-313.
- Goodman, Martin. "Nature Versus Naturalist: Paths Diverging and Converging in Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son*." *Life Writing* 11, no. 1 (2014): 85-101.
- Goss, John. *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1967.
- Gosse, Edmund, ed. *English Odes*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1883.

  The Discourses of Sir Joshua Reynolds. London: Kegan Paul, 1884.
- Gosse, Edmund. *A Short History of Modern English Literature*. England: William Heinemann, 1898.

  Aspects and Impressions. London: Cassell Limited, 1922.

  Critical Kit-Kats. London: William Heinemann, 1896.

  Father and Son. Edited by Michael Newton. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [1907].

  Firdausi in Exile and Other Poems. London: C. Kegan Paul, & Co., 1885.

  Gossip in a Library. London: William Heinemann, 1891.

  Gray. London: Macmillan & Co., 1882.

  Ibsen. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907.

  Leaves and Fruit. London: William Heinemann, 1927.

  New Poems. London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1879.

  Northern Studies. London: Walter Scott, 1890.

  On Viol and Flute. London: Henry S. King & Co., 1873.

  Portraits and Sketches. London: William Heinemann, 1913.

  Portraits from Life. Edited by Ann Thwaite. Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1991.

  Questions at Issue. London: William Heinemann, 1893.

  Raleigh. London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1886.

  Seventeenth Century Studies. 3rd ed. London: William Heinemann, 1897 [1883].

  Sir Thomas Browne. London: Macmillan, 1905.

  Some Diversions of a Man of Letters. London: William Heinemann, 1920.

  The Collected Poems of Edmund Gosse. London: William Heinemann, 1911.

  The Life and Letters of John Donne. London: William Heinemann, 1899. 2 volumes.

  *The Life of Philip Henry Gosse, F.R.*S. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, and Trübner, 1890.

  Three French Moralists and The Gallantry of France. London: William Heinemann, 1918.

- Gosse, Philip Henry. *A Memorial of the Last Days on Earth of Emily Gosse, by her Husband*. London: J. Nisbet, 1857.
- Grant, James. *The Plymouth Brethren: Their History and Heresies*. London: William Macintosh, 1875.
- Gray, John. *The Soul of the Marionette: A Short Enquiry into Human Freedom*. London: Penguin, 2015.
- Green, André. *The Tragic Effect: The Oedipus Complex in Tragedy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979..
- Green, Kelda. *Rethinking Therapeutic Reading*. London: Anthem Press, 2020.
- Greenhut, Morris. "G. H. Lewes's Criticism of the Drama." *PMLA* 64, no. 3 (June 1949): 350-368.
- Griffin, John R. *John Keble: Saint of Anglicanism*. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1987.
- Gross, Kenneth. *Puppet: An Essay on Uncanny Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.
- Grundy, Joan. *Hardy and the Sister Arts*. London: Macmillan, 1979.

  Hadot, Pierre. *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*. Edited by Arnold I. Davidson. Translated by Michael Chase. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1995.

  The Inner Citadel the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius. Translated by Michael Chase. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Halliwell, Stephen. *Aristotle's Poetics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

  Between Ecstasy and Truth: Interpretations of Greek Poetics from Homer to Longinus. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Hardy, Thomas [and Hardy, Florence], *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*. Edited by Michael Millgate. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984 [1928, 1930].
- Hardy, Thomas. *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. Edited by Tim Dolin and Alan Manford. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [1873].

  Collected Short Stories. Edited by Desmond Hawkins and F. B. Pinion. London: Macmillan, 1988.

  Desperate Remedies. Edited by Patricia Ingham. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [1871].

  Far From the Madding Crowd. Edited by Suzanne B. Falck-Yi. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 [1874].

  Jude the Obscure. Edited by Patricia Ingham. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 [1895].

Tess of the D'Urbervilles. Edited by Simon Gatrell and Juliet Grindle. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 [1891].

The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hardy. Edited by Samuel Hynes. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982–1995. 5 vols.

The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy. Edited by Lennart A Björk. London: Macmillan, 1985.

The Mayor of Casterbridge. Edited by Pamela Dalziel and Dale Kramer. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 [1886].

The Return of the Native. Edited by Simon Gatrell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [1878].

The Woodlanders. Edited Dale Kramer and Penny Boumelha. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 [1887].

Thomas Hardy's Public Voice: The Essays, Speeches and Miscellaneous Prose. Edited by Michael Millgate. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001.

