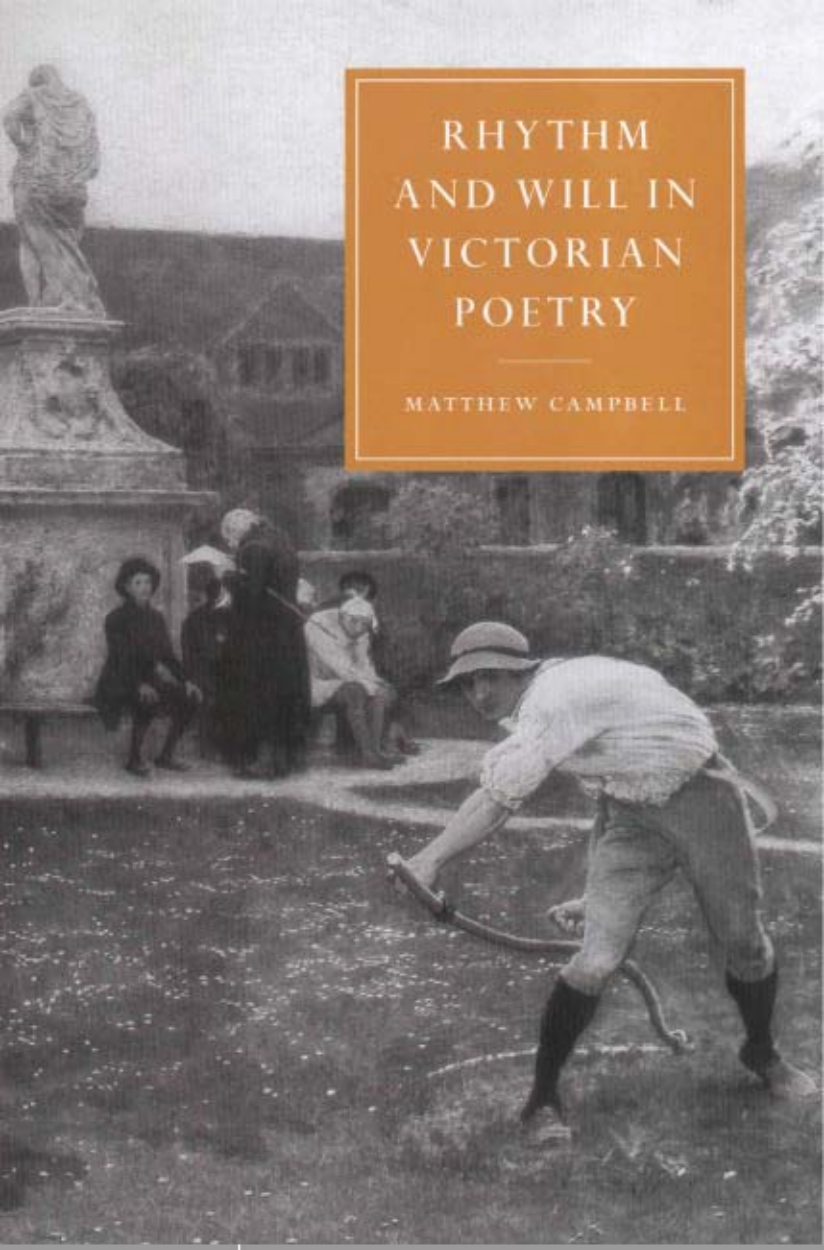

RHYTHM AND WILL IN VICTORIAN POETRY

MATTHEW CAMPBELL

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In *Rhythm and Will in Victorian Poetry*, Matthew Campbell explores the work of four Victorian poets – Tennyson, Browning, Hopkins and Hardy – as they show a consistent and innovative concern with questions of human agency and will. The Victorians saw the virtues attendant upon a strong will as central to themselves and to their culture, and Victorian poetry strove to find an aesthetic form to represent this sense of the human will. Through close study of the metre, rhyme and rhythm of a wide range of poems – including monologue, lyric and elegy – Campbell reveals how closely technical questions of poetics are related, in the work of these poets, to issues of psychology, ethics and social change. He goes on to discuss more general questions of poetics, and the implications of the achievement of the Victorian poets in a wider context, from Milton through Romanticism and into contemporary critical debate.

Matthew Campbell is Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Sheffield, and co-editor of *Beyond the Pleasure Dome: Writing and Addiction from the Romantics* (1994). He has published articles in *Essays in Criticism, English, Tennyson Research Bulletin, Bullán* and the *European Journal of English Studies*.

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RHYTHM AND WILL IN VICTORIAN POETRY

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Nineteenth-century British literature and culture have been rich fields for interdisciplinary studies. Since the turn of the twentieth century, scholars and critics have tracked the intersections and tensions between Victorian literature and the visual arts, politics, social organisation, economic life, technical innovations, scientific thought – in short, culture in its broadest sense. In recent years, theoretical challenges and historiographical shifts have unsettled the assumptions of previous scholarly syntheses and called into question the terms of older debates. Whereas the tendency in much past literary critical interpretation was to use the metaphor of culture as 'background', feminist, Foucauldian, and other analyses have employed more dynamic models that raise questions of power and of circulation. Such developments have reanimated the field.

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For Valerie, Maeve and Hannah

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Preface and acknowledgements

Discussing the inappropriateness of Gerard Manley Hopkins' use of the word 'counterpoint' as a musical analogy for 'the relation between iambic norm and rhythmic actuality', John Hollander reminds us that any would-be 'clarifier of the talk of prosodists . . . would try to illuminate the ways in which linguistic and conceptual habit produced garbled descriptions of prosodic events nevertheless clearly and effortlessly *perceived* and understood'.[1] This is a reassurance not only to those who find Hopkins' own metrical practice 'garbled', but also to those who have difficulty perceiving rhythm at all. Whatever the method of description, all the prosodist is describing is the perception, in which all who listen may share.

The habit of listening to the rhythms of poetry has passed from the skills imparted to many students and scholars of poetry alike. Consequently, I have attempted to scan the rhythms of the poems discussed in this book with a methodology derived from the classical model which 'the talk of prosodists' has declared to be a limited means of describing the dominantly accentual-syllabic rhythms of English poetry. Alternative scansions of some of the poems described here could be supplied by applying the Trager-Smith system of scansion, according to four degrees of stress, which important books on the rhythm of English by Derek Attridge and Philip Hobsbaum have adopted.[2] Despite the anxieties of Tennyson, who greatly desired the introduction of a system of notation which would fix his sonic intentions in print, or the consistent prosodic theorising of Hopkins, the classical model of scansion was the one in which the poets discussed in this book described their own verse. That alternative systems of scansion have not, as yet, supplanted the older means of describing English rhythm can be seen in a recent colloquium in which the poet Robert Wallace goads a number of fellow critics and poets into responses to his call for a clarification of prosodic discussion, and a reclamation of it back from the linguists.[3] Hopefully,

an ear for prosodic events can then return to the skills the poet or critic expect from their readers.

However, this book is not entirely a book on metre or rhythm, as it is not entirely a book on Victorian will. That latter distinction must belong to John R. Reed's encyclopaedic *Victorian Will*. Rather, this is a study of the *rhythm of will* as marked mainly in the work of only four major Victorian poets, Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning, Gerard Manley Hopkins and Thomas Hardy. It touches on contemporary and Victorian prosodic theory and practice where necessary, as it also attempts to provide some historical basis for what might be meant by 'will' in this period. But this is a book about poetic form and its relation to the concern that the poets considered here show with decision, action and event. It seeks to describe how, in lyric, narrative, dramatic and elegiac forms, these poets construct versions of a Victorian self which is shown acting through a medium which can analyse motive in deliberation, purpose and intention, and out to decision, action and event. Key 'prosodic events' in the poems discussed here provide a means of relating poetic form to Victorian conceptions of self and will. No matter how the apprehension of the will is sounded in the rhythms of the poets here, finding and describing a 'rhythm of will' serves as a key means of showing its formal embodiment in Victorian poetry. Tennyson's speaker in *In Memoriam* tells us that he knows better than others, 'How much of act at human hands / The sense of human will demands' (LXXXV, 39-40). This book seeks to locate the aesthetic demands of that sense of will primarily, but not exclusively, within the rhythms of the poems discussed here.

Parts of chapters six and eight have appeared elsewhere, in *Essays in Criticism* and *Memory and Memorials, 1789–1914*. This book began as a PhD thesis on Tennyson's poetry at the University of Cambridge, under the supervision of Eric Griffiths. There are many ways in which this book, or indeed my own discovery of the importance of the sound of poetry, could not have happened without his close attention, and the brilliant example of his own work on Victorian poetry and voice. Others have read and commented on parts of this work, and to them I owe a debt: Antoinette Quinn, Jeremy Prynne, Aidan Day, Rod Mengham, Neil Roberts, Tim Armstrong, Christopher Ricks, John Haffenden, Sally Shuttleworth, and the anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press. At the Press, Kevin Taylor first put faith in this project, and Josie Dixon and Linda Bree have seen it through a long period of gestation. Others have given help in no less tangible ways: Patrick Close, Sean

Doran, Nicholas Grene and Philip Roberts. My parents, Brian and Paula Campbell, supported me unconditionally through much of this work. Valerie Cotter has lived most of it, for a number of years now, and to her I owe a great debt for her patience and love.

Texts used

Unless otherwise noted, the following editions have been preferred in this book.

Robert Browning, *The Poems*, ed. J. Pettigrew and T. J. Collins, 2 vols. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981).

The Ring and the Book, ed. Richard D. Altick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971).

The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hardy, ed. Samuel Hynes, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982–95)

Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. Catherine Phillips, the Oxford Authors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

The Poems of Tennyson, 2nd edn, ed. Christopher Ricks, 3 vols. (London: Longman, 1987).

CHAPTER I

Introduction: two decisions

With characteristic humility, Hallam Tennyson omits to name himself as the recipient of this advice from his father:

> I cannot refrain from setting down his talk to a young man who was going to the University. – 'If a man is merely to be a bundle of sensations, he had better not exist at all. He should embark on his career in the spirit of selfless and adventurous heroism; should develop his true self by not shirking responsibility, by casting aside all maudlin and introspective morbidities, and by using his powers cheerfully in accordance with the obvious dictates of his moral consciousness, and so, as far as possible, in harmony with what he feels to be the Absolute Right.'[1]

This advice is familiar in the Victorian public school fiction which promotes a 'muscular Christianity'. Heroism is selfless before it is adventurous; responsibility exists in facing the morbid, and bowing to the moral necessity of 'the Absolute Right'. This is an example of something that John R. Reed might describe as moving from the Romantic to the Victorian, from 'aggressive heroism, or what might be called the imperial will, to controlled heroism, or the reflective will'.[2] Napoleon and Wellington are replaced by the model citizens of Samuel Smiles' *Self Help*.

In the midst of such counsel from his father, Hallam includes these lines from 'Oenone':

> Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,
> These three alone lead life to sovereign power.
> Yet not for power (power of herself
> Would come uncalled for) but to live by *law*,
> *Acting* the law we live by without fear;
> And, because right is right, to follow right
> Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence. (142–8)

(The text here is Hallam's *Memoir* of his father; the italics are Hallam's.) This is a key passage for Tennyson, and also for his family. Yet the very

status of these lines, as moral instruction, impairs the quality of the verse. The yoking of the self into reverence, knowledge and control to achieve 'sovereign power' is easily said, but harder done. Even the ease which is supposedly a characteristic of Tennyson's verse has difficulty with this. There is a straining after self-evident truth, almost to tautology: 'because right is right, to follow right / Were wisdom . . .' Hallam's emphases, on 'law' and 'Acting', bringing together as they do necessity and freedom, or the freedom to act in acknowledgement of necessity, overstress the already strenuous at the very point at which the calm of conviction should hold.

In 'Oenone', these lines are related by the outcast and powerless heroine who speaks in the main body of what is a partially realised dramatic monologue. They come from the speech of Pallas Athene, describing the benefits which will follow if Oenone's lover Paris decides to opt for the way of will. The speech continues in the poem (not quoted by Hallam) a few lines after this, describing just what the bodily experience of this will might be:

> '. . . rest thee sure
> That I shall love thee well and cleave to thee,
> So that my vigour, wedded to thy blood,
> Shall strike within thy pulses, like a God's,
> To push thee forward through a life of shocks,
> Dangers, and deeds, until endurance grow
> Sinewed with action, and the full-grown will,
> Circled through all experience, pure law,
> Commeasure perfect freedom.' (156–64)

The quality of these lines is their very strenuousness, an imitation of the difficulty of the task proposed. The blank verse courts rhyme as the line ending 'like a God's' is picked up with a close sonic echo in 'life of shocks'. The verse itself admits its subject matter as one of great struggle: 'cleave . . . vigour . . . blood . . . strike . . . pulses . . . push . . . shocks . . . Sinewed'. The experience of will in the masculine body is experienced in the sonic body of the verse as it strikes off these vital signs of power. Yet this is a hard task, and pictures a life of great strain. 'Power of herself', gendered in this poem, will be given by the goddess to this man, as she says to Paris that she will 'push thee forward'. Her way is towards law, wisdom and power through a strengthening of habits of will.

Oenone, passive narrator of the poem, cries out that Paris, her former lover, should give the golden apple to Pallas, and we can hear the older Tennyson and his son concurring at this point, along probably with the

majority of their Victorian readership. Choices to be made, or moments of will like this one, have both the watching speaker Oenone, as well as an imaginary audience, urging them on. These are particularly Victorian moments, and they can be caricatured in the terms of Kipling's exhortation to the future officer class in 'If' ('And so hold on when there is nothing in you / Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on!" '[3]) or in the handbook for self-improving capitalism which is *Self Help*:

> there is no power of law that can make the idle man industrious, the thriftless provident, or the drunken sober; though every individual can be each and all of these if he will, by the exercise of his own powers of action and self-denial. Indeed all experience serves to prove that the worth and strength of a State depend far less upon the form of its institutions than upon the character of its men.[4]

For Kipling and Smiles, as well as for Tennyson and Browning, the first mover behind such an ideology of resilience and activity is Thomas Carlyle, who posits a conception of heroism revealing itself to the hero-worshipper, thus acting as a powerful example to all. In his lecture, 'The Hero as King', Carlyle works no less than the meaning of life, for all of his audience, around the importance of vital and active willing:

> And yet, I say, there is an irrepressible tendency in every man to develop himself according to the magnitude which Nature has made of him; to speak out, to act out, what Nature has laid in him. This is proper, fit, inevitable; nay, it is a duty, and even the summary of duties for a man. The meaning of life here on earth might be defined as consisting in this: to unfold your *self*, to work what thing you have the faculty for. It is a necessity for the human being, the first law of our existence.[5]

Duty and necessity both go out to meet volition and individualism. We can actively control our destiny, but only insofar as that destiny reveals itself to us. We are not prompted to act by will, as a first cause, but by what, as Carlyle's rhyming prose stresses it, 'Nature has made' of us, what 'Nature has laid' in us.

Yet such exhortations are as much the source of an anxious sense of powerlessness in the writing of the nineteenth century, and the centrality of individual agency in the unfolding of the self is often inspected to reveal a hollowness, a sense of being without just such a centre. For every official exhortation of Tennyson, Carlyle, Kipling or Smiles, there is a voice, like Arthur Hugh Clough's, which might ask that the struggle nought availeth, or as his speaker confronts the issue in *Sa Majesté Très Chrétienne*,

> Alas, and is it true
> Ought I can purpose, say, or will, or do,
> My fancy choose, my changeful silly heart
> Resolve, my puny hand enact,
> To that great glory can in ought conduce
> Which from the old eternities is Thine?
> Ah never, no! (52–8)[6]

This drama of weakness before the imperatives of action, and the sense of failure in purpose, speech, will, action, choice, resolve is trapped here where 'can' meets 'ought', and issues only in passive denial. With duty laid before him, Clough's speaker can only turn to an intuited sense of a contained subjectivity which may never have to engage in a world in which it may fail: 'Somehow I think my heart within is pure'(122).

Decisions such as face Paris in Tennyson's 'Oenone' are founded in a testing of the will, a version of self which is held up in a dramatic verse which allows itself to work as mimic, counterpoint, enemy or ally, of the efforts of poet or speaker to work their way into a position of informed choice carried through with a strong will. These moments are marked in the poems discussed in this book by their rhythms in the way that a speech such as Pallas Athene's is conveyed in a poetry which seeks for a rhythm of will. The dilemma which is presented to Paris captures not only a Carlylean account of history as the individual responding to crisis, but it captures the way in which the poetry that wished to work within such moments sought to find form, here narrative as well as prosodic, for insight into processes of mind which were dependent not only upon thought and feeling, but also on will. Tennyson is not alone in such a seeking, and as John R. Reed and Isobel Armstrong, to name but two, have recently told us, the will is a central and often unquestioned part of Victorian accounts of self and mind. The implicit logical shift in equating volitional power with moral strength in Tennyson's advice to his son, and the related terms of Pallas' offer show this: the ethical, the psychological and the means of describing action as experience and necessity meet in a strenuously argued medium.[7] That medium is a Victorian poetry, which, as Dennis Taylor and Eric Griffiths have also stated, is one which has been concerned with moving towards the rhythmic representation of the human voice.[8] Add to this the moral and psychological preoccupations of a poetry which explores character in dramatic monologue and loss in elegy, and we have a concern with sounding a sense of self or

caracter through the experience of that character's volitional abilities or failings.

This book presents readings of a number of poems in order to discuss varying Victorian accounts of agency through comparable accounts of voiced rhythm. Bringing these concerns together, it describes the workings of human will through poetic effect both in the narrative and lyrical forms which move towards dramatic monologue and in Victorian versions of elegy. The means of sounding the many voices which the poetry of Tennyson, Browning, Hopkins and Hardy presents us, is through an ear for prosodic innovations. These innovations are concerned with laying the line of a lyric or dramatic consciousness within the line of poetry, working one with or against the other, within or outside metrical norms or inventions. An attention to prosodic practice in Victorian poetry is no mere technical matter. Rather, it enables us to listen for the rhythms of will which emerge from the representation of experiences of self through the bodily experience of a poetry which is conscious of itself as voiced sound.

The dramatic and elegiac poetry of the nineteenth century investigates agency through speech, a sense of agency which is posited as central to the identity of the self. The self, in turn, strives to make its presence felt in the speech which is recreated in Victorian verse. This happens both in the individual decision and in the greater sense of the marking of these decisions in history. What is sounded along the line of poetry aspires to be either the sound of the self facing the moment of decision or a life spent avoiding such decisions. Before poet and speaker the options for change are always open. The possibilities of new life for the subject in the poem, or new form available to the subject who is the artist, tug this poetry into the challenge of something that we might call modernity, but the Victorians would call the future. Passionate about the past as they were, the attitude to the will as the faculty which places the agency of the individual in a position to determine the future, to effect change, to bring into form the new, is represented with the ambivalence shown in many poems discussed in this book. The poems do find rhythms for representing agency in crisis, but they might just as easily sound the inertia attendant upon a conception of the agent existing only in a scene of aftermath.

Robert Browning's *Sordello*, a poem so innovative it is still nearly unreadable, sees action, event and character often circling around themselves with varying degrees of crisis, inertia and obscurity. Book v attempts to move the poem away from the enervation which threatens

its poet-hero, and out to its story of a European civilisation emerging from the Dark Ages. Speaking directly to his hero 'in modern speech', the 'low voice' of Browning's narrator counsels the despondent Sordello to take a part in the history of man. He advances a theory of history which will exemplify how 'collective man / Outstrips the individual' (103–4) and points to 'The Multitude to be materialized' (124–5). History is 'loose eternal unrest' (126) and while it needs individuals to bring it to form, those individuals are destined to be subsumed both by the materialized multitude for which they work and a human progress which will in its turn need other individuals to advance it. So the narrator, steeling himself to make his point clearly for once ('Speak plainer!'), shows Sordello how from one specific of policy, a single Pope's decision to take the responsibility for ecclesiastical appointments, the position of Roman power in history has been secured:

> 'Speak plainer! Is't so sure
> God's church lives by a King's investiture?
> Look to last step! A staggering – a shock –
> What's mere sand is demolished, while the rock
> Endures: a column of black fiery dust
> Blots heaven – that help was prematurely thrust
> Aside, perchance! – but air clears, naught's erased
> Of the true outline. Thus much being firm based,
> The other was a scaffold' (v, 153–61)

The cataclysmic blotting of heaven here is due to the process of the realignment of social organisations into their true forms. A critical moment of upheaval clears to show, in a conflation of two passages from St Matthew, the destruction of the house made of sand (vii, 24–7) and the surviving outline of the rock of Peter's Church (xvi, 18). The scaffold of a temporal organisation makes way for the true outline of eternal forms, in this case Rome.

This reorganisation contributes to an emergence of what is prophesied in scripture from what is temporary. The expedient of the scaffold is no longer needed, and history progresses, further revealing the eternal, an achievement in time which reveals the timeless. Yet that achievement, the revelation of the outline of truth from the clearing air, is one which has to be realised by an individual, even though that individual is obeying what history will reveal to be necessity. The individual reveals this truth from the processes of his own body. The passage continues:

> 'See him stand
> Buttressed upon his mattock, Hildebrand
> Of the huge brain-mask welded ply o'er ply
> As in a forge; it buries either eye
> White and extinct, that stupid brow; teeth clenched,
> The neck tight-corded, too, the chin deep-trenched,
> As if a cloud enveloped him while fought
> Under its shade, grim prizers, thought with thought
> At dead-lock, agonizing he, until
> The victor thought leap radiant up, and Will,
> The slave with folded arms and drooping lids
> They fought for, lean forth flame-like as it bids.
> Call him no flower – a mandrake of the earth,
> Thwarted and dwarfed and blasted in its birth,
> Rather, – a fruit of suffering's excess,
> Thence feeling, therefore stronger: still by stress
> Of Strength, work Knowledge!' (v, 161–77)

Writing from the nineteenth century, Browning pictures key moments which assist him in his version of history as eternal progress. To do this he pictures not only the government of the 'Multitude' but also of the self, and the critical moment of history is placed in the eleventh century body of the 'suffering', 'feeling' Pope Gregory VII. That body has come dramatically to the decisions which here burst into the present tense at 'thought leap radiant up', and show a contorting rhythmic portrait of the mechanisms of will.

Browning portrays an intellectual strife within the self. Processes of mind are shown allying power with will: at one point decision-making is compared to a prize fight. The body of the Pope is locked into its processes of thought, vigorously disputing with itself and showing the fierceness of that dispute in brain, eye, brow, teeth, neck and chin. The rhyming verse chafes with the strain: 'ply/eye', 'clenched'/'trenched', 'fought'/'thought'. These rhymes hold the couplets into the deliberating body that the rhythms of the passage scan. Those rhythms are chopped up into seemingly random caesura, sudden substitutions and enjambments which, due to the semantic emphasis of the couplets, never really allow the verse to throw off its constraint. They work with the mind which is stressing its body so. 'Teeth clenched / The neck tight-corded, too, the chin deep-trenched': the lines pack their metrical stresses around the moments of physical stress shown in the hyphenated tension of the tightened neck and impacted chin. They must relax, and do. 'At dead-lock, agonizing he, until / The victor thought leap radiant up, and

Will': the strain is released gradually into that isolated iamb, and the 'until/Will' rhyme works us out of the impasse of thought, through decision, and into action. This action results from the capitalised 'Will', a faculty which, the decision taken, 'bids' with the sudden destructiveness of a flame. This faculty is in the service of one who knows an excess of suffering, of one who feels. It only increases his strength to work Knowledge.

This is exactly what Pallas Athene promises Paris in 'Oenone', the abilities of a 'full-grown will', and the corresponding civic and political virtues which will involve hard decisions, but decisions that Paris can make. As I have said, these would be the virtues that an official version of a strong will would hold up before a society keen to materialise a multitude of autonomous individuals. Such choice is a necessary fiction of the newly liberal society which was then in its infancy in Victoria's Britain. Yet choice may be compromised by other factors. Oenone has told us of the 'clear and bared limbs' of Pallas, a candid nudity which is, we suspect, mediated by what is undoubtedly the sort of advice you give to young men going to the university. The way of will is open, but other factors can influence the way in which we make decisions.

The allure of overpowering sexuality may be one of them. Thus Paris is faced with the half-naked, half-shadowed body of Aphrodite, slowly drawing back her hair in a tempting display of erotic dissemblance. She,

> 'With rosy slender fingers backward drew
> From her warm brows and bosom her deep hair
> Ambrosial, golden round her lucid throat
> And shoulder: from the violets her light foot
> Shone rosy-white, and o'er her rounded form
> Between the shadows of the vine-bunches
> Floated the glowing sunlights, as she moved.' (172–8)

It takes four enjambed lines of rolling blank verse, so different in rhythmic style from Pallas' speech, to effect this revelation. Even Aphrodite's foot is 'light', the pun stressing the growing brightness that this goddess' nudity brings to the scene. She offers a single sentence as her speech to Paris, 'The fairest and most loving wife in Greece', and this and the above erotic picture (narrated to us by a woman) make up his mind. He chooses to reject the faculty which will make more and better choices part of his personality. The option of power is given up in favour of the option to continue as a 'bundle of sensations'.

Unlike Hildebrand's effort, which rights the course of the history of Western Europe, this is an instance of incontinence, the choice of a course of action taken against the agent's better judgement. Paris surrenders to sexual attraction, giving up the opportunity of divine assistance towards absolute moral control. Pallas Athene had offered an intermingling of godly power with the human body: her vigour and his blood are shown in the internalised image of a perpetual adrenalin rush of power which will 'strike within thy pulses', and then give Paris the moral muscularity of one who is 'Sinewed with action'. However, the method which Pallas uses to tell Paris how he can have a full grown will is one which does not sweeten the facts of a life spent struggling towards it. The 'shocks, / Dangers, and deeds' are hardly attractive, and the strenuous rhythms and straining syntax of that speech too perfectly mimic the harshness of what she is outlining. Neither the myth nor Tennyson can allow us to see what might happen if Paris were to take up Pallas' offer. The cataclysmic effects of his choice are elsewhere well documented, ready to meet with the consequences of another action, and, as Yeats says, 'The broken wall, the burning roof and tower / And Agamemnon dead'.[9] Rhythmically acknowledged human shortcomings cannot allow Paris to grasp fully the idea, or even the physicality, of the metaphors used to express Pallas' offer and the consequences in history of his decision.

It takes only a split-second shutting of Oenone's 'sight for fear' (184) for Paris to give the apple to Aphrodite, and for her narrative to come to a close. This is a decision which goes desperately wrong for the poem's heroine, who has had no part in the drama enacted in front of her. A passive spectator to a process of choosing, her complaint is the complaint of the powerless, one who has had no opportunity to choose, no option of will. Alluding to the last line of 'Ulysses', Gerhard Joseph summarises a tradition of criticism of 'Oenone' and Tennyson's early poetry, in terms which are applicable to the marginalised yet titular heroine: she is in 'that hovering state between the fatality of suffering victim and the striving, seeking, unyielding hero'.[10] Her grieving situation is the result of the denial of Pallas' offer. Another's choice leaves her alone, and her predicament is one where another's actions have irrevocably affected her circumstances.

Oenone cannot know what Tennyson called 'The happiness resulting from power well exercised'. This phrase appears in the fragment of a letter that he sent to his fiancée Emily Selwood in 1839, one of the few remaining pieces of evidence we have of a relationship which nearly

foundered on circumstance. The letter works from power on earth to silence in eventual knowledge:

> The happiness resulting from power well exercised must in the end far exceed the mere physical happiness of breathing, eating and sleeping like an ox. Can we say that God prefers higher happiness in some to a lower happiness in all? It is a hard thing that if I sin and fail I should be sacrificed to the bliss of the saints. Yet what reasonable creature, if he could have been asked beforehand would not have said 'Give me the metaphysical power, let me be the lord of my decisions: leave physical quietude and dull pleasure to lesser lives'? All souls methinks would have answered thus and so had men suffered by their own choice, as now by necessity of being born what they are, but there is no answer to the question except in a great hope of universal good . . . Let us be silent for we know nothing of these things and we trust there is one who knows all.[11]

Writing within a particularly difficult moment in his relationship, Tennyson asks to be lord of its decisions. He moves at first towards the orthodox Christianity of the recipient of the letter, but then veers away in claims of ignorance, and the assertion only of 'trust'. The 'reasonable creature' asks for power and will, yet questioningly. The sacrifice of the self in failure is the 'hard thing' of responsibility, but 'all souls methinks' would want it. Suffering and necessity do condition such freedoms, and they exist only as the 'great hope of universal good'. Paris repudiates just such an opportunity, and Oenone is shown to possess very little in the way of 'the metaphysical power'.

Power, decision and choice are all placed before characters such as these in Victorian poetry; often they remain ungraspable, held there either only by a 'trust' in 'one who knows all', or in the merely intuited sense of a need to pursue a progress barely to be felt in the hero's own lifetime. The 'low voice' of Browning's narrator wonders whether Sordello himself might effect the move to the final stage of human progress:

> 'Knowledge by stress of merely Knowledge? No –
> E'en were Sordello ready to forego
> His life for this, 'twere overleaping work
> Some one has first to do, howe'er it irk,
> Nor stray a foot's breadth from the beaten road.'
>
> (v, 211–15)

The theme is that Rome wasn't built in a day, but it is also one which allows the self to play a crucial part in its construction. That part may be neither an easy nor an attractive option. For the first time in Book v,

Browning rhymes 'work' with 'irk' (he does it again at lines 305–6), and suggests the labour that is required to achieve a task, and the necessity of keeping to its already beaten road. Such achievement may not be possible, and much that follows in this book may be a record of failure. But the option of foregoing a life for such tasks was always before the Victorians, and their poetry tries to sound the experience of its strenuous difficulty.

PART ONE

Rhythms of will

CHAPTER 2

Rhythms of Will

THE NAKED THEW AND SINEW OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Despite being counselled by his father not to give up hope of his deliverance from captivity, Milton's Samson turns despairingly against arguments for patience. Manoah had warned his son not to believe the temptings of his mind, and not to add mental anguish to bodily imprisonment. But the blind Samson knows that his anguish is of the mind as much as it is of the body. As so often through the early passages of the poem, he turns inward to the torments of the captive, 'inmost mind':

> O that torment should not be confined
> To the body's wounds and sores
> With maladies innumerable
> in heart, head, brest and reins;
> But must secret passage find
> To the inmost mind,
> There exercise all his fierce accidents.
> And on her purest spirits prey,
> As on entrails, joints and limbs,
> With answerable pains, but more intense,
> Though void of corporal sense.
> My griefs not only pain me
> As a lingering disease,
> But finding no redress, ferment and rage,
> Nor less than wounds immedicable
> Rankle, and fester, and gangrene,
> To black mortification.
> Thoughts my tormentors armed with deadly stings
> Mangle my apprehensive tenderest parts,
> Exasperate, exulcerate, and raise
> Dire inflammation which no cooling herb
> Or med'cinal liquor can assuage,
> Nor breath of vernal air from snowy alp.

> Sleep hath forsook and given me o'er
> To death's benumbing opium as my only cure.
> Thence faintings, swoonings of despair,
> And sense of Heaven's desertion. (*Samson Agonistes*, 606–32)[1]

Samson concentrates his speech round the cruel pun in the first line: torment is not 'confined' – a logical description, limiting a definition – to the body; the tormented speaker can think only in terms of his physical confinement in body and in cell. The confinements of the speech work their way into the body of thought of one who spends his time brooding on the facts of his imprisonment, and on the circumstances of his blinding and emasculation. The verse of the speech suggests to us the experience of that brooding.

The speech describes thought – as its subject and as mental process – and finds a rhythm for the thought of one whose bodily strength has been his greatest gift from God. Samson can only think of his remorse in bodily terms. To take the second verse paragraph, the sense moves from grief to incurable disease, from thought to perpetual torture, and from insomnia to the medicine of suicide. The rhythm marks this process in bodily terms. The iambic metre of the dialogue of the poem as a whole allows in an irregularity which is otherwise reserved for the metrical experiments of the poem's Choruses. Lines shorten and distend, stresses pack themselves together in a kind of muscular tension, and the verse works its way into the sound of a straining body. These, for instance, are his 'griefs':

> ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ /
> But finding no redress, ferment and rage,
> ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ /
> Nor less than wounds immedicable
> / ∪ / ∪ ∪ / /
> Rankle, and fester, and gangrene,
> ∪ / / ∪∪/ ∪
> To black mortification.

As I have marked in the stresses, the pentameter line subsides to tetrameter and trimeter after 'ferment and rage', and the heroic iambs succumb to feminine endings and stresses which are wrenched into dactyls, a spondee and a final falling trochee. The lines continue with opening trochaic substitutions, and then brilliantly return us to iambs just where they can wreak the most damage on the body of the spoken verse: 'Thoughts . . . ExASperate, exULcerate, and raise/Dire IN-

flammation . . .' By the end of the paragraph the return of the iambic rhythm is only carried in tetrameters of limping despair: 'Thence faintings, swoonings of despair, /And sense of Heaven's desertion'. The last syllable is an unstressed and lonely feminine ending, bearing testimony to the exhaustion of the body through the torments of the mind. The masculine Samson is bound in chains, but he is also musclebound. Bound to thought through blindness and captivity, his muscles can now only suffer the torment of his mind. The rhythm of the verse in which he speaks carries these two things, the muscularity of his mental suffering and the speech of the character who can feel thought only through his body.

Milton's blank verse here achieves exactly what his most formidable critic says is a logical impossibility. Samuel Johnson reserved special scorn for the 'harsh and dissonant' experiments of the Choruses of *Samson Agonistes*, which to his ear sounded as if they were without 'any appearance of metrical regularity'.[2] In another essay in the *Rambler*, he is equally sceptical on the matter of onomatopoeia:

> Dionysius himself tells us, that the sound of Homer's verses sometimes exhibits the idea of corporeal bulk: is not this a discovery nearly approaching to that of the blind man, who after long enquiry into the nature of the scarlet colour, found that it represented nothing so much as the clangour of a trumpet? The representative power of poetic harmony consists of sound and measure; of the force of the syllables singly considered, and of the time in which they are pronounced. Sound can resemble nothing but sound, and time can measure nothing but motion and duration.[3]

For Johnson, the pre-eminence of the poet above all other artists is due to the fact that he has 'the faculty of joining music with reason, and of acting at once upon the senses and the passions'.[4] So poetry should not only modulate the sense to the sound, but also the senses to the reason. In his complaint against Dionysius, he recommends that we should never confound the senses, and imagine that the sound of a trumpet be considered red.

This does not mean that we should disregard the source of the sounds of dramatic verse. The source of Samson's speech is in the body and voice of the character that speaks it, as well as the verse of its author. Speech and verse combine to convey the experience of a body tormented by thought, and of a move from one sense to the other. This is done in simile: the thought only seems to torture, as if it resembles a tortured body. But this simile carries across resemblances that Johnson

could not allow, resemblances which work the verse experienced by the reader/listener as physical suffering in sound into the verse experienced by the speaker as mental suffering.

In the dialogue, but particularly in the Choruses, of *Samson Agonistes*, Milton discovered something that Johnson and at least two centuries of successors heard only rarely. That is a rhythm which enables a sound to represent more than just a sound, a rhythm which allows the speaker to express an experience of the activity of the body. Johnson could have heard a famous defence of such imitative effects in the examples that Pope gives of a versification which is more than just a smoothing over of 'harshness' by art:

> 'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence,
> The sound must seem an echo to the sense:
> Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently blows,
> And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows.
> But when loud surges lash the sounding shore,
> The hoarse, rough verse should like the torrent roar:
> When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to throw,
> The line too labours and the words move slow:
>
> (*Essay on Criticism*, 364–71)[5]

In a polemic designed to rescue metrical matters from technical prescription, Robert Wallace observes that the penultimate line here 'builds to the release in the final iamb, "to throw," where the distinct contrast between the unstressed syllable and the stressed one seems to let us feel the physical gesture'.[6] This is very properly put: the effect 'seems' to realise an experience of bodily exertion in the reader, achieved only through the reading voice. The experience of the poem as sonic form, so Pope might say, can convey an experience of the corporeal, of movement and of effort. Such a sense of the corporeal is great in all of Samson's speeches too, a wrecked heroic metre spoken from the wreck of a great hero on the verge of a final spending of his passion. The rhythm of the poem, like that of Pope's line on Ajax, is one of will. It represents the will of a hero which works out, finally for Milton, God's will. As he destroys the Philistines, and himself, Samson eventually becomes a demonstration both of individual will and necessity, the 'uncontrollable intent' (1754) which is the will of God. *Samson Agonistes* does this for the reader through the experience of the body of the poem.

The poets of the nineteenth century heard again what had been sounded in the rhythms of the older Milton. Their effort was to break through into a new means of sounding and hearing the rhythms of verse

in the English language before the great move into free verse which followed their innovations. As well as in Milton, those rhythms also existed in such disparate places, unofficial as well as canonical, as ballad, nursery rhyme, and the songs of Shakespeare's late plays. The poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins is often read as the summation of the nineteenth century's rhythmic inventiveness. While Hopkins' insistent, often anxious attempts to find a satisfactory conceptual account of English rhythm in his critical writings, correspondence and idiosyncratic practice provided such a powerful example to his Modernist successors, it did not occur in a vacuum. At the very least, Hopkins' achievements represent also an important means of hearing the achievements of his precursors and contemporaries. The range of the sonic inventiveness of the poets discussed in this book, at once self-consciously aware of classical or English example and working towards new forms, is worked into one of its great subjects, the representation of human agency in verse.

What is central to the Victorian sense of self – the will – becomes the source of what is new about its poetic practice. For the new to exist in art, grounded as it might be in previous practice, traditions overlooked or options now taken which were, though available, ignored before, the innovative artist needs to believe in the possibilities of change. And change can only be effected in the future. According to William Hazlitt, the will can only address itself to the future, since 'All voluntary action, that is all action proceeding from a will, or effort of the mind to produce a certain event, must relate to the future.'[7] Hopkins also saw that when the will is involved in a process of choosing, in accordance with the will of God or not, the 'act must always be in the future'.[8] By the beginning of the twentieth century, William James made of this a pragmatic description:

> Free-will pragmatically means *novelties in the world*, the right to expect that in its deepest elements as well as in its surface phenomena, the future may not identically repeat and imitate the past. That imitation *en masse* is there, who can deny? The general 'uniformity of nature' is presupposed by every lesser law. But nature may be only approximately uniform; and persons in whom knowledge of the world's past has bred pessimism (or doubts as to the world's good character, which become certainties if that character be supposed eternally fixed) may naturally welcome free-will as a *melioristic* doctrine. It holds up improvement as at least possible; whereas determinism assumes that our whole notion of possibility is born of human ignorance, and that necessity and impossibility between them rule the destinies of the world.[9]

Poems, like other works of art, are new things at their moments of composition. In the midst of imitation and uniformity there remains

possibility, '*novelties in the world*'. For the Victorian poet, this may, of course, hold out that possibility will lead to deterioration as much as improvement. Left bereaved of the influence of the deliverer of Britain and Europe from despotism, Alfred Tennyson wonders if, in the 1852 version of his *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington*, 'a darkening future yields / Some reverse from worse to worse'.[10] It is on the future that the voluntary act takes effect, an act which presumes 'possibility', whether or not it be evidence of a '*melioristic* doctrine'.

