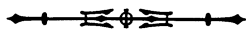


# The Victorian Age



1832–1901

## Thomas Carlyle

*Past and Present* (1843)

One might start with some background about the 1843 Poor Law, explaining that this supposedly rational legislation was based on Malthus: the thinking was that subsidizing the poor would lead them to multiply, and then they would be even more miserable. Instead they were incarcerated in workhouses and segregated by sex. The “crime” of poverty was apparently regarded as worse than felony, since workhouse inmates received a diet of fewer calories than criminals in prisons. Carlyle was scathing about the irony of a system of “workhouses” in which no work could be done.

The Poor Law was intended as a deterrent to poverty, on the assumption that its causes were not unemployment and low wages but idleness. A distinction was made between the “deserving poor” (the aged, the blind, orphans) and the able-bodied, who were punished and stigmatized for their condition. By forcing shirkers into honest labor, the Poor Law aimed at the moral reform of the pauper population.

Carlyle expresses his outrage with every rhetorical strategy at his command, comparing the workhouses to the Bastille and to Dante’s hell. The analogy to Midas is central, and one should spend time exploring the implications of this vivid allusion, since students may be confused about the nature of the Enchantment from which England suffers; some will think Carlyle is saying that England is an enchanting place with terrible problems. This isn’t too far off, but it misses the eerily frozen quality that Carlyle stresses, and the idea of enchantment as imprisonment.

Carlyle writes in the style of a biblical prophet, exhorting his readers in impassioned prose to wake up and reform their society. He is furious, sarcastic, appalled. He drives home his arguments with the most shocking examples he can find, such as the horrible story of the parents who were tried at the Stockport Assizes for poisoning their own children to collect the insurance money.

*Past and Present* accuses the entire economic and social system which permits such atrocities to take place. Carlyle points to the division between rich and poor (cf. Disraeli’s notion of Two Nations in *Sybil* in the Industrial Landscape perspectives section). The Master Worker whom he indicts is the laissez-faire capitalist (not a skilled laborer, as some students believe), concerned only with profit, indifferent to the social fallout from his self-serving policies. (The Master Idler or Unworker is the parasitic Aristocrat—not a workhouse pauper.)

On the subject of class division, one might go over Carlyle's allusions to the Corn Laws, protectionist legislation that drove up the price of grain, and the Game Laws, which inflicted brutal punishments for poaching on the hunting preserves of the wealthy. (In 1823 William Cobbett estimated that one third of English prisoners were in jail for killing hares or game birds).

Ask students to discuss the story of the poor Irish widow who infects her neighbors with typhus in the "Gospel of Mammonism." In what sense would it have been "economy" to help her? (Those who clutch their padlocks and money-safes while claiming she is no business of theirs suggest Scrooge and Marley's attitude towards charity.) How does she "prove her sisterhood"? Contagion serves as a powerful symbol of brotherhood, for no one, rich or poor, is immune to infection. Gaskell's *Mary Barton* and Dickens's *Bleak House* also use disease as a metaphor for human interconnectedness. Carlyle condemns the lack of leadership in a society where the rich do not acknowledge any responsibility for the poor.

In "Labour" Carlyle reiterates the Gospel of Work (articulated earlier in *Sartor Resartus*). In the context of his belief in the sacredness of work, the picture of an England full of unemployed workers, of paupers prevented from working, and of idle aristocrats takes on even greater resonance. Students might be interested in seeing Ford Madox Brown's famous painting, *Work* (1852). Inspired by Carlyle's injunction to "Produce!" it includes a portrait of Carlyle observing a group of laborers.

In "Democracy" Carlyle elaborates on the implications of the Irish widow's story, specifically the way the worship of wealth results in human isolation: even the "savages" in Africa would help a stranger, whereas supposedly civilized people in Edinburgh spurn their own neighbor. Even "Gurth, born thrall of Cedric," could count on being looked after by his master. This is the thorny heart of Carlyle's argument: that it is better to be a medieval serf whose master takes care of him than to be a supposedly free Englishman of the nineteenth century, whose freedom consists of the liberty to starve. Unlike the modern industrial worker, Gurth had clean air, the certainty of food, and, most important of all, "social lodging," i.e. a place in the social scheme of things.

Why did Cedric "deserve" to be Gurth's master? Because Cedric did not shirk his responsibility for Gurth, as contemporary capitalists and industrialists shirk their social obligations. Carlyle's arguments, of course, are paternalistic and anti-democratic. One could ask students whether they find Carlyle's example about preventing a madman from jumping off a cliff a convincing rationale for the abrogation of liberty. He expresses a nostalgic longing for an ordered society in which everyone knew his place, in which everyone *had* a place, was "related indissolubly, though in a rude brass-collar way, to his fellow-mortals." The brass collar that symbolizes slavery and the rule of force does not trouble Carlyle.

Harking back to the Middle Ages in his search for an ideal polity, Carlyle echoes Pugin, who had pointed out the abominations of nineteenth-century industrial society in *Contrasts* (1836). Have students look at *Catholic Town in 1440/Same Town in 1840* for another example of the contrast between past harmony and present horror implicit in Carlyle's title. One might use *Past and Present*

as a starting point for the topic of the Gothic Revival and the uses of medievalism in Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*, Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, Morris's *News from Nowhere*, etc.

Finally, in "Captains of Industry" Carlyle develops his notion that strong leaders are the solution to society's ills. Democracy is not the answer; Parliament cannot solve the "Condition of England" crisis by enacting laws (although progressive legislation throughout the century *did* gradually improve conditions, reducing hours of factory work, and so on). Rather, Carlyle optimistically urges the industrialists to take command and regulate themselves. They must become "noble," a new kind of benevolent aristocracy—wise fatherly heroes who will put profit and self-interest aside and revitalize the chivalric ideal of leadership.

In their novels Gaskell and Dickens reiterated Carlyle's appeal, showing factory owners (Carson in *Mary Barton* and Thornton in *North and South*) and businessmen (Scrooge and Marley) coming to a new understanding of their duties towards their employees. In each case this requires a traumatic personal wake-up call (Carson's son is murdered, Scrooge is visited by ghosts), and in *Past and Present* Carlyle makes explicit the threat of national trauma, in the form of revolution: "will not one French Revolution and Reign of Terror suffice us, but must there be two?"

To prevent this the Captains of Industry must find ways to lead that go beyond "cash-payment." To exist only in the relation of employer and employee is soul destroying. The feudal baron felt it "a necessity, to have men round him who in heart loved him." He is to be the model because his leadership was based on mutual esteem, not on hire-for-money. Without such bonds of loyalty and emotional connection, each individual is alone—and "isolation is the sum-total of wretchedness to man." (Cf. Teufelsdröckh, who suffered from "a strange isolation" in which "Invisible yet impenetrable walls, as of Enchantment, divided me from all living" like "the tiger in his jungle.") Carlyle's message about the deadening and chilling effect of human isolation became the central theme of Dickens's *Christmas Carol*, where Scrooge lives "solitary as an oyster."

These excerpts from *Past and Present* can be paired very fruitfully with the *Carol*, and they also serve as an excellent introduction to the Industrial Landscape perspectives section. However, even if one has no time for anything else, it would be worthwhile to read Dickens's *A Walk in a Workhouse* (1850) alongside Carlyle's analysis of the workhouse system.

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## PERSPECTIVES

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### The Industrial Landscape

This perspectives section is designed to suggest some of the ways in which machine work and machine-made products affected every aspect of Victorian life, from ordinary household objects to social relations, economic systems, and even basic notions of space and time. It is also designed to give the instructor flexibility: some or all of the selections can form a separate unit on the Industrial

Revolution, or individual selections can be taught in combination with texts elsewhere in the anthology.

The section as a whole works well with *Past and Present*: Carlyle's grim picture of the human consequences of industrialism can be considered along with the testimonies of child workers, and with the excerpts from **Engels** and **Mayhew**. The class alienation illustrated by the inability of Carlyle's Irish widow to find charity, and Carlyle's insistence that "isolation is the sum-total of wretchedness to man," can be compared with **Disraeli's** passage on a divided nation, and with Engels's claim that "isolation of the individual . . . is everywhere the fundamental principle of modern society." Such themes lay the groundwork for Dickens's *Christmas Carol*, enabling the student to bring a more informed awareness of contemporary social and economic issues to that familiar text.

Similarly, the illustration from **Pugin's** *Contrasts*, the portrait of Coketown from **Dickens's** *Hard Times*, Engels's description of Manchester, and the lives of the child laborers recorded in the Parliamentary papers can all be read along with Ruskin's *The Nature of Gothic*. Taken together, they form the basis of a discussion of the degradation of the workers from craftsmen to "hands," the changed face of the landscape, the monotony of factory work, and the various ways in which the middle classes were implicated in the plight of the workers.

The radically altered landscape appears vividly in the excerpt on "The Coming of the Railway" from *Dombey and Son*, as well as in Pugin's *Catholic Town in 1440/Same Town in 1840*, and in Engels, who evokes the rural past that has given way to slums in the industrial north. Pugin's illustration serves not only as a jumping off point to discuss the industrial landscape, but also as an introduction to the notion of Victorian Gothic. The pervasive nostalgia for an imagined medieval past can be traced from Pugin to *Past and Present*, *The Stones of Venice*, *Modern Manufacture and Design*, the *Idylls of the King*, *The Lady of Shalott*, and on through William Morris's writings and designs. A Catholic convert, Pugin went even further by insisting that only a return to Catholicism would restore medieval values. The staunchly Protestant Ruskin denied being influenced by Pugin, but between them they sparked the revival of the Gothic arch that has left its mark on public institutions and college campuses throughout England and America.

The texts gathered in this section include not only indictments of industrialism, but also expressions of pride and wonder at the accomplishments of technology. Along with the pro-technology voice of **Macaulay**, *The Steam Loom Weaver* captures the pure energy and exuberance of this new world of machines, as does **Fanny Kemble's** enthusiastic delight in the marvel of the railroad. In conjunction with these readings one might talk about the Great Exhibition of 1851 (see the photograph of the Crystal Palace), and the ways in which ideas of social and material progress were linked with ideas of scientific progress (cf. Darwin, and some of the passages in the Religion and Science perspectives section).

Both Kemble's letter and the excerpt from *Dombey and Son* give a sense of the sheer strangeness of the railroad. One might look at Tennyson's *Locksley Hall* (1842): "Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change." Like Kemble, Tennyson also rode the Liverpool to Manchester line in

1830—though his recollection of the technical details of the experience was less precise than hers!

Kemble's conceit—the train engine is like a mare or a she-dragon—illustrates the tendency to naturalize the mechanical. Compare this to Dickens's famous image for the monotonous motion of a steam-engine piston: it is "like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness." *The Steam Loom Weaver* uses the rhythmic movement of the steam-powered loom as a metaphor for the natural processes of sex. Today, we still attempt to humanize the complexities of technology through analogies to natural functions: computers think, get viruses, talk to each other, enjoy "downtime."

As well as being fascinating social documents, these selections are literary texts in their own right. Mayhew, for example, crafts the narratives that he has collected on the street in such a way that they become mini-autobiographies. In his introduction to the Dover edition of *London Labour and the London Poor*, John D. Rosenberg writes of Mayhew's superb artistry: "he edits, shapes, and intensifies, until we are stunned by the slang beauty and inventiveness of the spoken voices he recreates." Comparing him to Browning, Rosenberg suggests that Mayhew "should be credited with evolving a new art form, a kind of dramatic monologue in prose."

Mayhew was presenting a world as unfamiliar to most middle-class Victorians as "Darkest Africa"—yet it was a world right at their own doorstep. As Thackeray put it, "these wonders and terrors have been lying by your door and mine ever since we had a door of our own. We had but to go a hundred yards off and see for ourselves, but we never did. . . . You and I—were of the upper classes; we have had hitherto no community with the poor." In his own way, Mayhew was teaching the Victorians to see freshly just as much as Ruskin was.

Individual readings in this perspectives section can also be combined in countless ways with material elsewhere in the anthology, material that may have little to do with the Industrial Revolution. For example, *The Steam Loom Weaver* could form part of a unit on ballads, oral tradition, work songs, and so forth. Or, in a discussion of autobiography and/or childhood, the voices of children preserved by Mayhew and the Parliamentary commissioners might be compared to the excerpts from the autobiographies of Mill, Ruskin, Cobbe, and Gosse. The conditions of life for the young mill or mine workers and the London street children might be juxtaposed with the portraits of children's lives in Blake, *Aurora Leigh*, *Tom Brown's School Days*, the Brontës, or *The Child in the House*.

## John Stuart Mill

### On Liberty (1859)

This is the classic defense of the individual's right to resist governmental constraints and social pressure to conform. For Mill, freedom of speech and press are not unquestionable rights but reasoned principles worth defending: "freedom of opinion" is necessary "to the mental well-being of mankind," the freedom "on which all their other well-being depends." It is important to remember that the

British have no written constitution or Bill of Rights guaranteeing these liberties. Characteristically, Mill undertakes to show the benefits that accrue to all if free speech is maintained, and the consequent injury to all if it is not. Free speech will ultimately serve the interests even of those whose beliefs are questioned, he says, because it will strengthen their convictions if they are proven correct, and will give them new insight if they are shown to be wrong. (Note that Darwin relies on this scenario in the testing of scientific theory; see the opening paragraph of the selection from *The Descent of Man*.) Ask students what Mill would think of current efforts to restrain free speech so as not to give offense.

Mill ties freedom of thought and expression to the notion of individuality, and he fears that in modern times mass culture and the increasing powers of censorship and social control have led to a situation wherein “society has now fairly got the better of individuality; and the danger which threatens human nature is not the excess, but deficiency, of personal impulses and preferences.” For Mill, individuality and eccentricity are not simply aberrations to be tolerated, but the sources of all social improvement (“the amount of eccentricity in a society has generally been proportional to the amount of genius, mental vigor, and moral courage which it contained”), and must therefore be vigorously defended against the pressures of conformity. Since most Americans have strong views about individual freedom, demonstrating the continuing relevance of these issues should not be difficult.

Because the role of the individual in modern society was an issue that engaged all the great Victorian writers in one way or another, Mill’s carefully articulated views can be compared to the more emotive or empathetic ideas of his contemporaries. He was almost certainly reacting against Carlyle’s more conservative stance: Carlyle argues for individual self-awakening in *Sartor Resartus* (1833), but then in *Past and Present* (1843) calls for “Government by the Wisest,” suggesting that the wage-slave’s “liberty to starve” would be better surrendered to “Captains of Industry.” Mill’s views were in turn challenged by Matthew Arnold in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), where Arnold condemns the English habit of “doing as one likes” as a practice that selfishly destroys the whole social fabric. Oscar Wilde, in *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* (1891), returned to Mill’s basic point: “In proportion to the development of his individuality, each person becomes more valuable to himself, and is therefore capable of being more valuable to others.”

A Millian celebration (or defense) of individual liberty comes up more obliquely in the free-market pleading of Macaulay’s *Review of Southey’s Colloquies*, in Ruskin’s concern for the artistic freedom of workers in *The Nature of Gothic*, in Pater’s stirring anthem to self-fulfillment in the “Conclusion” to *The Renaissance*, and in Oscar Wilde’s trials. One can find counterpoints in Dickens’s biting portrait of Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol* and in Engels’s grim view of industrial poverty in “The Great Towns.” Note that the individuality of capitalist and worker are often at odds.

Be on the lookout for Mill’s subtle irony: in *On Liberty*, for example, he claims that the “collective mediocrity” of the English press is fine with him, since “I do not assert that anything better is compatible, as a general rule, with the present low

state of the human mind.” In *The Subjection of Women* he notes wryly that men base claims about women’s nature on their wives, yet “most men have not had the opportunity of studying in this way more than a single case.”

### The Subjection of Women (1869)

In conjunction with this selection, assign Mill’s brief “Repudiation” of his marriage rights, and Caroline Norton’s *Letter to the Queen* in the perspectives section on Victorian Ladies and Gentlemen. Norton directly addresses the legal status of Victorian women. Other important Victorian statements on “the Woman Question” include Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* (Book II), Tennyson’s *The Princess*, Florence Nightingale’s *Cassandra*, and George Eliot’s *Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft*. Eliot, like Mill, compares the current situation of women to slavery, and asserts that men too suffer by enforcing such inequality.

Mill begins by pointing out that all arguments urging the logic of male dominance are weak because the alternatives, equality or matriarchy, have never been tried: “The present system, which entirely subordinates the weaker sex to the stronger, rests upon theory only.” Moreover, the system is maintained in the face of the very meaning of modernity, “that human beings are no longer born to their place in life . . . but are free to employ their faculties.” For Mill, the “subordination of women thus stands out an isolated fact in modern social institutions,” sustained by unexamined custom rather than rational analysis. Citing other historical prejudices that have since been overturned, he asks tellingly, “was there ever any domination that did not appear natural to those who possessed it?”

Mill strategically uses the language of Victorian laissez-faire economics to shake the foundations of gender stereotypes. He first contends that women should be left to decide what roles they will play in society: “Whatever women’s services are most wanted for, the free play of competition will hold out the strongest inducements to them to undertake.” But then he uses this conservative, commercial premise to ask whether “the vocation of wife and mother” is truly natural for women. If so, then why do men force them into it? The free-market implication, Mill says, is that women would naturally rather do anything else, if they had the economic and personal freedom to do so. Far from being natural, the inequality of Victorian marriage is based on coercion and men’s fear that women would not stand for it, except on equal grounds. Thus, one might add, the fictional *Aurora Leigh*, as well as Florence Nightingale and Christina Rossetti, refused proposals of marriage in order to live and work alone.

Anticipating twentieth-century feminist theory and gender studies, Mill pushes his argument further by saying that all speculation about the essential qualities of women is moot because of the social construction of personality: it is impossible to know in our society what the true nature of men and women is since “what is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing—the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others.” Even when compared to slaves women are in a unique position, since “Men do not want solely the obedience of women; they want their sentiments. . . . They have therefore put

everything in practice to enslave their minds.” Here Mill implicitly calls for the discipline of Women’s Studies: women’s true character will remain unknown until women are free to reveal it, “until women themselves have told all that they have to tell.” Interestingly, he compares a woman’s unwillingness to be open with her husband to a son’s reticence with his father—there is more than a hint of his own biography here.

Deborah Epstein Nord has an intriguing article, “Mill and Ruskin on the Woman Question Revisited,” in *Teaching Literature: What Is Needed Now*, ed. James Engell (1988): 73-83. Nord contrasts Ruskin’s enormously popular *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) to Mill’s *Subjection*, which was “roundly criticized by contemporary reviewers as social heresy,” and reconstructs the Victorian debate about woman’s “true nature” and gender difference.

### Autobiography (1873)

Mill’s unique education now seems inseparable from his famous mental crisis. But did the second invalidate the first, or merely indicate that a sound pedagogical approach had been mismanaged on the human level? Mill contends that he was not unusually gifted, but simply avoided “the wretched waste of so many precious years” of conventional schooling; “if I have accomplished anything, I owe it . . . to . . . the early training bestowed on me by my father.” Certain aspects of James Mill’s approach have found their way into the contemporary curriculum, such as flash cards (though not in ancient Greek) and the practice of having advanced children tutor the others. Half a million American families now homeschool their children, often with superior results. Can Mill be seen as a model and not just a dire example?

It may be said that all the great Victorian autobiographies center around a crisis in faith, and in Mill’s case the faith in doubt was Utilitarianism. But the *Autobiography* provides ample evidence that the roots of his breakdown lay in his childhood. Like Ruskin, who confessed in *Praeterita* that “I had nothing to love,” Mill had no playmates. He had a distant, if intense, relationship to his father; his mother is never once mentioned. He also had little other “mental activity than that which was already called forth by my studies.” When he catastrophically discovered at the age of twenty-one that “my love of mankind . . . had worn itself out,” the chief obstacle to his recovery was his inability to take pleasure in anything for its own sake. Raised on the principles of Bentham’s moral calculus that sought to magnify “associations of pleasure with all things beneficial to the great whole, and of pain with all things hurtful to it,” Mill suddenly saw how artificial his attitudes were. His insight casts doubt on the wisdom of reward-and-punishment approaches to child rearing or teaching. But it is a sign of how deeply balanced a mind Mill possessed that, even when he perceived that “the habit of analysis has a tendency to wear away the feelings,” he did not reject his learning, his family, or his political work. Compare this early realization with Darwin’s similar discovery about analytical thinking (described in his autobiography).

Mill’s recovery has two turning points. The first comes when reading Marmontel’s memoir about the death his father. In *The Evolution of a Genius*

(1985), Peter Glassman examines this passage in detail: Mill not only imagines how he will be able to act (freely) when James Mill dies, but he also sees this death as James's punishment for being so unrecognizing of his son's separate existence and needs (38–43). With the death of a father, “the oppression of the thought that all feeling was dead within me, was gone.” Deciding that happiness comes “by the way” when “aiming at something else,” Mill was now in a receptive frame of mind for reading Wordsworth, the second stage in his recovery.

Compare Mill's crisis to Teufelsdröckh's in *Sartor Resartus*. Mill's dissatisfaction with Byron (“The poet's state of mind was too like my own”) echoes Carlyle's famous injunction “Close thy Byron.” But Mill opens Wordsworth, not Goethe, and finds consolation not in a philosophy of work, but in cultivating, through “the love of rural objects and natural scenery,” “a source of inward joy, of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure, which could be shared in by all beings.” Do students who have just read Wordsworth share this view? (Note that here, as in almost all his writings, Mill—perhaps because he was so conscious that he had an exceptional background—makes every effort to convince his readers that his proposals and discoveries are dedicated to the *common good*.)

Finally able to imagine that people can enjoy life even if all their wants are satisfied, Mill is able to return to his work, the delight he takes in poetry showing him he has “nothing to dread from the most confirmed habit of analysis.” Curiously, he does not rate Wordsworth very highly as a poet, saying he values him “less according to his intrinsic merits, than by the measure of what he had done for me.” Ask students if they think the merit of literature can be divorced from its effect on the reader. Mill's experience would seem to prove the truth of William Carlos Williams's remark that “It is difficult to get the news from poems, but people are dying every day for lack of what is found there.”

## Elizabeth Barrett Browning

In *The Second Common Reader* (1932) Virginia Woolf wrote that people were more interested in Barrett Browning's biography than they were in her works: “‘Lady Geraldine's Courtship’ is glanced at perhaps by two professors in American universities once a year; but we all know how Miss Barrett lay on her sofa; how she escaped from the dark house in Wimpole Street one September morning; how she met health and happiness, freedom, and Robert Browning in the church round the corner” (182). While renewed critical interest in *Aurora Leigh* makes it harder for professors to remain aloof from Barrett Browning's texts, student curiosity about the interplay of her love life and her love poetry still tends to dominate discussion. Yet this is as Barrett Browning would have had it: unlike her husband, she valued highly the open, personal quality of poetic expression. All the poems included here touch on Barrett Browning's double sense of herself as woman and writer.

Barrett Browning said that the French novelist George Sand, known for her masculine attire and passionate love affairs, was “eloquent as a fallen angel.” Her two sonnets addressed to Sand are ardent fan letters lauding and defending her tar-

nished heroine. Both poems mingle male and female attributes, and progress through purgatorial fire from a state of blame (for sexual freedom) to redemption (because of the writer's great soul). The concluding image of *A Recognition* is especially provocative, suggesting that the immense tension between being "True genius, but true woman!"—a veritable paradox for most Victorians—can be resolved only in death, by God's finally "unsexing" the pure artist. Whether artistic genius has any intrinsic sexual identity, male or female, is a question that occupies Barrett Browning throughout her work.

The urgent, often conflicting demands of sexual desire and poetic drive give *Sonnets from the Portuguese* much of their passionate power. Written as the Brownings' secret love affair progressed, the sequence has the immediacy of a private diary: will the brilliant, aging invalid be used by the younger, unknown poet? Does he really love her? The author herself is not quite sure. (*A Year's Spinning*, from the same period, also confronts the threat sex poses to women and their work.) In the first sonnet Love arrives suddenly, warding off the deathly shadows of the poet's past. But in contrast to harmless Theocritus, whose Greek text she is able to control through her learning, Love grabs her by the hair—symbol of a Victorian woman's sexuality—and masters her. He seems as ready to ruin as to save her. The danger recurs in Sonnet 13: despite her lover's urging, the poet strongly refuses to speak her love. Yet her "voiceless" silence "rend[s] the garment of my life"—an image suggesting that her deepest self, the private woman who is also an outspoken poet, will be violated whether she speaks or not.

The battle for verbal and erotic mastery continues in subsequent poems. Sonnets 14 and 21 seek reassurance but play with "love" as word, sound, and entity, reiterating it into a silence that will wordlessly, paradoxically, say even more. By Sonnets 22 and 24 the lovers struggle less against each other than against heaven and earth. In 22 the "erect" lovers turn their aspirations from heaven to delight in standing out among ordinary mortals, while in 24 they shut the world out as if closing a pocket-knife, so that free of "the stab of worldlings" they can become pure lilies in the care of God. In Sonnet 28 the poet plays again with texts, words, and silence, rereading her lover's letters, only to balk at revealing some secret phrase that all his words have taught her not to betray. The most private words she now guards are his, not hers.

But the poet's lover is in control once again in Sonnet 32: she becomes a "worn viol," a defaced instrument that his "master-hands" can turn to wonderful music. While the metaphor suggests sexual surrender, it also retains the poet's artistic integrity; her lover speaks through her, relying on her voice. The ambiguous epithet "great souls" can thus apply to both of them. The poet returns to writing and speaking in Sonnet 38, her hand, head, and lips blessed and enabled by her lover's kiss. But with characteristic wit Barrett Browning makes gentle fun of herself (not letting people shake that hand) and also of Robert Browning (whose kiss misses her brow and lands on her hair) in order to explore the nature of sexual power by which his third kiss grants her possession of him.

The most famous of all her love lyrics, Sonnet 43 (*How do I love thee*), is even more remarkable when read in this context. We see how hard-won is its impetuous

rush of passion, its unreserved declaration of love that breaks the rules of sonnet form by refusing the customary “turn” of idea and attitude in lines 9 to 14. But there is a subtle play, as images of spiritual love are succeeded by more physical, personal images. The shift implies not only that the poet has lost conventional religious faith, but also that love has replaced it; now her God is love.

The question of how a woman can love, write, and do God’s will is raised most extensively in *Aurora Leigh*, where the heroine recounts her growth as poet and lover, undergoing experiences that loosely parallel Barrett Browning’s own life. *Aurora Leigh*, she said, was a book “into which my highest convictions on Life and Art have entered,” and she focussed her efforts on making an epic of *her* moment: “my chief *intention* just now is the writing of a sort of novel-poem . . . running into the midst of our conventions, and rushing into drawing rooms and the like . . . meeting face to face and without mask the Humanity of the age, and speaking the truth of it out plainly.” Reversing the mask-obsessed poetic strategy of Robert Browning, she presents Aurora’s quest as a successive stripping away of masks—all the preconceived notions of what a woman is and should do. Aurora begins with her own dawning, describing her childhood and parents (mother first), starting to construct a modern, psychologically informed autobiography. The dominant event is the early death of her mother (Barrett Browning’s mother did not die till the poet was twenty-two), and the dominant pattern of imagery is maternal: pregnancy, birth, nursing, caring for children. She then describes the mystery built about her mother’s picture, a disturbing concatenation of the stereotypes applied to women, ranging from Muse and Madonna to the Medusa.

These are the conceptions she must contend with, first suffering through her miserable aunt’s idea of a proper Victorian gentlewoman’s education, and then confronting the condescending prejudices of her rich cousin and lover, Romney Leigh. The description of Aurora’s education is a classic (I:372–498); to set it in a larger context, students can read selections in the Ladies and Gentlemen perspectives section, particularly Mrs. Ellis on women’s necessary submission to man, and Cobbe and Martineau on women’s education. Though savagely scornful of British social convention, Aurora withers in this cold, unloving climate, saving herself only by discovering poetry’s power to transcend petty materialism and human weakness (I:815–80).

Having dedicated her future to art, she is outraged when Romney proposes that they marry so she can help him with his grand plans to cure society’s ills. Echoing Jane Eyre’s rejection of St. John Rivers (Brontë’s novel was published in 1847), their great debate explores the conventional ideas about women’s characters and capabilities. But unlike *Jane Eyre*, it also offers crushing feminist rejoinders to these views, particularly II:359–61: “am I proved too weak / To stand alone, yet strong enough to bear / Such leaners on my shoulder?” Aurora’s views quarrel in important ways with Tennyson’s widely quoted passage from *The Princess* (1847), “The woman’s cause is man’s,” and anticipate Mill’s systematic attack on sexism in *The Subjection of Women* (1869).

In Book 3, set seven years later, we see the results of Aurora’s defiance. She has found “a room of one’s own” in London, and earns her living as an independent

literary woman. In a kind of interior monologue she comments on her mail—the ludicrous advice of critics, the bizarre requests from strangers, and an intriguing note from an artist friend, Vincent Carrington, asking her opinion of how to best represent Danae’s sexual encounter with Jove. Aurora comments that the two versions of Danae’s response, one active, one passively self-negating (III:121–43), represent “Two states of the recipient artist-soul.” Surprisingly, she appears to opt for the passive response. Is the poet being ironic? Or is the ambitious Aurora’s quest for a feminist poetry, with Jove as male muse, as fraught with contradictions as the masculinist views she opposes?

The visionary, oddly violent passage that follows (III:167–203), one of the rare descriptions of an *urban* sunset in Victorian poetry, also stresses how humans can be blotted out by superior forces of nature or God. As she “view[s] the city perish in the mist,” the poet safe in her garret compares Londoners to the Egyptians swallowed by the Red Sea, and herself to Moses’s sister Miriam, who celebrated the Hebrew victory. This alternating classical/biblical frame of reference—poet as ravished Danae, poet as virgin Miriam—indicates the complex, sometimes contradictory way Barrett Browning seeks to clarify the experience of the woman artist, and her all-out search for metaphors to sustain her quest.

Her poetic ambitions come through most clearly in Book 5 of *Aurora Leigh*, where she presents her rationale for a modern, feminist epic. In his Preface to *Poems* (1853) Matthew Arnold had insisted that contemporary life had little to offer poets, and here Barrett Browning responds at length by asserting that the poet’s duty is “to represent the age, / Their age, not Charlemagne’s,—this live throbbing age” (202–03). Having read the social satire of Pope, Swift, Johnson, Blake, and Byron, and conditioned by American culture’s obsession with the present, students may not have noticed how wary the Victorians were about dealing with contemporary life in poetry—and thus how bold Barrett Browning’s words were. But a quick run-through of Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, and others will turn up very few poems that directly address the looks, clothes, fashions, events, issues, and technology of the day. Almost every theme was treated obliquely through a historical parallel, a static rural setting, or the borrowing of some earlier story. Asserting that “every age / Appears to souls who live in’t (ask Carlyle) / Most unheroic” (155–56), Barrett Browning rejects the Victorian tendency—from Carlyle and Pugin to Morris and Pater—to denounce the present by reimagining the past. Moreover, in what is probably a rebuke of Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*, she feminizes this iconoclastic perspective: “King Arthur’s self / Was commonplace to Lady Guenever” (209–10).

Her aim is to reinvent the epic poem—and even the “man’s world” of Victorian culture itself—on matrilineal terms: “unscrupulously epic,” she will capture “the full-veined heaving, double-breasted Age” in a “living art” that will suckle future generations (216–22). In *Cassandra*, Florence Nightingale complains, quoting from *Othello*, that women are expected to “suckle their fools and chronicle their small beer,” rejecting this confining familial role she turns to a *metaphoric* nursing and makes a worthy profession of it. Barrett Browning, however, uses her epic to stress repeatedly the value of suckling as a *literal* as well as metaphoric act, an image of

female creativity and cultural transmission—like poetry itself. Nightingale compares wives to prostitutes, but Barrett Browning claims that if a woman is true to her art, genuine love and marriage are possible.

Although *Aurora Leigh* insists on the noble, even sacred function of art, some of the later poems emphasize an important undertone in the epic—the painful nature of artistic creation, whether prompted by angels or gods, Christian or classical muses. *A Curse for a Nation* explores the poet's unwillingness to turn her writing into cursing, even against slavery, and *A Musical Instrument* examines the brutality of “the great god Pan” who rips the reed from its home by the river, violating nature and changing its being forever, in order to produce life-giving art. In Barrett Browning's poetry, disturbingly, writing is never very far from coercion and rape.

An interesting biographical aspect of Barrett Browning's abolitionist writing is that she appears to have considered herself as, in part, descended from slaves. Discussing her family name and background (her father's family were rich slaveholders in Jamaica) in a letter to her future husband, she wrote: “Nevertheless it is true that I would give ten towns in Norfolk [where an ancestor was governor] . . . to own some purer lineage than that of the blood of the slave!—Cursed we are from generation to generation!” In *Dared and Done: The Marriage of Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning* (1995), Julia Markus explores the significance of Barrett Browning's writing *The Runaway Slave* on her honeymoon, and suggests that the reason her father allowed none of his children to marry was his fear of continuing black blood in the Barrett line (88–115). Like Elizabeth Barrett, Robert Browning was considered “dark” in complexion; his paternal grandmother was Creole, and this may have been a further bond between the two poets.

## Alfred, Lord Tennyson

The Victorians embraced Tennyson as their national poet because almost everything he wrote seemed to be about their inmost selves, and yet also applicable to their times and destiny as a people. In the vast library of Tennyson criticism that seeks to reconcile the brooding, private lyricist with the resolute and timely public voice, a good starting place is *Critical Essays on Alfred Lord Tennyson*, ed. Herbert F. Tucker (1993). The volume contains recent essays, both formalist and contextual, by leading critics on the major works and poems. Tucker's introduction surveys the poet's evolution into Victorian sage, his fall from popular grace by the turn of the century, and his subsequent resurrection.

But one could equally begin with the insights of Tennyson's first reader. Arthur Hallam's review of Tennyson's first book—“On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry” (1831)—remains unsurpassed. If in death Hallam, the “hero” of both *In Memoriam* and *Idylls of the King*, turned into Tennyson's most elaborate literary creation, in life he was the poet's most astute critic. Calling Tennyson a Poet of Sensation, Hallam summarized “five distinctive excellencies” of his verse that are still worth pointing out: 1) “his luxuriance of imagination and . . . his control over it;” 2) “his power of embodying himself in ideal characters, or rather moods of charac-

ter” such that the narration evolves naturally from the predominant feeling; 3) “his vivid picturesque delineation of objects . . . fused . . . in a medium of strong emotion;” 4) “the variety of his lyrical measures, and exquisite modulation of harmonious words and cadences to the swell and fall of the feelings expressed;” and 5) “the elevated habits of thought” and “mellow soberness of tone” that does not so much “instruct the understanding” as “communicate the love of beauty to the heart.”

These qualities emerge distinctly in the early verse, mellifluous poems that seem to undercut mainstream Victorian values. All the earlier poems included here, from *The Kraken* to *The Eagle* (mirror versions of one another) concern themselves either by their music or subject with a passivity and lack of will that challenge Victorian earnestness and the Carlylean Gospel of Work. They are lyrics of isolation and desolation, their topics chosen from literature rather than life, seeking release from life’s cares and duties.

*Mariana*, whose dense psychological landscape caught the attention of Mill and Edgar Allan Poe, piles an eerie array of thickly textured description (“With blackest moss the flower-plots . . .”), sound (“The blue fly sung in the pane”), and vocal silences (“unlifted was the clinking latch”) upon a nearly static refrain that emphasizes Mariana’s solitude and helplessness. The poem is driven by a certain sexual tension (the shadow of the gnarled poplar on her moonlit bed), but the overall effect is one of inertia and passivity. Ruskin grumbled over Millais’ beautiful painting of the poem, *Mariana in the Moated Grange* (1850): “If the painter had painted Mariana at work in an unmoated grange, instead of idle in a moated one, it had been more to the purpose—whether of art or life” (qtd in Houghton’s *Victorian Frame of Mind* [1957] 243).

In an age of energy, the young Tennyson appears strangely fatigued. This is most obvious in *Tithonus*, where the misguided quest for too much life has undone the once-impassioned speaker, who now mourns for the brief simplicity of ordinary human life succinctly presented in line 3. Similarly, *The Lotos-Eaters* is a soporific tour-de-forcelessness whose initial resolve, like an old-fashioned phonograph, runs down under the weight of Tennyson’s long, heavy vowels. The “island home” and attendant responsibilities that the debilitated mariners cannot rouse themselves to regain would seem to be not just ancient Ithaca, but also modern Britain.

Even *Ulysses*, so often read as a stirring call to action (Matthew Rowlinson’s “The Ideological Moment of Tennyson’s ‘Ulysses,’” *Victorian Poetry* 30.3–4 [1992]: 265–276, traces this view) is sabotaged by the language the speaker uses to convince himself and his men to set off: the pauses of the last few lines appear less emphatic than simply weary, Ulysses trailing off redundantly with “that which we are . . . we are” and finally lurching to a halt amidst his closing monosyllables. As Christopher Ricks asks in his immensely helpful guide to the poems, *Tennyson* (1972), why aren’t there any verbs in the future tense? Ricks cites one Victorian reviewer who said that Ulysses only “intends to roam, but stands for ever a listless and melancholy figure on the shore.” Attuned to Tennyson’s floundering meter, Matthew Arnold commented that the three lines beginning “Yet all experience is an arch . . .” (19–21) “by themselves take up nearly as much time as a whole book of the *Iliad*” (see Ricks 122–25).

Why does the poet dwell on incapacity and inanition? Why does a great hero like Ulysses dismiss the Victorian virtues of hearth, family, and public duty? Why does Tennyson admit later that even his tears are “idle”? *The Lady of Shalott*, probably Tennyson’s most complex and elusive early poem, provokes a range of possible responses. Because the Lady is an artist, we see more clearly the poet’s likely identification with characters who feel trapped by the spell of life or circumstance. The poem casts a spell with its ornate musicality, which struck reviewers in 1832 and which the poet carefully refined before republishing the work in *Poems* 1842. Tennyson sets the poem in the realm of fairy tale, and in section 1 heightens the unreality of the Lady’s existence, occupation, and isolation. Traditionally, readings have focused on the Lady’s curse (which Tennyson himself added, along with the mirror, to the story he found in Malory) as a sign that art and life are incompatible. Regarding the world only indirectly through her mirror, the Lady inhabits a sort of Plato’s cave, one which it is fatal for her to break out of, since both her art (the web) and she herself are destroyed—and then, tragically or ironically, her great sacrifice is puzzled over by an uncomprehending public downstream in worldly Camelot.

But as soon as one foregrounds the fact that this artist is a *woman*, a new series of possible readings opens up. Since Tennyson links artistry to a passive, patient, shadowy, cloistered femininity, is he suggesting that poets occupy a woman’s place in Victorian society? and what would that role be, exactly? The poem’s form provides some clues: the two worlds of embowered Shalott and towered Camelot, female and male, are separated by the rest of the stanza, yet linked by rhyme. The whole thrust of the narrative is to bring them together, creating a further tension between the magic of the poem’s music and its tragic topic. Ignorant of the Lady’s plight and the action his appearance precipitates, Lancelot may be read as a figure of oblivious indifference (“tirra lirra”) or sympathetic understanding (his final words). Visual potency and sexual attraction (“the helmet and the plume”) seems to bring them together momentarily in her fatally unmediated gaze. But the shadow-world of art and isolation have already failed to satisfy the knightless Lady—although she perhaps realizes that even visual contact with Camelot is deadly. Is Tennyson saying that women or poets have no scope of action in masculine Victorian society; that action is death for woman or poet; that romantic self-sacrifice or sexual knowledge brings death for women (who might well die in childbirth if they acted on that knowledge)?

In “‘Cracked from Side to Side’: Sexual Politics in ‘The Lady of Shalott,’” Carl Plasa contends that the supposed separation of art and life in the poem is really an illusion, since that separation is an issue historically grounded in Tennyson’s own society, and thus the poem is itself an example of how art and life really *are* inextricably mixed. He reads it as a fractured, self-contradictory addressing of “the Woman Question.” Plasa takes the mirror as “the ideological status quo” which is overturned by the Lady’s daring, iconoclastic gaze; but it is only a short-term victory over patriarchy, since marriage, figured as death, “is tantamount, for women, to a form of self-annihilation” (*Victorian Poetry* 30.3–4 [1992]: 258, 260; the entire issue is devoted to essays on Tennyson).

Julia Sackville reads the poem against its many Victorian illustrations, Holman Hunt's chief among them. In "The Lady of Shalott': a Lacanian Romance," she regards the distinction between "real" Camelot and faery Shalott as a misconception that has deluded readers as much as it deludes the Lady: "In order to read Camelot as representing 'life' . . . one is surely forced to close one's eyes to its long-established literary role as the context for romantic fiction" (76). Mistaking the world of romance (in both senses) as a true "beyond," a way out of the mediated world she inhabits, the Lady attempts to "experience the revelation of direct contact with the real" (78). But in so doing, she collapses the double mystery (what she imagines about Camelot, what Camelot imagines about her) upon which her art and life depend. Portraying the moment at which mediation becomes revelation, Hunt focuses on the disarray of hair and web to show how the Lady's bold delusion has "undone" her both sexually and artistically (*Word and Image* 8 [1992]: 83).

Was Tennyson an imperialist? a sexist? gay? Poems of the middle period, such as *Locksley Hall*, *The Princess*, and *In Memoriam* may prompt students to ask these questions—to which the answers are complicated, both biographically and textually. Not surprisingly, Tennyson seems more interested in exploring a range of possible attitudes to war, women, and love, than in committing himself to one position. The dramatic monologue (or tirade) *Locksley Hall* is a kind of reverse *Ulysses* (his comrades are urging the speaker to go) that cuts a wide swath through major Victorian issues (including commercialism, gender roles, evolution, imperialism, racial characteristics, human destiny, and divine providence). Like *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, it may seem a sabre-rattling endorsement of masculine self-fulfillment in action, duty, and world domination—or else the story of "someone [who] had blunder'd."

The strong caesura of the unusual octameter line implies a self-divided mind that is only partially reconciled by the distant rhymes at the end of the lengthy couplet. Is the speaker justly or unjustly laying blame for the ruin of society and his own aspiration when he lashes out against materialism, social hierarchy, his conventional cousin Amy and her loutish upper-class husband? Does his fulminating against women ("woman is the lesser man") and other races or religions ("I count the gray barbarian lower than the Christian child") suggest that their lower evolutionary status will have to be subsumed in that of the Victorian male in order to attain his idealistic, Providential, science-fiction view of a universal peace to come, with him as "heir of all the ages"?

One could say that the poem is most concerned with exploring social, sexual, racial, and evolutionary *levels*, through the troubled hopes, grudges, and prejudices of a young man trying to find his own level emotionally. In "Tennyson and the Savage" Gerhard Joseph points out that in his treatment of other lands and races Tennyson was torn between a pastoral/utopian tradition of the Noble Savage and Edenic landscape, and an evolution-oriented Victorian ideology: "His literary heritage and romantic bent may have inclined him to extol the virtues of the native and his natural setting, but his cultural heritage and belief in progress in the guise of imperialist ideology led him to extol the virtues of civilization" (*Tennyson Research Bulletin* 6.1 [1992]: 38). While both these attitudes jostle uneasily in *Locksley Hall*, Lynne B. O'Brien sees Tennyson endorsing a way out of the speaker's

confusion through the “beneficial function” of alienation and war, which initiate “a quest for personal growth which benefits the entire society” (“Male Heroism: Tennyson’s Divided View,” *Victorian Poetry* 32.2 [1994]: 180–181; see also Marion Shaw’s “Tennyson’s Dark Continent” in the same issue, 157–168).

*The Princess* seems equally ambivalent in its response to “the Woman Question.” Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick points out in “Tennyson’s *Princess*: One Bride for Seven Brothers” (reprinted in Tucker from her book *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, 1985) that formally the poem has a “direct and explicit link to the division of gender; for the narrative, feminist content and all, is attributed entirely to the young men [who narrate it], while the ravishing lyrics that intersperse the narrative, often at an odd or even subversive angle to what is manifestly supposed to be going on, are supposed to be entirely the work of women in the group” (134). Such a structure implies, like *The Lady of Shalott*, that while the process of ideological construction is male, mere “ornamental” (though perhaps oppositional) work belongs to women and poets. In the speech that has come to be called “The Woman’s Cause Is Man’s,” the Prince claims attention as a visionary “feminist” by prophesying a more androgynous narrowing of sexual difference, even as he conceives it under the aegis of a traditional marriage that helps the sexes differentiate themselves. As he says later to the Princess: “Accomplish thou my manhood and thyself; / Lay thy sweet hands in mine and trust to me” (Book 7, lines 344–45). This strategy is reminiscent of Barrett Browning’s comment that Victorian culture grants women the “Potential faculty in everything / Of abdicating power in it” (*Aurora Leigh* I: 441–42).

Many of the lyrics reinforce this feminine passivity or masculine call for surrender, particularly “Sweet and Low” and “Come Down, O Maid,” but others, such as “Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal,” require the male listener to lose himself in a woman’s body. J. Hillis Miller’s essay “Temporal Topographies: Tennyson’s Tears” (*Victorian Poetry* 30.3–4 [1992]: 277–289) reads “Tears, Idle Tears” as Tennyson’s attempt to “express the human sense of time” in genderless spatial images (280), so that the poem transcends its immediate dramatic role within *The Princess* as a marker of feminine idleness and nostalgia at odds with masculine efforts to build the future. As Miller notes, the poem “expresses Tennyson’s own obsession with what he called ‘the passion of the past’” (280), a generalized feeling of human mortality and temporality, a distance in time figured as spatial distance. As Tennyson said, his boyhood feeling for the past “is so always with me now; it is the distance that charms me in the landscape, the picture and the past, and not the immediate today in which I move.”

Tennyson is enamored of distance: perhaps that explains why a poet who makes readers uncomfortable with his far-off resolutions to religious and social problems should be so immensely effective on a personal level. In fact, it is probably the appeal to the emotions that makes his wispy case for political or spiritual evolution more convincing. We may have difficulty crossing the physical distances of empire or the dizzying perspectives of the distant future (*Locksley Hall*) or the psychological frontiers of a re-gendered society (*The Princess*), but we all know, and feel, losses that we inevitably image to ourselves as a distance from time past. That

is why “Tears, Idle Tears” (and *Break, Break, Break*, which treats similar themes) works so subtly to translate images of what is before our eyes, but just out of reach, into images of “the days that are no more.”

Building on this impulse, Tennyson managed in *In Memoriam* to put his tears to good use. “Much soothed and pleased with Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*,” Queen Victoria wrote in her diary on January 5th, 1862: “Only those who have suffered as I do, can understand these beautiful poems” (*Dear and Honoured Lady: The Correspondence Between Queen Victoria and Alfred Tennyson*, ed. Hope Dyson and Charles Tennyson [1969], 67). The Queen had reason to be soothed: the poem’s structure and technique are built around an ultimately reassuring pattern of loss and recuperation. The poem’s memorable lines seem to solve the dilemmas they propose: on the personal level, the “hand that can be clasp’d no more” of section 7 is offset by “’Tis better to have loved and lost / Than never to have loved at all” (section 27, repeated in 85); on the religious and evolutionary level, the presciently pre-Darwinian horror of godless “Nature, red in tooth and claw” (section 56) is allayed by section 118’s confident injunction, “Move upward, working out the beast / And let the ape and tiger die.” The poem gains additional continuity and a consolatory narrative drift from the poet’s contrasting reactions to key images (such as the old yew tree in sections 2 and 39), places (Hallam’s house in 7 and 119), dates (the anniversaries of Hallam’s death in 72 and 99), and larger topics, such as the spiritual implications of evolution, first despaired over in sections 54, 55, and 56, but then re-viewed in a positive light in 118, 120, and 123. Even the fact of Tennyson’s having doubted is recuperated: “There lives more faith in honest doubt / Believe me, than in half the creeds” (section 96).

In his helpful book *Reading ‘In Memoriam’* (1985), Timothy Peltason calls Hallam “a vivid absence” at the heart of the poem, and this may well be a large part of the poem’s lasting appeal, allowing readers to project their own losses into that emotionally charged void, as did Queen Victoria. As J. Hillis Miller comments in the article cited above, “Hallam’s death did not generate Tennyson’s feeling of loss. Rather the death gave Tennyson an occasion to personify a loss he already felt” (282). And as John D. Rosenberg notes, Tennyson invited this practice; in the course of the poem he compares his love “to that of mother, father, fiancée; wife and husband; friend, brother, mate, comrade, widow, and widower; a ghost seeking a ghost; a poor girl in a great man’s house; a dog that loves its master; a father giving away a bride” (“Stopping for Death: Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*,” *Victorian Poetry* 30.3–4 [1992]: 305). Thus, in a famous comment, an early reviewer wrote that the poem (published anonymously) revealed the grief “from the full heart of the widow of a military man.”

But this polyvalence of mourning can also be disturbing. In reviews of the first edition, Gerard Manley Hopkins’s father was troubled by the “amatory tenderness” of one man for another, and the Rev. Charles Kingsley compared the poem to Shakespeare’s sonnets in treating “love passing the love of woman.” Exploring the homoerotic aspects of the poem, Christopher Craft (“‘Descend, and Touch, and Enter’: Tennyson’s Strange Manner of Address” in Tucker 153–73) contends that the poet, addressing a desire perhaps born of death, treats “homosexual de-

sire as indissoluble from death" (158); he produces a "discourse of homosexual longing" (170) whose satisfaction, or even expression, death and social norms combine to make impossible. Craft concludes that "in the sheer ferocity of its personal loss . . . Tennyson's elegy manages to counterspeak its own submission to its culture's heterosexualizing conventions;" it is a "desiring machine whose first motive is the reproduction of lost Hallam" (170).

Rosenberg disagrees that this desire is homosexual. Pointing to the range of readers who grieve along with the poet, he views the poet's feeling for Hallam as part of a "freely gendered sexuality" which is "so primal and all-encompassing that it lacks gender specificity or constancy" (303). But he does agree that "the most startling effects of *In Memoriam* all have a transgressive quality, a crossing of borders that normally separate the living from the dead, the natural from the supernatural, one sex or species from another" (295). Rosenberg notes that when Tennyson seeks to "grow incorporate" with the yew tree in section 2 he is striving to possess the corpse of Hallam that the yew's roots now embrace more fully than he (295). Rosenberg also takes seriously Tennyson's remark that the poem was "a sort of divine comedy—cheerful at the close," arguing that Hallam is Tennyson's Beatrice, and that "the marriage that overrides all others and is both the origin and end of *In Memoriam* is the marriage of Alfred Tennyson to Arthur Hallam. This union, the true Epithalamion of *In Memoriam*, is consummated in the last third of the Epilogue and takes place in heaven" (323).

Students interested in the strange compound of physical and spiritual longing in the poem can look at the pervasive hand imagery (such as the clasp broken by death that is figured in the white space between stanzas one and two in section 7, but re-established mentally in section 119); the mingled desire for the rebirth of Christ and Arthur (figured in the ambiguity of "he" that starts section 107, that at first seems to refer to Christ, the last noun in section 106); and the ghostly consummation Tennyson so devoutly wishes in section 93 ("Descend, and touch, and enter") and in section 95, which many readers take as the poem's climax ("The dead man touched me from the past, / And all at once it seemed at last / The living soul was flashed on mine").

### Idylls of the King

A central difficulty of the *Idylls* is the ethereal quality of *its* Arthur. The king emerges out of dark rumor, struggles with shadows, and passes into a distant dawn. In "The Coming of Arthur" Tennyson deliberately clouds the question of Arthur's birth to emphasize both the king's supra-human qualities and the morally revealing responses they elicit from the other characters. The King's uncertain origins and strange proofs of legitimacy also suggest anxiety over patriarchal authority and the credibility of Christianity, for Arthur's elusiveness stems in part from his Christlike embodiment of ideals unattainable in a fallen world. This is a theme stressed repeatedly in "The Passing of Arthur," whose conclusion can be read as a dirge for Christianity itself, "a broken chancel and a broken cross." Most contemporary readers readily grasped the parallels between the shattered spiritual aspirations of

Victorian society and the Round Table's self-ruin through sensuality and faithlessness. But partly, too, Arthur is so much the "once and future king" of Tennyson's own life that the pain of his passing and the yearning for his return leave the poet little room to savor his presence as a vigorous, living human being. As the resigned yet hopeful conclusion of the *Idylls* makes clear, the return of Arthur, his "Second Coming," is just as "far off" here as at the ending of *In Memoriam*.

Of the many larger patterns of imagery in the poem (including the reciprocity between the natural world and human one, figured most strongly in the changing seasons), humanness and beastliness are central. Throughout the poem, as beasts (and heathens) are extirpated, human (and spiritual) qualities flourish; but by the end, as it was in the beginning, the reverse is also true. In "The Coming of Arthur" Britain is a wilderness where "the beast was more and more" till Arthur arrives and eventually remakes the land: "the old order changeth, yielding place to new." The gathering storm is symbolized by the animality of "Pelleas and Ettarre." Ettarre is a biting ant, her knights are hounds, Gawain is a dog, and the disillusioned Pelleas invokes foxes, wolves, and rats before finally becoming a hissing snake at Arthur's court.

Finally, in "The Passing of Arthur," as the "realm / Reels back into the beast" this savage devolution is figured by traitorousness, civil war, and "the last weird battle in the west," one of the most dark, despairing, and eerie passages in all of Tennyson. Arthur's own doubts ("I know not what I am . . . I seem but King among the dead") are followed by Bedivere's questioning of the legend ("empty breath / And rumours of a doubt") until "the whole round Table is dissolved / Which was an image of the mighty world." But in slaying Modred, Arthur casts a temporary otherworldly peace over the wasted landscape; the sheep and goats of Judgment Day are the last beasts mentioned in the epic. On the poem's overarching themes, see John D. Rosenberg, *The Fall of Camelot: A Study of Tennyson's "Idylls of the King"* (1973).