Thomas Hardy's 'Poetical Matter' Notebook. Edited by Pamela Dalziel and Michael Millgate. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

- Harley, Alexis. "Sexing the Aesthete: The Autobiography and Apostasy of Edmund Gosse," 3, no. 3 (Winter 2007): https://www.ncgsjournal.com/issue33/harley.html.
- Harriet Martineau to John Chapman, June 11, 1857, in *The Collected Letters of Harriet Martineau*, edited by Deborah Anna Logan, 33-36. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2007.
- Harvey, Geoffrey. *The Complete Critical Guide to Thomas Hardy*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Hatt, Michael. "Near and Far: Homoeroticism, Labour and Hamo Thornycroft's *Mower*." *Art History* 26, no. 1 (February 2003): 28-29.
- Heimann, Paula. *About Children and Children-No-Longer: Collected Papers 1942-80*. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Helmuth, William Tod. "Homeopathy." In *Encyclopædia Britannica* 11th edition, XIII.646. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911.
- Hempton, David. *Evangelical Disenchantment: Nine Portraits of Faith and Doubt*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.
- Henderson, William. *John Ruskin's Political Economy*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Herrick, Marvin Theodore. *The Poetics of Aristotle in England*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930.

- Hertz, Neil. *George Eliot's Pulse*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- Hewison, Robert. *Ruskin and Oxford: The Art of Education*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Hicks, R. D., "Note on *κάθαρσις*." In *The Politics of Aristotle: A Revised Text*, 641-65. London: Macmillan, 1894.
- Hill, Andrew P., ed., *The Psychology of Perfectionism in Sport, Dance, and Exercise* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016.
- Hill, Geoffrey. *Collected Critical Writings*. Edited by Kenneth Haynes. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Hilton, Timothy. *John Ruskin: The Early Years*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.

  John Ruskin: The Later Years. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.
- Hoberman, Ruth. "Narrative Duplicity and Women in Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son*." *Biography* 11, no. 4 (Fall 1988): 303-315.
- Hobson, J. A. *John Ruskin: Social Reformer*. London: James Nisbet, 1898.
- Holloway, John. *The Victorian Sage*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1965.
- Holub, Robert C. *Nietzsche's Jewish Problem: Between Anti-Semitism and Anti-Judaism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.
- Homer. *The Odyssey of Homer: Done Into English Prose*. Translated by Alexander Lang and Samuel Henry Butcher. London: Macmillan, 1879.
- Houghton, Walter E. *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.
- Hurka, Thomas. *Perfectionism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Hutton, Richard Holt. *Essays on Some of the Modern Guides of English Thought in Matters of Faith*. London: Macmillan, 1887.
- Ingham, Patricia. "Introduction." To *Jude the Obscure*. Edited by Patricia Ingham, xi-xii. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

  Thomas Hardy. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990.
- Introvigne, Massimo. *Plymouth Brethren*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Jackson, Stanley W. *Care of the Psyche: A History of Psychological Healing*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Jacobus, Mary. *The Poetics of Psychoanalysis: in the Wake of Klein*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Jaffe, Audrey. *The Victorian Novel: Dreams of the Real*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.
- James, Henry, to James, Mary Walsh. 26th March 1869. In *The Complete Letters of Henry James*, edited by Pierre A. Walker and Greg W. Zacharias, I.255-260. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2017.
- James, Henry. *Literary Criticism: French Writers, Other European Writers, the Prefaces to the New York Edition*. New York: Library of America, 1984.
- James, William. *Pragmatism and Other Writings*. Edited by Giles Gunn. London: Penguin, 2000. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Edited by Martin E. Marty. Penguin: London, 1982 [1902].
- Johnson, Lionel. *The Art of Thomas Hardy*. London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane, 1894.
- Johnson, Trevor. "Hardy's Poetry: A General Survey." In *Thomas Hardy*, edited by Harold Bloom, 25-40. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2010.
- Jones, Ernest. "Reminiscent Notes on the Early History of Psycho-Analysis in English-Speaking Countries." *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 26 (January 1945), 8- 10.
- Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Edited by Jeri Johnson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 [1916].
- Kaufmann, Walter. *Freud, Adler, and Jung*, vol. III of *Discovering the Mind*. London: Routledge, 2017 [1980].
- Kearney Maynard, Katherine. *Thomas Hardy's Tragic Poetry*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991.
- Keats, John. *Complete Poems*. Edited by Jack Stillinger. Harvard, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982.