One way to ensure that the actions of individuals are carried out to the good, or that the specific innovations of writing have purpose, is to grasp the paradox that the willed action must demonstrate what Milton calls the 'uncontrollable intent' of necessity. The will of God is something for which Hopkins, like Milton, strove to find physical poetic form, but also a physical form which contained within it the possibility of change. According to Robert Bridges, Hopkins was the first among Milton's successors, two hundred years later, and after a century of prosodic invention, who was able properly to hear the metre of *Samson Agonistes*. The prosody which enabled Hopkins' discovery is contained in his sporadic lectures and prefaces and in his letters to his friend Robert Bridges, who suppressed the true authorship of this discovery until the publication of his own *Milton's Prosody*. Since Hopkins never finished his own oft-proposed treatise on rhythm (and may never have done so), Bridges' footnote to the then unknown Gerard Hopkins crediting him with the discovery in his chapter on *Samson Agonistes* will do.[11] For Hopkins, as for Milton, the human body is where the sound of verse finds its greatest resemblance. Hopkins wrote to Bridges that his own style tended not towards Milton but Dryden. But his terms for describing Dryden's poetry could be the verse he heard in *Samson Agonistes*. For him, Dryden is 'the most masculine of our poets; his style and his rhythms lay the strongest stress of all our literature on the naked thew and sinew of the English language'.[12]

The powerful prosodic example to Hopkins of the poetry of Christina Rossetti would not allow that it is only the masculine body which has naked thew and sinew. However, it is part of the fascination with power, in the male body as in the sounds of the English language, that allows Hopkins to promote the notion of poetic language as a muscular body which can be stressed in style and rhythm. We could imagine the body in this highly unorthodox sonnet speaking Samson's lines of naked thew and sinew:

Harry Ploughman

Hard as hurdle arms, with a broth of goldish flue
Breathed round; the rack of ribs; the scooped flank; lank
Rope-over thigh; knee-knave; and barrelled shank -
Head and foot, shouldér and shank -
By a grey eye's heed steered well, one crew, fall to;
Stand at stress. Each limb's barrowy brawn, his thew
That onewhere curded, onewhere sucked or sank -
Soared ór sank -,
Though as a beechbole firm, finds his, as at a rollcall, rank
And features, in flesh, what deed he must do -
His sinew service where do.
He leans to it, Harry bends, look. Back, elbow and liquid waist
In him, all quáil to the wallowing o' the plough. 'S cheek crímsons; curls
Wag or crossbridle, in a wind lifted, windlaced -
Wind-lilylocks-laced;
Churlsgrace too, chíld of Amansstrength, how it hángs or hurls
Them – broad in bluff hide his frowning feet lashed! raced
With, along them, cragiron under and cold furls -
With-a-fountain's shining-shot furls.

Hopkins sent this sonnet to Bridges from holiday in County Down, in an extraordinary form with metrical marks and a glossary. He says that it is 'a direct picture of a ploughman, without afterthought', and worries then that Bridges might say that it is like Walt Whitman.[13] In his next letter, Hopkins worries a little more:

> The rhythm of this sonnet, which is altogether for recital, not for perusal (as by nature verse should be) is very highly studied. From such considering it I can no longer gather any impression of it: perhaps it will strike you as intolerably violent and artificial.[14]

This is an odd apology: Hopkins hedges around the startling figure of the man in the poem, claiming there is no afterthought, only a picture of a labouring male body.

The sonnet tries to bind up an erotic picture with a feeling out for the touch of the body which it imagines, without afterthought. This is a verse which works its sound into the idea of corporeal bulk. From the first line, it is as if the poem imagines itself skimming a hand over the surface of the rigid muscular body of the ploughman: the 'broth of goldish flue' is the effect of the fine down of hair on the arms of the man. The ribs of the man are straining as if on a rack, or as if racked like lamb chops. This body is good enough to eat, indeed, it is cooked: the broth,

the rack, the thigh, the shoulder, the shank, all participate in the animal muscularity of a man arrayed like a collection of cuts of meat. At this stage of the poem the figure is not actually doing anything, it is a picture of anticipation, of standing at stress, eventually standing like a crew of sailors or a soldier in rank, ready for battle. The anticipation of the body is how it features itself, 'what deed he must do', the tasks for which this muscular physique was constructed. Those tasks use his 'sinew-service'.

So, in the sestet, the man's purpose is carried in a rhythm which moves time and sound into motion. The poem also bends into its task. The verbs of bodily motion glare into emphasis with the stress forced on to them: 'leans . . . bends . . . look [an order to the viewer] . . . quail'. The body is rigid and flexible at once: his back and his elbow work with a liquid waist to suggest stiffness and movement into the action of the plough. This action moves to the sound of hair fluttering in the wind and against the movement of the body: the wagging, crossbridling, lacing curls of the ploughman's hair are carried in a verse which now must move to a lightness of touch after a concentration of physical effort. And this strength and lightness come together in the final outcome of the poem, the actual ploughing. Here the soil seems simply to be furled by the plough, a concentration of strength in to what appears to be an effortlessly light result. The 'f' of 'furls', the completed ploughing, works delicately through the alliterative line of the man's work, and out to the near ecstasy of the furled earth. The lightness of the 'curls', and the effort of 'hurls' also work their way into the final repetition of their sound in the final line and its burden line in the full rhymes on 'furls'. The rhythm, rhyme and alliterative impetus all carry us along in the activity, and fully work their way in to the experience of this body. To modify Johnson, the corporeal is not so much bulky here as vigorous, virile even.

The protagonist in a sonnet which goes by the title 'Harry Ploughman' will be described carrying out only one action. Unlike the unemployed in its companion poem, 'Tom's Garland', who carry out no useful action, Harry will by necessity plough. This poem gives us the rhythm of the will of that action, as 'Tom's Garland' strives with so much effort for the form that mystified even the most sympathetic of its early readers. The action in 'Harry Ploughman', about to happen, and then vigorously in movement, is new, it demands our attention. The poem strives to represent that action.

Hopkins' poem shares certain characteristics with a painting by one

of his favourite painters, Frederick Walker, 'The Plough', which pictures a similarly virile character carrying out his work. Of another of Walker's pictures, 'The Harbour of Refuge', and its depiction of the movement of a man with a scythe, Hopkins said,

> the young man mowing was a great stroke, a figure quite made up of dew and grace and strong fire: the sweep of the scythe and swing and sway of the whole body, even to the rising of the one foot on tiptoe while the other was flung forward was as if such a thing had never been painted before, so fresh and so very strong. . .[15]

The terms of Hopkins' praise may perhaps be the terms of one describing his own work, in its admiration for the strong male body. He eventually ends with praise of originality, 'as if such a thing had never been painted before'. The painting is like a wholly new seeing of the new thing, the action of the will on the as yet undetermined future. This is the movement in stasis of a painting here, but in 'Harry Ploughman' the poem attempts to convey the stillness, decision, act and movement in the work described. It does this by means of rhythmic invention, finding in the rhythms of Milton a means of sounding the body in action.

IMMEASURABLE SAND

Writing about Victorian poetry has come a long way from F. R. Leavis' opposition of Hopkins to his Victorian precursors and contemporaries. Leavis said of Hopkins:

> His words seem to have substance, and to be made of a great variety of stuffs. Their potencies are correspondingly greater for subtle and delicate communication. The intellectual and spiritual anaemia of Victorian poetry is indistinguishable from its lack of body.[16]

It is the vacillation between the substantial and the anaemic, and the very sense of bodily stress which results in a poetry such as Hopkins'. Yet that poetry, with its preoccupation with resolve, will and activity follows a tradition of Victorian poetry which works a sense of will into the conflict of active and passive which confronts the poet. Contemporary criticism is also sceptical of a perceived urge in Victorian poetry towards the disembodied and the passive, deconstructing a Victorian sense of self defined through will. Historicised, the complaint centres on a sense of the lack of body in a poetry which works in the light of a philosophical psychology which confronts that absence by constructing an 'idealist'

will. Discussing the influence of J. F. Ferrier on the poetry of the 1830s, Isobel Armstrong says of his concept of the will,

> Agency is created by the will, which is the antagonistic principle intruding on the life of simple sensation. Its struggle to exist and control the immediacy of experience through a reflexive act constitutes freedom. Oterwise the self must exist as 'reverie' without action in a world which is essentially violent because, like a being in the sea, consciousness is at the mercy of what is external to it.[17]

For Armstrong, Ferrier is working against an associationist account of mind, and so we get an 'idealist will, brought in to redress a materialist psychology'.[18]

The supposed 'lack of body', the idealising of the self's sense of agency, or better, agency only conceivable as part of an idealist self, has significant aesthetic implications. What Leavis perceived to be anaemia in Victorian poetry, and what Armstrong sees as the option only to be antagonistic or passive, are symptoms of writing which has a concern wit agency in speech, art and ethics. This meets the practice of the poets discussed in this book. That practice sounds this sense of self working through its will, to give body to an assertion like Hopkins', in his sonnet 'As kingfishers catch fire', '*What I do is me: for that I came.*' Victorian conceptions of will are like those pictured in 'Harry Ploughman'. They have issue at the point at which certain activities find their necessary form through the agent which carries them out: Harry Ploughman ploughs. That agent is pictured as something highly developed in terms of its power, but it is fitted for one thing. In Hopkins' terms, discussed in chapter seven here, having had freedom of field, Harry has chosen his activity with freedom of play, and now carries it through with freedom of pitch. This formulation may appear to be an account merely of agency, but it needs only to move a little to encompass the ethical, where the right thing before the agent must be chosen. For the Roman Catholic priest Hopkins, this choosing would eventually be informed by the grace of God, of course, and would become a transcendent as well as bodily act. But other Victorian conceptions of choice and agency, when they locate such choosing in the human agent, find that it is, perhaps with more hope than logical or theological certainty, effected with the strong will which demonstrates moral strength.

This is the connection which, when sundered, halts the progress of the weak-willed agent in 'immeasurable sand' in Tennyson's remarkable lyric 'Will'. The 'immeasurable' clogging of activity is something for which 'Will' attempts to find sonic form in the rhythms Tennyson

knew so much about measuring. Not all readers at first heard this. While praising 'a good deal of beauty' in Tennyson's early poems, Coleridge found it a 'misfortune . . . that he has begun to write verses without very well understanding what metre is'.[19] Thankfully the mistake has not been repeated, and before W. H. Auden made his famous comment on Tennyson being 'undoubtedly the stupidest' of the English poets, he had praised him as the possessor of the finest ear.[20] But Tennyson, like Hopkins, possessed a sonic intelligence. He is a rhythmic thinker: 'It doesn't matter so much in poetry written for the intellect . . . but in mine it's necessary to know how to sound it properly.'[21] Even the schoolboy Tennyson consistently showed that, if he knew nothing else, he knew what metre was. He was thirteen when he made the translation of the third section of Horace's Third Ode which begins,

> The people's fury cannot move
> The man of just and steadfast soul
> For he can brook
> The tyrant's look
> And red right-arm of mighty Jove:
> What! though the echoing billows roll
> And on the lonely sea-beach dash,
> What time the cold and cheerless blast
> From the dun south has o'er them past,
> What though upon this earthly ball
> Heaven's canopy itself should fall,
> Yet fearless would he brave the crash. (1–12)[22]

This is more than just precociously inventive, it delights in the manipulations of an overwhelming sonic impressiveness. The inventions of the young Tennyson's version, 'the echoing billows', the 'lonely sea-beach', the 'cold and cheerless blast', the 'crash', revel in the effects of an apparently untramelled power lined up against a single individual. This 'man of just and steadfast soul' (in Horace it is Augustus Caesar), is of far less interest than the sounds of the tyrant and of Jove. The hyphens accentuate the packed stresses on 'red right-arm', and 'sea-beach dash'. The rhyming words which anchor the last six lines, 'dash' and 'crash', sandwich a couplet with which they half-ryme, 'blast' and 'past', furthering the experiments with half-rhymes begun with 'move' and 'Jove', and picked up through 'soul' and 'roll' and 'ball' and 'fall'. The translation shows us an intelligence feeling its way into the situation through

sound, searching for a power over the poem's effects to suggest the powers at work in the original.

This translation dwells on a sublime grandeur which delights the schoolboy, but is later to show up in the mature work of the man, in 'Will', published in 1855, and written in association, Christopher Ricks suggests, with a poem for another 'man of just and steadfast soul', the *Ode on the Duke of Wellington*.[23]

Will

I

O well for him whose will is strong!
He suffers, but he will not suffer long;
He suffers, but he cannot suffer wrong:
For him nor moves the loud world's random mock,
Nor all calamity's hugest waves confound,
Who seems a promontory of rock,
That, compassed round with turbulent sound,
In middle ocean meets the surging shock,
Tempest-buffeted, citadel-crowned.

II

But ill for him who, bettering not with time,
Corrupts the strength of heaven-descended Will,
And ever weaker grows through acted crime,
Or seeming-genial venial fault,
Recurring and suggesting still!
He seems as one whose footsteps halt,
Toiling in immeasurable sand,
And o'er a weary sultry land,
Far beneath a blazing vault,
Sown in a wrinkle of the monstrous hill,
The city sparkles like a grain of salt.

The first stanza alludes to the first eight lines of *Odes* III, iii, but more specifically picks up on the first twelve lines of Tennyson's own schoolboy version. Here we have a 'promontory of rock' rather than a beach, and 'turbulent sound', coming out of 'echoing billows', replaces the more specific 'blast'. 'Crash' is adapted to the typically Tennysonian 'shock'. The poem bears witness to its poet's education, moral as well as literary, but it does play down the thrill in its own abilities which the earlier lines show. Where the boy is wilfully courting the sublime, the older man strives to work it into an ethical frame which may have been missing from that stage of the boy's education in the classics.

In its way, 'Will' is an official statement, a conventional account of a Victorian commonplace, fitting into a model of morally edifying verse. In other ways, it is an affront to such certainties, setting accepted wisdom against the physical experience of the poem's form and versification. If we could say that it is sounded 'for the intellect', then we might get some sense of the particularities of such writing, and its contribution to a debate about virtue and strong will in an age which might promote self help as the main source of any social or moral dynamic. The poem gains its impetus from the conceit that it works in the light of geological knowledge, reducing a promontory of rock to a grain of salt. In this shrinking image there is a shift between the irrationalities of a cacophonous sublime ('hugest waves . . . turbulent sound . . . surging shock') to a silent landscape and a tiny object.

The contrast of power with weakness, however, of strong and susceptible intellects, is not presented in a symmetrical form. The ambivalence in the poem's attitude is never in balance, and the outcome is always in doubt. A nine line stanza of strength competes with an eleven line stanza of weakness, which has the last word. The first stanza effortlessly rhymes three opening lines of seemingly convinced statement, but then the second brings in the poem's title/subject, 'Will', as the word which initially upsets the formal expectations set up by the first stanza. In the first stanza, the opening lines maintain an iambic pulse up to the fine effect of the extra stress thrown in on 'loud world's random mock' – / / / ∪ /, and the fifth line allows an anapaest into the rhythm at a key word ('calamity's hugest waves' – ∪ / ∪ ∪ / ∪ /), quickly righting itself into the returning iambs of the next line. Line seven's 'with turbulent sound' works a final anapaest out to the rhyme word, anticipating the stanza's final image of strength in adversity which has to do combat with a rising rhythm reversed into a trochee, a dactyl, a further trochee and then a final threatened, but securing, iamb ('Tempest-buffeted, citadel-crowned' – / ∪ / ∪ ∪ / ∪ ∪ /). The stresses and strains of the strong-willed are indicated, but the sound of the poem does hold the subject together.

In the second stanza, the will and the sound of the poem are subjected to a searching examination. As early as its first line, the possibilities of improvement twist the prosody out of joint: 'who, bettering not' – ∪ / ∪ ∪ /, with the stress wrenched on to 'not'. 'Corrupts' in the next line then quietens the stress with an iamb, as the verse struggles and recollects itself. The iambs are reconstituted for a further four lines, but only after some struggle in the process of composition. In Trinity Notebook 25

there is a significant metrical variation, where 'And ever weaker grows through acted crime' reads 'Is ever weaker made by some one fault'.[24] The revision of the final spondee here into the continuation of restored iambs clears the line of any question that the rhythm is attempting to inject any extra metrical strength. Another Trinity manuscript speaks of the intriguing 'one vile crime'. This is excised from the final version for more than prosodic reasons, clearing the line of suggestions of damnation brought on the self by a single, possibly heroic, more likely sexual, transgression.

The reconstituted iambs do become susceptible to further corruption manifest in the surface of the verse. In the first stanza the rhymes are strong, and the rhythm of the verse leads us with confidence, and some ease, into strong rhyming consonants: 'mock . . . rock . . . shock'. The seventh line of the first stanza is, with some daring, allowed to rhyme within itself: 'compassed round with turbulent sound'. The circular movement of internal rhyme back into the line is one that the strong-willed verse of the first stanza can maintain. Conversely, the second stanza contains the internally rhyming, 'Or seeming-genial venial fault'. This is another revised addition to the poem. All but the Trinity manuscript have 'Or only seeming-venial fault'.[25] The annoying insistence of the revised line, deliberately courting a doggerel ugliness, sets up a tautology, or repetition, of sound, something which is, in the words of the next line, 'Recurring and suggesting still'.

Tennyson's treatment here is at once mimetic of the self-absorption of one with a paralysed will, and also concerned with showing us its rhetorical limits. Line thirteen's tautology becomes line fourteen's paradoxical 'Recurring and suggesting still', where 'still' is both current, passing, time, as well as stasis and death. Coming as the first full rhyme with 'will', it shows us the ease with which the poet's rhymes can further disturb the strength and power of an uneasy intellect and will. Tennyson can place his by now thoroughly divided subject into rhythmic sinking sands. Line fifteen's 'He seems as one whose footsteps halt', literally halts the poem's iambic steps, and the next line wreaks havoc on the poem's metre: 'Toiling in immeasurable sand'. If we stress 'in', it could be scanned as containing two trochees, a dactyl and a final iamb: / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ ∪ ∪ /. Conversely, with 'in' in a precarious position of quantity, the line could be said to contain a trochee quickly reversed back into an anapaest, a pyrrhic and an iamb: / ∪ ∪ ∪ / ∪ ∪ ∪ /. We have a phrase which, in its metrical indeterminacy, threatens to annihilate the movement of the verse. The unstressed syllables which lie in the middle

of that word 'immeasurable', added to the uncertainty over how its first syllable should be vocalised, causes the reading voice to mumble through the uncertainty out to the word's final syllable, which serves as a nearly anonymous contributor to the securing end-line iamb. The line's quantity is almost immeasurable, and Tennyson halts the stumbling of his weak-willed man through the desert of irresolve at this point.

Now our eyes are led from this point of stasis into the ambivalent position of seeing an image of some beauty. In the second stanza, the word 'will' itself has upset the first stanza's form. Premeditation, dwelling on the subject (something which is always anterior to an action) has unsettled the motivation (something which can only be described during or after an action) implicit in the form of the lyric. Dwelling on powers of action before action has taken place, the poem allows a lack of sureness into its rhythms, and the 'promontory of rock' and the 'grain of salt' pull wider apart. The strength of the first stanza's rock is no longer that sharply contrasted with the near anonymous frailty of the thirsting man's distant vision, perhaps mirage, of the end of his troubles: 'The city sparkles like a grain of salt'. Ruskin said that 'he would sacrifice nearly all his books to have written one of Tennyson's lines – the last line of "Will",'[26] and the line does carry both horror and salvation in it. Both Christopher Ricks and John Bayley find the image a sterile one, Ricks in particular, pointing to the pun available in the fact that the grain of salt is 'sown' in the hill, like seed.[27] But surely desalination accompanies dehydration in deserts, and the salt may not be just a barren goal, but also a means of effecting a recovery? This gives us a final image of a controlled ambivalence, held up in an area where Tennyson's prosody, that seemingly effortless performative power, works willingly with or often wilfully against, an ethics. In what it puts moving before us in the play of its rhythms, this is a dramatic lyric, showing us its speaker drawn away from the 'heaven-descended Will', uncertain as to his position in nature and the universe. That uncertainty is played out in a drama of consciousness and will, with the divided subject of poem and self working round the faculty which might enable the self and the poem to return to meaning and unity, a strong will.

In this lyric, 'will' is conceived of as a faculty of our consciousness upon which the subject's ability to determine his or her own actions is based. Although it is 'heaven-descended', it is less an all-informing transcendental will than a faculty of self-determination.[28] The poem implies that power dissipates in proportion to the weakness of the will and is secure with a strong will. Tennyson runs together the philosophy

of action and ethics. For him, any investigation of what we are able to do is bound up with what we ought to do, and conversely, the question of ought is bound up with ability. For Immanuel Kant, the will 'is conceived as a power of determining oneself to action *in accordance with certain laws*'.[29] These on the one hand are matters of contingency. We can wish to walk on water, but we lack the divine power of those we may believe to have done it. A willed action is always contingent upon the limits of our powers, and laws of, say, physics or physiology. On the other hand, Kant is referring to ethical laws, based on notions of a 'good' or 'pure' will, and 'bad' will, where our actions must operate to ensure the further operation of the will in a strong and central position, 'Tempest-buffeted', but also 'citadel-crowned'. The manuscript versions of Tennyson's 'Will' waver over 'some one fault', 'one vile crime' and 'acted crime' as they search for the characterisation of moral weakness leading to weakness of will. The will is antecedent to questions of power; if weakened through habitual wrongdoing, that will weakens our powers of acting. The psychological and metrical struggle of the man caught 'Toiling in immeasurable sand' is one which results from a lessening of power through a loss of the ethical imperatives of maintaining a strong will.

Logical and ideological objections press hard on this connection between agency and ethics. In his essay 'A Plea for Excuses', J. L. Austin has made the most persuasive argument against the thinking which leads to the position that Tennyson adopts, and what he sees as an unwanted intrusion of ethics into issues of will and agency. Austin's complaint is against the logic which collapses 'succumbing to temptation into losing control of ourselves'. This, he admits, has an honourable pedigree, as old as Plato or Aristotle.[30] The Loeb translation of Plato's *Protagoras* has Socrates stating that 'it is from defect of knowledge that men err, when they do err, in their choice of pleasures and pains – that is, in the choice of good and evil'.[31] As Browning says in Book III of *Sordello,* 'Evil' is 'the scheme by which, through Ignorance / Good labours to exist' (803–4). Through it the subject will fall into 'seeming-genial venial fault'. But when the agent acts against his principles, as Socrates says that he does from 'defect of knowledge' (*epistemes hendeia*), then Austin asks whether the necessity of ethical principles influencing all action can be proven if his action does not appear to have shown a detrimental influence over the workings of his strong will. Aristotle describes the incontinent man as being under the influence of mere passion, not will, thus: 'It is plain then, that incontinent people must be

said to be in a similar condition to men asleep, mad, or drunk.'[32] These people are then halted in immeasurable sand.

Actions performed against one's better judgement may be carried out with strength of purpose and will. Working over the versions of incontinence given by Plato and Aristotle, and adding to them accounts of the problem by Austin, St Paul, Aquinas and Dante, Donald Davidson sees that the confusion is one of the will as a cognitive as well as a conative power.[33] Oppositions such as reason and passion, desire and will, temptation and judgement, are not helpful in that separate faculties, willing and reasoning, are brought to bear on the matter of human agency. The weak-willed subject in Tennyson's poem is continuously prone to act in error through past habits of sin, but each individual act may still be performed in the knowledge that it is wrong. Kant, therefore, is careful to distinguish between 'willing as such', amoral, as prone to crime as virtue, and 'pure will' guided by reason, and able to act in accordance with law. In Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, the witch Vivien is described as 'Fixt in her will'[34] to destroy Arthur's court. An entire civilisation falls after she succeeds in separating Merlin from Arthur, and breaking the strict bonds of the Round Table. Hers, though, is 'willing as such', not informed by the reason of ethics. It is evil in action, and an evil which wreaks havoc with its untramelled power and will.

The criticism in this book negotiates issues of the ethical as much as the poetic. The Victorian conception of the human will consistently makes the mistake of which Austin and Davidson accuse the tradition in which it works, finding in the faculty of will a model for the inherent moral imperative before the human. Yet the aesthetic organisation of the lyric, or indeed the social organisation of its readers, is fruitfully dependent on this mistake. Victorian aesthetic and social forms must be concerned to work for the good, and they need to posit a strong will as the basis on which such work may succeed. The proper domain of this book is aesthetic form, and as a lyric like 'Will' shows, that form works its will into or against an ethics. Error will always frustrate form as it strives to capture the self in voice, metre, colour or sound. Yet what was for the Victorians a crucial faculty of that self, the will, as a deliberating, intending and purposive faculty,[35] invokes issues of responsibility over artistic form as well as human action. In the writing of nineteenth-century poetry, these issues of the agency of the poet meet a great Victorian concern with the issue of the agency of a subject so often seen toiling in immeasurable sand. The poems discussed here work between the vital aspects of this faculty and its seemingly inevitable stagnation.

One of the crucial ways in which they do this is through their rhythms. As 'Will' shows, listening to its rhythms we hear the drama of how its form participates in the struggle and defeat of its attempts to sound the rhythm of will.

THE CREATIVE WILL (1): WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

Tennyson objected to this version of the freedom of will granted to Satan in Book 1 of *Paradise Lost*:

> . . . the will
> And high permission of all-ruling Heaven
> Left him at large to his own dark designs,
> That with reiterated crimes he might
> Heap on himself damnation . . . (211–15)

'I hope most of us have a higher idea in these modern times of the Almighty than this', Hallam Tennyson quotes his father as saying.[36] In 'Will', the responsibilities attendant upon such freedom may just as easily lead to the living damnation of the stagnancy which follows reiterated crime. As Geoffrey Hartman says, quoting Wordsworth's 'Resolution and Independence': 'The creative will . . . may become wilful and turn against what it wishes to bless; and "thereof come[s] in the end despondency and madness".'[37]

The 'higher idea in these modern times' of the freedoms, not only of the human subject, but also of the 'creative will' of the artist, may have found its brief expression in a place that Tennyson would not have known, the great celebration of new-found freedom which opens the first book of the 1805 *Prelude*. There, exploring issues of freedom and necessity, Wordsworth's second verse paragraph begins with the assertion, 'Enough that I am free' (33) yet then goes on to contemplate 'chosen tasks' (36), the work which will follow such freedom.

One of the conditions of exercise of the will is that it is dependent on being conceived of as free. But it is only one of a number of conditions, and to it must be added the circumstances of action, and the prospective choices which are given to the agent: Harry needs a plough in order to plough. Wordsworth's freedom is not to heap on himself damnation, but to choose to follow 'the hope / Of active days, of dignity and thought', and so to live, 'The holy life of music and of verse' (50–4). The conditions of such a freedom gained in the light of a creative calling are that he be aware of 'the sweet breath of Heaven blowing on my body'.

However, this bodily experience from without is matched by a feeling from within which is soon out of control. It begins as a 'mild creative breeze', becomes 'A vital breeze', then 'A tempest', then 'a storm' (35–48). The sense of personal creativity may promise the hope of activity, but it is dependent on a self which is both responsive and responsible. The creative will needs both to recognise power and to participate in its celebration.

As priest and poet, or poet as priest, Wordsworth describes the use to which he can put this freedom:

> Thus far, O Friend! did I, not used to make
> A present joy the matter of my Song,
> Pour out that day, my soul in measur'd strains,
> Even in the very words which I have here
> Recorded: to the open fields I told
> A prophecy: poetic numbers came
> Spontaneously, and cloth'd in priestly robe
> My spirit, thus singled out, as it might seem,
> For holy services: great hopes were mine;
> My own voice chear'd me, and, far more, the mind's
> Internal echo of the imperfect sound;
> To both I listen'd, drawing from them both
> A chearful confidence in things to come. (55–67)[38]

The 'measur'd strains' and the 'poetic numbers' of 'my own voice' are what propel this act of retrospect over the creative moment. Reading over, reading out, his own writing ('the very words which I have here / Recorded'), Wordsworth hears the echo, in music and in verse which is sounded through his own voice, of the holy life on which he resolves and which he is compelled to live. The music and verse have been poured out, they came 'Spontaneously', from one who was 'singled out'. The creatively active moment was dependent on a passive letting go, an acknowledgement of a power in which the poet as priest can only perform the function of celebrant. In order to do this, though, agency is required, here the use of the poetic voice, as instrument of communication and as artistic instrument, making present joy the matter of song. As if it were separate from his self, the poet tells us that his own voice has cheered him, cheered him up and cheered him on, therapist and spectator to this moment of creativity. More than this, the echo of the voice within the self, which is the mark of the self listening to its own voice and then echoing it back, has taken the vocal imperfections of poetry and given them the power to instil the cheerful confidence of the future.

The grounding of writing in such separations – of active self and creative artist, speaking poet and listening spectator, vocal performance and sonic apprehension, sound and meaning – provides the site at which many late twentieth-century accounts of poetic language construct an acknowledgement of the impossibility of the aspiration to be cheerfully confident of activity in the future. In the gap between 'present joy' and the 'matter of my Song' (since song cannot be matter) the poet hears the 'internal echo of the imperfect sound', an echo which describes nothing but its own absent origin in a textual (not vocal) performance which needs cheering up in order to face its impossibility. A version of this account of voice and meaning in Wordsworth is by Geoffrey Hartman, glossing this passage from Book II:

> for I would walk alone,
> In storm and tempest, or in starlight nights
> Beneath the quiet Heavens; and, at that time,
> Have felt whate'er there is of power in sound
> To breathe an elevated mood, by form
> Or image unprofaned; and I would stand,
> Beneath some rock, listening to sounds that are
> The ghostly language of the ancient earth,
> Or make their dim abode in distant winds.
> Thence did I drink the visionary power. (321–30)

For Hartman, such a conflation of the power in sound of an untranslatable nature with the visionary power of the poet marks the impossibility of visioning metaphor and voice. He brings together the two passages thus:

> To characterize what is heard as a 'ghostly language' is already to humanize it by a metaphorical act that engages the drift of the entire *Prelude*. 'My own voice cheered me,' the poet says candidly at the outset, because it is a voice rather than the mutterings, sobbings, yellings, and ghostly blowing echoes that are his ear-experience. When he adds, 'and far more the mind's / Internal echo of the imperfect sound' he suggests not only his hope for a perfected voice, his 'cheerful confidence' that he will advance beyond the prelusive strains of his perambulatory pastoral (*paulo majora canamus*), but also his hope that he will master the echosphere – darkly numinous after-effects evoking the 'dim abode' of a visionary geography which 'unknown modes of being', 'mighty forms that do not live like living men' (1805, I, 452ff) inhabit. Poetry is echo humanized, a responsive movement represented here in schematic form.
>
> This progress towards a language which is human and timely, a word that dwells with and between men, remains uncertainly fulfilled. For the 'power in sound' cannot be humanized by a sheer act of will or the arbitrariness of metaphorical speech.[39]

For all that Wordsworth locates the play of the gentle breeze of the opening of the poem as a felt, bodily experience for which he must seek a corresponding internal breath or spirit, Hartman cannot allow the metaphorical transference. The sound of nature is not language, and is thus not to be understood, or 'humanized', in the willed activity of metaphor- or poetry-making.

'Poetry is echo humanized', and as such an illusory granting of sense to that which has only a secondary relation to voice or the sensible. Echo then, in John Hollander's terms a 'disembodied voice', is sundered from its 'human' source and its lack of matter makes it an unrepresentable thing. Wordsworth's song can have no matter, since it is not a material thing in itself. With a slight adjustment of terms, Hollander says of the echoes of other poets caught in literary texts, that 'the natural fact of disembodied voice vanishes, in the later stage of things, into text'.[40] In both Hartman and Hollander, the 'human' or the 'natural' take a part in a critique of an idealist account of writing, or text, which worries over the position of the sonic in perception and composition as it disappears back into the written. Elusive of metaphor and representation, the power in sound, in its very immateriality, demonstrates the logical impossibility of making sense through sound.

In order to reach this position, though, Hartman needs to make a number of conjectural interpretative acts of his own. So, for instance, the 'imperfect sound' of the mind's internal echo posits an unattainable desire for a perfected voice. Yet nowhere in this passage does Wordsworth suggest that such a thing is desired or desirable. The imperfections of echo are a source of pleasure, fallen and impartial as the perception of it is. More problematic is the position of the act of will in this account of listening, writing, reading and subsequent meaning. Hartman says, rightly, that arbitrary metaphorical speech, or 'a sheer act of will' cannot humanise the 'power in sound'. Courting as he does the sublimities of cacophonous natural phenomena, Wordsworth does not seek to translate, or will into metaphor, the 'ghostly language of the ancient earth'. Poetry does indeed echo back in the 'schematic form' of language which provides sensible form for the 'responsive movement' of representation. It is not, though, a product merely of the will, unattached to the conditional schemae of grammar, form or metre. The ghostly is no longer even the natural, let alone something which was or can be humanised. As a ghostly language, the sounds of nature do remain beyond the metaphor-making capabilities of this or any other poet's will.

That is not to say that the poem does not contain within it another, controlled, aesthetic means of sounding the echoes of this experience. As poetry, it is conscious of itself as both text and voiced sound. It has rhythm. 'Power in sound' becomes 'the visionary power' very quickly here; the sonic moves to the prophetic, as sound and vision, or vision through sound, are conflated in the passing over of 'The ghostly language of the ancient earth'. The iambic pulse of the passage, of the rhythm of the sounds of the ancient earth, is broken in the act of mystic perception ('listening') and by the melody of the line which carries 'The ghostly language of the ancient earth'. I hear three unstressed syllables in the middle of a line, which skips into the triple foot of the anapaest, in order to carry the mystic sounds of nature: ∪ / ∪ / ∪ ∪ ∪ / ∪ /. So strong is this foreign melody that it has to be firmly corrected by a reading which will enunciate a perfect iambic pentameter in the following line which tells us of separation from the origin of the sound: 'Or make their dim abode in distant winds'. The metrical variation in Wordsworth's lines draws attention to the ways in which the reading voice is led away from iambic expectation and into a connection with a flexing of the vocal effects to which the poet wishes us to attend. The sonic form – in Hartman's terms 'schematic form' – never attempts here directly to echo the ghostly language which is heard, however it may work simple mimetic effects. The repetitions of the same consonant in 'dim abode in distant winds' calm the verse into the diminishing iambs of a dissipating power which hisses quietly over the final plural of the line, 'distant winds'. Mimicking the fading of the visionary moment is easier than writing in its full glare.

The imperfect echo of the poet's own voice, removed from the site of writing, but reading over it again, gains in a recreated sonic form an echo of voice with which that poet is reminded of difference from the point of creativity. The creativity is sounded again as it is read out loud. The two things to which the reading Wordsworth listens, his own voice and the internal echo of the imperfect sound, are poem and rhythm, or more specifically, rhythm sounded and metre intuited. In *The Prelude,* these are the primarily iambic impulse of the metre of the blank verse and the variations which mark the voiced occurrences of the poem's actual rhythm. Echoing the imperfect sound of the voice, the expectations of metre provide the cheering up and cheering on of poetry adapted for the future, the activity for which this poem serves as prelude. As will be discussed later in this chapter, Wordsworth said in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* that metre has a tendency 'to divest

language, in a certain degree, of its reality, and thus to throw a sort of half-consciousness of unsubstantial existence over the whole composition'.[41] This is the internal echo of metre, always imperfectly sounded in the actualities of rhythmic form itself.

For Schopenhauer, John Hollander tells us, music was a 'copy of The Will itself'.[42] The Romantic emphasis on the importance of will can be heard in the musical forms of poetry, as it takes the form both of an untranslatable Spirit which informs the melody of the world and stimulates creative power, but also what Michael Cooke calls 'the attractive principles of the will'. These are creatively practical, dealing with powers such as the compositional and the imaginative, the handling of time, the articulation of the world and the meaning of art.[43] Matters of technique and of form are governed by the creative will which resolves to follow 'The holy life of music and of verse'. Cheered by listening to the echoes of its poet's voice, Wordsworth's poetry frequently appears to affront ideas of the musical. Praising a characteristic Wordsworthian effect, 'in which line gives way to line with the utmost intangibility of division', Christopher Ricks is careful to remind us of Dr Johnson's warning in his *Life of Milton*, 'Blank verse seems to be verse only to the eye'.[44] It is a warning that Alfred Tennyson and Edward FitzGerald felt that Wordsworth often did not heed. They contested the composition of 'the weakest Wordsworthian line imaginable', both claiming the winner, 'A Mr Wilkinson, a clergyman'.[45] (Only Browning achieves a more unlikely line of pentameter, in Guido Francheschini's railing against the forms of culture: 'Civilisation and Society!' (*The Ring and the Book*, XI, 463).)

Tennyson and FitzGerald may have been complimenting Wordsworth's success in achieving the prosiness to which blank verse tends. Indeed Ricks takes as a gloss on his observation on the Wordsworth line James Smith's 'exquisite' remarks on *Michael*: 'The verse of the poem is a delicate thing. It has almost ceased to beat, and seems maintained only by the flutter of tenuous hopes and sickening fears . . . Wordsworth, who was so often an imitator, here speaks with his own voice; and the verse is the contribution he makes to prosody.'[46] Looking for a Wordsworth who is important because he speaks in his own voice, rather than the voice of 'the poet' or indeed a dramatic 'character' courts finding a prosaic and flatly unvaried verse. It is only a slight movement from the pathos of *Michael* to 'A Mr Wilkinson, a clergyman'. Consequently, much writing on Wordsworth's verse has been involved in scanning the verses of the sublime, following the lead of a critic like Geoffrey Hartman, and

concentrating on tracing Wordsworth's blank verse effects in his debt to what we might call a Miltonic voice in the context of a greater sceptical project which seeks to dismiss any discussion of voice apparent through writing.[47] Further, the breeze of spontaneous inspiration which is so quickly whipped up into a tempest at the beginning of *The Prelude* may, after its sudden appearance, just as quickly blow itself out. Dependent on such vital energies in the creative will, the danger is that the exhausted poet may become the prosaic establishment figure that Tennyson and FitzGerald lampooned.

In an essay on the occurrence of the lyric voice within the blank verse of *The Prelude*, Mary Jacobus finds the Wordsworth of the opening of Book VII aware of just such a danger, as he toys with the ambitions of the eighteenth-century 'irregular ode'. This, she says, was 'certainly the highest form of lyric poetry for the eighteenth century, and the one in which the poet was also thought to speak most directly in his own voice'.[48] She locates a Wordsworthian ambivalence to the 'dythyrambic fervour' of the sublime in the opening of the 1805 version. There, for Wordsworth, the voice is the voice that he used to have at the beginning of Book I:

> Five years are vanish'd since I first pour'd out,
> Saluted by that animating breeze
> Which met me issuing from the City's Walls,
> A glad preamble to this Verse: I sang
> Aloud, in Dythyrambic fervour, deep
> But short-liv'd uproar, like a torrent sent
> Out of the bowels of a bursting cloud
> Down Scawfell, or Blencathara's rugged sides,
> A water-spout from heaven. But 'twas not long
> Ere the interrupted stream broke forth once more,
> And flowed awhile in strength, then stopped for years;
> Not heard again until a little space
> Before last primrose-time. (I–13)

Wordsworth is taking account of what Jacobus calls 'me-now and me-then', speaking about a previous time, which in its turn spoke of another me-then, and for a time, did not speak at all.[49] The developing moments of artistic self to which the passage alludes cause consciousness to multiply. The passage is held together by voice: it speaks in and about its own voice. That voice is one which seems so little under the poet's control, since the dithyrambic is a wild bacchanalian song. The poet works hard to talk of the frequently interrupted career of his voice, yet

we are given no story of the initial stopping of the stream, before it splutters, and stops and starts, and is placed in 'a little space' (not time) before the most recent spring. The whole passage speaks of a connected series of previous consciousnesses, and a movement that this poem must record about itself a few lines further on: 'for slowly doth this work advance' (17). The poem cannot depend on 'dythyrambic fervour', for no matter how deep it is, its uproar will only be shortlived. That torrent flows breathlessly over the rugged sides of Scawfell or Blencathara, and breathlessly through the lines of the poem, exhausting itself after the power of the experience. Before you can use your voice you have to get your breath back.