Yet one of the things that separates man and beast is terribly equivocal: the use of weapons. From the mystic arrival of Excalibur, which proves Arthur's legitimacy, to Pelleas's Freudian lament, "I have no sword," when he loses all hope of Ettarre's love, to the protracted trial of Excalibur's return to the Lady of the Lake, swords are of vital interest to Tennyson, his knights, and his ladies. Looking at visual interpretations of Tennyson's text in "To Take Excalibur: King Arthur and the Construction of Victorian Manhood," Debra N. Mancoff argues that the sword, with its commands in ancient and modern tongues, requires the Victorian gentleman "to bring ancient, honorable standards to life in the modern world" (258), and she concludes that "to take Excalibur was to be a man" (*King Arthur: A Casebook*, ed. Edward Donald Kennedy [1996], 278). In a very different reading of the poem's "modernity," entitled "Commodifying Tennyson: The Historical Transformation of 'Brand Loyalty'" (*Victorian Poetry* 34.2 [1996]: 133-148), Gerhard Joseph connects the imposing physical and symbolic power of Excalibur and the medieval "brand" or sword with the birth of "brand-name" proprietorship in commerce and bookselling. We are all Bediveres, he says, idealist-consumers tantalized into covetousness by both the author's unadulterated text and his signifying sword.

But how male is this masculine-seeming signifier? Linda Shires examines how the “maleness” of the sword depends on its relation to a female donor or recipient (“Take me” / “Cast me away”) in such a way that “the poem asserts a definition of manliness as the letting go of literal objects of masculine authority” (“Patriarchy, Dead Men, and Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*,” *Victorian Poetry* 30 [1992]: 408). One might look at this in conjunction with Newman’s feminized ideal gentleman in our perspectives section on Victorian Ladies and Gentlemen. Moving from sword to society, Elliot Gilbert’s article, “The Female King: Tennyson’s Arthurian Apocalypse” (in Tucker; also *PMLA* 98 [1983]: 863–78) considers how the unstable patriarchy of *Idylls*, even as it seeks to punish female transgression of Arthur’s hopelessly ideal laws, projects authority as chastely female: “the Arthurian credo of passionlessness embodies the early Victorian belief in the benevolence and controllability of . . . nature. But just as the Victorians’ famous efforts to suppress female sexuality only succeeded in generating a grim and extensive sexual underground, so Arthur’s naive manipulations of nature conclude in the society of the Round Table being swept away on a great wave of carnality” (213).

Scenes from Julia Margaret Cameron’s classic photographic edition of *Idylls of the King* (1874–75) are worth bringing into class. How—and why—would one go about photographing a work of poetic fiction? Some answers can be found in Helmut Gernsheim’s beautifully illustrated *Julia Margaret Cameron* (1975) and in Victoria Olsen’s “Idylls of Real Life,” *Victorian Poetry* 33.3–4 (1995): 371–89.

## Edward FitzGerald

### The *Rubáiyát* of Omar Khayyám (1859, 1868, 1872, 1879, 1889)

The author was born Edward Purcell, but his whole family took on the name “FitzGerald” on the death of his maternal grandfather in 1818. A graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge, where he became friends with Thackeray and Tennyson, FitzGerald lived the life of a country gentleman, puttering on his estate, sailing, writing letters, and above all making the many free translations or adaptations from Greek, Persian, Spanish, and other languages that he is known for today. He rarely allowed his name on a title page, and was not known publicly as the author of the *Rubáiyát* until 1875. But by 1900, it had become one of the most popular poems in English; it was printed in over 200 editions in the century following its first publication. The first major review of poems, published by Charles Eliot Norton in the U.S., did not appear until 1869, a year after the second edition, but most people agreed with Norton’s conclusion: “It has all the merit of an original production.” In many ways, FitzGerald’s poem anticipates Oscar Wilde’s resolution to take the serious things of life trivially and trivial things seriously.

Like his friend Tennyson, FitzGerald seems to speak to his audience intimately of private feelings on big questions. And as Tennyson had done in *The Lotos Eaters*, he proposes a subversive, drugged inertia as a response to life’s most urgent demands. His self-deprecating tone and penchant for pondering the larger meaning

of life fit in well with the late-Victorian backlash against the moral earnestness of earlier generations. But what is his message, exactly? Is the final effect a longing for rest, certitude, a structure and meaning to life? Or a Paterian affirmation that “experience itself” is all that matters? Stanza 96 circles round to the themes and images of the opening stanzas, mourning the passing of Spring, Youth, the Rose, the song of the Nightingale. But Stanza 99 suggests neither resignation nor a simple quest for understanding; rather, Omar and his love want to “grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire” in order to “shatter it to bits” and then “Re-mould it nearer to the Heart’s Desire!” His form of address to his lover—“Ah Love!”—reminds one of the conclusion to Arnold’s *Dover Beach*, but what does FitzGerald/Omar want to be true to? Wine alone?

Claiming to have toned down the “Drink and make merry” aspects of the original, FitzGerald insisted that his text was not a frivolous one: “Either way, the Result is sad enough: saddest perhaps when most ostentatiously merry.” One might sense in the music of the poem something of this underlying sorrow. The distinctive four-line stanzas of the *Rubáiyát* recall another, equally beloved poem of similar stanza length, similarly constructed around the author’s musings about life, death, and the place of humans in the universe. Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* mournfully fights its way toward Christian orthodoxy even as FitzGerald’s poem flippantly proclaims a *carpe diem* outlook. But both struggle long and hard with mortality and the apparent unknowability of any divine plan, either for individuals or for the entire human race. The aural strain of bridging the symbolic and emotional gap between the rhymes of lines one and four in *In Memoriam* may actually be easier to handle than the gap between lines two and four in the *Rubáiyát*. Tennyson’s opening and closing lines embrace a couplet, just as Tennyson longs to embrace Hallam; but FitzGerald’s triple rhyme makes the unrhymed third line all the harder to bear—it has a lonely individuality, and no mate.

Though he may have had Tennyson’s poem at least partly in mind—he did call the poem “a sort of Consolation”—FitzGerald denied any extenuating symbolism in Omar’s text: “Worldly Pleasures are what they profess to be without any pretense at divine Allegory: his Wine is the Veritable Juice of the Grape: his Tavern where it was to be had: his Sáki [wine bearer] the Flesh and Blood that poured it out for him.” Although he hints that he has ruined his life and reputation with wine, Omar appears to prefer the world of drink to that of sobriety, as in Stanza 94—“Indeed, indeed, Repentance oft before / I swore—but was I sober when I swore?” The poem’s final comment on Wine—“I wonder often what the Vintners buy / One-half so precious as the stuff they sell” (Stanza 95)—reaffirms one of the poem’s underlying themes, that drink offers greater, and surer, insight into “the one True Light” (Stanza 77) than religion. In this sense, the *Rubáiyát* could be seen as a very curious part of the nineteenth-century fascination with “the derangement of the senses” promulgated by Poe, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verlaine, and others.

A good locus for classroom discussion is the “Colloquy of the Pots,” Stanzas 82–90. Note that FitzGerald marked off this section with stars so that it would stand alone, yet he precedes it in Stanzas 77–81 with a discussion of the apparent absurdities of the Bible’s rationale for human existence, including an attack on the

doctrine of predestination. Thus when the pots speak the theological stage is set for their musings on the motivations of their Maker. In his notes to the third and fourth editions, FitzGerald commented: "This Relation of Pot and Potter to Man and his Maker figures far and wide in the Literature of the World, from the time of the Hebrew Prophets to the present; when it may finally take the name of 'Pot theism,' by which Mr. Carlyle ridiculed Sterling's 'Pantheism.'" There are six speakers, and it may be useful to have students offer a precis of each pot's "theology"—what position does each take, what thinkers or doctrines might each one represent? Despite their variety of opinions, the pots all turn eagerly toward the arriving porter and his wine. What's the point? Perhaps that all humans need physical fulfillment, even of a most literal sort, as in food and wine. Or if the wine is to be taken symbolically despite FitzGerald's disclaimer, then perhaps it represents thirst for God's Word or the reanimating infusion of some life-force greater than ourselves. Because Omar's exploration of key religious issues is situated in a foreign culture, English readers would have found themselves able to indulge his ideas without too much threat to their own beliefs, even as they saw Judeo-Christian attitudes relativized by reference to images and ideas shared with other traditions.

Look also at the role played by pots elsewhere in the poem. In Stanza 36, Omar drinks from a vessel that was once a man; in Stanza 37 a pot on the wheel seems to speak to its Potter, and in 38 readers are reminded that in Genesis God made Adam from clay. Thus when the pots speak later on, they are not just metaphors for humans, but human material themselves.

FitzGerald adds in his note that a friend has written him with this corroboration of his "pot theism": "Apropos of old Omar's Pots, did I ever tell you the sentence I found in 'Bishop Pearson on the Creed'? 'Thus are we wholly at the disposal of His will, and our present and future condition framed and ordered by His free, but wise and just decrees. Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? (Rom. ix. 21). And can that earth-artificer have a freer power over his brother potsherd (both being made of the same metal), than God hath over him, who, by the strange fecundity of His omnipotent power, first made the clay out of nothing, and then him out of that?'"

One could opine that all this textual buttressing of pot-and-pan-theism just renders the whole subject ridiculous. Having proposed what he knew would strike readers as an untenable philosophy based on immediate gratification and the rejection of religious doctrine, and then having put this philosophy in the mouths of wine-jars, FitzGerald goes one step further: he uses his notes deliberately and ironically to exaggerate the theological pedigree of his argument. Maybe that is the point—outside of "A Book of Verses underneath the Bough, / A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread—and Thou," all the rest is nonsense.

In Salman Rushdie's *Shame* (1983) the hero is named Omar Kayyam Shakil. The narrator comments: "Omar Khayyam's position as a poet is curious. He was never very popular in his native Persia; and he exists in the West in a translation that is really a complete reworking of his verses, in many cases very different from the spirit (I say nothing of the content) of the original. I, too, am a translated man.

I have been *borne* across. It is generally believed that something is always lost in translation; I cling to the notion—and use, in evidence, the success of FitzGerald-Khayyam—that something can also be gained” (23). Ask students if they sense anything “lost” behind FitzGerald’s “original” translation. What do they think he may have added? What is that “something” that Rushdie thinks “can also be gained” in translation?

A good paper project would be to investigate how FitzGerald’s depiction of Persian leisure squares with other popular Victorian representations of the Islamic world, including the travel books of Eliot Warburton and Alexander Kinglake (see *Perspectives: Travel and Empire*) and the painted images of William Holman Hunt, Edward Lear, and Frederic Leighton. Lear and FitzGerald in particular make a fascinating pair.

## Charles Darwin

### The Voyage of the Beagle (1845)

From *Tierra del Fuego*:

Instructors may wish to assign the selection from Darwin’s *Autobiography* first; even though it was written much later, the story of Darwin’s being chosen to go on the *Beagle* voyage helps prepare students for reading the *Voyage* itself. The *Autobiography* also contains Darwin’s reflection that “the sight of a naked savage in his native land is an event which can never be forgotten,” a remark which may serve as a useful introduction to the Tierra del Fuego section, with its meditation upon the differences between “savage and civilized man.”

The *Voyage* is interesting not only for what it tells about the development of Darwin’s scientific theories, but also as a work of travel and exploration. Have students compare this book with the selections from Burton, Stanley, and Kingsley in the Travel and Empire section. One might also situate Darwin’s first contact with the Fuegians in the context of other well-known moments of “first contact,” such as Columbus’s arrival in the New World, or Montaigne’s essay “Of Cannibals,” or *The Tempest*’s portrayal of the mariners’ encounter with Caliban. In Darwin’s case, the notion of “first contact” is complicated in odd and interesting ways by the fact that the *Beagle* actually carried three Fuegians aboard, with whom Darwin had had daily contact for nearly a year. It is fascinating to see Darwin waver between his perception of Jemmy Button as fully human, and his incredulity that Jemmy could be “of the same race . . . with the miserable, degraded savages whom we first met here.” There is a similar disjunction between Darwin’s description of Fuegia Basket (“a nice, modest, reserved young girl”) and his undisguised horror at the sight of “absolutely” naked women in the rain.

In *Darwin’s Century* (1958) Loren Eiseley claims that the account of the *Beagle*’s departure, and Jemmy’s last signal fire, “contains the pathos of great literature” (265). Indeed, the story of Jemmy Button, a person whose emotions we can comprehend and with whom we can sympathize, works against Darwin’s portrayal of the Fuegians as wretched, abject, sub-human beings. Darwin seems on the brink

of suggesting that the differences between “savages” and “civilized” peoples might in fact be cultural rather than natural or biological. In a footnote, Darwin wrote: “I believe, in this extreme part of South America, man exists in a lower state of improvement than in any other part of the world. The South Sea islander of either race is comparatively civilized. The Esquimaux, in his subterranean hut, enjoys some of the comforts of life, and in his canoe, when fully equipped, manifests much skill. . . . But the Australian, in the simplicity of the arts of life, comes nearest the Fuegian. He can, however, boast of his boomerang, his spear and throwing-stick, his method of climbing trees, tracking animals, and scheme of hunting. Although thus superior in acquirements, it by no means follows that he should likewise be so in capabilities. Indeed, from what we saw of the Fuegians, who were taken to England, I should think the case was the reverse.”

Eiseley quotes from Darwin’s diary: “It was quite melancholy leaving our Fuegians amongst their barbarous countrymen. . . . In contradiction of what has often been stated, three years has been sufficient to change savages into, as far as habits go, complete and voluntary Europeans” (*Charles Darwin’s Diary of the Voyage of H.M.S. “Beagle,”* ed. Nora Barlow [1933], 136).

Despite this apparent insight, Darwin declared in the penultimate paragraph of *The Descent of Man* that he would as soon be descended from a baboon as from “a savage who delights to torture his enemies.” In *Rule of Darkness* (1988) Patrick Brantlinger writes that throughout *The Descent of Man*, Darwin “emphasizes the distance between savage and civilized peoples,” adding that “in general, Darwinism lent scientific status to the view that there were higher and lower races” (187).

In *Victoria’s Year* (1987) Richard Stein has an essay contrasting Darwin’s description of the *Beagle* voyage with Captain Fitz Roy’s, tracing the ongoing debate in their writing (211–35). Stein says that although Darwin initially can scarcely make himself “believe that they are fellow-creatures,” he recognizes that nature has fitted the Fuegians to their environment. This thought, an early speculation on the path to the theory of evolution, presupposes a common ancestor for the educated Englishman and the “savage.” Stein writes that Darwin “is beginning to experience, with some of Kurtz’s ‘horror’ but a far greater measure of pure fascination, that the savage Other is in reality his own double” (224). The notion of savages as animals in fact defines our essential kinship with them—once we have recognized ourselves as animals, too. Stein notes that such an idea stands in stark contrast to Captain Fitz Roy’s view of “savages” as fallen from “some originally perfect form;” he could not accept that different cultures might be at different stages of development. Fitz Roy saw only degradation, where Darwin came to perceive adaptation (the Fall vs. evolution).

In *Open Fields* (1996) Gillian Beer writes that “Darwin’s encounters with Fuegians in their native place gave him a way of closing the gap between the human and other primates, a move necessary to the theories he was in the process of reaching” (67). In a sense, though, the Fuegians raise as many questions as they answer. One that can never be answered is what the experience of being taken to England meant to the three Fuegians themselves. Beer writes that it is “as sentimental to imagine that they enjoyed nothing as that they relished everything and

were grateful for their kidnap. . . . The reader can know *el'lepari, o'rundel'lico*, and *yok'cushlu*, if at all, only under the sign of the their Western sobriquets as York Minster, Jemmy Button, and Fuegia Basket. . . . Trying to understand the sensibility expressed by the British sailors in that act of re-naming the Fuegians . . . is likely to make us register our baffled distance from the shipboard community of the 1830s more intensely than does anything in the rest of Fitzroy's urbane or Darwin's ardent prose" (70).

From *Galapagos Archipelago*:

In *The Flamingo's Smile* (1985) Stephen Jay Gould has a chapter called "Darwin at Sea—and the Virtues of Port" (347–59) in which he cautions us to avoid "the myth of the *Beagle*." Debunking the notion that Darwin miraculously "discovered evolution" by simple observation of natural phenomena in the Galapagos, Gould reminds us that "Darwin functioned as an active creationist all through the *Beagle* voyage" (359); Darwin "did not appreciate the evolutionary significance of the Galápagos while he was there" (348). Indeed, Darwin wrote in 1877 that "when I was on board the *Beagle* I believed in the permanence of species" (350). In *The Voyage of the Beagle* Darwin admits that while in these islands he was told that the tortoises differed, but that he did not "pay sufficient attention to this statement" for he "never dreamed that islands, about fifty or sixty miles apart . . . would have been differently tenanted."

Gould explains that "evolutionists see variation as fundamental, as the raw material of evolutionary change," whereas "creationists believe each species is endowed with a fixed essence" and "variation is a mere nuisance" (353). The distinct species of finches found on the Galapagos were in fact evolutionary descendants of colonists from the mainland. Ultimately, these insights formed the basis of evolutionary theory. The discovery was exciting, but also embarrassing, since Darwin had so utterly failed to realize this on the spot that "he didn't even bother to record or label the islands that had housed his specimens" (353). As a result, "Darwin's finches are not mentioned at all in the *Origin of Species*" (356).

Gould wishes to counter the romantic view of Darwin as a lone genius, and of the process of scientific creativity itself as a matter of sudden flashes of inspiration. Rather, he argues for a vision of science as "a communal activity, not a hermit's achievement" (359). Compare these ideas with Darwin's own memorable image in the *Autobiography* for the difficulty of seeing phenomena that have not been noticed before: on their geological trip to Wales, he and Professor Sedgwick did not notice that they were in a valley formed by glacial action, though "a house burnt down by fire did not tell its story more plainly."

### On the Origin of Species (1859)

One might spend some time in class sketching the state of scientific thought at the time Darwin undertook his *Beagle* voyage, and the conflict between natural theology and natural selection. Our headnote to the Religion and Science perspectives section briefly describes Paley's analogy about the watchmaker (an argument that Darwin ex-

plicitly rejects in his *Autobiography*). For more detail, Tess Cosslett's *Science and Religion in the Nineteenth Century* (1984) anthologizes excerpts from William Paley, Robert Chambers, Hugh Miller, and Darwin himself. Philip Appleman has compiled a useful anthology of "companion readings" ranging from Charles Lyell and Thomas Henry Huxley to Carl Sagan and Noam Chomsky (*Darwin*, Norton Critical edition, [1970], 1979). Our bibliography for the Religion and Science perspectives section includes many titles that would be helpful to the student of Darwin.

In *The Panda's Thumb* (1980) Stephen Jay Gould summarizes the story of publishing the *Origin*; Gould writes that Darwin set forth his theory of natural selection "in two unpublished sketches of 1842 and 1844," then, "afraid to expose its revolutionary implications, he proceeded to stew, dither, wait, ponder, and collect data for another fifteen years" (48). Darwin finally rushed the *Origin of Species* into print when it appeared that Alfred Russel Wallace might preempt him. (The rest of Gould's essay explores the differences between Wallace's position and Darwin's). In her introduction to the Oxford edition of *The Origin of Species* (1996) Gillian Beer outlines various theories as to why Darwin waited so long to publish; her essay also situates the work in its intellectual context and traces the impact of Darwin's ideas on his contemporaries.

Have students look at the paragraph on the struggle for existence, with its description of songbirds "constantly destroying life" and being themselves destroyed by "beasts of prey." To illustrate the shock of this violent depiction of nature, read the famous passages from Tennyson's *In Memoriam* about "Nature, red in tooth and claw" (sections 55 and 56). Although these lines pre-date the *Origin*, they convey the emotional impact of a Darwinian vision of nature, not divinely ordered for mankind's use, but indifferent to human concerns. Darwin's observations about the brutal struggle for reproductive success negate comforting thoughts of a God who is aware of the fall of every sparrow. Nature is not the visible evidence of God's handiwork, but rather an amoral force, "careless of the single life."

Darwin uses vivid images to portray the competition for survival, yet students may find these excerpts rather dry; they may not grasp the larger implications of Darwin's work, and how it was that *On the Origin of Species* raised such frightening questions for the Victorians. By arguing that species change over time, Darwin undermined the belief in a single Creation, as described in Genesis, and thus indirectly cast doubt not only on the truth of Christianity, but even on the existence of a beneficent Creator.

The book shook people's sense of themselves and their place in the divine scheme of things as radically as Copernicus had done in saying that the earth was not the center of the universe. Richard Altick writes: "The ancient metaphor of the great chain of being therefore had to be revised. . . . It gave the impression now of a vertical zoo in a state of eternal flux rather than a structure of classic design raised by the Creator and enduring unchanged to the end of time" (*Victorian People and Ideas* [1973], 229). For many, the result was a profound crisis of faith. Despite the upbeat last sentence of the chapter, most Victorians were *not* "consoled." As Tennyson's lines illustrate, Darwin's vision of nature as a battleground seemed bleak, random, and purposeless.

Look at the excerpt from Edmund Gosse's autobiography, *Father and Son* (Religion and Science perspectives) in which Gosse describes his father's "omphalos" theory. In 1857, in a vain attempt to reconcile Darwin's theories with traditional religion, Philip Henry Gosse proposed that God had created the world with fossils already in the rocks, even though no dinosaurs had ever lived, just as He created Adam with a navel, even though Adam had no mother. Gosse was laughed at for his efforts, but his book suggests the intense resistance to Darwin's ideas.

Another approach to Darwin is taken by Gillian Beer in *Darwin's Plots* (1983) and George Levine in *Darwin and the Novelists* (1988), works which treat the *Origin* as a work of imaginative literature in its own right. Beer's book looks closely at the influence of Darwin on George Eliot and Hardy, while Levine explores the ways in which Darwinian assumptions permeated the culture: "Darwin's vision, his great myth of origins, was both shaping the limits of the Victorian imagination of the real and being tested in the laboratories of fiction as well as in scientific argument" (4). Levine's chapter, "Darwin's Revolution," analyzes how "Darwin's language helped his ideas subversively enter the culture" (95).

Finally, one might discuss the ways in which Darwin's images of natural struggle and survival of the fittest echo metaphors of social and economic competition. Gould believes "that the theory of natural selection should be viewed as an extended analogy—whether conscious or unconscious on Darwin's part I do not know—to the laissez faire economics of Adam Smith. The essence of Smith's argument is a paradox of sorts: if you want an ordered economy providing maximal benefits to all, then let individuals compete and struggle for their own advantages. The result, after appropriate sorting and elimination of the inefficient, will be a stable and harmonious polity" (*Panda's Thumb*, 66). In other words, not God but rather the struggle among individuals produces order. As the title of an essay by Robert M. Young puts it, "Darwinism is Social."

Darwin's ideas have, of course, been much misunderstood and abused, with the notion of "survival of the fittest" used to justify the exploitation of the poor by the rich. Social Darwinism has been used to sanction oppression, war, tyranny, imperialism—after all, Darwin had "proved" that "might is right" (as he himself observed ironically in a letter to Lyell in 1860, quoted in Walter E. Houghton's *Victorian Frame of Mind* [1957], 209). As Altick puts it, "The history of animals, from amoeba to man, gave warrant to the assumption by analogy that cutthroat competition was an ineradicable fact of economic life and that the prizes were reserved for those best equipped to survive—the tough-bargaining employer, the hard-working employee" (*Victorian People and Ideas*, 232).

### The Descent of Man (1871)

In *On the Origin of Species* Darwin carefully avoided placing mankind in the picture; twelve years later he spelled out the implications: those who look at the facts "cannot any longer believe that man is the work of a separate act of creation." Even more explicitly, "man is descended from a hairy quadruped, furnished with a tail and pointed ears."

Students might be interested in a description of the now-legendary confrontation between Huxley and Bishop Wilberforce on the question of descent from a monkey (described briefly in our headnote on Thomas Henry Huxley in the Religion and Science perspectives section, and more fully in many other places, including Robin Gilmour's chapter, "Darwin and Darwinism" in *The Victorian Period*, 1993).

In *The Descent of Man* Darwin used a detached, rational tone to describe the processes of sexual selection in human beings. Sexual selection is not quite the same thing as natural selection. "Sexual selection means the selection of mates by individual animals: the preference for particular variations could cause them to become inherited, at the expense of characteristics that were not attractive to the other sex. This process would account for characteristics that were of no use or survival value to the species" (Tess Cosslett, *Science and Religion in the Nineteenth Century*, 156).

Even people who could accept that human beings were descended from animals found difficulty in accounting for the moral and spiritual qualities of mankind. Darwin argues here that faculties such as conscience derive from the same social instincts that we share with animals; had he our degree of intelligence, a pointer dog would arrive at the same moral conclusions. Such claims could not fail to antagonize many; Tess Cosslett quotes a reviewer of 1872: "We do not see how to reconcile with our Christian faith the hypothesis . . . that our moral sense is no better than an instinct like that which rules the beaver or the bee; that He whom we have been accustomed to regard as the Creator of all things, is a creature of our imagination, and that our religious ideas are a development from the dreams and fears of anthropomorphous apes."

### Autobiography (1876)

Compare the tone and style of the *Autobiography* to Darwin's scientific works; here, the object of study is himself, and he attempts to view his own life with the same dispassionate objectivity that he brought to any other subject. Note the extraordinary statement in the opening paragraph about writing "as if I were a dead man in another world looking back at my own life." One might ask students to reflect on this narrative stance: is it really possible to write about oneself with such detachment? If so, does this defeat the "purpose" of autobiography?

The simile warns us not to expect intimate revelations; Darwin's *Autobiography* is concerned, rather, with tracing the development of his own scientific mind. He apparently regards himself as an example, on a small scale, of the evolutionary process at work: in explaining how he lost his taste for shooting Darwin writes that "the primeval instincts of the barbarian slowly yielded to the acquired tastes of the civilized man."

As a reliable guide to the stages by which Darwin arrived at his theories, the autobiography must be treated with caution: Gould calls it "maddeningly misleading." For example, Darwin recalls his reading of Malthus as a eureka providing the sudden key to natural selection, yet "the notebooks belie Darwin's later recollections—in this case by their utter failure to record, at the time it happened, any special exultation over his Malthusian insight" (*Panda's Thumb*, 64).

In devoting himself so exclusively to science, Darwin gradually lost his capacity to enjoy most aesthetic and emotional pleasures; his mind became “a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts.” (Contrast this with Mill’s belief that it was the discovery of poetry that saved him from being a mere thinking machine.) Like many of his contemporaries, Darwin also lost his faith. These passages in the *Autobiography* make a good introduction to the Religion and Science perspectives section, for they lay out in clear and simple language many of the issues that led to the widespread Victorian crisis of faith. Students may be interested, for example, in a fuller discussion of Paley’s argument from design, and the ways in which Darwin claimed to have refuted it.

Darwin’s wife Emma found certain of his remarks in this section “raw” and shocking, and they were omitted when the *Autobiography* was first published. For example, she disapproved of his reference to the “damnable doctrine” of eternal punishment, and of his comparing the difficulty in throwing off belief in God to that of a monkey ridding itself of “its instinctive fear and hatred of a snake.” The full text did not appear in print until 1958 (in his granddaughter Nora Barlow’s edition of the *Autobiography*, from which our text is taken).

The modesty of Darwin’s self-assessment in the final paragraphs has occasioned much comment. Was it hypocrisy? Or had he so internalized his father’s low opinion of him that, even after spectacularly proving his father’s predictions wrong, Darwin still on some level accepted his father’s estimate? If Darwin—the child stealing fruit from the garden—was an Adam in relation to his uncannily omniscient Father, he went on to undo his “Father’s” creation and re-write the story of Genesis. Possibly he felt both triumphant at this supplanting of the father’s authority, and yet also profoundly ambivalent and full of unresolved anxiety about his relationship to his father.

In “Mr. Darwin Collects Himself” (possibly the best single article on the *Autobiography*) John D. Rosenberg writes: “It is difficult not to see in his theft of fruit from his Father’s garden shades of the primal transgression in Eden. . . . Ancient archetypes are embedded just below the surface of Darwin’s narrative, as if in his own childhood he were naturalizing or secularizing our culture’s central myth of guilt, as he was later to naturalize the central myth of our Beginnings in *The Origin*” (*Nineteenth-Century Lives*, ed. Lockridge, et al. [1989], 88).

In “Darwin’s Comedy: The *Autobiography* as Comic Narrative” (*Victorian Newsletter* 75 [Spring 1989]), Eugene R. August suggests another interpretation: “Darwin created a comic portrait of himself as an unpromising dimwit who evolves into an unlikely hero, a klutzy innocent who confounds the stolid wisdom of the ages” (15). Like the folk hero of traditional comedy, Charles the “troublesome bumbler” redeems himself “by undertaking a perilous journey-quest” that leads first to self-discovery, then to a return “with saving knowledge for humanity” (17). Analyzing the humor throughout the book, August notes that “while Darwin eschewed the sublime and the tragic, he never abandoned the comic” (19).

The note on marriage (published for the first time as an appendix to Nora Barlow’s edition) provides a fascinating glimpse of Darwin’s mind. Note the dis-

tancing use of the second person: “Only picture to yourself a nice soft wife”; “poor slave, you will be worse than a negro”; and “Never mind my boy—Cheer up.” Darwin addresses himself as though he were someone else, and concludes that a wife will be “better than a dog anyhow.”

Have students compare Darwin’s autobiographical writings with his *Biographical Sketch of an Infant* (his eldest son) in *Perspectives: Imagining Childhood*.

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## PERSPECTIVES

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### Religion and Science

This section is designed to introduce students to some of the key debates among the Victorians on the changing roles of science and religion. It was an era when both subjects were passionately interesting to the educated layman, and neither had yet become the exclusive province of the specialist. Just as Darwin read Milton aboard the *Beagle*, so novelists and poets followed scientific and theological developments, and what they read permeated their own creative work. The section can accompany Darwin or Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*, but some or all of the selections can certainly be taught independently. The Macaulay passage provides a starting point for consideration of the wide range of attitudes towards science. Strauss and Colenso will give students an idea what the “Higher Criticism” was, and why it had such an impact on fundamentalist religious beliefs. The selections from Dickens, Brontë, Clough, and Gosse offer a glimpse of Evangelicalism and the hostility it aroused in some quarters (here one might also assign our excerpts from *Praeterita*, both for Ruskin’s portrait of an Evangelical childhood and for his famous description of his loss of faith). Newman recounts the most famous spiritual crisis of the century—although, unlike many of his contemporaries, he was not an *unconversion* prompted by scientific upheavals, but an embracing of Catholicism at a time when the Protestant ascendancy was still strong. For a general overview of the issues, Robin Gilmour has interesting chapters on religion and science in *The Victorian Period* (1993).

#### Thomas Babington Macaulay *from* Lord Bacon (1837)

This excerpt is a fruitful starting point for discussion of nineteenth-century attitudes toward science. Contrast Macaulay’s cheerful confidence in the benefits of science with the anxieties expressed in *Frankenstein* about science getting out of control and unleashing monsters. Was Macaulay’s faith in progress justified? Ask students to think about twentieth-century scientific developments and the controversies surrounding them. On the one hand, there have been extraordinary advances in medicine, computer technology, and space exploration; on the other hand, the atom bomb, Chernobyl, global warming, and chemical warfare make it harder to assume that the fruits of science will always be applied wisely, for the greater good of humanity.

Point out how the piling up of clauses in this paragraph suggests the inevitability, even inexorability, of the “march” of progress (or, given the imagery of “goal” and “starting-post” in the last line, the *race* of progress). Compare this passage with the views on progress that Macaulay voiced in “A Review of Southey’s *Colloquies*” (Perspectives: Industrial Landscape). In contrast to Macaulay’s materialistic notion of what constitutes human happiness, Newman ridiculed the idea that “education, railroad travelling, ventilation, drainage, and the arts of life, when fully carried out, serve to make a population moral and happy” (note on “Liberalism” in *Apologia pro Vita Sua*; qtd. Houghton, 41).

In *Victoria’s Year* Richard Stein points out that Darwin was “reading Macaulay’s essay on Bacon at the time he was revising the *Journal of Researches* [later *The Voyage of the Beagle*] for publication” (233). Did Macaulay’s ideas about progress influence Darwin’s formulation of his theories? (In “Darwin’s Reluctant Revolution,” George Levine writes that while he denied “that natural selection is necessarily progressive . . . Darwin *believed* in progress.” See *South Atlantic Quarterly* 91:3 [1992]: 547).

### Charles Dickens

#### *from Sunday Under Three Heads* (1836)

Dickens returned to the subject of Sunday closings several years later in *A Christmas Carol*, where Scrooge reproaches the second spirit for preventing the poor from getting a hot dinner on Sundays: “I wonder you, of all the beings in the many worlds about us, should desire to cramp these people’s opportunities of innocent enjoyment.” The Spirit may not be personally guilty of seeking Sunday closings, Scrooge admits, but “it has been done in your name.” The Spirit objects that there are those “who lay claim to know us, and who do their deeds of passion, pride, ill-will, hatred, envy, bigotry, and selfishness in our name.”

Contrast Dickens’s conviction of the importance of pleasure (e.g. the Christmas festivities in *A Christmas Carol*) with the Evangelical suspicion of it. The selections from Ruskin’s *Praeterita* and Gosse’s *Father and Son* portray two families intent on Sabbath observance: in the Ruskin household, pictures were covered or turned to the wall on Sundays; Gosse’s father regarded the keeping of Christmas as “nothing less than an act of idolatry” and indignantly threw the servants’ illicit Christmas pudding on the dust heap.

Dickens was hardly alone in his resentment of Evangelical attempts to legislate morality: Frances Trollope detested Evangelicalism and its effects on the arts (see *Travel* perspectives); Walter Besant called it a “Wretched, miserable creed!” and George Eliot wrote in *Middlemarch*: “The Vincys had the readiness to enjoy, the rejection of all anxiety, and the belief in life as a merry lot, which made a house exceptional in most county towns at that time, when Evangelicalism had cast a certain suspicion as of plague-infection over the few amusements which survived in the provinces.”

Dickens is particularly cutting on the ill-concealed class condescension implicit in the proposed legislation. He pulls no punches in spelling out the myriad ways in which the bill is designed to keep “the lower orders” in line; it is social control

dressed up as religion. Infuriated by such sanctimonious hypocrisy, Dickens concludes by asking what could possibly motivate Agnew's self-serving fanaticism? Only "an envious, heartless, ill-conditioned dislike, to seeing those whom fortune has placed below him, cheerful and happy." Compare this reading to the excerpt from *Jane Eyre* below.

**David Friedrich Strauss, (trans. G. Eliot) 1846**  
*from The Life of Jesus Critically Examined (1835)*

This reading may strike students as dry until they realize how new and shocking such ideas were. Have them look at the first two sentences: the very notion of using words such as "mythical," "legendary," and "fiction" in the same breath with the Gospels was offensive to many people. In a brief but useful discussion of Biblical history, Robin Gilmour points out that "myth" was the most contentious term of the Higher Criticism: people were not ready to accept the notion "that an episode in the Bible could be both fictional (i.e. unsupported by history and science) and . . . also be a true embodiment of genuine religious insights." Strauss's work thus led to "a predictable outcry," for he did not accept miracles, found the Gospel narratives unreliable, and worked to discover the historical Jesus, an entirely human figure. That Jesus was not the Messiah did not, for Strauss, "invalidate Christianity, for the ethical teachings remained as well as the profound symbolic truth about human destiny expressed in Christ's life and death" (*The Victorian Period* [1993], 55).

Richard Altick also has several pages on the Higher Criticism; he writes that the higher critics regarded the Old Testament not as divinely inspired "but as a mixed bag of human documents—tribal histories, genealogies, digests of laws, erotic songs, biographies, and folk myths . . . quite fortuitously assembled, and endowed long after the fact with divine authority." As for the Gospels, they "comprised several versions of a biography of a historical figure named Jesus whom an early group of disciples believed to be the Son of God. . . . Thus the New Testament was a record of a particularly memorable episode of hero-worship in Hebrew-Roman times. In brief, the Bible was not what it was taken to be, the pure Word of God and from Genesis to Revelation the infallible factual basis of Christian faith." As for Strauss, "he himself concluded that the abiding value of the Bible resided not in its 'facts' . . . but in its character as a body of symbol and myth. . . . Stripped of its vulnerable historicity, Scripture retained its spiritual and ethical significance" (*Victorian People and Ideas* [1973], 220–21).

Students may find helpful some explanation of Christian typology, the practice of seeking parallels between events in the Hebrew bible and the Christian gospels, and arguing that the earlier events foreshadow the later. Far from seeing these parallels as evidence of divine providence dropping hints to prepare the world for the Messiah, Strauss argues that "when we find details in the life of Jesus evidently sketched after the pattern of [Hebrew] prophecies and prototypes, we cannot but suspect that they are rather mythical than historical." In other words, the gospel writers shaped the story of Jesus's life so as to reflect earlier stories—men, not God, are the authors of the scriptures.

Have students read Clough's *Epi-strauss-ium* for a contemporary commentary on Strauss.

### Charlotte Brontë *from Jane Eyre (1847)*

Victorian novels are full of caricatures of Evangelical clergymen, from Chadband in Dickens's *Bleak House* to Obadiah Slope in Trollope's *Barchester Towers*. But the worst is undoubtedly Brocklehurst, a real-life figure whom Brontë had good reason to detest. Yet it is worth pointing out, as Richard Altick does in *Victorian People and Ideas* (1973), that since "fanaticism and absurdity always make good copy," we may have a somewhat exaggerated image of Evangelicalism based on these fictionalized portraits (178). Not everybody was a hypocrite or an extremist: "there were plenty of Evangelical families who laughed and played," and Evangelicals were responsible for much real and useful social reform (e.g. abolishing flogging, opposing slavery). Gilmour also has a helpful discussion of Evangelicalism in *The Victorian Period*, 71ff.

Students may be amused by Brocklehurst's resemblance to the Big Bad Wolf ("What a face he had . . . what a great nose! and what a mouth! and what large prominent teeth!"), and horrified by the sadistic threat of hellfire and damnation with which he torments Jane. His hypocrisy emerges in his praise of the Psalm-reciting little boy, whose insincerity earns him extra ginger-nuts. One might also tell students about the comic episode later in the novel, where Brocklehurst allows his own daughters to curl their hair, but forbids the Lowood schoolgirls to wear curls—even natural ones! His daughters appear "splendidly attired in velvet, silk, and furs" immediately after he has reproved the headmistress for allowing the charity girls more than one change of clothes a week. These incidents underline the complacent snobbery of a certain sort of insufferable Evangelical, focused on the moral reform of those "beneath" him socially; thus Brocklehurst emphasizes Jane's dependent position, and calls Mrs. Reed (Jane's own aunt) her "excellent benefactress." As in the proposed Sabbath laws so bitterly opposed by Dickens, religion is used to reinforce class distinctions and keep inferiors properly "humble."

### Arthur Hugh Clough

Although he died at 42 after a fairly undistinguished career, Clough (pronounced *cluff*) was in the thick of things during his short life: he was Dr. Thomas Arnold's star pupil at Rugby; he was Matthew Arnold's best friend at Oxford; he married a cousin of Florence Nightingale's; he was good friends with Carlyle, Emerson, and Tennyson; he was the subject of Arnold's famous elegy, *Thyrsis*. American students might be interested to learn that as a boy Clough lived for several years (1823–29) in Charleston, South Carolina, where his father worked as a cotton merchant. Most of his poetry was not published until after his death.

*Dipsychus* means "of two minds" and the title conveys Clough's own unsettled state of mind on religious questions: he seemed unable either to reject Christianity or to embrace it fully. This quintessentially Victorian tension emerges everywhere

in his poetry: note the negative formulations expressive of doubt in the lines “It may be that in deed and not in fancy, / A hand that is not ours upstays our steps” (from *Poems*, 409).

But if he freely confessed his own uncertain agnosticism, Clough was nonetheless wryly observant of the hypocrisies of others, as *The Latest Decalogue’s* satire of money-grubbing Pharisees makes plain. Note the resolutely practical nature of these revised Commandments—no wasted effort or energy, just a steady focus on the main chance, on ends not means. Students will appreciate the dry humor: “Thou shalt not steal; an empty feat, / When it’s so lucrative to cheat.” Compare this ironic exposé of the materialist and self-serving aspects of Evangelicalism with Dickens’s and Brontë’s attacks. “*There Is No God*,” the *Wicked Saith* is similarly knowing and humorous about the complacency of those who are well-off.

*Epi-strauss-ium*, of course, refers to David Friedrich Strauss, author of *Das Leben Jesu*, and students who have read Strauss will be amused at Clough’s mock-horror: “Matthew and Mark and Luke and holy John / Evanished all and gone!” Clough wrote to his sister in 1847 that the contemporary furor over Strauss was an overreaction: “I do not think that doubts respecting the facts related in the Gospels need give us much trouble.” The poem seeks to capture the public dismay but also the poet’s reassurances. Earlier, reverential attitudes toward the four Gospel writers, or evangelists, have punningly “evanished” in the light of common day. The sun, the light of God’s truth, when rising in the east helped color their “gorgeous portraits” as it shone through stained glass (“pictured panes”). Now setting in the west, it shines directly through plain glass. The “luster” on the Gospels is lost, but Clough suggests that the Church is now “more sincerely bright” for this naked Straussian light of inquiry. As proof, he concludes that the Son/Sun of God (“the Orb”) continues visible in the heavens. The allusion in the poem’s title (which means “On Strauss-ism”) to Spenser’s *Epithalamium* (“On the Marriage-bed”) gives an intertextual clue to the poem’s origin, imagery, and outlook. In Psalms 19:1–6, the sun is both bridegroom (Spenser) and proof of God’s existence (Clough): “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. . . . In them he hath set a tabernacle for the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber.” For close readings of these and other poems by Clough, see Anthony Kenny’s *God and Two Poets: Arthur Hugh Clough and Gerard Manley Hopkins* (1988).

### John William Colenso

#### *from* The Pentateuch and Book of Joshua Critically Examined (1862–1879)

Colenso can usefully be paired with Strauss as another example of the sort of biblical criticism that caused enormous controversy in the nineteenth century. A fellow mathematician, J. B. Young of Belfast University, implied that Colenso must be crazy: “If Bishop Colenso be really in a condition of mind which renders him fully accountable for what he writes (and there is reason to suspect otherwise), then we say that a more reprehensible instance of scientific *guesswork*, deliberately promulgated as established scientific truth, has rarely been witnessed” (qtd. in Michael Brander’s *The Victorian Gentleman* [1975], 114).

In “Colenso’s ‘Intelligent Zulu’: A Rhetorical Trick?” (*Victorians Institute Journal* 11 [1982–83]: 33–43) Ben Varner argues that the notion that Colenso’s doubts were suddenly triggered by the innocent questions of a Zulu was merely a clever rhetorical device. “The clear implication is that if an intelligent but untutored Zulu native found these biblical stories impossible to believe, then the inhabitants of one of the most cultured nations in the world could hardly assent to them.” Colenso, in fact, had a long history of unorthodox views and involvement in controversies: for example, in 1855 he’d published a book which “seemed to condone the Zulu practice of polygamy.” The Zulu himself, William Ngidi, apparently held perfectly conventional beliefs.

Varner quotes some hilarious Victorian limericks about Colenso that demonstrate the currency of the story:

A Bishop there was of Natal  
 Who took a Zulu for his pal.  
     Said the Kaffir, “Look here,  
     Ain’t the Pentateuch queer?”  
 And converted the Lord of Natal.

There once was a Bishop of Natal  
 Whose doubts on the Deluge were fatal;  
     Said the infidel Zulu,  
     “D’you believe this—you fool, you?”  
 “No, I don’t,” said the Bishop of Natal.

**John Henry Cardinal Newman**  
*from Apologia Pro Vita Sua (1864)*

Even students for whom the religious issues in the *Apologia* remain obscure might be intrigued by Newman’s description of his childhood vision of himself: “I thought life might be a dream, or I an Angel, and all this world a deception, my fellow-angels by a playful device concealing themselves from me, and deceiving me with the semblance of a material world.” In essence, the young Newman was raising the question of human identity; as he put it elsewhere in the *Apologia*, “Who can know himself, and the multitude of subtle influences which act upon him?” It is the fundamental question at the heart of every autobiography.

For many Victorians reason and faith were at loggerheads (think of Ruskin hearing the clink of the geologists’ dreadful hammers “at the end of every cadence of the Bible verses”). But Newman professed himself untroubled by the contradictions that were keeping his contemporaries awake at night: “Many persons are very sensitive of the difficulties of Religion . . . but I have never been able to see a connexion between apprehending those difficulties . . . [and] doubting the doctrines to which they are attached.” Newman distrusts reason, for if reason can convince you to believe, it can as easily convince you *not* to believe: reason tends “towards a simple unbelief in matters of religion.” Faith, therefore, must be beyond reason.

Newman's vision of a fallen world is striking: since he is more certain of the existence of God "than that I have hands and feet," he is filled "with unspeakable distress" to see no evidence of God in the world of men: "If I looked into a mirror, and did not see my face, I should have the sort of feeling which actually comes upon me, when I look into this living busy world, and see no reflexion of its Creator." It is a remarkable image, worth spending time on in class, and it suggests the essentially personal—some might say egotistical—nature of Newman's religious belief. The self must prove the existence of God, since the world so obviously doesn't (Newman was unpersuaded by Paley's "argument from design" in *Natural Theology*; he refers to "the tokens so faint and broken of a superintending design"). One might set Newman in the context of the Romantic stress on the individual self in reaction to eighteenth-century rationalism.

Newman was not a liberal; he did not share Macaulay's faith in human progress and the unlimited capacities of human reason to solve our problems. He believed that mankind is in a fallen and sinful state, and he saw "the defeat of good, the success of evil, physical pain, mental anguish, the prevalence and intensity of sin" as "a vision to dizzy and appal." He can only conclude that "either there is no Creator, or this living society of men is in a true sense discarded from His presence." He argues therefore that "if there be a God, *since* there is a God, the human race is implicated in some terrible aboriginal calamity."

Newman is defending himself against a charge of untruthfulness, but he is also, in a broader sense, defending his conversion to Catholicism. (His conversion was gradual, not sudden and dramatic; in fact, the actual moment is omitted entirely from the *Apologia*.) Thus he is led to defend the Catholic Church, and particularly its doctrine with regard to papal infallibility, which Protestants found especially hard to swallow. Newman, however, calls it "a provision, adapted by the mercy of the Creator, to preserve religion in the world, and to restrain that freedom of thought . . . and to rescue it from its own suicidal excesses." Infallibility is "a working instrument . . . for smiting hard and throwing back the immense energy of the aggressive, capricious, untrustworthy intellect."

Students who wish to know more about the *Apologia* might begin with David DeLaura's Norton Critical edition (1968), Walter Houghton's *The Art of Newman's Apologia* (1945), and Blehl and Connolly's collection of essays, *Newman's "Apologia": A Classic Reconsidered* (1964). More recent collections include Ker and Hill's *Newman After a Hundred Years* (1990), Block's *Critical Essays on John Henry Newman* (1992), and Magill's *Discourse and Context: An Interdisciplinary Study of John Henry Newman* (1993).

### Thomas Henry Huxley *from Evolution and Ethics* (1893)

Huxley may have been "Darwin's bulldog," but he also voiced late-nineteenth-century fears about where evolution might lead. Selective breeding? Degeneration of the species? In *The Time Machine* (1895) H. G. Wells (who was Huxley's student) imagined a future in which human beings had devolved into two distinct species, the decadent Eloi and the cannibalistic Morlocks who feed off them. *Brave New*

*World* (1932), written by Huxley's grandson, Aldous Huxley, seems to dramatize a scenario envisioned in *Evolution and Ethics* by depicting an authoritarian future in which selective breeding is the law.

*Evolution and Ethics* opens with a vision of nature, apparently unchanging, but in reality in constant flux. As Darwin had already shown, the living world is in a perpetual struggle for existence. Huxley then draws a distinction between the processes of nature and the artificial works of man, such as the creation of a garden: nature is antagonistic towards that garden, in the sense that "if the watchful supervision of the gardener were withdrawn" natural forces would overrun and eventually destroy it. He then draws an analogy between the garden and a settlement of English colonists who must similarly "conquer or be vanquished" in the struggle for existence. Human morality, as expressed in maxims such as the golden rule, has nothing whatsoever to do with this cut-throat competition for survival: evolution is unconcerned with ethics. The golden rule amounts to a "refusal to continue the struggle for existence." As Huxley memorably formulates the question: "What would become of the garden if the gardener treated all the weeds and slugs and birds and trespassers as he would like to be treated, if he were in their place?"

Thus, although mankind is part of nature, we are inescapably at war with it. Survival of the fittest refers only to those who are best adapted to the environment; it has nothing to do with those who are morally superior. Evolution demands self-assertion; ethics demand self-restraint. As Huxley says elsewhere in the lecture, ethics aim "not so much to the survival of the fittest, as to the fitting of as many as possible to survive."

The notion that moral conduct—not extirpating the "unfit" among us—runs counter to the very evolutionary processes of adaptation that ensure our survival as a species raises deeply troubling questions. One might wish to bring up twentieth-century issues such as Hitler's desire to breed a master race, or current debates about the rationing of medical care and the wisdom of allowing very sick infants to survive. At the very least, Huxley's lecture serves as a caution against a naive and optimistic faith that evolution is synonymous with progress.

For further reading, see the introduction and essays in James Paradis and George C. Williams's edition of *Evolution and Ethics* (1989).

### Sir Edmund Gosse *from Father and Son* (1907)

Even if one has time to teach nothing else from this perspectives section, this excerpt can be read in conjunction with *Origin of Species* to give students a sense of the extreme resistance Darwin's theories met in some circles. Look at Gosse's use of the language of science ("test," "experiment") in the comic description of worshipping the chair: even as a child, Gosse employed scientific methods to test the claims of religion—in contrast to his father, who asserted the infallibility of revelation even at the cost of rejecting a lifetime of patient scientific observation. Students who are intrigued by Philip Henry Gosse's theory might wish to read the original: *Omphalos: An Attempt to Untie the Geological Knot* (1857).

These passages also suggest what it meant to grow up in an Evangelical household; here, one might compare Gosse to Ruskin, and also look at the excerpts from Dickens and Brontë. The Evangelical distrust of art shaped many a Victorian upbringing, but perhaps nowhere is it so memorably depicted as here, where the book-loving child is sternly kept from the knowledge of any form of story. Gosse was eleven years old before he discovered the existence of fiction, and he described the shock and intoxication as like being given “a glass of brandy neat.”

One of the best articles on Gosse is Vivian and Robert Folkenflik’s “Words and Language in *Father and Son*,” *Biography* 2 (1979): 157–174. In *The Victorian Self: Autobiography and Biblical Narrative* (1989) Heather Henderson has a chapter on the autobiographer as idolater in Gosse. Those with an interest in autobiography, or in portraits of Victorian childhood, might compare our excerpt from *Father and Son* with *Sartor Resartus*, Mill’s *Autobiography*, *Aurora Leigh*, Newman’s *Apologia*, Darwin’s *Autobiography*, *Praeterita*, and *Cassandra*, all linked by themes of education, conversion, vocation, and self-realization.

## Robert Browning

Browning labored to find—or create—a reading public that would take pleasure in his strange viewpoints and unexpected juxtapositions of sounds and images. With his grotesque details and sudden disjunctions, his eccentric characters and their tangled motivations, Browning prepared the way for the discontinuities of twentieth-century poetry. But his demanding allusions, twisted, elliptical syntax, and abrupt transitions make for difficult reading: John Ruskin complained to Browning, “The worst of it is that this kind of concentrated writing needs so much *solution* before the reader can fairly get the good of it, that people’s patience fails them, and they give the thing up as insoluble.”

George Eliot warned that one should expect no “drowsy passivity in reading Browning.” His poetry “requires the reader to trace by his own mental activity the underground stream of thought that jets out in elliptical and pithy verse” (*Westminster Review*, 1856). Extending this insight, Oscar Wilde claimed that “It was not thought that fascinated him, but rather the processes by which thought moves” (*The Critic as Artist*).

Browning gets at that thought by presenting his characters in intense moments where self-justification mixes with anger, fear, and daring self-betrayal. By turns cramped, explosive, lyric, or commonplace, Browning’s language simultaneously builds and exposes character through apparently chaotic self-revelation. The first nineteen lines of *The Bishop Orders His Tomb* are a masterpiece of disorganized thinking about the Bishop’s children, his mistress, his rival Gandolf, his anxieties about death, and his concern for eternal life—in the form of a marble tomb. It is a stream-of-consciousness barrage three-quarters of a century before Joyce’s *Ulysses*, winding up in cacophony: “Shrewd was that snatch from out the corner south / He graced his carrion with, God curse the same!”

Claiming that Browning's ability to invent and project character through idiosyncratic language was second only to Shakespeare's, Wilde wrote: "If Shakespeare could sing through myriad lips, Browning could stammer through a thousand mouths." Some good examples of this awkward, illuminating density of speech include the schizophrenic end of *Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister* ("Ave Virgo! Gr-r-r—you swine!"); stanza 12 of *Childe Roland*, remarkable for the way the thickly textured sound evokes the mutilated landscape; the deliberate contraction of swelling hopes in alternate lines of *Love Among the Ruins*; and the irresolute fits and starts that conclude *Andrea Del Sarto*.

James Mason's chilling, urbane reading of *My Last Duchess*, included on our audio CD, beautifully brings out the intense drama of Browning's verse. For Wilde, Browning was not so much a poet as "a writer of fiction, the most supreme writer of fiction, it may be, that we have ever had. His sense of dramatic situation was unrivalled." The monologues are often delivered in outrageous situations: Porphyria's lifeless head resting on her lover's shoulder, the Duke negotiating for the hand of his next duchess. The dramatic monologue forces the reader into uneasy intimacy with these speakers—we become "you," listening just inches away. The form enables these speakers to solicit our sympathy, and causes us to suspend evaluation and moral judgement.