  The Letters of John Keats 1814–1821. Edited by Hyder Edward Rollins. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958. 2 volumes.
- Keble, John. *Lectures on Poetry*. Translated by Edward K. Francis. Oxford: James Parker, 1912. 2 volumes.
- Keen, Suzanne. *Thomas Hardy's Brains: Psychology, Neurology, and Hardy's Imagination*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2014.

- Kenwood, Sydney H. "Lessing in England." *The Modern Language Review* 9, no. 2 (April, 1914): 197-212.
- Kernan, Alvin B. *The Death of Literature*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.
- Khan, M. Masud R. *Hidden Selves: Between Theory and Practice in Psychoanalysis*. London: The Hogarth Press, 1983.

  The Privacy of the Self. London: Karnac, 1974.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *Attack on "Christendom"*. Translated by Walter Lowrie. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968.

  Kierkegaard's Writings. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992-2000. 26 volumes.
- King, Jeanette. *Tragedy and the Novel: Theory and Practice in the Novels of George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and Henry James*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978.
- Kingsley, Charles. *True Words for Brave Men*. New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1886.
- Kirschoff, Frederick. *John Ruskin*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984.
- Kohon, Gregorio, ed. *The British School of Psychoanalysis: The Independent Tradition*. London: Free Association, 1988.
- Kosofsky Sedgwick, Eve. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990.

  Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Kramer Dale, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Kramer, Dale, ed. *Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Thomas Hardy*. London: Macmillan, 1979.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Melanie Klein*. Translated by Ross Guberman. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.
- Krook, Dorothea. *Elements of Tragedy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969.
- Kubie, Lawrence S. "The Fallacious Misuse of the Concept of Sublimation." *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (1962): 73-79.
- Lacan, Jacques. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller and translated by Dennis Porter. London: Routledge, 1992.

- Landow, George. *The Aesthetic and Critical Theory of John Ruskin*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971.

  Elegant Jeremiahs: The Sage from Carlyle to Mailer. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1986.
- Lang, Andrew. Review of *On Viol and Flute*, by Edmund Gosse. *The Academy and Literature* (January 31, 1874): 108.
- Lavery, Grace. "Trans Realism, Psychoanalytic Practice, and the Rhetoric of Technique." *Critical Inquiry* 46 (Summer 2020): 719-744.
- Lear, Jonathan. "Katharsis." *Phronesis* 33., no. 3 (1988): 297-326.

  Aristotle: the Desire to Understand. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

  Happiness, Death, and the Remainder of Life. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2007.

  Love and its Place in Nature. London: Faber and Faber, 1990.

  Open-Minded: Working Out the Logic of the Soul. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998.

  Therapeutic Action: An Earnest Plea for Irony. New York: Other Press, 2003.

  Wisdom Won From Illness: Essays on Philosophy and Psychoanalysis. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2017.
- Lee, Hermione. "Writing Victorian Lives and Victorian Life-Writing: Gosse's 'Father and Son' Revisited." *Journal of Victorian Culture* 8 no. 1 (01 January 2003).
- Lee, Richard E., ed., *Questioning Nineteenth-Century Assumptions About Knowledge, II: Reductionism*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2010.
- Lee, Vernon. *Belcaro: Being Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions*. London: W. Satchell, 1881.

  Gospels of Anarchy. London: T.Fisher Unwin, 1908.

  Vital Lies: Studies of Some Varieties of Recent Obscurantism. London: John Lane, 1912. 2 volumes.
- Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim. "Dramatic Notes." Translated by Helen Zimmern in *Selected Prose Works of G.E. Lessing*, edited by Edward Bell, 227-493. London: George Bell, 1879.

  Laocoon. Translated by Sir Robert Phillimore. London: Macmillan, 1874.
- Lewes, George Henry. *On Actors and the Art of Acting*. London: Smith, Elder, 1875.
- Lewis, C. S. "On Science Fiction." In *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature*, 55-68. Orlando: Harvest, 1982 [1966].