Jacobus refers back to the 'glad preamble' of Book I, as Wordsworth considers it from this mid-point of Book VII:

> Wordsworth comments of the 'glad preamble', 'My own voice cheared me, and, far more, the mind's / Internal echo of the imperfect sound' (I, 64–5). The appeal to voice might usually be thought of as having the function of making the self whole. Whereas writing disperses, voice unifies, providing the illusion of single origin and temporal unity (no 'two consciousnesses' here). Yet, in this instance, Wordsworth writes of a doubling effect whereby the sound of his own voice has an internal echo, and one which, unlike echo as usually figured, perfects rather than incompletely repeating 'the imperfect sound'; it is voice here that functions like echo, since speech is imagined as secondary in its attempt to represent the silence of self-present meaning in consciousness.[50]

Jacobus' criticism echoes Hartman's account of a necessary transgression in the urge to will the origins implicit in speech back into the absent voice of writing. Wordsworth could hear his own voice reading through his own writing, imperfect echo or not (she repeats Hartman's interpretation that echo 'perfects' the imperfect sound of his voice). The rhetorical drift of this criticism is directed at the illusory or fictional nature of the struggle, accusing Wordsworth of the epistemological irresponsibility of a sort of wilful self-deception.

This has a long pedigree in the critique of Romanticism: in the terms of Paul de Man, reading Jacques Derrida's reading of Rousseau, if we posit that the 'replacement of mere stressed sound by articulated speech is the origin of language', an excess, or 'supplement', is created when we attempt to govern a system which we no longer control.[51] Yet at no point is Wordsworth claiming 'unity', or claiming that his self is whole. Rather, he is celebrating the doubleness of the experience, the me-now and me-then, or the me which just 'pours out', whether it has 'measured

strains' or not, and the me which needs some measurement in case it is just pouring itself out. The dispersal which Jacobus sees as central to showing up 'the illusion of single origin' is wilfully embraced by the poet of 1805, aware of the possible annihilation of his verse implicit in a 'dythyrambic fervour'. These passages gladly confront the imperfections of the processes of composition, and take delight in struggle and imperfection. They attempt to move to a place of pause, taking stock, where action and change might be expected, sobering up after the bacchanal of inspiration in order to recollect their emotions in tranquillity.

There is another part of the process of composition. The 1850 *Prelude* adds another year, and says something quite different.

> Six changeful years have vanished since I first
> Poured out (saluted by that quickening breeze
> Which first met me issuing from the City's Walls)
> A glad preamble to this Verse: I sang
> Aloud, with fervour irresistible
> Of short-lived transport, like a torrent bursting,
> From a black thunder-cloud, down Scafell's side
> To rush and disappear. But soon broke forth
> (So willed the Muse) a less impetuous stream,
> That flowed awhile with unabating strength,
> Then stopped for years; not audible again
> Before last primrose-time. (1–12)

Jacobus writes the previous, 1805 version, into a 'retreat from the Sublime', perhaps following the orthodoxy established by Hartman and others, when she asks if Wordsworth, like Cowley in his *Pindarique Odes*, found 'his own dithyrambic tide unnavigable, preferring to emphasize not the voice of the Sublime but the voice of nature?'[52] Cooper's *Concordance* records the words dithyramb or dythyramb nowhere in the poet's authorised printed work.[53] Its replacement, though, seeks further to emphasise the sense of power in the writing, which may or may not be under control. It does this by providing a sonic imitation of the ostensible subject of the passage, writing itself: 'first . . . Verse . . . fervour . . . burst' are all repositioned in the blank verse more effectively to contribute to a cluster of sounds which rhyme off that capitalised 'Verse'. The first parenthesis attempts to contain the ambiguity surrounding what exactly is 'issuing', if not exactly solve it. And the second parenthesis places an origin for subsequent interruptions, a Muse, and a power given to that origin, its will.

The most significant revision of the earlier passage creates as many new difficulties as it does away with old ones. 'Fervour irresistible' is a facet of the dithyrambic, or possibly of the sublime, but it is not the sublime itself. Like the sublime, it is not to be contained, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the quantity of its syllables. The reading voice slurs through the end of the pentameter which holds it, roughing up the song to which it gives expression: fervour irresistible. Those repeated 'er . . . our . . . irr' sounds crowd in on each other, move us past that hissing stress on 'sis', over a feminine ending, into a 'short-lived transport', and then burst out of their threatening confinement into a torrent which will now 'rush and disappear'. Irresistible the fervour may be, but once it pours out, it will never be heard agan. The older poet will settle for a 'less impetuous stream'. This is not entirely a victory: 1850 now tells us '*too* slowly moves the promised work', and the prize won by the revision is a voice which can be heard even as it is only indistinctly articulate. This is gained through abating the vital energies of composition. The revised passage tunes itself down into the further indistinct syllables hiding in the quiet pyrrhic contained in 'not audible again' (∪ / ∪ ∪ ∪/), blurring the sound of the verse at 'audible', the very word for the heard.

Jacobus states that the attempt is to 'represent the silence of self-present meaning in consciousness' in writing such as this, but that would be to misunderstand the conversation that these passages have with one another. Those lines which describe the activity of the creative will in the poetic moment, or rather the poet's moment of poetry – 'I sang / Aloud, with fervour irresistible / Of short-lived transport' – gain in their own sounds the sound of the poet's own singing, the sound of his own voice, his contribution to prosody. He slurs through his account of his own 'fervour irresistible'. 'Self-present meaning in consciousness' would be silent. But the poet and his poem cannot let that annihilate them, no matter how much they may, now and then, not be able to resist its fervour, or at least not speak clearly about what it might be. In that key line, the iambs of the original version of the pentameter ('Aloud, in Dythyrambic fervour, deep', is replaced by 'Aloud, with fervour irresistible' – ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ ∪) break down, ever so briefly, and hang in a position of indeterminate quantity over the pyrrhic which opens into the short-lived transport of a disappearing torrent. The poet must be cheered by his own voice, in order that his poem be audible, and not just to be a sort of silent communing in that 'ghostly language of the ancient earth' which might also seem to speak in his poetry. Poetic metre, and rhyth-

mic effect, assist in allowing us to hear this poetry written against the temptations of silence.

THE CREATIVE WILL (2): THE BROWNINGS

For the Victorians, the dithyrambic belonged to a previous age with different, epic, preoccupations, no matter how much the particular versions of epic that the nineteenth century wrote might wish to approach the vital energies which it seems to unleash. This vitalism is a literary construction which enables hero-artists to picture themselves facing the sublime nature of their willing Muse. For writers like Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning, Wordsworth's trading-in of the 'fervour irresistible' for something 'less impetuous' is the mark of the post-Romantic poet. Yet, the English poetry of the nineteenth century strives to sound this 'fervour irresistible' and its various impulses and imperatives of an often uncontrollable creativity which is seen to drive artist or self.

The main concern of this book is in the conscious will and its struggles, such as Wordsworth's here, to hold the writing and speaking self together before the bacchanal which threatens to pour out of the verse with no issue. However, the Dionysiac mode remains a possibility. These fervours or tendencies are in their way constructed as ideal form, insubstantial intuitions of something driving the self, or indeed driving history. The will need not be a personal faculty, it may be a determining force to which the individual subject is a mere plaything, 'the never-ending push of the Universe' which the First World War finally convinced Thomas Hardy was 'an unpurposive and irresponsible groping in the direction of the least resistance'.[54] Yet in his attempt to make 'audible' the fervour of his moments of composition, and then to read out and write them out again, Wordsworth negotiates poetic necessity in order to capture the rhythms of the experience of writing in his own voice.

The poetry that followed that of Wordsworth often attempted to rekindle the sense of the dithyrambic, of a vitalist will moving through its form. That will needs a body in order to come into perceptible form. Joyce Zonana says that the primarily sonic ability of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poet-heroine Aurora Leigh, similar to that of Wordsworth, is to 'hear celestial harmony'. This she 'embodies' 'in mother's breasts and through her own passion'; it is a 'linking of the rhythm of blood with the rhythms of her own verse'.[55] Zonana overstresses the radical-

ism of this position: much of this book asserts that such effects are widespread in Victorian poetry. But she does point to a need to embody a sonic apprehension of the rhythm of body and verse. In the most 'Wordsworthian' part of *Aurora Leigh*, the first book, Aurora conceives of the influences on, and development of, her own physical act of writing thus:

> is the music mine,
> As a man's voice or breath is called his own,
> Inbreathed by the Life-breather? There's a doubt
> For cloudy seasons!
> But the sun was high
> When first I felt my pulses set themselves
> For concord; when the rhythmic turbulence
> Of blood and brain swept outward upon words,
> As wind upon the alders, blanching them
> By turning up their under-natures till
> They trembled in dilation. O delight
> And triumph of the poet, who would say
> A man's mere 'yes,' a woman's common 'no,'
> A little human hope of that or this,
> And says the word so that it burns you through
> With a special revelation, shakes the heart
> Of all the men and women in the world,
> As if one came back from the dead and spoke,
> With eyes too happy, a familiar thing
> Become divine i' the utterance! While for him
> The poet, speaker, he expands with joy;
> The palpitating angel in his flesh
> Thrills inly with consenting fellowship
> To those innumerous spirits who sun themselves
> Outside of time. (I, 892–915) [56]

This reaches out with a remarkable lack of anxiety to the dead poetic influences who might be speaking to the apprentice poet, or have used the language into which she says that she can breath a new life.

Where Wordsworth has heard the ghostly language of the ancient earth, Aurora authenticates her utterance through a sounding of the rhythms of her own body. The 'rhythmic turbulence / Of blood and brain swept outward upon words': this is an embodying of self in a rhythmic language. Zonana worries that while the poet may hear the beat of her blood, the reader may not.[57] Yet for Aurora here, poetic utterance 'burns you through / With a special revelation, shakes the

heart / Of all the men and women in the world'. In an adaptation of a later extraordinary image in *Aurora Leigh* of two clocks set together, gradually coming to tick together and tell 'the mutual time' (IV, 417–32), Aurora conceives of an immediate sympathy of living and dead, angel and spirit, poet and audience, through the 'consenting fellowship' which is given by the power of poetic language. Aurora goes on to say that poetry is 'cognisant of life / Beyond this blood-beat' (915–16), but it is first sounded along the beat of the body. It communicates a vital power which is intuited through a rhythm of will.

As *Aurora Leigh* progresses, however, that vitalism often meets with psychological as well as moral failings. The fervour irresistible can become bogged down in immeasurable sand. Under the impress of Thomas Carlyle, Barrett Browning's epic of aspiration and failure faces the imperatives which threaten the poetic career of the poet. Later in the poem, she attempts to work out how the 'less impetuous' – poetry – might contain the fervour irresistible of vital composition.

> While Art
> Sets action on the top of suffering:
> The artist's part is both to be and do,
> Transfixing with a special, central power
> The flat experience of the common man,
> And turning outward, with a sudden wrench,
> Half agony, half ecstasy, the thing
> He feels the inmost – never felt the less
> Because he sings it . . .
> O sorrowful great gift
> Conferred on poets, of a twofold life,
> When one life has been found enough for pain!
> We, staggering 'neath our burden as mere men,
> Being called to stand up straight as demi-gods,
> Support the intolerable strain and stress
> Of the universal, and send clearly up
> With voices broken by the human sob,
> Our poems to find rhymes among the stars!
>
> (V, 365–73; 380–8)

The effect of the caesura which holds the quick turning in the verse in the sudden wrenching of 'flat experience' to 'half agony, half ecstasy', and out to the enjambed 'the thing / He feels the inmost' is to give a rhythm to the verse which is propelled by an insight which the speaker *feels* within the self. Like contraction and childbirth, this is irresistible. The impetus of the insight is like that spoken by poets as 'demi-gods'

shouldering the burden of 'the intolerable strain and stress / Of the universal', facing up to their responsibilities to the *Sturm und Drang* in composing experiences of the sublime.

Barrett Browning is following an account of the importance of vital human powers which comes to her through Carlyle, Coleridge and the early poetry of Robert Browning. Behind her account of 'The artist's part' is the passage from Carlyle's 'Hero as King' lecture which I quoted in chapter one: 'there is an irrepressible tendency in every man to develop himself according to the magnitude which Nature has made of him; to speak out, to act out, what Nature has laid in him . . . The meaning of life here on earth might be defined as consisting in this: to unfold your *self*, to work what thing you have the faculty for.'[58] Barrett Browning's 'artist's part is both to be and do', is a response to the rhymes in Carlyle's prose, to what has been made of and laid in the self by nature. Then the 'irrepressible tendency' is to speak out, to act out. 'The artist's part' is this duty. Wordsworth cannot allow himself this duty, and for some this amounts to a desire to escape from possible bewilderment, a wilful resisting of what should be irresistible.

Carlyle speaks of the vitalism which has been lost in his own, post-Romantic age when in his 'Characteristics' essay he bemoans the loss of 'that mysterious Self-impulse of the whole man, heaven inspired, and in all senses partaking of the Infinite, being captiously questioned in a finite dialect, and answering, as it needs must be, by silence'.[59] There is no response to an intimation of infinity in language. The sublime in meaning renders us dumb. For poets, this is an impossible lesson: Elizabeth Barrett Browning has to add the coda that the poet transfixes the thing he feels the inmost, but that it is 'never felt the less / Because he sings it'. The expression of the infinite is only possible through this transfixing of flat experience, but the finitude of words, sung or not, is the part of the artist, and a 'sudden wrench' may make it art. This sudden wrench is centred in the body and in the rhythm of the blank verse, which turns it outward, giving to the infinite corporeal form. Barrett Browning's artist is the possessor of a 'special, central power', setting action on top of suffering, giving body to the ideal. Centred in the self, and central to the commonality of a culture, this vital power has an irrepressible tendency to express itself. Necessarily, she cannot accept from Carlyle that silence is the only way to answer a heaven-inspired 'Self-impulse'.

Her husband, Robert Browning, gives us another artist's way of approaching the problem:

> There's the bell clinking from the chapel-top;
> That length of convent-wall across the way
> Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside;
> The last monk leaves the garden; days decrease,
> And autumn grows, autumn in everything.
> Eh? the whole seems to fall into a shape
> As if I saw alike my work and self
> And all that I was born to be and do,
> A twilight piece. ('Andrea Del Sarto', 41–9)

Nothing could be further from the fervour that Barrett Browning invokes. Yet in that slight waking after the lethargic beauties of an elegiac autumn landscape at 'Eh?', creative potentialities 'fall into a shape'. Elizabeth's phrase 'The artist's part is both to be and do', appears as the artist speaking of 'all that I was born to be and do'. Husband and wife concede that the artist is *ascitur et fit*, working together the sense of calling into a conception of artistic self which is defined through doing. Robert, with an exquisite anticlimax, allows the next line to contain a whispering of dissent, as it falls into an early caesura after 'A twilight piece'.

This is a post-Romantic moment and Warwick Slinn remarks well that it is a moment of conflict, 'generated deep within [Andrea] by the tension between passive, not responsible, and active, possibly failing, selves [which] underlies his fluctuating expressiveness throughout'.[60] The fluctuating expressiveness can be heard at the reminder of a speaking voice pulling itself up at 'Eh?' The poet cannot operate in silence, a voice must always be audible. The movement in poems like these, is, if not to resistance, to will. The question is one of agency in speech, the extent to which the voice needs a will, and the conditions under which that will can operate. Both artists, Aurora and Andrea, fail in their respective callings.

Poems like 'Andrea Del Sarto' rein in just what can be achieved by the inspirations of the mysterious self-impulse of man. Further on in his monologue, the artist tells his wife

> In this world, who can do a thing, will not;
> And who would do it, cannot, I perceive:
> Yet the will's somewhat – somewhat, too, the power -
> And thus we half-men struggle. (137–40)

While these lines do suggest a self-awareness of departure from an ethical standard, or artistic duties, in a sudden wilful assertion they contain a rhythmic imitation of the opposite of their original statement. Andrea takes St Paul for authority in his depiction of his own weakness,

as the blank verse in which he speaks echoes the prose cadences of the King James Bible: 'For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do' (Romans 7, 18–20).

In the speaking voice which the fiction of the poem asks us to hear inhabiting these lines, we are made to feel close to a commonplace. The end placing of the main verb, 'I perceive' (a typical Browning technique), appears to give the first two lines the status of a syntactically closed statement. However, the colon which separates these lines from the rest of the statement gives only the briefest of pauses, as the speaker changes his mind in mid-sentence. We move from a tone of conventionally passive regret into a suddenly strenuous flexing of poetic muscle. The will, as subject matter of the verse, re-emerges as a conceptual possibility. Similarly, the speaker's will reasserts itself, demonstrating the capacities inherent in considering its own existence. The claim is partial, perhaps lasting no longer than four words, 'Yet the will's somewhat', and may be just as quickly about to break down. The repetition of 'somewhat – somewhat', catching itself up in an echo of the negatives of the preceding lines 'will not . . . cannot', and the sudden deceleration of 'somewhat too, the power – ', allow enough space for the qualifications of the last line. Carlyle's 'meaning of life' is to 'unfold your *self*, to work what thing you have the faculty for'. Andrea finds the perception of a will a curse, bringing only struggle. For a brief moment, though, perhaps one of short-lived transport or sudden wrench, the self that speaks the verse has shown itself resurgent.

This may be Leavis' anaemia, or Armstrong's idealist will brought in to face up to a determining materialism. 'Yet the will's somewhat' is hardly the irrepressible tendency to speak out, to act out the self. No one could accuse any of Browning's characters of the urge to be silent, yet even in the impotent internally rhyming rhythms of the voice of the speaker in 'Andrea Del Sarto', the irrepressible is heard. The monologue dramatises a turn to will, and a turn which is dramatised within its rhythms of will. The very movement of the verse is an attempt to live into the imagined experience, to give it its own voice. The voice of the self which speaks it is then imagined as a thinking, choosing, discriminating agent following what is given as well as it might, making do when things are not given. Between self as artist, and the self which is the character imagined speaking in the poem we have a drama of intention and agency in art and speech which poems such as these explore. As

John R. Reed says in his history of Victorian writers' conception of will, 'The best of the dramatic monologues allow a central figure to attempt to assert his or her will – some succeed, some fail – while permitting the true source of creative energy, the poet composing the poem, to retreat from view. Self-assertion is transferred from author to text. The text speaks, not Robert Browning.'[61] Reed's 'true source of creative energy' is close to Barrett Browning's 'special central power', but it misses a key generic element in monologue, which, as discussed in chapter four here, Barrett Browning herself missed in her future husband's poetry. That is the fact that it is dramatic. It is in the drama of dramatic monologue that the test of assertions of will can be made. That drama allows texts to speak in a way that gives voice to the embodiment of the new investigation of human agency in speech which is explored in the rhythms of nineteenth-century poetry.

AN INTERPENETRATION OF PASSION AND OF WILL

The innovations of prosodic form which lead to the ability of the poems discussed here to investigate agency in verse have their origins, as Eric Griffiths has shown, in the first great experimental volume of English Romantic verse, Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*. They work, as Dennis Taylor says, up to the last experiments with metrical form in the poetry of Thomas Hardy before the move to the *vers libre* which accompanied Ezra Pound's imperative that one last heave would break the pentameter. Griffiths and Taylor have attempted to re-create or listen again to the voice of nineteenth-century poetry, and concentrating on different ends of the century, on the influence of Wordsworth and the experiments of Thomas Hardy respectively, have sought to initiate a means of understanding the breadth of nineteenth-century innovations and experiments in verse.[62] They point to a formal means of relocating our thinking about Romantic and post-Romantic poetry away from the critique implicit in an account of speech and writing which finds only absence, or an idealising lack of body.

Following on from tantalising suggestions made by Francis Berry in his 1962 study *Poetry and the Physical Voice*,[63] Griffiths finds Wordsworth making a 'discovery about metre' in his 'Preface' to the second edition to *Lyrical Ballads*, where the rhythm of the poem might not be 'strictly connected with the passion', thus allowing for ambiguities to develop between printed form and spoken performance.[64] This develops throughout the nineteenth century from Wordsworthian blank verse or

ballad into the dramatic monologues of Tennyson and Browning, and the extraordinary metrical innovations of Gerard Manley Hopkins. Working from later texts, and their influence on Thomas Hardy, Taylor has shown that Coventry Patmore's 'Essay on English Metrical Law' in particular, and the work of a surprising number of philologists and prosodists shows that the nineteenth century scrutinised the occurrences of voice in poetry in sophisticated and inventive ways. Taylor sees Hardy as a much more knowledgeable innovator in verse than might previously have been allowed, further cementing the growing influence that his poetry has had on the poetry of the twentieth century, and its innovations, and consolidations, in verse.[65] In all this work, the suggestion is that attention to the sound of words, the rhythms of poetry, and the great difficulties that might attach to listening for a voice in verse will provide a new way of reading the poetry of the Victorian age, and a way of hearing the different voices which proliferate in its new poetry of character and self, of a lyricism which is always moving towards a dramatic representation of the voices of those characters and selves. Those voices assert their physicality in rhythms of will.

The urge to write in your own voice is the challenge after Wordsworth that faces Victorian prosody. In a diary entry for 28 December 1863, William Allingham records with typical detail an evening spent towards the end of a Christmas holiday at the Tennysons', with Francis Turner Palgrave and two public schoolmasters and their wives.

> In the drawing-room A.T., P. and the two Bs. all on 'Classic Metres'. T. setting the schoolmasters right more than once, I noticed. I asked Mr. Bradley afterwards, when he called on me at Lymington, did he think he could read one – any one – of Horace's Odes as it was intended to be read? He said he was sure he could *not* . . . I had the ladies all to myself, and we discoursed profoundly on 'poets and practical people', 'benevolence true and false', 'the gulf between certain people and others', etc. Mrs T. confessed herself tired of hearing about 'Classic Metres'. The company gone, T., P., and I went to Palgrave's room, where the poet read to us the 'Vision of Sin', the 'Sea Fairies', and part of the 'Lotos Eaters', – a rich and solemn music, but not at all heavy. He will not admit that any one save himself can read aloud his poems properly. He suffered me to try a passage in the 'Lotos Eaters' and said 'You do it better than most people', then read it himself and went on some way further. Thus I got from him *viva voce* part of a poem which has always seemed to me among his most characteristic works.[66]

Allingham's ruse to get the poem *viva voce* from the poet is based on his knowledge of something which greatly upset Tennyson, that, like

Horace, his own voice would be lost from his poetry after his death. The whole evening gives an insight into Allingham's specially detached kind of patience with the older poet ('T. setting the schoolmasters right more than once, I noticed'), a patience which was not shared even by Emily Tennyson, who 'confessed herself tired of hearing of 'Classic Metres'". Tennyson had been 'full' of them since the beginning of the holiday, eight days previously, and indeed his 'Attempts at Classic Metres in Quantity' had just been published in *Cornhill Magazine*.[67] Suggestion of the unrecoverable voice of the classics shows a Tennyson urged into correction of teachers and fellow poets. His gruff 'You do it better than most people' is a rare compliment for a man who thought that a new means of annotating pronunciation might be introduced in order to enable readers to sound his poetry properly.[68]

Not all poets are this intolerant given the prospect of the absence of a *viva voce* performance of their poetry. This is Wordsworth in 1815, suggesting how a reader might perform his poetry:

> Some of these pieces are essentially lyrical; and, therefore, cannot have their due force without a supposed musical accompaniment; but, in much the greatest part, as a substitute for the classic lyre or romantic harp, I require nothing more than an animated or impassioned recitation, adapted to the subject. Poems, however humble in their kind, if they be good in that kind, cannot read themselves; the law of long syllable and short must not be so infexible, – the letter of the metre must not be so impassive to te spirit of versification, – as to deprive the Reader of all voluntary power to modulate, î subordination to the sense, the music of the poem; – in the same manner as his mind is left at liberty, and even summoned, to act upon its thoughts and images. But, though the accompaniment of a musical instrument be frequently dispensed with, the true Poet does ot therefore abandon his privilege distinct from that of the mere Proseman;
>
> 'He murmurs near the running brooks
> A music sweeter than their own.'[69]

This is an open and democratic account of metre, free of the dogmatism which is often the hallmark of later nineteenth-century theories of prosody. It allows a role for the voice of the reader as he or she attempts to re-create the voice that has spoken in the written poem. The writer asks only for 'an animated or impassioned recitation' which should be suitable for the poem: the poet does ask the reader to perform if reading his poems, they 'cannot read themselves'. Wordsworth, unlike his successor as Laureate, Tennyson, does not demand of the reader how they should be read, but he does offer the reader 'voluntary power to

modulate, in subordination to the sense, the music'. The passage seems to be unexceptionable, except when we think about what Wordsworth might mean by 'subordination to sense'. Could we stop making sense of the poem, and listen only for sound? The reader's 'mind is left at liberty, and even summoned, to act upon its thoughts and images'. This is a summoning in a contrary direction after the previous 'subordination', as if the poet here advocates what may be many people's experience, of playing background music while thinking about something else, reading the paper or doing the ironing. The music of the poem leaves the mind at liberty, as a kind of insubstantial thing, just keeping us company in the room where we read, while we are 'summoned' to make sense of the meaning of the poem.

In the earlier 'Preface' to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth was less cavalier in the attitude to this freedom allowed by the movement of metre. There he says that it enables the reader to endure a 'pathetic situation', because oetre has a tendency 'to divest language, in a certain degree, of its reality, and thus to throw a sort of half-consciousness of unsubstantial existence over the whole composition'.[70] The performance of the text of the poem is necessary, but it may not necessarily be adding substance to the text. Without going as far as Roman Jakobson, in erecting such an insight into the structural opposites of delivery instance and verse instance in the matter of a performed poem's divergence from its written text,[71] subsequent writers on metre have also wondered about its substantial existence. This is somewhere near the paradoxical position in which W. B. Yeats puts the metre of *Paradise Lost* sounded against its performance in an actual reading as 'a ghostly voice, an unvariable possibility, an unconscious norm'.[72] The abandonment of the norm is the way of the 'mere Proseman'.

In prose, we might be able better to subordinate ourselves to sense, but the insubstantial existence of metre can become an argument for the importance of poetry, through its mental measuring of a norm. This is Coventry Patmore, from his 'Essay on English Metrical Law' on the same question:

> These are two indispensable conditions of metre, – first, that the sequence of vocal utterance, represented in written verse, shall be divided into equal or proportionate spaces; secondly, *that the fact of that division shall be made manifest* by an 'ictus' or 'beat', actual or mental, which, like a post in a chain railing, shall mark the end of one space, and the commencement of another. This 'ictus' is an acknowledged condition of all possible metre; and its function is, of course, much more conspicuous in languages so chaotic in their syllabic quantities as to

render it the *only* source of metre. Yet, all important as this time beater is, I think it demonstrable that, for the most part, *it has no material and external existence at all*, but has its place in the mind, which craves measure in everything, and, wherever the idea of measure is uncontradicted, delights in marking it with an imaginary 'beat'.[73]

For Wordsworth, metre assisted in enduring tragedy, as for Patmore it provides a source of order for a mind which may be working away at differing aspects of the poem it is reading. In both of these writers, reading poetry must be imagined as a continuous activity, in which sense leads, but in which metre is continuously marking its imaginary beat. And that metre has 'no material and external existence at all'. Mind, thought or passion are all curiously only half-connected to the musical form of verse, but their connection is unvariable, a norm, a measure for which the mind craves, and gains pleasure in marking.

Patmore's prosody works under the influence of Hegel's aesthetics and pursues a necessitarian line with some propriety, suggesting just how we might know that we apprehend the 'imaginary "beat"' of the spirit of metrically patterned thought. In his 'Essay', he glosses an unidentified sentence translated from Hegel which is concerned not to oppose 'sensible materials' and the 'free outpouring of poetic thought', thus:

> Art, indeed, must have a body as well as a soul; and the higher and purer the spiritual, the more powerful and unmistakable should be the corporeal element; – in other words, the more vigorous and various the life, the more stringent and elaborate must be the law by obedience to which life expresses itself.[74]

The body of a poem, its outward form, is its obediently organised metre, which is conveyed through a rhythm, which, in turn, is apprehended only by sense. Those rhythms are often then spoken about in terms of the human body and its rhythms – heartbeat, breath, circulation – both in nineteenth-century prosody, and the prosody of the present day.

Elizabeth Barrett's friend R. H. Horne, in his *Poems of Geoffrey Chaucer Modernized,* held that 'It would be far nearer the truth if we were to call our scanning gear by such terms as systole and diastole, – metre being understood as muscle, and pulsation as rhythm, – varying with every emotion.' In the essay introducing his selection from English poetry, *Imagination and Fancy,* which stresses the importance of 'variety in uniformity' for English verse, Leigh Hunt put the quality of 'strength' first in his list of the facets of good poetry. It is 'the muscle of verse, and shows itself in the number and force of the marked syllables'. This conception

of the apprehension of rhythm as a physical event has continued into contemporary linguistic and critical writing about rhythm. Derek Attridge, in *The Rhythms of English Poetry*, states that 'Rhythm . . . is the apprehension of a series of events as a regularly repeated pulse of energy, an experience which has a muscular as well as a mental dimension.'[75] Rhythm brings about a physical response.

Physical response may, of course, not entirely echo the sense: the muscular and mental need not work in direct mimetic relationship. For Amittai Aviram, describing the psychic aspects of listening to rhythm in terms similar to Wordsworth's, it engages the body while it may leave the mind behind. Contemplating a washing machine in the spin cycle, in terms which are rather like the liberty which Wordsworth reserves for the mind when poetry is being performed, Aviram says that we 'feel a *liberation* at the moments we give in to these rhythms, precisely when we are abandoning the activities we have chosen with our wills – even though individual conscious choice is usually thought of as the very heart of what we call freedom'.[76] Thomas Hardy's cruelly limited version of the freedom of the will of man suggests itself here:

> When swayed by the Universal Will (which he mostly must be as a subservient part of it) he is not individually free; but whenever it happens that all the rest of the Great Will is in equilibrium the minute portion called one person's will is free, just as a performer's fingers are free to go on playing the pianoforte of themselves when he talks or thinks of something else and the head does not rule them.[77]

The outward form of the poem and the sense that it makes partake of bodily function and mental concentration or distraction. Between the two we have a performative motion which impresses its rhythm upon us. It is sensed, working like the individual will against the great will, now and again free to vary the metre and thus impress its vigour upon us.

The difficulty with this thinking is the courting of binaries, the wilful acceptance of Jakobson's delivery instance and verse instance. Consequently metre and rhythm are written as at best opposites or at worst unconnected ideal and perceptible actuality. Aware of this danger, seen most particularly in his former poetic collaborator Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge strives to bring sound and sense together in what he sees as a prime function of aesthetic form – in this case, metre – as 'that spontaneous effort which strives to hold in check the workings of passion'. Rather than be a mere 'antagonism' to feeling, metre, because it is evidence of the voluntary action of the artist, is what holds passion

and will in balance. These are Coleridge's 'two legitimate conditions' of poetry:

> First, that as the elements of metre owe their existence to a state of increased excitement, so the metre itself should be accompanied by the natural language of excitement. Secondly, that as these elements are formed into metre artificially, by a voluntary act, with the design and for the purpose of blending delight with emotion, so the traces of present volition should throughout the metrical language be proportionally discernible. Now these two conditions must be reconciled and co-present. There must be not only a partnership, but a union; an interpenetration of passion and of will, of spontaneous impulse and of voluntary purpose. Again, this union can be manifested only in a frequency of forms and of figures of speech (originally the offspring of passion, but now the adopted children of power) greater than would be desired or endured where the emotion is not voluntarily encouraged and kept up for the sake of that pleasure which such emotion so tempered and mastered by the will is found capable of communicating.[78]

In his seeking for the accompaniment of metre and excitement and the blending of delight with emotion, 'the traces of present volition' must be discernible in the aesthetic artefact. Coleridge works his description of this in his prose into reconciliation, partnership, union, 'an interpenetration of passion and of will', until eventually, in a great parenthetical swerving away from this imagery of marriage and procreation, 'the offspring of passion' are necessarily usurped by 'the adopted children of power'. The will intervenes to enable the reader to endure, but it must also be apparent through writing in order to temper and master emotion into communication. This is not that far removed from Wordsworth's 'sort of half-consciousness of unsubstantial existence'. In both writers, however Coleridge marks their differences, the artificial form works to vary and voluntarily to contrast the emotion from which artifice gives pleasure.

Vigour and variety, in Patmore the signs of a kind of muscular aesthetic, are embodied in the stringencies and elaborations of form. Where Wordsworth had imagined himself pouring out his dithyrambic song, he must also have known that it had to be resisted in order that his life express itself. Criticism such as this moves the ethical, the formal and the sensuous close together and seems to ask for a possibly constricting rigour. It is writing about the rhythms of poetry as perceptible in bodily ways. It is writing about the vigour and variety of a particular experience of the body, and the extent to which it may obediently follow a rhythm of an activity governed by will. Rhythm must allow, in its variations, the ordering of free thought in the sensible, and it will allow the reader to

apprehend the modulations of the poet, given a subordination to sense, through will. To do this, though, new ways of thinking about the metres of English poetry were needed, to suggest vigour and variety in the ordering of a perceptible speech.

In 1816, Coleridge finally published his unfinished poem *Christabel*, which had produced rich imitations, by Scott and Byron,[79] of its innovative style. In the final paragraph of a brief 'Preface' written as an apology for the publication of an unfinished poem, he states that the poem contains a 'new principle' of metre, an innovation which T. S. Omond, in his exhaustive account of the metrists of the nineteenth century, states has 'revolutionized' theories of English prosody.[80] Omond is sceptical of the actual metre of *Christabel* carrying out Coleridge's claim, and unsympathetic to the new writing in stress-rhythms which owes its existence to the poem, but he rightly places it at the beginning of nineteenth-century prosodic discussion. Here, we get a suggestion of just how to address the positions of Wordsworth and Patmore, reconciling matters of composition and form in the subjects of poetry.

> I have only to add that the metre of Christabel is not, properly speaking, irregular, though it may seem so from being founded on a new principle: namely, that of counting in each line the accents, not the syllables. Though the latter may vary from seven to twelve, yet in each line the accents will be found to be only four. Nevertheless, this occasional variation in number of syllables is not introduced wantonly, or for the mere ends of convenience, but in correspondence with some transition in the nature of the imagery or passion.[81]

For Coleridge, the counting of accent rather than syllable frees the English poetic line of much of its adherence to classical or iambic certainties, while retaining a principle which corresponds with the matter of the poem. The line of verse can move closer to the line of voice, while still providing musical accompaniment, or correspondence, in the means of expression to that which is expressed.

The terms that Coleridge sets himself are revealing. His new principle is not 'irregular', because it demands that the metre must function 'in correspondence with some transition in the nature of the imagery or passion'. Metre and its 'occasional variation' may, in Wordsworth and Patmore's terms, diverge from its intellectual or emotional basis. Coleridge's emphasis is not on imagery and passion, but their transitions. In the preface to *Christabel*, he seeks for variation in the very mobilities of a new metre which tells of imagery or passion in action corresponding with that action in verse. This effects a freeing of poetic form, and demands a reconsideration of the terms of the obedience due

to the principles of the voiced occurrences of poetry in metre. The emphasis is on the agency demonstrable from the poem, and the voice which speaks it, which, as Wordsworth would agree, can be the poet's or the reader's. Image and passion are not static, they are in transition, and the variations of the poem must record their movements. With an attention to accent rather than syllable, the line of poetry is freed to give an imitation of action, to represent image and passion in movement. The line of poetry imitates possibility and change.

The debate between Tennyson and his friends in the 1860s was performed in the light of such knowledge. *Christabel* was 'new' only to the extent that it revisited a medieval setting and form, but it inspired a 'new verse'[82] on medieval subjects by, among others, Scott, Byron, Keats, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the Rossettis and their circle, Swinburne and Morris, before it found its fullest sonic development in the poetry of Hopkins, decades later. Take, for instance, the experiment with supposedly unofficial metres which is Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*. Rossetti has heard the achievements of the effects of Milton and Pope in expressing the male body, but is writing after Coleridge has licensed, as it were, 'occasional variation' in the syllable count of the line of poetry. Liberated, Rossetti can mark the rhythm of the experience of a heroism of endurance and eventual collapse:

> Swift fire spread thro' her veins, knocked at her heart,
> Met the fire smouldering there
> And overbore its lesser flame;
> She gorged on bitterness without a name:
> Ah! fool, to choose such a part
> Of soul consuming care!
> Sense failed in the mortal strife:
> Like the watch-tower of a town
> Which an earthquake shatters down,
> Like a lightning-stricken mast,
> Like a wind-uprooted tree
> Spun about,
> Like a foam-topped waterspout
> Cast down headlong in the sea,
> She fell at last:
> Pleasure past and anguish past,
> Is it death or is it life? (507–23)[83]

In its way this is a virtuoso exercise in the simile, achieved through refusing the epic simile of Homer or Milton or Pope. An epic simile might indeed also have had the effect of slowing down the gradual

toppling of Laura; here though, Rossetti favours a seemingly indiscriminate series of images of collapse. The effect is of a seeking for a means to describe the vigorous complexity of the gradual movements of this body – shattering, lightning-struck, spinning – surrendering its agency and facing physical collapse.

However, it is the rhythm of this movement that makes new the rhythm of Rossetti's precursors. It is observed from a narrative distance while sounded through the body itself. From the extended, nearly unmetrical, packed stresses of the opening line of the verse paragraph ('Swift fire spread through her veins', / / / ∪∪ /), through to the perfectly iambic narration of defeat ('And overbore its lesser flame'), Rossetti uses a verse form capable of dramatic variations in order rhythmically to convey a body which is courting possible oblivion. 'Sense failed in the mortal strife'(/ / ∪ ∪ / ∪ /) opens again with two stresses, before marking an irregular trip through an anapaest until it is returned to the iambic pulse of the unconscious toppling body. Rossetti's rhythm is at once ancient – partaking of the expectations of heroic verse, nursery rhyme, hymn and an interest in medieval or Gothic irregularity – and new. Depicting the fall into unconsciousness it sounds body and will in effort and, as here, in defeat. It sounds a Victorian rhythm of will.

Syllabic variation and metrical irregularity became a certain good in the metres of English poetry, and suggested ways in which previously conventional measures could be inspected and broken. The classical, as well as the Gothic, the oriental and the Celtic, all gain new breath from the debate which surrounded the effort of some mid-Victorian poets and critics to resuscitate the accents of previous poetries in English. The debate filtered through to a young writer living in the West Country, Thomas Hardy, and a few years later he tried his hand at the classical in this poem.

Neutral Tones

We stood by a pond that winter day,
And the sun was white, as though chidden of God,
And a few leaves lay on the starving sod;
– They had fallen from an ash, and were gray.

Your eyes on me were as eyes that rove
Over tedious riddles of years ago;
And some words played between us to and fro
On which lost the more by our love.

The smile on your mouth was the deadest thing
Alive enough to have strength to die;
And a grin of bitterness swept thereby
Like an ominous bird a-wing . . .