What does Browning want us to learn about them, and how does he expect us to react? Is Porphyria a representative victim of male possessiveness and anxiety about female sexual freedom? Students alert to the class barriers that divide Porphyria and her lover (sketched in lines 24–29) may decide that Porphyria was trifling with the speaker, and got what she deserved—or at least what she may literally have been asking for, to be his forever. Similarly the Duchess may be an innocent victim of brutal patriarchy, or else have boldly flirted in front of the Duke once too often. A formalist reader might point out that Browning is the artist who has drawn her "as if she were alive" and argue that her vitality cannot be contained by the Duke's masterful rhetoric, even in death. Although the Duke now limits access to the image of the duchess and boasts about his other artistic possessions (lines 54–56), he cannot control curiosity about her portrait's wayward gaze, its "spot / Of joy," any more than he controlled his wife while she lived. But then should Fra Lippo Lippi, with his roving eye, be seen as a laudable contrast to the Duke, as the masculine embodiment of the duchess's fatal freedom? Is he a courageous artist struggling to bring a hidebound medieval church into an enlightened Renaissance awareness of the true spirituality of the flesh? Or is he a sensual, self-serving opportunist who now hypocritically paints "saints and saints / And saints again" (48–49) for an equally unenlightened secular patron?

Our access to the cagey ventriloquist behind these characters is rigorously controlled. The poet is very much like his dominating Duke: "since none puts by / The curtain I have drawn for you, but I." Whatever Browning's speakers confess, their words appear to be grounded as much in the historical moment as in the speakers' or poet's own personal passion. Hence the difficulty not only in deciding what the author thinks of his creations as individuals, or the Renaissance as an epoch, but also what the poem might be implying about Victorian manners and mores. Is Browning

suggesting that the Duke and Porphyria's lover are intentionally provocative versions of how Victorian men treat women? Browning's audience was divided over his ability to communicate effectively, and even his wife wished he would step out from behind the mask. Perhaps the quest for interpretive control within the poems—by dukes, lovers, painters, knightly questors—is meant as a self-revelatory but cautionary tale of Browning's own artistic and sexual searching. Maybe the point is that all forms of domination or control are misguided, morally wrong, and ultimately impossible.

Reflecting on the active but uncomfortable role of the reader in these poems, John Maynard singles out the last line of *Porphyria's Lover* as emblematic of the responsibility Browning places on us. The assertion that "God has not said a word" underlines "the interpretive problem at the very beginning of the Browning dramatic monologue: God doesn't offer definitive reader responses and interpretations. In his silence, we will rush forward with our own interpretations. But if God won't, who will authorize the one standard reading?" ("Reading the Reader in Robert Browning's Dramatic Monologues," *Critical Essays on Robert Browning*, ed. Mary Ellis Gibson [1992], 74). Students might also look ahead to Swinburne's lurid sex-and-murder poem *The Leper*, which deliberately picks up on *Porphyria's* strategy of daring God and reader to judgment.

In effect, however, Maynard says, the reader occupies a non-theistic "third position" between the poem's speaker and its auditor: "the envoy's silence and compliance in *My Last Duchess* allow us to objectify and criticize our own tendency merely to submit to the strength of the Duke's rhetoric—thus provoking us to a middle position, combining respect for hypnotically powerful language and moral distance and criticism" (75). Collectively, the monologue's readers produce a multiplicity of responses that further constructs, in our own images, the intricate personality who addresses us.

Yet for all that reading Browning is a sort of mirror experience, there is very much an actual, historically minded poet writing these portraits into being, shading the light in certain ways. As the poems show, love, art, class, money, and sexual or artistic control are recurring topics in Browning. But the monologue form turns them into moving targets, figured dynamically as a struggle between past and present, between textual and actual life. Taking *The Bishop Orders His Tomb* as his prime example, Herbert Tucker usefully distinguishes between two historicisms in Browning's dramatic monologues—the first, such as impressed Ruskin (see opening footnote), reads the individual speaker as a manifestation of his historical moment (all the paraphernalia of Renaissance greed, classicism, ambition, amid a Christian outlook), while the second explores "the truth of subjective experience" (what Elizabeth Barrett admired when she called *The Bishop* a poem "full of the power of life"). The first historicism is "what history means" while the second historicism is "how history feels" ("Wanted Dead or Alive: Browning's Historicism," *Victorian Studies* 38 [1994]: 25).

Bringing these two perspectives together, Tucker focusses on line 13, the bishop's query to himself and to his "nephews:" "Do I live, am I dead?" The Bishop is worried about his corporeal status, but he is also asking about his own fictive life as a character in literature. Tucker argues that "through these auditors

the poem makes its appeal to a different posterity: the one comprising its readers, whose curiosity or fascination with the past mirrors the Bishop's bemusement or obsession with the future. Our desire for the past that was the Bishop's matches, and so to speak fulfills, his desire for the future that will be ours" (32). Thus the poem is both literally and figuratively about the desire for burial and resurrection—of the past (for us) and of the future (for the bishop). In an interesting essay on "Browning's Corpses," Carol Christ points out a number of poems that reveal Browning's "need to appropriate the dead body to the use of the living" (*Victorian Poetry* 33.3–4, 399).

The lump of lapis lazuli (lines 40–48) is a key image in the Bishop's transhistorical scenario. "Bedded" in fig leaves, buried, dug up, and set between the bishop's (statue's) knees as a symbol of the omnipotency of God, the stone is further complicated by associations with the fertile, nurturing Madonna, and martyred, symbolically castrated John the Baptist. It functions as an image of rebirth for the bodily Bishop and his sexuality, but also for classical learning, for the unearthing of new life and the construction of a glorious tomb to mark the end of an old one. For the Bishop, the tomb is eternal life, and he is literally dying to become his own monument, an iffy effigy which turns from marble to gritstone to text before the reader's eyes. As Elizabeth Barrett wrote to the poet in 1845: "You force your reader to sympathize positively in his glory in being buried!"

Even as he explores historical attitudes and timeless literary themes, Browning is also interested in contemporary Victorian parallels. In contrast to Pugin, Carlyle, Ruskin, Tennyson, and Morris, all of whom are entranced by the Middle Ages as a model for social and cultural reform, Browning appears to revel in the corruption and worldliness of the Renaissance. Is it because it seems a time like his own? Does Browning, like Ruskin in *Stones of Venice*, see Victorian Britain on the verge of a moral and political decline? Or does the era's exuberance outweigh its immorality? Browning went beyond suggesting a merely general relevance for *The Bishop Orders His Tomb*: trying to sell the poem to its first publisher in 1845, he wrote that it was "just the thing for the time—what with the Oxford business" (a reference to the Tractarian Movement at Oxford University).

*Love Among the Ruins* and *Two in the Campagna* would also be good poems to consider when addressing Browning's uses of the past. Both are love lyrics whose dramatic monologue form renders them unreliable as professions of pure affection. In the first poem love is counterpointed to yet allied with empire, whose glory is in turn connected to gold. The awkwardly short even-numbered lines truncate the ambition, the emotion, the "plenty and perfection" (line 25) that build in the long lines preceding them, thereby evoking the empire's reduction to a few broken stones. The woman waiting in the turret is a Lady of Shalott figure, held motionless till the arrival of the narrator-lover, who perhaps glories in his own power no less than in the civilization he condemns. After all, who is he talking to here? Is he boasting to male friends? (The mobile male narrator and the waiting woman also appear in *Meeting at Night* and *Parting at Morning*).

A similar undercutting of emotion occurs in *Two in the Campagna*. The old tomb in stanza 3 and the ghost of Rome in stanza 5 connect the speaker's fleeting

love to the vanished empire, suggesting that his rejection of the earth-bound woman is historically inevitable. Meanwhile, the narrator pursues his free, darting intellect into the ether, transcending (or having satisfied) the worldly passion of “the good minute” (line 50). Both poems can be compared to Rossetti’s *The Burden of Nineveh* as reflections on what builds and destroys empires or love affairs, and what sort of things, such as art, might outlast them.

Most of the poems included here can be construed as being about “maleness,” as assertions of masculinity in which quests for verbal, artistic, social, or intellectual control of a situation are tied up in a sexual, or sexualized, power struggle. The Duke, the Bishop, Porphyria’s Lover, Childe Roland, Fra Lippo Lippi, and Andrea Del Sarto all define themselves through their imagined standards of male behavior and their ability to construct in life or art a place for themselves in a man’s world. Critics have long pointed to Browning’s frustration that he was unable, before or after marriage, to make a living wage in the marketplace. In *Dared and Done: The Marriage of Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning* (1995) Julia Markus explores some of the crueler ironies of his position: while living comfortably, Browning’s parents had little money to spare because his father had refused to profit from the family’s slave-dependent business in the West Indies. But the only way Browning could afford to flee to the continent with Elizabeth was by living on *her* inheritance from the extensive Barrett family sugar plantations in Jamaica. Both poets were painfully aware of the moral compromise involved. See Markus’s chapter, “The Runaway Slave,” 88–115.

Browning’s uneasiness about the financial insecurities of the artist emerges in both *Fra Lippo Lippi* and *Andrea Del Sarto*. Herbert Sussman argues that, as compared to Tennyson’s or Arnold’s depiction of the artist’s world as romantic, passive, and feminized, Browning projects an artistic “manliness” defined by sexual and commercial activity: “Lippo exemplifies the ‘successful’ artist not merely because he has moved from medieval formalism to a more modern sacred realism. This formal ‘progress’ is also inseparable from his moves from the patronage of the Church to that of a merchant prince and from the imprisoning male celibacy of the monastery to energetic heterosexual activity. Within the gendered, historicist categories of mid-century aesthetics, this highly sexed artist-monk represents the possibility of creating a popular realist religious art while maintaining a truly ‘manly’ gender identity” (“Browning and the Problematic of a Male Poetic,” *Victorian Studies* 35 [1992]: 189).

Yet, as Sussman points out, “the conditions of artistic production within a mercantile society generate new constraints upon male desire” (192). Lippo works long hours for his “master” (the term Victorians used for factory owners), fulfilling repetitive, moralistic commissions (lines 47–49). Is his escape to the brothel the inevitable and necessary consequence of artistic self-prostitution? Is Browning using Lippo to sanction the Victorian double standard, his excess of sexual/artistic energy needing “natural” release outside his unsatisfying work? *Fra Lippo Lippi* establishes the potent masculine artist only to subvert him; in *Andrea Del Sarto* the protagonist is already married, and thus that much further tangled in the commodification of sexual and artistic energies.

One can read “*Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came*” as a further chapter in the search for masculine and/or artistic self-definition. Notice that the poem opens with uncertainty about the narrator’s honesty: “the working of his lie / On mine.” My lie or my eye? The ambiguity suggests that knight and poet may not be telling the truth about this cryptic quest, in which Roland’s friends have already perished shamefully (stanzas 16 and 17). Is this a poem of deep faith or radical doubt, honor or futility? The nature of the quest seems to depend on the nature of the critic: the blighted (post-industrial?) landscape interests contextualizers, while Freudians see a psycho-sexual journey to the dark tower of *eros* and *thanatos*, and intertextualists may find a nightmarish reworking of Byron’s *Child Harold’s Pilgrimage*. Victorians (and many readers since) regarded the poem as detailing the trials of a bracing spiritual quest. When a friend asked if the poem meant “he that endureth to the end shall be saved,” Browning responded “yes, just about that” (W. C. DeVane, *A Browning Handbook* [1955], 229–231).

Read this way, *Childe Roland’s* blast on the horn could signal Browning’s self-assertion as poet against all odds. One might talk about the poem as a metaphoric journey through Browning’s work, probing (as Roland does with his lance) for answers, endings, or closure. But even then the poem arrives only at its origin, giving narrative “sense” to nonsense words uttered by someone pretending to be crazy (Edgar as “Poor Tom” in *King Lear*). So Browning is speaking like Edgar, or Hamlet, insinuating that there is method to the madness he adopts. It is instructive to compare this strategy to how Tennyson uses a line from *Measure for Measure* to generate *Mariana*. Both poets take a gap in the Shakespearean text and fill it, but Tennyson deepens his character by describing her time alone, waiting for the play to return to her. Browning on the other hand *creates* a whole new character who exists entirely in his own dream—or nightmare—animated and motivated by words outside his world. As with the Bishop’s maunderings, these last words are his only destiny, his verbal attempt to break into fictive life.

Intriguingly, *The Last Ride Together* can be seen as a sort of mini-*Childe Roland*, having a similarly broad range of meaning. It might be an allegory of the poet’s relation to his muse—one Victorian saw it as “the noblest of all Robert Browning’s love poems”—and for Robert Altick it describes the “fulfillment of God’s purpose for man in the simple process of living” (*Victorian Poetry* 1 [1963]: 64). Readers who want to bring the poem down to earth will note that horses are never mentioned. Their ride is sex.

*Caliban upon Setebos* (1864) was written 1859–60, close to the time Darwin’s *Origin of Species* was published. Caliban muses upon the source and meaning of the natural world in a way that bears on Darwin, but he is as much concerned with the evolution of religion and thought as biology and organic form. In “*Upon Caliban Upon Setebos*” Barbara Melchiori argues that physical evolution is not what bothers Caliban. He seems to accept it, based on evidence of fossils: he mentions the newt “turned to stone, shut up inside a stone” (lines 214–15) and does not view this phenomenon as questioning the existence of God. Rather, says Melchiori, Caliban asks, “how did God evolve? And he answers the question by showing the thought processes by which a concept of God could,

or would, come into being" (*Browning's Poetry of Reticence* [1968]; rpt. in *Caliban*, ed. Harold Bloom [1992], 96).

The poet is also concerned with the birth of art, and of human art's uneasy relation to a jealous God's power of creation. Caliban uses reeds to make bird sounds, and imagines his pipe mocking him, saying, as Caliban might say to God: "I am the crafty thing, / I make the cry my maker cannot make / With his great round mouth; he must blow through mine"; he then comments: "Would I not smash it with my foot? So He" (lines 123–26). (Elizabeth Barrett Browning also takes up this topic in *A Musical Instrument*.)

As a shaper of words and maker of music, Caliban is obsessed by the dangerous possibility that God might overhear him, and "hides" himself by avoiding personal pronouns. In his fears, Caliban is rather like his poetic creator, Browning. It was J. S. Mill who said that poetry was not so much heard as overheard, and Mill whose penetrating analysis of the anonymous author of *Pauline* confirmed the poet's desire to mask his lyric utterance. As Melchiori notes, Caliban's sin against Setebos is most obviously his speech, and his anxiety about God hearing him expresses Browning's own uneasiness as a writer: "This poet's fear of offending God by his speech is . . . the simplest reading of *Caliban upon Setebos*, to which the opening quotation from the Psalms gives a clue" (99).

The epigraph—"thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself"—is worth lingering over. Not only does it suggest that Caliban is making God in his own image, and that Browning is audaciously doing the same, but also that Browning is making Caliban in his own image, and that his readers will be caught in a similar stance. In *Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter* (1996) Gillian Beer comments that this "double-faced" epigraph signals a poem that "disturbs any easy developmental patterning": "Ethnocentrism, cultural imperialism, anthropomorphism are jangled in that biblical rebuke" (90). Thus it could be Caliban or God speaking to each other or to us about their or our perceptions of humans, God, or savages—or poets. Beer points out that "Unlike in most of Browning's monologues, there is no dramatized listener within the poem. We are caught into the mind of Caliban and into the brooding reflexivity of his attempt to manage the universe" (91). Wilde grasped the range of Browning's implication when, in the Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, he projected all nineteenth-century readers as Calibans.

## Charles Dickens

### A Christmas Carol (1843)

The *Carol* is sometimes thought of as a sentimental fable about the spirit of charity at Christmas. But students who have read *Past and Present* and a few of the selections in the Industrial Landscape section (particularly Engels and Mayhew) will be better prepared to appreciate the ways in which *A Christmas Carol* "was born out of the very conditions of the time" (Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens* [1990], 407). Through the figure of Scrooge, Dickens was addressing the inadequacy of contemporary attitudes towards the poor or feeble—those whom Scrooge regards as "surplus popu-

lation.” Like Carlyle and Pugin, Dickens was angry about the 1834 Poor Law and the callous Workhouse system (instructors might assign *A Walk in a Workhouse* along with the *Carol*).

Scrooge was not an anomaly; his views were fully in keeping with political and economic theory of the day. Having paid his taxes to maintain the prisons and workhouses, he is quite satisfied that he has fulfilled his obligation to society. Edgar Johnson writes that with the growth of industry in the nineteenth century “political economists had rationalized the spirit of ruthless greed into a system claiming authority throughout society.” Scrooge, he says, “is nothing less than the personification of ‘economic man’” (*Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph* [1952], 256). Profit is Scrooge’s only goal, and he acknowledges no bonds between human beings except those of economic exchange, of what Carlyle had termed the “cash-nexus.”

Carlyle was an enormous influence on Dickens, even a hero to him (see Michael Goldberg’s *Carlyle and Dickens* [1972], 32–44). In *A Christmas Carol* Dickens adapted Carlyle’s call to the Captains of Industry to exercise paternal leadership rather than merely pursuing gain. Scrooge is thus not only a private miser but, more importantly, a capitalist businessman. He and Marley form part of what Carlyle termed in *Past and Present* “a virtual Industrial Aristocracy as yet only half-alive, spell-bound amid money-bags and ledgers.” In awakening to the possibility of becoming a compassionate employer, Scrooge acts out Carlyle’s injunction to “Arise, save thyself, be one of those that save thy country.”

Part of the great popularity of *A Christmas Carol* is that it is a “feel good” story, and readers may sympathize uncritically with Scrooge’s transformation. But teachers might wish to talk about the limitations of benevolent paternalism as a solution to deplorable economic and social conditions.

Another *Christmas Carol* theme that echoes *Past and Present* is human alienation. Scrooge is “solitary as an oyster,” while Carlyle proclaimed that “isolation is the sum-total of wretchedness to man.” Marley has no mourners; Scrooge has no children. Material suffering is not the only consequence of laissez-faire capitalism; Scrooge’s notion that the lives of others are “not my business” illustrates his estrangement from all of humanity. Fezziwig, in contrast, invites everyone to his party, including not merely his own employees and servants, but even the half-starved “boy from over the way.” He is generous with food and drink, but even more importantly, he shakes hands with each guest individually, a gesture suggestive of the social responsibility and enlightened paternalism that Carlyle longed for.

As in so much of Dickens’s work, childhood is a major theme. The impulse to write *A Christmas Carol* grew out of a visit Dickens had paid earlier in 1843 to a “ragged school”: “I have very seldom seen in all the strange and dreadful things I have seen in London and elsewhere, anything so shocking as the dire neglect of soul and body exhibited in these children.” The child-like figures of Ignorance and Want are allegorical representations of the lives of children such as those interviewed by Mayhew and the Parliamentary Commission (see *Industrial Landscape* perspectives).

There are also psychological and autobiographical elements in the depiction of Scrooge’s childhood. The Spirit succeeds in evoking sympathy for another

being, not by showing Scrooge scenes of misery and suffering, but by reminding him of his own lonely boyhood (point out how the description of the solitary boy in the silent schoolroom echoes the psychological landscape of Tennyson's *Mariana*: the mice, the poplar, the creaking door). Scrooge has to recall his deeply repressed past, and to feel for himself, before he can begin to feel for others (though the chapter ends with his snuffing out the spirit's light with an "extinguisher cap"—a striking pre-Freudian image of repression). The unexplained neglect of the boy Scrooge, his virtual abandonment by his family, coupled with his refuge in books and the imagination, suggest that Dickens was tapping into the secret sources of his own inner grief. As Michael Slater puts it, "The longed-for school and the dreadful blacking-factory are deftly merged (with considerable assistance from Tennyson's "Mariana") into one house of desolation" (*Dickens and Women* [1983], 33).

In other ways, too, the grouchy old miser shares surprising traits with the jolly young novelist (his inability to resist a pun, for example); Dickens was perhaps trying to exorcise the fear that his own determination never to be poor again might turn him into a Scrooge. (See Ackroyd's *Dickens* for more on the circumstances of composition of the *Carol*, and on the biographical aspects of Dickens's identification with Scrooge and his preoccupation with money, 407–14).

In addition to its prevailing imagery of cold and fire, *A Christmas Carol* seems to antedate twentieth-century "magic realism" in startling ways. Harry Stone describes how the world inhabited by Scrooge comes to life: "Dickens builds an atmosphere dense with personification, animism, anthropomorphism, and the like. The inanimate world is alive and active; every structure, every object plays its percipient role in the unfolding drama. Buildings and gateways, bedposts and door knockers become sentient beings that conspire in a universal morality. Everything is connected by magical means to everything else" (*Dickens and the Invisible World* [1979], 121).

The most complete discussion of *A Christmas Carol* can be found in Paul Davis's illustrated *Life and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge* (1990). He describes the *Carol* as an essentially urban text that transforms nostalgia for an idealized rural past by reclaiming Christmas for the city. Davis explores the *Carol*'s place in popular culture from 1843 until now, and the history of theatrical representations of it, from Dickens's own public readings through a long line of dramatic adaptations that have constituted a virtual "Carol industry" (215). (Even the Muppets got into the act with *The Muppet Christmas Carol* in 1992.) One reason for its enduring relevance is that "contemporary America, like Victorian England, is two nations" (229); those engaged on both sides of the economic debate in the *Carol* continue to enlist Scrooge on their side.

Instructors who wish to read further might look at the special issue of *The Dickensian*, 89.3 (1993), devoted to *A Christmas Carol*; it includes articles by Kathleen Tillotson, Philip Collins, Edwin Eigner, J. Hillis Miller, and others. Michael Slater's contribution, "The Triumph of Humour: The *Carol* Revisited" (184–92), traces the comic facets of the work, arguing that one way of expressing Scrooge's conversion "might be to say that he begins as a Wit and ends as a

Humorist.” Certainly it would be a shame to focus on the economic and social message of *A Christmas Carol* without taking pleasure in its exuberant jokes and verbal playfulness.

### A Walk in a Workhouse (1850)

Even though it was written several years after *A Christmas Carol* and Carlyle’s *Past and Present*, this essay’s first-hand account of workhouse conditions provides an excellent background for these texts. One might also pair it with the interviews conducted by Mayhew or with the Blue Book reports of the Parliamentary Commission (in the Industrial Landscape perspectives section).

Dickens made a lifelong habit of touring places where the destitute and disadvantaged were incarcerated—prisons, orphanages, hospitals, lunatic asylums—and writing exposés about the conditions he encountered. Most middle-class people steered clear of such places, but Dickens’s investigative reporting brought them vividly before his readers. He published much of this writing in *Household Words*, a journal he had founded in 1850 at least in part to crusade for radical social reform. For further examples of Dickens’s social journalism see *A December Vision*, a collection edited by Neil Philip and Victor Neuburg (1986).

Dickens had already vented his hatred of workhouses in *Oliver Twist* (1837–39), and he would return to the subject in *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–5) where old Betty Higden pleads “Kill me sooner than take me” to the workhouse. In between the two he published *A Walk in a Workhouse* (1850). As this piece demonstrates, Dickens the journalist had a great deal in common with Dickens the novelist. In both themes and language, much of this essay could come straight from the pages of one of Dickens’s novels. There is his abiding concern with social justice, with the plight of the weakest and most neglected members of society. There is his characteristic mixture of pathetic sentiment and ironic anger. There is his restless play of language and imagery. And there is his almost magical ability to animate a scene, so that out of these endless wards of colorless misery emerge the voices of individual paupers.

For example, the scene with which *A Walk in a Workhouse* opens might be straight out of *Macbeth*, with its assembly of ancient paupers, crouching, drooping, leering, and its “weird old women, all skeleton within, all bonnet and cloak without.” The “ugly old crones . . . with a ghastly kind of contentment upon them which was not at all comforting to see” might figure in *Oliver Twist*, just as “the dragon, Pauperism, . . . toothless, fangless, drawing his breath heavily enough, and hardly worth chaining up,” inhabits the same imaginative realm as the *Megalosaurus* with which *Bleak House* begins.

Yet these toothless dragons *are* chained up, and their loss of liberty is one of the pervading themes of the essay. Why should children, guilty only of being poor or crippled, be locked away with no hope of a better future? Why should dying old people, whose only crime is being unfit to go on drudging for a pittance, have to spend their last days in confinement? Although Dickens does not propose concrete alternatives, the thrust of his article is that surely a healthy and sane society could find some better way to provide for these innocents.

Dickens interviews the paupers, asks why the nurse of the Itch Ward is crying, whether the chattering, witch-like old women get enough to eat, whether the feeble old men are comfortable. Like Mayhew and the Parliamentary Commissioners, he records their answers, preserving their idiom and their thoughts on their lives. Obviously their responses are shaped by the questions that have been posed, and by the social gulf between the paupers and their questioner; we can no more get an unmediated glimpse of their inner world than we can of Darwin's Fuegians. Yet even if we see them only through a glass, darkly, certain qualities come through: the humble, even obsequious, note of the aged paupers' gratitude; the mustn't-grumble mentality ("I have no complaint to make, Sir"); the flicker of enthusiasm over the fate of Charley Walters.

Dickens is morally outraged that criminals receive better treatment than the poor. Of the epileptic girl imprisoned with noisy madwomen, he writes: "If this girl had stolen her mistress's watch, I do not hesitate to say she would, in all probability, have been infinitely better off." He observes bitterly that the only way for workhouse boys to improve their lot in life would be "by smashing as many workhouse windows as possible, and being promoted to prison." The workhouse system was administered on the theory that people are indigent because of idleness (rather than unemployment, low wages, etc.), and so they should not be indulged with easy living but spurred to useful activity. See M. A. Crowther's *The Workhouse System, 1834–1929* (1981) and Beatrice and Sidney Webb's *English Poor Law Policy* (1910, rpt. 1963).

Dickens's walk takes him through Dantesque scenes of gloom and suffering. He uses animal imagery to convey the degradation of the inmates: crippled children are lodged in a "kennel" and they slink about "like dispirited wolves or hyaenas." It would be better to be a "big-headed idiot . . . in the sunlight outside" than to be caged up like these castoff youths. The people thus shut away are so numerous as to constitute "groves" of babies, mothers, and lunatics, and "jungles" of men. It takes Dickens two long hours to survey them all.

He takes care to praise where he can: "I saw many things to commend. It was very agreeable . . . to find the pauper children in this workhouse looking robust and well." He notes with pleasure the "two mangy pauper rocking-horses rampant." Yet the very presence of these meager toys is itself a poignant detail; the thought that children might actually try to play in this grotesque setting is painfully incongruous.

The most striking section may be the spectral old men, too inert to reply when spoken to. In a scene reminiscent of Grandmother Smallweed's outbursts in *Bleak House*, they are briefly roused by the interesting topic of death, only to subside into apathy again. Dickens flirts with comedy here, but he's already established that the old men are virtually starving. It is not remarkable that they should be listless, but rather that they should bother to go on living at all. The pathetic yet dignified request to be allowed a bit more fresh air dramatizes the needlessness of their privations—air, after all, is free.

The ability of these old men to endure such a bleak and hopeless existence arouses Dickens's curiosity, and he tries to make a leap of imaginative sympathy into their consciousnesses, wondering "whether Charley Walters had ever de-

scribed to them the days when he kept company with some old pauper woman in the bud, or Billy Stevens ever told them of the time when he was a dweller in the far-off foreign land called Home!"

The essay ends with the burnt child, as it began with the dropped one. As he had done with Tiny Tim, Dickens evokes the potential death of a sick child as the ultimate indictment of a sick society: he looked as if he thought it best, "all things considered, that he should die." Tiny Tim's fate, the Spirit implied, hung in Scrooge's hands; the burnt child's is in the hands of Dickens's readers.

## Elizabeth Gaskell

### Our Society at Cranford (1851)

Perhaps it is Gaskell's apparent switch from the serious social themes of *Mary Barton*, published only three years earlier, that has led many critics to dismiss *Cranford* as a bit of nostalgic fluff. Yet *Cranford* can be situated in relation to the contrasts between past and present, rural and industrial, that animate the work of Carlyle, Pugin, Ruskin, and others. The narrator draws a sharp distinction between Cranford and "the great neighbouring commercial town of Drumble," and repeatedly asks, "Do you ever see that in London?" The question implies the singularity of Cranford's eccentricities, but also a sense of loss, since the eventual dominance of London and all it stands for can hardly be in doubt.

Contemporary readers would easily have seen how out-of-date the Cranford ladies were. For one thing, the story (published in December 1851) is backdated fifteen years: the famous literary quarrel must take place in November 1836 if *Pickwick* is hot off the presses. Fashion provides another clue: they are the last in England to cling to the outdated styles of their youth. The railroad which kills Captain Brown was still very much a symbol of innovation in the 1830s, and Gaskell conveys through many nuances that this is a community on the edge of enormous changes.

For background on the social world the Cranford ladies inhabit, have students read Mrs. Ellis and Mrs. Beeton in the Ladies and Gentlemen perspectives section: Beeton's rules about limiting social calls to a quarter of an hour clarify Miss Jenkyns' advice to the young narrator, and Ellis's notions of female self-sacrifice illuminate the choices made by Gaskell's characters (such as Miss Jessie's devotion to her sister) and yet suggest how surprisingly utopian this fellowship of independent women really was, with no husbands and children to cater to. Florence Nightingale, who relished novels in which the heroines had "no family ties," must have enjoyed this one.

Students who have not yet encountered both Johnson and Dickens will need some explanation of the literary dispute. Johnson, like everything else Miss Jenkyns admires, belongs to the previous century. She has formed her style upon his, and the letters of which she is so proud are elaborate, artificial, and full of multisyllabic words. It is fun to read the extract aloud and translate into more modern English her grand expressions ("communicated to me the intelligence," "quitted," "quondam," "you will not easily conjecture"). Dickens represents the other side of Gaskell's contrast between past and present: he is lively, colloquial, and full of

jokes. His style is popular, not elevated, and Miss Jenkyns is deeply hostile to it, as she is towards all things newfangled.

Since Dickens was the editor of *Household Words*, in which this story first appeared, his reaction to the praise of his own early work is interesting: he insisted that Captain Brown be killed while reading the poems of Thomas Hood instead. Gaskell was annoyed at the change, and reinstated the references to *Pickwick Papers* when she republished the collected sketches as *Cranford*. (She also dropped the final sentence: "Poor, dear Miss Jenkyns! Cranford is man-less now.")

In *Scheherazade in the Marketplace* (1992), Hilary Schor argues that *Cranford* "rewrites marginality to form its own kind of experiment with narrative" (84). Critics "have assumed, simplistically, that Gaskell was only describing from *within* the village life she missed" but in fact the narrator also "becomes a kind of anthropologist, an ethnographer visiting an alien culture" (86). Schor observes that the first number "offers an extended meditation on women and their relationship to male texts" (89), and analyzes the composition of *Cranford* partly in terms of Gaskell's complicated relationship with Dickens. (Schor suggests that having Captain Brown killed while reading *Pickwick* "makes Dickens himself seem the murdering engine").

What does Gaskell mean by calling the ladies of Cranford "Amazons"? Initially, it appears ironic: these women are not fierce in battle but in upholding small gentilities and economies. They may seem quaint, even ridiculous, in their preoccupation with trivial matters, but when put to the test, they display courage and moral integrity. Miss Jessie is heroic, despite her dimples, and Miss Jenkyns forgets her anxiety about the carpet in the face of real tragedy. It is sometimes objected that their self-sufficiency is illusory, that in critical moments they always rely on outside male assistance (e.g. Miss Jessie's fairytale rescue by Major Gordon). But Miss Jessie is quite prepared to go to work and support herself—one could say that she is rewarded, but hardly that she is rescued.

Some see these isolated spinsters and widows as ultimately sterile: they are stuck in a bygone era, and have no future in the form of children. Are they really happily self-reliant single women, regarding men as merely a nuisance, or are they putting a brave face on a dismal situation? In "Gaskell's Feminist Utopia" (1994), Rae Rosenthal maintains that the Amazons "do battle with and defeat the succeeding invasions of patriarchal forces, and . . . ensure the preservation of their utopian society through the education and assimilation of the narrator, Mary Smith" (74). Captain Brown's violent end might seem harsh, but it is necessary for "the future of their utopia" (85), for *Cranford* "is much less innocuous than it first appears" (92). In *Nobody's Angels* (1995), Elizabeth Langland argues that the spinsters are not stagnant and moribund, but brimming "over with engaged life;" they are constantly "creating meaning rather than slavishly following rigid social formulas" for "the very conventions that seem, in the abstract, to bind them, prove enormously flexible in their practice" (123).

Carlyle's paternalist Captains of Industry represent a top-down solution to the evils of the new industrial society; in contrast, Gaskell's feminist Cranfordians represent a very different kind of organic community. They too take care of one an-

other, and are bound by loyalty and compassion, not the cash-nexus—but they manage this without resorting to the brass collar. They practice neither laissez-faire economics nor feudal magnanimity but “elegant economy.” One can read *Cranford* as a celebration of a feminine alternative, or a mourning for its disappearance—just as one can read Captain Brown’s death as the triumph of the Amazons, or the triumph of the modern era, with its railroads and novels by Boz.

## Thomas Hardy

### The Withered Arm (1888)

In *Wessex Tales* Hardy was consciously striving to preserve a record of a way of life that was passing; *The Withered Arm* is set in humble rural surroundings in the years about 1826–32. But Hardy’s rustics enact dramas on the scale of Greek tragedy; in the opening scene the anonymous milkers comment on the lives of the protagonists like a Greek chorus. Hardy himself made the connection in the preface of 1912, writing of “our magnificent heritage from the Greeks in dramatic literature” which had found sufficient scope in a geographical area not much larger than Wessex.

With its portrait of intertwined lives drawing inexorably towards catastrophe, *The Withered Arm* echoes Greek tragedy. But it also echoes the classic triangle of the folk ballad, such as the one where Lord Thomas chooses “fair Annie” over the “nut brown maiden,” who takes her revenge by killing them both. As Kristin Brady points out in *The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy* (1982), Rhoda’s questions about Gertrude “directly invoke the conventions of the ballad or folk tale,” underlining the two women’s “opposing physical, social, and moral attributes: dark and fair, tall and short, strong and weak, poor and wealthy, rejected and beloved” (25). The contrast between the virginal blonde and the passionate dark woman is familiar, but Rhoda and Gertrude are more than stereotypes: Brady describes the “complex interplay” of strength and weakness between the women, who “continually fluctuate between affection and hostility” (25–26). The initial polarity dissolves as Gertrude’s emotional isolation comes to mirror Rhoda’s social isolation.

Unlike *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (written two years earlier), *The Withered Arm* does not make the working out of the man’s destiny its central focus. The choices Farmer Lodge makes—to seduce and abandon Rhoda, to marry Gertrude—set events in motion, but we get scarcely a glimpse of his thoughts and feelings. Our attention is first directed to Rhoda, the spurned woman, jealous of her rival, and then to Gertrude, the insecure newcomer and neglected wife, anxious to recapture her husband’s faded affection. Interestingly, the women are not really enemies: they strike up a friendship, and fate grinds forward to the dénouement *in spite of* their actions, not *because of* them. (Students may argue that on a moral level, this makes the story merely depressing—all the characters are punished far beyond what they have conceivably deserved).

As in Hardy’s novels, the past is inescapable: Lodge ignores his castoff mistress and their illegitimate son—the evidence of his earlier misdeeds—but they blight his new marriage. His wife’s withered arm destroys his desire for her, and he fears their

childlessness “might be a judgement from heaven upon him.” There are no fresh starts in Hardy.

One should ask students about the symbolism of that arm: it is the external sign of Gertrude’s coming-to-consciousness, or loss of innocence, as well as of her husband’s impotence. The arm dramatizes the power of the unconscious, for while Rhoda gives up any conscious desire to harm Gertrude, her unconscious is clearly working overtime. As Brady puts it, “the power of Rhoda’s mind over her rival is so strong that it can only be expressed in an image which challenges belief” (23). On a psychological level, the story is set up so as to fulfill *both* women’s deepest wishes: the contrived coincidence of the ending enacts Gertrude’s suppressed longing to erase her husband’s past, embodied in his son.

Hardy’s reliance on elaborate coincidences has troubled many readers. In *Thomas Hardy in Our Time* (1995) Robert Langbaum argues that Hardy sacrifices verisimilitude “to set up highly concentrated scenes that permit the explosive revelation of internal states of being. . . . Hardy’s coincidences . . . allow his characters to fulfill their desires and destinies.” Langbaum adds that “what appears to be chance turns out to be design—that of fate and/or the characters’ unconscious” (25).

Brady notes that the implausible elements in Hardy preserve “the mood and substance of a rural community’s belief in the improbable” (48). Harold Orel concurs, arguing that Hardy relied on “bizarre events as a means of stimulating reader interest” (*The Victorian Short Story* [1986], 105). Hardy—who said that “‘realism’ is not Art”—was interested not in the grey details of everyday life, but in “spectres, mysterious voices, intuitions, omens, dreams, haunted places” (Orel 106). As Julia Briggs puts it in *Night Visitor* (1977), “his Wessex novels are deeply imbued with local legends, superstitions, omens, techniques of divination and sympathetic magic. Hardy had seen cures and curses made, knew the tricks of ‘conjurers’ (white witches) and the many signs and portents that directed the lives of country folk before the coming of the railways and agricultural mechanization radically altered their way of life. The supernatural of his novels is commonly susceptible of rational explanation and can often be attributed to accident or coincidence, but in his short stories such as *The Withered Arm* the events speak for themselves, and the inexplicable is presented with that terseness, that refusal to abide our question, which also characterizes the ballad” (100). Hardy said that “a story dealing with the supernatural should never be explained away” (Brady 22).

One may want to talk specifically about Egdon Heath, that ancient and mysterious place where Conjurer Trendle lives in remote solitude. It is a symbolic and fearful landscape, into which Gertrude undertakes a kind of mythic journey into the unknown (or the unconscious). She ventures forth to find the guardian of primitive powerful folk wisdom, hoping to gain access to his secret knowledge. Here again Hardy melds classical and folk sources, for her quest seems to echo Aeneas’s visit to the sibyl at the gate of the underworld.

Hardy may not have cared for realism, but in *The Withered Arm* he carefully delineates the class distinctions that structure this rural world. The dairyman who employs the milkers has to pay the prosperous Farmer Lodge rent for every cow. Lodge wouldn’t stoop to marry a milkmaid: he prefers “a lady complete.” Rhoda

wonders whether the new wife “seems like a woman who has ever worked for a living, or one that has been always well off, and has neer done anything, and shows marks of a lady on her.” Rhoda’s thatched mud cottage contrasts to Lodge’s “white house of ample dimensions.” Riding in his fancy gig past his trudging son, Lodge remarks condescendingly that “these country lads will carry a hundredweight once they get it on their backs.” Clothes are another class indicator: Gertrude wears “a white bonnet and a silver-coloured gown,” while the boy who observes this dies “wearing the smockfrock of a rustic, and fustian breeches.”

Brady makes an important point about the ending of the story: just “when the two women finally enact the physical struggle of Rhoda’s dream, the narrator shifts the reader’s attention to the real victim of the story: the boy who earlier had been pitifully attracted to Gertrude and her position of elegance in the parish.” Suddenly we realize that we too have neglected the solitary child, viewing him merely as the evidence of his parents’ illicit union. Our final recognition implicates us in “the shared guilt of having allowed the boy to come to such an end” (26–7).

Like Jo in Dickens’s *Bleak House*, this nameless boy represents the failure of the rich to take responsibility for the poor, and their own resulting sterility. Like the typhus widow in Carlyle’s *Past and Present*, the boy proves his connection at last. Remind students of Hardy’s words about the eighteen-year-old whom his father saw hung merely “for *being with* some others who had set fire to a rick. . . . Nothing my father ever said to me drove the tragedy of Life so deeply into my mind.”

Another aspect of the story is its treatment of the “fallen woman.” As in *Thraun Janet*, a woman who has borne a child out of wedlock lives as a semi-outcast in a rural world of suspicious gossips. Neither Janet nor Rhoda intentionally harms anyone, but their previous sexual transgressions place them sufficiently beyond the pale that they are suspected of possessing threatening unnatural powers: Janet is “sib to the deil” and Rhoda is “a sorceress [who] would know the whereabouts of the exorcist.” Their neighbors project their own fears onto these female scapegoats, isolated by disgrace. Powerless, they are perceived as dangerously powerful. (In *The Woman Warrior* Maxine Hong Kingston portrays a community’s atavistic fear of a woman who violates its taboos: she is stoned by the villagers for becoming pregnant while her husband is away).

Hardy returned to the figure of the fallen woman (another milkmaid) in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891). He writes sympathetically, with no moral condemnation. In fact, the “fallen woman” would actually make Farmer Lodge a better wife than the “virgin,” for Rhoda is both vital and fertile, whereas Gertrude is tame and sterile. Despite her profound isolation, Rhoda is a survivor; Gertrude dies when her husband rejects her, but Rhoda outlives them all, fiercely independent to the last.

## Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

### A Scandal in Bohemia (1890)

Watson tends to be neglected in discussions of the Sherlock Holmes stories, but in *Murder Will Out* (1989) T. J. Binyon calls the creation of Watson “a stroke of

genius,” for “however outré the events he describes, the fact that they are mediated through his prosaic, stolid personality gives them a reality and a plausibility which they would otherwise lack” (9–10). Many critics have noted the parallels between Watson and Boswell, each an admiring chronicler of the doings of a great man.

The portrait of Holmes is more complex. Despite his cozy name and respectable lodgings, Holmes is recognizably “a product of the Romantic tradition. He is another proud, alienated hero, superior to and isolated from the rest of humanity; a sufferer from *spleen* and *ennui*, who alleviates the deadly boredom of existence with injections of cocaine and morphine” (Binyon 10). Students are often surprised by this side of Holmes, and they aren’t the only ones: Julian Symons writes that it seems “astonishing that this Victorian philistine [Doyle] should have created an egocentric drug-taking hero so alien from his own beliefs” (*Mortal Consequences* [1972], 65).

Holmes is a sufficiently fin-de-siècle figure that instructors might want to pair *A Scandal in Bohemia* with some of the selections from the Aesthetes and Decadents perspectives section. In his introduction to the Oxford World’s Classics edition of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1993), R. L. Green calls Holmes a “domesticated aesthete” in the tradition of Poe, Baudelaire, Huysmans, and Wilde, who yet “falls short of true decadence” (xvi). Ian Ousby notes that in later stories Holmes becomes more conventional and “the cocaine, surely Holmes’s most blatant venture into Decadence, all but disappears” (*Bloodhounds of Heaven* [1976], 158–59). (For more on Holmes as aesthete, see Paul Barolsky’s “The Case of the Domesticated Aesthete” in *Critical Essays on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*, ed. Harold Orel [1992]).

Near the beginning of the story, Holmes demonstrates his trademark ability to guess what others have been up to, observing that Watson has resumed practice and has had a wet walk recently. He had already claimed in *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) that “by a man’s finger-nails, by his coat-sleeve, by his boots, by his trouser-knees, by the callosities of his forefinger and thumb, by his expression, by his shirt-cuffs—by each of these things a man’s calling is plainly revealed.” This aspect of Holmes’s character was modelled on Joseph Bell, one of Doyle’s professors of medicine at Edinburgh University. Doyle wrote that Bell “would sit in the patients’ waiting-room with a face like a Red Indian and diagnose the people as they came in, before even they had opened their mouths” (For more on the legend of Bell, see Green xvii-xxi).

The essence of Holmes’s method is to make readers feel that we could do it, too; there’s nothing arcane or supernatural about his skill. Watson says, “When I hear you give your reasons . . . the thing always appears to me to be so ridiculously simple that I could easily do it myself.” Yet “the reader cannot preempt Holmes’s deductions, for the evidence on which they are based . . . is usually displayed only after the deductions have been made” (Binyon 63). Nonetheless, Holmes’s ability to “place” people is comforting. In the worlds of *Cranford*, *Brother Jacob*, *Thrawn Janet*, and *The Withered Arm*, events hinge upon the arrival of a stranger—but in London, *everyone* is a stranger. Amidst the disorienting flux of urban life, jostled by

crowds of people we can't possibly know, we feel soothed by the idea that *someone*, at least, can make sense out of chaos, can "read" the city. Holmes's airy deductions suggest that identity is visible, that bodies give clues and can be deciphered.

However, while Holmes's deductions depend on the stability of other people's identities, he himself has a chameleon's gift for metamorphosis: he moves freely through different levels of society, breaking the rules of class in order to uphold the social system. Thus, Holmes is not merely a reader or detached observer; he is also an actor, a master of different roles. Even Watson scarcely recognizes him when he appears as a drunken groom or an amiable clergyman, writing that "his expression, his manner, his very soul seemed to vary with every fresh part that he assumed." Holmes further aspires to become director and stage manager when he orchestrates the theatrics outside Irene Adler's house: he hires the actors, assigns them their parts, and prepares to take the lead role himself. In *The Valley of Fear* Holmes said, "Some touch of the artist wells up within me and calls insistently for a well-staged performance."

Holmes's ability to transform himself makes the King's feeble attempt at disguise look pathetic. But, oddly, Holmes seems to forget that Irene Adler is a professional actress. He gloats to Watson that she "responded beautifully," as though she were his creature, unknowingly playing her part in his play. Irene, of course, outwits him by taking charge from behind the scenes, adopting her own disguise, and arranging her own drama. (Ask students why she says good-night when she passes Holmes.)

Holmes underestimates Irene Adler, not merely because she is a better actor, but because she is a woman. Holmes confidently assumes he knows all about women; for example, he informs Watson that "women are naturally secretive" (neither sees any irony in a bachelor preaching to a married man). But in fact Holmes neither knows nor loves women. He has no interest in "the softer passions;" emotions "were abhorrent to his cold, precise" mind. For Holmes, love would be like "grit in a sensitive instrument." (*Star Trek's* Spock seems descended from Holmes, another "perfect reasoning machine" without feelings.) One might ask students about the significance of such dichotomies. Do they represent a basic distrust of intellect?

Sherlock Holmes is not infallible. At the beginning we may imagine that he will be duped by falling in love with Irene, but he's blinded by patriarchal convention, not desire. Before she outsmarted him, Holmes "used to make merry over the cleverness of women." He believes that they are ruled by passion: her "instinct is at once to rush to the thing she values most. It is a perfectly overpowering impulse." In short, he sees women as precisely opposite to himself, all heart and no head. His ignorance of women is his Achilles heel.

Irene Adler unmans Holmes. Look at the verbs when he realizes she's beaten him at his own game: staggered, pushed, rushed, tore, plunged—Holmes is no longer cool and precise. She had already unmanned the King, placing him in the vulnerable (female) position of fearing that his reputation might be ruined by scandal; in contrast, Irene emerges unscathed, conscience untroubled and respectable marriage secured. These role reversals are symbolized by the question of who controls access to her safe

and photographs, images of her sexuality. In her letter, she takes control of her story by narrating it herself. (In the 1990s Carole Nelson Douglas has published a series of detective novels with Irene Adler as the protagonist.)

One might argue that *A Scandal in Bohemia* is thus a feminist text dramatizing the dangers of stereotyping women. But in that case, why does Holmes call Irene Adler “the woman”? By emphasizing her singularity, Holmes avoids learning anything about women in general. He solves the problem of her threatening female competence and sexuality by concluding that this one woman “eclipses and predominates the whole of her sex.” She is the exception that proves the rule.

Furthermore, her boldness and cleverness are always described as *male* qualities. The King says she has “the mind of the most resolute of men.” Adler adopts male disguise to verify Holmes’s identity, and writes that “male costume is nothing new to me. I often take advantage of the freedom which it gives.” She beats Holmes at his own game, but does so by adopting his terms (after all, she could have disguised herself as a nursemaid or washerwoman). One might ask students whether a feminist reading of the story is undermined by the fact that Irene Adler only enters the masculine sphere of action and initiative in the guise of a man.

Finally, ask why Holmes coolly ignores the King’s outstretched hand. Although he began as the King’s agent, working to defeat Irene Adler, by the end Holmes feels himself allied with her. He recognizes her as an equal—but the King still maintains she is “not on my level.” Holmes despises the false values of the aristocrat: the King is arrogant and selfish; he’s not very bright, but relies on his inherited wealth and position. In contrast, Adler and Holmes live by their wits; they are self-made masters of their craft. Middle-class readers would applaud the triumph of merit over birth. Steven Knight adds that “the King of Bohemia is a fairly thin disguise for the Prince of Wales, that great antagonist of Victorian respectability” (“The Case of the Great Detective,” in *Critical Essays*, ed. Orel, 57).

## Edith Nesbit

### Fortunatus Rex & Co. (1901)

Originally fairy tales were passed on orally, but in the nineteenth century collectors began recording them. The brothers Grimm tales, for example, were translated into English in 1823. English writers, including John Ruskin, Charles Kingsley, Christina Rossetti, George MacDonald, and Oscar Wilde, adopted the form, producing literary fairy tales. English Puritanism disapproved of stories of elves and sprites, however, and some authors argued that children’s literature should be strictly factual. Maria Edgeworth asked: “Why should the mind be filled with fantastic visions, instead of useful knowledge? Why should so much valuable time be lost?”

Fairy tales play with the border between the everyday world and the fantastic. In Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), a well-bred little girl finds herself talking to a White Rabbit, a Mad Hatter, and a Cheshire Cat—and occasionally correcting their manners. In *Fortunatus Rex* the familiar schoolroom world

is transformed by a battle between rival magicians. Part of the fun of the story is that the King and Queen are such models of unimaginative respectability that they scarcely notice this injection of sorcery into their lives. The Queen goes right on making preserves and knitting stockings. The King concludes that the whole mad adventure shows “you cannot go far wrong if you insist on the highest references!”

This preposterous obsession with references—even the ruling sovereign is required to supply them—highlights Nesbit’s mockery of all sorts of bourgeois conventions. The comedy begins in the second sentence, where Miss Robinson realizes she is “insufficiently educated” to do anything but teach. Have students read Cobbe’s account of her own fashionable boarding school for background; Nesbit takes the genteel pretensions of Cobbe’s school to a ludicrous extreme by having *all* the pupils be the daughters of “respectable monarchs.”

The reliance on references also suggests a society where the basis of trust has been eroded, where everyone (including Miss Robinson, whose references are phony) is a sham. How can Miss Robinson be sure of her customers? How can they be sure of her? When the King asks, “But can I trust you?” she reminds him starchyly that “We exchanged satisfactory references at the commencement of our business relations.” Her no-nonsense answer is *no* answer, of course. But since their *only* relations are “business relations”—defined by the King’s ability to pay ten thousand pounds a year—the King is forced to be satisfied.

In his grief, the King embarks on an entrepreneurial frenzy. Far from feeling any patrician disdain for money-grubbing, he eventually hangs the six princes, maintaining that “business is business after all.” He floats a company of land developers (hence the title), making a fortune by building ugly little suburbs and destroying “all the pretty woods and fields.” In lines that seem to come straight out of John Ruskin’s *Modern Manufacture and Design* (1859) or William Morris’s *The Beauty of Life* (1880), Nesbit remarks: “It is curious that nearly all the great fortunes are made by turning beautiful things into ugly ones. Making beauty out of ugliness is very ill-paid work.” On one level, then, the story represents a showdown between money and magic, between the destructive forces of the capitalist (who makes beautiful things ugly) and the creative forces of the artist (who makes beauty out of ugliness).

The wealthy princesses “don’t require the use of magic, they can get all they want without it.” But Miss Robinson, a woman of modest means, must rely on her talent for magic—as Nesbit herself relied on writing to support her family. In real life, the middle-aged spinster with no money and limited education would be a hopeless downtrodden governess; here, in a comic fantasy of female empowerment, Nesbit cleverly transforms the schoolmarm into a powerful magician who invests in land and defeats the King’s voracious building schemes. Miss Robinson drives a hard bargain: her price for restoring the princesses is to “make the land green again,” thus fighting off the “greedy yellow caterpillars” of speculative building. On a mythic level, she accomplishes the redemption of the Waste Land; the blight upon the land, caused by the loss of the King’s daughter, is reversed by Daisy’s restoration. (The echo of the legend of Proserpine, who also returns to make the land green, may be ironic, in that housing development is hardly seasonal.)

Nesbit's satire has other targets as well. In *Forbidden Journeys* (1992) Auerbach and Knoepfelmacher write that Nesbit was "a critic of imperialism, which she persistently identified with male domination." Thus in *Fortunatus Rex* "modern geopolitics are deliciously mocked." The imprisoned magician shouts: "Open up Africa!" or "Cut through the Isthmus of Panama" or "Cut up China!" Meanwhile, "the six princes assume that they are being asked to colonize the globe, and protest that they have no such imperialist ambitions" (135–37).

In "Of Babylands and Babylons: E. Nesbit and the Reclamation of the Fairy Tale," U. C. Knoepfelmacher suggests that *Fortunatus Rex & Co.* "provides a self-mocking commentary on [Nesbit's] own imaginative enterprise by thematizing a female imposter's magical recovery of a threatened girlhood world" (*Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 6.2 [1987]). He argues that Nesbit "often saw herself as an impostress of sorts." Like Nesbit, Miss Robinson is a "dispenser of illusions [who] profits from her ability to make others believe in her fictions." Miss Robinson's restoration of the princesses and the land ("a female terrain") is both literal and literary, for it also represents Nesbit's "own reappropriation of a literary province," that of children's fantasy and fairy tales, which had been usurped by men (such as Perrault and the brothers Grimm, who had taken over the "folk-tales that had once been the pre-eminent possession of women story-tellers").