- Liebert, Rana Saadi. *Tragic Pleasure from Homer to Plato*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Lobkowicz, Nicholas. *Theory and Practice: History of a Concept from Aristotle to Marx*. Lanham: University Press of America, 1983.
- Loewald, Hans W. *Sublimation: Inquiries Into Theoretical Psychoanalysis*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.
- Lutz, Tom. *American Nervousness, 1903*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue*. London: Bloomsbury, 2007.
- Mahaffy, John Pentland. *A History of Classical Greek Literature: the Prose Writers*. London: Longman, Green, and Company 1880. 2 volumes.
- Marcus, Laura. *Dreams of Modernity: Psychoanalysis, Literature and Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Marlowe, Christopher. *Edward the Second*. Edited by Osborne William Tanock. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879.
- Matz, Adam. *Satire in an Age of Realism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Maxwell, Catherine. *Scents & Sensibility: Perfume in Victorian Literary Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- McLean, Robert Simpson, "Altruistic Ideals versus Leisure Class Values: An Irreconcilable Conflict in John Ruskin." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 31 no. 3 (1973): 347-356.
- McNeill, John T. *A History of the Cure of Souls*. New York: Harper & Row, 1977.
- Melius, Jeremy. "Ruskin's Broken Middle." *Nonsite* 35. May 9, 2021. https://nonsite.org/ruskins-broken-middle/.
- Meltzer, Donald. *Dream Life: A Re-examination of the Psychoanalytical Theory and Technique*. London: Karnac, 2009.
- Micale, Mark S. *Hysterical Men: The Hidden History of Male Nervous Illness*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008.
- Mill, John Stuart. *Autobiography*. Edited by Mark Philp. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2018.

  On Liberty. Edited by Stefan Collini. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003 [1859].

On Liberty, Utilitarianism, and Other Essays. Edited by Mark Philp and Frederick Rosen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Miller, Andrew H. "Bruising, Laceration, and Lifelong Maiming; Or, How We Encourage Research." *ELH* 70, no. 1 (Spring, 2003): 301-318.

The Burdens of Perfection: On Ethics and Reading in Nineteenth-Century British Literature. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010.

On Not Being Someone Else: Tales of Our Unled Lives. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2020.

- Miller, J. Hillis. *Others*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Miller, Jesse. "Medicines of the Soul: Reparative Reading and the History of Bibliotherapy." *Mosaic (Winnipeg)* 5, no. .2 (2018): 17–34.

Millgate, Michael.

Thomas Hardy: Life and Thought. London: Macmillan, 1978.

Thomas Hardy: A Biography Revisited. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

- Milligan, Barry. *Pleasures and Pains: Opium and the Orient in 19th-Century British Culture*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995.
- Milner, Marion. *The Suppressed Madness of Sane Men*. Hove: Brunner Routledge. 1987.
- Milton, John. *John Milton: Prose*. Edited by David Lowenstein. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2013.
- Momigliano, Arnaldo. *Studies on Modern Scholarship*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- Moore, Rayburn S., ed. *Selected Letters of Henry James to Edmund Gosse 1882-1915: A Literary Friendship*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1988.
- Moretti, Franco. *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture.* London: Verso, 2000.
- Morgan, Benjamin. *The Outward Mind: Materialist Aesthetics in Victorian Science and Literature*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017.
- Morgan, Rosemarie, ed. *The Ashgate Research Companion to Thomas Hardy*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010.
- Morley, John. *Diderot and the Encyclopaedists*. London: Chapman and Hall, 1878.

Studies in Literature. London: Macmillan, 1891.

- Moule, Horace M. *Christian Oratory: An Inquiry Into Its History During the First Five Centuries*. Cambridge: Macmillan, 1859.
- Mualem, Sholmy. "Narrative Aspect Change and Alternating Systems of Justice." In *Wittgenstein on Aesthetic Understanding*. Edited by Garry L. Hagberg, 131-152. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.
- Mukherjee, Ankhi. "To Write Like a Dream: Nineteenth-Century Legacies." *Criticism* 61, no. 4 (Fall 2019): 509-526.
- Murray, Gilbert. *History of Ancient Greek Literature*. London: Heinemann, 1897.
- Myers, Frederic William Henry. *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*. London: Longmans, Green, 1903.

  "Hysteria and Genius," *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* VIII, no. 138(April-May 1897), 51-58, 69-70.

  "The Mechanism of Hysteria," in *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* IX, no. 24 (1894): 12-15.
- Nehamas, Alexander. "Pity and Fear in the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*." In *Aristotle's* Rhetoric: *Philosophical Essays*, edited by David J. Furley and Alexander Nehamas, 257-282. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

  Only a Promise of Happiness: The Place of Beauty in a World of Art. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017.

  The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Nemesvari, Richard. "Introduction." To Thomas Hardy, *Desperate Remedies*, edited by Richard Nemesvari, xxvii-lxxxii. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- Newman, John Henry. *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. Edited by Ian Ker. London: Penguin, 2004 [1864].
- Newton, K. M. *Modern Literature and the Tragic*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008.
- Ngai, Sianne. *Ugly Feelings*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2007.

  Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Daybreak*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982 [1881].

  The Birth of Tragedy. Translated by Douglas Smith. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000 [1872, 1886].

The Gay Science. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1974 [1882].

Thus Spoke Zarathustra. Translated by Adrian del Caro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1006 [1883].

The Will to Power. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale. Vintage: New York, 1968.

- Nikolopoulou, Kalliopi. "Reflections on Catharsis in an Anticathartic Age." *The Minnesota Review* 87 (2016): 76-109.
- Nussbaum, Martha. *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Nuttall, A. D. *Dead From the Waist Down: Scholars and Scholarship in Literature and the Popular Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

  Why Does Tragedy Give Pleasure? Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- O'Gorman, Francis. "Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son*, Modernism, and a History of Nerves," in *Modernism and Autobiography*, edited by Maria DiBattista and Emily O. Wittman, 3-17. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

  "Romance and Victorian Autobiography: Margaret Oliphant, Edmund Gosse, and John Ruskin's 'Needle to the North'." In *A Companion to Romance from Classical to Contemporary*, edited by Corinne Saunders, 360-374. Malden: Blackwell, 2004.
- O'Gorman, Francis. *Late Ruskin: New Contexts*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001.
- Ogden, Thomas. *Rediscovering Psychoanalysis: Thinking and Dreaming, Learning and Forgetting*. London: Routledge, 2009.

  This Art of Psychoanalysis: Dreaming the Undreamt Dream and Interrupted Cries. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Olson, Elder. *Aristotle's "Poetics" and English Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965.
- Oppenheim, Janet. *"Shattered Nerves": Doctors, Patients, and Depression in Victorian England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Orel, Harold. "The Dynasts: Hardy's Contribution to the Epic Tradition." *The Ashgate Research Companion to Thomas Hardy*, edited by Rosemarie Morgan, 355-370. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010.

  Victorian Literary Critics. London: Macmillan, 1984.

- Page, Norman, ed. *Oxford Reader's Companion to Hardy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Palmer, John David. *The Rise of English Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965.

  Papers in Psychoanalysis. London: Masefield, 1948.
- Parker, David. *The Self in Moral Space: Life Narrative and the Good*. Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2018.
- Passmore, John. *The Perfectibility of Man*. London: Duckworth, 1970
- Pater, Walter. *Essays from The Guardian*. London: Chiswick Press, 1896.

  Greek Studies. London: Macmillan, 1901 [1894].

  Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas. London: Macmillan, 1900. 2 volumes.

  Studies in the History of the Renaissance. Edited by Matthew Beaumont. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010 [1873].
- Peacock, Thomas Love. "The Four Ages of Poetry." In *The Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, III.324-337. London: R. Bentley and Son, 1875.
- Perelberg, Rosine Jozef. "Paternal Function and Thirdness in Psychoanalysis and Legend: Has the Future Been Foretold?" *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 82, no. 3 (2013): 557-585.

  Phillips, Adam. *Houdini's Box: On the Arts of Escape*. London: Faber and Faber, 2001.

  Missing Out: In Praise of the Unlived Life. London: Penguin, 2012.

  On Balance. London: Penguin, 2011.

  On Getting Better. London: Penguin, 2021.

  Unforbidden Pleasures. London: Penguin, 2016.

  Winnicott. London: Penguin, 2007.
- Pinion, F. B. *Thomas Hardy: His Life and Friends* Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992.
- Pite, Ralph. "Thomas Hardy." In *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature, Volume 4: 1790-1880*, edited by Norman Vance and Jennifer Wallace, 601-618. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Pite, Ralph. *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life*. London: Picador, 2006.
- Pladek, Brittany. *The Poetics of Palliation: Romantic Literary Therapy, 1790-1850*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019.

- Plato, *Phaedrus*. Edited and translated by C. J. Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2022.
- Porter, James I. "Jacob Bernays and the Catharsis of Modernity." In *Tragedy and the Idea of Modernity*, edited by Joshua Billings and Miriam Leonard, 14-41. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Poster, Carol. "Pedagogy and Bibliography: Aristotle's "Rhetoric" in Nineteenth-Century England." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (Spring, 2001): 5-35.
- Prawer, Siegbert Salomon. *A Cultural Citizen of the World: Sigmund Freud's Knowledge and Use of British and American Writings*. London: Legenda, 2009.
- Proust, Marcel. "Preface to *La Bible d'Amiens*." In *On Reading Ruskin*, edited and translated by Jean Autret, William Burford, and Phillip J. Wolfe, 5-62. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.
- Pulham, Patricia. *Art and the Transitional Object in Vernon Lee's Supernatural Tales*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008.