Since then, keen lessons that love deceives,
And wrings with wrong, have shaped to me
Your face, and the God-curst sun, and a tree,
And a pond edged with grayish leaves.
1867

This poem is written in what Dennis Taylor calls 'roughened sapphics': it is based on a four-line stanza which would originally have been written in a predominantly falling rhythm, three five-foot lines followed by a two-foot line, called an 'adonic'.[84] Hardy's first collection of poems, *Wessex Poems,* of which 'Neutral Tones' forms a part, began with 'The Temporary the All', parenthetically subtitled 'Sapphics', and the volume contains other variations on the form.

Taylor suggests certain examples of efforts at classical metres in English by more established poets, such as Clough, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Robert Browning and Tennyson[85] which would have influenced the apprentice poet. The main influence, though, is Swinburne, and his poem 'Sapphics' in the original edition of *Poems and Ballads*. On this influence, Taylor is supported by an editor of Hardy's, G. M. Young, who dismisses 'Neutral Tones' as merely imitative magazine verse: 'any young man who had read Browning and Swinburne might have written it'.[86] In a review of Young's selection from Hardy, the comment elicited from William Empson a typically impatient response: 'Swinburne my foot. In the poems selected it seems to me that Hardy often simply drops his rhythm, as a child drops its rattle and stares before it straight at the skyline, dribbling slightly.'[87] This is a rare observation on Hardy from Empson, which sums up something of the stupefaction before both the natural and the literary which can afflict a Hardy poem. Hardy has often been accused of being childlike or naive, but here Empson makes it a prime virtue, and a mark of the poet's innovations just where he seems to be at his most imitative.

Earlier in the review, before he goes on approvingly to quote the final line of 'Neutral Tones', Empson speaks of Hardy's 'good rhythm', and its 'certain clumsiness that fits his grim scenery', before he corrects himself and praises the poet's 'closeness to the accent of spoken English won through indifference to the poetic conventions of his time'.[88] This is a comment redolent of James Smith's praise of the Wordsworth of

Michael speaking in his own voice in his poetry, but it is a comment which Empson works into the relations that the poet here has with poetic convention, never forgetting the 'grim scenery' that the poem describes. 'Neutral Tones', though, is far from indifferent to poetic convention, no matter how it strives to work its effects from that accent of spoken English. The opening lines enter into an iambic/anapaestic rising rhythm which works its 'grim scenery' against a conventional holiday reminiscence. The anapaest which rises through 'by a pond' is faintly comic, and the possibility of being 'children of God', the phrase carrying a more certain quantity, as well as familiarity, is revealed to be a grim pun tricked out of 'chidden of God' (why not 'chidden by'?), with a kind of agnostic attention to the scolded sun. The spondee which is sandwiched by anapests in the next line – 'And a few leaves lay on the starving sod': ∪ ∪ / / / ∪ ∪ / ∪ / – fails to hide an emphasis on the internal rhyme on 'lay' (with 'day', and 'gray'), slows down the duration of the line into the rhyme of 'sod' with 'God', but does little to prepare us for the final line of the stanza.

This line – 'They had fallen from an ash and were gray' – carries only three stresses, but stresses distributed throughout the line in such a way as wholly to unbalance even the irregularities which we have seen in the opening three lines. First, the line is lengthened if the reading voice takes account of the dash which begins it, notating a pause which suggests that what will follow may be of some significance. The scansion is similarly consistent at attempting to fill more time than it should. Granting an elision on 'fallen', I scan the line as containing three anapaests (∪ ∪ / ∪ ∪ / ∪ ∪ /). The anapaest in its middle lengthens its duration, and thus further stresses the pun that we could hear in 'ash', a pun to which Hardy would return forty-five years later, in 1912, in his poems on the ashes of his marriage. Tom Paulin tells us that the comma in the line is an example of Hardy's 'deftly significant'[89] deployment of commas, and in this line the comma further lengthens the duration of a line which appears to be irregular, but is really working to reinforce the final monotone of sound and colour in the rhyme on 'gray', working a transition to a cheerless pathetic fallacy.

This line creates the very effect which Coleridge had envisaged in *Christabel*: within a strict stanzaic form, carrying distinct allusions to a classical model, the loosening of the metre records transitions in image and feeling, where the wintry images are given emphasis by the irregularities imparted by the rhythm of the voice which speaks them. The lyric is one of half-substantial landscape and memory conveyed in a

rhythm which is quite happy to work its own dead smiles and bitter grins into the lack of voice which is the poem's subject. These two are not really speaking, words are only playing 'to and fro', and the absence of speech reinforces only the certainties of a recalled landscape in the uncertain rhythms of a human voice. One of the characters of this scene is now speaking in verse: the writing is recreating the significance of an unspeaking day. The lyric itself is participating in a drama, a drama which derives power not from the powerless feeling of non-communication on that day, but in the power of the communication of a recollection of a scene. The characters standing by the pond were doing their best to resist making a scene, but the scene that the images of the poem make is carried in the rhythms of the will of the voice which now, or at least in the year of the appended date of composition, 1867, strives to speak them. 'Neutral Tones' is in its way a record of immobility and lack of communication. It appears to be a poem of a hopeless sense of something lacking in human agency, a lack in human agency in speech. Yet such is its sonic arrangement, that its very effect of dropping its rhythm, staring at the skyline with a dribble, is arranged in ways which amount to what we may call Hardy's 'contribution to prosody'. Its rhythms, for all that they seem enervated, do convey a will.

Keen to rescue Hardy from the patronising tone of criticism apparent in the comments of Young, and to a lesser extent, Empson, Donald Davie cites this crucial passage to describe just what is distinctive about Hardy's contribution to prosody.[90] In it, Hardy is keen to say that he knew full well what he was doing.

> In the reception of this [*Wessex Poems*] and later volumes of Hardy's poems there was, he said, as regards form, the inevitable ascription to ignorance of what was really choice after full knowledge. That the author loved the art of concealing art was undiscerned. Years earlier he had decided that too regular a beat was bad art. He had fortified himself in his opinion by thinking of the analogy of architecture, between which art and that of poetry he had discovered, to use his own words, that there existed a close and curious parallel, both arts, unlike some others, having to carry a rational content inside their artistic form. He knew that in architecture cunning irregularity is of enormous worth, and it is obvious that he carried on into his verse, perhaps in part unconsciously, the Gothic art-principle in which he had been trained – the principle of spontaneity, found in mouldings, tracery, and such like – resulting in the 'unforeseen' (as it has been called) character of his metres and stanzas, that of stress rather than of syllable, poetic texture rather than poetic veneer; the latter kind of thing, under the name of 'constructed ornament', being what he, in common with every Gothic student, had been taught to avoid as the plague. He shaped

his poetry accordingly, introducing metrical pauses, and reversed beats; and found for his trouble that some particular line of a poem exemplifying this principle was greeted with a would-be jocular remark that such a line 'did not make for immortality'.[91]

Davie speaks with envy of the importance of the architecture analogy, carrying as it does a knowledge which Hardy shared with Walter Pater and Hopkins and Patmore, of texts by Ruskin and Pugin which may have been lost to those detractors of Hardy who find his poetry that of a naif.

Yet the passage is not without its overstatements, like many apologias. Its great urge is to move the chosen, the discriminatingly willed, the intentional, into the spontaneities of which Gothic art gives the illusion. But this does not save the forcefulness of the tone from being indignant. '*Really* choice after full knowledge . . . That the author loved the art of concealing art *was undiscerned* . . . *Years earlier* he had decided . . . He had fortified himself . . . He knew that in architecture . . . and *it is obvious* . . . the 'unforeseen' (*as it has been called*) . . . He shaped his poetry *accordingly* . . . and found for his trouble': the passage is full of slights being noted, often with sarcasm, and then excused, of a strengthening of the intentionality of years of calculated study. Choice, decision, fortification (the self behind Gothic battlements), and finally shape: this is a vocabulary of strong will, long years of poetical and architectural training resulting in an ability to act governed by principle. Yet at this point the principle becomes one of 'spontaneity', of the 'unforeseen', of what appears to be irregular, but actually follows a principle.

Coleridge had been careful to excuse the metre of *Christabel*, an earlier experiment in what might later be called Gothic, from irregularity, stating that it obeyed a new principle which would introduce 'occasional variety'. Hardy is similarly spontaneous in a principled way, but he is unafraid of the word 'irregular'. His irregularity is 'cunning irregularity', where the expected fall of emphasis in the line is delayed or reversed, giving a false impression of a wanton denial of expected regularities. Wantonness or convenience were, for Coleridge, no reasons for variety in verse. Like the example from Christina Rossetti, Hardy shows us metrical inventiveness demonstrating an agency which conveys the active powers of the poet working variety in correspondence with movement. In the Gothic, for Hardy, 'texture' becomes more important than 'veneer', and a high level of intention is attached to something which may at first appear rough and unconsidered. This is the art which

conceals art, an art of cunning irregularity. He may have had this passage from Ruskin in mind:

> The idea of reading a building as we would read Milton or Dante, and getting the same kind of delight out of the stones as out of the stanzas, never enters our mind for a moment. And for good reason; – There is indeed rhythm in the verses, quite as strict as the symmetries or rhythm of the architecture, and a thousand times more beautiful, but there is something else than rhythm. The verses were neither made to order, nor to match, as the capitals were; and we have therefore a kind of pleasure in them other than a sense of propriety. But it requires a strong effort of common sense to shake ourselves quit of all that we have been taught for the last two centuries, and wake to the perception of a truth just as simple and certain as it is new: that great art, whether expressing itself in words, colours, or stones, does *not* say the same thing over and over again; that the merit of architectural, as of every other art, consists in its saying new and different things; that to repeat itself is no more a characteristic of genius in marble than it is of genius in print; and that we may, without offending any laws of good taste, require of an architect, as we do of a novelist, that he should be not only correct, but entertaining.[92]

This passage circles the 'new' around the remembered, attempting to restore variety into art in the shape of a Gothic principle. Hardy takes from Ruskin and Coleridge a license to portray pleasures in forms which are neither made to match or to measure, obeying other laws than those of strict propriety. Earlier in this chapter I quoted Hopkins praise of the originality of Frederick Walker's 'Harbour of Refuge', 'as if such a thing had never been painted before', and William James, on the freedom of the will meaning 'novelties in the world'. In a poetry written with an ear for 'cunning irregularity', Hardy admits odd moments when the individual poem might free itself from a uniform metronomic will, allowing the spontaneous, the 'unforeseen'. Ruskin, too, finds the merit of art in that it says 'new and different things'.

Tonally, the passage from *The Life* is not without its difficulties, and we have nowadays come to suspect such self-justifications, especially under the conditions of this passage, in the pages of an autobiography not so cunningly ascribed to the author's wife. But we must take such writing seriously, and not only for the richness of the analogy with the Gothic in architecture, an architecture which finds its great apologist using metrical form as evidence of the importance of irregularity, newness and difference in art. Hardy's passage knows the metrical tradition in which it is working, a knowledge for which we have evidence in its author's mastery over metrical matters in a poem such as 'Neutral

Tones'. These cunning irregularities, which Hardy promotes to a principle for the forms in which his poems are constructed, suggest just what is introduced into English poetry throughout the nineteenth century after the example of criticism from such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Patmore or Ruskin. As much as anything, they are an example of a new way of thinking about speech, verse and the performance of speech in verse, and a way of placing the varieties of the speaking voice into a principled artistic form. From that discovery, the poetry can think about its great contribution to literature in lyric, dramatic monologue and elegy, the dramatic representation of human agency in verse.

CHAPTER 3

Tennyson, Browning and the absorbing soul

The purpose of rhythm, according to W. B. Yeats in 'The Symbolism of Poetry' (1900), is 'to prolong the moment of contemplation . . . by hushing us with an alluring monotony, while it holds us waking by variety, to keep us in that state of perhaps real trance, in which the mind liberated from the pressure of the will is unfolded in symbols'. For Yeats, this passive acquiescence in rhythm was betrayed by a poet such as Tennyson, for whom the descriptive, the moral, the anecdotal and the scientific 'so often extinguished [his] central flame'. Advocating a return to a symbolist poetry, Yeats has this to say of its prosodic form:

> With this change of substance, this return to imagination, this understanding that the laws of art, which are the hidden laws of the world, can alone bind the imagination, would come a change of style, and we would cast out of serious poetry those energetic rhythms, as of a man running, which are the invention of the will with its eyes always on something to be done or undone; and we would seek out those wavering, meditative, organic rhythms, which are the embodiment of the imagination, that neither desires nor hates, because it has done with time, and only wishes to gaze upon some reality, some beauty . . .[1]

Yeats' desire is to lose the Victorian rhythms of will which interfere with the timeless, if passive, gaze of the embodied imagination. He cannot follow Ezra Pound in his praise of just such rhythms, when he toasts Browning: 'Here's to you, Old Hippety-Hop o' the accents.'[2] Yeats calls for what is still a pre-Modernist, Keatsian, account of the world of poetry as a life of sensation rather than thought, in which both artist and audience are absorbed. The organic rhythms that he advocates assist in a process of complete absorption in sense.

This criticism has been repeated in Isobel Armstrong's important study, *Victorian Poetry*. She describes English poetry opting to follow the inventions of the will from the moment that Tennyson suffers from a critical loss of nerve between his volumes of 1832 and 1842. Armstrong

finds that the radical insights of the poetry of Tennyson in that decade, initially under the influence of the nascent symbolist aesthetic of Arthur Hallam (whose work Yeats knew) and the politics of the Cambridge Apostles, were extinguished by setting an idealist conception of will, taken from subjectivist German metaphysics, against the implicitly mechanistic account of mind of empirical British psychology. The historical moment, the 1830s, is crucial because it marks the move 'from a "Romantic" to a "Victorian" conception of art'. So, in literary terms, she describes a number of poems – 'The Palace of Art', 'The Lotos-Eaters', 'Mariana', 'The Lady of Shallot' – which explore the passive states of heightened perceptual ability which are betrayed in Tennyson's subsequent poetry by a recourse to moments of will.[3] Adapting her methodology, which concentrates on grammatical and syntactic instances of the 'passive consciousness',[4] we can hear this in rhythm. In Yeats' terms, this is heard in 'those energetic rhythms, as of a man running, which are the invention of the will'.

For both the younger Yeats and Armstrong, a conception of will appears at the point at which early Victorian poetry gives up on a commitment to a politicised aesthetics which had prioritised the external over the privileged inner self. A key moment may have been provided by the supposed statement of Richard Chevenix Trench, 'Tennyson, we cannot live in Art',[5] and Tennyson's response in 'The Palace of Art', of picturing just what the consequences of such a life might lead to:

> A spot of dull stagnation, without light
> Or power of movement, seemed my soul
> 'Mid onward-sloping motions infinite
> Making for one sure goal.
>
> A still salt pool, locked in with bars of sand,
> Left on the shore; that hears all night
> The plunging seas draw backward from the land
> Their moon-led waters white.
>
> A star that with the choral starry dance
> Joined not, but stood, and standing saw
> The hollow orb of moving Circumstance
> Rolled round by one fixed law. (245–56)

Tennyson makes one small move, from the passive contemplation of the aesthetic into the paralysing stillness of this now stagnant soul. The will has been removed from the absorption in art and sense in the poem because, to vary Yeats, there is nothing to be done or undone.

Of course, much is done by the poem's poet. The means of achieving this are, paradoxically, through the aesthetic itself. In the stanza, Tennyson presents something which moves to its eventual stagnancy in an unbalanced form. In visual, as well as rhythmic form, the stanza gradually diminishes in quantity towards its ending, opening wide and expansive, countering the shortening of its lines, but then slimming in size towards its final slightly offset line. The effect throughout a poem which consistently works enjambed lines against caesurae (see the third stanza above, where the metrical and syntactic pauses only coincide in the stop at the end) is to tilt the verse ever so slightly into that final trimeter line, skewing the balance of its supposedly stable self. The soul of the poem's speaker is still, yet the movement that is going on around it ('onward-sloping motions infinite' which themselves slope into the stanza's last line) has the effect of carrying the soul forward. The alternate rhyming cruelly associates the 'goal' of the surrounding motions with the 'soul' itself, and the stanzas move towards the hollowness of a position held without agency, acted upon by 'Circumstance'. The flow of the enjambed lines is in one sense the flow of the departing tide, and that is untouchable, flowing away in diminution with the stanza and under the agency only of the moon. The expanding concentric circles in the imagery too, from the spot, to the pool, to the moon, and out to the orb of circumstance itself, represent gradual modifications out to the hollowness of a world seen without centre, no matter how packed with meaning the expression of that de-centring is.

The becalmed stagnation of 'The Palace of Art' is the logical extension of something that Armstrong calls 'empathy', and Arthur Hallam calls absorption.[6] Arrogating all experience to the self, 'Lord over Nature, Lord of the visible earth / Lord of the senses five' (179–80), the speaker's mastery results only in his absorption. Tennyson pushes this to the stage that, filled full of experience, the sponge-like soul becomes stagnant. Undiscriminating, passive, quite literally full up with sensation, the soul aspires to lose self, and once it discovers that this is an emotional and logical impossibility, crisis follows. For Tennyson and Hallam, it is as logically nonsensical to imagine complete absorption in sense as it is to imagine utter dominion over the external world. 'Nature', 'visible earth', 'the senses five', is the order in which the speaker's version of his supposed dominion goes. But it is also a diminution into the trimeter which carries the final limiting of his perceptual world, from all Nature into the five senses which form the boundary of the self.

By the 1830s the associationist account of the formation of human consciousness found itself dealing with the dilemma which confronts Tennyson here. From David Hartley's *Observations on Man* of 1749, through its central positioning in the criticism and poetry of Wordsworth, to its final Benthamite consolidation in James Mill's *Analysis of the Phenomena of Human Mind* (1829),[7] this psychology would not share Tennyson's difficulty with the gift of artistic powers of empathy leading to inertia. The sense of power, though, of a resistance to the inherent passivity of such a formulation of perception, is one that the poetry and philosophical psychology of the 1830s places against the previously dominant empirical tradition. Influenced by the post-Kantian versions of synthesis coming into English thought through Coleridge and then Carlyle, Sir William Hamilton and J. F. Ferrier, early Victorian conceptions of the artist/self describe a drama of dominion over nature through sense, which rapidly finds its limits as it is worked only tentatively through a version of necessity. The gifted – poets like the speaker of *Pauline*, the character Sordello, or the Keats, Shelley or Tennyson that Arthur Hallam praised in his essay on 'The Characteristics of Modern Poetry' in 1830 – veer between the clear idea of self, and the demeaning of self in perception.

Arthur Hallam's paper 'On Sympathy', which was delivered to a meeting of the Cambridge Apostles in December 1830, also addresses this dilemma. It tries to demonstrate its author's ambivalence about the associationist account of mind that he had been reading in Hartley the previous October.[8] The paper describes a way in which we can be all, or know all, through sympathy, yet still retain our identity. It argues against the linking of self-interest with sympathy, indeed it works to posit 'the absolute disinterestedness of sympathy'. It does this by asserting the continuing identity of a unified subjective consciousness in time and place, both with reference to past and future states of mind, and out to the inference through sympathy of external objects or other conscious subjects. Through its 'subjective consciousness', the self marks its difference from external objects, while through the actions of sympathy, that self can transfer feeling out from the self and import feeling which is not its own. The dual processes of the consciousness of difference and the associative power of external influence work together in this synthetic 'principle' of sympathy.

Hallam has this to say of the modification of the subject from childhood onwards by the perception of the limits that other beings place upon it.

> Material objects were indeed perceived as external. But how? As unknown limits of the soul's activity, they were not a part of subjective consciousness, they defined, restrained, and regulated it. Still the soul attributed itself to every consciousness, past or future. At length the discovery of another being is made. Another being, another subject, conscious, having a world of feelings, like the soul's own world! How, how can the soul imagine feeling which is not its own? I repeat, she realises this conception only by considering the other being as a separate part of self, a state of her own consciousness existing apart from the present, just as imagined states exist in the future. Thus absorbing, if I may speak so, this other being into her universal nature, the soul transfers at once her own feelings and adopts those of the newcomer.[9]

This passage is based around what Hallam calls the 'ultimate fact of consciousness that the soul exists as one subject in various successive states'. These include the future, and must stretch here to include 'the other being as a separate part of self'. By its end the absorbing of the other into the self is an outward as well as inward movement. The soul 'transfers' its own feelings, and 'adopts' the other's feelings 'at once'. Material limitations are dissolved. Hallam attempts to solve the problem of the subject imagining feeling which is not its own, by the use of the analogy of future states of consciousness. The analogy follows the emphasis in Hazlitt's *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* that the future alone 'can be the object . . . of rational or voluntary pursuit', and states that the interest of the self in a 'future being' is 'one and the same thing as carrying me out of myself into the feelings of others'.[10] But these imagined future states we may take either to be in contradiction of his characterisation of identity continuing through 'various successive states' or to risk an admission that the subject is divided. The self, as agent or acted upon, must be aware of that which is separate – the future of the self, external objects or other subjects – in order that they be objects of voluntary pursuit. For Hallam, the 'absorbing' subject can exist as a being which 'transfers' parts of its own feelings, and 'adopts' those of another. The metaphor of absorption describes this action, going two ways, both out of and into a discrete self in the processes of perception.

'Absorption' is a favourite concept of Hallam's, but also one which sums up a current of thinking which carries a debate in the accounts of mind and agency in the philosophical psychology of his day through into literary criticism. W. J. Fox, for instance, reviewing Browning's *Pauline* in 1833, speaks of a 'peculiarity of modern poetry, arising from its more philosophical character, by which the internal is brought to illustrate the external, and the feeling is made an image of the object'.[11]

The philosophical issue of this peculiarity, which after Ruskin we might call 'pathetic fallacy',[12] concerns the limitation of a self only by the material difference which the self goes on to disregard in its capacity to be cast into a radically all-embracing principle of sympathy. The aesthetic issue of it is to see in the sensibility of the artist a highly developed soul, absorbing all in its powers of sympathy. In theory, there are no limits to the absorbing self, arrogating the entire sensible world to its own experience, abolishing all difference. Isobel Armstrong, then, finds that the progress of the revisions of the work of Tennyson through the 1830s inscribes a retreat from such insights. 'The Palace of Art' discards the 'empathising', absorbing soul of its 1832 version in its revision of 1842, and in doing so creates an 'unstable and uneasy' text which abandons the poem's radical exploration of 'a condition of narcissistic empathy in which the ego remains self-interested'. Recognising that it exists 'without "Love"', the soul has no option but to betray the possibilities of sense.[13] This is both a matter of metaphysical debate and logical self-betrayal, not helped by a crucial confusion in Hallam's position, where it strives towards a correct placing of agency in the process of consciousness that he is striving to describe.

Following David Shaw, Armstrong has invoked the contribution of J. F. Ferrier to this debate, in particular his 1838–9 *Blackwood's* articles on the philosophy of consciousness.[14] Ferrier's conception of consciousness is quite different from Hallam's, in that it describes a faculty of self which acts in opposition to feeling and sense. It establishes the difference of the subject and the objects of its perception, other subjects, the world and indeed the body. Perception and consciousness involve an 'act of negation', and this involves the will: 'without his will [man] is not a conscious or percipient being, not an *ego*, even in the slightest degree, without the concurrence and energy of his volition'.[15] For Ferrier, consciousness creates the self: the coming into being, through an act of will, of a subject referring to itself in the first person constitutes an entirely original act. This is the denial which recognises the difference of the self from the material world, and is a necessity, since that denial is the only way in which we may place limits upon the all-absorbing senses.

> If this act of negation never took place, the sphere of sensation would be enlarged. The sensation would reign, absorbing, undisputed, and supreme; or, in other words man would, in every case, be monopolized by the passive state into which he had been cast. The whole of his being would be usurped by the passive modification into which circumstances had moulded it. But the act of negation or consciousness puts an end to this monopoly . . . An antagonism is

now commenced against passion . . . The great unity of sensation, that is, the state which prevailed anterior to the dualization of subject and object, is broken up, and man's sensations and other passive states of existence never again possess the entireness of their first unalloyed condition – that entireness which they possessed in his infant years – that wholeness and singleness which was theirs before the act of negation broke the universe asunder into the world of man and the world of nature.[16]

Ferrier's dualism works the passage from Arthur Hallam above in reverse. The self in infancy is undeveloped just because of the absorbing abilities of sensation, and not due to its consciousness of difference. 'The sensation would reign, absorbing, undisputed and supreme.' The ego is only developed through the active powers of will, a 'law of dissent' which opposes the empiricist's 'law of causality'. The will is 'the ground-law of humanity, and lies at the bottom of the whole operation of consciousness, at the roots of the existence of the "I"'.[17]

A conception of consciousness as an 'operation', an active process worked from the mind upon the world and upon the body, provides a strong vitalist suggestion as to how to resolve Hallam's conundrum in his 'Sympathy' essay. The two-way absorption of the passive sympathising self is held in position by a destructive act, the breaking up of the 'great unity of sensation'. In his literary criticism, though, Hallam's positions, are not completely passive. This is his celebrated description of Keats and Shelley:

They are both poets of sensation rather than reflection. Susceptible of the slightest impulse from external nature, their fine organs trembled into emotion at colours, and sounds, and movements, unperceived or unregarded by duller temperaments. Rich and clear were their perceptions of visible forms; full and deep their feelings of music. So vivid was the delight attending the simple exertions of eye and ear, that it became mingled more and more with their trains of active thought, and tended to absorb their whole being into the energy of sense.[18]

The word 'absorb' again provides the two-way, and problematic, interaction of one consciousness with another in the operations of sympathy. It is stubbornly unified where Ferrier can only admit antagonistic division, yet Hallam, despite his talk of the 'universal' and the 'whole being', does make the special perceptual abilities of these poets active. The absorption of the self in Keats and Shelley is effected in 'the energy of sense'. Perception is pictured as an energetic principle, a mingling in habit of 'active thought' and sensation. The 'energy of sense' becomes progressively developed until the finely tuned perceiving machine of the

body responds with seeming passivity, but actual agency, to 'the slightest impulse from external nature'.

There is still a danger of dejection. The issue finds itself incorporated into Robert Browning's conception of two classes of poet in *Sordello*. In Book 1, the first class of poets, who are possessors, like Sordello himself, of souls 'fit to receive / Delight at every sense' (1, 465–6), wonder why they ought to fear their own enervation:

> So, homage, other souls direct
> Without, turns inward. 'How should this deject
> Thee soul?' they murmur; 'wherefore strength be quelled
> Because, its trivial accidents withheld,
> Organs are missed that clog the world, inert,
> Wanting a will, to quicken and exert,
> Like thine – existence cannot satiate,
> Cannot surprise? Laugh thou at envious fate,
> Who, from earth's simplest combination stampt
> With individuality – uncrampt
> By living its faint elemental life,
> Dost soar to heaven's complexest essence, rife
> With grandeurs, unaffronted to the last,
> Equal to being all!' (*Sordello*, 1, 535–48)

The danger for these poets is the introspection that afflicts Sordello, content with the potential of mastery alone, and therefore inactive. But Sordello's faculties are those of an energy of sense, giving access past the limitations of the organs of the body to an unclogged world where the objects are not inert. That 'inert/exert' rhyme works semantic opposites across sonic echo, showing how the poetry itself can work through this poet's divided position. Sordello possesses an energy of sense, where the active and the absorbing combine to produce the 'uncrampt' quality of perception that Hallam shows in the passivity required in the first place to enable 'trains of active thought'. The poetry of the 1830s must make a conceptual move in order to accommodate the emphasis on human will that, according to Yeats and Armstrong, causes a shirking of the radical contemplation of symbol or object. If the perceiving subject lacks individuation it will find its logical and psychic end 'without "Love"', inertly absorbed in its own isolated and powerless self.

Isolation and powerlessness are the main constituents of the predicament which faces Tennyson's Mariana. Hallam's 'energy of sense' is at once expressive of the spontaneous power that the poet may exert and doubtful about the poet's abilities to cultivate it actively. The 'vivid' delight in the

'simple exertions' of perception comes from 'fine organs' that are gifts of nature, hardly cultivated assets. They are instruments of modification, but not out of the self: the poet's inner sense is modified. Hallam, like Browning, is attempting a depiction of the poetic sensibility, rather than the forms that it produces (in *Sordello*, these forms – poems – are conspicuous by their paucity). The artistic sensibility is predominantly conceived as passive. Yet poets have powers, determined by themselves, which are demonstrated in their work. For Hallam, the poems of Tennyson show 'his power of embodying himself in ideal characters, or rather moods of character, with such extreme accuracy of adjustment, that the circumstances of the narration seem to have a natural correspondence with the predominant feeling, and as it were, to be evolved from it by assimilative force'.[19] Tennyson's *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* of 1830 does not always bear out his friend's assessment of such successful characterisation, but in its lyrical picturing of 'moods of character' it works towards absorbing sympathies, while lamenting the loss of power implicit in such a move. Tennyson was not twenty-one when he published these poems, yet they demonstrate the variety of a soul existing as one subject in various successive states. More particularly, the best of them shows a notion of artistic sympathies which includes the absorption of another's gender. 'Mariana' adopts the qualities of its subject, and transfers the writer's own, and in the abolition of sexual difference that is implicit in Hallam's thinking, produces, at the least, a metaphor for poetic disinterestedness, as it works the narration into the feeling by 'assimilative force'. The poem pictures passivity in sense, but the picturing is forceful and energetic.

'Mariana' is a poem about the absorption of 'inward sense', the palpable transition of feeling from the self both into a character, and into the landscape which surrounds her.

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

The example of Tennyson, and particularly this poem, may have been before Matthew Arnold in his 'Preface' of 1853 when he wrote of the 'monotonous' description of 'situations' from which we can derive 'no poetical enjoyment', ones 'in which a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope, or resistance; in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done'.[20] The absence of action and incident need not follow from the absence of hope or resistance. Many incidents occur in this passage, in a kind of slow-motion, their very imperceptibility adding to their significance. They are all part of a gradual process, the growth of moss, the fall of rusted nails, the growing pear, the dereliction of the sheds, and the growth of weeds over the thatched roof. But Tennyson's style and Mariana's state of mind conspire in attempting to hide this from us.

There is only one present participle in the whole stanza. The past participles combine to give the impression, not of the natural process which is going on around Mariana, but of stasis and of frozen decay. So the 'flower-plots' are 'thickly crusted', the nails are 'rusted', the sheds are 'broken', the latch is 'unlifted', the thatch is 'weeded and worn'. There is the appearance of a frozen tableau. But it is to both Tennyson's and Mariana's purpose to create the illusion of stasis, and of an order in which there can be no movement. The psychological craving for such an illusion of order, existing in sympathy between poet and heroine, is shown to be just a craving and nothing more. So the sudden movement of 'The rusted nails fell from the knots' gives us a specific activity. The ironic use to which the present participle 'clinking' is put, suggests the intrusion of an external reality, of a world continuing to live despite this absorbed subject. The 'clinking latch', which is 'unlifted', also shows nature's lack of sympathy with the heroine and, within the consciousness of a long-suffering abandonment, shows us that consciousness grasping the fact as further cause for suffering. The lover will not lift the latch, so nature cruelly mimics his actions.[21] The nervous anticipation of a reassuring, hoped-for sound, slips back into the habitual frame of mind in which the significance which nature is given reaffirms desire, but without the means to effect it. The longing ends up being reassured, because the denial of hope will prolong its emotional existence.

Tennyson positions the verbs in the stanza in order to strengthen their function as modifying terms while weakening them as a possible source of action in the poem, and in doing so conceals the controlled use of the passive mood. So, a possible statement of a visual scene, that the

flower-plots were thickly crusted with blackest moss, reads 'With blackest moss the flower-plots / Were thickly crusted'. The clinking latch was unlifted reads, 'Unlifted was the clinking latch'. And, dispensing with the verb altogether, the ancient thatch was weeded and worn, reads 'Weeded and worn the ancient thatch'. Even in the deployment of the active mood, the passive suggests itself in the use of past-participle modifiers. The nails which fell are 'rusted', and the sheds 'looked sad and strange', where the copular verb 'looked' approaches the syntactic function of a participle. The apparent redundancy of such specific pointers to alienation in 'sad and strange' serves to reinforce the imaginative activity in which poet and heroine are modifying simple nouns, and, in the effect of the poem, giving them a controlled emotional significance.

Critics have found in this virtuoso use of participles evidence of the influence of the practice of Keats, one of Arthur Hallam's poets of sensation rather than reflection. Harold Bloom gives this first stanza as an example of the 'naturalistic particularities of Keats', and Herbert Tucker states that while Tennyson 'learned much about the past participle from his reading of Keats', it is used as an 'inert part of speech . . . rendering a state of process without apparent agency or issue'. Both agree that the interaction between modifier and modified lends itself to the depiction of 'particularities' (Bloom) in a 'cumulative permanence that makes each scenic feature preternaturally vivid' (Tucker).[22] Bloom finds that behind this, and beyond Keats, we have a source of some 'trouble' in reading the poem: '. . . we are troubled by the impression that what we confront is not nature, but phantasmagoria, imagery of absence despite the apparent imagery of presence. The troublesomeness comes from a sense of excess, from a kind of imagery of limitation that seems to withdraw meaning even as it thickly encrusts meaning.'[23] This 'kind of imagery of limitation' I take to be a description of the discreteness of the objects portrayed in this stanza, and the specificity of the modifiers attached to them. The limitation that Bloom, paradoxically, observes giving a sense of excess, is part of a relentless modification of natural particularities which does not ask of the reader that he or she be troubled by the seeming absence of a natural scene. The natural cannot remain untainted by eye or ear in the processes of perception. We are in a mental landscape, which if not phantasmagoria, is the product of a mind (Tennyson's and Mariana's) aware of the effects of perception acting upon the phenomena perceived, as well as the effects of the phenomena acting upon the perceiver. This is

Hallam's absorption in the energy of sense, the transference and adoption of feeling. Bloom's trouble may have been Keats' trouble, but it is not Tennyson's.

The grammatical relation between modifier and word, adjective and adverb on noun and verb, has aesthetic as well as phenomenological implications. It is an instance of the demonstration of an active power on the part of both perceiver and poet on the inert objects of nature. In 'Mariana', this is rather more than Bloom's giving and then withdrawing of meaning to naturalistic particularities. Crucially, it represents the role that the will plays in mediating between the passive and active elements at work in perception, between sensation and thought. Eric Griffiths reminds us that Immanuel Kant guards the frontier between sensation and thought, a frontier that Hallam attempts to cross, and Bloom and Isobel Armstrong, for instance, find logical difficulty in recognising. Griffiths says that nineteenth-century idealism works from a Kantian realisation that 'it is not possible for human beings to have sense-experiences unmediated by certain categories of thought, so that skeptical arguments to the effect that all our terms for the world might systematically distort our experiences of the world must be invalid'.[24] Idealism limits itself as it refuses to allow the logical impossibility that the active power, the organising, aesthetic intelligence of the poet-perceiver, is distinct from the passive power of the perceiver of the natural given. Given this synthetic relationship, the modifier is crucial in formulating 'terms for the world', because it is the means by which meaning and feeling are actively mediated in the processes of perception and representation. In Kantian terms, this is how we come to understanding:

> What transcendental logic, on the other hand, teaches, is how we bring to concepts, not representations, but the *pure synthesis* of representations. What must first be given – with a view to the *a priori* knowledge of all objects – is the *manifold* of pure intuition; the second factor involved is the *synthesis* of this manifold by means of the imagination. But even this does not yet yield knowledge. The concepts which give *unity* to this pure synthesis, and which consist solely in the representation of this necessary synthetic unity, furnish the third requisite for the knowledge of an object; and they rest on the understanding.[25]

In a poem like 'Mariana', the operations of the heroine's imagination upon the manifold take it as given, and then make of it understanding. We come to understand the objects which surround her as she understands them, as they are modified and given feeling according to her mood. The mind acts upon the world as it is acted upon in return in

these operations of the imagination. Through imagination, a volitional power here, both are modified.

The notion of modification is crucial for Romantic aesthetics, since it emphasises the agency of perceiver and poet. 'Mariana' is a mood piece, and that mood is dependent on the quality of its modifiers. For an object to be modified, it is necessary that its existing qualities be retained as it is transformed. For a sensation to be modified, it needs to be passively received (as external object, emotion or even word) and then actively transformed in the processes of perception. Modifications are transformations: dependent on natural facts, they are held in balance between the given and its imaginative transformation both in the operations of the understanding and the work of art. This balance is one in which the philosophy of action meets aesthetics in English Romantic thought before Tennyson and Hallam. William Hazlitt, for instance, tells us,

> It is of the very nature of the imagination to change the order in which things have been impressed on the senses, and to connect the same properties with different objects, and different properties with the same objects; to combine our original impressions in all possible forms, and to modify these impressions themselves to a very large degree. Man without this would not be a rational agent: he would be below the dullest and most stupid brute.[26]

Having combined our impressions of objects, the modifications we make of them are evidence of our reason and will.

In Dr Johnson's *Dictionary,* the verb 'to modify' is given in two senses: 'To change the form or accidents of anything; to shape', and 'to soften or moderate'. The *Oxford English Dictionary* repeats these, but gives other meanings to 'modify' and 'modification'. It finds an important obsolete meaning of the word, last recorded in Sir William Hamilton's *Metaphysics*, that great early nineteenth-century attempt to introduce the Kantian system to British philosophy: 'The word *modification* is properly the bringing of a thing into a certain mode of existence, but it is very commonly employed for the mode of existence itself.'[27] The word 'modification', in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, finds its active, creating, sense, merging into the contemporary sense of effecting changes in an already existing thing. The third *OED* definition has 'The action of making changes in an object without altering its essential nature or character; the state of being thus changed; partial alteration'. The sixth definition gives its connected grammatical usage, 'Qualification or limitation of the sense of one word, phrase, etc'.

Modification is an aid to the understanding, but one which involves a necessarily active transformation effected by the imagination in the synthesis of the manifold.

In poetry, the poet is both agent and acted upon. In Shelley's preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, the concept of modification is brought to a position where it occupies a central role in discussing the subjective and the objective in relation to the poet.

> A poet is the combined product of such internal powers as modify the nature of others; and of such external influences as excite and sustain these powers; he is not one but both. Every man's mind is, in this respect, modified by all the objects of nature and art; by every word and every suggestion which he ever admitted to act upon his consciousness; it is the mirror upon which all forms are reflected, and in which they compose one form. Poets, not otherwise than philosophers, painters, sculptors, and musicians, are, in one sense, the creators, and, in another, the creations, of their age.[28]

Shelley pre-empts the distinction which Browning makes, in his essay on him of 1852, between the objective and subjective poet, effecting a dissociation that Shelley is at pains to unite. Browning's objective poet attempts 'to reproduce things external . . . with an immediate reference, in every case, to the common eye and apprehension of his fellow men', and 'has the double faculty of seeing external objects more clearly, widely, and deeply, than is possible to the average mind, at the same time that he is so acquainted and in sympathy with its narrower comprehension'. Limitation is necessary so that his poetry 'can combine into an intelligible whole'. The subjective poet, on the other hand, 'prefers to dwell upon those external scenic appearances which strike out most abundantly and uninterruptedly his inner light and power, [and] selects that silence of the earth and sea in which he can best hear the beating of his individual heart'.[29] Browning makes common Romantic distinctions, but Shelley had attempted to realise some sort of combination of the two. The two-way movement of the word 'modification' assists him in this enterprise. The poet can modify, and is modified. Passive reception can result in poetic agency.

The word shuttles back and forth between Wordsworth and Coleridge. Coleridge's description of his first acquaintance with Wordsworth's poetry, in *Biographia Literaria*, praises the ability to modify the objects of sense as one of his friend's prime poetic virtues.