But if Miss Robinson embodies aspects of the adult writer, so Princess Daisy embodies aspects of Nesbit's childhood: "Daisy" was her own nickname. Nesbit's father died when she was four, and her mother was emotionally distant; Knoepfelmacher points out that her fiction reenacts the trauma of abandonment and the fantasy of loving reunion. When Daisy disappears in *Fortunatus Rex*, her mother carries on with the housekeeping and has "not much time for weeping," while her father immerses himself in business. The story is partly about parental—and especially maternal—neglect, about being in trouble while one's mother is too busy to notice. The happy ending fulfills the frustrated wish to reconstruct a harmonious nuclear family. Autobiographically, then, Nesbit is both Miss Robinson and Daisy—the powerful artificer and teller of tales, but also the lost child reunited with her family.

## John Ruskin

### Modern Painters (1843-1860)

The critic John D. Rosenberg has called *Modern Painters* "perhaps the finest" book on art by an English writer; it is "the last great statement of the English Romantic renovation of sensibility, as the *Lyrical Ballads* is the first." He traces its genesis to the patterned carpet in the nursery upon which the solitary child developed his powers of observation (*The Genius of John Ruskin*, 18).

Ask students about Ruskin's definition of painting as a language, and "nothing more than language"—his point is that a painting's subject counts more than its style. He never abandoned this conviction, though he came to feel that he may have stated it too categorically, thus encouraging inferior artists to imagine they

could get away with poor workmanship as long as they chose a noble subject. But Ruskin wasn't saying that style doesn't matter: on the contrary, he believed that a thorough mastery of technique was the starting point, not the goal, of great painting. Much later he said that while "there are few who enjoy the mere artifices of composition or dexterities of handling as much as I . . . the pictures were noblest which compelled me to forget them."

The Art for Art's Sake movement rebelled against the privileging of subject-matter, asserting the centrality of form and color. Students might like to hear about the Ruskin-Whistler trial (described briefly in our headnote to Whistler), and to read the excerpts from Whistler's "Ten O'Clock" lecture, which argues that art has "no desire to teach" and deplores people's habit of looking "not *at* a picture, but *through* it, at some human fact, that shall, or shall not, from a social point of view, better their mental or moral state" (see Perspectives: Aestheticism, Decadence, and the Fin de Siècle).

Turner was an enormous influence on Ruskin, and one might bring some reproductions of his work to class. The young Ruskin was inspired to begin *Modern Painters* as a defense against accusations that Turner's paintings distorted nature. Ruskin owned *The Slave Ship* for many years, eventually selling it because he found the subject "too painful to live with." But in contrast to the definition of greatness in art, this passage is sheer aestheticism; Ruskin confines mention of the painting's subject—slavery—to a footnote! It is all light, shadow, color, with scarcely a word about the immorality of slavery, about guilt or human suffering. But, as Oscar Wilde put it in *The Critic as Artist*, "who cares whether Mr Ruskin's views on Turner are sound or not? What does it matter? That mighty and majestic prose of his, so fervid and so fiery-coloured in its noble eloquence, so rich in its elaborate symphonic music . . . is at least as great a work of art as any of those wonderful sunsets that bleach or rot on their corrupted canvases in England's Gallery."

In *Ruskin and the Art of the Beholder* (1982) Elizabeth Helsinger points out the sheer energy of Ruskin's seeing: describing *The Slave Ship*, Ruskin puts "figure, story, and literary allusion last instead of first . . . meaning does not emerge easily or at once; it seems to come only out of energetic visual exploration" (181).

Like Carlyle, Pugin, Tennyson, and Morris, Ruskin contributed to the ongoing contrasts the Victorians made between their own century and the Middle Ages. Ruskin's angry sarcasm echoes Carlyle's: "whereas the mediaeval never painted a cloud but with the purpose of placing an angel in it, and a Greek never entered a wood without expecting to meet a god in it . . . [o]ur chief ideas about the wood are connected with poaching." Ruskin uses art now as a launching pad from which to analyze the flaws of the times, the ugliness, the want of solemnity, the ennui, the dull "modern principles of economy and utility."

### The Stones of Venice (1851-53)

Just as Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* trace the rise and fall of Camelot, so the three volumes of *The Stones of Venice* recount the rise and fall of the Venetian empire—and both epics warn Victorian Britain of a similar fate if this latest empire doesn't

mend its ways. The central theme is “the relation of the art of Venice to her moral temper” and this theme is most famously expressed in “The Nature of Gothic,” the chapter where Ruskin relates “the life of the workman to his work.”

Bring in pictures of Gothic architecture to give students an idea what Ruskin has in mind when he writes of pointed arches, vaulted roofs, flying buttresses, and grotesque sculptures. Also, have students look at our illustration from Pugin’s *Contrasts* (though the evangelical Ruskin did not accept Pugin’s linking of the Gothic revival to a Catholic revival). The argument of *The Stones of Venice* is that the very imperfections of the Gothic style were evidence of a moral society; the Renaissance represented degeneration and corruption. A memorable example (from the chapter “Roman Renaissance”) is the carved statues on tombs who are propped up on one elbow, looking about instead of reclining peacefully—the worldly pride and vanity of the sixteenth-century soul “dared not contemplate its body in death” (one thinks of Browning’s bishop ordering his tomb, apparently imagining that he’ll still be around to enjoy it; Ruskin’s comments on *The Bishop Orders His Tomb* are quoted in the first footnote).

For the pure pleasure of Ruskin’s prose, read aloud the long passage about the bird’s-eye view of Europe as it flies north from the Mediterranean to the polar north. Point out how even the language gradually modifies, with latinized words and geographical features (lake, promontories, volcano, variegated, lucent) giving way to Anglo-Saxon ones (clefts, heathy moor, wood, ice drift). The landscape, the human beings who inhabit it, and their artistic productions are all inextricably entwined: there is a “look of mountain brotherhood between the cathedral and the Alp.” The capacity to appreciate both—the barbaric remnants of the Dark Ages, the ugly blister on the face of the earth—represented an important shift of taste. But more important, for Ruskin, is his conviction that art and architecture are expressions of religious principle, a kind of visible bodying forth of the inner moral temper of a people.

Thus the very perfection and symmetry of ancient Greek architecture are evidence that the Greek workman was in fact a slave. Medieval Christians, however, did away with this slavery, “Christianity having recognized, in small things as well as great, the individual value of every soul.” The very rudeness of Gothic sculpture attests to the greater nobility of spirit that lay behind it, and Ruskin sees in the goblins and monsters of the old cathedral “signs of the life and liberty of every workman who struck the stone.” This liberty modern industrial Europe has lost, and Ruskin sees the “degradation of the operative into a machine” as one of the leading causes of nineteenth-century political upheavals, even revolutions.

The argument about Gothic architecture thus segues into an indictment of the Industrial Revolution. Modern Englishmen, like ancient Greeks, desire an inhuman perfection that is nowadays only possible with machines. Compare Ruskin’s depiction of a brutalized factory worker with Dickens’s description of the monotonous lives of Coketown “hands” in *Hard Times*. Ruskin argues that the medieval craftsman was freer than the nineteenth-century operative: “there might be more freedom in England, though her feudal lords’ lightest words were worth men’s lives . . . than there is while the animation of her multitudes is sent like fuel to feed the

factory smoke.” (These words seem to echo Carlyle’s about the brass-collared serf, Gurth, and might be a starting point for a discussion about the true nature of liberty, bringing in not only Carlyle but also Mill’s *On Liberty* and Arnold’s thoughts about “Doing as One Likes” in *Culture and Anarchy*). Ruskin’s concerns about both the value of work and the plight of workers anticipate twentieth-century issues surrounding the nature of work, consumer advocacy, and human rights in a global economy. His indictment of materialist and consumerist society still resonates: “It is not that men are ill fed, but that they have no pleasure in the work by which they make their bread, and therefore look to wealth as the only means of pleasure.” Discuss his claim that “every young lady . . . who buys glass beads is engaged in the slave-trade” (one might draw a contemporary parallel with current efforts to boycott the products of third-world sweatshops).

Ruskin did not invent the Gothic Revival, which began in the late eighteenth century, but he did more to popularize it than anyone else, even Pugin. As Kenneth Clark put it in *The Gothic Revival* (1928; 1962), Ruskin “disinfected” Gothic architecture for an audience wary of Catholicism. The success of the revival can be seen in buildings all over England—and on many American college campuses—but Ruskin himself was appalled at the unintended consequences of his own influence; in the preface to the 1874 edition of *The Stones of Venice* he wrote: “I would rather . . . that no architect had ever condescended to adopt one of the views suggested in this book, than that any should have made the partial use of it which has mottled our manufactory chimneys with black and red brick, dignified our banks and draper’s shops with Venetian tracery, and pinched our parish churches into dark and slippery arrangements for the advertisement of cheap coloured glass and pantiles.” For more on this topic see Michael Brooks’s *John Ruskin and Victorian Architecture* (1987).

### Modern Manufacture and Design (1859)

Invited to address the citizens of Bradford on art, Ruskin instead inveighed against the horrors of unrestrained industrial development. By this point in his career he had turned more towards social criticism than ever before; the lecture expands on the themes of *The Nature of Gothic* and prepares the way for *Unto this Last* (1860). Ruskin was ahead of his time in sounding warnings about the destruction of the environment, and he was vigorously denounced by a hostile audience; as Rosenberg explains, “If the uproar over *Unto this Last* now seems excessive, we need only recall that Ruskin attacked every principle held sacred by the economists and industrialists of the age” (*The Genius of John Ruskin*, 219).

The lecture begins with a ghastly futuristic vision of an England covered from shore to shore with chimneys, mine shafts, and engines, a landscape so clotted that there is no longer “even room for roads”—travel takes place on viaducts or in tunnels (an unfortunately prescient intuition!). Ruskin contrasts an imaginary seventeenth-century cottage with an industrial suburb, the one a pastoral paradise, the other a fallen wasteland. The imagery is biblical (a blighted garden, a blackened stream), suggesting an Eden transformed into Hell, or the New

Jersalem become Coketown (“the furnaces of the city foaming forth perpetual plague of sulphurous darkness”).

Ruskin then creates a gorgeous word-portrait of fourteenth-century Pisa (with “bright river” and “brighter palaces”), another set-piece worth reading aloud for the hypnotic and poetic quality of the prose. Note the single 200-word sentence (beginning “Above all this scenery of perfect human life . . .”) that piles clause upon clause to evoke a world where mankind lived in harmony with nature, and where nature incarnated the sacred; the sentence culminates with the word “God.” In contrast to this fantasy of dazzling medieval splendour Ruskin reminds us of the “depressing and monotonous circumstances of English manufacturing life”—not, he says, from any hope that Bradford can become another Pisa, but to urge industrialists to “surround your men with happy influences and beautiful things.”

For, Ruskin argues, “all that gorgeousness of the Middle Ages” was founded upon “the pride of the so-called superior classes.” The fine arts have “been supported by the selfish power of the noblesse” but now it is time to extend “their range to the comfort or the relief of the mass of the people”—to bring “the power and charm of art within the reach of the humble and the poor.” The lecture closes with a plea not to allow greed and consumerism to destroy the arts, the virtues, and “the manners of your country.”

### Praeterita (1885–1889)

Victorian autobiographies have some notable omissions: just as Mill leaves out his mother, so Ruskin never mentions his six-year marriage to his cousin. But he warns us in the preface that he will pass over “in total silence things which I have no pleasure in reviewing.” *Praeterita* offers one of the most famous depictions of an evangelical childhood, one in which his mother had it “deeply in her heart to make an evangelical clergyman of me.” He describes the tedious Sundays, the long hours spent memorizing the Bible, and the prohibition on toys or companions. It was a childhood where the “chief resources” consisted of the carpet and the patterns on the wall-paper; the greatest misfortune was “that I had nothing to love.” Yet, although Ruskin does not mitigate the errors of his well-intentioned elderly parents, the dominant impression is somehow one of richness, not of deprivation. If he was brought up in an Eden where it was forbidden to eat the fruit, it was, nonetheless, an Eden, a place of clear streams and marvellous summer excursions.

The passages in which Ruskin recalls his travels might be compared with some of the readings in our Travel and Empire section. Ruskin was no audacious adventurer roughing it in the wilderness; even as an adult he almost always travelled with his parents, and they travelled in style. They carried the comforts and routines of home with them, for they were seeking neither excitement nor novelty: we “rejoiced the more in every pleasure—that it was not new.” The Ruskins, who had not been born to wealth, felt a certain social insecurity that led them to keep to themselves, both at home and abroad. Their isolation further reinforced the primacy of Ruskin’s pleasure in looking: wishing to be a “pure eye,” his “entire delight” was “observing without being myself noticed.” His nostalgic contrast be-

tween the old days of travel by private carriage and the contemporary system of mass travel by rail echoes Thackeray's remarks (quoted in the headnote to *Perspectives: The Industrial Landscape*).

In "The Grande Chartreuse" Ruskin traces the "breaking down of my Puritan faith," and one might juxtapose this account with some of the selections in *Perspectives: Religion and Science*. Clearly these recollections were not among those which gave him pleasure because he begins to digress, as though to postpone the moment when he will reluctantly describe his "unconversion." At the time of writing, he was battling episodes of madness: "He suspended publication for six months," Rosenberg writes, then issued the superb chapter, "The Grande Chartreuse," "one of the most exquisitely written passages in all of *Praeterita*." In it, the lifelong conflict between Evangelicalism and Art sharpens into crisis—first there is the drawing made on a Sunday, then the urban pleasures of Turin, and finally the dreary sermon contrasting so powerfully with the glorious painting of Paul Veronese. Finally, the arbitrary life-denying restrictions of the evangelical Sabbath drive him to his "final apostacy from Puritan doctrine." Yet, ironically, the embrace of the aesthetic also marked its decline in his life, for Ruskin wrote that "the real new fact in existence for me was that my drawings did not prosper that year, and, in deepest sense, never prospered again." The decisive turn from art criticism to social criticism dates from this period, as though on some level Ruskin was atoning for his unconversion by dedicating himself to duty.

Students who would like to read more Ruskin, without tackling the brilliantly indexed 39 volumes of the Cook and Wedderburn edition, should see *The Genius of John Ruskin*, an anthology edited by John D. Rosenberg. For a good introduction to the somewhat confusing subject of Ruskin's views of earlier painters see Patrick Conner's "Ruskin and the 'Ancient Masters' in *Modern Painters*" (*New Approaches to Ruskin*, ed. Robert Hewison [1981], 17–32). The same volume contains an essay on "The Nature of Gothic" by John Unrau. A more recent collection, *John Ruskin and the Victorian Eye* (1993), has readable introductory essays and is lavishly illustrated.

## Florence Nightingale

### Cassandra (1852)

Myra Stark's introduction to the Feminist Press edition of *Cassandra* (1979) addresses the contradiction between the popular view of Nightingale as "the prototype of the saintly nurse" and the reality of her work as a reformer. Stark situates Nightingale's writing in the context of contemporary Victorian thinking about women's lives, and provides interesting biographical background. Stark focuses closely on *Cassandra*; for a more general introduction to Nightingale's career, students will enjoy the chapter on her in Elizabeth Longford's *Eminent Victorian Women* (1981).

Many of the selections in the Ladies and Gentlemen perspectives section relate closely to the issues that concern Nightingale. For example, Ellis, Cobbe, and Beeton illustrate the social expectations for middle- and upper-class women against

which Nightingale was rebelling. Reading these three excerpts before turning to *Cassandra* helps make vivid the sort of world in which Nightingale lived, with its ideology of separate spheres and female subordination. Without some sense of this social setting, students may see her passionate complaints as merely neurotic.

Compare, for example, Nightingale's description of society—"you are not to talk of anything very interesting"—to Mrs. Beeton, who informs us that social calls "should be short, a stay of from fifteen to twenty minutes being quite sufficient," and the subjects of conversation "such as may be readily terminated." Similarly, the narrator of *Cranford* observes that "As everybody had this rule in their minds, whether they received or paid a call, of course no absorbing subject was ever spoken about. We kept ourselves to short sentences of small talk, and were punctual to our time." No wonder Nightingale felt herself stifled by the obligation "to drop a remark" every two minutes, unable "to follow up anything systematically."

Cobbe's description of life in a fashionable boarding school illuminates the difficulties that even wealthy girls faced in acquiring a serious education or putting it to some practical use; the very notion would have been regarded by Cobbe's headmistresses as "a deplorable dereliction." It was the duty of women in Nightingale's rank of life to be "Ornaments of Society," a duty her sister and mother embraced without question: as Nightingale wrote scathingly, "The whole occupation of Parthe and Mama was to lie on two sofas and tell one another not to get tired by putting flowers into water."

In *Cassandra* Nightingale astutely makes the connection between female infirmity and free time: "A married woman was heard to wish that she could break a limb that she might have a little time to herself." It does seem that illness was managed creatively by some Victorian women; think of Isabella Bird, an invalid at home, an adventurer abroad. Five years after writing *Cassandra*, Nightingale apparently employed this strategy herself: "Florence took to her 'deathbed' at the age of thirty-seven, and remained there on and off—mostly on—for another fifty-three years" (Longford, 86). She lived to be 90 and performed heroic amounts of work, all the while maintaining that she was too frail for any social engagements. In *Creative Malady* (1974) George Pickering argues that her illness was a socially acceptable way to protect herself from her family.

Nightingale wrestles with the question of how the needs of the individual—particularly the female individual—can be met within the confines of the family. Conventional wisdom urged women to sacrifice themselves on the altar of family life, but Nightingale likens the inevitable consequence of psychological repression to the foot-binding endured by Chinese girls. Directionless young women daydream over novels, whose secret charm is that the heroine has "no family ties (almost invariably no mother)." As if these images were not revealing enough, Nightingale's stinging parable of the lizard and the sheep proclaims her intense alienation from her family.

Although both Nightingale's essay and her career now serve as feminist inspirations, she herself was emphatically not a supporter of women's rights. In a letter to Harriet Martineau in 1861 Nightingale said: "I am brutally indifferent to the wrongs or the rights of my sex." Like George Eliot, she refused to sign the petition for fe-

male suffrage. “That women should have the suffrage, I think no one can be more deeply convinced than I,” she wrote to J. S. Mill; nonetheless, she was reluctant to lend her influence and prestige to the cause. Wondering how we can “place Nightingale in the context of nineteenth-century feminism,” Elaine Showalter asks whether she was “a great leader or merely a great complainer?” (“Florence Nightingale’s Feminist Complaint: Women, Religion, and *Suggestions for Thought*,” *Signs* 6.3 [1981]). Myra Stark suggests that Nightingale was impatient with women who did not work as hard as she did, seeing their failure “as a failure of will.”

Both Mary Poovey and Nancy Boyd explore how the Nightingale mystique was built upon powerful gender myths. In *Three Victorian Women Who Changed Their World* (1982) Boyd says, “The legend of Florence Nightingale contained much that people wanted to hear. . . . It centred on two folk heroes—the British soldier and the woman who serves him. . . . It epitomized what the Victorians believed to be the ideal relationship between man and woman” (186–87). In *Uneven Developments* (1988) Poovey writes that “the mythic figure of Florence Nightingale had two faces . . . the self-denying caretaker [and] . . . the tough-minded administrator. . . . These two versions of Florence Nightingale most obviously consolidated two narratives about patriotic service that were culturally available at midcentury—a domestic narrative of maternal nurturing and self-sacrifice and a military narrative of individual assertion and will” (168–69). What was not available at mid-century was *Cassandra* itself, which has given twentieth-century readers new insights into the private despair that launched the public figure.

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## PERSPECTIVES

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### Victorian Ladies and Gentlemen

This section serves as an introduction to some of the debates about gender and class in Victorian culture. The views of the different authors are by no means uniform: one imagines that neither Caroline Norton nor Harriet Martineau would have had much use for Mrs. Ellis and Mrs. Beeton. These passages on women’s lives interact with one another in provocative ways: Norton’s description of how married women forfeited virtually all rights might lead students to wonder why women ever agreed to marry; the Brontës’ accounts of the miserable lives of governesses suggest at least one answer.

These selections can be paired with other texts throughout the anthology: contrast the conventional wisdom urged on women by Ellis and Beeton to the unconventional lives led by Isabella Bird, Frances Trollope, and Mary Kingsley (Travel perspectives). Ellis on separate spheres, and Cobbe and Martineau on women’s education, provide good preparation for Nightingale’s *Cassandra*, Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh*, and Eliot’s *Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft*. Norton on women’s rights makes an excellent companion reading to Mill’s *Subjection of Women*. Ellis’s notions of female inferiority counterpoint Gaskell’s portrayal of an all-female society of “Amazons,” and Beeton’s advice about social calls sets the

Cranford ladies' standards in context. Compare Nesbit's fanciful description of a fashionable boarding school in *Fortunatus Rex & Co.* with Cobbe's real-life recollections of just such a school.

Juxtapose these readings with the Industrial Landscape perspectives: where the earlier section offers glimpses of working-class lives and attitudes towards the family, childhood, and education (or lack of it), this one provides insight into the middle-class world. There, we read about women and children in factories and mines; here, we see how female inactivity becomes a status symbol. In Mayhew, boys and girls work the streets; here, they torment governesses and attend expensive schools.

The notion of what constitutes a "gentleman" or a "lady" was intensely fascinating to the Victorians, with their newly expanded middle classes. What did it take to belong? Could one lose caste? Only ladies could become governesses, but were governesses still really ladies? Such questions pervade Victorian literature: in Gaskell's *North and South* Margaret Hale, whose family has sunk into poverty, insists that she is still "a born and bred lady;" in Dickens's *Great Expectations* the convict Magwitch "makes" both a lady and a gentleman with his money.

Inevitably, questions of rank are linked not merely to birth and money, but to occupation and education. Women's educations might be trivial, but they were designed to ensure status. One could assemble a unit on Victorian education, reading not only this perspectives section but also chapter 1 of Mill's *Autobiography*, book 2 of *Aurora Leigh*, and the selections from Darwin's and Ruskin's autobiographies.

### Frances Power Cobbe

#### [A Fashionable English Boarding School]

The memorable image of the girls "in full evening attire" being punished in the corner illustrates how upper-middle class women were educated to serve a largely decorative function as "Ornaments of Society." Cobbe gives a good picture of the nature of genteel female "accomplishments": foreign languages, music, dancing were essential, while "Morals and Religion" were at the bottom of the scale.

Cobbe writes in a lively, humorous way, for she has a keen sense of the ridiculous. Yet she's also outraged at the recollection that these girls, "full of capabilities," were expected to do nothing useful with their lives: "all this fine human material was deplorably wasted." Compare Cobbe's amused regret to Nightingale's passionate anguish in *Cassandra*: Cobbe was writing at the end of a long life in which she had, in fact, accomplished a great deal, while Nightingale wrote before she had found her vocation.

For an overview of nineteenth-century women's education, see Lee Holcombe's chapter, "Women and Education," in *Victorian Ladies at Work* (1973). Reviewing the findings of the Taunton Commission, which investigated the state of middle-class education in 1867, Holcombe notes that the majority of girls' schools were small boarding schools in converted private houses, that "snobbery was rampant," and that since chaperoned walks were the schoolgirls' only form of exercise, "pallor and crooked spines were supposedly their distinguishing marks" (23-24).

Academic achievements were not considered feminine; they might even be a hindrance in the marriage market, for who would care to marry a "bluestocking"?

As Joan Burstyn puts it in *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood* (1980), “No father wanted to be accused of educating his daughter so as to make her unsuited to marriage and motherhood; better to ignore the possibility of her remaining unmarried and in need of supporting herself than to run the risk that her very education would make her an old maid” (37).

**Sarah Stickney Ellis**  
*from The Women of England* (1839)

Charlotte Brontë described her efforts to live up to the feminine ideal: “Following my father’s advice . . . I have endeavored not only attentively to observe all the duties a woman ought to fulfil, but to feel deeply interested in them. I don’t always succeed, for sometimes when I’m teaching or sewing, I would rather be reading or writing; but I try to deny myself; and my father’s approbation amply rewards me for the privation” (qtd. in Joan Burstyn, *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood* [1980], 106). That even so gifted a woman as Brontë should regard reading as self-indulgence and force herself “to feel deeply interested” in housework suggests how pervasive—and potentially destructive—such attitudes were. Many more women than Brontë and Nightingale must have been led to distrust their own deepest instincts, to wonder what was wrong with them when they couldn’t find fulfillment in home-making and self-denial.

Mention the famous title of Coventry Patmore’s popular poem, *The Angel in the House* (1854–63), which has come to serve as shorthand for the domestic ideal promoted by Ellis (T. H. Huxley complained that girls were educated “to be either drudges or toys beneath man, or a sort of angel above him”). Although dated, Walter Houghton’s chapter on “Love” (*The Victorian Frame of Mind*, 1957) and Richard Altick’s chapter on “The Weaker Sex” (*Victorian People and Ideas*, 1973) provide brief introductions to Victorian attitudes concerning middle-class women and the sanctity of the home.

Mrs. Ellis aimed her books at a specific readership: those families “connected with trade or manufacture, as well as the wives and daughters of professional men of limited incomes.” Davidoff and Hall’s chapter on “Domestic Ideology and the Middle Class” (*Family Fortunes*, 1987) devotes several pages to Ellis (180–85); they point out that while “she addressed herself first and foremost to women who did not need to earn,” she herself “clung with some guilt to her financial independence.” They suggest that “a tension between the notion of women as ‘relative creatures’ and a celebratory view of their potential power lies at the heart of Mrs Ellis’s writing and helps to explain her popularity.” Nonetheless, “the moral panic engendered in the 1840s by the vision of women working in the mines, mills and factories of England was fuelled by the view that women’s duty was to care for home and children”—a view that Mrs. Ellis “played a part in rigidifying.”

In *Nobody’s Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture* (1995) Elizabeth Langland analyzes gender ideology in terms of class (71–76). She notes that Ellis’s “mystifying rhetoric” of ministering angels “effects at once a justification of the status quo and a concealment of the class issues as gender ones.” Pointing out that “the myth of the home as a harmonious refuge from external

strife and storms was daily in jeopardy from the discontent of servants,” Langland argues that “supervision and control become a mistress’s unacknowledged and mystified agenda, which is accompanied by a rhetoric of concern whose purpose is to reinscribe bourgeois women within a domestic ideology that posits the home as refuge from the workplace it refuses to recognize that it is.”

**Charlotte Brontë**  
*from Letter to Emily (1839)*

**Anne Brontë**  
*from Agnes Grey (1847)*

Elizabeth Longford tells us that “Charlotte was stoned by a small Sidgwick of Stonegappe Hall. Nevertheless, her influence over this child was to develop satisfactorily until he burst out at dinner that he loved her; whereupon Mrs. Sidgwick barked, ‘Love the *governess*, my dear!’” Brontë got her revenge: Mrs. Sidgwick became the model for Mrs. Reed in *Jane Eyre* (*Eminent Victorian Women* [1981], 30). Brontë returned to the governess in *Shirley* (1849), where a man is horrified at the thought that his niece might become one: “While I live, you shall not turn out as a governess, Caroline. I will not have it said that my niece is a governess.” In *The Victorian Governess* (1993) Kathryn Hughes cites this passage as eloquent testimony “of the way in which middle-class women were responsible for reflecting and confirming the status of their male relatives” (33–34).

Show students how the details of Richard Redgrave’s painting, *The Poor Teacher* (1844), convey visually many of the same points that the Brontës were making concerning the governess’s misery, isolation, and ambiguous social position.

The Victorians were fascinated and troubled by the governess, although M. Jeanne Peterson remarks in “The Victorian Governess” that her suffering “seems pale and singularly undramatic when compared with that of women in factories and mines” (*Suffer and Be Still*, ed. Martha Vicinus [1973]). (Brontë, however, declared that “I could like to work in a mill. I could feel mental liberty.”) The governess’s difficulties arose principally because, as a contemporary observer put it, she “is not a relation, not a guest, not a mistress, not a servant—but something made up of all. No one knows exactly how to treat her.” Elizabeth Eastlake defined the ideal governess: “Take a lady, in every meaning of the word, born and bred, and let her father pass through the gazette [bankruptcy], and she wants nothing more to suit our highest *beau idéal* of a guide and instructress to our children.”

The fact that being a governess was an acceptable occupation at all is connected with the ideology of separate spheres—at least she was working in the home, engaged in the feminine task of caring for children. The lack of alternatives meant that “for much of the nineteenth century, the supply of governesses far exceeded the demand” (Hughes, 37). Precisely because they were easier to replace than good servants, “employers frequently placed their parlourmaid’s comfort and contentment above that of the two-a-penny governess” (154).

The governess features frequently in Victorian novels: after *Jane Eyre* one thinks of Becky Sharp in Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* (1847). In *Daniel Deronda* (1876)

Gwendolyn marries a detestable man to avoid becoming a governess. Yet Hughes points out that “it is one of the great ironies of Victorian history that we know virtually nothing about the 25,000 women who actually worked as governesses” (xi). We do know, however, that the lunatic asylums were “supplied with a larger proportion of their inmates from the ranks of young governesses than from any other class of life” (Lady Eastlake, qtd. by Hughes, 163). In *Uneven Developments* (1988) Mary Poovey has a chapter called “The Anathematized Race: The Governess and *Jane Eyre*” (126–163).

### John Henry Cardinal Newman *from The Idea of a University (1852)*

From the first sentence, Newman’s notion of a gentleman contrasts sharply with the manly, fighting ethos of Hughes, Kingsley, and Newbolt, for how could a fighter avoid inflicting pain? Further, how could soldiers treat an enemy “as if he were one day to be our friend”? Muscular Christians would have seen effeminacy in every sentence of Newman’s (as they had seen it in the entire Oxford Movement). The adjectives Newman uses to define a gentleman—tender, gentle, merciful, patient, forbearing, resigned—could easily apply to the model Victorian woman. What sort of man “submits” and rarely “takes the initiative”? What sort of man can be compared to “an easy chair or a good fire”?

While Newman himself hardly disdained a good fight (as his triumphant rejoinder to Kingsley in his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* demonstrates), he clearly endorses a less aggressive ideal of male behavior. In *Dandies and Desert Saints* (1995) James Eli Adams writes: “there is no question that Newman from the outset understood his Christian discipline to be an affront to prevalent, broadly aristocratic norms of masculinity” (85); “in his 1843 sermon, ‘Wisdom and Innocence’ . . . Newman cannily anticipates the dynamics of Kingsleyan manliness well before its public manifestation” (99).

In *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel* (1981) Robin Gilmour says that Newman’s “is a superb, searching definition, feeling its way . . . into the nuances of the gentlemanly character. Justice is done to the courtesy and stoicism of that character, but Newman also mercilessly lays bare the pride at the heart of the gentleman’s self-effacement. Behind the seeming selflessness lies a real selfishness; the gentleman will surrender the outworks of his personal convenience in order to preserve the citadel of his self-esteem intact. Newman acutely perceives that there is an exquisite vanity at work in the gentleman’s courtesy which works against deep commitment or self-surrender. Hence the strikingly *negative* character of the definition. . . . Newman’s gentleman is not a man who does but a man who refrains from doing” (91).

In *The English Gentleman* (1987) David Castronovo proposes that the entire definition is in fact a parody of extravagant idealizers of the gentleman: “He reduces the gentlemanly ideal to absurdity by writing his own purple passage, a stretch of prose that destroys the ideal—for the careful reader—by parodying its pomposity and confusion.” Castronovo calls it “an ironic bravura performance staged to show the inflated claims of the gentleman and the inadequacy of gentlemanly traits when they are compared to a higher good” (64). The gentleman is a hollow man,

all surface, embodying the poverty of worldly values; for Newman, he is “a grand illusion, a marvellous spectacle” (65).

### Caroline Norton

#### *from A Letter to the Queen (1855)*

Norton’s writings are of interest, not merely because they so dramatically portray the legal situation of Victorian married women, but because of the assumptions those laws reveal about women’s very nature. The title of an essay by Frances Power Cobbe concerning married women’s property rights says it all: “Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Minors: Is the Classification Sound?” (*Fraser’s Magazine* [1868]). In *Uneven Developments* (1988) Mary Poovey has a good chapter entitled “Covered but Not Bound: Caroline Norton and the 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act.” Poovey writes: “The point that Norton makes indirectly is that women’s legal incapacities are a function of their social *position*, not of natural, biological inferiority” (65).

Poovey notes that the debates surrounding reform called attention to women’s paradoxical “nonexistence” in the eyes of the law, and also, by “acknowledging the fact of marital unhappiness . . . inevitably exposed the limitations of the domestic ideal.” Further, “in publicizing the economic underpinnings of many marital disputes, the parliamentary debates threatened to reveal the artificiality of separate spheres” (52). If class stability depended on “the morality of women and the integrity of the domestic sphere,” then “allowing anyone to petition for divorce would imperil the social order” (59–60).

Although Norton played a central role in the debates about women’s rights, she did not herself demand equality; she merely asked for protection. In this sense, “her challenge actually reinforced the idealized domesticity she seemed to undermine.” Nonetheless, her story made it clear “that women were not necessarily protected in exchange for their dependence” (81).

The story of reform is told by Lee Holcombe in “Victorian Wives and Property: Reform of the Married Women’s Property Law, 1857–1882” (*A Widening Sphere*, ed. Martha Vicinus [1977]) and in *Wives and Property: Reform of the Married Women’s Property Law* (1983). Although the 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act began to improve the legal position of women, until the 1880s they could legally be sent to prison for denying their husbands “conjugal rights.”

### George Eliot

#### Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft (1855)

Eliot used the occasion of an anonymous book review to offer her own views on the position of women, arguing for “that thorough education of women which will make them rational beings in the highest sense.” To put her essay in context, one might assign Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), J. S. Mill’s *The Subjection of Women*, and also some of the selections concerning women’s rights and education in the Ladies and Gentlemen perspectives section, particularly Cobbe, Ellis, Norton, and Martineau. Florence Nightingale’s passionate *Cassandra*, which was also written in the 1850s, makes an excellent counterpart to Eliot’s carefully reasoned review.

The essay has troubled readers eager to enlist George Eliot in the ranks of nineteenth-century feminists. On the one hand, she argues in favor of women's education, and quotes approvingly Margaret Fuller's words about letting women be sea captains, or letting girls saw wood and use carpenter's tools. On the other hand, she writes: "Unfortunately, many over-zealous champions of women assert their actual equality with men—nay, even their moral superiority to men." Students are likely to have difficulty with this passage, and to assume that Eliot does not believe equality to be either possible or desirable.

However, her logic is more subtle: "If it were true, then there would be a case in which slavery and ignorance nourished virtue, and so far we should have an argument for the continuance of bondage. But we want freedom and culture for woman, because subjection and ignorance have debased her." In other words, if women, lacking education and opportunity, are nonetheless *already* equal or even superior to men, then what are the grounds for granting women the things they lack?

Kathleen McCormack discusses how Eliot's novels enact various aspects of *The Rights of Woman* ("The Sybil and the Hyena: George Eliot's Wollstonecraftian Feminism," *Dalhousie Review* 63.4 [1983–84], 602–14). She says that these connections "help explain many of the problems . . . that have led to feminists' perception of Eliot as an awkward nineteenth-century puzzle piece rather than as a force in the development of feminism. Point for point, Eliot's novels illustrate Wollstonecraft's feminist arguments, possibly most importantly the argument relevant to Rosamund [in *Middlemarch*]: that the education that society currently designs for girls ultimately produces not an angel in the house but an adulteress."

The male voice in which Eliot writes, both in this essay and in many of her novels, has often been noted. Here, for example, she refers to "our wives," and the last sentence presumes a male reader, one likely to be but half-interested in this whole business of women's lives. In adopting a masculine stance, is Eliot distancing herself from her sisters, as some critics have claimed? Or is she employing a rhetorical strategy calculated to play on the fears of the male audience? For instance, she suggests that men "are really in a state of subjection to ignorant and feeble-minded women," for weakness always triumphs over strength, "as you may see when a strong man holds a little child by the hand, how he is pulled hither and thither." Eliot cleverly transforms the familiar sexist comparison of women to children into an unsettling image of male vulnerability. She is arguing, in essence, that man will strengthen his own position by strengthening woman's: better to deal openly with a "rational being" who will "yield in trifles" than to be yoked to an "unreasoning animal."

Eliot's novels demonstrate her awareness of the debilitating effects of limited education and opportunities on talented women, such as Maggie Tulliver and Dorothea Brooke. Even a vain and selfish woman like Rosamund Vincy might have been better off if she'd had a real education instead of a finishing school, and if she had had something to do all day. Eliot warns in this essay that "men pay a heavy price for their reluctance to encourage self-help and independent resources in women. The precious meridian years of many a man of genius have to be spent in the toil of routine, that an 'establishment' may be kept up for a woman who can understand none of his secret yearnings, who is fit for nothing but to sit in her drawing-room

like a doll-Madonna in her shrine.” In *Middlemarch* she would later dramatize this warning in Lydgate’s appalling fate: an intelligent man’s ambitions are wrecked by his own insistence on having an ornamental wife who cannot begin to sympathize with his dreams. Eliot’s heroines suffer from having no outlets for their energy and abilities, but it is not *only* the heroines who suffer: as she insists here in *Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft*, when Woman is debased, then so is Man.

Yet Eliot was not herself an active champion of women’s causes; she refused, for example, to sign the petition for female suffrage that J. S. Mill presented to Parliament in 1866. No doubt she felt hampered by her own anomalous position as an unmarried “wife.” McCormack suggests that Wollstonecraft’s life would have served Eliot as a cautionary tale, for she read *The Rights of Woman* at a critical juncture in her own life: “Just back in England after her elopement with George Henry Lewes, she was experiencing constant humiliation and rejection for having pursued precisely the same course that Wollstonecraft had followed.” Her strong identification with Wollstonecraft might, somewhat paradoxically, explain her “adopting the low feminist profile for which she is often criticized today.”

### Thomas Hughes

#### *from Tom Brown’s School Days (1857)*

*Tom Brown’s School Days* introduces the American student to the world of the English public school and to the schoolboy code that governed the conduct of the Victorian gentleman. The whole question of what constituted a “gentleman” was hotly contested among the Victorians (perhaps most famously in Dickens’s *Great Expectations*), but it was generally agreed that the product of a public school such as Eton, Harrow, Winchester or Rugby was a gentleman, no matter what his social origins might have been.

In *The Return to Camelot* (1981) Mark Girouard observes that Hughes’s philosophy of life “owed much to Carlyle: life was a constant fight between good and evil; strength of intellect was useless and even dangerous without strength of character. But *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* . . . went far beyond Carlyle in suggesting that the best way to moral prowess was physical prowess, in actual fighting or in sport” (166). Tom, for example, voices his ambitions thus: “I want to be A 1 at cricket and football, and all the other games. . . . I want to carry away just as much Latin and Greek as will take me through Oxford respectably. . . . I want to leave behind me . . . the name of a fellow who never bullied a little boy, or turned his back on a big one.”

Not everybody endorsed this conception of the gentlemanly ideal; in *Jane Eyre* Charlotte Brontë conveyed her disdain by putting a version of it in the mouth of the arrogant and disagreeable Blanche Ingram: “as to the *gentlemen*, let them be solicitous to possess only strength and valour: let their motto be:—hunt, shoot, and fight: the rest is not worth a fillip.”

Ask students to analyze the values implicit in Brooke’s speech to “the dear old School-house.” Why would he rather “win two School-house matches running, than get the Balliol scholarship”? Those interested in learning more about the gentlemanly ideal might turn to Girouard’s book; for more on the public schools themselves, see Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy’s *The Public School Phenomenon* (1977),

J. R. de S. Honey's *Tom Brown's Universe: The Development of the English Public School* (1977), J. A. Mangan's *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School* (1981), and John Chandos's *Boys Together* (1984). Instructors may want to teach Kingsley and Newbolt in conjunction with Hughes.

### Isabella Beeton

#### *from The Book of Household Management (1861)*

The growing popularity of etiquette books beginning around the 1830s attests to the rise of the middle class and the fluidity of social caste. Clearly there was a large market for books that would tell women how to pay a social call or manage servants. Yet in *Nobody's Angels* (1995) Elizabeth Langland argues that "it is a popular misconception that these etiquette manuals helped to facilitate the movement of individuals from a lower to a higher sphere in society. In fact, they . . . consolidated an image of the genteel middle class" (28). "The very popularity of the etiquette manuals reveals a pervasive awareness of and commitment to the class distinctions they create and reinforce" (32).

These manuals offer fascinating glimpses of the intricate maze of duties, manners, and social codes that defined middle-class womanhood. They also demonstrate that, despite the carefully constructed impression of cultivated leisure, Victorian middle-class women were not lounging about; the home was a workplace where genuine labor was done and servants had to be hired, trained, and supervised. Beeton compares the housewife to the Commander of an Army; another etiquette guide compared her to the "captain of a seventy-four" gun warship (Langland 47). With her emphasis on the housewife's multitude of duties, "Beeton underscores only what is generally accepted in the etiquette guides and household manuals, but often mystified in the novels, tracts, and sermons: the mistress's key management role" (45).

Beeton stresses the moral as well as administrative dimension of being a good commander: the housewife must serve as an exemplar for her servants. If she sleeps late, her servants "will surely become sluggards." Beeton reinforces her precepts with an implicit threat: a woman must perform up to snuff or risk losing her man to the rival attractions of clubs and taverns. The suggestion that the feminine domain of the home was in competition with the masculine domain of dining-houses—rather than a refuge from it—is a revealing twist on the ideology of separate spheres.

### Queen Victoria

#### Letters and Journal Entries on the Position of Women

Read against the stereotype of the Victorian woman as selfless and uncomplaining, the letters of the Queen—who supposedly embodied the domestic ideal—are almost comical. She dwells on her own sufferings, she resents the births of her children, and she grumbles that her husband never sympathizes when she bemoans the lot of women. In one startling epistle, she calls the news of her daughter's first pregnancy "horrid"—and grimly predicts a miscarriage. Nor did her acute awareness of women's trials make the Queen a supporter of efforts to improve their legal and educational position: she terms the suffrage movement "mad, wicked folly."

Queen Victoria was nothing if not outspoken. Yet if her character did not quite match the feminine ideal, she nonetheless provided a compelling, if paradoxical, image of female power. The competent presence of a woman at the head of an enormous empire seemed to undermine the prevailing orthodoxy about the home being the only proper sphere for females—an orthodoxy Victoria herself seemed all the more determined to uphold. She was always troubled by her dual roles of monarch and matriarch: in 1852, after fifteen years on the throne, Victoria wrote, “I am every day more convinced that *we women, if we are to be good women, feminine and amiable and domestic, are not fitted to reign.*” The contradictions that both Victoria and her subjects perceived as inherent in her position make a good starting point for discussions about nineteenth-century domestic ideology.

Students interested in Victoria might like Elizabeth Longford’s 1964 biography, which has been called “the envy and despair” of subsequent biographers; these include Stanley Weintraub (1987) and Dorothy Thompson (1990).

### Charles Kingsley *from Letters and Memories*

In *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity* (1995) James Eli Adams writes that Kingsley’s “ideal of ‘muscular Christianity,’ formulated largely in antagonism to Newman’s ascetic discipline, has long been seen to codify a crucial shift in Victorian conceptions of masculinity, through which an earlier paradigm of spiritual discipline gave way to a celebration of unreflective bodily vigor.” Interestingly, Adams argues that “Kingsley’s ‘muscular’ ideal of manhood is structured by the very asceticism he insistently attacked” (17); “Newman’s ideal of priestly celibacy . . . was a standing affront to Kingsley’s celebrations of marital bliss” (84). Adams associates Kingsley’s popularity with British anxieties about upholding its farflung empire, as well as with the public schools’ glorification of “success on the playing fields” (109).

Mark Girouard suggests that Kingsley’s obsession with manliness “was probably inspired by his friendship with Thomas Hughes” (*The Return to Camelot*, 136). While the term “muscular Christian” may have struck Hughes and Kingsley as slightly ridiculous, Girouard points out that it “caught to perfection” the flavor of their doctrine. “Emotionally they found physical prowess gloriously exciting . . . they preferred a strong man to a clever one” (143). Girouard notes, however, that “under his surface aggressiveness [Kingsley] was neurotic, morbid, and liable to frequent collapses; his heroes were what he would like to have been, not what he was. There is a hysterical edge to his writing that can be very distressing.” Girouard adds that “Kingsley’s enthusiasm for working men’s causes diminished as he grew older. . . . In 1865, when Governor Eyre’s prompt but savage suppression of disaffection in Jamaica divided the English Establishment into two camps, Kingsley supported Eyre, and lost Thomas Hughes’s friendship in consequence” (144).

For further reading see *Muscular Christianity* (1994), a collection of essays edited by Donald E. Hall.

**Sir Henry Newbolt**  
**Vitai Lampada (1897)**

Newbolt's poem merges the language of the playing fields with the language of the killing fields: the "Captain" is at once a schoolboy heading his rugby team, like Brooke in *Tom Brown's School Days*, and an officer urging his men on in battle. The schoolboy who "rallies the ranks" echoes Brooke's rousing speech to his teammates. Newbolt's glorification of bloodshed may shock modern American students—or strike them as naive—but it is the logical extension of the credo proclaimed forty years earlier in Hughes's novel: "From the cradle to the grave, fighting, rightly understood, is the business, the real, highest, honestest business of every son of man." When one of the boys in *Tom Brown's School Days* chooses a career as an army officer in India, the master says, "He'll make a capital officer," and Tom exclaims, "Aye, won't he! No fellow could handle boys better, and I suppose soldiers are very like boys."

Writing about World War I in *The Public School Phenomenon* (1977), J. Gathorne-Hardy says: "Letter after letter from the front says how glad the writers are not to have let school or house down. . . . And these themes are echoed again in the school obituaries. The public school ethos had gone beyond the grave. . . . To play well for your school meant to die well for your country" (199–200). One might think that the horrors of that war put an end to such glamorizations, but as late as the 1920s the American sportswriter Grantland Rice wrote, "when the One Great Scorer comes / To write against your name / He marks—not that you won or lost—/ But how you played the game."

In *The Return to Camelot* (1981) Mark Girouard has a chapter called "Playing the Game" where he reproduces Baden-Powell's 1908 adaptation of *Vitai Lampada* for performance by Boy Scouts (233–34). Girouard adds: "It is still widely believed that the Duke of Wellington said, 'The Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton.' He never said anything of the sort, but the legend . . . had been taking shape since the 1850s."

Girouard traces the rise of sports in the nineteenth century, and links the Victorian code of the sportsman with the concept of gentlemanliness and with chivalry. Ask students to reflect on how phrases taken from sports, such as "it's not cricket," "the whole nine yards," "par for the course," and so on, became part of the language. How do sports come to serve as metaphors for character and moral conduct?

For more on the connections between public school sports and the work of empire, see J. A. Mangan's *The Games Ethic and Imperialism* (1986).

**Matthew Arnold**  
**Poetry**

Though poets and critics have found fault with the style of Arnold's poetry, they have always taken seriously what he has to say about a central problem of modern

life: the difficulty of achieving true communion with another person, or even oneself. In "Matthew Arnold," in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), T. S. Eliot commented on Arnold's forthrightness: "With all his fastidiousness and superciliousness and officiality, Arnold is more intimate with us than Browning, more intimate than Tennyson ever is, except at moments, as in the passionate flights of *In Memoriam*. . . . His poetry, the best of it, is too honest to employ any but his genuine feelings of unrest, loneliness and dissatisfaction" (106). Most readers tend to agree with Eliot, whose essay is harsh but fair on Arnold's technical limitations and murky definitions. W. H. Auden, on the other hand, felt that Arnold's openly acknowledged difficulty in penetrating his "buried life" meant that his own inhibitions "thrust his gift in prison till it died // And left him nothing but a jailer's voice and face," so that "all rang hollow but the clear denunciation" of his times ("Matthew Arnold," 1940).

From early to late, Arnold's poems thus raise a tortured question: if we cannot know ourselves or others, how can we discover and communicate our true feelings about this underlying alienation? The "Marguerite" poems speak with conviction about human longing, the capacity for both self-deception and disillusionment, and the deep-rooted loneliness of each individual. In the second poem Arnold implies, in the face of Donne, that every man is an island. His beautiful concluding line suggests that a sea of tears divides us all, and that, in a kind of abortive genesis, God separated lands and waters without ever continuing on to make an Adam and Eve who could couple to compensate for this estranging process.

The poems have provoked keen speculation as to Marguerite's identity. "Marguerite, at best, is a shadowy figure," writes Eliot, "neither very passionately desired nor very closely observed, a mere pretext for lamentation. His personal emotion is indeed most convincing when he deals with an impersonal subject" (107-108). Arnold's biographers and editors, however, such as Hugh Kingsmill, Park Honan, and Miriam Allott, have sought an actual woman as the source of Arnold's poems—a French waitress, a well-educated Englishwoman and family friend named Mary Claude, or "a pious and rather literary, though appealing, young holiday friend," respectively. How important is it that the poems be about a real love affair? Is it more important to see them as the self-revelation of the *speaker*, who need not be Arnold at all? Is Arnold conveying an insight into the nature of human experience, the catalyst for which is relatively insignificant? The "Marguerite" debate, along with the issue of how relevant biographical information should be to literary interpretation, is taken up by Wendell Harris and Bill Bell in the Fall 1989 and 1991 issues of *The Victorian Newsletter*.

*Dover Beach* is one of the great poems of the era, and, with its irregular lines, rhymes, and stanzas, which seem to echo "the turbid ebb and flow" of its subject, it is Arnold's finest foray into modernist poetics. Stefan Collini even calls it "the first major 'free-verse' poem in the language" (*Matthew Arnold* [1988], 41). Likely written in 1851, perhaps on Arnold's return from his honeymoon, the poem ponders the withdrawing tide of religious faith in a way that links it to *Stanzas on the Grande Chartreuse*. The overall tenor of the poem has been read variously as a classic expression of Romantic self-sufficiency, or of Victorian doubt. Note the appar-

ent contradiction of the injunction, “Ah, love, let us be true / To one another” in a world that, the speaker claims, has no love in it. Is this a dubious come-on, a Victorian agnostic’s version of *To His Coy Mistress*? Or is it a heartfelt appeal to romantic love as the one stay against confusion in a brutal post-Darwinian world?

The speaker is usually assumed to be Arnold (or, in Clough’s words, “someone very like him”), although much attention has been given to the possible situation in which the narrator addresses his “love.” Most notable is Anthony Hecht’s satiric poem *The Dover Bitch* (*The Hard Hours* [1960]), which depicts the auditor as an impatient prostitute. But recently Eugene R. August has argued that the poem is “gender neutral,” and that “every line of the poem could just as plausibly be spoken by a woman as by a man. . . . For all we know, the poem’s speaker may be a recreation by Arnold of what a woman (Marguerite? Mary Claude? Frances Lucy Wightman? someone else?) said to him” (“The Dover Switch, Or the New Sexism at ‘Dover Beach,’” *Victorian Newsletter* [Spring 1990]: 36). August says the poem should be seen as “an expression of a human feeling shared by women and men alike” (37). His article follows from a lively debate over the poem’s meaning by Gerhard Joseph, Nathan Cervo, and Tom Hayes in *The Victorian Newsletter* (Spring 1988 and Fall 1989).

Whoever is speaking, the text is haunted by echoes, including much-disputed possible references to Sophocles in stanza 2 (*Antigone* 583ff or *Trachiniae* 112ff), and to Thucydides or Tennyson in the last line (*Peloponnesian War* 7.44 or “The Passing of Arthur,” lines 90ff). In *Matthew Arnold and the Betrayal of Language* (1988), David G. Riede offers a fine overall discussion of the poem (196–203). He points out how the poem’s opening parallels that of Wordsworth’s sonnet *It is a Beauteous Evening*, while there are significant echoes of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* toward the end: “neither joy, nor love” is what Hell holds for Satan (*PL* 4:509), and “the world, which seems / To lie before us” revises the epic’s concluding passage “The world was all before them” (*PL* 12.646). Riede also summarizes Ruth Pitman’s important article (“On Dover Beach,” *Essays in Criticism* 23 (1973): 109–136), which makes a strong case for the insubstantiality of the landscape in the poem (due to geological erosion and metaphysical doubt—perhaps picking up on section 123 of *In Memoriam*). Pitman also notes that there are ghosts of two sonnets in the first twenty-eight lines, and the eroded octet of a third at the conclusion. As Riede puts it, “like ‘The Buried Life,’ it is a poem that in subtle ways is about its own decomposition” (196).

The poem’s fame and emotional appeal have caused it to function in contemporary culture as something of a high-art symbol of the crisis of belief in the self, nature, or science. There have been sightings in Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* and in cyberpunk novels. See Robin Roberts, “Matthew Arnold’s ‘Dover Beach,’ Gender, and Science Fiction,” *Extrapolation* 33.3 (1992): 245–257.

Dating from the same period (early 1850s), *Lines Written in Kensington Gardens*, *The Buried Life*, and *Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse* are built around inside-outside contrasts, written from a momentary vantage point wherein Arnold, presenting himself as an estranged outsider, gains a privileged glimpse into the bosom of nature, self, or faith. In postlapsarian *Kensington Gardens* the poet stresses the phys-

ical contrasts between country and city, park and street, in order to make an emotional and spiritual opposition between nature's peace and the city's deathly uproar. In a variation on Cowper's famous eighteenth-century dictum "God made the country, and man made the town" (alluded to in the penultimate stanza), Arnold uses a sequestered nook in the park to cast himself, Wordsworth-style, into a more vital relationship with himself and his past. But the revealing images of nurse, cradle, child, and broken toy posit not simply a further contrast, but also an underlying connection, between frazzled adult poet and helpless child. Both can only pray that Mother Nature will look after them.