  The Sculptural Body in Victorian Literature: Encrypted Sexualities. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Purdy, Richard Little, and Millgate, Michael, eds. *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978. 7 vols.
- Rees, Kathy. "'Jesus and Pan Held Sway Together': Christological Resonances in Edmund Gosse's *The Secret of Narcisse: a Romance* (1892)." In *The Figure of Christ in the Long Nineteenth Century*, edited by Elizabeth Ludlow, 261-273. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

  "Reading Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son* (1907) Through a Dickensian Lens." *Dickensian Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (September 2016): 223-243.

  Republic. Translated by Tom Griffith and edited by G. R. F. Ferrari. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

  Symposium. Translated by Robin Waterfield. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Richardson, Angelique. "Darwin and Reductionisms: Victorian, Neo-Darwinian and Postgenomic Biologies." *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 11 (2010).
- Ricks, Christopher. *Tennyson*. London: Macmillan, 1972.

- Ricoeur, Paul. "Psychoanalysis and the Movement of Contemporary Culture." Translated by Willis Domingo. In *The Conflict of Interpretations*, edited by Don Idhe, 119-156. London: Continuum, 2005.
- Ridley, Aaron. "Perishing of the Truth: Nietzsche's Aesthetic Prophylactics." *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 50, no. 4 (October 2010): 427–437.
- Rieff, Philip. *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: The Uses of Faith After Freud*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Roberts, P. "Patterns of Relationship in *Desperate Remedies*." *Thomas Hardy Journal* 8, no. 2 (1992).
- Robinson, Peter. "Thomas Hardy." In *The Cambridge Companion to English Poets*, edited by Claude Rawson, 439-456. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Rose, Jacqueline. "'On Not Being Able to Sleep': Rereading *The Interpretation of Dreams*." In *On Not Being Able to Sleep: Psychoanalysis and the Modern World,* 105-124. London: Vintage, 2003.
- Rose, Phyllis. *Parallel Lives: Five Victorian Marriages*. London: Vintage, 1984.
- Rosenberg, John D. *The Darkening Glass: A Portrait of Ruskin's Genius*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1961.

  The Genius of John Ruskin. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998 [1964].
- Roth, Marty. *Drunk the Night Before: An Anatomy of Intoxication*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.
- Rudd, Anthony. *Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.
- Rush, Fred. "Two Pistols and Some Papers: Kierkegaard's Seducer and Hedda's Gambit." In *Ibsen's Hedda Gabler: Philosophical Perspectives*, edited by Kristin Gjesdal, 295-214. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Ruskin, John. *The Library Edition of the Works of John Ruskin*. Edited by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn. London: George Allen, 1903-1912. 34 volumes.
- Russell, David. "Facing Reality." *Raritan* 40, no. 3 (2021): 119-139.

  Tact: Aesthetic Liberalism and the Essay Form in Nineteenth Century Britain. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017.
- Ryan, Alan. *J. S. Mill*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974.

- Rycroft, Charles. *A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*. 2nd ed. London: Penguin, 1995 [1968].
- Rylance, Rick. *Literature and the Public Good*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Saunders, Max. *Self-Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Sayers, Janet. "Healing Aesthetics: Kristeva through Stokes." *Theory and Psychology* 14, no. 6, 777-795.

  Kleinians: Psychoanalysis Inside Out. Padstow: Polity, 2000.
- Schramm, Jan-Melissa. *Censorship and the Representation of the Sacred in Nineteenth-Century England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.
- Scull, Andrew. *Hysteria: the Disturbing History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Segal, Hanna. *Dream, Phantasy and Art*. London: Routledge, 1991.