> It was the union of deep feeling with profound thought; the fine balance of truth in observing with the imaginative faculty in modifying the objects observed;

and above all the original gift of spreading the tone, the atmosphere and with it the depth and height of the ideal world, around forms, incidents and situations of which, for the common view, custom had bedimmed all the lustre, had dried up the sparkle and the dew-drops.[30]

There is some awkwardness here: it is the perception (or observation) of the object which is modified in making a representation of it, not the object itself. Coleridge attempts to place his friend's poetry in a vital position where the poet need not invent unnatural objects, or discover new forms in nature. The power of modification provides the originality with which the dull objects of custom are re-presented.

Seventeen years earlier, in his 'Preface' to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth had used the word in more limited ways. The passages from Shelley and the *Biographia* are written very much under the sense of reaction to mechanical accounts of mental process, a reaction first critically initiated by Kant. Shelley and Coleridge are concerned with asserting active poetic power over observed objects, even while admitting the action of those objects upon the self. Shelley states that a 'man's mind . . . is modified . . . by every word and every suggestion which he ever admitted to act upon his consciousness'. But this admission is a willing surrender to fact, and the word 'suggestion' like the word 'association' comes from the mechanistic pleasure and pain psychology which was to cause so many logical problems for Arthur Hallam. Wordsworth is much more under the direct impress of the associationist ideas of David Hartley than his contemporary Coleridge, and his successor Shelley, would allow themselves to be.

Wordsworth characterises his writing as not beginning with 'a distinct purpose formally conceived'. 'Habits of meditation' are what prompt the feelings of the poet, so that the objects, or rather their 'descriptions', 'will be found to carry with them a *purpose*' (Wordsworth's italics). The realisation of an art with a purpose is achieved by a mind in a state of regulated associative habits. This applies a limitation, by degrees, never absolute, to the active powers of the poet. He must be passive before certain unwilled elements in his mind; these can be cultivated, but only achieve significance when they attain the status of habit. So, Wordsworth's definition of poetry does not have its origin in an attempt to place the position of the poem only as it can be considered as a finished formal entity, but in a concern with the agency of the poet:

For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: and though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached were never

produced by any variety of subjects but by a man who, being possessed by a more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply. For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings; and, as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives to each other, we discover what is really important to men, so by the repetition and continuance of this act, our feelings will be connected with important subjects, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced, that, by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits, we shall describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature, and in such connection with each other, that the understanding of the Reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified.[31]

This is an attempt to contain the quickness of spontaneous feelings themselves within the bounds of a single sentence. It appears to catch these feelings in a slow-motion which shows us the complexity of their process in action. The terms used to describe this creative process swivel between the active and the passive. The starting point, 'more than usual organic sensibility', is a given, but from that point, the uses or 'purposes' of it are described. The first clause gives us a taste of the difficulty of the proposed description. 'Influxes of feeling' (sensibility passive) are 'modified and directed' (sensibility active), by 'thoughts which are . . . the representatives of all our past feelings' (sensibility passive). The sentence continues with an attempt at a delicately balanced picture of the creative mind: contemplation of 'relation' (active) and the repetition and continuance' of this contemplation, lead to the feelings being 'connected with important subjects' (active to passive: passive mood, 'connected'), thus producing 'habits of mind' (passive mood), which result in the poet 'obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits' (triumph of the receptive, passive state). The end of the sentence suggests a 'purpose' for such a product, and the reader benefits from a moral, and psychologically therapeutic, improvement.

Wordsworth's description of the poetic mind differs only from a Hartleyan model in the position that is given to the active will as an initiator of the associative process of writing poetry. It follows associationism in that it is founded on a notion of mind governed entirely by past experience. Experience is gained by the reception, through sensation and in a particular order, of a finite number of ideas which will then mechanically govern how we understand our perceptions and our desires. Wordsworth touches on the same problem that would face Arthur Hallam in his 'Sympathy' paper: poetry is directed entirely by

the self's past experience, an experience governed by illimitable possibilities of sense. The consequence can be the imprisonment in sense that Browning warns of in *Sordello*, which results in a deterministic acceptance of a passive, receiving state. This comes fraught with all of the ethical as well as logical dangers that confront Hallam and Tennyson.

Later in the 'Preface', Wordsworth speaks of the 'multitude of causes' which 'blunt the discriminating powers of mind', making it 'unfit . . . for all voluntary exertion'. Imprisoned within a landscape which is completely modified by her psychic state, Tennyson's Mariana finds that all the discriminating powers of her mind contribute to the active emphasis of her involuntary, inert state. Much exertion is expended in achieving this. A. Dwight Culler states that in 'Mariana', 'the chief resource in fusing subject and object is the utter absence in the poem of any guiding, organizing, or generalizing intelligence. The description consists entirely of isolated, atomistic detail.'[32] However, 'Mariana' is concerned with pointing out the imaginative agency in a state of psychic disorder. The first stanza ends with a refrain containing the same active verb, repeated three times. The refrain is part of the 'description' which the poem contains, an isolated, yet hardly atomistic detail. The narrative voice, 'She only said', would appear to come from some sort of organising intelligence, the 'only' bearing all the weight of a generalisation. This activity, of course, draws attention to itself as severely limited, and with reference to the desire for death, ultimately limiting. As John Hollander says, the echoing capabilities of the device of the refrain develop an important 'attribute of echo: decay or diminution. Mere reiteration can lessen significance.' Following the strategies of the poem, the illusion of change in the refrain throughout the poem serves to reinforce the changeless repetition, what Hollander calls 'predictability and redundancy',[33] and it asks us to look in vain for any sign of physical movement.

The lack of relief in incident, hope or resistance results from the prolonged distress caused by the absorption of self in sense, where endurance is all. Arthur Hallam did not find the motives and actions of his friend's poetry of endurance 'monotonous'. In a letter to W. B. Donne, he compares 'Mariana' with 'Mariana in the South', voicing a distinction which we feel may be a paraphrase of Tennyson's own thoughts about the poem.

> You will, I think, agree with me that the essential & distinguishing character of the conception requires in the Southern Mariana a greater lingering on the outward circumstances, and a less palpable transition of the poet into

Mariana's feelings, than was the case in the former poem. Were this not implied in the subject, it would be a fault: 'an artist', as Alfred is wont to say, 'ought to be lord of the five senses', but if he lacks the inward sense which reveals to him what is inward in the heart, he has left out the part of Hamlet in the play. In this meaning, I think the objection sometimes made to a poem, that it is too picturesque, is a just objection . . .[34]

In 'The Palace of Art', the soul, 'Lord of the senses five', was lacking in the inward sense which would prevent its eventual 'stagnation'. Hallam's letter to Donne continues by saying that 'it is the business of the poetic language to paint'. In the *'palpable* transition of the poet' into the feelings of the character we have a process of absorption where the character assumes the poet. 'The inward sense which reveals to him what is inward in the heart' is necessarily complementary to the perception of external objects. Inward sense informs them and is associated with the motivation and the actions of the poet who represents. We gain a method of representation through which we can see the action, and its motives, even if that which is represented cannot act its way out of the situation. The inward sense becomes the character. George Brimley, a critic to whom Tennyson took the unusual step of writing in thanks for an essay on his work, objected to this while acknowledging the palpable transition of feeling: 'The suffering is, so to speak, distinct and individual, but the woman who suffers is vague and indistinct . . . all the individuality is bestowed upon the landscape in which she is placed.'[35] Making suffering 'distinct and individual' can be taken as a poetic virtue, unwittingly held in Brimley's ethical objections. The seeming absence of distinct human agency in a poem such as 'Mariana' is an absence willingly acknowledged to be present in the poem through the 'energy of sense'.

Hallam's 'energy of sense' is apparent in the modifications that the poem, its central character and poet effect on the dramatic world of the moated grange and the objects of nature which form the imagery of the poem. This is more than either Bloom's phantasmagoria or Culler's 'isolated, atomistic detail'. The mode of the poem is one of sympathy, between character and nature, and poet and character. In that mode, a synthesis is effected between the passive and the active. In poetic terms, we can see it gaining its most satisfying manifestation in the sounds of the poem. Its rhythms, in strict stanzaic form, continuously stress the importance of repetition in this landscape. Just as the rhythm of a poem can function only when vocalised against time, so the repetitions of the refrain, the forward and backward echoes of rhyme, and the consistent

modifications and thematic returns to specific sounds, exist in an active, temporal, medium. We are given an echo of Mariana's state of mind, a mind which operates against the very time upon which it appears to lay such stress in its passive state.

In Hazlitt's terms, for all her passivity, Mariana is changing the order in which things have been impressed on her senses. The sense of hearing works through a sound in this poem which acts against time, vocalised in strict time. Stanzas two to three bring us from night through day to morning. The gradual process is accompanied by the discrete sounds of the various separate parts of that process. The bats are 'flitting' in 'thickest dark'. Sight gives way to sound. The 'night-fowl' crows in the middle of sleep, waking Mariana. Sleep gives way to sound. The cock crows before light, and the oxen low in the dark. In the absence of light, the mind fixes upon sounds. In the half-light of dawn or dusk, sound signifies movement, and movement follows from an external agency which announces itself with a sonic rush.

The fifth stanza has a rare rhythmic ambiguity which announces a surprisingly unTennysonian word:

> And ever when the moon was low,
> And the shrill winds were up and away,
> In the white curtain, to and fro,
> She saw the gusty shadow sway.
> But when the moon was very low,
> And wild winds bound within their cell,
> The shadow of the poplar fell
> Upon her bed, across her brow. (49–56)

The definite articles in the second and third lines here appear uncertain as to their quantity and a rhythmic stumble falls on the word 'shrill'. This word occurs five times in total, exclusively associated with female characters, in Tennyson's 1830 and 1832 volumes, but only six other uses in the whole of Tennyson's poetry are listed in Baker's *Concordance*. Of these six, one occurs in 'Morte d'Arthur', in a landscape similar to 'Mariana' with 'a wind that shrills / All night in a waste land, where no one comes, / Or hath come, since the making of the world' (201–3).[36] The lines from 'Mariana' and 'Morte d'Arthur' alert us to this rare effect by doubling the sibilants, with 'shrill winds' and 'shrills'. In 'Mariana' this is further emphasised by the replacement of the regular iambs of the previous line with the spondee on 'shrill winds' and a final lift into a closing anapaest, 'up and away'. A rhythmic uncertainty in the lines

occurs just as the poem is describing vigorous movement. This line may not be, as Christopher Ricks says, 'the only instance in the poem of so vigorous a rhythm':[37] the ambiguity, rhythmic and semantic, works against the vigorous representation of such movement. Thus the lengthening of the line into its final five syllables, 'were up and away', does not give an impression of unfettered power. Rather, that power is constrained by a rhythm which does not take the opportunity to mimic the activity contained in the line.

A semantic ambiguity, thus established, is carried into the next line. When the winds are low, she sees the shadow in the moving curtains. But with the rhythmic uncertainty in the second line, a sense is momentarily given of the shrill winds not up and away, but entangled in, and tangling, the curtain. The powers of nature are checked in the verse, the effectiveness of their agency suddenly doubted. The line just as suddenly disentangles itself, with nothing less than a reference to rhythmic movements themselves, 'to and fro'. Cut off from the rest of the sentence, 'to and fro / She saw the gusty shadow sway', seems an impudent courting of shrill sibilants in the return to the rhythmic equilibrium which will soon imprison the wild winds. The damage is allowed to stand, and the complex synthesising power of the transitions and adoptions, modifications and absorptions, worked out in the relationship between nature, its sounds and those of the poem itself, are placed on an unsure footing. This is more than a mere technical hiccup, it is evidence of sympathies worked with a disturbed and inconsistent mind. The sounds of the first line of this extract, 'And ever when the wind was low' (taking the word 'whenever' apart, reversing it to suggest not placing in time but perpetuity), are picked up four lines later, 'But when the moon was very low'. The suggestions of perpetuity in 'ever' are challenged in 'very low'. The near anagram (ever/very) shows us degrees of lowness and an acknowledgement of difference in what was formerly held to be static. The poem is absorbed in its subject, showing a disinterested sympathy in the sonic representation of the heroine's plight.

The poem's final two stanzas give us a virtuoso conducting of creaks, buzzes, shrieks, ghostly footsteps and voices, chirps and ticks. All contribute to 'confound / Her sense' (76–7). One of the melodies in this confusing music is unnamed, but it represents a return to, and some sort of resolution of, one of the poem's dominant notes. This is 'the sound / Which to the wooing wind aloof / The poplar made' (74–6). Much has been made of this poplar in the poem. Harold Bloom, for instance, dismisses the notion that it is a phallic symbol as 'grotesque', preferring

to read it as 'the Sublime . . . an element of repression'.[38] However, this poplar, even if it is only a shadow, does present Mariana with some physical interaction with the natural scene that is shown around her. The insubstantial interaction, distinct from the imaginative interaction which provides the poem's energy of sense, is the closest Mariana comes to the sense of touch. Though realised in a tactile, we might say Keatsian, immediacy, thickly-crusted flower-plots or rusted nails are never touched in the poem. The imaginative medium in which these concrete objects are perceived and then modified by their epithets, requires the maintenance of distance. The poplar, 'All silver-green with gnarled bark', is no less set apart as a discrete detail of the scene, despite the roughened edges in the verse which the sinewed gnarled bark suggests. Hallam quoted Tennyson as saying that 'an artist . . . ought to be lord of the five senses'. There is no smelling or tasting in Mariana's synaesthetic perceptions. And the touching is of a shadow only, and that shadow a 'grotesque' parody of the shape of a man, 'Upon her bed, across her brow'.

For a poem which is so concerned with concrete detail and distinct modifications of that detail, 'the sound' of the poplar, along with the accompaniment of the wind, is strangely imprecise. Other than Mariana's own voice at the end of the final stanza, it is the last sound presented to us in this poem. The key to its significance is in its accompaniment. Herbert Tucker has pointed to the importance of 'l' sounds in the poem,[39] but 'Mariana' has a finer, and more significant repetition of one accompanying sound. At a rough count, there are at least sixty-three occurrences of the letter 'w' in its eighty-four lines. Many of the poem's alliterative effects depend upon its sound: 'Weeded and worn . . . aweary, aweary [seven times] . . . I would that I were dead [six times] . . . cold winds woke . . . wild winds bound within their cell . . . wooing wind . . . Was sloping towards his western bower . . .' The sound that the poplar makes is to the accompaniment of the 'wooing wind', and the sound 'woo' comes again in the last line of every stanza, 'I *would* that I were dead.' In her frustration, Mariana's complaint is that she is aware of existing distinct from an absorbing nature, and is not being wooed: as Christopher Ricks says, 'the wind woos the poplar, but nobody woos Mariana'.[40] Like the speaker in 'The Palace of Art', she is 'without Love'. The repetitions and mocking modulations of this sound create their own pattern of stasis yet movement in and around that stasis, where the seeming passivity at the centre of the scene is conceived in a highly organised activity. The activity belongs both to Tennyson

and Mariana. We can take the 'aloof' poplar to be the poet, making shadowy contact while maintaining a mode of disinterested sympathy.

This is Browning's description of his own *Paracelsus*:

> it is an attempt, probably more novel than happy, to reverse the method usually adopted by writers whose aim is to set forth any phenomenon of the mind or the passions by the operations of persons or events; and that, instead of having a recourse to an external machinery of incidents to create and evolve the crisis I desire to produce, I have ventured to display somewhat minutely the mood itself in its rise and progress, and have suffered the agency by which it is influenced and determined, to be generally discernible in its effects alone, and subordinate throughout, if not altogether excluded: and for this reason. I have endeavoured to write a poem, not a drama . . .[41]

Browning characterises the poetry of the 1830s in terms of the poet's attempt to absorb the mood of his subject, and to show us agency only discernible through 'its effects alone'. Plot may be dispensed with in something which conceives of itself as a new poetry. Then the poet can share in the virtues praised by Arthur Hallam: 'his power of embodying himself in ideal characters, or rather moods of character'. The mood is that which effects the modifications of all that might give rise to it. By this perceptual process, by portraying the mood itself in order to set forth phenomena of mind or passion, the poems of Tennyson and Browning in the 1830s establish a new poetry which asks what might happen if the whole being was absorbed in the energy of sense.

The emphasis on will meets an emphasis on the new. In Robert Browning's early poetry, the awareness of the need to be 'new' lies at the basis of something that might be described as working under the impress of an urge to modernity. Browning's modernism, if he were to understand the term, is something that he himself might place at the beginnings of the Renaissance, as he does in *Sordello*. In the 1830s the emphasis on the new is something which can only come about with the sense of actively bringing novelties into the world. The modifying power of the poet gifted with powers of will can do this, and he needs freedom. In his version of the Kantian synthesis, J. F. Ferrier distinguishes between 'two species of existence', the natural and consciousness, and between them we have a mediating power.

> Human Will comes into play, and has its proper place of abode; and this new phenomenon, lying in the very roots of the act of Consciousness, dislocates the whole natural machinery of man, gives a new and underived turn to his

development, and completely overthrows with regard to him, the whole law and doctrine of causality; for Will (as contradistinguished from, and opposed to, wish or desire) is either a word of no meaning or intelligibility at all, or else it betokens a primary absolute commencement – an underivative act.[42]

The underivative act is a new thing, in Ferrier's terms a violent overthrow of causality as consciousness meets it and strives to form its own individuality. In early Browning, this working around the new, of finding new forms of will, creates as many problems for him as absorption does for Tennyson and Hallam. *Pauline, Paracelsus* and *Sordello* all contemplate the new, but only as a preparation for it, establishing the sensibility that can will the new, if never the actual forms it might take.

The sense of an underivative newness can cause anxiety for those who are most conscious of practising it, where special abilities or gifts may as often lead to inertia and weakness as to power. This is the opinion of himself held by the poet/speaker of Browning's *Pauline*:

> I am made up of an intensest life,
> Of a most clear idea of consciousness
> Of self, distinct from all its qualities,
> From all affections, passions, feelings, powers;
> And thus far it exists, if tracked, in all:
> But linked, in me, to self-supremacy,
> Existing as a centre to all things,
> Most potent to create and rule and call
> Upon all things to minister to it;
> And to a principle of restlessness
> Which would be all, have, see, know, taste, feel, all –
> This is myself; and I should thus have been
> Though gifted lower than the meanest soul. (268–80)

The passage swivels unstably between vocabularies of causality and unfettered power: 'distinct . . . tracked . . . linked . . . self-supremacy . . . potent . . . rule . . . minister . . . restlessness'. It is deeply anxious about the direction of the modifying powers of this poet. He suffers from 'a principle of restlessness / Which would be all, have, see, know, taste, feel, all –'. At the same time, he wishes to remain conscious of the distinctness of self. Like Arthur Hallam's absorbing poet, or Tennyson's 'Lord of the senses five', Browning's speaker is caught on the restless dilemma which confounds self and action, and the compromise of the potential of self in the pursuit of action. But the passage is a facing up to the options which would be open to a poetry which can pursue the absorption of all sense, or remain 'potent to create and rule and call'.

Pauline, subtitled *A Fragment of a Confession*, does not resolve these options. Earlier in the poem, the speaker confesses to dejection:

> I am sad and fain
> Would give up all to be but where I was,
> Not high as I had been if faithful found,
> But low and weak yet full of hope, and sure
> Of goodness as of life – that I would lose
> All this gay mastery of mind, to sit
> Once more with them, trusting in truth and love
> And with an aim – not being what I am. (81–8)

Herbert Tucker has written well of the last line here: 'Browning interrupts himself in line 88 with a reminder that he is too interesting for the tautological circuit: being what he is he cannot resume former aims. The argument of *Pauline* is that this discrepancy, the difference between "am" and "aim", is a blessing in disguise.'[43] This is well observed, and can be taken further. 'Aim' is an anagram of 'I am', and the circling of the passage around the verb to be ('I am . . . I was . . . I had been . . . not being . . . I am') is a circling around the holding of the self, formed, distinct and separate from the world which may be the object of its modifications.

Later in the poem, Browning cannot resist the anagram again, where the poet compares himself to Shelley:

> 'And though I feel how low I am to him,
> Yet I aim not even to catch a tone
> Of harmonies he called profusely up . . .' (214–16)

Aspiration and being are caught up in the fear of failure implicit in all action, and *Pauline* itself never overcomes its enervating distrust of action. J. S. Mill complained in the margins of his copy of *Pauline* that the speaker was 'always talking of being *prepared* – what for ?' and Browning, reading the annotation, replied, 'Why, "that's telling," as the schoolboys say.'[44] J. Hillis Miller has described this provisional state as coming from a poetry which has 'Massive substance, a seething diffused energy' but is made only in forms which 'are possible, not actual. The soul is seething with an immense power of life, but so far is not actually anything or anybody.'[45] The poem is working its principle of restlessness around the options available to its poet, to modify or be modified, to retain the distinctness of self, to become an absorbing or antagonistic influence in or on the world. Unfortunately for its readers and its speaker, the only evidence of power is in its conservation: a 'restlessness of passion' afflicts

the poet, and he only finds 'the sole proof / Of yet commanding will is in that power / Repressed' (620–3).

An early supporter of Browning, W. J. Fox, had this to say of the practice he found *Pauline* demonstrating:

> The soul has its seasons, which may be sung with all their contrasted, yet connected phenomena, and with as many an episode to be naturally and gracefully interwoven, as the solar year. There is an art, not less felicitous than that which produces characters like a Creator, and links events together like a providence, and makes its combinations tend to the premeditated result like an overruling fate or destiny, in that which traces the growth of an individual mind, the influences upon it of things external, the powers unfolding themselves within it with all their harmonies and discords, the ties of association flowing hither and thither like the films of a spider's web, yet strong as iron bands, its prevailing tendencies and frequent irregularities, with all that makes it a microcosm, and that of mind, the true and essential universe worthy of observation and interest.[46]

These ties of association, spider's web and iron bands, are what the poetry and aesthetics of Browning and Hallam engage with in the 1830s, working their way out towards a position where they might be able to reconcile 'am' and 'aim'. Browning's solution, like Tennyson's, is to move towards dramatic poetry, but a dramatic poetry based on character rather than plot.

Browning does not achieve his new poetry without a struggle, and certainly not without struggle on the part of his readers. As John Woolford has pointed out, Browning's poetry of the mood itself in its rise and progress is reliant on its relationship with its reader in order to develop its meaning fully. Writing about the implications of this for a poetry which celebrates its own 'difficulty', Donald Latané paraphrases the poem's opening line: 'who will may hear the story, although volition becomes not a quality of the text, but an asset in the reader'. The reader is a kind of co-worker in the enterprise of the poems, someone who should assume the kind of familiarity with the poet's work that enables him or her to speak in the language of one of the poet's own family. Latané states that many 'listener/narratees in Romantic verse seem to be on the verge of sleep . . . but Browning's audience is an active one of poets . . . and these are by definition men awake to the world'.[47] Sordello's long speech which thinks of the familiarity, the family relationship, of audience and poet is spoken to the yawning Salinguerra who turns out to be his father. According to Sordello, poet and reader need to achieve a position where they can

'. . . attain to talk as brothers talk,
In half-words, call things by half-names, no balk
From discontinuing old aids.
. . . Leave the mere rude
Explicit details! 'tis but brother's speech
We need, speech where an accent's change gives each
The other's soul – no speech to understand
By former audience: need was then to expand,
Expatiate – hardly were we brothers! true –
Nor I lament my small remove from you,
Nor reconstruct what stands already. Ends
Accomplished turn to means: my art intends
New structure from the ancient . . .
. . . Ne'ertheless
E'en he must stoop contented to express
No tithe of what's to say – the vehicle
Never sufficient: but his work is still
For faces like the faces that select
The single service I am bound effect . . .'
(v, 624–6; 634–43; 651–6)

Woolford's comment sums up the response of many in Sordello's audience of would-be brothers, the British public 'who like me not' (*The Ring and the Book*, I, 410): 'It is hard to believe that any intention in literary history has ever failed so badly.'[48] The narrator of *Sordello*, too, knows as much, and comes in ten lines later with an expression of exasperated sympathy for his hero's efforts at communication: 'My poor Sordello!' But Sordello is describing no more than that to which Browning or Hallam or Tennyson might aspire, a sympathy with mood through the accents of speech which could give to character, poet and reader 'each / The other's soul'. The half-words, half-names, the accent's change of a brother's speech, these are parts of a description of language dependent on an intimate knowledge of pre-established contexts and voices. The accent is the fall of the stress in poetry, and the speech is the sounding of the poetry. Sordello must attempt to console himself for the possible grief caused by the absence of speaker from reader. Browning's poet need not 'lament my small remove from you', he has no need to 'reconstruct' the details of extraneous contexts, since those contexts can exist in the mood pictured in the speech which is the verse. The 'external machinery of incidents' is unnecessary in what becomes a self-consciously innovative process: 'my art *intends* / New structure from the ancient'. It is, in the terms of Ferrier, both derived from established form, and determined by its own underivative consciousness of self. It is 'New'.

This is Sordello's account of a rhythm of will, the reconstruction of accents which will embody the consciousness of character and self. Nevertheless, he knows that it requires the accommodation of the lack of power, the compromise into contentment of expressing less than a 'tithe of what's to say'. 'The vehicle' – the poem, speech, written language, performance – is 'Never sufficient', but it is 'For faces'. These faces are the faces in the audience from which the poet does not lament that he is at a small remove. Earlier in the poem, in Book II, such a difficulty was to result in the enervation of Sordello, as he watched the ignorance of his audience before his new art.

> . . . perceptions whole, like that he sought
> To clothe, reject so pure a work of thought
> As language; thought may take perception's place
> But hardly co-exist in any case,
> Being its mere presentment – of the whole
> By parts, the simultaneous and the sole
> By the successive and the many. Lacks
> The crowd perception? painfully it tacks
> Thought to thought, which Sordello, needing such,
> Has rent perception into: its to clutch
> And reconstruct – his office to diffuse,
> Destroy: as hard, then, to obtain a Muse
> As to become Apollo. (II, 589–601)

The narrator here works a delicate play around Kantian notions of perception, synthesis, understanding and language which is ignored by attempts to enlist Browning as a precursor of contemporary theories of deferment and difference in language.[49] Browning's 'presentment' is a representation in thought and language which never pretends that it can catch perceptions whole. Arthur Hallam's poet of sensation rather than reflection is not hamstrung by such difficulty, having an energy of sense which can overcome the obstructions in mind and body which make the metonymies, metaphors and classifications of representation in thought and language necessary. The painful sluggishness of the audience which needs to be led through reconstructing contexts can see little of the diffusing, destroying poet of newness. That poet, though, needs form in order to impress this reshaping modifying power. He will find that his 'art intends / New structure from the ancient' in Book V, just before he dies in failure. His intentions cannot be achieved by him.

Yet Browning succeeds where Sordello fails. These are the lines from near the end of Sordello's speech to Salinguerra again:

> Ne'ertheless
> E'en he must stoop contented to express
> No tithe of what's to say – the vehicle
> Never sufficient: but his work is still
> For faces like the faces that select
> The single service I am bound effect . . .

These lines are from 'My Last Duchess', published just two years later:

> Who'd stoop to blame
> This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
> In speech – (which I have not) – to make your will
> Quite clear to such an one, and say, 'Just this
> Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
> Or there exceed the mark' – and if she let
> Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
> Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
> – E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
> Never to stoop. (34–43)

For Sordello, expression becomes a matter of contented stooping. For Browning's Duke of Ferrara, such stooping is something that one who can exercise power will never do. The Duke's terms for this are odd, though. His confession is not so much of a breakdown in marital communications, but a refusal to communicate at all. He protests that he lacks 'skill / In speech', skill which takes up the rhyme of what it could achieve, 'to make your will / Quite clear'. In this monologue Browning is presenting, in a fully developed form, exactly the new poetry that *Sordello* envisages, the new structure from the ancient that can take the literary form of a previous era, the eighteenth-century heroic couplet, and use it in a poem so conscious of its modernity. This form can then explore mood, in its rise and progress, attempting to catch an accent's change in order to give the soul of its character. That soul is one which has mastery over all around it, which can stand in front of the picture of a former wife, and complain of the lack of skill to make his will clear in speech, just as the poet shows him in a chilling clarity.

Poet, poem and character (and auditor and reader) are shown at work in what may be the insufficient vehicle of the poem's couplets presenting us with perception and thought. These couplets, which 'My Last Duchess' and *Sordello* share, are the vehicle of expression to which the poems stoop, which present the medium for it to work its agency. Speaking of a passage from Book III of *Sordello*, Herbert Tucker compares its use of couplets to 'My Last Duchess', saying that they are employed in a more

'wilfully outrageous' way. He states that 'Browning's syntactical structures overwhelm the apparent structure of the rhymed couplet, as he will have them do in the interests of character drawing with "My Last Duchess"'.[50] The overwhelming of rhymed couplets is exactly the diffusing and destroying that Sordello had envisaged in Book II, just as the decision to use them can also be the contented compromise of Book V. From *Sordello* to dramatic monologue, Browning finds just how much he should stoop to give us his accent 'in the interests of character drawing'.

Sordello shows us that matters of agency, power and will are preeminently matters of poetic form for its hero and author. Where 'My Last Duchess' contains the Duke's confession of an inability to express himself, matched only by an unwillingness to do so, Sordello has to work through into the compromise of expression into which he might stoop. For Sordello, like the speaker of *Pauline*, or the restless intellect of Paracelsus, consciousness of his own mastery does not issue in power effectively used. All of these characters suffer from a principle of restlessness, from which they are doomed to fail. Edward Dowden, in an account of the poem which gained Browning's approval, says that it shows 'the failure of an attempt to manifest the infinite scope, and realise the infinite energy of *will*, the inability of a great nature to deploy all its magnificent resources, and by compelling men in some way or other to acknowledge that nature as their master, to gain a full sense of its existence'. But such a development of full mastery, Browning and Sordello know, can just as easily lead to the tyranny of a Duke of Ferrara or Salinguerra as to the establishment of an epoch governed by all its magnificent resources. The poem bears out matters of the individual subject and of great historical movements, and concentrates them into the couplets which carry its rhythm of will. Dowden describes Browning's account of the type of poet (described earlier in this chapter) which might do this.

> These are not the worshipping spirits; they are characterised not by a predominance of love but of *will*; they would subdue all things to themselves; their claims on life are boundless, and they compel life (unless failure overtake them) to yield up to their sublime self-assertion untried forms of beauty, goodness, knowledge, power; and thus they vindicate the rights of humanity, thus they raise the standard of the general demands on life and the gifts of life, so that we all, to the meanest of us, may in the end follow them with our more bounded wills.[51]

Written towards the end of the nineteenth century, Dowden's Carlyleanism sounds less the making of new forms and more the restate-

ment of what would become a vitalist orthodoxy. It is, though, the temptation which is held up before Sordello, the temptation for the poet to make of the forms of the world the forms of his own imagination. Given power and will, he could assert his own mastery.

Power, though, has many limitations, and the conditions of its exercise may lead to necessary failure. It is limited by one thing in particular, the human body. At the peak of his sense of sublime self-assertion, Sordello tries the patience of the narrator with these observations:

> 'The world shall bow to me conceiving all
> Man's life, who sees its blisses, great and small,
> Afar – not tasting any; no machine
> To exercise my utmost will is mine:
> Be mine mere consciousness! Let men perceive
> What I could do, a mastery believe,
> Asserted and established to the throng
> By their selected evidence of song
> Which now shall prove, whate'er they are, or seek
> To be, I am – whose words, not actions speak,
> Who change no standards of perfection, vex
> With no strange forms created to perplex,
> But just perform their bidding and no more,
> At their own satiating-point give o'er,
> While each shall love in me the love that leads
> His soul to power's perfection.' Song, not deeds,
> (For we get tired) was chosen. (II, 425–41)

Later in Book II, thought is described as the 'mere presentment' of perception, and here the hero declares that he will be satisfied with 'mere consciousness'. In saying so he does not admit stooping or weakness. This poet lacks a machine to exercise his utmost will, so opts to demonstrate what he could do in 'song', which will serve the interests not of action or even of sympathetic engagement in the world. It will simply serve a mastery which is content to exist *in potentia*, as a possibility never to be attempted. The only evidence will be poetry, and that will encourage belief.

Just as Sordello is enunciating what the poetry will be about, his speech begins to suggest a regular iambic beat:

> ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ /
> Which now shall prove, whate'er they are, or seek
> ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ /
> To be, I am – whose words, not actions speak,

∪ / ∪ / ∪ ∪ ∪ / ∪ /
Who change no standards of perfection, vex
∪ / / / ∪ / ∪ ∪ ∪ /
With no strange forms created to perplex,
∪ / ∪ /
But just perform

By the word 'perfection' these lines have fallen off the pulse which strives to take them into the expression of self, but for a number of stresses the couplets seem to be moving regularly into that self. The regular iambic pentameter is the unperplexing form of those who would rather not be vexed, who might simply be content with expression of self, and not with action. As in the example from *Pauline* that I have discussed above, the rhythmic effect is pointed up where the verb 'to be' meets an expression of aspiration (here, to 'seek'). Both instances suggest a pursuit which is a mere tautology: 'whate'er they are, or seek / To be, I am -'. Sordello attempts to stress being himself, a self which can become the throng, a sufficient aim for action and for poetry. The 'seek/speak' and 'vex/perplex' rhymes work semantic uncertainties around this tautology. The 'satiating-point' of the audience is on the one hand something achieved by the self-conscious generosity of the giving over of the self, but also of the 'give over' of the impatient listener who would rather that the person who was speaking would shut up. (In these terms the murdering half of Browning's dialogue 'In a Gondola' is allowed to express what would be heresy for Browning, 'no word more! / Since words are only words. Give o'er!') Those with Dowden's 'bounded wills', who love this sort of thing, can then contemplate the perfect soul of the man content to be a will without a machine to exercise it. By the end of this speech the narrator, for one, has had enough ('For we get tired'), and hurries through what Browning would call 'an external machinery of incidents' in order to get to his crisis.

Book II leaves off with the unresolved question which precipitates the sliding of the self after crisis into inertia:

> The Body, the Machine for Acting Will,
> Has been at the commencement proved unfit;
> That for Demonstrating, Reflecting it,
> Mankind – no fitter: was the Will Itself
> In fault? (994–8)

The stilts on which the verse walks here are the stilts of a barely functioning intellect, so absorbed in self is it. It is the verse of break-

down, a mechanical questioning, aware of the body as the faulty machine of aspiration, other humans as unfit for audience. The question is left hanging whether it is a problem of will. But at this point of the poem, Sordello simply throws away his crown of king of poets and retires from his career. *Sordello* does bring its hero back to the world, and does suggest that he might be able to contribute to the history of his time and to the development of the civilisation of his audience. But the very establishment of such possibilities, even if not action itself, in a poem which takes place in the midst of war, exhausts the 'Machine for Acting Will' of the poem's hero.

In Book VI the narrator settles us into the reasons for Sordello's failure, and points to a moral.

> Now, of the present sphere we call
> Life, are conditions; take but this among
> Many; the body was to be so long
> Youthful, no longer: but since no control
> Tied to that body's purposes his soul,
> She chose to understand the body's trade
> More than the body's self – had fain conveyed
> Her boundless to the body's bounded lot.
> Hence, the soul permanent, the body not, –
> Scarcely its minute for enjoying here, –
> The soul must needs instruct her weak compeer,
> Run o'er its capabilities and wring
> A joy thence, she held worth experiencing:
> Which, far from half discovered even, – lo,
> The minute gone, the body's power let go
> Apportioned to that joy's acquirement! (506–21)

We move quietly back into the 'ancient' form which is suggested by the couplets in this passage. The poem, which is about to end, has tested the new only to find it has destroyed itself. It is one of the few 'classicist' moments of a poem written in the couplet form, a classical form which may historically have lent itself to reflective, philosophical verse. This moment is needed to record the calm of failure, and its reasons. The rhymes are firm and assured where previously they had been the very instruments of a diffusing and destroying principle of restlessness. 'Control/soul . . . trade/conveyed . . . lot/not', the rhymes themselves act like the body which bounds the soul 'conveyed . . . boundless to the body's bounded lot. / Hence, the soul permanent, the body not, –'. Briefly, this passage appears to surrender to the doggerel

which the whole poem has in its 'wilfully outrageous' way been trying to avoid.

Sordello is the most exhaustive, and exhausting, early Victorian attempt to sound a rhythm of will. The activity in and around the energy of sense which Arthur Hallam praises in Tennyson, and that 'Mariana' explores, discovers a dead end by 1840 with the death of Sordello. The poem rehearses the possibilities of, and clears the way for, dramatic monologue, since only there can Browning and Tennyson fully explore the 'skill / In speech' of those who might speak in a rhythm of will, without leading to the destruction of the self which may befall the all-absorbing sympathetic poet. In Book VI of *Sordello*, the hero ends his life, 'The minute gone, the body's power let go / Apportioned to that joy's acquirement!' By 1855, in 'Two in the Campagna' the acquisition of joy simply for the self can become the no less vexed issue of joy in love. There,

> I kiss your cheek
> Catch your soul's warmth, – I pluck the rose
> And love it more than tongue can speak -
> Then the good minute goes. (47–50)

The minute which leaves Sordello has achieved no such experiences, no experiences of what Arthur Hallam might describe as 'feeling not its own'. But that minute is a temporal achievement, an achievement which sees reasons for aspiring to such a thing as sympathy:

> Only I discern
> Infinite passion, and the pain
> Of finite hearts that yearn.
> ('Two in the Campagna', 58–60)

In dramatic monologue and elegy, the two great forms of English poetry of the nineteenth century, the yearning for the infinite within the finite may result in great sorrow and the question of how to avoid it. But the yearning is a matter of will, and it will modify the world in all its energy of sense.

PART TWO

Monologue and monodrama

CHAPTER 4

Browning and the element of action

In his essay 'The Novel in *The Ring and the Book*', Henry James imagines just what the poem might have been if written as a novel. Much of the essay is concerned with suggesting that the 'sense, almost the pang of the novel [it] might have constituted, sprang sharply' from it, and that the poem is 'a work of art . . . smothered in the producing'. It is as if artistic production, as labour and childbirth, has been followed by infanticide. To state why he thinks that Browning failed not only to deliver a novel, but also why he conveys 'clustered hugeness or inordinate muchness', James puts forward an encounter with the poet which is not an encounter with the novelist:

> we feel ourselves, however much or however little to our advantage we may on occasion pronounce it, in the world of Expression at any cost. That essentially *is* the world of poetry – which, in the cases known to our experience where it seems to us to differ from Browning's world, does so but through this latter's having been by the vigour and the violence, the bold familiarity, of his grasp and pull at it, moved several degrees nearer us, so to speak, than any other of the same general sort with which we are acquainted; so that, intellectually, we back away from it a little, back down before it, again and again, as we try to get off from a picture or a group or a view which is too much upon us and thereby out of focus. Browning is 'upon' us, straighter upon us always, somehow, than anyone else of his race; and we thus recoil, we push our chair back, from the table he so tremendously spreads, just to see a little better what is on it. That makes a relation with him that is difficult to express; as if he came up against us, each time, on the same side of the street and not on the other side, across the way, where we mostly see the poets elegantly walk, and where we greet them without danger of concussion. It is on this same side, as I call it, on *our* side, on the other hand, that I rather see our encounter with the novelists taking place; we being, as it were, more mixed with them, or they at least, by their desire and necessity, more mixed with us, and our brush of them, in their minor frenzy, a comparatively muffled encounter.
>
> We have in the whole thing, at any rate, the element of action which is at the same time constant picture, and the element of picture which is at the same

time constant action; and with a fusion as the mass moves that is none the less effective, none the less thick and complete, from our not owing it in the least to an artful economy.[1]

The brilliance of this criticism is that it pictures the reader in movement as he or she struggles with the generic challenges of something as vigorous and violent as *The Ring and the Book,* and beyond that the monologue form. The reader is shown backing away, recoiling and bumping into the over-familiar poet. Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote to Richard Watson Dixon of Browning's 'way of talking (and making his people talk) with the air and spirit of a man bouncing up from table with his mouth full of bread and cheese saying that he meant to stand no blasted nonsense'.[2] For James and Hopkins, Browning's monologues are unmannerly: talking with their mouths full, they transgress the due, formal distance that the poems, their 'people' and their audience should keep from one another. The resultant danger of collisions with the reader comes from the sense of being closer than usual to the poet, who is both 'upon' us in Browning's case, and writing a poetry which presents us with the often unclearly enunciated 'Expression at any cost'.