*The Buried Life* employs Arnold's characteristic river and sea imagery to channel its way to his inmost self. It is as if he were a geological formation concealing an underground stream that might, if plumbed, buoy him toward that deeper calm he strains for in *Kensington Gardens*. For many readers, the search for "the buried life" is the quintessence of Arnold's poetry, and of the modern condition in general. But how do we know when we *are* (or aren't) in touch with our "true" feelings? (Note how little Arnold actually tells us about his). Consider the validity of the archeological (or funereal) metaphor the poem is built on: how useful or misleading is our cultural predisposition to value depth over surface? In an essay that is itself rather lofty and Arnoldian, Philip Davis writes of the centrality of the poem and its sentiment for the whole of nineteenth-century poetry: "in what seem to me the greatest lines written by anyone in the century, Arnold captures what (in retrospect) we can see it would take to turn Thomas Hardy back towards William Wordsworth, when suddenly 'A bolt is shot back somewhere in our breast / And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again'" ("Arnold's Gift: The Poet in an Unpoetic Age," *Essays and Studies*, special Arnold issue, ed. Miriam Allott [1988]: 78).

In *Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse* Arnold situates himself within the famous community of monks, not—he is at pains to point out—"as their friend, or child," but as a fellow seeker who leaves worldly paths "to possess my soul again." Here he finds himself in the company of those whose faith is as out of favor with the world as his melancholy introspection; he declares himself ready "to die out with these / Last of the people who believe!" (lines 111–112). In the poem's central stanza, the speaker presents himself as "Wandering between two worlds, one dead, / The other powerless to be born" (lines 85–86). These lines epitomize the Victorian sense of living in "an age of transition," when Christianity appears to have lost its power to console and guide, and nothing convincing has appeared in its stead. Arnold captures the feeling of frustrated postponement and self-division that wracks Carlyle in *Sartor Resartus*, Tennyson in *In Memoriam*, and even Hopkins in his late sonnets.

It is typically Arnoldian to want to wait out this period somewhere isolated, while still feeling that his life is driven onward "To life, to cities, and to war" (line 180). Yet his concluding remarks (beginning with line 169) are couched in a strange, extended simile in which Arnold compares his Victorian, post-Romantic generation to children who live in an abbey in the forest (*not* mountains). Like Ladies of Shalott, they catch gleams "Of passing troops in the sun's beam" (line 177), but they resist the charm of "bugle music on the breeze," instead answering

that this call has come too late for such “shy recluses” as they. Thus the poem ends by turning Arnold and his fellow orphans into monks after all, perhaps suggesting that even if a new world were to be born soon, they would be unable to inhabit it.

*The Scholar Gipsy* (is the title a contradiction in terms?) presents the scholar as having been spared the disease of modern life because centuries ago he had the good sense to anticipate Arnold’s advice: “fly our paths, our feverish contact fly!” He is a romantic version of the monks’ religiously based renunciation of the world in *Stanzas*. But the rejection of an Oxford education brings questionable success: is the ex-scholar perhaps fatally deluded, doomed to wander enchanted in his time-warp, forever unsatisfied, because of his misguided quest? Is he a victim of the gipsies’ magic, rather than the master of it? His professed intention to reveal their secrets to the world when he finds them out may have been his undoing. His desire to communicate hidden knowledge is one of the many features in the poem that link the gipsy-scholar to the poet, and may echo Coleridge’s promise at the end of *Kubla Khan* to rebuild the pleasure dome himself if he can “revive within me” the song of the Abyssinian maid.

In his rich, densely descriptive Keatsian stanzas, Arnold seems to be positing a vague, solitary identification with the natural world as an alternative to modern angst and alienation. He also implies that the source of this angst has at least two historical locations. The first is when the scholar joins the gipsies, the moment in the seventeenth century when the Hebraism of Puritan England won out over the Hellenistic spirit of the Renaissance (see *Culture and Anarchy*). The second source of civilization’s woes, it is suggested in the complex final simile, can be found in ancient times, when the “merry,” intrusive Greeks first came into Tyrian waters. Thus the “repeated shocks” of change that “wears out the lives of mortal men” are as old as Western culture, and what seem the Victorian poet’s particular woes are those of introspective, solitary souls in every era. For more on the way in which Arnold grounds (and ungrounds) his poem historically, see Antony Harrison, “Matthew Arnold’s Gipsies: Intertextuality and the New Historicism,” *Victorian Studies* 29 (1991): 365–383; and Alan Grob, “Arnold’s ‘The Scholar Gipsy’: The Use and Abuse of History,” *Victorian Poetry* 34.2 (1996): 149–174.

*Thyrsis* is unusual as a pastoral elegy. It relies less on the classical pastoral tradition of Milton or Shelley than on an earlier poem of Arnold’s own. In *Thyrsis* Arnold inserts the figure of Clough into the framework of *The Scholar Gipsy*, employing the same stanza form, and changing the search for the gipsy into the quest for a glimpse of “the signal elm” whose existence proves “Our friend, the Gipsy-Scholar, was not dead.” Through Arnold’s act of poetic will, Clough thus metamorphoses into an already immortal literary character who haunts the Oxford countryside as Clough did in his youth. But the later poem also seems to confirm the earlier one’s warning that contact with modern life is fatal; ironically, what turns Clough into the Gipsy-Scholar is his failure to act as the Gipsy did: Clough made the mistake of leaving Oxford for London where “his piping took a troubled sound.” The search for the tree, triumphantly located at the last moment, images the poet’s quest to believe in his dead friend Thyrsis’s continuing life, whether in nature or art. The tree functions as a symbol of the afterlife, but also of lost youth,

and of phallic power or poetic potency (Arnold's perhaps more than Clough's). As in most elegies, the poet uses the task of resuscitating a dead friend as a means of insuring his own literary immortality. The poem ends with the poet reaffirming the value of the Scholar's search, and rededicating himself to the same pursuit, urged on by Thyrsis's otherworldly words. But Arnold wrote no more poetry, and Clough is remembered mostly for his spectral role in this valediction. The tree and Scholar provide the final, active images, suggesting that Corydon and Thyrsis have been subsumed by them.

### Prose

In 1849 Arnold wrote to Clough complaining "how deeply *unpoetical* the age and all one's surroundings are. Not unprofound, not ungrand, not unmoving,—but *unpoetical*." Within a few years Arnold all but gave up trying to deal with his "unpoetical" times in verse form. In the literary and social criticism that followed, he sought to reconcile his high-minded poetic concern for eternal verities with the more down-to-earth demands of timely, topical commentary on the shortcomings of Victorian culture. In his most famous essay, *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time*, he suggested that, in an era where great creative activity was impossible, criticism could stand in as "a free creative activity," one that could both improve society at large and still satisfy the intellect of the gifted observer.

But to have genuine authority, Arnold contends, criticism must preserve its "disinterestedness" or objectivity "by keeping aloof from what is called 'the practical view of things.'" If criticism does not pursue "the law of its own nature" as "a free play of the mind on all subjects which it touches," it will end up serving private interests, not the public's. Only non-sectarian, purely intellectual analysis can enable critics to pursue their fundamental goal: "to see the object as in itself it really is." For Arnold, then, criticism has little to do with the prophetic denunciations of Ruskin, or even the closely reasoned defense of human rights offered by Mill. Instead, Arnold stresses that criticism is not so much a toting up of faults and merits as it is a continuing process, dedicated to producing "a current of true and fresh ideas."

Arnold's claims for the necessity of critical open-mindedness can be compared to Mill's position regarding the benefits of free speech in *On Liberty*. Like Mill he asserts that an unimpeded entertaining of all ideas, including those that challenge convention, is "an essential provider of elements without which a nation's spirit . . . must, in the long run, die of inanition." What Arnold adds to Mill is the explicit championing of an ideal intellectual position—a "disinterested love of a free play of the mind on all subjects, for its own sake"—that sets the true critic above the fray of political contention, so that he can dedicate himself to pursuing "the best that is known and thought in the world, irrespective of practice [and] politics." Claiming that "practical considerations cling to it and stifle it," Arnold recognizes that his brand of criticism may be "slow and obscure," but contends that such a careful, collected transcending of the "inadequate ideas" of the masses is the only way "that the critic can do the practical man any service."

But Arnold's own rhetoric often seems to undermine his argument: why is it so insistent yet so vague, so repetitious, so ungrounded by examples of what "fresh and true ideas" really are? And don't you have to have an interest in disinterestedness in order to practice it? Moreover, Arnold clearly delights in attacking people by name, attempting to expose fallacious reasoning or uninformed opinions. One might respond that Arnold is proposing a critical method whose benefit lies in its refusal to take sides or to spare anyone, liberal or conservative, bishop or working man. It could also be said of his criticism that, like his poetry, it sets up standards it cannot reach, and that the perhaps noble aspiration is more important than the failed execution.

Arnold himself does not seem to question whether the critical objectivity he calls for is genuinely possible, just as he does not seem to doubt his ability to see "the object as in itself it really is." Does he purposefully avoid raising these vexed questions because he expects his audience to recognize that *all* critical theory depends, to a greater or lesser extent, on some sort of universalist claim? He would no doubt have vehemently rejected Baudelaire's view that criticism should be "passionate, partisan, personal." Since current critical sympathies seem to lie more with Baudelaire than Arnold, it is interesting to examine just how Arnold carries out his difficult task. The essay's most famous passage deals with the news item ending "Wragg is in custody." By contrasting the bombast of self-congratulatory political rhetoric about "our old Anglo-Saxon breed" to the sensational crudity of tabloid journalism, Arnold attempts to moderate, in a double sense, the discourse of British national life. Wragg's sad example casts doubt on the country's economic health, the fineness of its landscape, the legitimacy of its citizens, the equality of its laws, its respect for women, and even the dignity of its names. Appearing to lay his own views aside, Arnold sets one aspect of his culture against another, in order to "get rid of what in them is excessive and offensive, and to fall into a softer and truer key."

The essay therefore provides a good opportunity to ask what the ideals of social commentary ought to be, and if critical "disinterestedness" is a laudable goal or an impossible dream. Eugene Goodheart provides a strenuous defense of the concept in "Arnold, Critic of Ideology" (*New Literary History* 25 [1994]: 415-428), arguing that in "Function," as in *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold realistically strives to develop "the human capacity for the transcendence of narrowly conceived self-interest." Susan Walsh, however, portrays a very different Arnold in her article "That Arnoldian Wragg: Anarchy as Menstrosity in Victorian Social Criticism" (*Victorian Literature and Culture* 20 [1992]: 217-241). Viewing the story of Wragg in the context of Victorian tendencies to connect menstruation, factory work, soiled rags, and female biological determinism, Walsh writes that "it is Arnold who completes the transformation of Wragg into a thing, a tattered cast-off of a commodity culture. . . . Elizabeth Wragg comes to stand, not for herself, but for an anarchical social political economy whose factories spawn abominations. . . . While it may appear as if Arnold means to liberate the working class from Roebuck and Adderley's sentimental portrait of the happy non-exploited laborer, he actually works to reestablish Victorian classism with his ugly, jarring portrait of Wragg."

*Culture and Anarchy* remains relevant for many reasons, among them its concern to identify the factors that make up a culture and shape its public discourse; its effort to defuse class hostility and promote mutual tolerance and political cooperation; and its questioning of whether “our worship of freedom in and for itself” is not detrimental to the public good. *Culture and Anarchy* evolved from a series of lectures and articles Arnold wrote in 1867–68, during debates over the Second Reform Bill. Passed in August, 1867, the bill doubled the electorate to include about one-third of adult males, among them many members of the working class. Filled with apprehensions about the direction that modern mass democracy would carry his nation, Arnold attacked the central British notion of “Doing As One Likes”—an anarchical tendency he found throughout society, but especially in the middle and working classes. His remedy, the cultivation of a trans-class “best self” based on education and located in the authority of the State, remains as controversial today as it was during Victorian times. To set Arnold’s social analysis within its initial context, see the complete editions edited by J. Dover Wilson (1950) and Samuel Lipman (1994). Lipman reprints the original 1869 text, and includes important new essays by Gerald Graff, Maurice Cowling, and Steven Marcus. On Arnold’s use of irony, satire, and humorous language, see Robert Altick’s “The Comedy of Culture and Anarchy” in *Victorian Perspectives: Six Essays*, ed. John Clubbe and Jerome Meckier (1989), 120–144.

There is much to grapple with—and argue about—in this text, including the two main structural premises: 1) Arnold’s vision of British intellectual and social history as a struggle between an active Puritan “Hebraism” and a reflective secular “Hellenism”; and 2) Arnold’s division of society into three warring, self-serving factions: aristocratic Barbarians, middle-class Philistines, and an uneducated working-class Populace. When he suggests that the current predominance of the individualistic Hebraic strand is in fact causing society to unravel, he raises the question of what can bind a nation together, particularly in an increasingly secular age. The media? Shared political or economic values? If something more uplifting, such as the “pursuit of perfection,” is desired, then how is this “sweetness and light” to be defined, and how best promoted? Can genuine culture ever be attained in the absence—or in the presence—of individual liberty? In “*Culture and Anarchy Today*,” (*The Southern Review* 29.3 [1993]: 433–452, rpt. in the Lipman edition), Steven Marcus points to Arnold’s foresight regarding the social ferment and challenges to tradition that strong group affiliation generate: “Arnold sensed or intuited in the matrix of nineteenth-century Dissenting British Protestantism a very early precursor of what nowadays goes by the temporary name of multiculturalism” (434).

Ironically, where Arnold comes under the heaviest attack from both Victorians and Moderns is where he is most idealistic, calling on people “to rise above the idea of class to the idea of the whole community, the State, and to find our centre of light and authority there.” Even if one were to second his hopes for enlightened universal education, and temporarily forget the uneven results of that effort in the past century, the notion that a “disinterested” government could direct the enterprise successfully smacks too much of Plato’s *Republic* and various totalitarian states ever since. But as Marcus concludes (speaking for many of Arnold’s critics),

*Culture and Anarchy* is difficult to reject in its entirety. Education, open-minded critical debate, and social cooperation remain essential values of the democratic culture Arnold feared would overthrow them: "What Arnold is in effect saying, with historical perspicacity, is that class life is in itself alienated life, and hence culture once again represents a project of transcendence. . . . Arnold's culture represents a permanent contribution to an evolving ideal of what may be thinkable if not possible for modern humanity. . . . And unlike Arnold's biddings about the state, it has not been either superseded or altogether defeated by historical experience" (449).

In *The Study of Poetry* Arnold seeks, in a sense, to apply his social and critical principles to the activity of reading. He proposes what might be called a "disinterested" evaluation of what constitutes "the best poetry," poetry that, more than religion or philosophy, has the "power of forming, sustaining, and delighting us, as nothing else can." In his opening paragraphs Arnold thus lays the groundwork for the Modernist worship of the religion of Art. Having placed an immense responsibility on poetry as a "criticism of life" that can guide humanity, Arnold tries to show readers how they can find the "really" best poetry; they must rule out "fallacious" estimates of poetic value based on historical significance or personal appeal. But can we read poetry apart from these relativistic considerations? Why do we care about poetry, if not because of its impact on us? Consider Pater's famous challenge to Arnold in the Preface to *The Renaissance*, where Pater places the personal response foremost: "What is this song or picture . . . to me?"

Rejecting such subjectivity, Arnold elaborates his famous doctrine of objective "touchstones"—readers should always have in mind examples of "the truly excellent" lines of "the great masters" so that they can "apply them as a touchstone to other poetry." Arnold provides many examples, from many languages, of what he considers the best poetry, and then proceeds to evaluate the major English poets on the basis of how their work measures up to the "higher truth and higher seriousness" of the very greatest poetry. T. S. Eliot, so harsh on Arnold elsewhere, says "you cannot read his essay on *The Study of Poetry* without being convinced by the felicity of his quotations: to be able to quote as Arnold could is the best evidence of taste." The Victorian critic John S. Eells noted in 1880 that Arnold favors quotations dealing with pathos, pain, and loss; Eells finds that what Arnold most admires is "contemplation, profoundly earnest, of the grimness and darkness of the human adventure."

The contemporary student of poetry may well quarrel with this taste, and hence the whole idea of touchstones. Though furnishing concrete examples, Arnold is still maddeningly vague, since he never says *why* these are great lines, contenting himself with reiterating that they are of "the very highest quality." Refusing to acknowledge "the historical estimate," Arnold does not consider how time-bound his own choices are. Modern readers may feel that what makes a text classic is its instability: very different lines within the same poem may acquire "touchstone" status over the years. Frank Kermode has remarked that a classic is a work that changes its meaning every generation.

Yet one of the things that keeps Arnold's essay interesting is the way in which it stimulates thought not only about what poetic greatness involves, but also about

how contextually determined any definition—or later response to that definition—is likely to be. Sensing this, Arnold leaves it to his readers to say (or intuit) why his touchstones have been chosen: “if we are asked to define this mark and accent [of greatness] in the abstract, our answer must be: No, for we should thereby be darkening the question, not clearing it.” He challenges his readers to grapple with Arnoldian standards of taste, to try and appreciate poetry as he does, and in the process to provide for themselves the fresh readings that will, provokingly, keep his dated essay up to date.

## Dante Gabriel Rossetti

In *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (2nd. ed., 1919), Arthur Symons wrote: “What would French poetry be to-day if Baudelaire had never existed? As different a thing from what it is as English poetry would be without Rossetti.” While it’s hard to credit such an extravagant claim today, fin-de-siècle poets like Symons, Wilde, and Yeats took Rossetti as a model because he had dedicated himself steadfastly to the pursuit of Beauty and Art for Art’s Sake. Whether one regarded it as lurid or laudable, his devotion to idealized images of beautiful women caused “Aestheticism” to be called “Rossetti-ism” in its early stages. He took inspiration from his Florentine namesake, but paid little heed to the conventions of Victorian art, literature, or society.

*The Blessed Damozel*, his earliest important work, was written while he was still a teenager. It can be read not only as the poet’s self-dedication to an unworldly, unattainable muse, but also as a rejection of the religiously and socially informed art of the day. Readers have always been amazed at the sensuous audacity of Rossetti’s conception of heaven, particularly the tangibility of the Damozel’s trappings and desires, and her daring plan to ask Christ “Only to live as once on earth / With Love,—only to be, / As then awhile, for ever now / Together, I and he.” Meanwhile, her egotistical earthly lover cannot conceive that the Damozel could be happy without him, even in heaven: “I heard her tears.”

But the poem challenges orthodoxy in subtler ways as well. Rossetti flattens out the religious or symbolic depth of his vision even as he complicates it formally and psychologically. Although they invoke the mystic numbers three and seven, the lilies and stars that adorn the Damozel seem less relevant to her situation than the weight of her golden hair or the heat of her bosom. (*The Woodspurge* is another example of Rossetti shifting potential religious significance—the “cup of three”—into the realm of visual fact and concrete observation.) Neither is it clear who presents the Damozel to the reader: is the earthly lover, who speaks in his own voice in parentheses, confidently fantasizing about her current position? or is there an omniscient narrator who describes her and sets her words in ironic juxtaposition with a bereft, earthbound lover who is just talking to himself?

The intertwined narrative—or is it two independent visions?—seems to progress toward a reunion, but death and life, represented by the gold bar and its typographical equivalents, the parentheses, conspire to keep the lovers apart.

Maybe Rossetti is projecting his own frustrations as lover and poet onto the imprisoned Damozel, as Tennyson does with the Lady of Shalott. What would it have meant for the Victorian artist to see himself as a passive, sequestered woman, hemmed in by otherworldly expectations about love? With her penchant for imagining future heavenly scenes, is the Damozel an artist figure, and “I” an inert caricature of the powerless, lovelorn Victorian maiden? The lovers’ sense of separation is reinforced by the well-known painting also titled *The Blessed Damozel* that Rossetti did much later. Begun in 1871, it was not “finished” until 1879 when the artist, at the request of a patron, added a predella depicting the earthly lover gazing upward. Those interested in poetry/painting comparisons can relate the parentheses of the poem to the actual “gold bar” of the painting’s frame, noting the painter’s use of embracing couples in the background to visually “narrate” the Damozel’s loneliness.

The brief selections from *The House of Life* give a sense of Rossetti’s approach to the sonnet as a timely yet timeless work of art (“a moment’s monument”), fraught with life-giving emotion. Using the sonnet sequence to enshrine bodily passion in sacramentally tinged language, Rossetti continues to explore the tensions that animate *The Blessed Damozel*. Some may feel that by investing so much in melding body and spirit, Rossetti has written himself into a sonorous sameness. (The notorious *Nuptial Sleep*, with its Adamic revelation at the end, is an exception.) In *The Fleshly School of Poetry* (1871) Robert Buchanan savaged what he called “this protracted hankering after a person of the other sex,” and complained about the “inference that the body is greater than the soul, and sound superior to sense; and that the poet, properly to develop his poetic faculty, must be an intellectual hermaphrodite.” Without accepting all Buchanan’s objections, one can still see how Rossetti’s sense of spiritual sexuality (or vice versa) produced artistic challenges for the author as well as his audience.

*The Burden of Nineveh* shows Rossetti at his wittiest. Taking his title from the opening words of the biblical book of Nahum, Rossetti plays on the many intertwined meanings of the word “burden.” First, it refers to the sheer bulk of Assyrian statuary whose awkward entrance into the British Museum prompts the poem. This physical grappling with an outlandish ancient object introduces the idea of the museum as an imperial storehouse, to be stocked by armies and aristocrats, then culturally raided by the public (Keats’s visits to the British Museum provided material for the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*). But “burden” also refers to the metaphorical weight of empire, both Assyrian and British. Then there is the formal “burden” or refrain of a poem—its central theme—and this meaning leads the poet to end each stanza with the word “Nineveh.” Finally, the dominant biblical meaning is “oracle,” a heavy lot or fate; the King James Bible thus speaks of “the burden of Babylon” in addition to “the burden of Nineveh,” since both cities are destroyed by the Lord because of their worldliness.

The revolving door through which the poet passes suggests the cycles of history that have brought Nineveh low and sent its remains to London. Britain may follow this fate, for the winged bull is also John Bull, the popular caricature of Britain. But Rossetti hints that Nineveh enjoys a certain post-mortem triumph in

the survival of its mighty icons, and raises the amusing possibility that future archaeologists might conclude that the bull was an idol worshipped by Victorian civilization. The vision of London as a ruin to be viewed nostalgically by a visitor from the South Pacific would have reminded Victorian readers of Macaulay's cautionary image of a New Zealander coming to sketch the ruins of London after the center of civilization had moved further west. Rossetti's concluding question, suggesting Britain's misplaced values, anticipates Kipling's doleful warning in *Recessional* (1897) about the transitory rewards of empire. But the chipper tone of Rossetti's poem, its brisk rhythms and rhymes, implies that the poet takes some delight in the prospect. The incongruity and semantic unruliness of the bull, its imagined carousings in the symbolic china-shop of history, seem to interest him more than dire prophecies about the fall of Victorian London.

Rossetti's poems provide a good starting place for discussing the Pre-Raphaelite movement. The original "Brotherhood" included Rossetti and the painters William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, and James Collinson; the sculptor Thomas Woolner; and the critics F. G. Stephens and William Michael Rossetti, Dante's brother. Christina Rossetti and Ford Madox Brown were closely allied with the group. Later, as the initial group grew apart, the term "Pre-Raphaelite" expanded to cover the highly-colored, mediievally inspired works done by friends and associates. These included the poets Swinburne, George Meredith, and Coventry Patmore, the artists Edward Burne-Jones and Arthur Hughes, and painter-poets such as William Morris and William Bell Scott.

There is a great deal of Pre-Raphaelite material to be found on the World Wide Web. Jerome McGann's Rossetti Archive at the University of Virginia is useful, along with the Pre-Raphaelite sites at the University of Indiana and the more general information on the Victorian Web at Brown University. There are many good print collections of PRB documents and images; in addition to those listed in the Bibliography, the new *Anthology of Pre-Raphaelite Writings*, ed. Carolyn Hares-Stryker (1997), is especially rich. Crammed with intriguing anecdotes, William Gaunt's *The Pre-Raphaelite Dream* (1966) remains the most lively introduction to the group. For illustrations and background, the best inexpensive book is still Timothy Hilton's *The Pre-Raphaelites* (1970), though the text is somewhat dated.

We were unable to include Rossetti's long dramatic monologue *Jenny*, spoken by a poet to a prostitute who has fallen asleep in his lap. Students or teachers might find it interesting to seek out the poem because the situation—a male speaker speculates on life and love to a silent/dead woman—seems characteristically Victorian, recalling *The Blessed Damozel*, Swinburne's *The Leper*, Arnold's *Dover Beach*, and Browning's *Porphyrion's Lover* and *Andrea del Sarto*.

## Christina Rossetti

Stylistically, Christina Rossetti's poems have a purity and grace, a quirky bemused intelligence that may remind readers of Emily Dickinson (whom she admired) or Edna St. Vincent Millay (who admired her). Her deceptive simplicity of language

and phrasing make her in many ways the most modern of Victorian poets, and an opening line like “Something this foggy day, a something which” seems right out of e. e. cummings. But Rossetti was rarely light-hearted in her choice of subjects; her lyrics are almost always addressed to an estranged lover-listener. Speaking in the voice of a slighted or forgotten lover, they often tell of a lonely yearning that persists even in the grave.

According to her older brother William, Christina Rossetti’s first poetic composition, spoken because she was still too young to write, was: “Cecilia never went to school / Without her gladiator.” William comments that “She understood this much—that a ‘gladiator’ would be a man capable of showing some fight for ‘Cecilia’ upon an emergency.” He adds that the euphonious, carefully metered lines forecast her future work, “hinting at a certain oddity or whimsicality of combination which (mingled indeed with qualities of a very different kind) can be not unfrequently traced in verse of her mature years” (*The Poetical Works of Christina Rossetti* [1904], xlix).

It could be said that, in spite of her whimsy, the mature Rossetti never wrote a lyric poem without missing that gladiator. Whether we call her “Cecilia” (the patron saint of music) or “Christina” (a female Christ), the speaker appears vulnerable and sinned against; she must become her own gladiator, providing her own protection against the wounds of love. Her weapons are the subtle ones of wit, irony, self-denial and above all an unsentimental, clear-eyed detachment.

Renunciation is in many ways Rossetti’s central theme, the tone becoming playful and arch in the few poems where the speaker suggests that *others* do the renouncing (such as *No, Thank You, John* and *Promises Like Pie-Crust*) and painfully resolute when it is she who appears forgotten (cf. *When I am dead, my dearest, Remember, After Death, A Pause, and Echo*). Unrelieved by the bursts of passion, classical allusions, and domestic, nurturing metaphors that characterize Barrett Browning’s love lyrics, Rossetti’s poems have a sort of bare lucidity, a “bleak mid-winter” quality; they seem to be written mostly after, rather than during, the relationships described. Some of the poems meditate on the idea of a life not fully lived (*Dead Before Death* and *In Progress*); the striking sonnet on what it was like to model for Dante Rossetti’s paintings (as Christina did before Elizabeth Siddal became his favorite subject) suggests that even when a woman has a man’s full attention, the sense of fulfillment belongs to him rather than her. Though her brother William’s famous assessment—“she was replete with the spirit of self-postponement”—does not take into account the ways in which Christina Rossetti validated her life through her art, it does capture an essential part of her poetic approach (lxvii).

In an equally influential reckoning, however, Virginia Woolf astutely noted the tug-of-war between the keenness of the poet’s desires and perceptions and the stern religious outlook that held them in check: “your eye . . . observed with a sensual, pre-Raphaelite intensity that must have surprised Christina the Anglo-Catholic. But to her you owed perhaps the fixity and sadness of your muse. The pressure of a tremendous faith circles and clamps together these little songs” (“I Am Christina Rossetti,” *The Second Common Reader* [1932], 219). Woolf continues, “You were not a pure saint by any means. You pulled legs; you tweaked noses.

You were at war with all humbug and pretense. Modest as you were, still you were drastic, sure of your gift, convinced of your vision . . . in a word, you were an artist" (220).

In *Christina Rossetti: The Poetry of Endurance* (1986) Dolores Rosenblum grapples with the tension between worldly and religious attitudes in Rossetti's poetry, concluding that "the religious poems 'correct' without cancelling the experiences of the fallen world rendered in the so-called secular poems, and that Rossetti's rewriting or doubling of her own poems, as well as the texts of biblical and Romantic literary tradition, contributes to a female myth, and ultimately, a female aesthetic" (84). Those looking for a briefer but still detailed introduction to Rossetti's work might consult Virginia Woolf's famous essay, as well as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's chapter on Rossetti in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) and their headnote in *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*. See also *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology*, ed. Angela Leighton and Margaret Reynolds (1995), a book which provides an excellent overview of its subject, and fine introductions to individual women poets, Rossetti and Browning chief among them.

In recent years, probably no Victorian poem has generated more interest than *Goblin Market*. It is unsurpassed for sheer energy and narrative drive, for accessibility of language and haunting quirkiness of image and action. The first edition featured line illustrations by Dante Rossetti, intense close-ups of furry-faced goblins and embracing sisters that did little to resolve the Victorians' still pertinent questions: who is this poem meant for? and what is it about? Is it a fairy tale, a religious allegory, a meditation on rape, money, or sexual repression?

Leighton and Reynolds point out the poem's "transgressive playfulness" and how, "like the wayward, perverse metres in which it is written, it constantly slips its own moral framework." They also note some interpretive possibilities: "The goblins' fruit may . . . represent original sin, Eucharistic redemption, sexual desire, prostitution, the nurturing south, economic power, imperial capitalism, masculinity, or even, as Gilbert and Gubar suggest, language and poetry. All of these are 'marketed' in the poem's extraordinary changes and exchanges of meaning. The fruit may even just be fruit, literally, and the poem about 'shopping'—that new popular pastime for women in the early 1860s" (355). Rosenblum includes a good chapter on *Goblin Market*, in which she suggests that the "goblin men" might be Christina's brothers, Dante and William Rossetti. She views the poem as built on a structure of acting, suffering, and recovering. Two other thought-provoking articles are: Elizabeth K. Helsinger's "Consumer Power and the Utopia of Desire: Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*," *ELH* 58.4 (1991): 903-33 and Dorothy Mermin's "Heroic Sisterhood in *Goblin Market*," *Victorian Poetry* 21.1 (1983): 107-18. Teachers can also compare the poem to Barrett-Browning's *Aurora Leigh* as a poetic narrative of women's education.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the poem is the way it seeks to control the conditions of its own reception via the final stanza, in which Laura relates the story—and the moral she draws from it—to her own daughters. The coda appears to tidy up and gloss over the desperate spiritual or psychosexual struggle of the narrative by proclaiming tritely that "there is no friend like a sister." Yet at the same

time, the poem seems destined as a cautionary tale for precisely this pre-adolescent female audience. Pulling no punches, it warns vulnerable young misses about the dangers of desire and strange men with tempting fruits, and the need for sisterly solidarity to resist them. What may be the most unsettling thing about *Goblin Market* is its status as a classic Victorian children's story: it is a tale whose darkly disturbing scenes really do seem *intended* to trouble children's minds, even as the fairy-tale elements allow "respectable" adults to read it aloud without ever explicitly raising the subjects of temptation, transgression, and fall.

Rossetti also wrote strangely affecting short stories. Students looking for paper topics may want to consider *Goblin Market* or the love lyrics in light of her curious fables: see especially *Nick* in *Commonplace and Other Short Stories* (1870), (rpt. *Forbidden Journeys: Fairy Tales and Fantasies by Victorian Women Writers*, eds. Nina Auerbach and U.C. Knoepfelmacher, 1992). Though quite short, *Nick* bears close comparison with Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* for the way in which its central character is bludgeoned into goodness; see also Rossetti's collection of nursery rhymes (1872) and the children's tale *Speaking Likenesses* (1874).

## William Morris

### The Defence of Guenevere (1858)

Morris's celebration of Guenevere's sexuality and energy contrasts with Tennyson's portrayal in *Idylls of the King* of a shamed and guilt-ridden queen responsible for Camelot's ruin. Unlike Tennyson, Morris is not concerned with moral disapproval. One might discuss other Victorian portrayals of "fallen women," such as the bourgeois adulteress in Augustus Egg's trilogy of paintings, *Past and Present* (1858).

Have students look at Morris's painting of Jane Burden as *Queen Guenevere* (1857). Carole Silver comments on how it "emphasizes the queen's heroic force and transcendence of conventional morality. . . . The power of the queen is manifest . . . in the strong vertical lines of her body which almost break through the patterns that enclose her. . . . Her dignity and calm make us perceive her not as 'fallen' but as risen, albeit from a bed of love" ("Victorian Spellbinders," *The Passing of Arthur*, eds. Christopher Baswell and William Sharpe, 1988, 253).

In *The Return to Camelot* (1981) Mark Girouard has a chapter called "The Return of Arthur," which details the Victorian reinvention of the legendary king. Jonathan Freedman writes that "for Morris, Arthurianism conjured forth a romance-world whose authenticity, intensity, and vitality stood in vivid contrast to the industrial ugliness of Victorian England, and at the same time evoked a privileged heterocosm whose squalor and violence ironically mirrored that of his contemporary world" ("Ideological Battleground," *The Passing of Arthur*, 236).

Interpretations of *The Defence of Guenevere* turn on the subtleties of the queen's argument: she seems to deny having committed adultery, yet her evocation of passionate love seems in itself a confession. In *The Romance of William Morris* (1982) Carole Silver suggests that "the queen does not know whether she is morally guilty;

she is uncertain of the rightness of her position, certain only of the strength of the love that has placed her in it" (20). Silver argues that "the poem's title is ironic. Guenevere intends a speech of self-vindication, but her words and actions persuade the reader of her adultery" (24).

Virginia S. Hale and Catherine Barnes Stevenson disagree. They argue in "Morris' Medieval Queen: A Paradox Resolved" that the apparent contradiction can be resolved by seeing Guenevere in the medieval context of courtly love: Morris portrays a woman who, "accused of treason, mounts a rhetorically sophisticated defense, in which she contemptuously dismisses that charge, while at the same time offering a celebration of her love in the medieval tradition of the 'defense d'amor'" (*Victorian Poetry* 30.2 [1992]: 171–78).

Freedman maintains, however, that Guenevere's assertion that Gauwaine lies "is clearly true: Gauwaine does not, cannot pierce the mystery of the love she and Lancelot share." But he adds that while this is "a brilliant equivocation," it is a flimsy defense; Guenevere's performance is in fact "a defense in a different sense: a knightly defense, a parrying, by the use of language, of the thrusts of her accusers—a holding action, while she awaits the intervention of Lancelot" (243).

Instructors will also want to call attention to Morris's use of the dramatic monologue, and to his language. Paul Thompson writes: "The poems must be read slowly, with each syllable given its full value, avoiding any strong rhythmic beat. Read like this, the apparently naïve defects in the poems, the odd deviations from the normal iambic beat, the unexpected rhymes and the curious overlapping of the lines, become masterly devices for creating tension, for suggesting a deeper meaning. . . . Morris had in fact created a new verse form, like stammering direct speech, which parallels the effects of Gerard Manley Hopkins" (*The Work of William Morris* [1991], 182–83). For more on the art of Morris's language see W. David Shaw's "Arthurian Ghosts: Phantom Art of *The Defence of Guenevere*" and Karen Herbert's "Dissident Language in *The Defence of Guenevere*," both in *Victorian Poetry* 34.3 (1996).

### The Haystack in the Floods (1858)

The inspiration for this bleak poem lay not in Malory's *Morte Darthur* but in the *Chroniques* of Jean Froissart, a history of the Hundred Years' War between France and England.

Cecil Lang calls Morris's poetry a hybrid of Rossetti and Browning: "Browning can be seen in the dramatic technique (abrupt openings, omitted transitions, harsh meter, etc.), Rossetti in the vivid, concrete detail." Morris's own contribution "was in the directness, bluntness, and violence—the brutality—with which he rendered his pictures of the Middle Ages. English poetry had seen nothing like it" (*The Pre-Raphaelites and Their Circle* [1975], 507–8).

As in *The Defence of Guenevere*, a woman's sexuality—and her right to control it herself—forms the crux of an emotional drama that mingles images of violence and passion. In each poem, a woman faces a male accuser who threatens to punish her illicit love affair with death. Yet in each case, the woman's "guilt" is really beside the point; for example, it isn't entirely clear why the "Paris folks" are clamoring to

kill Jehane (presumably they regard her as a traitor for having an English lover, and wish to scapegoat her for the recent French defeat). Carole Silver points out that “Jehane, unlike Guenevere, does not reveal the inner workings of her mind” and “her passive strength . . . is sharply opposed to Guenevere’s histrionic power” (*The Romance of William Morris* [1982], 34).

The impact of this poem lies in the horrific impasse in which Jehane finds herself. Students may feel she makes the wrong “choice”—but does she really have one? Would the sadistic Godmar have spared Robert if she had yielded to him? The very first lines betray the outcome, suggesting that the point is not what choice she makes—or even, as Silver proposes, “her ability to stick to it despite the pressure put upon her” (34)—but rather the stark *lack* of choices she faces. *The Haystack in the Floods* may be the only significant Victorian poem that offers no redemptive possibilities whatsoever.

In “Cataclysm and Pre-Raphaelite Tragedy: Morris’ *The Haystack in the Floods*,” Antony Harrison writes: “This poem, with its dominant tone of morose inevitability symbolically reinforced at every turn, austere depicts for its characters life’s apocalyptic hour.” He notes the poem’s surreal quality: “The pervasive horror, the sublimated sexuality, the violence and paranoia that are normally relegated to nightmares, here alone constitute reality.” Jehane does not go mad at the end, for “doing so would be an escape that Morris does not allow from his wrenchingly tragic universe.” In the end, Harrison concludes, Pre-Raphaelite poetry such as this “attempts to redeem the tragic by emphasizing the sensory and sensual” (*South Atlantic Review* 47.4 [1982]: 43–51).

### The Beauty of Life (1880)

Beginning in the late 1870s, Morris began lecturing on the decorative arts, bringing to the people his message about the necessity of art and beauty for a meaningful life. In his concern for the working classes, *The Beauty of Life* foreshadows Morris’s decision to join the Socialists several years later, for he came to believe that only under socialism would the renewal of society he envisioned become possible. Many of the essay’s themes—preserving green spaces, providing decent housing, reducing air pollution, saving historic buildings—strikingly anticipate twentieth-century preoccupations.

Ruskin’s “The Nature of Gothic” (*The Stones of Venice*, 1853) was a kind of manifesto for Morris & Company and the Arts and Crafts movement (Morris called it “one of the very few necessary and inevitable utterances of the century”). To Ruskin’s theories Morris added his own years of practical experience as a craftsman and designer. Compare Ruskin’s credo in *Modern Manufacture and Design* (1859)—“Beautiful art can only be produced by people who have beautiful things about them, and leisure to look at them”—with Morris’s dictum in *The Beauty of Life*: “Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful.”

Like Ruskin, Morris insists that this is not an elitist project: just as Ruskin, disdaining “the selfish power of the noblesse,” claims “the loftier and lovelier privi-

lege of bringing the power and charm of art within the reach of the humble and the poor," so Morris argues that "the civilization which does not carry the whole people with it is doomed to fall." Morris wants a Democracy of Art, "Art made by the people and for the people."

Have students read Nesbit's *Fortunatus Rex & Co.* along with Morris's essay; Nesbit's own socialism and environmentalism led her to satirize unhindered development as "eating up the green country like greedy yellow caterpillars." Paul Thomson describes Morris's pioneering effects on British town planning, particularly "the restriction of advertising hoardings to towns, the protection of ancient buildings, the clean air acts and attempts to control litter, and the garden cities and new towns" (*The Work of William Morris* [1991], 73).

## Algernon Charles Swinburne

Even in the bizarre world of the Victorian dramatic monologue, populated by charlatans, lechers, lunatics, and murderers, *The Leper* stands out. Students will be fascinated and horrified to discover that this tale of unrequited passion is told by a necrophiliac who begins to satisfy his desires only when his beloved is too wasted with leprosy to resist. The poem offers a good occasion to ask why any poet would want to impersonate such a character: what could he hope to say either about human psychology or—since Swinburne's narrator is a medieval scribe—about the nature of writing? Toward the end of the poem the scribe muses: "It may be all my love went wrong— / A scribe's work writ awry and blurred, / Scrawled after the blind evensong— / Spoilt music with no perfect word." Is writing a poem like making love to a corpse? Students may be quick to see parallels with the half-crazed confessional monologues of Browning, especially *Porphyria's Lover* (which also invokes God's judgment at the end) and *My Last Duchess*. To suggest the extent of Victorian poetic fetishizing of the dead or inert woman, remind them of Tennyson's *Mariana* and *The Lady of Shalott*, Dante Rossetti's *The Blessed Damozel*, and Christina Rossetti's *When I Am Dead My Dearest* and *After Death*.

But Swinburne goes further than any of these in literalizing the idea of physical love after death. Moreover, while the speaker's hunger for the lady's diseased body has its own perverse purity of devotion (he is "maddened" by her worn-off eyelids), Swinburne triangulates this desire by suggesting in stanza 7 that the narrator had earlier also been enamored of his rival—the golden-haired knight who "shames" the lady sexually and possibly gave her leprosy in the bargain. The knight's hair and mouth are one of the "three thoughts" the speaker takes "pleasure" in; of the other two "thoughts" one is the lady's thanking the scribe for acting as a go-between, and the third is his glad response to her subsequent disease. The lady's leprosy functions as an outward sign of her secret liaison, so that everyone, including the knight who once covered her with kisses, now shuns her. But the lowly scribe can now shelter her, performing what he cryptically calls "the service God forbids."

Perhaps sensing how outrageous this plot was, Swinburne not only made up a sixteenth-century French source for his tale (see first note), but also distanced the

action by using archaic or awkward formulations (“it is meet,” “this was well seen”). In addition, he generates a great deal of symbolic and aural density—while keeping the action vague—by repeating key words and concepts that resonate with religious, feudal, and modern meanings: service, forbiddenness, golden hair, kisses, blindness, sweetness. The poem’s final question (“Will not God do right?”) attempts to cast the whole situation in a theological light, but right to and for whom? Is the question a sign of the scribe’s craziness? Or of the poet-creator’s desire either to mollify or further scandalize a devout Victorian readership?

If *The Leper* reveals Swinburne’s twisted genius for shocking monologues, the oft-recited passage from *The Triumph of Time, I Will Go Back to the Great Sweet Mother*, gives the full flavor of his sonorous style. It is a wonderful piece to read aloud. The dactylic rhythms (long short short) seem to emulate the surge of the sea. The rhyme scheme is a variation of *ottava rima*, such as Byron used in *Don Juan*, but with the normally concluding couplet inserted between the second and third group of *ab* lines—perhaps to suggest the unconventional or frustrating nature of the speaker’s love affair. There is more than a hint of incest in this passage, as the speaker seeks to forget his lover by merging with the sea. As a way of getting into Swinburne’s sensibility as well as his method of constructing a line, ask the class to distinguish between “the pain of pleasure” and “the pleasure of pain,” and to consider how that concept-construction operates in this passage (and in *The Leper*) as an underlying principle. John D. Rosenberg notes that Swinburne made “compulsive use of alliterating antitheses” because he was “obsessed by the moment when one thing shades off into its opposite, or when contraries fuse. . . . Swinburne *perceived* in paradoxes” (“Swinburne,” *Victorian Studies* 11 [1967]: 131-152). Two examples from the last stanza are “The hopes that hurt and the dreams that hover,” and “Thy depths conceal and thy gulfs discover.”

*Itylus* is a beautiful, disturbing, and at first confusing poem. In the Greek legend Philomela, raped and mutilated by her sister’s husband Tereus, turns into a swallow; her sister Procne, who kills their son Itylus in revenge, turns into a nightingale. Latin versions reverse the sisters’ fates. The Greek version is perhaps sounder ornithologically, since the nightingale is thought to sing sweetly to mourn its dead child, while the tongueless swallow merely chatters. But the Latin version, which most English poets follow, suggests how the deepest art, the fullest song, is born out of the sexual violence and voicelessness endured by women.

Not till the end does Swinburne specify who is singing, and yet the impact of the poem depends on whether it is Procne (the mother of Itylus) or her sister who mourns. The death of Itylus and the feast where he was eaten by his father are not mentioned until the third-to-last stanza. The penultimate stanza alludes to the tapestry revealing Tereus’s crime, and the result of Procne’s seeing it: “the small slain body” of the boy she has killed. The only clue as to which sister is the suffering nightingale haunted by this death and which the forgetful swallow comes at the start of the last stanza: “O sister, sister, thy first-begotten!” By obliquely leading up to this revelation, Swinburne seeks to convey not only the lingering horror of the boy’s murder, but the raped sister’s grief that the mother who did it has now forgotten her son. It is typical of Swinburne to focus on the violence of act and affection that de-

stroys families, and also typical that, by giving voice and body to Itylus as well as Philomela, he manages to suggest a surprisingly intense bond between them.

Because of his licentious topics and flagrant disregard for Christian morality, Swinburne was often called “pagan” by Victorian critics. In the dramatic monologue *Hymn to Proserpine* he speaks in the voice of a Roman writer who mourns the death of his own ancient faith as the era of Christianity begins. (The attempt to view the Christian era from a perspective and time outside it anticipates Yeats’s poems *The Magi* and *The Second Coming*.) The situation gives Swinburne latitude to compare pagan gods, oriented towards fertility and natural abundance, to a self-denying Christ and Madonna. The poem’s most famous line, “Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has grown grey from thy breath,” yields victory to the Christians, but in such a way as to suggest that life on these grim terms is not worth living. Anapests (short short long) usually create a light, rapidly tripping meter, but here Swinburne manages through word choice and his long, six-beat alexandrine line to suggest the world weariness of the pagan poet who—having pronounced an eventual death sentence for the new Christian faith—is ready to sleep forever in the Underworld.

*The Forsaken Garden* is a post-Darwinian fantasy that may derive from memories of Swinburne’s childhood home of East Dene on the Isle of Wight. Its supple anapestic rhythms, its narrative of lost love and passion’s vulnerability amidst the fleeting vista of years, are typically Swinburnian, as are the coupling of contrasts and aggressive liminality of the opening lines. Sometimes it seems Swinburne collapses opposites to the point of muddle, as in “Here death may deal not again forever” (line 65), and the lovers embedded at the heart of the poem have far less definition than those in a similar poem, Browning’s *Love Among the Ruins*.

But Swinburne’s aim seems to be to create a sort of anti-Eden, a garden at the end of time where geological forces have outdistanced theological concerns. A master of evoking what is gone or to come, Swinburne projects a landscape where Adam and Eve, and all human history, are irrelevant: “Not a breath of the time that has been hovers / In the air now soft with a summer to be” (lines 59–60). The poet anticipates the cosmic perspective of Thomas Huxley’s *Evolution and Ethics* (see the Religion and Science perspectives section): “nothing is more certain than that, measured by the liberal scale of time-keeping of the universe, this present state of nature, however it may seem to have gone and to go on for ever, is but a fleeting phase of her infinite variety.” Swinburne’s concluding lines gain in power and shed some of their showy paradox when read as part of a vast natural process. With the passage of aeons, the world crumbles and in the absence of any animal or vegetable life, even Death, born in Eden and now a mere remnant of transitory organic epochs, finally perishes. What Swinburne adds to Darwin and Huxley is a nostalgia of barrenness, the idea of lifeless places haunted by imperceptible ghosts of memory.

Aware of his own reputation for vagueness, Swinburne was adept at locating it in other writers. His parody of Tennyson’s *The Higher Pantheism*, called *The Higher Pantheism in a Nutshell*, strikes to the heart of Victorian religious confusion; it is a funny poem to read aloud. But in its nonsensical parallels and contrasts the poem

makes fun of Swinburne's own style as well. He parodied himself at greater length in *Nephelidia* (Little Clouds), whose first line reads "From the depth of the dreamy decline of the dawn through a notable nimbus of nebulous moonshine." Swinburne once said of his work, "If we insist on having hard ground under foot all the way we shall not get far." But readers who waded in after him, surfing in the waves of words, inevitably have a good time.

## Walter Pater

It could be argued that the most important word in Walter Pater's work is "me." But far from being an egotist, Pater produced an impressionistic, subjective criticism whose emphasis on the relativity of experience and knowledge seems to dissolve the human personality along with the absolutes his fugitive consciousness challenges. In doing so, Pater helped spark the transition from High Victorian morality to the Aesthetic creed of "art for art's sake." Pater begins his attack immediately at the start of the Preface to *The Renaissance*. First he questions the underlying project of Ruskin's *Modern Painters* (and of classical aesthetics) by claiming that attempts to define beauty in the abstract are not very helpful; rather, "the true student of aesthetics" seeks to define beauty "in the most concrete terms possible," because the experience of beauty, like all human experience, is relative.

Then Pater deliberately undercuts Arnold's critical aim of seeing the object "as in itself it really is" by suggesting that the most one can be sure of is "one's own impression as it really is." The "primary data" of aesthetic response, says Pater, exist only in relation to the observer: "What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book, to *me*? What effect does it really produce on me? Does it give me pleasure? and if so, what sort or degree of pleasure? How is my nature modified by its presence, and under its influence?" For Pater, the critic registers the "pleasurable sensations" that beautiful art produces, and it is important for him to have "a certain kind of temperament, the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects." Pater thus might be said to be the original embodiment of Wilde's "critic as artist," a man whose "sole aim is to chronicle his own impressions."

Students may enjoy—or be outraged by—the danger Pater poses to the Academy. Is there such a thing as objective criticism, then? If it is philosophically impossible, should it exist as a laudable goal? If a student paper bears little relation to the text we have read and taught, should we protest—or encourage the further cultivation of this creative sensibility? Why is it all right for Pater to daydream on paper but not all right for students and art critics to do the same? Wilde works through Pater's ideas with dazzling logic in *The Critic as Artist*, concluding that the task of the critic is "to see the object as in itself it really is not."

By his choice of topic, Pater shifts the home ground of beauty from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, countering those such as Ruskin and Morris who denounced the Renaissance as too corrupt, sensual, pagan, and materialist. The Victorian prejudice against the Renaissance was so strong that only in the 1860s

did it begin to get critical attention, thanks to Pater's efforts; the first entry on the Renaissance in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* does not appear until 1885. But Pater's full title, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, raises the question, what kind of history is this? He speaks vaguely in the Preface of the "general spirit and character" of an age, and of its "aesthetic charm," yet his description of painters and their works is so intensely idiosyncratic that all the history it seems to supply is a history of Victorian taste, or maybe just the poetic "history" of Pater's own evanescent appreciations and imaginings.

In *Stones of Venice* Ruskin viewed art as an index of morality, the lasting evidence of the spiritual health or sickness of a society. And in Pater's emphasis on recreating the experience of art through imaginative prose, he seems to follow Ruskin: compare Pater's *Mona Lisa* to Ruskin's description of Turner's *Slave Ship*. But as Harold Bloom notes, Pater's "great achievement was to empty Ruskin's aestheticism of its moral basis" (*Walter Pater: Modern Critical Views* [1985], xxxi). For Ruskin, Turner's painting expresses divine wrath at slavery; for Pater, the *Mona Lisa* is a catalogue of supposedly timeless and definitely fantastic notions of womanhood, ranging from Greek goddesses to vampires. Compared to Ruskin's moral humanism, which sees art as objectively shaping and responding to human behavior, Pater offers a hedonistic humanism implying that art does not exist or matter apart from our sensations of it.

In "Arnold and Pater," T. S. Eliot insists that since Pater uses his rhapsodic prose to tell people how to live, Pater is indeed a moralist after all. "A writer," says Eliot, "may be none the less classified as a moralist, if his moralizing is suspect or perverse" (*Selected Essays* [1950], 389). Eliot complains that "the degradation of philosophy and religion, skilfully initiated by Arnold, is competently continued by Pater" (388), and he denies Pater's aestheticism: "The right practice of art for art's sake was the devotion of Flaubert and Henry James; Pater is not with these men, but rather with Carlyle and Ruskin and Arnold" (393).

Pater did seem troubled by the impact of his work. He chose not to reprint the "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance* in the second (1877) edition because he thought it might "mislead" impressionable young men, and though *The Renaissance* brought him recognition, it also precipitated a crisis in his own life. In 1874 it appears that Benjamin Jowett, master of Balliol, blocked Pater's routine promotion to University Proctor because Pater's writing made it impossible for Jowett to ignore Pater's relationship with a Balliol undergraduate. See Billie Andrew Inman's "Estrangement and Connection: Walter Pater, Benjamin Jowett, and William M. Hardinge" in *Pater in the 1990s*, ed. Laurel Brake and Ian Small (1991), 1–20, and William F. Shuter's "The 'Outing' of Walter Pater," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 48.4 (1994): 480–506. Pater was also satirized as the hedonistic "Mr. Rose" in W. H. Mallock's *The New Republic* (1877). Together, the two events brought pain to Pater and prevented him from being considered for Professor of Poetry in 1877. After 1874, the theme of victimization and suffering becomes pronounced in his works.

Despite the homoerotic current to his thought, Pater's attitude toward sexuality remains notoriously elusive. On Pater and "manliness" see James Eli Adams's chapter in *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity* (1995), 183–228. More

directly useful in the classroom is Herbert Sussman's detailed reading of the "Conclusion" in *Victorian Masculinities* (1995), 173–202: "these famous words are wholly self-contained, a call not for a particular formal program but for a particular practice of regulating male desire. Rather than an essay on style, the 'Conclusion' is a sermon on manhood" (193). After an early "trajectory of unmaning" (196) that deals with the dissolution of the personality ("that strange perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves"), the essay shifts, says Sussman, to "figures of . . . structuring, control, agency" culminating in the famous phrase, "To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life."

Sussman comments that "for Pater as for his predecessors" (such as Carlyle) "the crucial act in achieving manhood lies in imposing form on the formlessness of male desire by a virile act of will." Seeking "tight control of the internal current of male potency," the image is "not only Pater's but his age's vision of manliness as contained power" (198). One might also connect Pater with the "hard" science of Darwin and Huxley. Pater's starting point—"our physical life is a perpetual motion"—is the evolutionary principle writ small. Pater applies the concept of the variability of species to the individual body and personality, and in a speed-up of biological time urges us to grasp fleeting impressions that are in "perpetual flight," for they will never come again.