  Introduction to Work of Melanie Klein. London: William Heinemann, 1964.
- Seymour-Smith, Martin. *Hardy*. London: Bloomsbury, 1994
- Shaughnessy, Robert. "Introduction to the Fourth Edition." In A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, xii-xlvi. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007 [1904].
- Shaw, W. David. *The Lucid Veil: Poetic Truth in the Victorian Era.* London: Althone, 1987.
- Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*. Edited by Donald H. Reimann and Sharon B. Powers. London: Norton, 1977.
- Sherborne, James. *John Ruskin, or The Ambiguities of Abundance: A Study in Social and Economic Criticism*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1972.
- Sherman, George William. *The Pessimism of Thomas Hardy*. Rutherford, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976.
- Shrimpton, Nicholas. "'Lane, You're A Perfect Pessimist': Pessimism and the English 'Fin De Siècle'." *The Yearbook of English Studies* 37 no. 1 (2007): 41-5.
- Shuttleworth, Sally. *The Mind of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science, and Medicine, 1840-1900*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Sidgwick, Henry. *The Methods of Ethics*. London: Macmillan, 1884.
- Small, Helen. *The Function of Cynicism at the Present Time*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.

  The Value of the Humanities. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

- Smith, M. M.; Sherry, Simon B.; Chen, Samantha; Saklofske, Donald H; Mushquash, Christopher; Flett, Gordon L; and Hewitt, Paul L. "The Perniciousness of Perfectionism: A Meta-Analytic Review of the Perfectionism–Suicide Relationship." *Journal of Personalised Medicine* 86 (2018): 522–542.
- Snedicker, Michael D. *Queer Optimism: Lyric Personhood and Other Felicitous Persuasions*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.
- Spenser, Herbert. *The Principles of Psychology*. London: William and Norgate, 1872.
- Sprinchorn, Evert. *Ibsen's Kingdom*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021.
- Stahr, Adolf. *The Life and Works of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing*. Translated by E. P. Evans. Boston: William V. Spenser, 1859. 2 volumes.
- Steele, Daniel. *Substitute for Holiness or, Antinomianism Revived, or The Theology of the So-Called Plymouth Brethren Examined and Refuted*. Illinois: Christian Witness Co., 1899 [1887].
- Stevenson, Robert Louis. *Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes*. Edited by Christopher Maclachlan. London: Penguin, 2004 [1879].
- Stoddart, Judith. *Ruskin's Culture Wars: Fors Clavigera and the Crisis of Victorian Liberalism*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998.
- Stokes, Adrian. *Three Essays on the Painting of Our Time*. London: Tavistock, 1961.
- Sully, James. "Lessing's Hamburg Dramaturgy." In *Sensation and Intuition: Studies in Psychology and Aesthetics*, 312-335. London: Henry S. King, 1874.
- Surtees, Virginia. *The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828- 1882): a Catalogue Raisonné*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.
- Swinburne, Algernon Charles. *Poems and Ballads; Atalanta in Calydon*. Edited by Morse Peckham. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merill Company, 1970.
- Symonds, John Addington. *Studies of the Greek Poets*. 2nd edition. London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1877.
- Szasz, Thomas. *The Myth of Psychotherapy: Mental Healing as Religion, Rhetoric and Repression*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1988.
- Taylor, Dennis. "Hardy's Missing Poem and His Copy of Milton." *The Thomas Hardy Journal* 6, no. 1 (February 1990): 50-60.

- Taylor, Jonathan, *Laughter, Literature and Violence, 1840-1930*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.
- Tennyson, Alfred Lord. *Tennyson: A Selected Edition*. Edited by Christopher Ricks. London: Routledge, 2007.

  The Complete Works of John Milton. Edited by Laura Lunger Knoppers. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

  The Edinburgh Critical Edition of the Selected Writings of Andrew Lang. Edited by Andrew Teverson, Alexandra Warwick and Leigh Wilson. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015. 6 volumes.
- The guestbook of Edmund Gosse covering the years 1876-1920 called 'The Book of Gosse, Vol. I.' GBR/0012/MS Add.7034. Gosse family papers. University of Cambridge Library, Cambridge, England.
- Thomas, Jane. "Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, and 'Comradely Love'." *Literature and History* 16, no. 2 (2007): 1-15.
- Thomas, Keith. *The Ends of Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Thwaite, Ann. *Edmund Gosse: A Literary Landscape 1849-1928*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

  "'My Dear Gosse': The Friendship Between Edmund Gosse and Thomas Hardy." *The Thomas Hardy Journal* 20, no. 3 (October 2004): 34-53.

  Glimpses of the Wonderful: The Life of Philip Henry Gosse. London: Faber & Faber, 2002.
- Trilling, Lionel. *Matthew Arnold*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1955.

  Sincerity and Authenticity. London: Oxford University Press, 1972.

  The Liberal Imagination. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978 [1940].

  Two Note Books of Thomas Carlyle: From 23rd March 1822 to 16th May 1832. Edited by Charles Eliot Norton. New York: The Grolier Club, 1898.