Reading Browning, James finds himself presented with something which is so familiar with its material that it takes it apart. This sense of a familial relationship with the 'mere, rude, explicit details' is Sordello's 'brother's speech'. The result is that Browning's art works with an 'energy of appropriation of a deposit of *stated* matter, a block of sense already in position and requiring not to be shaped and squared and caused any further to solidify, but rather to suffer disintegration, be pulled apart, melted down, hammered . . .'[3] What this familiarity, vigour and violence does to the eventual form is to produce something which is simultaneously in the elements of action and constant picture as well as those of picture and constant action. The 'fusion' of these elements, to mix James' adaptation of the metallurgic metaphor that Browning himself uses to describe his practice in the poem, produces something which is forged, metal and ring.

Matter disintegrates in the process of its encounter with Browning's art and is forged back into another shape with the assistance of an alloy, the audience, doing their best to avoid concussion while still partners in the process of the poem. As in *Sordello,* this audience's task is not an easy one, but they are brought within the genre. That genre, according to James, is one where this pulling apart and melting down takes place in

the interchangeable elements of action and picture. Browning's dramatic poems are, at one and the same time, narrative and descriptive. *The Ring and the Book*, and other poems in the genre to which it belongs, by Tennyson as well as Browning, present us with a lyric/dramatic form. In it, characters speak, picturing themselves simultaneously in the action of their lives that constitutes their own sense of self and in the speech which provides the form of the drama in which they speak. Add to this the fact that these characters speak in verse, and we have a dramatic form which is action and picture, narration and description, speech and verse.

The earliest readers of Browning's and Tennyson's monologues had great difficulty with this, feeling that they were in James' 'world of poetry', but unable to bring it into focus. One in particular, Elizabeth Barrett Barrett, wished, like James, that both Browning and Tennyson would work in another form. This was not the novel, but the lyric, in which she imagined their virtues truly to lie, a world of poetry in which there might be a reassuring identity between speaker and poet, and thus a recognisable means of grasping the poem's intent. She was confused by the lack of correspondence between the 'I' of the poet and the 'I' which speaks the poem. In a letter to Charles Esmarch, referring to 'Locksley Hall Sixty Years After', Tennyson wrote to 'object and strongly' to Esmarch's statement, '*I* [Tennyson's emphasis] am the hero of the poem . . . Some of my thought may come out into the poem, but am I therefore the hero?' 'I' is the hero of the poem, but that is to be distinguished from the 'I' which is the poet.[4] Distinctions such as the one that Tennyson felt compelled to make are now an orthodoxy in considering the dramatic monologue, but they confused Barrett.

> Tennyson seldom uses the *ego* of poet-dom; and when he does you generally find that he does not refer to himself, but to some imaginary person. He permits the reader to behold the workings of his individuality only by a reflex action. He comes out to sing a poem and goes back again; or rather sends his song out from his shadow under the leaf as other nightingales do; and refuses to be expansive to his public and open his heart on the hinge of music as other poets do. We know nothing of him, except that he is a poet; and this, though it is something to be sure, does not help us to pronounce distinctly upon what may be called the mental intention of his poetry.[5]

Barrett's inability to 'pronounce distinctly' upon Tennyson's 'mental intention' may come as a result of a lack of familiarity with the dramatic forms of his poetry. As late as 1879, Robert Browning wrote to Wilfrid

Meynell, still feeling bound to state the special nature of his 'dramatic idyls': 'These of mine are called "Dramatic" because the story is told by some actor in it, not by the poet himself.' Meynell, who quotes from this letter in a memoir called 'The Detachment of Browning', goes on to state an observation made by many about the curious privacy of the highly sociable Browning, that 'you got to a certain point of frankness and cordiality very quickly, but only so far, and never beyond. To reach the real inner Browning his close friends no less than his casual acquaintances had to go to his books.'[6]

Elizabeth Barrett, we might think, had access to 'the real inner Browning'. But a letter of May 1846 betrays a vacillation between the Romantic subjectivism of her own poetry and the dramatic forms that she urges her lover to forsake. Concerned with placing the personality of the poet at the centre of poetry, she wonders at Browning's use of the dramatic. Initially seeing great virtue in Browning's writing, since 'I am not likely to mistake your poetry for the flower of your nature, knowing what that flower is', she goes on to praise the effectiveness of his speakers: 'But . . . you have the superabundant mental life & individuality which admits of shifting a personality & speaking the truth still. *That* is the highest faculty, the strongest & rarest, which exercises itself in Art, – we are all agreed there is none so great faculty as the dramatic.'[7]

Barrett's 'shifting a personality' finds an echo in Alan Sinfield's conception of dramatic monologue as constituting a 'feint'. He says that it 'feigns because it pretends to be something other than what it is', in other words, a poem spoken by someone who is not the poet. He does admit that 'We feel continuously the pressure of the poet's controlling mind', but would like to propose that we have 'an impossible reading experience: that we should be aware that the speaker is being placed by an agent outside the fictional world (not by other characters within it, which causes no problem), and at the same time credit him with attitudes independent of that agent'.[8] When Barrett finds Tennyson's individuality suggested 'by a reflex action' she anticipates and answers Sinfield's 'impossible reading experience'. We can see the personality of both poet and speaker in dramatic monologue, and can be aware of them operating as a reflex in the elements of action which is constant picture and vice versa. There is no need to find it 'impossible' that we should accept the fiction of the speaker's agency, while still aware of the poet's agency. Once shifted, a personality can be seen 'speaking the truth still', since we are given both

action and picture. In dramatic monologue, this is an agent – the poet – giving a representation of the agency of a fictional character in that character's speech.

'The superabundant mental life and individuality' which Elizabeth Barrett saw in Browning is the distinct and shaping poetic agency which Sinfield asks us to see as the origin of his 'impossible reading experience'. We must be aware of the feint, and acknowledge the fiction, in order to embrace the 'mental intentions' which Barrett found difficult to discern in Tennyson. As this letter of May 1846 continues, she expresses a wish for something more than the dramatic in Browning's poetry, coming perhaps from a dissatisfaction with the ways in which he shifts his personality.

> Yet I am conscious of wishing you to take the other crown besides – & after having made your own creations speak in clear human voices, to speak yourself out of that personality which God made, & with the voice which He turned into such power & sweetness of speech. I do not think that, with all that music in you, only your own personality should be dumb, nor that having thought so much & deeply on life & its ends, you should not teach what you have learnt, in the directest and most impressive way, the mask thrown off however moist with the breath.[9]

Although she later uses the same image to represent her perception of Tennyson's personality through his poetry ('Not that I usen't to fancy I could see you and know you in a reflex image in your creations!'), there is an uncertainty attached to the responsibility of the poet's agency in a dramatic poem. She suggests a religious transgression has been committed when Browning does not 'speak yourself out of that personality which God made'. The image of breath on the mask, constricted, and perhaps claustrophobic in the context of these analogies of the reflexive, refers back to the dumbness of Browning's personality, and further into a lack of responsible productivity in the monologue form. But this comes from a lack of sympathy with, perhaps a lack of understanding of, the form, shown in her puzzlement at Tennyson's position: 'he does not refer to himself, but to some imaginary person'. Barrett continues with what almost amounts to a confession of failure in reading Browning's monologues: 'it is too difficult for the common reader to analyse, and to discern between the vivid and the earnest'. To solve this difficulty she proposes what might be an impossible writing experience, when she suggests that the common reader 'is apt to understand always, when he sees the lips move'.[10]

'Earnestness' is a key Victorian literary concept, mixing as it does ethical and aesthetic prescriptions, but it is something which the dramatic monologue, according to Elizabeth Barrett, may not make clear to the imagined earnestness of its reader.[11] She would not go as far as to say that the vivid representation of the speaker of a monologue is not an earnest undertaking. Rather, she suggests that the earnestness of the speaker may, as a result of a vivid representation, mislead 'the common reader' into taking his word for it. This forms one pole of Robert Langbaum's classic formalist definition which has established the terms of contemporary accounts of dramatic monologue. He proposes that sympathy exists in tension with judgement in the experience, and that the reader must find a balance between the two.[12] Where Barrett expresses an uncertainty as to the shortcomings of a given reader's apprehensive powers, Langbaum places the reader in an equal position with the poet in such poems, a participant in what Linda K. Hughes has called 'a literary event'.[13] Where this is seen as distinct from other literary events is in the role of the speaker himself. The speaker's earnestness we must at least temporarily believe.

Langbaum's description of the workings of monologue, based on his reading of Browning's 'My Last Duchess', hinges on a theory that the form is relativist.[14] 'We will not have arrived at the meaning', he says, without 'an appeal to effect. . .moral judgement does not figure in our response'; again, 'condemnation is not our principal response'. Whatever our experience of reading 'My Last Duchess', Langbaum's way out of its ethical implications is a recourse to 'form', and form which works in a way we might call dialogic. This enters his discussion as representing 'that extra quantity which makes the difference between content and meaning . . . It is an index of what is believed too implicitly to be discussed.' According to Langbaum, content as distinguished from meaning is what the writer, or his society, might see as the intentions behind writing a dramatic monologue. Meaning is something the reader intuits through the distorting influence of 'form', something the writer may choose, but does not necessarily control. When Langbaum states that we can 'sense the poet's consciousness' in monologues such as Yeats' Crazy Jane poems, he says that we can see this consciousness as 'the mark of the poet's projection into the poem'. In these terms, this is part of a binary, or dialogic, structure, only 'a pole which attracts our projection, since we find in it the counterpart of our own consciousness'.[15] Yet, to take one example, Browning's Duke in 'My Last Duchess' confesses that he has not 'skill / In speech . . . to

make [his] will / Quite clear' (35–6). In doing so, the poet reveals a speaker complaining of the limits of his agency in speech, a complaint which is placed strongly against the power that we infer that the character has exercised. While the poem shows a verbal skill which says that it is sundered from will represented in fluent speech, the form simultaneously requires that a sensitive audience be aware of its fictive nature. That form is dramatic monologue, and despite its separate generic elements – speaker, auditor, poet, reader, speech, verse – not dramatic dialogue. While Browning, according to James, may be 'upon us' more than other poets, this dramatic lyric, not novel, gives its pictures in action through the flawed agency it shows in its actors' speech.

The action of dramatic monologue is at one and the same time a representation of intention and agency moving in speech and a showing up of the limits of such representation. For Browning, the monologue pictures action. The means of picturing, speech, is action in itself, inextricable from the representation of action and intention in the form. In *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country*, the narrator interrupts a verse paragraph which begins, 'He thought . . .' with this parenthetical digression,

> (Suppose I should prefer 'He said?'
> Along with every act – and speech is act –
> There go, a multitude impalpable
> To ordinary human faculty,
> The thoughts which give the act significance.
> Who is a poet needs must apprehend
> Alike both speech and thoughts which prompt to speak.
> Part these, and thought withdraws to poetry:
> Speech is reported in the newspaper.) (IV, 23–31)

The parting of speech and thought into the dialogue of poetry and newspaper – form and content – creates a faulty representation, action without significance. 'Significance' is something that the dramatic monologue attempts to convey through the speech which falls into verse, the source of its difficulty for many readers.

Dramatic monologue works to show up the shifting of personality through partial perceptions. Thinking of Italy and its seasons at the end of the first part of *The Ring and the Book*, Browning goes on to describe 'variance' within the year, and 'the eventual unity' of 'the miracle' which is life in process. This leads him to this extraordinary metaphor for his art:

> See it for yourselves,
> This man's act, changeable because alive!
> Action now shrouds, now shows the informing thought;
> Man, like a glass ball with a spark a-top,
> Out of the magic fire that lurks inside,
> Shows one tint at a time to take the eye:
> Which, let a finger touch the silent sleep,
> Shifted a hair's-breadth shoots you dark for bright,
> Suffuses bright with dark, and baffles so
> Your sentence absolute for shine or shade.
> Once set such orbs, – white styled, black stigmatized, -
> A-rolling, see them once on the other side
> Your good men and your bad men every one,
> From Guido Franceschini to Guy Faux,
> Oft would you rub your eyes and change your names.
>
> (I, 1364–78)

The suffusing of bright and dark and the bafflement of working out intention from an action which has its origins in what can only be a partially perceived consciousness ('a spark a-top, / Out of the magic fire that lurks inside') is the challenge of dramatic monologue.

Browning plays around the 'sentence absolute' most notably in the struggling with verdict and sentence that makes up the Pope's monologue. The Pope pronounces on a life – Guido's – summed up in a 'last deliberate act' (X, 521) – murder – which is apparent only in 'this filthy rags of speech' (X, 372) of the court's depositions. But an absolute sentence is made in *The Ring and the Book*, and in Browning's other monologues. Langbaum's relativism is not the same thing as Browning's bafflement. The act is 'changeable because alive'. This is what Henry James and Elizabeth Barrett found so difficult. Browning did too: 'Oft would you rub your eyes and change your names', is an exasperated address to the reader ('British Public, ye who like me not', the next paragraph begins) about the difficulty of shifting focus and personality. Even if speech is used to tell lies, judgement must be used to apprehend truth at its core:

> None of this vile way by the barren words
> Which, more than any deed, characterize
> Man as made subject to a curse: no speech –
> That still bursts o'er some lie which lurks inside,
> As the split skin across the coppery snake,
> And most denotes man! since, in all, beside,
> In hate or lust or guile or unbelief,

> Out of some core of truth the excrescence comes,
> And, in the last resort, the man may urge
> 'So was I made, a weak thing that gave way
> To truth, to impulse only strong since true,
> And hated, lusted, used guile, forwent faith.' (x, 348–59)

Dramatic monologue, a representation of agency in speech, can only show the excrescence if there is a core of truth. It is engaged with the problem of speaking agents saying what they mean, and meaning what they say. Through it, truth can be apprehended, even though the speaker may not intend to speak truth. Along with the Pope, Browning must believe that this form enables the weakness of our speech to give way to truth, even though we may be speaking lies.

Browning's character Fra Lippo Lippi engages in these questions related to the meaning of the world that he perceives, as contrasted with the purposes that his representation of that meaning may be put to. His monologue is one of 'so many utterances of so many imaginary persons, not mine', as Browning said of his 1842 *Dramatic Lyrics*.[16] Yet the poet is not claiming impersonality or impersonation, or disowning his monologist's opinions. The utterances which make up 'Fra Lippo Lippi' may be attributed to the titular speaker, yet the speakers of dramatic monologues cannot speak the titles of the poems in which we are to imagine they are speaking. The titled poem belongs to the poet.[17] We can sense the misunderstood Browning behind these lines.

> This world's no blot for us,
> Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good:
> To find its meaning is my meat and drink.
> 'Ay, but you don't so instigate to prayer!'
> Strikes in the Prior: 'when your meaning's plain
> It does not say to folk – remember matins,
> Or, mind you fast next Friday!' Why, for this
> What need of art at all? (313–20)[18]

'Folk', in the Prior's words, may be a rough analogue of Elizabeth Barrett's 'common reader', an entity which, 'when your meaning's plain', needs to be shown the edifying example which leads to proper sacramental observance. The Fra Lippo Lippi who finds the world neither obscure ('blot') nor vacant ('blank') finds himself under orders to instruct rather than to interpret.

The key verb here is 'instigate'. An instigation is an act performed in order to bring about another act. Its associations are criminal or revol-

utionary, and in Fra Lippo's placing of the word in the Prior's reported speech we might think that we have found a more subtle form of the impatience he feels with his philistine superiors. That impatience expresses itself in very solid forms, and hardly with the expanding ambiguities that we might detect in the word 'instigate'. 'What need of art at all?' the monk asks in a tone of exasperation. After another monk approves of one of Fra Lippo's diluted works, stating 'Your painting serves its purpose!', the speaker has recourse to the exclamatory bellow of 'Hang the fools!' (335). The shades of meaning which we can extract from 'instigate to prayer' seem to be beyond the careering assertion and denial of Fra Lippo's monologue at this point. Yet the suggestions that the phrase contains do contribute to the ironic presentation (in which Fra Lippo himself participates) of Church orthodoxy. This attracts attention to an element of the debate about the purposes of art, instructive or didactic, skewed into 'instigate', conspiratorial or inflammatory. If we cannot see this as part of Fra Lippo's intentions, and if dwelling on it contradicts the pace of the monk's speech, we still need not reject it as a contribution to the 'meaning' of the poem. Similarly, the repetitive and alliterative echoing roll of '*me*ans intensely . . . *me*ans good . . . *me*aning is my *me*at and drink', stops short in the Prior's 'meaning's plain'. The 'me' which we hear Fra Lippo so 'intensely' articulating ceases to be 'mine' in the Prior's mouth, since there it is 'plain'.

Browning conveys more in this poem than Fra Lippo intends in his speech. The poem initially rests within what the fictive personality who articulates it intends to say; but the character's speech can step out of its bounds. An agent – no matter in this instance how 'virile' – is portrayed as lacking in power over his own agency in speech. The exhaustive reading of the poem in terms of masculinity and power by Herbert Sussman finds Fra Lippo's monologue before the night watch an instance of male power which is homosocially conspiratorial. It must be remembered, though, that Fra Lippo is in danger of incarceration, and is talking his way out of a mess.[19] Fra Lippo recognises this, and, literally 'out of bounds' after dark, attempts to draw back from his transgression of the bounds of tactful speech. After the exclamation 'Hang the fools!' and a space in the text which allows some recollection, the next verse paragraph continues:

> – That is – you'll not mistake an idle word
> Spoke in a huff by a poor monk, God wot,
> Tasting the air this spicy night which turns
> The unaccustomed head like Chianti wine!

> Oh, the church knows! don't misreport me, now!
> It's natural a poor monk out of bounds
> Should have his apt word to excuse himself:
> And hearken how I plot to make amends. (336–43)

Just as we can sense Fra Lippo effortfully attempting to bring his words under control, so we can see a semantic range of punning suggestiveness which indicates a discourse which is beyond his bounds. Fra Lippo proposes an excuse for his indiscretion which is similar to the analogy Aristotle uses to describe the incontinent man under the influence of passions: 'It is plain then, that incontinent people must be said to be in a similar condition to men asleep, mad, or drunk.' Fra Lippo accordingly says that it is his state of mind which has produced 'an idle word' and that he is 'in a huff', overpowered by the airiness of freedom on a 'spicy night'. We know too that when he began to speak he was drunk, though in the course of such a long speech, he does sober up. Fra Lippo is like Guido, at the beginning of his first monologue, taking only a small sip of the proffered wine: 'I want my head / To save my neck'. He is in the position of one 'having knowledge but not using it'.[20] Unwittingly employing a standard ethical argument, the speaker recognises his indiscretion as incontinent speech and attempts to disclaim what he has previously so wilfully stated, all the while reclaiming what 'the church knows!'[21]

Fra Lippo becomes aware of the capacity of speech to transgress the bounds of tact. His characterisation of his own previous words in the retractive 'idle word / Spoke in a huff by a poor monk' is allied with the danger in which he finds himself with his auditors. The man who has just said that he has misreported his ideas about the repression of his art by the Church turns to representatives of that repression, and asks 'don't misreport me, now!' The 'poor monk out of bounds' of cloister and tact calls on an 'apt word' to cancel out the dangers of the misreporting of his heresy, because he calls on the context of temporary incontinence of speech. What Browning does is to suggest the physical circumstances of this retraction, making us aware of the dramatic situation. What is conveyed beyond Fra Lippo's meaning is a significance in the word 'misreport' which travels across our perception of the whole monologue. The pun in 'out of bounds' refers us to the monk's literal moonlighting, the metaphorical transgression in his speech, and the speech out of which he is compulsively bound to speak.[22] The echoes of a moral argument from Aristotle also may not be of Fra Lippo's making. His

excuse can after all be paraphrased along the lines of 'Oh, I didn't mean all that I said, I'm just a bit wound-up and giddy tonight.'

'Fra Lippo Lippi' shows us something of the relations of poet with speaker, and the monologue's special capacity for representing an agent speaking. As I have hinted above, we need not conclude that this describes Browning in anticipation of a novelistic, or dialogic writing, or of a post-structuralist critique of relations between signified and signifier. The description of the dramatic monologue form in Langbaum and Sinfield[23] could countenance a reading dependent on a split between the element of action and the ability of language to picture it. Yet in 'Fra Lippo Lippi' part of the speaker's problems stem from the fact that he actually says what he thinks and feels, regardless of what he might intend to mean: 'Out of some core of truth the excrescence comes.' Browning acts to give us a representation of agency. We don't need to take Fra Lippo Lippi's word for it, since he only speaks in 'Fra Lippo Lippi'.

Eric Griffiths has suggested that we can connect the development of the dramatic monologue with Wordsworth's 'discovery about metre', in his 'Preface' of 1801. There, Wordsworth suggested how we can establish that poetic form is 'not strictly connected with the passion'. A metre which need not correspond with, or might even work against, the fiction of imagined speech in poetry (as in Wordsworth's blank verse, or his use of the ballad), allows poets the 'opportunity for practical self-consciousness about the conventions of poetry, and about extra-literary conventions'. Griffiths' suggestion provides a context in which we can see the dramatic monologue occupying an area where the contrasting claims of poetic form, and the representation of imagined speech in that form, gives us two of a number of ways of seeing the difficulties in determining the question of the author's or the speaker's agency and the portrayal of personality by one who is supposedly impersonating. While aspiration towards impersonality is impossible, the extent of the poet's conscious instrumentality is often not to be quantified.

> The fiction of such poems generally suggests that the imagined speaker is 'simply speaking' while the poet arranges that his words happen to fall into verse. In the dramatic monologue, it becomes a structural principle that metre provides an intertexture of feeling not strictly connected with the passion, for the consciousness of poet and fictional speaker diverge and coincide in creatively many ways, rather as diction and subject revolve around each other in mock-heroic, and with similarly inquiring effects: where does affectation or insincerity begin and end? how can one adjust rival senses of value to each

other? might there not at times be more than one thing that needs to be said?[24]

Griffiths' creative divergence and coincidence of poet and speaker is another of the ways in which we can think of the simultaneity of effect of monologues, at one and the same time action and picture, vivid and earnest. The very virtue of the form lies in Sinfield's 'impossible reading experience'. It also suggests the difficulty of any attempts to anchor the personality of the poet, or to extract the evidence of agency in unambiguously paraphraseable intentions. Dramatic monologue establishes competing orders of human agency where the intentions of poet and speaker imagine situations in which their 'skill / In speech' tests the ability to make their wills 'quite clear'.

Dramatic monologue must allow its speakers to reveal themselves, and then draw back; its writers must move in and out of their role of anonymous impersonator. 'Fra Lippo Lippi' does suggest a fluid movement of divergence and coincidence, yet between these, of course, we can struggle to bring the meaning into focus. Vigour, variety and familiarity, drunken speaker or not, can obscure the sense. Add to these generic difficulties the vastness of an intricate murder case, and we have Browning's great challenge to himself, of using dramatic monologue to convey to us the 'facts' of an event told through many perceptions of it. This is the challenge of *The Ring and the Book*, a series of monologues and a soliloquy, all ostensibly a representation of an action by actors in it and observers and judges of it. The act which forms 'the core of truth' is the deposit of stated matter that Browning's monologues contrive to pull apart. Ascertaining just what that act was, through the organisation of the source material by Browning, and the interpretation of the finished poem by the reader, is the challenge of the poem, indeed the challenge of reading dramatic monologue itself. *The Ring and the Book* is the most sustained achievement of Browning's career, yet it is still difficult to see through its vividness to what happened.

Browning allows his procrastinating, irresolute villain to state the dangers of such vividness in a final moment of what may be self-knowledge, if never guilt. In his second monologue, Guido broods on the mess of his plan to rid himself of his wife and her family. He compares his plot to a work of art, and in doing so allows us to hear an artist's complaint about the inability of aesthetic structures to complete themselves:

> Oh, why, why was it not ordained just so?
> Why fell not things out so or otherwise?
> Ask that particular devil whose task it is
> To trip the all-but-at perfection, – slur
> The line o' the painter just where paint leaves off
> And life begins, – puts ice into the ode
> O' the poet while he cries 'Next stanza – fire!'
> Inscribes all human effort with one word,
> Artistry's haunting curse, the Incomplete!
> Being incomplete, the act escaped success. (XI, 1551–60)

The slurring of the attempts at perfection by the Incomplete is by a devil which is 'particular'. Browning allows his speaker to pun around the word, since the devil which Guido picks out as haunting human effort does this by being picky. The artist is haunted by the curse of being particular, never satisfied. 'Human effort' cannot achieve success, no matter how close it is to perfection.

The temptation, at this point, is to commit a frequent error when reading monologues, and read Guido's speech as carrying his author's imprimatur. It is part of the daring of Browning in a poem so caught up in the daring-in-action and consequent failures of its various protagonists that he allows this conflation of murderer and artist, allowing Guido to conceive of his action in aesthetic terms. Yet Guido is a failed artist, as he is a failed – in the sense that he has been caught – murderer. A few lines later in this last monologue, Guido goes over his flawed actions again:

> I march to the Villa, and my men with me,
> That evening, and we reach the door and stand.
> I say . . . no, it shoots through me lightning-like
> While I pause, breathe, my hand upon the latch,
> 'Let me forbode!' Thus far, too much success:
> I want the natural failure – find it where?
> Which thread will have to break and leave a loop
> I' the meshy combination, my brain's loom
> Wove this long while and now next minute tests?
> (XI, 1573–81)

(He goes on to recount his irresolution for another twenty or so lines before he can come to a description of the deed.) The 'next minute' here, what G. K. Chesterton called Browning's 'doctrine of the great hour',[25] the defining act which will determine a life, is ethical, practical

and psychological. For a seventeenth-century character, Guido is given a very nineteenth-century conception of the brain which weaves his plot as a 'loom', a machine which can easily go wrong. He needs this anachronism, so that he can hide his fear from himself and behind a conception of a flaw in the power to carry out his will. His is not an irresolution bred of punctiliousness, or the 'particular devil'. Rather it is fear, and fear of physical harm at the very moment of his life-defining act of violence. Browning's blank verse serves now to sound this moment in Guido's speech in this monologue, and his memory of the moment. The verse is allowed an elision just as it is supposedly narrating a journey and an event. 'It shoots through me lightning-like', Guido says, as 'it' courses through Guido and the verse. This 'it' interrupts the rhythm of the event, indeed the rhythm of the will to carry out the action in the event, by working spontaneity through into stasis. The line literally shoots over its ending, only to be held up at the early caesura, the metrical pause which follows the word 'pause'. That line is slowed up into taking breath, and the action, lifting a latch, is crucially stopped. From here the 'thought' which determines action turns only to irresolution.

In his earlier monologue, Guido had said that he was able to carry out his act because of anger, the anger which followed when the door was answered by Pompilia's hated mother. Guido's defence is a mixture of *honoris causa* and one which would be recognised in English law (if not eventually accepted in this Italian court). This would, in 1949, be described as the 'sudden and temporary loss of self-control' of the 'reasonable man' who finds himself a cuckolded husband. Discovering his wife *in flagrante delicto,* this reasonable man has mitigating circumstance before law for his actions because he has suffered due provocation. As Browning was writing the poem, English law, in the case of *Walsh* (1869), first came to the conception of what might constitute a 'reasonable man' suffering a loss of self-control. In that case Justice Keating had asked the jury to consider the 'amount of provocation as would be excited by the circumstances in the mind of a reasonable man and so lead the jury to ascribe the act to the influence of that passion'.

English Victorian law has a conception of the agent which allows such moments to be considered as evidence which might excuse or ameliorate judgement of that agent's actions.[26] Guido says that he had suffered his sudden and temporary loss of self-control when he saw the face of his mother-in-law:

> There was the end!
> Then was I rapt away by the impulse, one
> Immeasurable everlasting wave of a need
> To abolish that detested life. 'T was done:
> You know the rest and how the folds o' the thing,
> Twisting for help, involved the other two
> More or less serpent-like: how I was mad,
> Blind, stamped on all, the earth-worms with the asp,
> And ended so. (v, 1661–9)

The word 'impulse' occurs forty-nine times in Browning's poetry, and thirteen times in *The Ring and the Book*.[27] Guido uses it three times in Book v, and the Pope four times in his soliloquy, twice when considering Guido's actions. For the Pope, it is 'in the last resort' that man complains that as a 'weak thing' he gives way to truth, 'to impulse only strong since true'. The word has some British legal history too: Justice Rolfe in *Kelly* (1848) stated that the act of a man killing his wife after catching her in adultery 'would only be manslaughter, because he would be supposed to be acting under an impulse so violent that he could not resist it'.[28]

Guido's version of this 'impulse' is that it is a necessary thing, 'a need'. It is a wave in which he is rapt. The description of this psycho-legal 'impulse' in the verse here is brief, but it does follow a great sublime roll across the rhythm of the line that crashes like breakers through 'Immeasurable' and into the iambic-anapaestic rhythm which prompts his action: 'everlasting wave of a need' (∪ / ∪ ∪ ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ ∪ /). The unstressed indefinite article which provides the final anapaest ('wave of *a* need', rather than the semantically and metrically acceptable 'wave of need') secures this effect, allowing Guido's speech to sound its impulse, a necessity greater than itself and its speaker. If self-control is lost, Guido's version of his own actions goes, hatred and anger have conspired with what he calls 'wave of a need' in order to carry out the act.

After he admits the act, Guido calmly slows down the impulsive verse into the matter of fact. Guido's ''T was done', like the account of his own actions given by the speaker of 'Porphyria's Lover', 'I found / A thing to do' (37–8), in its narrative calm attempts to separate self from act, pleading necessity as Porphyria's lover pleads chance. The Duke of Ferrara's curt 'I gave commands; / Then all smiles stopped together' ('My Last Duchess', 45–6) is too a means of picturing his own action, thus distancing himself from it. These monologists all move from the element of action into the element of picture when speaking of themselves. It is still the element of action, because it is speech, and it is in the

very act of narrating the actions of the self that these poems show 'the informing thought' or 'thoughts which give the act significance'. 'Thought' for Browning is synonymous with intention, motive, purpose, even Guido and the Pope's 'impulse'. It is a conative as well as a cognitive faculty. Porphyria's lover and the Duke of Ferrara may have the power to carry out will, just as Guido has had such difficulty with it. All three work that power within a poetic form which strives to find form for that which impels them. It is the poem, the artist's creation, which gives these narratives action in which to picture them. It gives them voice.

The power, which in Guido's case is murderous, is shared with the artist who sets these characters speaking. In Browning's 'very ABC of fact' (*The Ring and the Book*, I, 708), it comes from a will which is central to something which, if it isn't quite creation, can be resuscitation.

> Inalienable, the arch-prerogative
> Which turns thought, act – conceives, expresses too!
> No less, man, bounded, yearning to be free,
> May so project his surplusage of soul
> In search of body, so add self to self
> By owning what lay ownerless before, -
> So find, so fill full, so appropriate forms -
> That, although nothing which had never life
> Shall get life from him, be, not having been,
> Yet, something dead may get to live again,
> Something with too much life or not enough,
> Which, either way imperfect, ended once:
> An end whereat man's impulse intervenes,
> Makes new beginning, starts the dead alive,
> Completes the incomplete and saves the thing.
>
> (*The Ring and the Book*, I, 720–34)

Browning has come a long way from the endlessly prepared but never acting speaker of *Pauline*, or the poet Sordello, content not to follow through his potential in mere action. He is also some way from Henry James' conception of *The Ring and the Book* as a mere preparation for a novel, a poem which is, in Guido's terms, 'the Incomplete'. This passage suggests just how completion can come to what is described here, a dramatic art.

The 'arch-prerogative' of the artist is his or her will. Following the twist of Browning's syntax, I can paraphrase this as something which turns thought into act, but also something which can make both conceptions and expressions. The artistic will can save 'the thing' by complet-

ing it. In other words it can find form for something which had lived but is now in need of a completion which can be achieved through an artistic 'impulse'. The thing must be something imperfect, 'Something with too much life or not enough'. Browning works close to the heresy which the poet actively courts: only God can bring the dead back to life. But He has also given man freedom, the freedom for which this poet yearns. Speaking in his own voice, as poet, Browning describes his own special gift, and moves it, this faculty for freedom in art, 'Will', to the capitalised beginning of a line:

> Yet by a special gift, an art of arts,
> More insight and more outsight and much more
> Will to use both of these than boast my mates,
> I can detach from me, commission forth
> Half of my soul; which in its pilgrimage
> O'er old unwandered waste ways of the world,
> May chance upon some fragment of a whole,
> Rag of flesh, scrap of bone in dim disuse,
> Smoking flax that fed fire once: prompt therein
> I enter, spark-like, put old powers to play,
> Push lines out to the limit, lead forth last
> (By a moonrise through a ruin of a crypt)
> What shall be mistily seen, murmuringly heard,
> Mistakenly felt . . . (I, 746–59)

The Gothic kitsch worked up at the end here is the guiding of the dead through the graveyard after their resuscitation. It only faintly ironises the boast of the passage, that the poet's gifts of will, perception, arcane learning and then consciousness, can resuscitate the dead. The coming to consciousness of the dead character is the 'spark a-top' man of which this book later speaks. But it is also in the finding of poetic form itself. Browning says that his recreation takes place because he can 'Push lines out to the limit', making his achievement primarily poetic, giving life through the technique of the artist as much as anything else. The will of artist and character is sounded through a pushing, limit-seeking, rhythm of will. The limits which are found are the mistily, murmuringly, mistakenly achieved monologues which make up his poem.

Browning's ABC of fact is an attempt to answer the question 'Is fiction which makes fact alive, fact too?' (I, 707). This 'fact' is not some incontrovertible 'deposit of stated matter' as James would have it. For an aesthetic which strives to give the element of picture in the element of action, striving to attain the status of fact through its fictive resuscita-

tion of past events, there is still the danger of a version of Alan Sinfield's 'impossible reading experience'. In other words, caught up in the vividness of a picture given by an agent in the events, the act and the informing thought of the poem and its author may be obscured as we view the fiction which has made fact come too much alive. The lack of agreement of numerous readers of the poem over what exactly its central event is and the identity of its hero testify to this. For Browning's friend, Julia Wedgewood, Pompilia is the hero, as for G. K. Chesterton, Henry James and A. K. Cook it is Caponsacchi. Recently, this balance of critics between male and female characters has continued, but with the shift of interest to Guido, who is the 'debased anti-hero' in Daniel Karlin's study of hatred in Browning, against Pompilia, who forms the basis of Ann Brady and Susan Brown's feminist accounts of the poem.[29]

The matter of the central event, too, is much discussed. For Chesterton it is Caponsacchi's rescue, a repetition of the Andromeda myth which occurs in Browning's work from as early as *Pauline*, and of the particular circumstances of his own courtship, elopement and marriage which form 'the crisis and centre of Browning's own life'.[30] For others, the central action is the murder, what the Pope calls 'the last deliberate act' (x, 521) which will lead to Guido's execution. Guido, naturally, asks that we take his 'whole life, not this last act alone' (v, 1786). But to search for a narrative centre is to repeat James' mistake. Dramatic monologue is less an Aristotelian imitation of action than a version of a Jamesian representation of character in action. James said that in Guido's monologues we have 'well-nigh the maximum play of the human mind'.[31] This is praise indeed, but it needs to be matched by Elizabeth Barrett's warning about confusing the vivid with the earnest. The complication which arises is shown in Guido's version of his actions narrated by himself: the only words we can take for it, the only facts, are those which, in the fiction, the speakers themselves provide. It is the poetic form which serves to point up that fact.

To show this, here are two speeches describing moments of premeditation, aspiration and action by two of the three main protagonists in the murder case, Caponsacchi and Pompilia. Both speeches are representations of previous events, made in the light of what has happened subsequently. Yet both have a drama of their own: they are picture in action. The first is by Caponsacchi, relating his indecision before the rescue of Pompilia. As we shall see in chapter five here, which describes the structurally central use of this device by Tennyson in *Maud*, the

monologue turns on the repetition and questioning of a single word, picked up by the speaker in a kind of double-take which serves to propel the next paragraph. Here, Caponsacchi's word is 'thought', picked up from a debate within himself over the significance of Guido's forged letters:

> 'Thought?' nay, Sirs, what shall follow was not thought:
> I have thought sometimes, and thought long and hard.
> I have stood before, gone round a serious thing,
> Tasked my whole mind to touch and clasp it close,
> As I stretch forth my arm to touch this bar.
> God and man, and what duty I owe both, –
> I dare to say I have confronted these
> In thought: but no such faculty helped here.
> I put forth no thought, – powerless, all that night
> I paced the city: it was the first Spring.
> By the invasion I lay passive to,
> In rushed new things, the old were rapt away;
> Alike abolished – the imprisonment
> Of the outside air, the inside weight o' the world
> That pulled me down. Death meant, to spurn the ground,
> Soar to the sky, – die well and you do that.
> The very immolation made the bliss;
> Death was the heart of life, and all the harm
> My folly had crouched to avoid, now proved a veil
> Hiding all gain my wisdom strove to grasp:
> As if the intense centre of the flame
> Should turn a heaven to that devoted fly
> Which hitherto, sophist alike and sage,
> Saint Thomas with his sober grey goose-quill,
> And sinner Plato by Cephisian reed,
> Would fain, pretending just the insect's good,
> Whisk off, drive back, consign to shade again.
> Into another state, under new rule
> I knew myself was passing swift and sure;
> Whereof the initiatory pang approached,
> Felicitous annoy, as bitter-sweet
> As when the virgin-band, the victors chaste,
> Feel at the end the earthly garments drop,
> And rise with something of a rosy shame
> Into immortal nakedness: so I
> Lay, and let come the proper throe would thrill
> Into the ecstasy and outthrob pain. (VI, 937–73)

Hide it as he might, this is the priest Caponsacchi describing himself

falling in love. The speech is about the abolition of one means of looking at self, motive and action by another. It is an exchange of the scholarly for the new way of love.