Sussman makes an interesting connection to Hopkins's *That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire* which "also moves along the trajectory of the masculine plot" to end in "immortal diamond," thus outdoing Pater's image for hardness and durability in the face of worldly flux (199). Yet, Sussman concludes, Pater is not merely appropriating "the vocabulary of normative Victorian [heterosexual] masculinities;" rather, "Pater subverts this formation by foregrounding the erotics always present within the practice of psychic restraint for earlier Victorians" (202). In other words the flame and the burning are what count most. Point out, however, that Pater concludes by saying that of all passions "the love of art for its own sake" is what makes for the fullest life.

This shading of eroticism into aestheticism, of experience into sensation and perception, continues in *The Child in the House*. Here Pater probingly explores the gradual process of how we come to be ourselves, and the role played by specific places and sensations in that development. According to Arthur Symons, Pater told him the story was designed to show "'the poetry of modern life,' something, he said, as Aurora Leigh does" (see Gerald Monsman, *Walter Pater's Art of Autobiography* [1980], 10). Though there is something outrageous in Pater likening his lush, measured prose to Barrett Browning's fitful, bristling pentameter, they are both concerned with how visual stimuli shape child psychology. Aurora's reaction to her mother's portrait in Book I not only parallels Florian's relation to his house, it is also a striking anticipation of (and perhaps a source for) Pater's famous rendering of the *Mona Lisa*.

While the story has traditionally been viewed as a thinly veiled autobiography, in *Walter Pater: Lover of Strange Souls* (1995) Denis Donoghue writes that such a reading is "no good" since "Pater never lived in such a house, his father didn't die abroad, the actual moves from Stepney to Enfield and later to Canterbury didn't at

all resemble the move in the story” (181). Noting that *A Child* is framed as a dream parable, Donoghue argues that “the purpose of memory in his fiction is not to recall an old experience but to create a new one” (182), and he points to the chain of sensations in the story as being not so much shaped by a historical causality as by a psychological predisposition, “a kind of tyranny of the senses,” in the narrator’s words, that rules over the boy. For Florian, the memoir has the perhaps liberating goal of self-exploration, “the noting . . . of some things in the story of his spirit—in that process of brain-building by which we are, each one of us, what we are.” As William E. Buckler says in *Walter Pater: The Critic as Artist of Ideas* (1987), *The Child in the House* is “the poetic myth of a man whose mental house is furnished forever in the first twelve years of his life. . . . It is the paradise from which his very eagerness to depart visits on him a piercing and eternal sense of loss” (187).

## Gerard Manley Hopkins

If one wanted to prove the truth of Ruskin’s famous pronouncement that “seeing clearly is poetry, prophecy, and religion, all in one,” the work of Hopkins would be a fine place to start. His impassioned combination of visual acuity and spiritual intensity not only produced great religious poetry, but prophetically opened the way for the dazzling leaps of sound and image that mark the most innovative poems of the twentieth century. Reading the selections from journals of 1871–73, when Hopkins was silently meditating on his new way of seeing the world and recasting its language, we discover how keenly he observed ordinary objects, and how carefully he sought to convey their exact appearance. He captures their particularity through a combination of minute, objective description and subtle references to the human body and activity—a sky is “frowning,” buds on a branch remind him of a finger tied with string, clouds in motion are like tossed napkins falling. His descriptive language thus emulates the interpenetration of human and natural worlds, and their infusion with God’s beauty and power—themes the poems present even more urgently.

Much fuss has been made about the terms “inscape” and “instress.” But as the journal entries show—like the wonderfully detailed one on bluebells (May 9, 1871)—Hopkins is simply trying with “inscape” to get at the complex “thisness” of the thing he observes, its look, feel, and structure. In *As Kingfishers Catch Fire* he clearly states his belief in the individuality of every entity: “Each mortal thing does one thing and the same: / Deals out that being indoors each one dwells; / Selves—goes itself; myself it speaks and spells; / Crying *Whát I dó is me: for that I came.*” Often he is frustrated that he can’t more readily bring outside, to everyone’s attention, “that being” that “indoors . . . dwells” in each thing. The entry on the beautiful roof structure hidden inside the barn (July 19, 1872) might serve as a metaphor for his mission as a poet, bringing inscapes to the world’s notice. It also anticipates his own lack of an audience for this undertaking: “I thought how sadly beauty of inscape was unknown and buried away from simple people and yet how near at hand it was if they had eyes to see it and it could be called out everywhere again.”

As for “instress,” it projects the uniqueness of the inscape toward the observer, but only if he or she is receptive and attentive—i.e., most likely alone. See the entry for Dec. 12, 1872: Hopkins comments that despite the presence of a friend, “I saw the inscape [of tufts of grass] though freshly, as if my eye were still growing, though with a companion the eye and the ear are for the most part shut and instress cannot come.” As it conveys the inscape outward, instress enables the poet’s eye to keep “growing” in maturity and power.

The letter to Bridges clarifies what principles of composition Hopkins had in mind when he finally began, in the late 1870s, to arrange these perceptions in words and sound. It is important to note that he never abandons form; although he wrenches syntax, makes up words, revises the rules of meter and diction, and violates the grammatical integrity of the poetic line, rhyme is always sacred for him. Moreover, most of his best poems are sonnets, with conventional Petrarchean octets (*abbaabba*) followed by a sestet (usually *cdcdcd*, his favorite conclusion) that registers the traditional “turn” in the poet’s attitude toward his topic.

Students will enjoy reading Hopkins aloud, once they have had a chance to work through each poem and familiarize themselves with the unusual words and constructions. Remind them of what Hopkins says to Bridges about accents in nursery rhymes and the natural rhythms of prose. If we let the stresses fall where they may, then most lines will scan pretty nicely.

*God’s Grandeur* is a good introduction to Hopkins’s outlook and technique. The internal rhyme in the first stanza augments the blariness of human toil, as contrasted to the flaming “grandeur of God” that worn-out mortals cannot feel. But after the turn, the world’s combined inscapes, the “dearest freshness deep down things” burst out irrepressibly (cf. “What is all this juice and joy?” in *Spring*). The startling break between lines 13 and 14 should be pointed out: Hopkins separates adjective and noun forty years before William Carlos Williams attempted it. In so doing he generates a suspense that is partially resolved in the image of the brooding dove and then transformed into sheer wonder with the heartfelt interjection—one of Hopkins’s trademarks—at the close.

*The Windhover* is a classic whose airborne energy, assonance, and alliteration seem to rip the sonnet form to shreds (“king- / dom” doesn’t survive the first line intact). But fragmentation is never Hopkins’s goal: his stress marks on “shéer plód,” for example, make the line scan and emphasize the mundane toil that can reveal—“no wonder of it”—God’s grandeur in ordinary, unlooked-for places. He reassembles the poem around the earthbound realization in the final tercet that the beauty of Christ’s sacrifice is emulated in the bursting open of soil or embers with their radiant self-rending. What happens in lines 9–11, however, is not clear: “Buckle” suggests conjunction, battle (a “buckler” is a shield), and collapse. Perhaps the Falcon is diving toward a sinner, creating a turmoil that, as Hopkins shows at length in the later dark sonnets, is indeed both “lovely” and “dangerous.” Compare this ecstatic Christ-the-Falcon to Yeats’s out-of-control predator in *The Second Coming*.

*Pied Beauty* is a good poem in which to examine Hopkins’s love of dense descriptive words conveying the multicolored and textured quality of “dappled

things.” The final lines slow the pace to dwell on each adjective. The short last line metrically joins the previous two to create a measured six-beat concluding couplet, while visually standing on its own to drive home the poem’s appreciation of the unchanging God who made this bountifully variegated flux.

As befits a season of plenty, *Hurrahing in Harvest* is full of gorgeous language, such as “has wilder, wilful-wavier / Meal-drift moulded ever and melted across skies?” Line 7 ends in a way unprecedented in English poetry, with the indefinite article “a.” But it works as a rhyme: the last three words are pronounced “gave ya” to rhyme with a cultivated British pronunciation of “Saviour.” The poem closes by insisting on the double, dynamic quality of observation. Nature needs to come together with a beholder to realize God’s greatness—“him” in the last line can be Christ for whom the heart hurls (exults).

*Binsey Poplars* and *Spring and Fall: to a young child* could be used to build a case for the “ecological” Hopkins, who feels the loss of trees as not simply a blight on the landscape but the destruction of their personality—in dying they “unselve,” robbing the world of their specialness and that of the landscape they inhabited. Compare the final journal entry (April 8, 1873) on the felling of an ashtree: “I heard the sound and looking out and seeing it maimed there came at that moment a great pang and I wished to die and not to see the inscapes of the world destroyed any more.” In *Spring and Fall* the child Margaret’s sorrow over the leaves falling from the trees reminds the poet, as it does Frost in *The Oven Bird*, of “that other fall we name the fall.” One of Hopkins’s most moving poems, *Spring and Fall* mixes the theological framework of original sin with basic human experience, claiming that our grief over calamity in the world beyond us is finally grief over our own mortality and deathly ways.

Exhausted and lonely at his final post in Ireland, Hopkins turned his sense of creative impotence and spiritual angst into unforgettable religious poetry. The Christ that is “lovely in limbs” in *As Kingfishers Catch Fire* now turns a “lionlimb” against him in the “terrible” sonnets. As Eliot said of Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*, it is “the quality of the doubt” that makes these works so compelling. In *Carrion Comfort* the opening line renders “Despair” as both noun and verb, setting up the engulfing, tortured language to come. Amid the violence of image there are echoes of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (II,ii) where Caliban and Trinculo cower under a cloak to avoid the coming storm: “in turns of tempest, me heaped there; me frantic to avoid thee and flee.” (See also “Here! creep, / Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind” in the equally bleak *No Worst, There Is None*). The shattering conclusion evokes Jacob wrestling with the angel, registering confusion and horror at the poet’s conflict with God, but what makes it most vivid is the interjection “my God!” that is also a recognition, an acknowledgement, a confession.

*No Worst, There Is None* and *I Wake and Feel the Fell of Dark, Not Day* continue to grapple with the darkness of the soul. The irrepressible morning of *God’s Grandeur* fails to come: night never ends and day is only redeemed by its death in sleep. In deepest misery, unable to communicate with God, the poet becomes gull, Christ’s bitter drink at the crucifixion, galling himself in a bitter parody of those revelatory embers at the end of *The Windhover*. Bodily, bloody imagery now pre-

dominates as Hopkins imagines himself scourged like Christ, but all this suffering only places him among the damned and “their sweating selves”—“but worse.”

*That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire* offers a momentary reprieve, its thickly textured description of nature recalling the early poems. Its mid-poem doubts give way to a final vision of the resurrection. But the overall effect is wrenching. The lines are broken (like the poet’s spirit?) into roughly three-beat halves, and after a sonnet-like opening, *abbaabba*, with no pause for a turn, the sonnet form explodes; first comes a typical sestet, *cdcdcd*, then another *d* rhyme, and finally a complete new unit with an alternate pattern to conclude: *ccceefff*. This desperate search for closure parallels the poet’s quest for Judgement Day, his desire to turn “This Jack, joke, poor potsherd” into “immortal diamond.”

*Thou Art Indeed Just, Lord* seems written to disprove the title, arguing that no enemy could wound as deeply as this heavenly friend. Sinners, plants, and animals prosper, but not “Time’s eunuch,” who builds no nest and breeds no lasting work. Perhaps Hopkins’s most sexually conscious work, the poem is a mini-*Waste Land* whose agonized plea for rain generates poetic fertility out of spiritual barrenness. Despite these harrowing last poems—or maybe in view of the agony they express—Hopkins’s dying words were “I am so happy, so happy.”

## Lewis Carroll

What makes a good story? One of the basic elements is a journey from the security of home out into regions of conflict and danger. When Carroll precipitated Alice “straight down a rabbit hole . . . without the least idea what was to happen afterwards” he launched her and his readers on a curiously epic adventure. Curious because of the tiny rabbit hole, the funny falling, the safe landing, the inverted or at least vertically tilted version of Arthurian medieval chases after a Questing Beast. Epic because Carroll has linked Alice’s adventure to that of the human race, as represented in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Like Adam and Eve, she has a *felix culpa* or “fortunate fall.” But it is a literal fall that leads her to a garden, not out from it. Moreover, what she eats enables her (eventually) to get into the garden, not get banished from it.

One of the hallmarks of Carroll’s inventiveness is his eagerness to turn things around, to entertain all possibilities, to look at the flip side of the rules laid down by society, religion, school. There is a poem by W. H. Auden, about the need for commitment, entitled “Leap Before You Look.” And while Alice has moments of conscientiousness, both she and her author leap into situations and explanations without being constrained by “normal” ways of thinking. When Alice falls and doesn’t hit the ground right away, it could be because she is falling slowly, rather than falling far. When she drinks and grows smaller, it seems logical that she might eat and grow larger. Reversibility is a key element in Wonderland, whether it is verbal (“Do cats eat bats?” “Do bats eat cats?”) or physical (opening and shutting like a telescope) or narrative (first the fall, then the eating, then the garden). If Adam and Eve fall into knowledge (of sexuality, of difference, of alienation from each

other, God, and the Garden), Alice falls into perplexity and wonder. Hers is no clear progress from light to darkness, or, as in spiritual autobiography, from darkness to light. Instead, she must try to make sense of the strangely mundane, the mundanely strange aspects of wonderland. One might ask students if Carroll's sense of her confused perceptual and moral "education" is not finally more "realistic" than that presented in conventional literature.

The poems play an important role in this grappling with the unknown. Like the fall down the rabbit hole, they contain familiar components, but keep coming out "wrong." "You are old, Father William" comes from Chapter 5 of *Wonderland*; a parody of Robert Southey's "The Old Man's Comforts and How He Gained Them" (1799), it is recited by Alice at the command of the Caterpillar, who afterwards comments that "it is wrong from beginning to end." In place of sententious moral instruction, the poem views old age as vigorous, fantastic, and foolish. Because it comes from Alice herself, it shows how her inner world has become as topsy-turvy as her outer one. We learn not only that received wisdom and school lessons can be undone by Wonderland experience, but also how implanted structures help create new ideas and images. In this regard, Carroll is anticipating some of Freud's work on how dreams are generated.

The Mock Turtle sings "The Lobster Quadrille" in Chapter 10 of *Wonderland*. As with so many of the creatures Alice meets, there is the question of eating in the air (Alice stops herself from saying that she knows all about whittings from her experience at dinner). But if "The Spider and the Fly," which it parodies, is about taking care not to be eaten, "The Lobster Quadrille" purports to be pure fun; it deliberately holds off on its moral, perhaps to entice the pale snail into a trap. It makes a good lead-in to "The Walrus and the Carpenter," where (in the meter of Hood's "The Dream of Eugene Aram" [1832], about a murderous schoolteacher) Tweedledee tells the story of some unfortunate little oysters. In Victorian times as now, children were taught to love animals that they sooner or later found on their dinner plates. By anthropomorphizing the food ("Their coats were brushed, their faces washed, / Their shoes were clean and neat"), Carroll brings together these two aspects of childhood education, the cuteness and the consumption. Students may have strong opinions on whether this is humorous or shocking, as well as reminiscences about their own culinary encounters with Peter Rabbit, Chicken Little, and the Three Little Pigs.

Finally, "Jabberwocky," from Chapter 1 of *Through the Looking Glass*, where it first appears as a backwards mirror-image, also begins and ends with food. As we and Alice learn later from Humpty Dumpty: "Twas brillig. . ." means that it is the hour for "broiling things." In the middle of the poem, we learn that the Jabberwock has "jaws that bite" so the hero must slay the beast first, with a sword that goes "snicker-snack." The eat-or-be-eaten side of the Alice stories, the conjunction of primeval struggle and childhood anxiety, is to be found everywhere, from the "cats eat bats/bats eat cats" and "EAT ME /DRINK ME" episodes of Chapter 1 to Alice's promise to her kitty on the last page of *Through the Looking Glass*: "All the time you're eating your breakfast, I'll repeat 'The Walrus and the Carpenter' to you, and then you can make believe it's oysters, dear!" Food, hunger,

appetite, absence. Ask students why the jar of marmalade that Alice picks up as she falls turns out to be empty. Is this a frustrated foretaste of the world of loss and mortality that Carroll builds around Alice and that he explicitly addresses in “Child of the Pure Unclouded Brow”?

“The White Knight’s Song” uses the stanza form of Thomas Moore’s “My Heart and Lute,” but its content parodies Wordsworth’s “Resolution and Independence.” Wordsworth’s “leech-gatherer on the moor” has been replaced by the “aged man / A-sitting on a gate.” Before the Knight starts singing, Carroll comments: “Of all the strange things that Alice saw in her journey Through the Looking Glass, this was the one that she always remembered most clearly. Years afterwards she could bring the whole scene back again . . . the mild blue eyes and kindly smile of the Knight—the setting sun gleaming through his hair, and shining on his armour in a blaze of light that quite dazzled her . . . all this she took in like a picture . . . listening, in a half-dream, to the melancholy music of the song.” Carroll saw himself as the White Knight, but then so did John Tenniel, the illustrator, who gave the Knight his own features. Both were old(er) storytellers who try to entertain a young girl with tales (or pictures) of inconsequential nonsense. They are allied with the speaker in the poem, a searcher for knowledge who shakes the aged man to wring from him the truth of life, but is so caught up in his own crazy world of invention that he cannot focus on the bizarre answers he receives.

One of the best books on Alice is Jackie Wullschläger’s *Inventing Wonderland* (1995), full of useful illustrations, which situates the Alice books in the context of Victorian images of childhood, and also has chapters on Edward Lear, J. M. Barrie, Kenneth Grahame, and A. A. Milne. The Norton Critical Edition of *Alice in Wonderland* (revised 1992) gives a good sense of the variety of critical approaches to the Alice books, ranging from the mathematical to the psychoanalytical.

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## PERSPECTIVES

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### Imagining Childhood

This section contains a wide variety of writings for and about children—and even, in the case of Daisy Ashford’s novel, *by* a child. Time permitting, the instructor might assign the entire Perspective in conjunction with the readings from Lewis Carroll. But it would also be possible to single out, for example, the nonsense verse of Carroll, Lear, and Belloc for a class session devoted to the whimsical and humorous aspects of Victorian poetry. Or one might focus on autobiographical recollections of Victorian childhood, linking some of the readings here with excerpts elsewhere in the anthology (from Newman, Mill, Darwin, Gosse, Ruskin, Cobbe, Pater, etc.).

Other depictions of childhood can be found in Parliamentary Papers and Henry Mayhew (*Perspectives: The Industrial Landscape*), Book I of *Aurora Leigh*, our excerpt from *Jane Eyre* (*Perspectives: Religion and Science*), *A Christmas Carol*, and several of the readings in *Perspectives: Victorian Ladies and Gentlemen* (notably, Cobbe,

the Brontës, and *Tom Brown's School Days*, though Queen Victoria's letters on child-bearing might also be relevant). Other writings for children include Edith Nesbit's *Fortunatus Rex & Co.* and Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories*. Thus, the instructor who wished to use *Childhood* as one of the unifying themes of a course on the Victorians would find ample resources within this anthology, perhaps to be supplemented with some full-length works such as *Oliver Twist* or *Great Expectations* or *Peter Pan*.

Antony and Peter Miall's *The Victorian Nursery Book* (1980) is excellent for giving students a sense of the visual world of Victorian children. It is heavily illustrated, with everything from pictures of bassinets and other nursery furniture, to the illustrations in children's books, to pictures of their toys and clothing. The book also contains a wonderful chapter on "The Photograph Album" which reproduces numerous photos of middle-class Victorian children all dressed up to have their pictures taken.

Students who wish to know more about the lives of working children should consult E. Royston Pike's *Human Documents of the Victorian Golden Age* (1967), which has many accounts of the lives of working children, as well as arguments for the necessity of child labor. A particularly compelling passage is the testimony of the Nottingham master sweep, which Pike quotes at length:

No one knows the cruelty which a boy has to undergo in learning. The flesh must be hardened. This is done by rubbing it, chiefly on the elbows and knees with strongest brine . . . You must stand over them with a cane, or coax them by a promise of a halfpenny, etc. if they will stand a few more rubs.

At first they will come back from their work with their arms and knees streaming with blood, and the knees looking as if the caps had been pulled off. Then they must be rubbed with brine again, and perhaps go off at once to another chimney. In some boys I have found that the skin does not harden for years.

The master sweep claims that although the best age to teach boys is about six, he has known them start as young as four or five. He recalls trying to accept no work in the afternoons so the sweeps could go to school, but "a lady complained to me because she could not get her chimney done, and said, 'A chimney sweep, indeed, wanting education! what next?'" Yet the boys became unemployable at fifteen or sixteen, and those who survived cancer or lung disease often went into the workhouse.

Without education, the chimney sweeps faced a grim future. But the education of children in nineteenth-century Britain was a wildly diverse and inconsistent affair. Have students examine the range of educational situations described or implied in this Perspective section, and elsewhere in the anthology. At one extreme was the absolute ignorance of the watercress girls (Miller's and Mayhew's) or the Blue Book girls. At the other was the expensive boarding school experience described by Cobbe or fictionalized by Hughes. Some children—these included Mill, Ruskin, Gosse, Robert Browning, and Stevenson—were educated at home by their parents; others—like Carroll's Alice, or Henry James's Maisie—had governesses (for

a description of what this could be like from the point of view of the governess, see Charlotte and Anne Brontë's writings in *Perspectives: Victorian Ladies and Gentlemen*). For middle-class children, there was an intense emphasis on proper behavior and manners (see, for example, *Alice, Moral Verses*, and *Peter Rabbit*). Memorization played a larger role than it does today, as illustrated in both the brutal schoolroom satirized by Dickens in our excerpt from *Hard Times* (in *Perspectives: The Industrial Landscape*), and Alice's preoccupation with recalling the words of poems she has learned by heart.

### Charles Darwin

#### *from A Biographical Sketch of an Infant (1839–41; 1877)*

One might ask students to consider how far modern beliefs about child development coincide with Darwin's—in what ways have we followed his thinking, and in what ways have we diverged? Notice how frequently he compares his child to various animals—this might have been thought radical at a time when suggestions that human beings are essentially animals provoked outrage. To a naturalist, such comparisons no doubt came easily to mind, and students who have read the readings from Darwin earlier in this anthology might recall his unromantic thoughts on a wife: “Better than a dog, anyhow.” Does Darwin emerge as a monster, dispassionately noting the reactions of his baby just as he would those of a laboratory animal? Or as a loving father, fascinated with every aspect of his baby's emerging capacities and personality? Have students compare Darwin's autobiographical description of his own childhood with his biographical sketch of his son's childhood.

### Moral verses

To Darwin, his baby was an object of study; to many Victorians, the child was an object to be improved upon. Where Darwin was curious to note vestiges of “savage” responses, the moralists were intent upon taming the savage by teaching it table manners. The earnest “Table Rules for Little Folks” is an excellent example of this sort of preoccupation. The Victorians continued to produce heavily moralistic literature for children at the same time that they mocked such writing. *Alice in Wonderland* has been called “the first fantasy entirely free of moralizing” (*Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia*); compare the verses in this section with the garbled nonsense Alice recites (“How doth the busy bee” for example) as she attempts to recall the lessons she has been obliged to learn by heart in the schoolroom. It is sometimes difficult to know where sincerity ends and mockery begins: if Eliza Cook's greedy little mouse dies merely to teach children a lesson about unselfishness, is Heinrich Hoffman's Augustus in quite the same category? It is hard not to detect irony in the wildly exaggerated punishments Hoffman's characters endure. Those wishing to know more about Heinrich Hoffman will find a chapter on him in Frey and Griffith's *The Literary Heritage of Childhood*.

There is an obvious pairing to be made between Thomas Miller's poem and Henry Mayhew's interview with the watercress girl (in *Perspectives: The Industrial Landscape*); perhaps a student might find a paper topic in comparing the two treatments of the same subject. On first reading “Willie Winkie,” students may assume

that Willie is the name of a child who won't go to sleep. But a moment's reflection suggests how unlikely it is that a toddler would be scampering about the village at bedtime. Rather, Willie Winkie is the name given to Sleep—perhaps analogous to the Sandman?—whose nightly visits help children nod off. Point out how light it stays on summer evenings in Scotland—children in northern countries have to go to bed in broad daylight, a situation described by another Scottish poet, Robert Louis Stevenson, in “Bed in Summer.”

### Edward Lear

In *Children's Literature: An Illustrated History* (1995) Peter Hunt points out that “Lear was a unique phenomenon”: not until his *Book of Nonsense* (1846) did nonsense become an accepted literary genre. He was “a talented artist, but it was his children's books . . . which gave him lasting fame, particularly for such surrealistically absurd narrative poems as “The Owl and the Pussy-cat.” “The rhythms of the verse, word coinages such as the ‘runcible spoon’, and Lear's use of extravagant imagery are wonderfully effective, even though a note of unease, almost panic, can often be felt even in the slightest lyrics” (94). His “limericks rarely preach Victorian morals but aim to make their readers laugh, while his black-and-white drawings often display adults as amusing eccentrics rather than figures to be respected” (95).

Instructors wishing to focus on nonsense as a genre should read an essay by X. J. Kennedy, “Strict and Loose Nonsense: Two Worlds of Children's Verse” (*School Library Journal*, 1991; rpt. *Only Connect: Readings on Children's Literature*, eds. Sheila Egoff et al, 1996). Kennedy writes that, far from being “merely lunatic and disorderly,” the nonsense of Lear and Carroll is “fearsomely reasonable”; these writers imagine a “strictly logical universe controlled at all times by cause and effect” (226). Lear, for example, gives us “a whole zooful of imagined beasts and even invented a ‘Nonsense botany,’” while in *Sing-Song* Christina Rossetti “gives us fish who carry umbrellas to protect themselves from the rain.” Kennedy adds that “a further rule of strict nonsense is . . . emotional detachment”; hence, “some find an apparent cruelty and indifference in those limericks wherein poor old characters are humiliated, publicly ridiculed, beaten, and even put to death” (229). But Lear “strives for total unreality. He banishes his characters to a nutty world all their own, and he stakes out the boundaries of that world in bouncing metre and jog-trot rhyme,” which along with the “loony” drawings advertise “the fact that a poem is a game” (230).

Some students have trouble with the violence in Lear (and in Carroll, for that matter). In *Secret Gardens* (1985) Humphrey Carpenter writes that Lear “was the first to realize that Nonsense is inextricably associated with violence, destruction, annihilation, and that any Nonsensical proposition, if pursued logically to its conclusion, must end in Nothing. And this realisation underlies Alice” (60). Carpenter argues that Lear's message was that the public world was vindictive and intolerant, and the true artist must alienate himself from society and pursue a private dream” (11–13). Lear's own alienation from society is thus the real subject of his *Book of Nonsense*. His later verses for children consist of explorations of the

possibilities of escape and strange journeys—a theme that became central to the great children’s writers: the search for a mysterious elusive Good Place.

*Inventing Wonderland* (1995) by Jackie Wullschläger elaborates on these themes of alienation and escape: “Edward Lear, whose secret homosexuality set him at odds with society and whose love affair with a judge ended in disappointment and rejection, wrote fantasies about mismatched couples—the Owl and the Pussy Cat, the Duck and the Kangaroo—living happily ever after” (6). Victorian fantasies “employ images which call attention to a sense of psychological release. *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* opens in a pool of tears. Edward Lear’s characters—the Owl and the Pussy Cat, the Daddy Long-legs and the Fly, the Jumbles—sail away to sea and freedom. . . . In fantasy, unconscious or repressed desires could be expressed, and this is why strict and sombre Victorian England inspired so great an outburst of anarchic, escapist, nonsensical children’s books” (26, 27). One of the great pleasures of such books is that “they celebrate rebellion and chaos, point no morals, rejoice in freewheeling thought. That liberty, however, is framed and made possible by their concentration on child and child-like characters” (27). Wullschläger points to contrasts between Carroll and Lear, however: whereas Carroll’s nonsense “is rooted in the Victorian England of trains and furniture dealers and Darwinian debate, Lear’s nonsense emerged out of the Mediterranean landscape [where he had settled in later life] and is full of the joys of sailing away to exotic, calm, distant seascapes.” And “where Carroll’s nonsense is intellectual and logical, Lear’s is poetic and emotional” (83, 85).

For a nineteenth-century view of Lear and his work, see Sir Edward Strachey’s “Nonsense as a Fine Art” which originally appeared in *The Quarterly Review* in October 1888 (rpt. Lance Salway, ed. *A Peculiar Gift: Nineteenth Century Writings on Books for Children*, 1976).

### Christina Rossetti

#### *from Sing-Song: A Nursery Rhyme Book* (1872, 1893)

Christina Rossetti and Lewis Carroll knew each other fairly well: Carroll, in the person of Charles Dodgson, photographed Christina and her family, and he sent her a copy of *Alice in Wonderland* when it first came out in 1865. But U. C. Knoepfelmacher, in his *Ventures into Childland: Victorians, Fairy Tales, and Femininity* (1998), speculates that Rossetti saw Carroll as a literary rival in the expanding children’s book market, and may have suspected him of borrowing her ending from “Goblin Market” (see Knoepfelmacher’s chapter on Rossetti, “Razing Male Preserves: From ‘Goblin Market’ to *Sing-Song*” pp 312–349). Carroll’s conclusion does indeed follow Rossetti’s in seeking to resituate what has turned into a wildly transgressive tale within Victorian social structures; it emphasizes how the story would be lovingly passed down to Alice’s own children. One might also hazard that the “Eat Me” and “Drink Me” episodes of Chapter 1 of *Alice* were inspired by the memory of a climactic moment in “Goblin Market” (1862) when Lizzie tells her sister Laura “Eat me, Drink me, love me” (line 471). But *Alice* made by far the bigger splash with the public, and when in 1872 Rossetti and her illustrator Arthur Hughes (whose little girls look like Tenniel’s Alice) brought out *Sing-Song*, they “en-

tered a market in which their competition with Carroll and Tenniel had to be openly confronted" (Knoepflmacher 339).

On the surface there seems little enough in common. However imaginative Rossetti may be, she finds ways to corral her wild ideas and set them in an instructive context. The book seems to be written for a double audience, a child who will wonder (or simply sit still and absorb the lesson) and an adult who will read, explain, and guide. In the best essay on *Sing-Song*, "Sound, Sense, and Structure in Christina Rossetti's *Sing-Song*," (*Children's Literature* 22 [1994]: 3-25), Sharon Smulders writes that the poem unfolds "a narrative from cradle to grave, from winter to fall, from sunrise to sunset," inviting readers "to understand life as an ordered totality" (3). Nothing could be further from the anti-structure of the Alice stories, which careen from place to place, character to character, only to end with the abruptness of a bad dream. Moreover, the enclosed nursery world of *Sing-Song* is clearly very different from the ever-changing landscape that Alice roams without help from adults. While Knoepflmacher writes that "*Sing-Song* . . . allowed [Rossetti] to realize an 'adult' agenda that she had previously been unable to disseminate" (xiv), one contemporary reviewer of *Sing-Song* asked whether "Miss Rossetti would have done more for the children if she had done less for us."

But there are enough patches of nonsense to warrant comparison, as well as an overlapping of animal characters and situations. Alice encounters the King and Queen of Hearts, who upset her emotionally till she upsets them physically, declaring them "nothing but a pack of cards." In Rossetti's "If I were a Queen" the little girl speaker on her heart-shaped throne yields to the importunate little boy—both the poem and illustration reinforce the way in which gender can redistribute power. In "When fishes set umbrellas up" Rossetti's semi-human fishes and lizards sport umbrellas and parasols, but only in the conditional tense, showing what is *not* likely or possible—on the order of "if wishes were horses beggars would ride." Carroll's Bill the Lizard, on the other hand, makes direct contact with Alice, and gets kicked up the chimney by her (see Knoepflmacher 330-331; 347-348). Or compare the linguistic oddities explored in "A pin has a head but no hair" with those in the Alice books. Rossetti concludes that "baby crows, without being a cock," but in Wonderland when Alice tells a baby not to grunt, it turns into a real pig.

One way to approach this material is to ask where the reader is supposed to be located in relation to the story—identifying, distanced, threatened, amused? Does one emerge from the reading feeling bewildered, empowered, chastened, superior?

The series is framed by dead and sleeping babies. The same year that *Sing-Song* was published Parliament passed the Infant Life Protection Act to fight the rising rate of unexplained baby deaths. Why does Rossetti think that mortality belongs in her nursery rhymes? One might sense a "that's the way the world is and you'd better accept it" strain to these poems, whether it's gender roles ("What does the bee do?"), household duties ("A pocket handkerchief to hem"), or human limitation ("Twist me a crown of wild-flowers"). Yet the two poems about flint, for example, hint at a different Rossetti, the fiery personality hidden within the drab exterior: "Stroke a flint, and there is nothing to admire: / Strike a flint, and forthwith flash out sparks of fire." Is this the "true" Christina, the powerful poet

seemingly imprisoned by chains of respectability and responsibility? One feels that elemental energy also in the most famous of the lyrics, "Who has seen the wind?" Like the wind, Rossetti's poems cause us to feel the force of emotions and contingencies we cannot see.

**Robert Louis Stevenson**  
*from A Child's Garden of Verses (1885)*

Darkness and light: whether part of the daily cycle or symbols of the moral universe, these are the double center of Stevenson's literary world. There is barely a year between the publication of these child-oriented poems and the very grown-up tale of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Both hinge on the fluctuating nature of human behavior and the physical world. If the adult horror tale alternates between respectability and depravity, dark streets of crime and mundane interiors of drab respectability, the Garden of Verses harbors both good and bad children, cozy bedclothes and troubling night shadows. "Bed in Summer" struggles with the incongruity of going to bed in daylight and rising in the dark. "The Land of Counterpane" is a daytime topography of toys dominated by the child-giant who controls them, while "The Land of Nod" contrasts that daytime comfort with the strange autonomy of dreamland that one can reach only alone and by night.

Daytime seems to bring out the moralist in Stevenson—or at least his moralizing poems have no specific location or temporal dimension; they are uttered as absolutes: "The world is so full of a number of things, / I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings." And rather like a king, the child-moralizer has definite ideas about private property ("Looking Forward"), manners ("The Whole Duty of Children"), naughtiness and poverty ("System"), and the superiority of his kingdom to that of anyone else ("Foreign Children").

Darkness, on the other hand, can bring out the adventurous child, as in "Escape at Bedtime," when the narrator sneaks outside to get an eyeful of the stars, a vision so powerful that even being "packed off to bed" cannot dim "the stars going round in my head." Similarly, in "The Lamplighter"—of all the poems the most evocative of Stevenson's childhood infirmity and the rhythm of late Victorian domestic life—the housebound speaker longs to join the lamplighter outside on his mission: "when I am stronger and can choose what I'm to do, / O Leerie, I'll go round at night and light the lamps with you!" But the attractive symbolic resonance of the lamplighter's task and the child's pride in his social standing ("for we are very lucky, with a lamp before the door") are mitigated by the poignance of childhood aspiration and the emotional vulnerability revealed at the end: "O Leerie, see a little child and nod to him to-night."

It can be easy to overlook the verbal artistry of the poems; like Christina Rossetti's they have a simple transparency of form that handles big ideas effortlessly. "Shadow March" is a good poem to focus on for some rhythmic analysis. The first and third lines of each stanza move forward briskly in a march-like tetrameter, while the second and fourth lines advance more slowly, in a hesitating trimeter. The shadows come rapidly "tramp, tramp, tramp" but the boy who is carrying his shadow-producing candle up the stairs dares not move too fast (he's scared, and

the candle might blow out if he runs). The poem's final line—"With the black night overhead"—brings everything to a stop with heavy stresses on four out of the last five syllables.

It might be interesting to look back to Blake's "Songs of Innocence" to see how Stevenson's middle-class vision of a sheltered childhood compares with the harsher world of Blake's little workers and orphans. So many children's works are written from the point of view of an adult that it is a rare achievement to speak in a child's voice and from a child's perspective. It may be that Blake, like James's Maisie, focuses on the difference between what a child lives through and what he or she can understand, thus making room for an adult reader to link the worlds of innocence and experience, while Stevenson's sickly, sensitive child is so preternaturally aware of his hopes, fears, and duties that one is touched by the amount of innocence in the experience, the level of anxious experience in the cosseted innocence.

### Hilaire Belloc

*from The Bad Child's Book of Beasts (1896)*

*from Cautionary Tales for Children (1907)*

Like Carroll and Lear, Belloc brilliantly juxtaposes the bizarre and the ordinary, as in the zany image of the yak on a leash at the art gallery, or the deadpan assumption that "mothers of large families" will appreciate a word to the wise about the value of keeping a tiger for a pet. The bouncing nursery-rhyme rhythms of the verse are hilariously at odds with the violence of the texts.

By the *fin de siècle*, a title such as *Cautionary Tales for Children* no longer could be taken straight. To illustrate the difference in tone, pair "Table Rules for Little Folks" with Belloc's explanation of why he calls the little child "bad." Then pair "The Mouse and the Cake," or "The Story of Augustus" with Belloc's "Jim, Who ran away from his Nurse, and was eaten by a Lion." Belloc is in a different universe entirely, and should be taught in conjunction with Carroll and Lear. His verse, like theirs, is often violent, and comically cruel: the tiger swallows up the baby, but the mother is expected to regard this a helpful reduction of household expenses; Jim is eaten by a lion, but his complacent mother—already drying her eyes!—takes comfort in being unsurprised that such a fate should befall a disobedient son.

The poet takes a diabolical pleasure in detailing Jim's demise, as he is devoured bit by bit, "shins and ankles, calves and knees." One senses that—unlike the authors of "Table Rules" and "The Mouse and the Cake"—Belloc is fundamentally on the child's side. What child wouldn't relish such a description? The adults in the poem are of no use: in addition to the easily consoled parents, there is the lionkeeper: "Though very fat he almost ran / To help the little gentleman." The "almost" is delicious. And Belloc shows his hand in the last line, when he points the moral of the story: "always keep a-hold of Nurse / For fear of finding something worse." Sticking to Nurse's side, in other words, is a fate only *slightly* less to be dreaded than being eaten by a lion! As the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* puts it: "The sense of ironic distance from the voice and attitudes of the Establishment, represented by the adult authority figures of his children's verse, is the key to the

appreciation of that verse. Belloc implicitly sides with the child reader against the pompous, didactic person in charge, revealing the absurdity of that person's values and attitudes" (volume 141).

### Beatrix Potter

#### The Tale of Peter Rabbit (1893, 1902)

Peter Hunt observes in *Children's Literature: An Illustrated History* (1995) that although Beatrix Potter was initially admired primarily as "one of the greatest of all animal artists," recent criticism has "laid increasing emphasis on the elegance and wit of her prose, with its humorous understatement . . . and its balanced, almost biblical rhythms" (186).

*The Tale of Peter Rabbit* seems at first to belong to the tradition of moralizing writings for children: Peter disobeys his sensible mother and muddles into a near-disaster (though, unlike Eliza Cook's mouse, or Heinrich Hoffman's Augustus, Peter Rabbit gets off with nothing worse than a fright and perhaps a cold). But in *Inventing Wonderland* (1995) Jackie Wullschläger places Peter in a more satiric world:

Before Carroll and Lear, children's books preached convention and duty, and criticised stupidity and bad manners. Since, children's writers have been on the side of the radicals. Edwardian writers shot their Arcadian visions through with irony as Carroll had done. . . . The rebelliousness and waywardness of the Wonderland creatures . . . can be traced in the irresponsible heroes of Edwardian children's stories—Peter Pan, Toad, Peter Rabbit (103–4)

Graham Greene has a wonderful brief essay tracing Beatrix Potter's literary career (rpt. *The Lost Childhood and Other Essays*, 1952). In it he calls *Peter Rabbit* "the second of the great comedies" (the first being *Two Bad Mice*, 1904). Greene writes: "In Peter and his cousin Benjamin Miss Potter created two epic personalities. The great characters of fiction are often paired: Quixote and Sancho, Pantagruel and Panurge, Pickwick and Weller, Benjamin and Peter. Peter was a neurotic, Benjamin worldly and imperturbable. Peter was warned by his mother, 'Don't go into Mr. MacGregor's garden; your father had an accident there; he was put in a pie by Mrs. MacGregor.' But Peter went from stupidity rather than for adventure. He escaped from Mr. MacGregor by leaving his clothes behind, and the sequel, the story of how his clothes were recovered, introduces Benjamin, whose coolness and practicality are a foil to the nerves and clumsiness of his cousin. It was Benjamin who knew the way to enter a garden: 'It spoils peoples' clothes to squeeze under a gate; the proper way to get in is to climb down a pear tree.' It was Peter who fell down head first" (108).

Students may be surprised, even dismayed, to hear Peter treated in such a portentous manner—an "epic personality"? But is Peter truly a stupid neurotic, an incompetent bumbler? In their chapter on *Peter Rabbit* in *The Literary Heritage of Childhood* (1987) Frey and Griffith put a more positive spin on the story. They see

it as a pastoral romance, a tale of illicit adventure in which the hero begins his initiation towards maturity.

In *Secret Gardens: A Study of the Golden Age of Children's Literature* (1985) Humphrey Carpenter devotes a chapter to Beatrix Potter, placing her in context (she knew Millais and Gladstone, for example, and kept a detailed journal commenting on the political and social events of the day). He takes issue with the popular view of her as a lonely spinster writing primarily out of nostalgic yearning for a childhood paradise: while "Peter Rabbit and his fellows certainly move through a landscape . . . perfect in terms of physical beauty," Potter "used the Arcadian setting as an ironic contrast and background to the blackly comic themes of her stories" (140-1). *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* is the first in a series, "a connected body of writing" with a "very adult view of the world." And although it is one of the "least ambitious" of her works, "its single theme is a dark one, familiar in folk-tales: the pursuit of a hapless individual (Peter) by a vengeful giant (Mr McGregor the gardener)." Carpenter adds: "Strikingly, his eventual escape is utterly unheroic; no folk-tale hero would arrive home in a pathetic condition and be put to bed by his mother." Thus, "the expectations of the folk-tale or fairy story have been upset. . . . *Peter Rabbit*, though slight, is an ironic comment on the giant-killer stories" (145).

### Daisy Ashford

#### *from The Young Visitors; or, Mr Salteena's Plan* (1890, 1919)

*The Young Visitors* is an extraordinary mixture of innocence and knowingness. For example, Ashford never questions or explains why "quite a young girl . . . of 17" is staying with "an elderly man of 42." Adult readers may raise an eyebrow at Mr. Salteena's leave-taking of Rosalind the housemaid—why are they so bashful and blushing, and why does he give her money?—or at Bernard's obliging distribution of guest rooms: "I have given the best spare room to Miss Monticue said Bernard with a gallant bow and yours turning to Mr Salteena opens out of it so you will be nice and friendly." Best of all—for the amused grown-up reader—"Ethel and Bernard returned from their Honeymoon with a son and hair."

Yet if Daisy Ashford betrays not the slightest awareness that such goings-on might be open to misinterpretation, she displays an almost frighteningly clear-sighted knowledge of the workings of other aspects of the adult world. The women in her novel trade openly on their looks to get what they want, and the men comment unabashedly on the women's appearance and desirability. Social or class distinctions are portrayed with a no-holds-barred frankness. Ashford has a keen eye for the trappings of wealth, and her characters take an uninhibited pleasure in them: Ethel admires the "violets in a costly vase" and Mr Salteena rolls over "in the costly bed"; he enjoys his "sumpshous" bathroom with its "good dodges of a rich nature."

Her grownups behave in many ways like children, tearing open letters and parcels avidly, running and skipping upstairs, sulking and sneering and bickering with one another. They exchange insults as casually as children in a playground: "You will look very silly"; "Well so will you"; "She has a most idiotick run." They say out loud things which grownups customarily express in a more roundabout

way: "Please bring one of your young ladies whichever is the prettiest"; "I am parshial to ladies if they are nice"; "I am not quite a gentleman but you would hardly notice it"; "he is inclined to be rich."

Yet the innocence of the author mingles disturbingly with a certain shrewdness—Daisy Ashford is wise beyond her years in ways that might make us uncomfortable were it not for her rollicking sense of fun and insouciant misspellings. Mr Salteena and Ethel are upstarts on the make: Ethel's frock "had grown rather short in the sleeves" and neither one is at ease in the world of "very exalted" footmen and country houses with indoor plumbing. They are unsure whether to tip the servants, but very clear about the power of money: "Well I am paying for the cab said Mr S. so I might be allowd to put my feet were I like." The Earl who undertakes the task of transforming Mr Salteena into a gentleman pulls no punches either: "Have you much money he asked and are you prepared to spend a good deal. . . . the point is that we charge a goodly sum for our training here but however if you cant pay you need not join."

Peter Hunt notes that *The Young Visitors* "is probably unique as an adults' book written by a child" (*Children's Literature: An Illustrated History*, 1995, xi). In his preface to the 1991 Academy Chicago edition of the book, Walter Kendrick argues that for many years the book was mistakenly pigeonholed as a children's book:

This was a gross injustice. . . . Ashford did not have nine-year-olds in mind while she wrote. What she had in mind was the truth of human experience, as she had seen it and read about it in novels written for adults. . . .

*The Young Visitors* has two themes: love and social advancement. So does *Pride and Prejudice*. It has a double plot, the specialty of Dickens, George Eliot, Trollope . . . . And her viewpoint throughout is strictly unsentimental. You may laugh with joy, but you dare not patronize her (x–xi).

*The Young Visitors* was a huge success when it was finally published, decades after Ashford wrote it; it was reprinted eighteen times in the year of its first publication. Yet although the author lived to be 90, she wrote nothing after 1894. *The Young Visitors* was made into a musical in 1968 (while Ashford was still alive) and a film in 1984. Students who wish to learn more about Ashford should consult R. M. Malcomson's *Daisy Ashford: Her Life* (1984).

### Henry James

#### *from What Maisie Knew* (1897)

Daisy and Maisie make a good pairing, and could easily be taught together. Each shows the adult world through the eyes of an innocent young girl. James relished the challenge inherent in his use of such a limited narrator: in his Preface he noted that "small children have many more perceptions than they have terms to translate them; their vision is at any moment much richer, their apprehension even constantly stronger, than their prompt, their at all producible, vocabulary." The child's understanding of what was going on around her would inevitably be confused and partial, so much so that James felt his novel would be "strangled" if he really re-

stricted himself “to what the child might be conceived to have *understood*”; rather, he decided, “I should have to stretch the matter to what my wondering witness materially and inevitably *saw*; a great deal of which quantity she either wouldn’t understand at all or would quite misunderstand.” The innocence of her perspective enabled James to explore ironic depths: James called her “the ironic centre.”

Since we have had space to print only the Prologue and first chapter, students may wish to know what happens next. Briefly, the parents who initially fought to gain custody of Maisie both remarry, and soon can’t be bothered with her. As James put it: “The wretched infant was thus to find itself practically disowned, rebounding from racquet to racquet like a tennis ball or a shuttlecock.” Yet although her parents treat her with relentless selfishness, Maisie somehow emerges unscathed. James felt that “for satisfaction of the mind . . . the small expanding consciousness would have to be saved . . . rather than coarsened, blurred, sterilized, by ignorance and pain” (Preface). *The Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Vol. 12) adds: “What Maisie gradually gains knowledge of is the baseness of some adults, the morality of one eccentric governess, and something which ought to be called love for her father’s second wife’s lover, who has become Maisie’s mother’s second husband. Poignant ambiguity results from the innocent little Maisie’s incomplete ability to verbalize her bewildering conceptions.”

In *The Image of Childhood* (1967) Peter Coveney has a chapter called “Innocence in Henry James.” Coveney writes that the “symbol of the sensitive child developing into an awareness of the complexities of life seems to have been specially attractive” to James; “Most of the greater James novels are in fact an inquiry into the fate of innocence, an investigation of the dramatic and moral possibilities of innocence confronted with life” (194). “The child’s psyche, claustrophobic, contained, gazing out upon the mysteries of adult life, had particular relevance to the kind of sensibility he was so often concerned to convey. The moral perceptions of *What Maisie Knew* are in fact the perceptions of a unique sensibility” (198). Coveney makes an interesting comparison to Pansy in James’s earlier novel *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881): she “suggests James’s distinctive image of childhood. She is the innocent ‘blank page,’ . . . the victim . . . of her father’s egotism. . . . [However], she is a victim with a frank, and very wide-eyed awareness. It is a forecast of a characteristic which he developed so brilliantly in *What Maisie Knew*” (198). Coveney also compares *Maisie* to Dickens’s *David Copperfield*: “Maisie’s phantasmagoric world is given in a way reminiscent of David Copperfield, with its keenly felt and disconnected sensations of a child thrust into an adult environment, with its wilful, and casual, sadism towards children” (201).

Yet for all his *fin de siècle* irony, James is still typically Victorian in his vision of the child as morally spotless; he fits right in with earlier portrayals of the child as a spiritual redeemer. As Jackie Wullschläger puts it, a favorite Victorian theme “was childhood as morally redemptive, with adult men cared for and spiritually rehabilitated by children. Mean miserly Scrooge is saved by Tiny Tim, a crusty old earl by Little Lord Fauntleroy” (*Inventing Wonderland*, 19). Thus James calls Maisie “our little wonder-working agent” who is “really keeping the torch of virtue alive” (Preface).

For further reading, Edward Wagenknecht has several good pages on *What Maisie Knew* in *The Novels of Henry James* (1983). Paul Theroux has written an interesting introduction to the Penguin edition of the book. There are also three essays on this novel in *New Casebooks*, ed. Neil Cornwell and Maggie Malone (1998). Students who wish to read all of *What Maisie Knew* and perhaps write a paper on it might follow up U. C. Knoepfelmacher's suggestion of pairing it "with *A Little Princess*, the novel written by James's brash neighbor Frances Hodgson Burnett" (*Ventures into Childland*, xiv).

## Rudyard Kipling

### Without Benefit of Clergy (1890)

The history of colonialism is full of stories of white men and their native mistresses. The most familiar scenario is the one Ameera so jealously predicts, in which the man jilts his mistress, either to marry a white woman, or simply to return home to Europe. Here, in contrast, the devotion of the lovers is entirely reciprocal, and the story does not moralize about interracial relationships—an unusual attitude for the period. *Without Benefit of Clergy*, then, works against a too-ready labelling of Kipling as a racist imperialist, despite his portrayals elsewhere of Indians as childlike. Somerset Maugham called it "a beautiful and pathetic tale . . . the best story Kipling ever wrote."

J. M. S. Tompkins notes the concentric circles that structure the narrative: "At the centre is the native house; all the pictorial details, the colours, the little homely sounds belong to the centre; here we listen to the language of love and grief. Outside . . . is John Holden's official life, the Club, the Office, the 'unlovely' bungalow, open to any visitor, the unsparing short phrases of order and criticism, edged with irony by the unseen facts of the native house. . . . Enclosing everything is the India of swarming life and terrifying epidemics, generating the menace and finally the certainty of separation" (*The Art of Rudyard Kipling* [1959], 115).

In *The Good Kipling: Studies in the Short Story* (1971) Elliot Gilbert offers a detailed reading of *Without Benefit of Clergy*, a reading that all subsequent critics have had to take into account. Gilbert describes Holden's constant visions of death and disaster, and the random, hopeless universe he inhabits. The secrecy of Holden's life with Ameera "testifies to the power of convention. The British, who stand ready at any hour to give their lives for the Indian people, nevertheless balk at accepting them as equals, and drive men like Holden into the pointless subterfuges of a double life" (25). Yet Holden relies upon the rigidity of English customs to hold himself together. He participates in native ceremonies, and Ameera learns many of the English ones, yet finally their "elaborate and hopeful" rituals turn out to be "of no use at all" (28). Gilbert claims that this failure of ritual is central to the story's meaning, for ritual is an effort "to achieve order in a chaotic world"—like the British administration's efforts to order the violence and chaos of India.

Ritual is a form of haggling with the universe, but "nothing can be gained, Kipling points out, from bargains like this. . . . It is a man's business . . . to live as

fully as he can, postponing nothing" (35). In these terms, Ameera's refusal to go to the Himalayas is not foolishly willful; rather, "it represents her passionate commitment . . . to the idea that life . . . is meaningful only when it is being lived" (33). Gilbert argues that Ameera is "absolutely honest. . . . She is not Madame Butterfly, building her life on self-deception" (36). In fact, she may be "the shrewdest person" in the story. With the death of her child she realizes "that sorrow is not the ultimate disaster of life" and she is freed "of the drag of ritual with its useless self-sacrifice, free to live without fear" (38). The title thus reinforces the "uselessness of ceremony," and represents "Kipling's approval of the couple, of their life together and, perhaps especially, of Ameera's courageous death" (40).

Jeffrey Meyers disagrees, writing that Gilbert "surely misinterprets the story." He contends that the lovers' sufferings, culminating in the "total annihilation of their house," are "a fatal retribution for breaking every rule and law of the white man's code" ("Thoughts on *Without Benefit of Clergy*," *The Kipling Journal* 36 [1969]: 8-11). Meyers writes that "Kipling is neither willing to permit Indians to marry whites nor to allow Indians a viable emotional and cultural life of their own. Wife-beating is the *sine qua non* of his native marriages." Holden and Ameera are "doomed to destruction, not by fatal fever and cholera, but rather by Kipling's sanction of the 'colour prejudice' and 'superiority complex' of his age."

Martin Seymour-Smith also takes issue with Gilbert's reading of the universe in this story as hostile, arguing rather that it is Holden who is a pessimist. Gilbert "has got it the wrong way round: it is Holden's perception of the universe that we are really being shown, not the universe. It may be like that or it may not, and in India it does seem so to foreigners; but we are seeing it through Holden, and we are seeing it because he has entered into a socially forbidden love" (*Rudyard Kipling* [1989], 97).