  Two on a Tower. Edited by Suleiman M. Ahmad. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998 [1882].

  Under the Greenwood Tree. Edited by Simon Gatrell and Phillip Mallett. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013 [1872].
- Tyler, William Seymour. *The Theology of the Greek Poets*. Boston: Draper and Halliday, 1867.
- Tyrrell, R. Y. "Jude the Obscure." *Fortnightly Review* LXV (1896): 857-64.

- Ueberweg, Friedrich. *History of Philosophy: From Thales to the Present Time*. Translated by George Sylvester Morris. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1880.
- Valdre, Rossella. *On Sublimation: A Path to the Destiny of Desire, Theory, and Treatment*. Translated by Flora Capostagno and Caroline Williamson. London: Karnac, 2014.
- Valentine, Elizabeth R. "'A Brilliant and Many-Sided Personality': Jessie Margaret Murray, founder of the Medico-Psychological Clinic." In *Philosophy and History of Psychology*, 237-255. London: Taylor Francis, 2014.
- Virtanen, Reino. "The Spectre of Solipsism in Western Literature." *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 59–76.
- Von Arx, Jeffrey Paul. *Progress and Pessimism: Religion, Politics, and History in Late Nineteenth Century Britain*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985.
- Waddell, Margot. "On Ideas of "the Good" and "the Ideal" in George Eliot's Novels and Post-Kleinian Psychoanalysis." *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 59 (1999): 271–286. *Inside Lives: Psychoanalysis and the Growth of the Personality*. London: Routledge, 2019.
- Waithe, Marcus. "Ruskin's Style of Thought." In *Thinking Through Style: Non-fiction Prose of the Long Nineteenth Century*, edited by Marcus Waithe and Michael Hurley, 183-200. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Watson, Walter. *The Lost Second Book of Aristotle's "Poetics"*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.
- Waugh, Patricia. "The Novel as Therapy: Ministrations of Voice in an Age of Risk." *Journal of the British Academy* 3 (2015): 35–68.
- Weininger, Otto. *Sex and Character: An Investigation of Fundamental Principles*. Translated by Ladislaus Löb and edited by Daniel Steuer and Laura Marcus. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005 [1903].
- Weltman, Sharon Aronofsky. *Performing the Victorian*. Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 2007.
- West, Anna. *Thomas Hardy and Animals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* Translated by Michael Chase. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002.

- Wheeler, Michael. *Ruskin's God*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Wheeler, Robert Mortimer. "Punch." In *Encyclopædia Britannica*, XXII.648. 11th edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911.
- White, Chris, ed. *Nineteenth Century Writings on Homosexuality: A Sourcebook*. London: Routledge, 2012.
- Wihl, Gary. *Ruskin and the Rhetoric of Infallibility*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.
- Wilde, Oscar. *An Ideal Husband*. London: Lane and Smithers, 1899 [1895].
  Miscellanies. Edited by Robert Baldwin Ross. London: Methuen, 1908.
- Williams, Bernard. "Introduction to *The Gay Science*." In *The Sense of the Past: Essays in the History of Philosophy*, 311-324. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.
- Williams, Carolyn. "Melodrama and the Realist Novel." In *The Cambridge Companion to Melodrama*, edited by Carolyn Williams, 209–223. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Williams, Rowan. *Being Humans: Bodies, Minds, Persons*. London: SPCK, 2018.
- Williamson, Eugene. "Thomas Hardy and Friedrich Nietzsche." *Comparative Literature Studies*, 15 no. 4 (1978): 403-413.
- Wilmer, Clive. "Creativity." In *The Cambridge Companion to John Ruskin*, edited by Francis O'Gorman, 230-245. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Wood, Michael. *Literature and the Taste of Knowledge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Woolf, Virginia. "Edmund Gosse." *Fortnightly Review* 129 (June 1931): 766-773.
  "The Novels of Thomas Hardy." In *The Second Common Reader*. 222-233. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1932.
- Wright, T. R. *Hardy and the Erotic*. New York: St Martin's Press, 1989.
- Yates, Velvet. "A Sexual Model of Catharsis." *Apeiron* 31 no. 1 (2011): 35-57.
- Zeller, Eduard. *Aristotle and the Earlier Peripatetics*. Translated by Benjamin Francis Conn Costelloe and John H. Muirhead. London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1897.
- Zwerdling, Alec. *The Rise of the Memoir*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.