In Book One of the poem, Browning describes Caponsacchi speaking 'rapidly, angrily, speech that smites' (I, 1070), and this might certainly describe one of the poem's great set pieces, Caponsacchi's vision of Guido sliding down to receive the kiss of Judas Iscariot in the bottom circle of Hell. Here though, Caponsacchi confesses shortcomings in his habits of thought, of being rendered passive by the circumstance in which he finds himself. In this passive state, he becomes weightless, defying the necessitation of gravity and selfhood and sensing the immortality of a bond with another which will survive beyond death. In her dying monologue, Pompilia will imagine a joining with her rescuer, but only in heaven. The speaker of *Maud*, too, plays with this idea of dying for love, or better, love as dying and rebirth, the remaking of the self in a way which makes all previous habits of mind and action redundant. The rationalised ethics which are the basis of Caponsacchi's thinking, Thomist and Socratic, Catholic and Classical, are replaced by something which renders him naked. Browning allows the speech to smite this new concept with a rhythmic impulse, the impulse which is turning the speaker's view of the world around. This courses through the challenges to the reader's recitation of the lines in 'initiatory pang' and 'felicitous annoy', two polysyllabic remnants of the old intellectual's picturing of the self. It is then overtaken by the rhythm of the new impulse, pang or annoy, a rhythm which rises, and conveys 'something of a rosy shame / Into immortal nakedness'. Eventually Caponsacchi's and the reader's voice give way to the erotic repetitions of the tongue-twisting lines which close the verse-paragraph: 'the proper throe would thrill / Into the ecstacy and outthrob pain'. That final coining, 'outthrob', is, in Browning's terms, a pushing of the line to the limit, sounding the activity of a consciousness which is remembering a picture of the self full of life.

Caponsacchi's moment here is one of passivity, of an impulse which had come from a feeling of which he previously had no experience. It is only when he speaks of this experience, waiting for the loved one to die of the wounds from which he feels his action had not protected her, that the memory of the beginnings of love is mingled with the remorse which in turn mixes with anger elsewhere in his monologue. He has had to think about a due course of action, and in this premeditation is taken over by another pang. Surprised by Guido and his men in the flight to

Rome, Caponsacchi is crucially unable to save Pompilia. He torments himself with thinking of the benefits of sudden action on that occasion, 'one quick spring, / One great good satisfying gripe, and lo! / . . . / A spittle wiped off from the face of God!' (VI, 1475–9).

Pompilia suffers from no such inaction. This is her description of her response to those events:

> When in my dreadful husband and the world
> Broke, – and I saw him, master by hell's right,
> And saw my angel helplessly held back
> By guards that helped the malice – the lamb prone,
> The serpent towering and triumphant – then
> Came all the strength back in a sudden swell,
> I did for once see right, do right, give tongue
> The adequate protest: for a worm must turn
> If it would have its wrong observed by God.
> I did spring up, attempt to thrust aside
> That ice-block 'twixt the sun and me, lay low
> The neutralizer of all good and truth.
> If I sinned so, – never obey voice more
> O' the Just and Terrible, which bids us – 'Bear!'
> Not – 'Stand by, bear to see my angels bear!'
> I am clear it was on impulse to serve God
> Not save myself, – no – nor my child unborn!
>
> . . .
>
> But when at last, all by myself I stood
> Obeying the clear voice which bade me rise,
> Not for my own sake but my babe unborn,
> And take the angel's hand was sent to help –
> And found the old adversary athwart the path –
> Not my hand simply struck from the angel's, but
> The very angel's self made foul i' the face
> By the fiend who struck there, – that I would not bear,
> That only I resisted! So, my first
> And last resistance was invincible.
>
> . . .
>
> But when at last, all by myself I stood
> This time the foolish prayers were done with, right
> Used might, and solemnized the sport at once.
> All was against the combat: vantage, mine?
> The runaway avowed, the accomplice wife,
> In company with the plan-contriving priest?

> Yet, shame thus rank and patent, I struck, bare,
> At foe from head to foot in magic mail,
> And off it withered, cobweb-armoury
> Against the lightning! 'T was truth singed the lies
> And saved me, not the vain sword and weak speech!
> (VII, 1585–601; 1614–23; 1632–41)

Pompilia's is the only action in the main plot where a character carries through intentions, and as such the only heroic action in the poem. Uniquely, Pompilia makes 'The adequate protest', 'on impulse to serve God', 'Obeying the clear voice which bade me rise'. Her moment of violence she justifies entirely: hers alone is an action where 'right / Used might', demonstrating by her actions a truth which takes over from her vain sword and weak speech.

Browning too finds a rhythm in which to give will to her version of her action. Strength had returned to her at that moment. No matter how weak she is, she says that strength returns again now in her speech. She speaks of 'a sudden swell, / I did for once see right, do right, give tongue / The adequate protest'. The assured iambs set in motion by the sudden swell of her activity are inverted when it comes to the things that she actually does: the trochees, possibly spondees, emphasise the verbs at '*see* right, *do* right,' or even '*see right, do right*'. The inversion back to the iambic beat carries us over the line ending into the slightly awkward phrasing of her 'adequate protest'. Pompilia's 'adequacy' at this moment, resolutely unheroic version of the self's response to its situation as the word is, is one of the very few instances of such adequacy in the whole poem. Unlike Guido, or even Caponsacchi and the Pope, there is no dramatising of self beyond the adequate in this speech. She does wonder whether she has sinned in her violence, but decides that the violence is 'adequate'. The heroic is the adequate. It is so because she demonstrates a will working in firm connection between context, motive and action. Where that will has previously been trained to 'bear' her lot in stoic acceptance, now it has no difficulty in attempting a righteous violence. She has followed an 'impulse', but is convinced that her motives are impeccable.

The Victorian critic R. H. Hutton is one of few readers to have seen this aspect of Pompilia in the poem: 'There is alacrity, even valour, at the bottom of Pompilia, in spite of what her husband calls the "timid chalky ghost" in her: she can seize his sword and point it at his breast when his cruelty and malignity pass all bounds; and even he feels this.'[32] Hutton's 'alacrity, even valour' is a version of a vital will possessed only by the female victim of the poem. The speaker of 'Half-Rome' tells us

that she 'caught at the sword / That hung there useless' (II, 1031–2), and this account of Pompilia further unmanning the already unmanned is an account of the strongest perpetrator of action in the poem. From plotting husband to eventually incompetent murderer, Guido cannot take this. Pompilia's strange romance of the Christian woman defending her virginity against the Paynims a few lines before this speech imagines another moment of grasping the sword:

> And lo, the fire she grasped at, fixed its flash,
> Lay in her hand a calm cold dreadful sword
> She brandished till pursuers strewed the ground,
> So did the souls within them die away,
> As o'er the prostrate bodies, sworded, safe,
> She walked forth to the solitudes and Christ:
> So should I grasp the lightning and be saved.
>
> (VII, 1397–403)

The last line here shows us Pompilia picking up the verb she has used six lines previously, 'grasped', in order to show a vocal control over it within the rhythm. The metrical indeterminacy of the line plays with trochaic inversions while pushing the stresses on to the possible spondee on the central verb, '*I* grasp' or '*I grasp*', and the final relaxing into the anapaest, 'and be saved' ('So should I grasp the lightning and be saved': / ∪ / ∪ ∪ / ∪ ∪ ∪ / or / ∪ / / ∪ / ∪ ∪ ∪ /). 'Grasp' is of course a key verb for Browning, and in this instance Pompilia shows us her belief that, when needed, it will not exceed her reach. The line carries the rhythm of a prayer to do the right thing at the right time, and when needed she does just this. However, no matter how strong in will she is, she does lack power. Such resolve brings about her death. It is not a paradox, as Susan Brown says, to find her both agent and victim, 'literary subject as speaking subject and cultural object'.[33] She speaks in dramatic monologue, and the element of action which is constant picture allows this simultaneity.

Daniel Karlin says that this stanza presents 'Browning's credo (if any single utterance deserves the name)'[34]:

> How the world is made for each of us!
> How all we perceive and know in it
> Tends to some moment's product thus,
> When a soul declares itself – to wit,
> By its fruit, the thing it does!
>
> ('By the Fireside', 241–5)

The 'moment' of *The Ring and the Book*, as shown by the disagreements of various readers, is a difficult thing to ascertain. It is Caponsacchi's decision to aid Pompilia, as it is also his inability to destroy Guido when he foils their plans. It is Guido's plot, long drawn out as that is, just as it is his inability to kill the supposedly runaway lovers. It may be Pompilia's declaration of her soul when she acts to save herself, failure though that action is. It is, too, the murders of Pompilia and her family. But perhaps the 'moment' of the poem is the final pronouncing of the sentence of death by the Pope, an act of judgement on the actions of the poem, putting in motion a final punishment.

The sentence of the Pope is the 'sentence absolute for shine or shade' that Browning says is so baffling for the reader of this poem and beyond that, the reader of the characters which speak in his monologues. Picking up this motif of the difficulty of partial human sight, the Pope pictures himself thinking on the sentence – death – that he has confirmed.

> So do I see, pronounce on all and some
> Grouped for my judgement now, – profess no doubt
> While I pronounce: dark, difficult enough
> The human sphere, yet eyes grow sharp by use,
> I find the truth, dispart the shine from shade,
> As a mere man may, with no special touch
> O' the lynx-gift in each ordinary orb:
> Nay, if the popular notion class me right,
> One of well-nigh decayed intelligence, –
> What of that? Through hard labour and good will,
> And habitude that gives a blind man sight
> At the practised finger-ends of him, I do
> Discern and dare decree in consequence,
> Whatever prove the peril of mistake.
> Whence, then, this quite new quick cold thrill, – cloud-like,
> This keen dread creeping from a quarter scarce
> Suspected in the skies I nightly scan?
> What slacks the tense nerve, saps the wound-up spring
> Of the act that should and shall be, sends the mount
> And mass o' the whole man's-strength, – conglobed so late –
> Shudderingly into dust, a moment's work? (x, 1238–58)

The Pope must 'dispart the shine from shade', and in doing so assist the poet in distinguishing the element of action from the element of picture, distinguishing between the vivid and the earnest. It is significant that he speaks in Book x, 'The Pope', which lacks an auditor or audience, and is

properly speaking a soliloquy and not a monologue. The speech is with the self, and that must remind itself of rational gifts which are schooled through long application, the 'hard labour . . . good will . . . habitude' that enable judgement. The speaker's voice is carried in a verse of alliterative determination which sounds a rhythm of will as it comes to describe its powers of judgement for itself: 'Discern, and dare decree . . . prove the peril of mistake'.

It is to Browning's credit, and to the immense benefit of the characterisation of the Pope, that the sentence absolute is not left here. The element of action returns, and the Pope is assailed by doubt, an impulse which upsets the daring of his decree. Giving textbook instances of spondaic substitutions, Paul Fussell suggests a line in *Romeo and Juliet*, in which Juliet describes the thickening of her blood, 'I have a faint cold fear thrills through my veins' – ∪ / ∪ / / / / ∪ ∪ /.[35] Browning achieves a similar effect as he alludes to Shakespeare's line in his own metrically chaotic version: 'Whence, then, this quite new quick cold thrill, – cloud-like' – / / ∪ / / / / / / ∪. The stresses pack around his 'quite new quick cold thrill' of dread, a dread beyond the perceptual experience of this Pope, and perhaps beyond that of the poem. The Pope says that he scans the night skies. The poem scans his thought, and finds an area of feeling beyond the limits towards which it pushes its scannable lines. The slacking of the tense nerve, the sapping of the power of the spring of act, and the turning to dust of this moment of judgement acquired through a life's work, stalls the Pope's thought, a thought sounded in his speech through a doubt which has assailed its rhythm of will. In this soliloquy the Pope works his speech towards a moment of power and judgement. Doubt, and speech itself, question his agency, bringing in new shade to obscure the act of the poem, and the actions that its form, dramatic monologue, can represent.

CHAPTER 5

''Tis well that I should bluster': Tennyson's monologues

> The Gods, the Gods!
> If all be atoms, how then should the Gods
> Being atomic not be dissoluble,
> Not follow the great law? My master held
> That Gods there are, for all men so believe.
> I prest my footsteps into his, and meant
> Surely to lead my Memmius in a train
> Of flowery clauses onward to the proof
> That Gods there are, and deathless. Meant? I meant?
> I have forgotten what I meant: my mind
> Stumbles, and all my faculties are lamed.
>
> ('Lucretius', 113–23)

Browning allows his virtuous intellectuals, Caponsacchi and the Pope, just so much volitional power before he suggests its limits. Caponsacchi's tasking of his whole mind to touch and clasp the 'serious thing', and the Pope's 'hard labour and good will, / And habitude' still do not fully equip them for the 'initiatory pang' or 'quite new quick cold thrill' which upsets the verse as it courses through their thought and speech. Tennyson's speakers, in thrall to mood as they and their poet are, have even rarer moments of decisiveness. By temperament, chance or error they often find themselves suffering from the great interruption into their intellectual and emotional lives of the moment of unwilled powerlessness such as Lucretius marks in his monologue. 'Meant? I meant?' he suddenly asks himself, picking up the word he has used four lines previously, before speaking in a present tense which knows only of his new-found forgetfulness, and the disabling of his stumbling mind and lame faculties.

While Browning's monologues picture action, or act pictures, they also test the abilities and limits of the will of their speakers. In these simultaneous elements of action and picture there are, or have been,

moments of decision and acts of will. No less convinced of the importance of will, Tennyson sets his monologists speaking in a verse which presents less assurance from its speakers of their volitional abilities. Like 'Oenone', his monologues may be spoken by powerless spectators, picturing action in its aftermath. Speaking in situations similar to that which confront Lucretius, his formerly powerful ratiocinative powers now lost, Tennyson's monologists are shown suffering from actions which occurred in a past over which the speakers may now acknowledge they never had power. The speakers in his poems are often caught in a seemingly passive imprisonment in the past, the 'passion of the past' which appears to determine their backward look. In thrall to what has gone before, in decisions made by others, or accidents of fate, heredity or bereavement, those poems would appear at best to be merely ambivalent about the possibility of change. Change, of course, can only occur in the future, the only thing over which the action of the present tense of the speakers of the poems – in which the element of action is pictured – could have power. While Browning's speakers are frequently imprisoned, mad, drunk or dying, their monologues are still performed in circumstances which are less extreme than those Tennyson imagines. Literally on the verge of madness, life or indeed love, the speakers of Tennyson's best monologues occupy a poetry which exploits all of its author's seemingly boundless technical mastery to suggest the ways in which mastery and power can be cruelly inhibited.

From an early age, as I have said in chapter two, Tennyson remembered most vividly his sonic experiences. In the *Memoir,* Hallam Tennyson quotes him as saying, 'Before I could read I was in the habit on a stormy day of spreading my arms to the wind and crying out "I hear a voice that's speaking in the wind."'[1] The pre-literate boy, we are asked to believe, could speak in pentameters. In his monologue 'Rizpah', published when Tennyson was seventy-one, he returns to the image and gives us a female voice, and explores an obsessive nature moving from motherhood into madness.

> Wailing, wailing, wailing, the wind over land and sea –
> And Willy's voice in the wind, 'O mother, come out to me.'

The virtuoso performance in the versification of these opening lines suggests that we are in the presence of an artist of supreme technical control. Taken as the opening of a sound poem, the force of the three opening trochees, the incessant return of 'w' sounds and the end-line iambs regulating metre into rhyme, all combine in the breathlessness of

the opening. But sound goes into meaning in Tennyson, just as 'Willy' returns us to 'Wailing', and his imagined request 'come out to me' allows the iambs to calm the verse with the sound. The reader of Tennyson remembers the breakers that murmur 'Ida' in *The Princess* (IV, 416), the rook's caw, 'Maud, Maud, Maud' (I, 414), or the attempt at self-reassurance in the longing lyric cadence of 'Break, Break, Break': 'But O for the touch of a vanished hand, / And the sound of a voice that is still.'

We do momentarily suspect that this is a familiar Tennyson voice speaking until the speaker moves to the first person in the following lines:

> Why should he call me tonight, when he knows that I cannot go?
> For the downs are as bright as day, and the full moon stares at the snow.

This is the imagined communication of the supernatural through nature, where the control of the versification is pointedly contrasted with the confused longings for a ghost in the speaker's words. Just as the wailing sound mutates into 'Willy', and then speaks in Willy's voice, so night turns into day, with the moon's stare illuminating the countryside. Such brightness is required of this dramatic monologue, since it keeps the woman indoors, to talk, and suggests the darkness required for her deed. This deed, the gradual stealing of her dead son's bones from the gallows, is discovered through the illuminations of her speech, though it must be completed in 'The loud black nights' (6). The paradox of the situation is that while darkness is necessary for her action, her monologue throws an incriminating light on it. Momentarily conspiratorial with the auditor who is addressed in the fifth line, the old woman reveals her guilt, just as she states why she cannot carry out her crime: 'We should be seen my dear, they would spy us out of the town.'

As Tennyson's monologists reveal more than they wish to say, so there are moments of retrenchment and cover-up. In this speaker's terms it is a sudden sense of being carried away, a realisation of the indiscretion, and then a wrestling for control over words again:

> Anything fallen again? nay – what was there left to fall?
> I have taken them home, I have numbered the bones, I have hidden them all.
> What am I saying? and what are *you*? do you come as a spy?
> Falls? what falls? who knows? As the tree falls so must it lie.
>
> (9–12)

The vacillating, and questioning, lack of stability in these lines moves uncertainly into the final, stabilising, quotation from *Ecclesiastes*. The key question, 'What am I saying?' is given little consideration as the speaker turns suspiciously on her interlocutor. Having incriminated herself, the speaker's willed struggle to think on her feet, and then to make her words say what she wants them to, stutteringly moves through a series of distractions, direct questions and then the enunciation of a Biblical quotation. In the fiction of the poem we may be asked to view a consciousness lamely stating the first thing that comes into her mouth. Simultaneously, the poem as a whole contains a number of references to the chapter in *Ecclesiastes*, to which this quotation alludes.[2] Dramatically convincing as it is, the woman's allusion takes on greater significance than she is aware. Just as her agency in speech is seen as wanting (through bereavement, and a morbid obsession with her dead son's body leading her to madness), we are notified of the presence of another agent in the poem.

It is the success of this dramatic monologue that we do not find this an intrusive flexing of authorial muscle. Granting a larger significance to the speaker's words does not diminish the strength of Tennyson's characterisation. To vary Elizabeth Barrett on Robert Browning, vividness becomes earnest when this detachment involves speaking from within the character. 'Rizpah' gains its most spectacular instance of this in Tennyson's imagining of what it is to have your body inhabited by a child.

> Flesh of my flesh was gone, but bone of my bone was left –
> I stole them all from the lawyers – and you, will you call it a theft?
> My baby, the bones that had sucked me, the bones that had laughed and had cried –
> Theirs? Oh no! they are mine – not theirs – they had moved in my side. (51–4)

Swinburne said that the last six words here 'give perfect proof once more of the deep truth that great poets are bisexual',[3] meaning, I suppose, hermaphrodite. Tennyson achieves this rhythmically. The image of the physical presence of a child moving in the womb, is carried in two final anapaests, or possibly a cretic and an anapaest ('they had moved in my side': ∪ ∪ / ∪ ∪ / or / ∪ / ∪ ∪ /), which are themselves pregnant with the metrical fullness used by the poet to allow this movement in and across the verse.

An effect such as this suggests that the monologue provides rhythmic form for something in the speaker's identity of which she is not con-

scious. Linda K. Hughes draws a distinction between Browning's and Tennyson's monologues, stating that 'Tennyson renders the *consciousness* of his speakers . . . whereas Browning renders the *personality* of his.' She goes on to state that while '"Personality" . . . implies the orientation of the human agent to the world and others and the concrete *form* of his character', Tennyson 'has located us in the inherently amorphous, oscillating, vibrating realm of consciousness'.[4] It is only in the speaker's own striving for the appropriate 'form' that an implicit instability in human agency in speech is shown. Yet before we can speak in such terms of the agency of the author, we must look at the gap between what the speakers strive to articulate and the grammatical, rhetorical and metrical forms that these strivings take.

'Rizpah' was written in 1878, but its poet's first attempts at the form go back more than forty years. Its full range of possibilities were apparent to him at the age of twenty-four.

> Although I be the basest of mankind,
> From scalp to sole one slough and crust of sin,
> Unfit for earth, unfit for heaven, scarce meet
> For troops of devils, mad with blasphemy,
> I will not cease to grasp the hope I hold
> Of saintdom, and to clamour, mourn and sob,
> Battering the gates of heaven with storms of prayer,
> Have mercy, Lord, and take away my sin.
>
> ('St Simeon Stylites', 1–8)

In one long opening sentence, the speech of this character immediately alerts us to an attempt at adequacy, of containing meaning within acceptable grammatical or rhetorical bounds. As we imagine, or recreate, his intentions, we can see areas where his grammar confuses what he wishes to say, his rhetoric overstates it, and the confusions in his mind keep the calm construction of prayers, aspiration and religious beliefs an ungraspable thing.

Lines five to six in the poem, 'I will not cease to grasp the hope I hold / Of saintdom, and to clamour, mourn and sob', show us thought spilling out beyond the bounds of the language chosen to accommodate it. Need one 'grasp' something one already holds? Surely repeated grasping, if it is to be seen as a series of single acts, and not a continuous one, relaxes the hold at successive moments? We can hear a pun in 'cease', seize, increasing the tautology, a sound which pulls the line in an opposing semantic direction. As the thought cannot be contained within a single line, its object, 'saintdom', is pulled by an enjambment into an

association with the next thought and line. In turn, this line instigates a number of open vowel sounds, which are closely related, and continue through it: 'Of . . . clamour . . . mourn . . . sob'. An enervating cadence is established, resolving itself in the near despair of 'sob'. We can sense a range of effects leading us away from the strenuous action which the language is ostensibly attempting to represent. In Hughes' words respecting Browning, this is uttered by a character, St Simeon, who wishes to establish 'the concrete *form* of his character'. The poem begins with a conjunction, 'Although', which is followed by a definition of the speaker by himself existing as a predicate to a main verb which appears only five lines and thirty-two words of self-mortification into the poem. St Simeon's character is now, paradoxically, given concrete form: we can sense the unstable personality through the uncontrolled words of which he is barely conscious.

In examining the particular nature of the dramatic monologue, a form suited to conveying the difficulties of a person saying what he or she means, there is the further, if simultaneous, difficulty that had so vexed Elizabeth Barrett, that of the poet saying what he or she means. 'Rizpah' or 'St Simeon Stylites' are superbly vivid impersonations: at the same time as we strongly sense the agency of the poet in, say, the prosody of lines five to six of 'St Simeon', we feel strongly that we are in the presence of a dramatic character. Edward FitzGerald's account of Tennyson's performance of the poem, 'with grotesque Grimness, especially at such passages as "Coughs, Aches, Stitches, etc."', laughing aloud at times', suggests an impersonation akin to that of a stand-up comic.[5] Tennyson strenuously resisted attempts at reading his monologues as autobiography, and he would be correct to display his animosity if we mistook these voices for his, even if we can never accord him the status of the blank page of the 'impersonal' poet. But Tennyson's 'personality' cannot but come through the 'consciousness' of his speakers.

Linda Hughes claims a 'deep sense of privacy' and its associated aversion to criticism as 'final reasons' for the existence of 'Ulysses' or 'Tithonus'.[6] To ask for confessional, or more straightforwardly elegiac forms, is to miss the added force that their fictional speakers can bring to the subject matter. When speaking of *In Memoriam,* Tennyson was at pains to point out that 'the author' is not always the 'I' that speaks in the sections of the poem, that it is 'a poem, *not* an actual biography', and that 'I' is 'the voice of the human race speaking thro' the author'.[7] This extraordinary claim to universality has been taken as a rather disingenuous attempt on Tennyson's part to protect his privacy. However, speak-

ing of a poem like 'Ulysses', written in a first person which is quite distinct from the poet, Tennyson himself reclaimed the personal. More even than many sections of *In Memoriam*, he said, it was 'written under the sense of loss and that all had gone by'. Tennyson places the moment of composition physically *under* the sense of loss, and temporally in aftermath. Weighed down, and unable to change the circumstances of age or grief, the poem, speaker and poet can only now do their best not to give up. 'Ulysses' is a poem of will: Tennyson goes on to say that it bears out the imperatives of 'the need of going forward and braving the struggle of life', or 'life must be fought out to the end'.[8]

Character and poet carry before them shared ethical objectives, objectives which emphasise the importance of action, no matter how ineffective that might be. Robert Langbaum's contention that the dramatic monologue brings relativism into English poetry results in a kind of moral ambivalence in his reader, who cannot respond in definite ways to what he or she sees as difficult texts, formally uncongenial to moral judgements. Yet 'Ulysses' and 'Tithonus' (along with the monologues in such poems as 'The Lotos-Eaters' and 'Lucretius', 'Tiresias', *Maud* and the Locksley Hall poems) carry the difficult ambiguities of their moral imperative before them. As the characters/speakers of those poems face the choices of activity or inertia, order or chaos, their eventual decisions, limited as they may cruelly be, call for judgements, however partial, as well as sympathetic associations. If we are to take seriously Tennyson's claim for the dramatic, that the voice of the speaker of *In Memoriam* is the 'voice of the human race speaking thro' the author', we can do it if we place the striving for impersonality in a medium which explores choice and action, the choices of language and art and the actions of characters facing oblivion. Inhabiting an area where the human will must combat the determining factors which threaten to extinguish all operations of self, Tennyson's dramatic monologues can explore it through language. Through the medium of monologue we can see the success or failure of the speaker's power in will, and the success or failure of that speaker's language, carried in a verse form which is uniquely adapted to the exploration of such questions of agency and speech, or agency through speech.

In Tennyson, the element of picture can overwhelm the element of action. Grammar, for instance, affords a system of rules which assist in determining the ways in which an auditor can picture what a speaker wishes to say. At the opening of 'Ulysses', the syntax appears to be slightly unhinged.

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

The first impression here is of an imperious command of language. It is a king speaking, and his tone gives us varying amounts of boredom and disdain, precisely chosen epithets unambiguously leading us to interpret his attitudes to the people and objects around him. The adjectives are 'judiciously' chosen: 'idle . . . still . . . barren . . . aged . . . Unequal . . . savage'. Like a modifying poet, Ulysses demonstrates power over the objects which surround him by this imperious working of adjective over noun. Yet this judiciousness is not that of a man content with the challenge of kingship, since the poem continues with his reasons for abdication.

Here the Ithaca to which *The Odyssey* brought its hero so strenuously home does not provide the strain that hero craves. The strain is apparent in his syntax. The sentence begins with the word 'It', and the 'idle king', Ulysses, may be made the object of the verb 'profit'. We might infer from this that the mercantile associations of this word serve to suggest some form of self-disdain, setting up the illusion that this speaker can make himself the object of the sentence. Syntactically then, there is a possibility set in motion that, taking a slight pause between 'profits' and 'that', the third line's 'I mete and dole' might correctly read 'should mete and dole'. Or conversely, removing the problematic 'that' of the first line, the sentence could run along the lines of 'It little profits [ ] an idle king . . . to mete and dole'. What happens in the actual syntax is that it suddenly shifts, and we have Ulysses making himself the subject of the sentence. Tennyson develops a syntactic ambiguity which still works in harmony with a fiction of an unselfconscious speaking voice. In accord with this, the ambiguity is deepened, given the self-consciousness of the man who possesses the voice that speaks.

Once the speaker shifts to the first person singular in the third line, it appears a further thirteen times in the poem. It is most significantly associated with specific acts of self-definition, or of aspiration:

> I cannot rest from travel: I will drink
> Life to the lees: all times I have enjoyed
> Greatly. (6–8)
>
> . . . I am become a name . . . (11)
>
> Much have I seen and known . . . (13)

I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough
Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move. (18–21)

This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
To whom I leave . . . (33–4)

When I am gone. He works his work, I mine. (43)

. . . you and I are old . . . (49)

. . . for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die. (59–61)

Only with reference to his son does the speaker not demonstrate a past, present or future modification of himself, as subject, in the actions that his verbs suggest. The self attempts to wrestle words, in close association with itself, into the service of its own imagined dominion. Yet such an exercise of will extinguishes itself in its last instance, the chiming internal rhyme in 'I die'.

Before this we have not seen the first person plural, not even in 'you and I are old'. Now it appears to shore up his aspirations, just as 'I' has left the poem. Language must lend itself to strengthening the speaker's intentions, so we can see that he fully intends to carry out in action what he suggests in utterance. He defines himself now in association with his fellows, where he had previously been involved in strenuous assertions of selfhood only. 'Strong in will' these men may famously be, but as the rhythms of the verse begin to assume a terminal cadence, the shortcomings of their power have to be admitted.

that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield. (67–70)

These closing lines are an exercise of a strong will in language, yet with a limited power. Just as 'equal' attempts to right the 'Unequal' of line four, and the efforts of the final line contemplate anything but the idleness of the opening line, all the heroism of the world can do little before the inevitability of death. Three infinitives, and a possibly heavy stress on 'not' can do little more than balance the oblivion of the will in the poem's last word.[9]

Ulysses exclaims 'How dull it is to pause, to make an end, / To rust

unburnished, not to shine in use!' (23–4). He calls on the accretive power of a list of infinitives, enlisting verbs to his aid as action words. The concerns of 'Ulysses', with margins, verges, limits and a final pause, are contemplated in its 'pendant' poem, 'Tithonus', by a speaker living with the dawn, but living eternal twilight. In its first version, as 'Tithon', Ulysses' concerns are given a contrary emphasis:

> Release me: let me go: take back thy gift:
> Why should a man desire in any shape
> To vary from his kind, or beat the roads
> Of life, beyond the goal of ordinance
> Where all should pause, as is most meet for all.
>
> ('Tithon', 19–23)

The revised 'Tithonus' (1860) is careful to avoid this rough antipathy towards strenuous action. The speaker of the 1833 'Tithon' does not wish to 'vary from the kindly race of men' (29), as the later Tithonus puts it. His aspirations, however terminal, are too clearly stated for that. The punning tautology of 'kindly race' (a 'kind', as in *Maud* III, 58, 'I am one with my kind', is a synonym for a people or race of creatures; the competitive race of man appears kind and accommodating compared to Tithonus' situation) does not appear in the early version. Rather, the strain of heroic endeavour spills out of the effort to keep a grip on the words that he utters. We can beat the roads as we walk them, yet they determine the direction of our journeys. Concentrating on self help, the Victorian hero might beat them, as he would an opponent, in the competitiveness of the 'kindly race' of nineteenth-century Englishmen about which Tennyson felt so ambivalent. Tithon's goals are contained in the ordinances of the game. Ordinances can be surveys which delimit the physical world, and here 'the appointed limit' (as Tennyson glossed the phrase 'goal of ordinance'[10]) is pleadingly asked for.

Tithon/Tithonus can only ask for release. The aspiration, even the termination of the need for aspiration, finds its sole realisation in speech. The 'strong hours indignant' of Tithonus' lover, have 'worked their wills' ('Tithonus', 18; not 'Tithon') and his will is deprived of the power to put it into action. Alan Sinfield, writing about Tithonus' erotic picture of the dawn (32–42), and the problem of attributing its meaning to the event itself, or the speaker's modifications of it, states that the 'writing . . . tilts beyond the point of balance [of literal and figurative] so that individual subjectivity appears not as the source of meaning in the world but as constructed by the world'.[11] This almost tells the whole story here if attributed to Tithonus' speech and not to Tennyson's writing. The

balances are tilted by a language of limits and pauses suggesting much more than the limits the speaker thinks have been set, and are shown precariously dependent on a human will struggling with all that attempts to determine its action from without.

Responsibility for meaning may be recklessly disowned by a speaker such as the one in 'Locksley Hall', who exclaims that ''tis well that I should bluster!' (63). Keeping a grip on words, meaning what we say, and saying what we mean, is a vexing business for Tennyson.

> Overlive it – lower yet – be happy! wherefore should I care?
> I must mix myself with action, lest I wither by despair.
>
> What is that which I should turn to, lighting upon days like these?
> Every door is barred with gold, and opens but to golden keys.
>
> Every gate is thronged with suitors, all the markets overflow.
> I have but an angry fancy: what is that which I should do?
>
> ('Locksley Hall', 97–102)

If the speaker of 'Rizpah' asks herself 'What am I saying?', the speaker of *Maud,* like that of 'Locksley Hall' must ask another question, 'what is that which I should do?' *Maud* and 'Locksley Hall' may be all 'bluster', but they leave behind the heroic pentameter of the blank verse of 'Ulysses' or 'Tithonus'. In the impression it gives of insistent metrical surprise and innovation, *Maud* is an attempt to find rhythmic form for a consciousness which is, to say the least, impelled by 'an angry fancy'. The lyrics in which its hero speaks work to mix that hero with action, lest he wither by despair. 'Love' in 'Locksley Hall' works synaesthetically, as it 'Smote the chord of Self, that, trembling, passed in music out of sight'(34). This music *Maud* tries to sound, of the trembling self caught in an activity not of its own choosing, responding in ways over which it has a gradually diminishing sense of control.

The thirteenth stanza of the first canto of the first part of *Maud* wonders just how the nation of shopkeepers might react if their country were to be invaded.

> For I trust if an enemy's fleet came yonder round by the hill,
> And the rushing battle-bolt sang from the three-decker out of the foam,
> That the smooth-faced snubnosed rogue would leap from his counter and till,
> And strike, if he could, were it but with his cheating yardwand, home. –
>
> (I, 49–52)

The last line here ends with the emphatic punctuation of a full stop and a dash after the speaker's concentrated emphasis on a pun in the word 'home'. Worrying about invasion, the speaker contemplates the debilitating effects of a society at war with itself through unconstrained liberal economics. In such a context, striking 'home' becomes a cliché bitterly turned into an emblem of the violence of civil war. Yet the phrase 'strike . . . home' is divided by two clauses, ten words and two pauses indicated in the speaker's speech.

The noun 'home', which arrives so late after the verb which modifies it, turns his thoughts away from the spleen of his social criticism and back to his family and the madness of his father, whose sins, he hopes, are not to be visited on the son.

> What! am I raging alone as my father raged in his mood?
> Must *I* too creep to the hollow and dash myself down and die
> Rather than hold by the law that I made, nevermore to brood
> On a horror of shattered limbs and a wretched swindler's lie?
>
> (I, 53–6)

A stanza like this is a great shock to the expectations that lyric poetry carries. Its very prosodic virtuosity, and willingness to confront us with the diction of Romantic lyric intensifies the shock. The musical modifications of sound can be heard in 'raging alone as my father raged', the falling cadence in 'dash myself down and die', and 'nevermore to brood'. Just as 'melancholy' is a familiar figure in poetic convention, so too 'mood' or the reflective 'brood' often serve as merely literary terms. In *Maud* though, moods cause suicides, and brooding on those moods brings us to the jangling consonants of 'a horror of shattered limbs and a wretched swindler's lie'. The versification, assured as it is, must rest alongside the strain of over-pitched emotion, shown in the text by exclamation marks, italicisations and anything but reflectively composed questions which work away within the text. The very composure that the speaker has vowed to impose on himself, 'Rather than hold by the law that I made', has a trochee, followed by an attempt at regularising the line with an iamb, and two strong anapaests, still drawing attention to the contrary direction ('Rather') to which it draws us back. 'I will bury myself in myself' (75), this lyric ends, and this is the self-reflexive movement of *Maud,* the continuing narcissistic 'Echo' which answers only with the meaning that the speaker's 'self' gives to it (in line four of this lyric, 'Death'). 'The law that I made' must hold its sonic ground against the force of the still-echoing opposite in 'Rather'.

The quick swivel (whatever the pause of the full stop, dash, and then unvoiced roman numerals announcing the stanza 'xiv' may do to decelerate this swivel) from 'home' to the self-questioning exclamation 'What!' is one example of a number of occasions in *Maud* where the speaker catches himself out. I have attempted to show this as one of the ways in which the dramatic monologue alerts us to the difficulties of a speaker's control over speech. *Maud,* a lyric sequence subtitled *A Monodrama,* is a narrative poem, over 1,400 lines in length, dependent upon the main participant in its story for that story to be told. This speaker, unnamed, suffers from an inherited mental instability, and the loss of the wealth that he might have expected to enjoy, and thus the social position that would have enabled him to pursue Maud without hindrance. Certain aspects of the speaker's situation are not unlike some of the facts of Tennyson's own life. Social alienation, and the real possibility of madness, combine with the extra determining factor of fortune, in an accidental killing, to drive the teller of the tale mad. In approaching the poem, we have a number of important formal elements which come between us and an understanding of the poem's events: we are dependent on a suspect temperament for relating the facts and are confronted with the problem of Tennyson's animosity in the matter of the correspondence of those facts with what we know of the poet. We are given all this in a medium of lyric language which often does not appear to be acting in the way in which we might think lyrics should.

To many critics of Tennyson these considerations are too much to handle. For Ralph Wilson Rader, the poem is 'uncomfortably raw and uncontrolled'. He states what he holds to be a truism about the poem.

> Most critics will agree with Mr Eliot who locates its imperfection in the character of the emotion which flows from the frenetic hero. Distorted and disproportionate to its objects as they appear in the poem, the hero's feeling prevents the reader from identifying with him fully and sympathetically, despite the fact that such identification is almost required by the nature of the poem. On the other hand, the poet does not provide any compensating frame of objectifying judgement by means of which the reader might gain more perspective on the hero and thus a more detached but more understanding and compassionate view of him.[12]

This is heavily influenced by Robert Langbaum's prescription of what the reader should ask from a dramatic monologue, as well as Coleridgean and New Critical requirements of 'organic form' and 'objective correlative'.[13] T. S. Eliot found that the poem does not 'make one's flesh creep with sincerity'. One of Eliot's objections to the poem is

enlightening: he states that 'Tennyson neither identifies himself with the lover, nor identifies the lover with himself'.[14] This can be read as a statement of praise for the relation of poet to speaker in dramatic poems, monologue or monodrama. The creation of a fictional character who shares some of its author's characteristics, but is not identical (Eliot's 'identifies' seems to ask for this), need not be an evasively dishonest undertaking.

The swivel of the speaker in *Maud* from 'home' to the sudden self-analysing 'What!' requires an imaginative act from the reader to create the implied circumstances, mental, social or political, in which such a turnaround in a single consciousness can take place. If *Maud* were a novel or a play, a narrator's voice might be piecing together the implications of such a movement, the actions of other characters might be providing extra contexts or we might be given a setting or a stage. Yet *Maud*, like *The Ring and the Book,* is not a novel or a play, and it suggests many of the generic difficulties that Henry James saw there. The narrative voice of *Maud*, its setting, is the silent lyrical medium which carries the story and it is fashioned by the poet to provide a disparity between poet's form and character's voice, within which something akin to a commentary may be implied. Between 'home' and 'What!', each word occupying a different stanza, the reader must recreate the consciousness which is imagined vacillating between these words, and occupy the spaces of interpretation into which such implications invite us.

The spaces which invite interpretation are opened up both by poetic form and the tactless speaker's lack of control over his speech. His tactlessness results from the bold state of mind of one whose speech itself is spurring on his monodrama. 'Tact', under its second definition in *OED*, is a 'Ready and delicate sense of what is fitting and proper in dealing with others, so as to avoid giving offence or win good will'. It is also 'the faculty of saying the right thing at the right time'. The tact of Tennyson, and Eliot's difficulties with Tennyson identifying 'himself with the lover' or 'the lover with himself', are apparent in the main characteristics of the speaker in *Maud*. He is unable to be fitting and proper, or say the right thing at the right time. The 'bluster' of the speaker of 'Locksley Hall' is, after all, a description of a random, uncontrolled or uncontrollable speech. *Maud* challenges the shortcomings of will and power over speech in a lyric medium which drives its speaker into a willess, eventually self-sacrificing madness.

After he has led her to the stricken home of canto i, and feels that

Maud has returned his love, the speaker tells us, for the first time in the poem, that he has actually spoken to another human being (as opposed to flowers or trees). He is uncertain whether or not he has spoken with a ready and delicate sense of what is fitting and proper.