Seymour-Smith is unhappy with the dialogue in *Without Benefit of Clergy*, calling it an "ineffective and unconvincing semi-Biblical English, stilted and poetical, and not at all as vigorous as the words [Kipling] put into the mouths of his private soldiers." Students, too, may find the characters' speech, with its "thee" and "thou" and "my lord," awkward and unreal. Gilbert contends, however, that while the dialogue has misled some critics "into reading the story as a quaint, rather sentimental love idyll," we should see these lines "as translations into English of expressions which, in the original, are completely idiomatic and unselfconscious" (36n).

Harold Orel suggests that what marks Kipling's "distinctive contribution to the short-story genre, and his arrival as a literary force to be reckoned with . . . comes at the moment that Holden, awed by his introduction to the fact of the physical existence of his son, reaches out to touch the hand of Tota, and learns something new about himself." Quoting the passage, Orel writes appreciatively: "The author of *that* has imagined greatly." For Kipling, who did not marry or have children himself until several years later, accurately captures the tumultuous emotions of the new father. "Kipling's best short stories . . . show a character in the process of change, and very frequently of growing in his or her understanding" (*The Victorian Short Story* [1986], 148).

In *Narratives of Empire: The Fictions of Rudyard Kipling* (1993) Zohreh Sullivan locates *Without Benefit of Clergy* in "a familiar nineteenth-century colonial discourse

that fetishizes the Other as fixed stereotype. The colonial object and the native woman, then, are both objects to be recognized and disavowed, appropriated and defamiliarized. . . . The details of Ameera's life, background, appearance, and destiny are all charged with Orientalist anxieties. The native 'wife' has been 'bought' from her mother . . . [who is] an Orientalist stereotype of the Eastern beauty as one who ages easily and hideously." The same things happens to Ameera, who "gradually dissolves from beautiful desired body to a corpse, even as the rain dissolves walls, roads and graves" (96–97). "The marginalized and otherwise silent native female is idealized and denigrated, given presence and voice, yet finally erased" (94). "Structures of forbidden sexuality and desire, troped in terms of mastery and pleasure, fetishize the woman in order to counter male fear of self loss" (96).

Instructors might find Norman Page's *A Kipling Companion* (1984) a useful reference, with its chronology of Kipling's life and its plot summaries of all Kipling's works. *The Illustrated Kipling* (ed. Neil Philip [1987]) is a good place to send students who would like to read more of Kipling.

### Just So Stories (1902)

Parental love is one of the themes of *Without Benefit of Clergy*, and Kipling himself went on to be a devoted father of three. He wrote the *Just So Stories* for his daughter Josephine, the "Best Beloved" (who died in 1899 at the age of six). A friend of Josephine's recalled "the fun of hearing them told in Cousin Ruddy's deep unhesitating voice" (qtd. in *The Illustrated Kipling*). They are still best read aloud.

The charm of the *Just So Stories* lies in their whimsical humor, and their mingling of the homely details of nursery life with exotic far-off worlds and talking animals. Angus Wilson admired the first seven stories, pointing out that "they are all united by the same little joke," namely "the pleasing little Darwinian send-up" (qtd. Norman Page, 55). Actually, as Gillian Beer has noted in *Darwin's Plots* (1983), the explanations are more of a throwback to Lamarck's theory of evolution (24); ultimately, comic absurdity seems more the point than any realistic account of causation.

J. M. S. Tompkins writes: "They are fables about how things came to be as we see them, the elephant's trunk, the camel's hump, the whale's throat, the armadillo's scales, the alphabet that children learn." She describes the idiom as "Oriental grandiloquences embedded in colloquial narrative" (58). "There are manners and morals in the fables, but they are not at all oppressive" (58–59).

Jacqueline S. Bratton analyzes the verses at the end of each story: some "take up the implicit relationship between the adult and the child to whom he tells the fantastical tales and bring their domestic life into focus. An example is 'When the cabin portholes are dark and green,' the vignette from the life of a travelling family which appears at the end of the story of *How the Whale Got its Throat*. This domestication of the story by the verse can have a moralizing effect, as in *The Camel's Hump*, where the fun of chanting and the relation of the story to the world of the nursery combine to drive home the moral point" ("Kipling's Magic Art," *Critical Essays on Rudyard Kipling*, ed. Harold Orel [1989], 58).

In *Kipling the Poet* (1994) Peter Keating remarks on “the subtle air of intimacy with a youthful audience in *Just So Stories*,” adding that “whether the balance falls in favour of instruction or entertainment, Kipling’s main concern is to communicate a pleasure in the rhythms and meanings of words, often revealing a delight in nonsense verse . . . that demonstrates his deep admiration for Lewis Carroll” (164).

Students who are interested in Victorian children’s literature might like to read Edward Lear’s *Book of Nonsense* (1846), Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), and Kipling’s *Jungle Books* (1894, 1895) and *Puck of Pook’s Hill* (1906).

### Poetry

In *Kipling the Poet* (1994) Peter Keating writes that Kipling’s poetry “offers an insight into early modern Britain, unique in its social range, linguistically adventurous, emotionally powerful, and deeply personal. Kipling’s poetry should not be regarded as simply an outward chronicle of public events: it is more a record of his personal responses to those events, and of his thoughts and feelings on a range of other matters, not least the art of poetry” (xiv). Keating adds: “Many of the poems are tantalisingly subtle; quite a number are allegorical; others are syntactically complex and disclose their full meanings through literary, Biblical, and topical allusions” (xv).

Keating notes that the soldier “whose life is so famously saved” by Gunga Din “speaks in a slightly modified Standard English which thickens at moments of emotion or tension and, more strikingly, is distinguished by the speaker’s linguistic inventiveness.” Keating argues that “the opening of *Gunga Din*, staled by countless mechanical recitations, is one of the finest moments in *Barrack-Room Ballads*. . . . The mood is quiet and thoughtful, with the opening line made up entirely of monosyllabic words, and the speaker remains calm as he tries to find the right terms to express his scorn for those of his listeners who have never experienced the ultimate test. As the terms are not ready to hand, he makes some up: ‘penny-fights’ for small frontier wars, and, with true poetic flair, he turns Aldershot, the name of the army training camp in Hampshire, into a verb. With his audience fixed as people who are used to having an easy time of it, he tells them (with the help of a heavy rhyme and an emphatic long line) that moral values are determined by necessity, and, until they realise that, they might as well sit safely in quarters drinking their ‘gin and beer’. The hero of the ballad is, of course, not the speaker, but Gunga Din, who proves himself to be brave, loyal, intelligent, and even courteous under fire: he is ‘white, clear white inside’. . . . *Gunga Din* has become something of a by-word for racial condescension . . . but if the speaker comes over as condescending it is because of his determination to assert his own inferiority” (72).

Norman Page has a chapter on Kipling’s verse (161–174) in which he observes that “even though *The Widow at Windsor* and many of the other poems . . . are monologues, there is no attempt to present the speaker as a unique individual: rather he is a representative and communal voice, and in this respect Kipling is closer to the traditional ballad and street-song than to the mainstream of poetic tradition in the late Victorian period” (168). Page suggests that in *The Widow at Windsor* “the loyal tribute to the Queen is undercut in two ways: first by the colloquial fa-

miliarity with which Victoria is referred to ('the Widow at Windsor / With a hairy [famous, splendid] gold crown on her head'; 'Missis Victorier's sons'), and then by the parenthetical refrain that echoes the tribute with significant variations that shift the centre of interest from the Queen to her soldiers. . . . The effect is to turn a patriotic poem into one that has as its real theme not monarch or Empire but the sufferings of the ill-paid, unsung common soldier" (167–68). Page proposes that *The Widow at Windsor* "may in the matter of tone be compared with Housman's '1887' (the opening poem of *A Shropshire Lad*) later in the same decade, and contrasted with the unqualified patriotism of Newbolt's poetry in the same period" (168).

Keating writes that the tone of *The Widow at Windsor* "is one of a boastfulness at the extent and power of the British Empire that is constantly undercut by a melancholy refrain recalling the human price demanded by imperialism. The final stanza extends this echoing discontent to open criticism." Keating points out that it contains "an allusion to Psalms 139:9 ('If I take the wings of the morning / And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea'). But the biblical meaning, that even here the Lord's hand will be a guiding influence, is overturned and the soldier transformed into some kind of grotesque wounded bird of prey, 'flopping' directionless around the globe. His guiding light should be the Union Jack, but this becomes merely 'a bloomin' old rag', that, like the Indian sun, is out of reach and impervious to the suffering it causes. It is hardly surprising that readers pondered the effect this particular poem might have on Queen Victoria, and, taking into account the range of attitudes and points of view presented in *Barrack-Room Ballads*, debated among themselves whether the young author from India was a flag-waving imperialist or a dangerous radical" (75).

*Recessional* (1897) only added to the confusion; like Bruce Springsteen's *Born in the USA*, Kipling's poem has found itself at the center of debate about its political and patriotic content. Norman Page calls it "one of the ironies of literary history" that *Recessional*, "actually a warning against the arrogance to which a world power is inevitably prone, should have come to be regarded by many as jingoistic and imperialistic. Kipling does not *celebrate* the imperial idea—and to this extent he was, of course, distinctly out of line with the public mood of 1897—being rather intent on reminding the mother country of its burden of duty" (181–82).

In *The Good Kipling* Elliot Gilbert devotes several pages to this controversial poem, noting that critics have long been offended "by the contempt for dark-skinned natives" that seems implicit in what has been called Kipling's most notorious line: "Or lesser breeds without the Law." Gilbert quotes George Orwell (who believed that Kipling was referring to the Germans, not to colonized peoples): "It is assumed as a matter of course that the 'lesser breeds' are 'natives,' and a mental picture is called up of some *pukka sahib* in a pith helmet kicking a coolie" ("Rudyard Kipling," *Essays* [1954]).

Gilbert reminds us that patriotic celebrants of Victoria's Jubilee "waited in considerable suspense" to see what Kipling would write for the occasion, for his voice "had become almost synonymous with" Britain's imperial destiny. But what Kipling produced shocked admirers and critics alike: the title suggests "not triumph and glory, but rather withdrawal, waning, a going-away. And the rest of the poem, with

its clear references to the impermanence of power and to the need for humility in an uncertain world, surprised Kipling's countrymen" (17–18). Nevertheless, the poem still strikes readers as "extraordinarily arrogant." Its "regular tread and comfortably familiar cadences" suggest "the security and self-congratulatory clubbiness of a not-very-demanding religion" (19). The discrepancy "between the announced and the implicit subject of the poem" jars. Ultimately, Gilbert says, it doesn't matter which race or nation is intended by the word "breeds," for "what is dismaying about the line is its inherent act of 'presuming to judge' in the context of a poem whose ostensible subject is the arrogance of such judgments" (19). In other words, the poem is an aesthetic failure because it never achieves artistic wholeness.

Keating points out that *Recessional* is "virtually a compilation of Biblical allusions, quotations, and echoes. . . . It is based on the assumption that God has made a special covenant with England . . . [but] *Recessional* points to its possible collapse. The principal text, from which Kipling took the refrain of his poem ("Lest we forget—lest we forget!") is Deuteronomy 6:12: "Then beware lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt" (116). As for "lesser breeds without the Law," both Germans and non-white races are outside the Law, "though in different ways. The Germans have turned their backs on it deliberately: the non-white races have still to be shown the benefits of living within the law. . . . *Recessional* suggests that even England is in danger of losing God's favour" (117).

*If—*, which appeared in the children's book *Rewards and Fairies* (1910), "escaped from the book, and for a while ran about the world" on its own, wrote Kipling in his autobiography, *Something of Myself* (191). Keating says "it was copied, parodied, recited, and reproduced in a variety of ways—needlework samplers being a favourite—until its eminently sensible, skilfully articulated maxims became a byword for unacceptable cloying moralism" (168). Zohreh Sullivan suggests that "repeated collapse under excessive pressure is, in a way, the repressed text lying just beneath the surface bravado of such poems as *If—*"; Kipling's "fascination with breakdown" was his way of "internalizing the unacceptable, the terror of annihilation or boundary slippage in the troubling structures of gender, race and identity" (79).

Finally, one might compare Kipling's attitudes towards empire—and the men doing the work of colonizing, trading, fighting, and administering—with Stanley and Burton (in the Travel and Empire perspectives section). Also, Kipling provides an excellent lead-in for many of the twentieth-century readings in this anthology, including *Heart of Darkness* and the various perspectives on the Great War (in which Kipling's only son was killed).

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## PERSPECTIVES

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### Travel and Empire

For the middle and upper classes the British empire was, according to the critic Robin Gilmour, "a global playground where they could enact the fantasies inspired by a classical education, and become the Romans of the modern world."

Though warnings by moralists such as Ruskin and Tennyson made Victorians mindful that Britain might soon imitate Rome's decline and fall, images of the glorious sacrifices they were making for their nation, culture, and religion kept the empire-builders going. As Rudyard Kipling wrote, "The idea is a pretty one, and men are willing to die for it."

There was also the more individual but still politically important glory of exploration. Scaling the highest peaks in the Alps during the 1850s and 1860s, mountain climbers used the rhetoric of conquest to recount their perilous ascents. In the 1870s and 1880s, British explorers like Stanley, Speke, and Burton survived daunting adventures to map the continent; the Scottish missionary David Livingston was the first European to cross Africa from coast to coast, locating and naming Victoria Falls in the process. Their exploits and best-selling accounts led the way for the dividing up of Africa by European colonizers.

Discuss with students the contradictions and complications of being a traveller. While any outsider remains inevitably "other," some travellers made intense efforts not to be mere spectators, but to participate as fully as possible in the culture they were visiting: Trollope opened a business in Cincinnati, Bird joined in the work of Western settlers, Kingsley set herself up as an African trader, and Burton succeeded in passing himself off as a Muslim pilgrim. From our perspective, these undertakings are hardly unproblematic. But they suggest the complexity of cross-cultural encounters—particularly between representatives of the world's most powerful empire, and members of its colonies, former, actual, or potential.

While many Victorian explorers, missionaries, and colonial administrators saw themselves as bringers of light to dark places, not every traveller fully shared the imperialist ideology of the era or the assumption of moral and cultural superiority. At the very least, some travellers were more nuanced in their approach. Mary Kingsley, in particular, seems to have approached West Africans with an intriguing blend of panache and humility: she wrote that "we gradually educated each other, and I had the best of the affair; for all I had got to teach them was that I was only a beetle and fetish hunter, and so forth, while they had to teach me a new world, and a very fascinating course of study I found it."

Instructors might teach this entire perspectives section as a unit, comparing the different travellers with one another, and perhaps also with Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle*. If lack of time makes this impossible, individual excerpts can be taught in conjunction with other readings in the anthology: Stanley and *Heart of Darkness*, for example, or Burton and Kipling. The women travellers can be taught in conjunction with the selections on Ladies and Gentlemen, illustrating that not all middle-class Victorian women were finding fulfillment in domesticity, whatever the prevailing dogma about women as angels in the house. One might also contrast these travellers to distant and "exotic" places with the more conventional Continental travel experienced by the Brownings, Arnold, and Ruskin (see, for example, the excerpts from *Praeterita* evoking the remembered pleasures of Ruskin's European tours). British writing exercised enormous influence throughout the world, but was influenced in turn, not only by literary currents in Europe, but also by the tales brought back by adventurers further afield.

## Frances Trollope

### *from Domestic Manners of the Americans (1832)*

As travel writing, *Domestic Manners* has never lost its appeal, in part thanks to the grouchy persona Mrs. Trollope adopts (a bit like Paul Theroux nowadays). She's a lively writer, with an ear for dialogue and colloquial speech. She combines the dramatic story of a woman venturing into wild territory with domestic and social analysis based on her two-and-a-half year residence in Cincinnati. Her method involves a constant comparison of England and America, sometimes direct, sometimes implied.

Trollope's opening description of voyaging upriver into uncharted territory conveys her initial unease. It is an almost apocalyptic scene of desolation. She compares the landscape to Dante's inferno (instructors might look ahead to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, with its ominous trip upriver into a nightmare landscape). But when Trollope meets her first Americans, she regains her equilibrium, and her tone quickly changes from foreboding to satiric. Taking comfort in social condescension, she mocks both American table manners and the American presumption of equality: in this new society, *everyone* professed to be a "lady" or a "gentleman." Students familiar with the readings in *Perspectives: Victorian Ladies and Gentlemen* will be better able to see why an English gentlewoman like Frances Trollope found such claims preposterous.

At every turn Trollope mercilessly exposes American pretensions: the proliferation of inflated military titles, the granting of worthless "degrees" after a smattering of instruction, the boasts of literary scholarship by a man who scarcely recognizes the most famous English authors. If nineteenth-century American readers were enraged by *Domestic Manners*, contemporary American students sometimes feel almost equally insulted. It can be uncomfortable to find one's own country subjected to the same patronizing attitudes that Western travellers have often displayed abroad.

Trollope's opinions, of course, tell us as much about her and her milieu as they do about America in the 1820s. It's helpful to situate this book against the backdrop of both the American Revolution (hostility towards English paternalism still lingered, and Trollope was often treated rudely) and the impending Reform Bill of 1832 in Britain. Taking democracy for granted, students find it difficult to see how anyone could have opposed the extension of the franchise. But the British, fearful of mob rule and a levelling of society, felt a mixture of admiration and anxiety as they watched the American experiment with democracy. Trollope—like Dickens a decade later—arrived with an idealized image of America that took a beating from the rough-and-tumble reality, and both authors reacted by painting sour portraits of the young country's flaws.

Americans, in turn, have always had complicated attitudes towards Europe: Mark Twain's *Innocents Abroad* (1869), for example, wavers uncertainly between awe towards the monuments of European culture and contempt for effete European traditions. Mrs. Trollope's hilarious conversations with her servant girl provide a good starting point for a discussion of cultural assumptions: Americans, suspicious

of class privilege, are likely to applaud the girl's assertive spirit and refusal to humble herself; English readers would have been as astounded at her impudence as at her attire. A world in which a servant considers herself "a young lady," wants money for a silk dress to go to a ball, and tells her employers "I never seed such grumpy folks as you be" must have seemed to Mrs. Trollope's English readers to be a kind of bedlam of misrule.

But Trollope's satire was not purely mean-spirited. One theme running throughout is her concern for the position of women. She believed that American women were undervalued by their men, a disregard powerfully symbolized by the universal habit of spitting which made it impossible to keep their dresses clean. She felt that early marriage, lack of education, and "the servant problem" condemned American women to narrow lives as household drudges. Women were thus denied their proper role as civilizing and uplifting influences on society. Seen in this light, her remarks about leisure seem less frivolous: without it, there can be no "great development of mind" (for background on these topics, see the readings about separate spheres and female education in *Perspectives: Victorian Ladies and Gentlemen*).

Trollope deplored the lack of opportunity for cultivated social life, not merely because she herself missed dinner parties, concerts, and the theater, but because she could see that American women had few outlets except church. She detested the evangelical distrust of pleasure and of the arts, which she saw as largely responsible for the sad state of society in Cincinnati. (In a passage we do not excerpt, Trollope described a revival meeting; she was horrified by the impropriety and excess she witnessed, particularly the lack of respect for women). Her views on "Amusement" can be compared with evangelical attitudes described in the Religion and Science perspectives section.

### **Thomas Babington Macaulay** **Minute on Indian Education (1835)**

Both popular and problematic, Macaulay has never lacked for readers or critics. Many Victorians shared Lord Acton's assessment: "He remains to me one of the greatest of all writers and masters, although I think him base, contemptible and odious." While the "Minute on Indian Education" does not show Macaulay's style or narrative drive to full advantage, it does give even the casual reader a sense of his personality: the essay is clear, confident, assertive, energetic, high-minded in tone and ruthless in pressing home its arguments. It might be a good idea to start with Macaulay's overstatements—"a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia"—and questionable assumptions: "The literature of England is now more valuable than that of classical antiquity." If proven false, do these generalizations make any difference to his overall argument? It might be demonstrated that other languages have made great contributions to world culture and scientific progress, but Macaulay insists that English is the language of the moment, the one best calculated to satisfy the dou-

ble charge of the vague legislation that he is trying to interpret: “the revival and promotion of literature” and “the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences.”

For Macaulay, it is English that will open minds, teach history, and advance science. Moreover, English is politically and economically expedient, since the “ruling class” of Indians already speak it, and English is also the language of South Africa and Australia, important trading partners. Macaulay found a good deal of local support; when he says in his summation that “the natives are desirous to be taught English” he could have pointed to the work of the Hindu social reformer Raja Rammohan Roy (1772–1833), who asked that educated Europeans “instruct the natives of India in mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry, anatomy, and other useful sciences, which the natives of Europe have carried to a degree of perfection that has raised them above the inhabitants of other parts of the world.” Finally, the other languages proposed, Arabic and Sanscrit, are studied chiefly for their religious texts, and Macaulay ridicules these texts as sources of “false history, false astronomy, false medicine” at the same time that he maintains that Britain should “be not only tolerant, but neutral on all religious questions.” Thus, he says, “we abstain, and I trust shall always abstain, from giving any public encouragement to those who are engaged in the work of converting natives to Christianity.”

The rest of his argument is built around two historical analogies, those of Britain and Russia. But the analogies work in different ways. Renaissance England was right not to focus its reading on what was written locally in the late 14th and early 15th centuries, for the ancient languages of the Greeks and Romans contained . . . what? Macaulay does not say, but he asks rhetorically, “would England have now been what she is” if education had centered on Norman or Anglo-Saxon? In those days, dead languages apparently had more to offer than living ones. So what about Sanscrit today, Macaulay’s opponents might well ask. He has an answer ready: more recently, in 18th and 19th century Russia, huge progress was made by “teaching . . . those foreign languages [of Western Europe] in which the greatest mass of information had been laid up.” Having claimed that English literature has now surpassed that of classical antiquity, Macaulay is in a position to argue that modern English carries with it the special something of the classics as well as the information of the Western European tongues. Ask students if these analogies are logical, convincing, or even fair.

Macaulay’s final two paragraphs are masterful summaries of his position that make explicit the long-term goals of his policy: “We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.” This apparent effort to govern a colony through conversion or subversion has been much discussed. Gauri Viswanathan’s *Masks of Conquest* (1989) is one of the better known analyses of how the British used the study of English as “a blueprint for social control in the guise of a humanistic program of enlightenment” (10); she asserts that English was “incredibly—the most substantial weapon in the colonial arsenal” (145). Others have argued that such a view fails to take into account how colonized Indians understood or resisted the

imposed texts, how they eventually remade the language in their own image—just as Americans have done. Today English is one of the official languages of India; along with Hindi it functions as a link-language in a multilingual society.

**Alexander Kinglake**  
*from Eothen (1844)*

Although Kinglake faced genuine discomforts and even dangers on his jaunt through the Near East, he saw himself not as an adventurer but as a tourist following wellworn paths. Indeed, so self-conscious was he about his predecessors—both actual and literary—that his first concern in writing *Eothen* was to stake out his own territory by announcing what his book was *not*: geographical, antiquarian, historical, scientific, political, or moral. The humor of Kinglake's approach depends on our picturing rows of these dusty tomes full of Useful Knowledge. But rather than be discouraged by not being the first to describe these regions, he chooses to be liberated. *His* contribution will not be further instruction, but merely a description of his own sensations: "as I have felt so I have written."

*Eothen* makes us aware of the ways in which the apparently simple encounter between the observer and the observed is rarely so straightforward. What each traveller sees is almost always mediated by what he or she has already read. Kinglake is explicit about this process, informing us that it was the "rapturous and earnest reading of my childhood which made me bend forward so longingly to the plains of Troy." Books do more than inspire travellers, they also shape their perceptions: Kinglake travels not to meet contemporary Turks or Egyptians but to see the landscapes of the *Iliad* and the Bible. Of course, by doing so he sets himself up for disappointment when reality doesn't measure up to his expectations: Kinglake watches with "vacant unsatisfied eyes" the Homeric waters of "divine Scamander." Sometimes *not* seeing for oneself is preferable, he concludes, finding that only later, now that "I am away from his banks," does the river recover "the proper mystery belonging to him as an unseen deity." Memory happily colludes in erasing the prosaic realities of travel: "One's mind regains in absence that dominion over earthly things which has been shaken by the rude contact." The traveller's feelings are bruised by "the material presence of a mountain or a river . . . but, let these once pass out of sight, and then again the old fanciful notions are restored."

Often, Kinglake would rather daydream about home than work himself up into the "right" frame of mind for appreciating "important" places. His reflections on the unpredictable interaction of imagination and landscape suggest some anxiety over not feeling what he thinks he's supposed to feel: "it is only by snatches, and for few moments together, that I can really associate a place with its proper history." Being well-read imposes an uncomfortable obligation to react in particular ways—he can't respond freshly to scenes when he knows so much about their past.

Kinglake's consciousness of the many ways in which the countries he visited were already-written inhibited not only his on-the-spot responses but also his ability to write his own book. Twice he tried and failed; only when Eliot Warburton asked for advice was Kinglake finally able to produce *Eothen*. Writing casually and humorously, as if to his friend, Kinglake composed not what he called "a regular

book of travels” but instead “a sadly long strain about Self.” His approach set the tone for much travel writing that has come after him: as F. A. Kirkpatrick observed in 1916, “the better travel-books of the nineteenth century . . . deal less with monuments, museums, churches and institutions: they deal more with men and women in relation to their surroundings. Sometimes, this human interest lies in the pleasant egotism of the traveller” (*The Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. 14, 240–56). Jan Morris approves, remarking that “*Eothen* is a thoroughly self-centred book, that is half its charm.” Edward Said disapproves, complaining in *Orientalism* (1979) that Kinglake “is more interested in remaking himself and the Orient . . . than he is in seeing what there is to be seen.”

But Kinglake declines the traveller’s usual duty to report back as impartially as possible. His solution to the problem of describing places that have already been much described is to turn inward, writing less about the places themselves than about the impression they made upon him. He acknowledges that focusing on feeling rather than fact opens him to the charge of egotism, and he embraces the charge: his very subjectivity will vouch for his truthfulness. He places himself at the center of each scene, arguing that ultimately we can only know our own sensations. Travelling vicariously through his words, seeing through his eyes, the reader—he claims—may be “slowly and faintly impressed with the realities of Eastern Travel” (For a more detailed version of this argument, see Heather Henderson’s “The Travel Writer and the Text” in *Temperamental Journeys: Essays on the Modern Literature of Travel*, ed. Michael Kowalewski [1992], 230–48).

### Sir Richard Francis Burton

#### *from A Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah (1855)*

Like Kinglake, Burton prefaced his book by acknowledging its personal nature: to some, it may appear “mere outpourings of a mind full of self.” Yet Burton was a voracious scholar and prolific writer, and his two dozen travel books are crammed with hundreds of pages of cultural detail and scientific information. In the three-volume *Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah* Burton recounts how he journeyed to the holy cities of Islam, disguised first as a dervish (a Muslim holy man), then as an Afghan physician. He travelled in a spirit of adventure, longing “to set foot on that mysterious spot which no vacation tourist has yet described,” and he claimed that “when entering the penetralia of Moslem life my Eastern origin was never questioned.” Had he been discovered, he would probably have been killed. In *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830–1914* (1988) Patrick Brantlinger notes how Burton dramatizes “the dangerous role of anthropological spy” and “revels in the Protean ambiguity of his various roles” (161, 162).

Burton is one of the most famous examples of a traveller who used a disguise to reach a forbidden destination, but he’s hardly alone: during the 1860s, William Gifford Palgrave spent a year in Arabia in the guise of a Syrian doctor; in the 1920s the Frenchwoman Alexandra David-Neel undertook a gruelling trek to Lhasa (closed to foreigners) masquerading as a Tibetan beggar; in the 1970s a young Englishwoman, Sarah Hobson, explored Iran dressed as a boy, entering people’s homes, mosques, and religious discussions. What motivates travellers to cast off their own identities

and assume the clothing, language, and manners of another culture, sometimes at the risk of their lives? How does a disguise alter the way in which one perceives others—and oneself? And what ethical dilemmas do such impostures present?

Clearly, such travellers are attracted by the idea of freeing themselves from the codes and customs of “civilization,” of shedding their own nationality, language, class, religion, even gender. Think of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s pleasure in adopting Turkish dress to pass unnoticed through the streets of Constantinople in the early eighteenth century. Brantlinger argues that for Burton “Disguise was a means of crossing the gulf between superior and inferior races, civilization and barbarism—a means that led to ethnological knowledge as well as to adventure. Disguise also allowed Burton to criticize western society while permitting him eventually to return to it” (163–64).

Disguise offers a temporary liberation from oneself, and also new perspective on one’s own privilege: wasting days in a frustrating effort to obtain a passport in Alexandria, Burton notes that as an Englishman he would have had no trouble—only as an “Asiatic” does he encounter rebuffs and delays. On the steamboat to Cairo he travels third class, disguised as a dervish, and the European passengers avoid him. Nick Danziger, a contemporary travel writer, found it similarly eyeopening to wear Afghan clothing on the streets of London in the 1980s: “Everywhere I went I was either shunned or regarded with undisguised suspicion” (*Danziger’s Travels* [1987]). Only her disguise admitted David-Neel into the hovels of poor Tibetans; ordinarily, no foreigner would have glimpsed their interiors. Such experiences afford genuine insight into the lives of others. But doesn’t the secret knowledge thus obtained represent a betrayal of trust and a form of cultural aggression?

Burton relished the challenge of creating and sustaining a difficult part; proud of his linguistic and acting skills, he invites the reader to admire his performance. Yet his disguise raises troubling questions: his quest was a morally dubious undertaking, an invasion of the privacy and sacred sites of another culture. When Burton finally glimpses Mecca, he thinks, “how few have looked upon the celebrated shrine!” Of course he means, how few Europeans. And although he shares the deep emotion of his fellow pilgrims, he admits that “theirs was the high feeling of religious enthusiasm, mine was the ecstasy of gratified pride.” Brantlinger points out how “In a sea of Muslim pilgrims . . . Burton remains isolated by his consciousness of difference, by his sense of personal and racial superiority. Yet the superior man has stooped to deception to reach his goal.” His gaze is not that of the “worshipful pilgrim” but that of western science “prying into the deepest, most sacred mysteries of every culture” (162–63). Brantlinger argues that disguise is ultimately an exercise in power and imperial domination: it “entails a double arrogance characteristic of Burton’s entire career: contempt for the peoples among whom he travels and upon whom he spies or anthropologizes” (164). “All of the information he gathered . . . he viewed as a form of power over nonwestern peoples” (166).

Reading our selection from Burton’s *Narrative* thus gives students not merely a taste of the popular Victorian genre of swashbuckling travel adventures, but also a jumping-off point to discuss nineteenth-century attitudes toward nonwestern cultures and people. Instructors might invite students to discuss Brantlinger’s argu-

ments; is he being fair to Burton? Have students look, for example, at Burton's description of the contrast between Eastern and Western manners, such as drinking a glass of water. How does he portray cultural difference? Some might contend that to observe the ways of others as minutely as Burton argues for a certain sensitivity and even respect for difference; others might point to ways in which a conviction of cultural superiority is embedded in the very language Burton chooses.

### Isabella Bird

#### *from A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains (1878)*

Travel offered women an escape from the restrictions of genteel lives at home; students who have read Nightingale's *Cassandra*, and our excerpts from Mrs. Ellis and Mrs. Beeton (*Perspectives: Ladies and Gentleman*), will have a clearer sense of what Bird was getting away from. Rejecting domestic comforts and responsibilities, she preferred to climb mountains, ride through blizzards, round up cattle, and flirt with a celebrated outlaw.

Bird's invalidism bears some discussion. The search for better health provided a respectable "excuse" for travelling, which women needed more than men. But Bird was not simply a hypochondriac; in *Across New Worlds: Nineteenth-Century Women Travellers and their Writings* (1990) Shirley Foster explains that "as an adolescent she underwent an operation to remove a tumour on her spine and suffered from back trouble for the rest of her life." Foster quotes Bird's obituary in the *Edinburgh Medical Journal*: Bird presented "many characteristics of a physical type which can hardly be considered as common. . . . The Invalid at Home and the Samson Abroad do not form a very usual combination" (13). A psychological interpretation is hard to avoid: illness bought Bird privacy, freedom, and time (just as it seems to have done for Christina Rossetti, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and even Charles Darwin). The advantages of ill health were acutely perceived by Nightingale, who remarks in *Cassandra* that "A married woman was heard to wish that she could break a limb that she might have a little time to herself."

Instructors might compare Bird's depiction of life at the Chalmers' with Trollope's depiction of life in Cincinnati. In each case, a cultivated Englishwoman recoils in horror and wry amusement at the narrowness of American horizons: graceless manners and tedious patriotism, self-righteous religion, devotion to work and money-grubbing, lack of intellectual and artistic pastimes, reduction of wives and daughters to mere drudges. And just as Trollope passed through scenes of appalling desolation, so Bird's scorching Sunday at the Chalmers', with its snakes and dust and blazing heat, becomes a hellish waste land.

Fortunately for Bird, these infernal horrors are but a prelude to the paradise of Estes Park, and her depression vanishes in exuberant exclamation points. Although her first experiences of the American West undercut romanticized myths about life on the frontier, she goes on to live a Western dream—driving cattle with real cowboys in the crisp air of the Rocky Mountains, acknowledged as one of the boys by the cattlemen.

These letters may surprise those who believe that all Victorian middle-class women aspired to be the "Angel in the House." Bird, in fact, actively resisted the

ideal. Although she found Estes Park to be a sublime Shangri-la, she wasn't inclined to settle down there. Marriage to Mountain Jim—quite apart from his problem with whiskey—would have meant housekeeping. And when Evans offered her a job for the winter, she turned it down, unwilling to exchange her glorious freedom for cooking and chores. It was a question of independence, particularly from women's traditional homemaking: "it would suit me better to ride after cattle," she wrote cheerfully.

If the duties of home defined most women's lives, then travel—leaving home—could liberate them in ways unimaginable in Britain. But not if they recreated home in a new land: Bird's letters are full of portraits of hard-working settlers' wives. All Western women, even "ladies," worked hard; Bird writes that Evans's wife worked like a "squaw." She was not about to spoil her exhilarating adventure by joining their ranks.

Travel "unsexed" Victorian women, in ways Bird is both eager for (she relishes the fact that the cattleman "had forgotten that a lady was of the party") and anxious about: early in her book she adds a footnote describing her riding costume as thoroughly feminine and, according to Dorothy Middleton, when *The Times* of London described her as riding in "male habiliments" she told her publisher "that as she had neither father nor brother to defend her reputation, she expected him personally to horsewhip the *Times* correspondent" (*Victorian Lady Travellers* [1965], 8). As Maria Frawley writes in *A Wider Range: Travel Writing by Women in Victorian England* (1994), "Women who flaunted their physical fortitude and vitality abroad . . . seemed to challenge their own 'natural' limitations and to invite" portrayals of themselves as "aggressively sexualized" (113).

Frawley devotes a chapter to "The Social Construction of the Victorian Adventuress" in which she argues that travellers like Bird "created a kind of imaginary 'wild zone,' one that enabled them to accomplish feats of physical endurance and courage that would be inconceivable for a middle-class woman in England." At the same time, these writers found ways "to translate adventure into an essentially womanly activity" (38). One such way was "to position themselves as mother figures in relation to the natives," as Bird does when she deplors "the extinction of childhood" in the Western States (117–18). Such an analysis posits Victorian women travellers as both in flight from patriarchal authority back home, and yet reinscribing its values.

Nor did the patriarchy welcome them home unequivocally; Frawley writes that "when a few women—led by Isabella Bird Bishop—began to agitate for admittance as fellows into the Royal Geographic Society, the debate took a nasty turn. In a letter to the editor of *The Times*, the influential MP George Curzon wrote: 'We contest *in toto* the capability of women to contribute to scientific geographic knowledge. Their sex and training render them equally unfitted for exploration, and the genus of professional globe-trotter is one of the horrors of the later end of the nineteenth century'" (111).

### Sir Henry Morton Stanley *from Through the Dark Continent (1878)*

Stanley is the only one of the six travellers excerpted here who could claim to be discovering new terrain or geographical features. In *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and*

*Transculturation* (1992) Mary Louise Pratt writes drily that “As a rule the ‘discovery’ of sites like Lake Tanganyika involved making one’s way to the region and asking the local inhabitants if they knew of any big lakes, etc. in the area, then hiring them to take you there, whereupon with their guidance and support, you proceeded to discover what they already knew” (202). In fairness to Stanley, even the Africans with whom and among whom he travelled apparently had no idea where the Congo river led. Given the immense obstacles his expedition encountered, his claim to be the first to descend the entire river is probably truer than similar Western claims to be “the first” to find or view a particular place in “unknown” territory.

Stanley writes that the object of his “desperate journey is to flash a torch of light across the western half of the Dark Continent.” In a chapter entitled “The Genealogy of the Myth of the ‘Dark Continent’” Patrick Brantlinger examines the origins and implications of this imagery (*Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830–1914* [1988]). By envisioning Africa as a dark and savage place, the Victorians justified their own intervention in the name of bringing civilization and light: “By the time of the Berlin Conference of 1884–85, which is often identified as the start of the Scramble for Africa, the British tended to see Africa as a center of evil, a part of the world possessed by a demonic darkness or barbarism, represented above all by slavery, human sacrifice, and cannibalism, which it was their duty to exorcise. . . . The obverse of the myth of the Dark Continent was that of the Promethean and, at least in Livingstone’s case, saintly bestower of light” (179, 180).

Books by Livingstone, Stanley, Burton, Speke, and others “took the Victorian reading public by storm. . . . Although such accounts of African exploration do not figure in standard histories of Victorian literature, they exerted an incalculable influence on British culture and the course of modern history. . . . The great explorers’ writings are nonfictional quest romances in which the hero-authors struggle through enchanted, bedeviled lands toward an ostensible goal: the discovery of the Nile’s sources, the conversion of the cannibals. . . . The humble but heroic authors move from adventure to adventure against a dark, infernal backdrop where there are no other characters of equal stature, only bewitched or demonic savages” (180–81).

Stanley is one of the possible models for Conrad’s Kurtz, and instructors planning to teach *Heart of Darkness* will certainly want to assign this excerpt from *Through the Dark Continent*. In an autobiographical essay Conrad recalls his own disillusionment at Stanley Falls in 1890: “A great melancholy descended on me . . . there was . . . no great haunting memory . . . only the unholy recollection of a prosaic newspaper ‘stunt’ and the distasteful knowledge of the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience and geographical exploration.” Brantlinger explains that “The stunt was Stanley’s 1871 trek . . . in search of Livingstone for the *New York Herald*, the scramble for loot that Conrad saw at first hand King Leopold’s rapacious private empire in the Congo” (239–40).

Stanley repeatedly images Central Africa as a blank white space: he tells Frank Pocock that “this enormous void is about to be filled up.” Indeed, Stanley has “already mentally peopled it, filled it with most wonderful pictures of towns, villages,

ivers, countries, and tribes—all in the imagination.” Yet—as Stanley knew perfectly well—Africa was *already* full of people and villages. Ask students to consider the implications of this imagery; how does it serve to free the European explorer to write himself across the blank paper? how does it serve to justify European colonial expansion?

Elsewhere in the book, Stanley exclaims—apparently without irony—“Think what a benefit our journey will be to Africa!” What sort of benefits did Stanley have in mind? Have students look closely at his heroic rhetoric: is the conversation with Frank Pocock really likely to have taken place in such elevated language? Stanley presents himself as a confident, resourceful commander with a grand vision and the courage to carry it out; meanwhile, the Africans are irrational and bloodthirsty savages. Frightful as they are, it takes the superior abilities of Englishmen but “five minutes work” to clear the river of “the filthy, vulturous ghouls.” On a more personal level, Stanley’s stupendous efforts to gain fame in Africa may also be seen as a lifelong attempt to overcome the poverty and obscurity of his own origins, to recreate himself on an epic scale.

There is a disturbing ruthlessness about Stanley, and what may most strike a reader of the entire two volumes of *Through the Dark Continent* is the horrifying loss of life he was prepared to accept in pursuit of his goal: “Nine men lost in one afternoon!” he pauses to lament, before pushing on. Perhaps only Odysseus returned home with fewer of his followers. In *Loneliness and Time: British Travel Writing in the Twentieth Century* (1992) Mark Cocker writes: “If ever there were an archetypal travel book, then surely this is it. Yet it contains an account, as Stanley bludgeoned his way down the Congo, of thirty-two battles between the white explorer’s Zanzibari retainers and the indigenous Africans—thirty-two episodes in what was, in effect, one long, continuous, private armed conflict” (105). Stanley’s private conflicts, however, had international consequences, as—for better or worse—his explorations helped bring Africa to the forefront of European consciousness.

### Mary Kingsley *from Travels in West Africa (1897)*

As her famous defense of “the blessing of a good thick skirt” indicates, Kingsley joined Isabella Bird in insisting on proper female attire as evidence of her own womanliness. Maria Frawley writes that “More than any other adventuress, Kingsley bristled at . . . implications of anomalous sexuality and aberrant womanhood. She publicly retaliated against being labeled a ‘new woman,’ and . . . claimed she could not have accomplished anything without help from ‘the superior sex’” (*A Wider Range: Travel Writing by Women in Victorian England* [1994], 113–14).

This sort of thing makes it easy to treat Kingsley as a slightly ludicrous figure poking crocodiles on the nose with her umbrella; as Evan Connell writes of Victorian lady travellers in *A Long Desire* (1979), “They give the impression of being mildly batty, these upright, energetic, innocent, valorous, polite, intelligent, prim, and condescending British females in long skirts, carrying parasols” (24). Kingsley, at first glance, seems to lend herself to this sort of caricature, but she was in fact a complex and elusive personality.

Dorothy Middleton's *Victorian Lady Travellers* (1965) is a good starting place for students who would like to know more about both Bird and Kingsley. Though her book is short on literary analysis, Middleton provides biographical background and she summarizes in detail the works of these and other travel writers. Another good source is the lengthy chapter on Kingsley in Catherine Barnes Stevenson's *Victorian Women Travel Writers in Africa* (1982), particularly useful for details of Kingsley's role as a spokeswoman for Africa once she was back in Britain.

Kingsley's life until the age of thirty was the classic story of the dutiful but solitary unmarried daughter at home; she later wrote of "the dreadful gloom of all my life before I went to West Africa." Biographers always mention her resentment that two thousand pounds were spent on her ne'er-do-well brother's schooling, while nothing at all was spent on hers. Those who have read Nightingale's *Cassandra* might see parallels: a sense of confinement and futility, coupled with a longing for some meaningful work. Stevenson concludes that Kingsley's years of service to others "fostered a radical sense of insignificance bordering on anonymity" (94). In her 1976 introduction to the Everyman edition of *Travels*, Elspeth Huxley quotes from a revealing letter written when Kingsley was thirty-seven: "The fact is I am no more a human being than a gust of wind is. I have never had a human individual life. I have always been the doer of odd jobs—and lived in the joys, sorrows and worries of other people. It never occurs to me that I have any right to do anything more than now and then sit and warm myself at the fires of real human beings." In this letter she also said: "I went down to West Africa to die." Kingsley's jaunty insouciance about heading off for "the white man's grave" reads rather differently in light of these words—the notion that she was not so much defying death as courting it gives an unsettling edge to her jolly comic send-up.

Kingsley's low-key approach and self-deprecating humor contrast vividly with Stanley's heroics and macho swagger, as do her humility and openness to new experience. Compare her portrayal of cannibals to his: for Stanley, they are ferocious primitives, but for Kingsley they are just people whose domestic habits happen to be a bit different from her own—she registers no moral disapproval, merely lively curiosity and willingness to learn. Unlike both Stanley and the missionaries, she doesn't see herself as a cultural superior conferring benefits upon Africans. There is a sense of wonder in her writing that might remind us of Mandeville. Never does she employ Dark Continent imagery, or suggest that she is a bringer of light. The Africans whom she meets are not unknowable and savage Others, but real people—fellow participants in the absurd drama of life.

Furthermore, as Mary Louise Pratt notes in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), "The masculine heroic discourse of discovery is not readily available to women." However, "through irony and inversion, [Kingsley] builds her own meaning-making apparatus out of the raw materials of the monarchic male discourse of domination and intervention. The result . . . is a monarchic female voice that asserts its own kind of mastery even as it denies domination and parodies power" (213). Pratt notes that "the domain she chose to occupy" was not the large-scale one of male conquest, but the small-scale one of mangrove swamps, through which Kingsley sloshed zestfully, "up to her neck in water and slime."

Glossing the passage in which Kingsley recalls those blissful nights “dropping down the Rembwe” in a makeshift sailboat, Pratt writes: “What world could be more feminized? There shines the moon lighting the way; the boat a combination bedroom and kitchen; Kingsley the domestic goddess keeping watch and savoring the solitude of her night vigil. . . . Kingsley creates value by decisively and rather fiercely rejecting . . . fantasies of dominance and possession.” Instead, she foregrounds the workings of her own imagination. “Far from taking possession of what she sees, she *steals* past” (214).

While Pratt goes on to argue that Kingsley’s playfulness and comic irony constitute “her own form of mastery,” she concludes that Kingsley ultimately “seeks out a third position that recovers European innocence. Politically she argued for the possibility of economic expansion without domination and exploitation.” Her “bumbling, comic innocence . . . proposes a particular way of being a European in Africa” (215)—a utopian mode that Pratt contrasts to the fearful, threatened mode experienced in night scenes on the river in *Heart of Darkness*.

Finally, one might look at *Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition* (1994), in which Karen Lawrence discusses Kingsley’s “complex relation to imperialism and the individualism of adventure.” Lawrence observes that Kingsley “deliberately eschews the search for identity thematized in much nineteenth-century travel literature.” Her “protean narrative performance” “frustrates our attempts to chart the narrator or traveler as a unified psychological ‘self.’” While inevitably implicated in colonial discourse, Kingsley sought “to represent the rich and complex African cultures that were being trampled by” colonialist policy. She “opposed both the blatantly aggressive policies and rhetoric of imperialism practiced by the Belgians and the more ostensibly liberal but still aggressive ethos of the British, who sought to ‘civilize the natives.’ . . . Although she never questioned the British presence in Africa, she argued that its Crown colony ideology and practice were both stupid and insensitive” (128–29).

### The White Man’s Burden (1899)

The poem was first published in *McClure’s Magazine* in early February 1899, and immediately reprinted in newspapers across the U. S. It appeared just as the United States formally assumed control of Puerto Rico, Guam, the Philippines, and Cuba in the wake of the Spanish-American War. While Kipling lay near death from pneumonia in New York (he eventually recovered), debates, testimonials, diatribes, and eulogies swirled in the press. One scathing parody, “The Brown Man’s Burden” by Henry Labouchère, appeared in London in the same month. It runs, in part:

Pile on the brown man’s burden  
To gratify your greed;  
Go, clear away the ‘niggers’  
Who progress would impede;

Be very stern, for truly  
 'Tis useless to be mild  
 With new-caught, sullen peoples  
 Half devil and half child.

Pile on the brown man's burden;  
 And, if ye rouse his hate,  
 Meet his old-fashioned reasons  
 With Maxims up to dae.  
 With shells and dumdum bullets  
 A hundred times made plain  
 The brown man's loss must ever  
 Imply a white man's gain.

Pile on the brown man's burden,  
 Compel him to be free;  
 Let all your manifestoes  
 Reek with philanthropy.  
 And if with heathen folly  
 He dares your will dispute  
 Then, in the name of freedom  
 Don't hesitate to shoot.

This, and many other texts of the day, can be found on a helpful website called “The White Man's Burden' and its Critics.” Written by Jim Zwick, the website can be found at [www.boondocksnet.com/ai/kipling/](http://www.boondocksnet.com/ai/kipling/) There one can also view an advertisement placed in *McClure's Magazine* in October, 1899 by the ever-opportunistic proprietors of Pears Soap. A white-haired ship's captain is seen washing his hands in his private cabin, while at the lower right a missionary offers a bar of soap to a dark man clad in a loincloth. The caption reads, “The first step towards lightening The White Man's Burden is through teaching the virtues of cleanliness. Pears Soap is a potent factor in brightening the dark corners of the earth.”

Was the vilification or praise of Kipling's poem fully deserved? Is there a middle ground between the imperialist assumption that the burden was necessary and the cynical view that American intervention meant nothing but violence and exploitation? Kipling himself speaks of no profit to be had from assuming the burden, only hardship and ingratitude. But he also makes it clear that civilization is a process of maturing from child to man. Since the poem anticipates what might be seen as a century of American imperialism, whether political, economic, or cultural, in the wake of the British Empire's decline, how has Kipling's prophecy—or Labouchère's—been borne out? This may take class discussion far from Victorian literature, but it can be reined in by comparing the poem to Kipling's other important poem about imperial power and responsibility, “Recessional” (1897), to be found near the end of the main Kipling entry in the anthology. “The White Man's Burden” rouses an empire on the rise to acknowledge and fulfill its new responsi-

bilities; “Recessional” warns an empire on the wane to heed God and ask for mercy: “Judge of the Nations, spare us yet.” In his advice to the Americans, has Kipling forgotten the lessons apparently learned by a country soon to be “one with Nineveh and Tyre”? In 1899 an anonymous contributor to the *New York World* succinctly forecast the evolution of both British and American foreign policy in the century to come:

We’ve taken up the white man’s burden  
Of ebony and brown;  
Now will you kindly tell us, Rudyard  
How we may put it down?

### **Robert Louis Stevenson** **The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886)**

The story was born out of Stevenson’s desire to explore “that strong sense of man’s double being which must at times come in upon and overwhelm the mind of every thinking creature.” Or, as G. K. Chesterton put it in *Robert Louis Stevenson* (1928), “The real stab of the story is not in the discovery that the one man is two men; but in the discovery that the two men are one man.” Victorians felt very intensely the truth of Stevenson’s assertion, and would likely have agreed with Chesterton’s assessment. But is that “sense of man’s double being” universal or historically conditioned? Is it a particular product of Victorian repression, of a society so tightly bound by conventions of moral and social behavior that many “natural” impulses—sexual, violent, self-indulgent impulses—must go “underground” only to coalesce around a dangerous alter-ego? Is our post-Freudian society less prone to generate Mr. Hydes? The story’s continuing popularity might suggest otherwise.

Moreover, as the widening circle of his impact implies, Hyde need not be seen as having importance only for the body that harbors him. In the edition of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* edited by Susan Wolfson and Barry Qualls (2000), the editors provide a range of responses to the text, from its initial reviews to recent criticism by contemporary authors and critics. They cite the critic Edwin M. Eigner who in 1966 wrote that “Hyde does not appear purely evil in this adventure, but he does seem to bring out all the cruelty and malice in those who judge him . . . . Enfield, the bystanders, and the other narrators are rejecting a part of themselves when they reject Hyde, and the more strenuously they excise him, the more thoroughly they come to resemble their notion of him . . .” (Wolfson/Qualls 94). In other words, one man’s Hyde may bring out the Hyde—and hatred—in others. There are few women glimpsed anywhere in the story (hence the novelist Valerie Martin was able to make a fascinating narrative called *Mary Reilly* out of the imagined experiences of Jekyll’s maid—the book is far better than the film), but those that encounter Hyde in the opening episode are turned “wild as harpies.”

In one of the most perceptive early reviews, Julia Wedgwood noted in 1886 that “Whereas most fiction deals with the relation between man and woman . . .

the author of this strange tale takes an even narrower range, and sets himself to investigate the meaning of the word *self*. No woman's name occurs in the book, no romance is even suggested in it; it depends on the interest of an idea. . . ." (Wolfson/Qualls 87). But what idea, exactly? In this male world of closely guarded emotions and long but distant friendships, where is the self to be located—in the daily dull discourse of law and medicine, in the few social gatherings between aging bachelors? Fairly early in the story, Utterson thinks, "If he be Mr. Hyde . . . I shall be Mr. Seek." As the narrative follows Utterson's efforts to penetrate Hyde's secrecy, Stevenson may be suggesting that a man's task is to get to know better both self and other. Mr. Hyde gives Utterson a new identity, that of "Mr. Seek." It is a more salutary personality shift than that undergone by Dr. Jekyll, for the more one Hydes, the more one comes to the attention of others. The story finally favors openness; it seems the opposite of Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" (1840) where an aged version of Mr. Hyde totally baffles all attempts that the narrator makes to discover his suspected secrets.

And yet many secrets remain. For twenty-first century readers—and possibly for nineteenth-century readers, too—Julia Wedgewood's review raises another set of questions: Is Dr. Henry Jekyll homosexual? Is Mr. Hyde the tortured expression of that heavily repressed desire or fear? Mr. Enfield remarks near the story's opening that "I make it a rule of mine: the more it looks like Queer Street, the less I ask." The narrative fluctuates between moments of hiding, moments of seeking; it seems unwilling to uncover the dark story it nevertheless propels the reader headlong into. Of the two Victorians cited in the headnote to the story as having their own inner Hydes, J. A. Symonds was openly gay and G. M. Hopkins, a Jesuit priest, was likely privately so. Are the adventures of Mr. Hyde a foreshadowing of the more comic Bunburying we hear about in Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, or the more tragic trial and imprisonment of Wilde himself because of his own hidden life?

It would help to know more about Mr. Hyde. As Elaine Showalter writes in *Sexual Anarchy* (1990), "Stevenson was the fin-de-siècle laureate of the double life," but "in the multiplication of narrative viewpoints that makes up the story . . . one voice is missing: that of Hyde himself." Unlike Frankenstein's monster, "we never hear his account of the events, his memories of his strange birth, his pleasure and fear." We don't, she says, because "Hyde's story would disturb the sexual economy of the text, the sense of panic at having liberated an uncontrollable desire." His power and potency may be felt so frighteningly precisely because his motives and most of his activities are so heavily veiled. Still, he is present in two ways, Showalter argues, "in the representation of his feminine behavior" and in his body language: "Hyde's reality breaks through Jekyll's body in the shape of his hand, the timbre of his voice, and the quality of his gait." To this should be added the impression that he conveys of an indefinable deformity. His twisted vagueness, his vague twistedness, seem to exude evil; he is a sort of spontaneous combustion of noxious repression.

A good way into the novel is through the light-dark imagery and the shifts between cozy, cold, and foreboding locations, and from interior to exterior. Like Dr. Jekyll himself, his house has two "outlets"—the front door manned by servants and

the rusty side door to which Mr. Hyde holds the key. In this regard it might be useful to make some links to Stevenson's "A Child's Garden of Verses" (see *Perspectives: Imagining Childhood*). If they haven't made the connection already, students might find it fascinating to realize that the author of a classic horror novel is also the classic author of nostalgic evocations of childhood—themselves composed upon a dark vs. light theme. Underlying the happy boyhood portrayed in the poems are lurking fears of the dark and the night, death, shadows and strange creatures.

There is a lot to be done in class exploring the narrative technique of *Dr. Jekyll*. The novelist Vladimir Nabokov wondered how Stevenson can manage to convey to his readers the full horror of Hyde when he has made the decision to bolster the story's plausibility by passing it through the matter-of-fact lens of Enfield and Utterson. Nabokov concluded: "I suggest that the shock of Hyde's presence brings out the hidden artist in Utterson" (Wolfson/Qualls 93). At first, Utterson seems about as artistic as Dickens's prying but tight-lipped "oyster of the old school," Mr. Tulkinghorn in *Bleak House*, surely one of the formative elements in his literary genesis. But Utterson's sheer patience and reticence allow the story to come to him, to the extent that we forget that he actually has no narration of his own. He asks questions but never, unlike Enfield, Lanyon, or Jekyll, or even Poole the servant, recounts his experiences in the first person. His artistry lies in the spider-web of narrative that he permits to be spun around him. The son rather than father of utterance, he has the story literally handed to him at the end. Stevenson allows Utterson to disappear entirely once the letters from Layton and Jekyll are in his hand; the author never returns to his frame; we never learn if Utterson gets back before midnight to relieve poor Poole and notify the police.

Is there a point, a moral to the tale? Wolfson and Qualls point out that the wine that brings out the humanity in Utterson at the beginning of the tale is akin to the blood-red potion that transforms Dr. Jekyll into Mr. Hyde. Both Utterson and Jekyll deny themselves and then indulge themselves, but Utterson manages to let himself out in little steps (the shift from solitary gin to social wine, for example, lights up his eye) while Henry Jekyll does it with a devastating cocktail of chemicals that wracks his whole body. Mr. Utterson's most pronounced trait, we learn in the story's first and second paragraphs, is his unusual tolerance for those "down-going men" of his acquaintance. Perhaps the story favors tolerance over condemnation, expression over repression, wine and companionship over gin and solitude. A late Victorian joke about pipe tobacco began, "do you have Prince Albert [brand tobacco] in a tin?" If the smoker or tobacconist said yes, then the prankster replied, "Well, why don't you let him out!" Stevenson may be saying the same thing about Mr. Hyde.

## Oscar Wilde

Writing a half century after Wilde's death, Jorge Luis Borges claimed to have made a discovery: "the provable and elementary fact that Wilde is almost always right." Fifty years later, Borges seems right too. Readers today praise Wilde's astuteness as

a critic, his brilliance as a dramatist, his insight as a social analyst, his proleptic genius as a one-man media event, and his theatrical understanding of gender as performance. Wilde was exceptionally versatile as a writer, perhaps more skilful in more genres than any other author. Our selections give a sense of the poet, critic, playwright, political theorist, autobiographer, and public man; students might also want to investigate his novel, stories, fairy tales, lectures, letters, other plays, and incidental journalism. The best introductions to the current discourse on Wilde are *Critical Essays on Oscar Wilde*, ed. Regenia Gagnier (1991), and the *Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*, ed. Peter Raby (1997). Richard Ellmann's *Oscar Wilde: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1969) remains valuable for its survey of earlier responses to Wilde, including those of Pater, Yeats, Joyce, Shaw, Auden, Alfred Douglas, Hart Crane, and Borges.

In some respects Wilde's poems are his shakiest claim to greatness, and the elaborate stylistic pastiche of Baudelaire, Swinburne, and Browning that dominated his first publication, *Poems* (1881), has troubled critics ever since. But the three poems included here represent a different Wilde: simple in diction, restrained in manner, they are characteristic of the early modernist fascination with London. *Impression du Matin* begins with allusions to Whistler's paintings; like the painter, Wilde stresses the insubstantiality of the city and the subtle transformations of light and color as night yields to day. Stanza 3 suddenly changes the tempo. Compare these bolder images of dawn with a probable source, Tennyson's final lines of sections 7 and 119 of *In Memoriam* (whose stanza form Wilde also emulates). Wilde's lurid final stanza undercuts both Whistler's refusal to moralize in his paintings and Tennyson's presentation of dawn as spiritually uplifting. Is the harlot an artistically "legitimate" feature of this morning impression, or does she function as a jarring, sensational note that breaks up the "harmony" and emphasizes the "clang" of early morning?

Each of the other two poems elaborates an aspect of *Impression du Matin*. *Symphony in Yellow* is an exquisite Whistlerian tone-poem that wavers between yellow and green, artificial and natural (bus to butterfly, fog to scarf), and motion and stasis (Thames to rod of jade). The poem could be regarded as an aesthete's version of Wordsworth's sonnet *Westminster Bridge*, Wilde substituting languid, fashionable details (the trendy color yellow, the allusion to Whistler's butterfly signature, the Wildean silk scarf, the orientalist taste for jade) for Wordsworth's spiritually charged wonder; where Wordsworth's sleeping city seems ready to burst into life, Wilde's urban activity gradually turns to stone. *The Harlot's House* reverses the emphases of *Impression du Matin*, exploring the harlot's world first, then bringing in the dawn in the last stanza. Is the harlot's house an image of death, of carnal knowledge, a sort of Goblin Market that entices all who pass by? Wilde's narrator keeps aloof, but his "love" enters, with mysterious results. Does the dancer's tune turn false for the speaker or for his love? Is it her arrival that breaks up the waltz of the "dead" dancers, bringing relief in the form of silver-sandaled dawn? Or does his lover's defection give the speaker a new perspective that contrasts the (properly) "frightened girl" of dawn to the worldly woman who has left him in the night?

In 1891 Walter Pater wrote that “*The Decay of Lying* . . . is all but unique in its half-humorous, yet wholly convinced, presentment of certain valuable truths of criticism.” Wilde turns Platonic philosophy on its head by asserting not only that art should be enjoyed for its own sake, regardless of mimetic accuracy, but also that art is the original creation and nature merely the belated, inferior imitation. “Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life,” Wilde concludes, and even “external Nature also imitates Art.” Therefore lying, the refusal to take Nature or Reality on its own terms, “is the proper aim of Art.”

Many of Wilde’s theories, such as the artist’s independence from his historical moment, and the foolishness of imitating nature, can be found in Whistler’s “Ten o’clock” lecture (see the “Aesthetes and Decadents” section), and Whistler in fact charged Wilde with plagiarism. Wilde does acknowledge “the Master,” as Whistler liked to be called: contending that life imitates art, Wilde attributes “the extraordinary change that has taken place in the climate of London” to Whistler’s paintings of the Thames. Students might compare the style, substance, and imagery of Whistler’s lecture and Wilde’s dialogue (their common source was Gautier’s famous Preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* [1835]).

Whatever Wilde’s intellectual debt to Whistler, *The Decay of Lying* sparkles with critical and comedic genius. First Wilde shocks his readers by assaulting their preconceptions: he doesn’t like *nature*? He’s going to defend *lying*? Then, instead of retreating from his attention-getting start, he pushes further, charging poets with “careless habits of accuracy,” and claiming that Hamlet proves his madness when he says, “Art should hold the mirror up to nature.” And yet, by logical exposition and constant reference to literary history, Wilde gradually makes us see how important it is that life—the raw material of art—be transformed by the artistic process (lying) into something more beautiful and expressive. Moreover, “life is the mirror, and art the reality,” since “a great artist invents a type, and Life tries to copy it.” Women imitate the Pre-Raphaelite look; frustrated lovers shoot themselves as did Goethe’s Werther; Impressionist paintings create London fogs. How can this be? Because “things are because we see them, and what we see depends on the Arts that have influenced us.” Ask students to come up with examples of this phenomenon—have they noticed a kind of landscape, a style of dress, a time of day or type of weather as a result of having been taught to see by a book, painting, or film? By the last lines of the dialogue, the sympathetic reader is ready to entertain the outrageous claim, unthinkable at the start, that nature’s “chief use is to illustrate quotations from the poets.”

In one of the most amusing passages, Wilde provokingly traces American commercialism (perceived then, as now, to be a major threat to European culture) to George Washington’s inability to tell a lie. Why *has* the cherry tree story assumed mythic status? Has public veneration of “the truth” contributed to the “materializing spirit” of the U.S. and its indifference to poetry? One could use this passage as a way into Wilde’s theory about lying. Point out that he carefully distinguishes *lying* from the mere “misrepresentation” of politicians and lawyers, who actually try to convince people of their veracity. For Wilde, lying should be practiced for its own sake, with no pretence of plausibility. Thinking particularly of Zola, he argues

that when Fact invades the realm of Fancy and Romance, art becomes vulgar and wearisome. But lying looks to art itself for a model, and can thus produce works of beauty and imagination. Why does Wilde use the word “lying,” instead of imagination or creativity, as do the Romantics? In *Oscar Wilde* (1987) Richard Ellmann suggests that imagination is “too natural” a word—for Wilde, lying is more conscious, sinful, and willful (302).

*The Soul of Man under Socialism* belongs to the tradition of Victorian social prophecy that includes Carlyle’s *Past and Present*, Ruskin’s *Nature of Gothic*, and Morris’s *Beauty of Life*. Meditating on “the condition of England,” each author stresses the interconnection of aesthetics and politics, and how beauty cannot flourish in an ugly, unjust society. But Wilde begins his surprising essay with a challenge to conventional definitions; instead of calling for collective action, he asserts a startling preference for individualism, and the means of achieving it: “Socialism would relieve us from that sordid necessity of living for others.” As he says later, individualism “does not try to force people to be good. It knows that people are good when they are let alone.” Gagnier points out that this is “Wilde’s best-known work in the world at large” and belongs “clearly with a long tradition of socialist aesthetics,” that ranges from Schiller and Marx to Morris, Trotsky, Marcuse, and Foucault, who wondered in a late interview, “couldn’t everyone’s life become a work of art”? (7–9).

Reenvisioning both society and human nature, Wilde combines a faith in spontaneous personal development with a bold, deliberately impractical case for abolishing private property; he turns over to machines “all the necessary and unpleasant work.” Anticipating the objection that his views are utopian, Wilde offers one of his brilliant rejoinders: “A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing.”

Compare the style and structure of the essay to Mill’s method in *On Liberty*. Both authors try to work through the vast body of received wisdom surrounding their topic, but while Mill carefully debunks common misconceptions, Wilde embraces conventional maxims so that he can turn the clichés inside out and then argue seriously from his apparently thoughtless one-liners. The essay moves rapidly through a series of unexpected insights which constitute almost a line of reasoning in themselves: “Charity creates a multitude of sins;” “disobedience is man’s original virtue;” “as for the virtuous poor, one can pity them but one cannot possibly admire them. They have made private terms with the enemy;” “agitators are a set of interfering, meddling people. . . . That is why they are absolutely necessary;” “wealthy people are, as a class, better than impoverished people;” “there is nothing necessarily dignified about manual labour.” Each of these formulations forces a reconsideration of Victorian social policy and its platitudes; any one of them might spark discussion on how poverty and social inequality should be addressed.

At the heart of Wilde’s program is his claim that private property gets in the way of individual development, encumbering the privileged even as it starves the poor. He criticizes the social conditioning that focuses people on “gain not

growth,” and to end this obsession with ownership he proposes an enlightened self-reliance (he admired Emerson). Some lines now read ironically in view of his experience in Reading Gaol: “Public opinion is of no value whatsoever. . . . After all, even in prison a man can be quite free.” Most remarkable, though, is the long passage reinterpreting the Gospels, where he imagines Jesus saying “You have a wonderful personality. Develop it. Be yourself.” Wilde apparently thought constantly about the implications of the Gospel stories, as many people who recalled his conversation, including Yeats and Gide, attested. Just as Wilde foresees the limitations of a planned economy (“under an industrial barrack system, or a system of economic tyranny, nobody would be able to have any such freedom at all”), in his reading of Christianity he anticipates the ego-centered approach of late twentieth-century psychology and religion. Ask students if they think Wilde is correct in assuming that the road to self-realization lies through the shedding of possessions. Does his message seem today to be more personal than social, more “self-help” manual than political manifesto? Or is that analysis itself a proof of Wilde’s point that individual and political philosophies need to converge?

Wilde added the Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in angry response to critics of the novel. For example, “Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming. That is a fault.” But, as Richard Ellmann points out, the Preface provokingly “flaunted the aestheticism” that the book’s own moralistic ending indicts ([1987], 315) Indeed, two inflammatory lines from the Preface would later be used against Wilde during his trials: “There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written or badly written. That is all.” Ellmann comments that “To prevent the book’s being treated as immoral, Wilde excluded morality from its province, although it exposed the follies of a false and excessive aestheticism” (322). Ask students if books (or other works of art) are really beyond moral judgment. Can literature that appears racist, sexist, treasonous, or threatening to public safety be evaluated only on the grounds of literary style? Is the denunciation of “dangerous” ideas the exclusive province of jittery dictators and intolerant moralists? In his essay “Why Write?” (1949), Jean-Paul Sartre offers an unexpected defense of Wilde’s position. For Sartre, reading requires a voluntary collaboration of reader and writer to produce meaning (cf. Wilde’s “it is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors”), and any attempt on the writer’s part to restrict the reader’s freedom diminishes the work of art. “Thus,” says Sartre, echoing Wilde, “there are only good and bad novels . . . the moment I feel myself a pure freedom [in the process of reading] I can not bear to identify myself with a race of oppressors. . . . I’d like to know a single good novel whose express purpose was to serve oppression, a single good novel which has been written against Jews, Negroes, workers, or colonial people.”

Wilde’s remark about Caliban’s rage over seeing (or not seeing) his face in the mirror raises the question, why do we read? How much like daily life do we want our literature and literary characters to be? Since, for Wilde, art mirrors the spectator, his warning about the dangers of interpretation (going beneath the surface, reading the symbol) acquires a sort of Oedipal urgency. We have to beware of what

art will tell us about ourselves. His stance recalls Mark Twain's "Notice" at the start of *Huckleberry Finn* (1884): "Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot." If, as Wilde claims (and Twain implies), art is not to be put to conventional uses, perhaps it serves a different purpose. In Wilde's case, his defiantly amoral attitude functions as a Victorian class indicator in its "gentlemanly" disdain for anything that smacks of business and trade.

*The Importance of Being Earnest* can be read as a seriously comic, or comically serious, dramatization of the social theories Wilde had earlier presented in *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* (Lady Bracknell denounces land ownership as a nuisance; Algernon chastises the lower classes for not providing a good moral example). The play also explores the aesthetic issues Wilde had raised in *The Decay of Lying*, particularly the connection between art and lying, and the dictum that life imitates art. Wilde's characters invent alter egos, lie without hesitation, and play their social roles with utter sincerity, ultimately confirming the reality of their own pretenses. While earnestness is a vital asset to the talented liars who transform social routine into an aesthetically satisfying spectacle, truth is simply irrelevant. It belongs to the dull realist novel, to Life, not Art. Jack begs Gwendolen's pardon at the end: "it is a terrible thing for a man to find out suddenly that all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth. Can you forgive me?"

What counts is the free-play of wit and imagination; as Gwendolen remarks: "In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity, is the vital thing." Or, as Lady Bracknell says, "We live in an age of surfaces. . . . Algernon has nothing, but he looks everything. What more can one desire?" In such a world, "success in life," to use Pater's phrase, depends on performance and the outward manifestations of class, gender, or character (gestures, etiquette, the rituals of social intercourse); a substantive, private, inner self is nowhere to be found. Every action is to be performed as if before an audience. When Jack proposes, Gwendolen says, "I hope you will always look at me just like that, especially when there are other people present."

Wilde's presentation of such self-consciously creative personas inevitably reminds the audience of the play's immensely clever author, and his own double life as self-fashioning Bunburyist. As Peter Raby writes in the best single introduction to the play, *The Importance of Being Earnest: A Reader's Companion* (1995), "Wilde's characters are all scriptwriters and storytellers: Chasuble's sermons, Prism's novel, Cecily's and Gwendolen's diaries, Lady Bracknell's list of eligible young men. Jack and Algy invent characters . . . to enable them to escape the restrictions of Victorian life and morality. . . . The dual fictions allow each bachelor to live a double life. The young women, in contrast, cannot wait to be married so that their double life can begin. . . . The play, so far from suggesting that the double life will be dispelled by marriage, suggests that it is a permanent and inescapable part of it" (89). Wilde took the "double life" theme closer to his own situation in the earlier four-act version of the play, when Algy is nearly sent to debtor's prison because of Jack's unpaid bills at the Savoy hotel; students might wish to compare versions in an annotated edition such as that edited by Russell Jackson (1980).

One of the many paradoxes of the play is that self-invention is also a quest for self-discovery. The play culminates with Jack's question, "Would you kindly inform me who I am?" Some critics have compared *Earnest* with *Alice in Wonderland* as a quintessentially Victorian search for self amid the elaborate, arbitrary conventions of society, while others link Wilde with Beckett, Ionesco, and Stoppard as an explorer of the Absurd. Joseph Bristow, for example, writes that in its rejection of realism and obsession with artifice, "Wilde's comedy marks . . . the beginnings of a theater of alienation or estrangement which would become a cornerstone of European modernism" (cited in Raby, 22). Yet it is equally possible to read *Earnest* back into the history of Western theater: Jack's question, echoing King Lear's "Who is it can tell me who I am?" was first posed by Sophocles in *Oedipus Rex*. Both plays deal with heroes who have "carelessly" lost both parents early in life, both are raised in ignorance of their true families, and both feel compelled to establish their genealogy in order to resolve social crises and penetrate the mysteries of identity. Oedipus's discoveries have the effect of forcing him out of society, while Jack's bring him further in; Wilde comically rewrites Sophocles to make the intolerable doubleness of Oedipus—his being both son and husband to Jocasta—become an admirable, "brotherly" social trait that the male leads share: "the vital Importance of Being Earnest." Like a cheerful Freud, Wilde presents the Oedipal state as a universal human condition.

Other trappings of Greek tragedy are also revised. Lady Bracknell is, as Mary McCarthy once remarked, "Olympian" (see Ellmann [1969], 109); she is the *dea ex machina* whose unshakable observance of social ritual propels the marriage plot. The Aristotelian fatal flaw turns into mild gluttony for cucumber sandwiches, and the expiation of sin is also expressed as a form of consumption: "They have been eating muffins. That looks like repentance." Parodying the convention of the lost baby, Wilde focuses on the trappings, not the child: Miss Prism is delighted to have her handbag back, never mind the baby whom she had mistaken for the manuscript of her novel. The Greek Chorus is implicit in the preoccupation with what "Society"—represented by the audience (and Lady Bracknell)—will think.

But do the "doubleness" of the characters and their preoccupation with fictive selves prevent what for Aristotle was a key feature of Greek drama, the audience's involvement with the characters? Do we have sympathy with Algy and Jack, with Cecily and Gwendolen? Is the play too clever to be humanly felt? George Bernard Shaw, for example, was unmoved by it, though he admired Wilde. Or does it strike too close to home in the sense that it shows how much our notions of "self" have to do with self-presentation and performance?

The play inverts other longstanding social norms: the servants are more polished than their masters; the women are more forthright and commanding than the men. The scene shift in Act II further emphasizes the topsy-turvyness of this world: it deceptively suggests a move from urban sophistication to rural innocence, but *this* country place isn't pastoral at all—the outdoor garden is as fully constructed and aesthetic an environment as any interior (books, chairs, tables, tea service). As Lady Bracknell puts it, "A girl with a simple, unspoiled nature, like Gwendolyn, could hardly be expected to reside in the country."

Lady Bracknell merits special attention. One of Wilde's greatest creations, she is an authoritarian representation "of all that is most obstructive, conservative, and negative in Victorian society. But as the play unfolds, it becomes clear that she herself has manipulated life for years" (Raby, 65). She is prepared to change the fashionable side of Belgrave Square, and with a sort of ruthless perspicacity she pronounces smoking a suitable occupation for a gentleman, recognizes that education poses "a serious danger to the upper classes," and advises Jack to "acquire some relatives as soon as possible" if he hopes to marry. Her frequent references to revolution, violence, and anarchy reveal her awareness of the fragility of upper-class privilege. She assesses social position with the acuteness of a former bondholder: "When I married Lord Bracknell I had no fortune of any kind. But I never dreamed of allowing that to stand in my way." She is pleased with Jack's income and excited about Cecily's fortune: looking out for Algernon and Gwendolyn, she wishes to assure the class status that only money can buy.

Thus, as Raby comments, the world of the play "is a mixture of the reassuringly stable and the chaotically surreal. Society, led by its spokesperson Lady Bracknell, offers the appearance of respectability, but the respectable has a disconcerting habit of vanishing, like the Cheshire Cat, leaving only a grin behind. . . . The individual characters are capable of rapid transformations" in affection and manner, and have none of the familial or moral stability that Victorian society prided itself upon. Lady Bracknell's difficult role is "to impose some kind of order on a society intent on dissolving before her eyes" (81-82). Marriage, the social glue of high society and the goal toward which all the characters race, is portrayed as dispiriting and divisive: Lane finds that "in married households the champagne is rarely of a first-rate brand," Lord Bracknell's ill health may be a Bunburyish fiction through which Lady Bracknell manages her own life; Gwendolen is likely to marry often; General Moncrieff was a man of peace except in his domestic life; and "a man who marries without knowing Bunbury," Algy remarks, "has a very tedious time of it."

Does the play finally challenge or confirm the social conventions that it mocks? "Why should there be one law for men and another for women?" Jack asks seriously; but he asks his momentary "mother," Miss Prism, and this misprision is characteristic of how Wilde deliberately ironizes all of his serious points. Do social structures inevitably triumph over individual witticisms, or does the clear-sighted reinforcement of tradition and hierarchy, in all their glorious folly, ultimately undermine their credibility? Critics tend toward the latter position. Raby points out that although the play was written when Britain's prosperity and empire were at their peak, "Wilde's jokes surreptitiously draw attention to the impermanence, and absurdity, of the prevailing social and political structures and to the inherited complacency that cocoons them" (7). Ellmann comments that "In *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, Wilde had repudiated marriage, the family, and private property; in his play, he repudiated them by pretending they are ineradicable, urging their enforcement with a mad insistence which shows how preposterous they are" ([1987], 422). And Katharine Worth concludes that *Earnest* is Wilde's "supreme demolition of late nineteenth-century social and moral attitudes, the triumphal conclusion to his career as revolutionary moralist" (155).

In addition to Raby, significant criticism of the play includes Katharine Worth, *Oscar Wilde* (1983); Harold Bloom, ed., *Modern Critical Interpretations: Oscar Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest* (1988); and the *Earnest* section of Gagnier's *Critical Essays*. For a fascinating contextualization, see Kerry Powell's *Oscar Wilde and the Theatre of the 1890s* (1990): "Like its hero, *The Importance of Being Earnest* can be said to have lost its 'parents'—those forgotten farces that in a real sense gave birth to Wilde's play" (124). Powell's genealogy includes *Godpapa* (1891), a play which contains a character named Bunbury who is prone to fictitious ailments (127). Life took revenge on Art: Bunbury was played by an actor who later helped collect evidence used against Wilde during his trials.

Contemporaries instantly recognized Wilde's uncanny skill at turning conversational clichés into provocative, show-stopping aphorisms. But they also claimed it was a trivial occupation, something anyone could do. Reviewing *An Ideal Husband* in 1895, G. B. Shaw wrote: "They laugh angrily at his epigrams. . . . They protest that the trick is obvious, and that such epigrams can be turned out by the score by any one lightminded enough to condescend to such frivolity. As far as I can ascertain, I am the only person in London who cannot sit down and write an Oscar Wilde play at will" (cited in Beckson, *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage* [1970], 176). For Shaw, the key was Wilde's sensitivity, as an Irishman, to English seriousness, to "the Englishman utterly unconscious of his real self" (Beckson 177).

Building on this insight, Regenia Gagnier writes that Wildean wit springs from the author's status as "an outsider—Irish, homosexual, artist—to Victorian imperial, commercial, and polite society." Wilde used the linguistic rituals of group affiliation to expose the instability of the social structure, and the shallowness of group identity. "His legendary wit consisted in practice of a talent for inverting Victorian truisms. . . . Yet the astonishing thing about his wit is not that he could always . . . find the right word to substitute for the key word of the platitude, but rather that he knew the platitudes so well to begin with. His mind was stocked with commonplaces, and these seem to have been there for the sole purpose of their subversion" (*Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* [1986], 7–8).

*De Profundis* might have been called "The Soul of Man Under Lock and Key." It has, according to Gagnier, a vast—and growing—readership who relate directly to its emotional accuracy in describing prison life ([1991], 17). In this undelivered letter to his ex-lover, Wilde veers between bitter accusation and even more bitter self-accusation, trying to understand how he came to be in prison, and how he might live to get out. While the epistle reads at first as a venting of anger and anguish, it returns consistently to the theme he had addressed more hopefully in *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, namely the necessity of self-understanding. Wilde twice repeats his call for painful introspection: "the supreme vice is shallowness. Whatever is realized is right." The line carries with it an echo of Edgar's pronouncement in *King Lear* in the midst of his distress and desperate soul-sifting, "Ripeness is all."

Yet even as he catalogues Bosie's vanities, and proclaims his own arrival at "absolute Humility," Wilde expands on his genius and his achievements: "I was a man who stood in symbolic relations to the art and culture of my age." Claiming for himself even greater representative status than Byron, Wilde stunningly conducts his own apotheosis, writes his own epitaph: "I awoke the imagination of my century so that it created myth and legend around me: I summed up all systems in a phrase, and all existence in an epigram." Unhumble as it may seem, this grandiosity could be regarded as in keeping with Wilde's gnostic intent: "It is only by realizing what I am that I have found comfort of any kind," he remarks. "To reject one's own experiences is to arrest one's own development. . . . It is the denial of the Soul." But in "realizing what I am," Wilde produces a *mélange* of re-priming, moralizing, and self-aggrandizement. It sometimes seems that Wilde's personal dealings with Bosie are less important to his quest than the assessment of his own artistic potential and accomplishment. Is it personal remorse or a sort of Faustian dramatization of his talent that leads him to write, "I was so typical a child of my age that in my perversity, and for that perversity's sake, I turned the good things of my life to evil, and the evil things of my life to good"? One could argue that the letter is Wilde's last great dramatic work, a biblical melodrama in which he creates a Satanic Bosie who tempts Eve/Christ/Oscar, precipitating a fall (from public grace), a crucifixion (at and after the trials), and finally a moral/literary resurrection.

### Companion Reading

When discussing the transcript of the trials (used as the basis of the recent play, *Gross Indecency*), debate the issues raised in the cross examination. Is Wilde justified in dismissing "Philistine" or "illiterate" responses to art? Does the artist bear any responsibility for the public's (mis)interpretation of a work that may defy mainstream views? Wilde commented in the second trial that "one man's poetry is another man's poison." Why did Douglas's poems, or Wilde's poetic letters to him, seem so disturbing to Wilde's opponents? Any trial is a sort of drama, a morality play in which guilt and innocence are meted out by judge and jury. The series of Wilde's trials came about because Queensbury accused Wilde of "posing" as a sodomite; Carson questioned Wilde about his artistic "pose." Should we read the trials—and Wilde's performance at them—theatrically, as exploring a role that first Wilde, and then British society, had created for the errant artist?

See Ed Cohen's *Talk on the Wilde Side* (1993) for an illuminating reappraisal of the received view of Wilde's "tragic downfall." Cohen reexamines the original newspaper reports on which H. Montgomery Hyde based *The Trials of Oscar Wilde*, showing how Hyde constructed a version of the trials that has been perpetuated by contemporary critics, including Richard Ellmann in his 1987 biography. Rather than regarding the story as that of the personal downfall of a genius who made a "fatal mistake," Cohen situates it in a larger social and political context, elucidating the underlying assumptions about normative masculinity, and "Wilde's emergence as a paradigmatic figure for a discernibly nonnormative male sexuality at the end of the nineteenth century."

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 PERSPECTIVES
 

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## Aesthetes and Decadents

Closely identified with the idea of “art for art’s sake,” the literary and artistic movement of Aestheticism flowered in England during the 1880s and early 1890s. By then the concept of moral, didactic art had been under attack for several decades from those who thought that books and pictures should be judged on their own intrinsic merits, rejecting any claim to utility, social relevance, or the education of a wide audience. Announcing the independence of artists from their times, figures such as Whistler, Wilde, and Symons scorned practicality and progress; heroically—in their eyes—they faced isolation as dandies and Bohemians cast out by a bourgeois world. Creating amoral art became their sacred mission. Whereas Ruskin had said that apprehension of beauty leads to apprehension of God in the world, Aesthetes argued that perceiving beauty was in and of itself a religious experience. Claiming that “Life is terribly deficient in form,” Oscar Wilde encouraged his readers to devote themselves to the perfections of art rather than questions of conduct: “Aesthetics are higher than ethics. They belong to a more spiritual sphere.”

Aesthetic ideas—and the reaction to them—coalesced in the early 1880s, when they were parodied in *George DuMaurier’s* cartoons in *Punch* (1879–81), spoofed in Gilbert and Sullivan’s light opera *Patience* (1881), and sympathetically appraised in Walter Hamilton’s book, *The Aesthetic Movement in England* (1881). As we learn from *W. S. Gilbert’s If You’re Anxious for to Shine*, Aesthetes were conspicuously fond of “Queen Anne” architecture, medieval art, bits of stained glass, Japanese furnishings, and rarified conversation. Many of their favorite articles could be found at the Liberty department store that had opened in London in 1875. Among the “vegetable” motifs Aesthetes sported were sunflowers, lilies, peacock feathers, and green carnations, the last invented by Wilde. The art of book-making also enjoyed a revival; authors demanded that the page be as thoughtfully conceived as the words upon it. Whistler, Wilde, Yeats, Symons, John Gray, and many others published their works in graceful editions employing distinctive type and a maximum of white space on every page. Thus in books as in interior design, architecture, and illustration, Aesthetes drew on the resources of both Art Nouveau and the Arts and Crafts Movement to create a taste for elegant simplicity that was diametrically opposed to the usual Victorian clutter.

The ostentatiousness of Aesthetic beauty-worship signalled to Gilbert that the Aesthetic manner was an elaborate pose designed to draw attention to egotistical bounders, who had a flair for self-promotion. Many commentators have seen in the flamboyant gestures and conversation of Whistler and Wilde the birth of the modern cult of celebrity, of fame as a media event based more on image than accomplishment. *George DuMaurier* is less cynical than Gilbert, and his clever, detailed cartoons seem designed to present the Aesthetes anthropologically, as if he were a bemused Mayhew chronicling a strange new tribe of Londoners. Against a trendy backdrop of Japanese and Chinese elements, *The Six-Mark Tea-Pot* features a drooping man and an imposing, sweepingly gowned woman with the long neck

and thick hair that characterize Rossetti's portraits of Jane Morris. "Six-mark" blue-and-white pottery of Chinese origin was highly prized, and the couple's aspiration to "live up to it" proceeds from one of Aestheticism's central tenets, that Life should imitate Art.

But not everybody's life had artistic potential. **Whistler** makes it clear in the *Ten O'Clock* lecture that art is not for the multitude, and that the middle-classes would be better off if they ceased to regard art as a fashionable status-symbol or a source of moral instruction. Divorcing art from history, national culture, and even nature, Whistler asserts the artist's autonomy, his indifference to politics, social organization, or mimetic obligation: "To say to the painter, that nature is to be taken as she is, is to say to the player, that he may sit on the piano." Does art then have any relation to its moment or context? Students may pick up on the ways in which Whistler's vision of a universal, eternal art released from Victorian notions of morality or progress is in itself quite Victorian. His contradictory gendering of Art and Artist is especially interesting; the "Master's" quest to win the favor of the "cruel jade" of inspiration seems to assert male supremacy at the same time that it proves it to be useless, since Art herself will decide whom to favor.

As the selections from Gilbert, Whistler, DuMaurier, Levenson, and Beerbohm show, the *fin-de-siècle* was an era of wit and witticism, in which caricatures and cartoons flourished alongside self-absorbed rhapsodies over art and artificiality. **Levenson's** short story *Suggestion* is a nuanced parody not only of Aesthetic self-involvement (in the person of "Cissy," its narrator), but also of upper-class family life and values. The first sentence announces the theme of gender definition and confusion, and the story ends with a word Levenson has done her best to problematize, "home." Levenson, like her great friend Wilde, delights in exploring contemporary social types through the lens of a sophisticated gay consciousness dedicated to cultivating pleasurable impressions and suggestive appearances. "Cissy" is an engagingly selfish teen-aged Prospero who seeks to arrange his own domestic happiness by stage-managing the love lives of his father, his sister Marjorie, and Marjorie's friend Laura (representing Victorian patriarchy, the New Woman, and the Aesthete, respectively). Cissy is a charming but ruthless egotist, particularly in the way he disposes of Marjorie, yet he can also be seen as a curiously moral figure whose desire for revenge upon his faithless, self-absorbed father seems motivated more by aesthetics than by ethics.

A public discomfited by male characters like "Cissy" was equally shocked by "manly" women. Feeling itself on the defensive, British society policed the borders of hitherto more fluid sexual identities with new medical and legal definitions of normalcy. Confronted with a growing openness about women's bodies and their desires, doctors lent credibility to the idea, found in many *fin-de-siècle* works, that women could become vampiric sexual predators, who endangered the human race when they cultivated either their intellects or feminist alliances. Bram Dijkstra's *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (1986) covers this ground in fascinating detail, and is especially strong on visual images of the femme fatale.

The emergence of the word "lesbian" at this time conveniently served to stigmatize women's friendships that appeared to threaten male power. In *Studies in*

*Sexual Inversion* (1897), Havelock Ellis, one of the first sexologists, assigned for the first time a deviant, “lesbian” identity to all women who “show some traits of masculine simplicity, and . . . a disdain for the petty feminine artifices of the toilet.” He also singled out “brusque energetic movements,” and “especially the attitude towards men, free from any suggestion either of shyness or audacity.” But because Parliament did not dare to address female sexuality, declaring women “passionless,” sexual relationships between females did not undergo any legal definition and prohibition, as did relationships between men.

**Katharine Bradley** and **Edith Cooper**, the aunt and niece who created the composite poet “**Michael Field**,” lived quietly; but though they did not ally themselves with the attention-getting tactics of Wilde, Douglas, Beardsley, or Symons, their lyric poems challenge received wisdom about women’s art and desires. After decades of neglect, their reputation is recovering: for an overview of their career, see David J. Moriarty, “‘Michael Field’ and their Male Critics,” *Nineteenth Century Women Writers of the English-Speaking World*, ed. Rhoda B. Nathan (1986); on their lesbianism and the complex issues raised by “poems written by two women writing as a man writing as Sappho,” see Yopie Prins, “Sappho Doubled: Michael Field,” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 8 (1995): 165–86, and “A Metaphorical Field: Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper,” *Victorian Poetry* 33.1 (1995): 129–145. In the same issue of *Victorian Poetry* see also Holly Laird’s “Contradictory Legacies: Michael Field and the Feminist Restoration,” which argues intriguingly that “there is an uncanny parallel between the archival creativity which was the hallmark of Field’s career and that of the contemporary feminist scholar/teacher” (112).

Field’s rendition of DaVinci’s *La Gioconda* follows from Pater’s description of her in *The Renaissance* as predatory and vampiric, but for Bradley and Cooper the keynote becomes the lady’s power and self-restraint. In *A Pen-Drawing of Leda*, they give Leda, “wild and free,” control over her encounter with the swan, who yields to her will (line 7). Readers accustomed (especially from Yeats’s poem) to regarding Leda as a victim are forced to reconsider. On Michael Field’s pictorial strategy in these and other poems, see Kenneth R. Ireland, “*Sight and Song: A Study of the Interrelations between Painting and Poetry*,” *Victorian Poetry* 15.1 (1977): 9–20. Their later lyric, *A Girl*, mingles the descriptive qualities of *La Gioconda* with the passionate embrace of *Leda*. In this “portrait,” the poet’s apparently detached rendering of her subject collapses in line 10 into a common identity (“our souls so knit”), a moment of consummation that momentarily stalls the act of poetic creation. But the author(s) can still give birth to a divine poetic “conception” if the girl will “come” into some further relation to “the work begun”—whether it be the poem, their love, or even a sexual act.

Few critics agree on just where Aestheticism—often regarded as an attitude toward art—shades over into Decadence, a term frequently used to describe both artistic style and personal behavior. “Decadence” literally means a “falling away” from an earlier standard. Walter Pater used the word in 1873 to praise some poems of the late Renaissance, and many find the seeds of decadence in his famous conclusion to *The Renaissance*, where he spoke yearningly of “any stirring of the senses, strange dyes, strange colours, and curious odors.” As a literary term, “d cadence”

gained currency in France during the 1880s to designate the elaborately crafted works of the Symbolists. Yet by the 1890s, the word, often with its French pronunciation intact, had become in England a vague and fashionable label of both moral censure and avant-garde respect. The decadent object or action is usually highly artificial, abnormally developed (or thought to be so, such as an intellectual woman), and unnaturally stimulated by physical disease or spiritual decay. The original literary decadents had been Latin poets of late Roman antiquity, so the emergence of English Decadents suggested that the decline and fall of the British Empire was imminent. The various strains of decadence—the spiritual and the sensual, the stylistic and the behavioral—are summed up in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) when Dorian reads J.-K. Huysmans's *A Rebours* [*Against the Grain*] (1884), the infamous "Bible" of French decadence: "it was written [in] that curious jewelled style, vivid and obscure at once, full of *argot* and archaisms, of technical expressions and of elaborate paraphrases, that characterizes the work of some of the finest artists of the French school of *Symbolistes*. There were metaphors in it as monstrous as orchids. . . . One hardly knew at times whether one was reading the spiritual ecstasies of some medieval saint or the morbid confessions of a modern sinner."

These days, when "Decadent Delight" is apt to refer to an extra-rich chocolate dessert, it may be useful to ask students to explore contemporary meanings of the word, and then direct their thoughts toward Arthur Symons's definition of decadence in *The Decadent Movement in Literature* as "an intense self-consciousness . . . a spiritual and moral perversity." "Healthy we cannot call it," he says. How does his approbation of literary unhealthiness relate to current ideas about bodily and moral health? How do the advantages Symons finds in this malady—such as a loosening of literary forms, a fresher kind of language—manage to spring from the "over-luxurious" sophistication of the 1890s? Curiously, Symons implies that artistic decadence is simply an honest response to the times he lives in, and that the two branches of Decadence, Impressionism and Symbolism, result from a genuine effort to capture the truth of the visible world or the "soul" of "things unseen." Wouldn't that make Decadence a fairly moral artistic enterprise, after all? In his Preface to *Silhouettes* he seems to be arguing for a more tolerant form of criticism that would allow room for both natural and artificial pleasures, and both moralistic and aesthetic responses to works of art. Perhaps what Symons wants is simply freedom to practice his nocturnal art without fear of moral censure or preconceived notions of what a poem should be.

In *Pastel* his emphasis is almost purely visual, with a minimum of commentary; he describes the sudden lighting of a cigarette in a vivid way that forecasts the thousands of such scenes that soon became a part of movie history. In *White Heliotrope*, the equally acute visual details of a one-night stand are presented in order to be condensed, à la Proust, into a sensation that the same perfume may release at a later date. Mixing Impressionism and Symbolism, Symons brazenly uses the *In Memoriam* stanza not to mourn a dead friend, but to package a memory of casual sex for future resurrection. Symons's reduction of the female object of desire into a hand, a ring, a hair-pin also anticipates Eliot's technique in *Preludes*, *Prufrock*, and *The Waste Land*; the young Eliot assiduously read Symons as an undergraduate at

Harvard. The best single book on Symons is probably Karl Beckson's *Arthur Symons: A Life* (1987).

The obsession with what Symons elsewhere called "perversity of form and perversity of matter" sometimes slips over into deliberate self-parody, with writers and artists such as Wilde, Johnson, Beardsley, and Beerbohm producing works that distressed the public while amusing insiders. **Richard LeGallienne's** *A Ballad of London* walks a fine line between celebrating its subject and denouncing it. It should be compared to Rossetti's *The Burden of Nineveh*, since the poems share an ironic appreciation of Britain's current imperial status and inevitable decline. Yet Le Gallienne's tone is far from the dire urgency of Kipling's *Recessional*; he seems to revel in London's role, shared with Paris, as a blazing gas-lit capital of modern Babylon, where lilies turn to iron, and humans into moths fatally attracted by the artificial light. There are the seeds of social critique, however, in stanzas five and six, the hint of an underground world of the oppressed (as in H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine*, published the same year, or Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*) working to support all this gaiety on the surface. Curiously, the doomed human moths of stanza 4 return to "eat up all" at the end; they become Time's agents, suggesting that human appetites will bring about their own demise. Vanquished nature, in the form of a desert, will return to reclaim London's night, as the poem moves from initial flower to final blight.

**Lionel Johnson's** poem *A Decadent's Lyric* joins the author's voice even more closely to the feverish behavior he might be condemning. Is the poem sincere? Is it a parody? Or a dramatic monologue containing both elements? Parody is a treacherous form because it requires the writer to inhabit the very literary body he rejects. Johnson comes so close in this poem to the vocabulary of Douglas (flame/shame) and the technique of Symons (the terse, unrepentant melding of steamy sex and musical metaphor) that only the intriguing grotesqueness of the final line suggests the poet's distance from the speaker. The choice of subject is significant, for like many writers of the 1890s, Johnson was torn between the longing to recover lost innocence and the need to express his sexual desires.

This tension, with its current of repressed homoeroticism, underlies Johnson's tortured poem, *The Dark Angel*. Though the poem ends with a renunciation of the Dark Angel of gay desire (displaying a bit of the bravado of Donne's *Death Be Not Proud*), the intensity of the struggle is unmistakable, and the first forty lines show the Dark Angel dominating every area of the poet's life. All dreams, thoughts, sights, sounds, and delights are transformed into poisoned desires, and only the rhetoric of otherworldly punishment and salvation in the final stanzas can deliver the poet from the tempting corruption he finds everywhere in nature. As if to confirm the newly conceived "norms" of sexual orientation, such a poem shows how sexuality can indeed become the central component of identity—when one is thrust into the position of deviant outcast. (In "The Poetry of Lionel Johnson," *Victorian Poetry* 28.3-4 [1990], M. G. H. Pittock suggests that the Dark Angel is both drink and poetry. See 47-49).

Ironically, Johnson himself had tried to brand Wilde this way a few years earlier when he accused him in *The Destroyer of a Soul* of corrupting Lord Alfred Douglas. Because sonnets traditionally speak of love, this "hate sonnet" gains ad-

ditional force from its Petrarchean form, barely controlling the venomous rage of the poet. Like *The Dark Angel*, the poem focuses on the health of the soul as the measure of true life. Johnson's feeling that a "living body" now hides the "dead soul" of his friend not only evokes the vampiric strain of 1890s thought, but also *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which Johnson had lent to Douglas in 1891. Johnson may have felt he had unwittingly helped Wilde create a real-life Dorian Gray whose physical beauty masked a deathly spirit.

If Johnson was tormented by his desires (and those of his friends), **Lord Alfred Douglas** seemed determined to celebrate his own passions boldly. In *Praise of Shame* uses the sonnet form to affirm his preference for "sweet" and "lovely" Shame (note how the diction and vocabulary of desire echo Swinburne's *The Leper*). Douglas explores Dantesque territory, but his flames seem harmless and unremorseful; indeed one might criticize the poem for the lack of tension in its structure, especially compared to the poems of Johnson. Perhaps the poet expects tension to emerge from the reader's surprise or shock that shame merits praise at all. But then doesn't such shameless approval of shame undo the very meaning of the word?

Douglas presents the topic more complexly in *Two Loves*, where the narrator hears, as if he were sitting in judgment, a smiling rosy youth accuse a "sweet" but pale youth of usurping the name of Love. The poet allows the youth who sings of heterosexual love to insist that he is "Love" and to designate the other as "Shame." The figure of "Shame" advertises nothing; he speaks of no partners; he simply sighs in a way that moves the narrator, conceding, "I am the love that dare not speak its name." While Douglas effectively conveys how righteously prescriptive a heterosexist world can be, he does not try to make "sweet" unspoken love look like a natural, everyday sort of thing. The terza rima suggests Dante's journey, and while words like "bright," "joy," "ivory," "gold," and "roses" describe the first youth, the second is "pallid" and "wan," associated with serpents and flame. One might ask if Douglas is not so much challenging conventional views as reiterating them, in order to stress the alluring difference of outlawed desire. One could even read *Impression de Nuit: London* as an effort to transform the whole of London, figured as a monstrous woman, into his own object of desire, turning her breasts into towers, and her dark lanes into a brain haunted by stealthy men.

The idea of a masculine identity built upon the dominance of homoerotic desire is a late Victorian construct, coinciding roughly with the criminalization in 1885 of any activity suggestive of male-male desire. Persecution led to activism: J. A. Symonds and Edward Carpenter defended the naturalness of homosexual attraction, citing the ancient Greeks and modern "comradeship." At boarding schools there continued to be room for same-sex romance under the guise of friendship—and the single-sex institutions of schools, clubs, and Parliament helped shield active homosexuality from the public eye. In the 1890s the new field of sexology sought to naturalize homosexuality and open the way for its decriminalization. But it did so by designating male-male love as a pathological state, thereby marking its "victims" as diseased. Richard Dellamora's *Masculine Desire* (1990) provides valuable background on efforts to define hetero- and homosexuality during the 1890s (see chapter 10, 193–217).

It has been suggested that **Olive Custance's** scandalous elopement with Lord Alfred Douglas, in defiance of her father's wishes, was meant to emulate the flight of the Brownings almost sixty years earlier. Like the Brownings, Custance and Douglas each respected the other's poetic talent, but the note of frustration and fatigue in Custance's work marks the *fin-de-siècle's* distance from the idealized, energetic *amours* of mid-Victorian times. *The Masquerade* seems intended as a comment on Wilde's *The Harlot's House*. Custance universalizes the dance in her poem and, unlike Wilde, does not allow her speaker to remain aloof from it. Wilde, guarding his distance, makes his dancers ghostly and grotesque, while she gives her reluctant dancers a weary dignity as they go through their repressed paces. The same sense of fatigue turns her poem *The White Witch* from conventional praise of female sexual magnetism into a decadent portrait of love-weariness. The idea of a woman's imprisonment in empty gestures of love comes through most strongly in *Statues*, where human passion is unable to awaken a reciprocal longing on the part of deified stone. Because the subject is plural, this seems less a love poem than a generalized complaint about the inaccessibility of sculpted male bodies. Is Custance asking herself, "why am I always falling in love with gay men?" or should the poem be read more symbolically (and heterosexually) as a revisionary text about art and inspiration, treating the relation between aspiring female poet and elusive male muse? Why is the speaker unable to achieve the favor of the gods, as did Hyperion, or Pygmalion?

Produced as a sort of prospectus, **Aubrey Beardsley's** "*J'ai baissé ta bouche, lokanaan*" won him the commission to illustrate Wilde's *Salome*. Here Salome floats in a dream-space with the object of her desire, the severed head of John the Baptist. There is a narcissism to Salome's gaze, and the disembodiment of her victim is oddly echoed in her own floating posture. Beardsley generates an eerie cross-projection of mirrored desire and sexual traits by giving Medusa-like hair to the Baptist, raising horns of hair on Salome, and not so much grounding as sinking the whole scene in the fluid sexual signification of water lilies and their phallic/vulvic flowers and tendrils. On how the Wilde/Beardsley text/images compliment each other, see Elliot L. Gilbert, "'Tumult of Images': Wilde, Beardsley, and *Salome* in *Victorian Studies* 26 (1983) 133-159; for arguments that the illustrations work disruptively against or disjointedly with the text, see, respectively, Jeffrey Wallen, "Illustrating *Salome*: Perverting the Text?" *Word and Image* 8.2 (1992): 124-132, and Robert Schweik, "Congruous Incongruities: The Wilde-Beardsley 'Collaboration,'" *English Literature in Transition* 37 (1994): 9-26.

Though the story of Salome might seem to reverse the terms of *The Ballad of a Barber*—here a woman commits violence upon a sexually unavailable man—in both cases one can read the woman as responsible for a man's execution, expressing the Nineties' preoccupation with the castrating, predatory female. Linking the Wilde/Beardsley protagonist with Ibsen's threatening female characters, lately arrived on the London stage, the Scottish drama critic William Archer called Salome "an oriental Hedda Gabler." A good overview of the free-thinking "new woman" and the uneasiness she caused even among Aesthetes and Decadents can be found in Karl Beckson, *London in the 1890s* (1992) 129-159, and in Patricia Marks, *Bicycles*,

*Bangs, and Bloomers: The New Woman in the Popular Press* (1990); Marks usefully deals with American as well as British attitudes. In *Dorian Gray* Wilde summed up the male artist's pervasive anxiety about feminine beauty: "Women inspire us with the desire to do masterpieces and always prevent us from carrying them out."

### Max Beerbohm Enoch Soames

Beerbohm's reflective and self-reflective story provides both a fitting close to the 1890s and also an excellent transition toward the modernism that was blossoming when he wrote his retrospective story in 1914, at the very end of "the long nineteenth century." Beerbohm wrote *Enoch Soames* in Rapallo, Italy, where he had moved in 1910 and where he spent the rest of his long life, sketching caricatures, writing verbal sketches, and maintaining a flow of witty, self-mocking conversation—most memorably recorded by the playwright S. N. Berhman in his *Portrait of Max* (1960).

Even in 1896, when he published his collected *Works*, the twenty-four-year-old Max liked to think of himself as a relic of a bygone era: "Already I feel myself a trifle outmoded. I belong to the Beardsley period," he wrote in his prefatory essay, *Diminuendo*. Yet he maintained a keen interest in contemporary life and literature throughout the modernist era and beyond, and on his bedroom wall he sketched a portrait of Joseph Conrad, in a mural of his favorite modern authors.

*Enoch Soames* shares both themes and formal devices, in fact, with *Heart of Darkness*, with which we begin our twentieth-century section. Both works involve complex frame-tales that play up the constructedness of the societies they portray, and suggest the ways fiction shades over into reality; and both involve a relatively innocent narrator who encounters a mysterious character who makes a pact with the Devil—literally in Soames's case, only barely metaphorically in the case of Kurtz. Kurtz is a Decadent character in his own right—a would-be painter and writer, making his way in rarified and finally fatal venues where he hopes to transcend his origins, much as Soames tries to leave behind the "plain, unvarnished Preston man" he used to be.

Beerbohm's tale is, of course, radically different in effect from Conrad's; one value in the juxtaposition is to show students how varied the modernism of these years really was. Beerbohm displays his virtuoso abilities in social satire and in parody—the sly way he works in the title of *Fungoids* is a classic moment. He parodies the Faust myth as well, in a way that is still all too apt today: Soames sells his soul not for knowledge or for sex, like his predecessors, but for *fame*: a classic 1990s lust, presciently planned to be fulfilled in the 1990s themselves.

Beerbohm draws freely on the supernaturalism favored in many of the popular stories of the later nineteenth century (as seen in some of the tales in our section on "Popular Short Fiction"), but at the same time he insists on the determining force of everyday realities. His satire is different in kind from the comedy of ideas that Shaw favored, for instance; in a review of one of Shaw's plays, Beerbohm criticized Shaw for creating characters who are "disputative machines," adding that "Mr. Shaw's penetrating eye is of great use to him in satire or in criticism. He is one of

those gifted observers who can always see through a brick wall. But the very fact that a man can see through a brick wall means that he cannot see the brick wall." The absurd futuristic world that Soames encounters when he gets his wish to look himself up in the British Museum is none other than the world made in Shaw's image: everyone dresses "in Jaeger"—Shaw's favorite clothing—and people write an incomprehensible phonetic spelling that parodies Shaw's rationalist agitation for spelling reform. Contemplating Shaw, Beerbohm approached Orwell's vision of the future.

Soames's comic tragedy is that he comes up against a series of brick walls: his own lack of talent; his inability to claw his way from provincial Preston into the social circle of aesthetes like Rothenstein; the world's refusal to provide any opponent more glorious than the devil-as-vulgarian—Pater and Wilde's worst nightmare brought to life.

*Enoch Soames* was published in Beerbohm's collection *Seven Men* (1919), a book that tells the stories of only six characters. The seventh is Beerbohm himself, present both as narrator and as refracted through his protagonists. At the start of *Enoch Soames*, Beerbohm fails initially to find Soames in Holbrook Jackson's *The Eighteen Nineties*; he neglects to mention that he himself is the subject of an entire chapter in that history, which is also dedicated to him. Soames's evanescence may be Beerbohm's own, or the evanescence of the period that he paradoxically immortalized in verbal and visual sketches alike. According to the story, in exchange for his soul Soames gets to visit the British Museum reading room on June 3rd, 1997. On that day, Professor Laura Frost of Yale was doing research at the British Library. Just after two o'clock, a vague figure in a long cloak rushed in, looked wildly through the "S" section of the card catalogue, uttered a cry of despair, and left. "Assuredly," as Beerbohm says, "truth was stranger than fiction."