> I trust that I did not talk
> To gentle Maud in our walk
> (For often in lonely wanderings
> I have cursed him even to lifeless things)
> But I trust that I did not talk,
> Not touch on her father's sin:
> I am sure that I did but speak
> Of my mother's faded cheek. . . (I, 695–702)

The verbs are affirmative in only one instance here. 'I have cursed him', the speaker knows for certain, but 'I trust that I did not talk' (twice), and 'I am sure that I did but speak', carry a limp and clichéd uncertainty. The examination of conscience results not in the isolation of errors: it conveys only a grudging wariness of self. The fear of giving offence in words, which his usual auditors, 'lifeless things', cannot take, contrasts with the barely controlled urges of his thought. He is unsure of the memory of his own conversation. We are unsure of his tact on this occasion as well (after all, he does blame Maud's father for the fading of his mother's cheek). In stanza v of this canto, he admits to 'letting a dangerous thought run wild' (735), the active 'letting' surrendering to a passive self-indulgence in his anger. We are dependent on this man for the story of *Maud*.

Or rather, his 'passion' is the story of *Maud*. Tennyson said that the poem's 'peculiarity' stems from a formal structure where 'different phases of passion take the place of different characters'.[15] 'Phases' can be shaded in and out of narrative, or they can stop and start abruptly. The speaker is given words to convey the phases of his passion, yet often the passion conveys the words. Most frequently, both set up an unstable interdependence. A word may be used, suggesting a 'passion' through varying meanings of the word; these are picked up by the speaker, constantly, yet unconsciously, reinterpreting his own speech: they then lead him into another phase, often away from what he had originally set out to say. When 'Echo' answers, she may sound the same, but be interpreted with differing meanings. We might assume that while the speaker has some grasp on what he intends to say, as he says it, he hears little but the sound of his own voice. Indeed he is haunted by the reflex –

pace Elizabeth Barrett – of the ways in which he has constructed himself for himself, in the sound of his own voice, the echoes of his words, even the ghost that haunts him in Part II. That voice lets him speak himself away from tact and into bluster. William Buckler says, with reference to this point, and concerning how Tennyson phases the passion of his main character, that 'the cantos move to a different or a deepened state of apprehension as language surfaces and signals the consciousness of the speaker to the next shading of the issue . . . inducing the successive phases of feeling through the illuminations that language casts into the next dark space'. Buckler later suggests that 'language is the speaker's Virgil',[16] but he overplays the determination of the speaker by 'language'. Rather than *langue*, it is its use, or *parole*, the previously voiced words of the speaker's utterances surfacing and signalling, that propels the poem through its 'phases of passion'. Dependent on the words he uses, they must also depend on him.

As Tennyson shows us an unstable man struggling to orient himself in his own words towards the object of his desire in Part I, so we have those words revealing themselves as unstable, ambiguous signs. A searching scrutiny is placed upon them, but they often resist the attempts of the speaker's suspect will to control. And this is a highly intelligent speaker, sensitive to the tricks that words can play in his own mouth. It is often only words that are brought to his aid, to try and lead his passion away from the direction that he can feel it going. Maud, on first sight, is passed off as 'Perfectly beautiful' (I, 80), and therefore without interest. She is not, though, so much without interest that the speaker does not continue exercising his linguistic energies upon her. Her physiognomy is subjected to his expanding imaginative vocabulary as his rhetoric is turned on her in a list of oxymoronic epithets, 'Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null, / Dead perfection' (I, 82–3), followed by the grudgingly admitted 'defect' (84) of abundance: her underlip is 'too ripe, too full' (85). These are well-controlled, and simple, descriptive tricks, but they are perverse. The description is in excess of what it is he intends to say; he is protesting too much.

The woman does not become the object of his thoughts, and object in his thoughts, through her own choosing, though she is blamed for it. She is accused of 'Breaking a slumber in which all spleenful folly was drowned' (I, 89), forcing himself away from himself. More precisely her face, and its 'paleness, an hour's defect of the rose' (I, 84), forces him away from himself. This paleness is picked up again in the third canto:

> Pale with the golden beam of an eyelash dead on the cheek,
> Passionless, pale, cold face, star-sweet on a gloom profound;
> Womanlike, taking revenge too deep for a transient wrong
> Done but in thought to your beauty, and ever as pale as before
> Growing and fading and growing upon me without a sound . . .
>
> (I, 90–4)

Maud's paleness, the opposite of the 'blood-red heath' of the poem's opening, becomes the source of the speaker's infatuation. The word returns in these lines like a dominant theme in a piece of music, starting his speech, and propelling him through it. It is a leading light, and a delicate pointer of direction: Virgil is initially of the speaker's own making, but is passively let run wild, in order to continue the speech. Pulse-like, the thoughts of her paleness, 'Growing and fading and growing', become the stirrings of an unwanted love. Before the pale, the speaker speaks from beyond the pale, and his dwelling on the concept pushes his feelings into another phase.

In this lyric, the speaker presents an observation on Maud from a less than tactful distance. Tact is also, according to the *OED*, 'A keen faculty of perception'. The man who telescopes us on to the dead eyelash on Maud's cheek is exercising one kind of tact, but in another sense is overstepping its bounds. George Brimley (whose account of *Maud* had Tennyson's approval) wondered that 'if a gentleman were to utter such sentiments at a board of railway directors, or at a marriage breakfast, he might not improperly be called hysterical'.[17] This is very well put, given the speaker's attitude to a society which contains such things as railway directors. The wonderful mimicry of the tactful English drawl of such occasions that Brimley brings out in the litotes of 'might not improperly' gives us a prejudice which is common in criticism of the poem. Gerard Manley Hopkins is as sniffy about Tennyson's manners as he was about Browning's: 'not only "Locksley Hall", but *Maud*, is an ungentlemanly row'.[18]

In canto iii, the mounting excitement of being haunted by the paleness of Maud's face, which is not to be spoken away ('ever as pale as before') drives the speaker out on an 'hysterical', and certainly ungentlemanly, midnight walk. That midnight walk provides him with crashing waves in a cold wind and the 'shining daffodil dead'. Though the daffodil is dead, as too may be the narcissistic reflex of his own image, the speaker does manage to project his feelings on to the landscape that he perceives. He finds his echo in nature. While conventions of proportion, control and the sense of what is fitting to an emotion are often

refused in this poem, even the speaker is aware that poetic matter is not behaving in the way that it should.

> Morning arises stormy and pale,
> No sun, but a wannish glare
> In fold upon fold of hueless cloud,
> And the budded peaks of the wood are bowed
> Caught and cuffed by the gale:
> I had fancied it would be fair. (I, 190–5)

A cruel joke is played on poetic expectation, no less on the gradually unfolding picture of a very 'poetic' storm. The speaker has met Maud the previous night. She has touched him and smiled at him: the expected sunny day of a new life ('Ready to burst in a coloured flame', 208) has not occurred, and he is struck with conflicting sensation.

Her smile was 'sweet' (201), so he turns his thoughts on the epithet, sweetness and its opposite, to consider the continuance of his old life, added to by the hint of a new one.

> Ah, what shall I be at fifty
> Should Nature keep me alive,
> If I find the world so bitter
> When I am but twenty-five?
> Yet, if she were not a cheat,
> If Maud were all that she seemed,
> And her smile were all that I dreamed,
> Then the world were not so bitter
> But a smile could make it sweet. (I, 220–8)

It is a big 'If' that the speaker introduces in line 225, but he tries to resolve it, as the verse tries to resolve it, in the words which take the stresses in the last line of the stanza, 'smile . . . make . . . sweet'. The second and third 'if' in this stanza introduce a longing shored up in the rhymes. 'Seemed' and 'dreamed', occupying a similar semantic space of illusion and desire, chime together in a couplet which separates 'bitter' from the arrival of itself again, and the more serious threat of 'cheat' rhyming with, and thus retrospectively modifying, 'sweet'. The lines suggest a further step back in the time of the lyric, since 'sweet' and 'cheat' rhyme fully with the previous stanza's 'feet', and even the faint semantic twist in its rhyming word 'deceit'. The lines above do attempt to turn the world's bitterness to sweetness. The occurrence of 'sweet' throws us back to the canto's second stanza, twenty-eight lines previously, where Maud's smile was so sweet. There it is an epithet to describe

the smile. Here it is a grander metaphor, applied to the speaker's perception of the world.

The speaker of *Maud* reassures himself with the sounds of his own voice. The lyric form of the poem underscores this, allowing for the quick changes of direction that these sounds call. The speaker is not wholly unaware of the dangers in such a lack of control. A damning indictment of Maud's brother, which follows on quickly from the sweetness which she could bring to this world, is itself followed with a counsel of wariness. The croak of a raven (metaphorical or actual) asks for tact and care in his dealings, 'Keep watch and ward, keep watch and ward' (247), settling the rush of his speech, and the thought it provokes, into a calming rhythm. The calm provides the necessary conditions for the speaker's attempts to articulate the reasons for his lack of control over the direction of his phases of passion, and the tactlessness of his speech. In stanza viii of this canto the speaker attempts to examine his lonely state. He can only articulate it in a stutter: 'For am I not, am I not, here alone' (254).

He is led, and leads himself, into the terrors of his own self-enclosed, self-pitying state, haunted not only by memories of the dead, but also by his own self-consciousness. 'Myself from myself' (249) he cannot guard.

> . . . I hear the dead at midday moan,
> And the shrieking rush of the wainscot mouse,
> And my own sad name in corners cried,
> When the shiver of dancing leaves is thrown
> About its echoing chambers wide,
> Till a morbid hate and horror have grown
> Of a world in which I have hardly mixt,
> And a morbid eating lichen fixt
> On a heart half-turned to stone. (I, 259–67)

Even the mouse in the wainscot echoes 'Mariana' here, and both that poem and this lyric state with some exactitude a sense of a physical placement of terrifying visions contributing to a lonely subject. This exactitude is achieved in both poems in the paradoxical conditions of metaphorical conceits which appear so extravagant. Not only do we have the familiar image of a heart of stone, we have moss eating away at it. The speaker attempts to get at the source of his terror, but it cannot be adequately stated in words. He chances upon a term which is as general as the description of his enclosed lonely existence is precise, 'morbid'.

According to George Brimley, the then fashionable word 'morbid

. . . is made to include all works of art and all views of life that are coloured by other than comfortable feelings',[19] stressing the range of its imprecision of application. Tennyson is aware of the semantic imprecision of the word and its half-rhyme with heroine and title, Maud.[20] His speaker would appear to chance upon it, and return to it two lines later, as if liking its sound and connotations, indiscriminately applying it first to his emotions, and then to his body. He makes the word his own, describing his incipient madness, and it is insufficient. Yet Tennyson gives us an insight into his character's personality which is much more definite than that character's own insight. After the impressive extended metaphor of the lichen eating away at the half-stone heart, uncontrollably growing out of the very word 'morbid' itself, the stanza ends. As if savouring, and then consolidating this metaphor in the silent gap between the stanzas, the speaker returns to the concept, but this time in a new tone, a new phase of passion. By now he is addressing his (whole, not half) heart of stone. The stimulus has been provided for this new phase, and we can see, as the form Tennyson uses shows us, that 'myself from myself' has not been guarded.

Maud alerts us to two questions that we can ask of dramatic monologue or monodrama. We have the choice of asking from the poem an assured dominion over language, tactfully expressing its speaker's consciousness and his story; or we could accept that there is a passive surrender to the processes of 'language', alien to thought or emotion, the speaker's will randomly allowing the suddenness of an articulated word to lead him to conclusions dependent on his interpretation of his previous utterances. The poem works between the possibility of both of these opposites, vividly portraying an earnest agent, struggling to construct his own unstable consciousness, and his story, in words. Its curious 'backwards'[21] process of composition, of lyrics written to complement preceding or successive elements of its story, reveals much about the poem. Each lyric ushers the reader uncomfortably into the presence of the speaker, and his 'ungentlemanly row'. The seeming entropy of this row is an effect enhanced by the random nature of the thoughts we are presented with, springing as they often do from a word just spoken, a hint dropped, and both taken and expanded into the next phase.

Canto x of Part I has the speaker's attention turned on Maud's family, and his hatred for them. Dwelling on the thought that Maud may have a suitor other than him, he briefly considers her possible position in society.

> Maud could be gracious too, no doubt
> To a lord, a captain, a padded shape,
> A bought commission, a waxen face,
> A rabbit mouth that is ever agape–
> Bought? what is it he cannot buy? (I, 357–61)

The slow poise of the first line above, caught in fantasy about the imagined nobility of Maud, is decelerated by the emphatic 'no doubt' which quickly picks up speed into the excitement where lords and captains suddenly become padded shapes. Carried away, the speaker contemplates a society of corrupt chinless wonders until a dash in the text leaves us momentarily still, rabbit mouths 'agape'. This sudden halt is followed by the swivel of a double-take. Two lines after he has used the word, the speaker picks up the echo of his own voice saying 'A bought commission'. He turns back on the word, and it returns with all the vigour of its possible meanings: 'Bought? [he halts himself] what is it he cannot buy?' The word comes in to prompt his thought in another direction. A previous utterance, used in a different context, prompts the direction of a new thought.[22]

As if admitting his dependence in this matter, the speaker now attempts to make a perspective, to objectify the contexts of his rant. We might imagine that, in the breathing space after the question mark, 'buy?', the unspoken thought is the self-examining 'What is it I can buy?' (with its inevitable answer, 'Very little'). We need to imagine something like this in order to make sense of the following lines, with their conclusive 'And therefore' following so soon after, as if completing a carefully prepared syllogism. We don't have anything like this, since 'therefore' gives us the mock-logical preparation for a protest that he lacks any sort of logical stability:

> And therefore splenetic, personal, base,
> A wounded thing with a rancorous cry,
> At war with myself and a wretched race,
> Sick, sick to the heart of life am I. (I, 362–5)

This rounding on the word 'sick' returns us to this canto's opening line 'Sick, am I sick', spoken thirty-five lines previously. All the speaker does is give himself reasons, not reasoning, for continuing to be 'personal', wrapped up in himself, and his 'rancorous cry'.

He turns on the Quakers with intellectual contempt as he asks 'Whether war be a cause or a consequence?' (374). This prepares him for a series of exclamations which revolve around the repetition of a single word.

> Put down the passions that make earth Hell!
> Down with ambition, avarice, pride,
> Jealousy, down! cut off from the mind
> The bitter springs of anger and fear;
> Down too, down at your own fireside,
> With the evil tongue and the evil ear,
> For each is at war with mankind. (I, 375–81)

The word 'down' is used in a possible five senses: to put down a rebellion, or put down an animal; to say 'down' to an affectionate animal; in the general sense of political protest ('Down with capitalist greed!'); and to suggest location, sitting down by the fire. The apparently cosy reductiveness of this last sense is belied by the speaker's location of social ills in a war of the hearth.[23] The versification responds to an effect like this, each 'down' carrying stresses like irregular heartbeats, leading the words through the damaged cries of their various meanings, pumping the verse towards its conclusion.

The very randomness of the speaker's thought as he returns to the word is ingeniously captured in the rhythms of the lyric, granting his speech order and form, but order and form designed to show a lack of control. We can see the point at which the speaker eventually ends at some remove from the intentions with which his speech began: the perfect fit of one word is returned to, and given a baggy or constricting lack of aptness which the speaker attempts to fill with an appropriate form. The state of mind of Tennyson's speaker seems to imply that it is impossible to represent a close, tactile, relationship between language and thought, like that imagined in Browning's monologues, where speech is act, and thoughts give the act significance. 'Thought' at this point in *Maud* might be having difficulty in finding linguistic form, in something like the terms of the early Wittgenstein: 'Language disguises thought. So much so, that from the outward form of the clothing it is impossible to infer the form of the thought beneath it, because the outward form of the clothing is not designed to reveal the form of the body, but for entirely different purposes.'[24]

Part I of *Maud* does make some approach towards a demonstration of the speaker's exercise of agency in his speech, making admissions of some form of self-knowledge.

> The fancy flattered my mind,
> And again seemed overbold;
> Now I thought she cared for me,
> Now I thought she was kind
> Only because she was cold. (I, 511–15)

The speaker begins to worry over what he says and thinks, regardless of the error of his conclusions. Canto xv contains the line 'Shall I not take care of all that I think?' (533).[25] Yet in this transitional phase (cantos xi–xvi) he still has grammatically and rhythmically to wrestle his way towards positions of even reassuring contempt.

> Scorned, to be scorned, by one that I scorn.
> Is that a matter to make me fret? (I, 444–5)

The speaker attempts to score a grammatical victory here. The verbs move through the passive sense, into a transitional infinitive with a past participle, and out towards an active verb which he uses to give himself the illusion of detached calm. The rhythmic ambiguity of the last two syllables (*I* scorn, in control of the verb, or I *scorn*, an order in the cadence, but the verb still uppermost) suggests that this is a fretting kind of victory. The struggle with words through the three forms of the verb suggests the difficulty of his effort to assume a position of disdain: these words 'matter', and, we sense in the physicality of his struggle, are matter to him.

It is only in canto xviii, approaching a state of rapture, that the speaker comes close to a tactful language. This is achieved not through his own efforts but through the 'gentle will' of Maud, which has 'changed my fate' (621). Hallam Tennyson states of the canto, following on from 'the exultation of love' in canto xvii ('Go not, happy day'), that 'this blessedness is so intense that it borders on sadness, and my father's voice would break down when he came to "I have led her home, my love, my only friend. / There is none like her, none."'[26] In the first two stanzas of the canto, the statement that there is none like Maud is repeated with the full force of the lover's absolute attained. The present tense is hardly enough, so the speaker goes on to state that there *will* never be one like her 'when our summers have deceased' (612). The psychologist R. J. Mann, whose account of the poem had Tennyson's approval, pointed to the metaphorical vacuum to which a woman without comparison leads the speaker, stating that repeating this phrase is not enough: 'This triumphant assertion of her excellence has now acquired such force from repetition, that it can no longer rest where it did before.'

Mann speaks of how *Maud* demonstrates 'The power of language to symbolise in sound mental states and perceptions'.[27] The fourth through to the seventh stanza of canto xviii show the verse demonstrating just such a power. In stanza iii, Maud at last has her analogy, no less than as

a descendant of Eve, conveniently stripped of all connotations of original sin and fall. At the start of stanza iv, the speaker decides to rest in his midnight walk ('Here will I lie, while these long branches sway', 627), imagining himself in Eden. He allows himself to express thoughts about the stars governing the ways of man: the Christian imagery of paradise and fall is replaced with astrology and beyond that the thought of a vacancy in the heavens. Lying on the ground, we can imagine him perceiving the stars in the sky, this perception prompting thought, and that thought prompting his speech. 'Here will I lie' the stanza has begun, and his physical lying, and the extravagance of his fancies, lies or not, lead him to talk of understanding,

> A sad astrology, the boundless plan
> That makes you tyrants in your iron skies,
> Innumerable, pitiless, passionless eyes,
> Cold fires, yet with power to burn and brand
> His nothingness into man. (I, 634–8)

The run-on of the enjambed final lines in this stanza, and the shortening of the last one into the cadence of atheistic fact, would have further confused the speaker in an earlier phase of his passion. Here though, the next stanza begins, 'But now shine on, and what care I', where the force of that 'But' gives us a sign of some control.

Stanza iv had begun with 'Here will I lie'. The 'lie' sound refers back to 'Sighing' and 'I', and is picked up and echoed in 'iron skies' and 'passionless eyes', unsettling the speaker's repose with their rhyming uncertainties. As if to re-emphasise that he is in control, he tauntingly uses it again in the assertive 'what care I'. Still toying with the void, the speaker introduces 'the sky', which appears again as a rhyme, and it is 'hollow' (641). A metaphor has been found for Maud, she is 'a pearl, / The countercharm of space and hollow sky'. Revelling in his control, the speaker brings in another rhyme for 'lie', perhaps the only one he has yet to use. He says that he 'would accept' (a limp acknowledgement, which he allows) his madness, and 'would die' for Maud. This is no lover's convention: the ground has been prepared for the entrance of the word 'die', and in the context of the speaker's talk of the 'sad astrology' which governs the world, it acquires a pertinent force.

The speaker runs this phrase, 'would die', on into the next stanza and once again the sound of the word suggests its repeated use. Here, though, he is not passively submitting to the limiting suggestions of a hastily chosen word.

> Would die; for sullen-seeming Death may give
> More life to love than is or ever was
> In our low world, where yet 'tis sweet to live.
> Let no-one ask me how it came to pass;
> It seems that I am happy, that to me
> A livelier emerald twinkles in the grass,
> A purer sapphire melts into the sea. (I, 644–50)

The last two images are linked closely to the imagery of jewellery stripped of its mercantile associations when suggesting the preciousness of Maud, and carry the conditions of near anonymity, and a life-enhancing loss of identity in which he can conceive his happiness. This calls for a tactful silence ('Let no-one ask me how it came to pass' – 'it came to pass', the evangelist's tact before the mystery of Christ's actions), since he 'seems' to be happy, contemplating the worthiness of self-sacrifice for love. 'The central idea – the holy power of love',[28] Tennyson said of the opening of the next stanza, and it turns the poise of a man, almost blasphemously contemplating oblivion, to an assertion of meaning in life: 'Not die', the rhyme comes again, 'but live a life of truest breath'.[29] Suddenly we believe that this man has come through playing with his fancy, and has found the preciousness of life and love. Poised over language here, he can turn to address his (absent) lover with an alliterative burst, the performance of which calls for careful enunciation. A new confidence in his vocal abilities allows him to ask what makes life worth living:

> Make answer, Maud my bliss,
> Maud made my Maud by that long loving kiss,
> Life of my life, wilt thou not answer this?
> 'The dusky strand of Death inwoven here
> With dear Love's tie, makes Love himself more dear.'
> (I, 655–9)

Echo answers 'Death' in the opening stanza of the poem, but here death is given meaning in love.

The canto's final stanza opens with a question which may be as much in response to the statement above as to a seeking after significance in the sounds of nature. This question sets up a new rhythm. At first it is the tide, and then it is the clock chiming midnight, reminding him what happened on the day in which he found happiness and a will to live, and finally, his own heart, 'long as my pulses play'. Three regular rhythms are set in concurrent motion in the stanza:

Is that enchanted moan only the swell
Of the long waves that roll in yonder bay?
And hark the clock within, the silver knell
Of twelve sweet hours that passed in bridal white,
And died to live, long as my pulses play;
But now by this my love has closed her sight
And given false death her hand, and stolen away
To dreamful wastes where footless fancies dwell
Among the fragments of the golden day.
May nothing there her maiden grace affright!
Dear heart, I feel with thee the drowsy spell.
My bride to be, my evermore delight,
My own heart's heart, my ownest own, farewell;
It is but for a little space I go:
And ye meanwhile far over moor and fell
Beat to the noiseless music of the night!
Has our whole earth gone nearer to the glow
Of your soft splendours that you look so bright?
I have climbed nearer out of lonely Hell.
Beat, happy stars, timing with things below,
Beat with my heart more blest than heart can tell,
Blest, but for some dark undercurrent woe
That seems to draw – but it shall not be so:
Let all be well, be well. (I, 660–83)

The speaker stands up to leave at the end, we may imagine, full of 'the noiseless music of the night!' (675), in time with, and timing, the rhythms of the clock, the tides and his own pulse and then makes an attempt at a triumphant ending to his day.

Yet the stanza and lyric end with a difficult moment. Where we, and the speaker himself, feel that he should be triumphantly exclaiming the unity of his being in these carefully measured rhythms, something beneath his powerful speech is acknowledged as a nagging influence.[30] As Browning will enervate the Pope at his moment of decision, with 'the quite new quick cold thrill' of the unforeseen 'keen dread creeping from a quarter scarce / Suspected', so too Tennyson enervates his rhythm at this moment of ecstasy. The rhythm is interrupted by 'some dark undercurrent woe' caught up in the flow of time, tide and body, an interruption from within the consciousness which has set its own rhythms in time with these natural rhythms. This moment of doubt is in turn interrupted by the willed moment, the harshly spoken resolution, 'but it shall not be so', to be followed by the diminishing echoes of the rhythmic mantra of 'Let all be well, be well'. At the last, the speaker's

resolve is superseded by sound, as he tries to replace the elision in the verse and the dread in his thought by the final incantation of a rhythm of will.

Canto xviii of *Maud* is the climactic section of Part I of the poem. It is curious then that it flirts so dangerously with anticlimax in its last three lines. The doubt that it leaves of an inability, even in the willed intensities of its rhythms and diction, ever to overcome the determinism of temperament and circumstance, is consistent with what we know of the speaker previous to this, and what the circumstances of an accident tell us later in the poem. Part II throws the speaker into madness, some time after the concluding raptures of canto xxii. The self buried within the self of the opening canto of Part I, once prised out into loving Maud is buried again, taking her image with it. It moves, shadow and ghost ('Not thou, but like to thee', II, 152, echoing 'There is none like her, none') as if in a mirror before him. When he sees her ghost in the meadow, 'the woodland echo rings' (II, 178) and the reflexivity of his self-obsession in Part I is turned to the self-delusions of madness. The beating of the rhythms in canto xviii are here grimly echoed as sounds over the madhouse, sounds which physically beat him.

> Dead, long dead,
> Long dead!
> And my heart is a handful of dust,
> And the wheels go over my head,
> And my bones are shaken with pain,
> For into a shallow grave they are thrust,
> Only a yard beneath the street,
> And the hoofs of the horses beat, beat,
> The hoofs of the horses beat,
> Beat into my scalp and my brain . . . (II, 239–48)

The tactless ironies played on the speaker are compounded of the 'beat' and the heart and dust images of the final stanza of Part I, spoken immediately before the unwilled event which has brought him to this. Such beating is of rhythm on the body – here bones, scalp and brain – as much as the merely sonic beating of the insistent clatter of horses' hooves. In terms which are further explored in chapter eight here, this section of the poem attempts to make physical the sonic insubstantiality of the experience of being haunted in rhythm.

The echoing across a greater distance of the speaker's previous utterances can be given a literary, formal, explanation as musical

'motifs', which supposedly unify disparate elements within a single narrative. Primarily though, these are mental associations across time: to borrow the title of an early monologue by Tennyson, they come from 'a Second-rate Sensitive Mind, Not in Unity with Itself'. They are made in the mind of the same speaker of 'I have led her home', and 'Come into the garden, Maud', yet a speaker whose consciousness is profoundly altered. His association is not one that comes from a sense of irony with his changed circumstances, whatever ironies the poem plays with them. *Maud* derives its form from the mental states of its fictional speaker and that form is given substance in the way his speech relates to its origin. The dramatic experience of the poem lies in the way the speaker follows the sound of his own voice, and it lies in a psychology which shows a man dependent on words, and shows a consciousness unable to fit himself into them. As R. J. Mann said, the speaker 'exhibits his story . . . not directly and connectedly, but as it were inferentially and interruptedly'. Mann's psychological diagnosis of the speaker is that he is in the same dependent relationship with words as a poet. The poem is 'the one person revealing to the reader his own sad and momentous history, by fits and starts, which are themselves but so many impulsive utterances called forth from a mind strung to the pitch of keen poetic sensibility'.[31]

'Strictly speaking', Tennyson said, 'I do not see how from the poem I could be pronounced peace or war man.' As usual, he resists any attempts to work out his opinions from those of his hero, and certainly the suggestion that the poem simply leads up to an apology for the Crimean War. All he has done in this 'new form of dramatic composition' is to take 'a man constitutionally diseased and [dip] him into the circumstances of the time and [take] him out on fire'.[32] The fire is doused in Part III, paradoxically the most incendiary of all the poem's sections in Tennyson's and our own time.[33] In the very first section of the poem, the speaker had found the liberal ideology of competition creating a society which was at war with itself. Dutiful only to the self-help which comes with the acquisition of wealth, the individual within that society works only for the self, the old obligations of land and nobility lost in the meritocracy from which the speaker is alien. Disinherited, 'constitutionally diseased', and living a life in the aftermath of a mortal accident for which he was not responsible ('The fault was mine', Maud's dying brother tells the hero), the hero has little sense of himself as one of a nation of autonomous individuals. By its close, *Maud* contemplates a governing ideology based in a fiction of individual choice which faces

the poem's speaker with only the narrowest range of choices, if there are any to be made at all.

Maud ends only with the invocation of duty to country, a duty which has only returned now that the country has unified itself in conflict. In Part I, the speaker refers to 'a world in which I have hardly mixt' (265). In Part III he states that he has 'mixed my breath / With a loyal people shouting a battle cry' (34–5). In an article which usefully surveys late twentieth century and mid-Victorian attitudes to Tennyson's poem through other poetic treatments of the war, Joseph Bristow finds that by the end of the poem the speaker achieves 'potency'. This comes through a conservative nationalism which finds in war the means by which speaker and poem solve for themselves their problems with masculinity, madness and the nation. Bristow's argument is that the final part attempts the tact of being in touch with a nation: 'I have felt with my native land, I am one with my kind' (III, 58).[34] But this is to find the poem much more secure in its ideological than literary construction, and certainly to find a greater 'potency' in the images of a nation at war than in the rhythms of the voice of the man who describes them.

The last canto begins in a matter-of-fact past tense, striving for this potency of solid construction in the language of the fictive reconstructed self:

> My life has crept so long on a broken wing
> Through cells of madness, haunts of horror and fear,
> That I come to be grateful at last for a little thing:
> My mood is changed, for it fell at time of year . . . (III, 1–4)

'Let no-one ask me how it came to pass' (I, 647) slips easily into the expansive narrative cliché of 'it fell at time of year'. The hero speaks out of his change of heart, however difficult we might find its circumstances, of the self submerged in a martial spirit, bowing down to the formula of conventional narrative to 'embrace the purpose of God, and the doom assigned'. Yet the rhythms are shot through with the exhaustion of the man who speaks them. Tennyson asked that the ending be compared with the railing against the age of the opening, and that we remember that these lines are spoken by someone who is 'is not quite sane – a little shattered'.[35] These rhythms too are shattered, hauling themselves with great effort into 'the doom assigned'. The laming of the iambic beat of these lines with anapaests ('so long on a broken wing', (∪ / ∪ ∪ / ∪ /, or 'haunts of horror and fear', / ∪ / ∪ ∪ /, even through the blandness of 'it fell at time of year', ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪) exists to keep the voice going in

one more effort into annihilation. We are presented now with an enervated monologue which gives us its speaker demonstrating an effective agency in his speech, his will purged of the need for fireworks to assert his control.

Maud leaves us with a thinking consciousness which has returned to the pale, back within the bosom of tact, trying to say the right thing for the right time. Unfortunately, this may be for the last time. The speaker's potency is to achieve the impersonal anonymity of one freed from sense of self, of annihilation. As in 'Ulysses' or 'Tithon/Tithonus', what W. E. Fredeman has called Tennyson's 'art of the penultimate'[36] leaves us waiting for a narrative resolution which the endings of the texts themselves refuse to offer. There is always some small future for the character beyond the end of his or her monologue, since not all of the action is in the element of picture. We cannot, I suppose, speak our own deaths. But it is also the beyond-death which Tennyson uses to shore up the self which so often has its actions inhibited by a past over which it has had little control. In the second part of *Maud*, an apparition of the loved one's ghost comes back to haunt him in his distracted state. In *In Memoriam*, the thought of such evidences of personal immortality make the speaker face a future over which he feels he must exercise control. Yet action may result only in the embrace of the future's 'doom assigned'. In *Maud*, the self which had been dipped in circumstance and taken out on fire is extinguished by the willed surrender of power, the giving up to a duty which may bring only death.

PART THREE

Making a will

CHAPTER 6

The drift of In Memoriam

Christopher Ricks suggests that Tennyson's early sonnet, 'Conrad! why call thy life monotonous?', probably borrows the character to whom it gives its advice from Byron's *The Corsair*, where, 'On Conrad's stricken soul Exhaustion prest, / And Stupor almost lulled it into rest' (III, xxii).[1] The sonnet was never published in Tennyson's lifetime, and the manuscript appears in Heath Notebook 7, along with poems published in 1830 and 1832. Writing about Tennyson and nineteenth-century subjectivism, William Brashear suggests that it counters another poem of the period, 'The Lotos-Eaters', in which Odysseus' exhausted mariners seem 'to give way completely to absorption'.[2] Indeed, 'Conrad!' also plays with many of the images of water, calm and sloth which will later tempt the speaker of *In Memoriam A.H.H.*

> Conrad! why call thy life monotonous?
> Why brood above thine anchor? The woven weed
> Calms not, but blackens, the slope water bed.
> The shores of life are fair and various,
> But thou dost ever by one beach abide.
> Why hast thou drawn thine oars across the boat?
> Thou canst not without impulse downward float,
> The wave of life hath no propelling tide.
> We live but by *resistance,* and the best
> Of life is but the struggle of the will:
> Thine unresisting boat shall pause – not still
> But beaten on both sides with swaying Unrest.
> Oh! cleave this calm to living eddies, breast
> This sloth-sprung weed with progress sensible.

Like many of Tennyson's sonnets, this is remarkable mainly in its irregularity, best viewed as an experiment in the quatrain. The sonnet refuses the option of the final couplet of the Shakespearean sonnet, instead overlapping, as it were, two resolving final quatrains. In doing

so, Tennyson turns a lyric form with which he was never comfortable to prosodic gain.

The metrical falling away of the last line, anti-climactically ending with an incomplete rhyme ('the will [iamb] . . . not still [spondee] . . . sensible [dactyl]'), instils rhythmic uncertainty just where the expectation is that it should be proving its point. Lines nine to twelve approach the capacity for epigram that the Shakespearean couplet, or indeed the *In Memoriam* stanza, could have given Tennyson,[3] but they also suggest the capacities of rhyming to work as a medium of modification upon the meanings of the words that rhyme. 'Best', weakly descriptive as it is, is modified by 'Unrest', and 'will' must counter 'not still', which is separated by an emphatic caesura from the rest of the line it occupies. Henry James famously observed that 'When he [Tennyson] wishes to represent movement, the phrase always seems to me to pause and slowly pivot upon itself, or at most to move backward',[4] and the rhymes of the sonnet move its progress backwards. They set up a controlled version of the monotony which the sonnet's first line sets out to challenge. The sonic progress is across words which sound similar: 'weed' and 'bed', half-rhyming themselves, receive a further half echo in 'abide' and 'tide', which in turn are not far removed from 'boat' and 'float'. The last six lines have only two rhyming sounds, slightly offset by the final feminine rhyme. The words in rhyming positions drift and merge in and out of one another, giving a mimic illusion of the random currents that affect the 'sloth-sprung weed' in a sonic form which is distinctly at odds with the lyrical sentiment of the poem: 'the best / Of life is but the struggle of the will'.

In Tennyson's poetry, this drifting can appear monotonous. His friend Edward FitzGerald said of *In Memoriam*:

> His poem I never did greatly affect; nor can I learn to do so: it is full of finest things, but it is monotonous, and has that air of being evolved by a Poetical Machine of the highest order. So it seems to be with him now, at least to me, the Impetus, the Lyrical oestrus, is gone . . . It is the cursed inactivity (very pleasant to me who am no Hero) of this 19th century which has spoiled Alfred, I mean spoiled him for the great work he ought now to be entering upon. . .[5]

Tennyson's *oestrus* – Greek word for a gadfly, but also the sexual heat of animals – meets the monotony which results from the evidence it gives of a 'Poetic Machine'. FitzGerald says in another letter that 'one is aware all the time that the poet wilfully protracts what he complains of'.[6] The complaint against cursed inactivity in Tennyson, peculiar to

the nineteenth century or not, was made again by T. S. Eliot, who suggested that the 'emotional intensity and violence' in Tennyson was 'so deeply suppressed, even from himself, as to tend rather towards the blackest melancholia than towards dramatic action'.[7] And Peter Sacks has said that the therapeutic implications for *In Memoriam* of the wilful protraction of melancholy, provide a 'tremendous counterpressure' to the consolatory processes of elegy. As a consequence, the extreme length of the poem, 'robs it of the energetic processional drive that is so important to elegy'. Other, more condensed, or 'intense' elegies 'leave the reader invigorated as well as comforted'.[8]

In Memoriam, in its monotonous protractions which appear generically to transgress the vigour necessary for effective consolation, carries an ambivalence towards the possibility of progress and change in the processes of grief. The slothful melancholy, against which the speaker of the Conrad sonnet warns, often appears to be the only option open to the exhausted mourner who speaks the sections of *In Memoriam*. 'Energetic processional drive' may not be available to the melancholic. However, this speaker knows about the dangers – moral as well as psychic – of his own melancholy. It is not so 'deeply suppressed' that it isn't wilfully allowed to surface every now and then. FitzGerald's reading of the poet/character who speaks *In Memoriam,* as one who 'wilfully protracts' his complaint, does not see a poet hiding from himself. Herbert Tucker points out that the lines 'That mind and soul according well, / May make one music as before' (Prologue, 27–8),[9] contain an etymological pun that actively courts monotony. 'One music' goes as easily into a monotone, which is both wilful and mechanical, as it does into the reintegration of personality, and the making of the living will of section CXXXI.

In section XLIX, Tennyson returns to the psychic and moral predicament about which he had written in the 'Conrad!' sonnet prior to the bereavement which prompted the long and protracted response which was the writing of the elegies which were to form *In Memoriam A.H.H* . Both poems explore what it is to set out upon a course of action which may be becalmed for years by circumstance or temperament. FitzGerald's complaint about wilful protraction in a poetry which finds great difficulty in bringing a process to a close,[10] is matched in these poems by imagery of minimally varied movement without purpose. Action, for the exhausted Conrad, is visited upon him only by an impersonal external agency: 'Thine unresisting boat shall pause – not still / But beaten on both sides in swaying Unrest'. *In Memoriam* XLIX

gives us the reasons, never reasoning, behind such a wilful protraction for holding out against movement:

> From art, from nature, from the schools,
> Let random influences glance,
> Like light in many a shivered lance
> That breaks about the dappled pools:
>
> The lightest wave of thought shall lisp,
> The fancy's tenderest eddy wreathe,
> The slightest air of song shall breathe
> To make the sullen surface crisp.
>
> And look thy look, and go thy way,
> But blame not thou the winds that make
> The seeming-wanton ripple break,
> The tender-pencilled shadow play.
>
> Beneath all fancied hopes and fears,
> Ay me, the sorrow deepens down,
> Whose muffled motions blindly drown
> The bases of my life in tears.

This is the Tennyson that Thomas Carlyle saw 'in an articulate element of tranquil chaos'.[11] It is a lyric about the suppression of intense emotion, a facing up to melancholia, while drowning in it.

The poem begins in chaos and disorder, an array of impressions working with random force. The ill-discipline of the mind turns to order the 'random influences' which are not within itself, but within the simile it stretches out to accommodate this emotion, carrying it over six lines, and across two stanzas. This ordering of disorder is further shown in the calm water, and its slight movements. We have an image of the mind as a still pool with only surface attachments, being quietly disturbed in a monotone of uneasy sonic harmony. The mimetic effects of the sibilants and soft expelling of air by the reader contribute to this: in the rhythmic progression of 'The lightest wave of thought' caught up in 'The slightest air of song'; the sounds of water echoed in 'lisp . . . fancy . . . slightest . . . song . . . sullen surface crisp'; the imitation of a soft wind in 'wreathe' and 'breathe', and the wordplay, which courts inarticulacy in 'lisp', while pointing to melody as the random disturber of the surface in 'air'. At the beginning of the third stanza, the reader is told to leave the poet, as, with some shame, he continues to describe his self-indulgence. This is no random, fortunate, thing. It is a fundamental and unifying factor, the source of his inactivity and his seeming indifference to the currents of life

above him. The rhythms which the lyric gives to the will of the becalmed poet who speaks these lines are simply the 'muffled motions' of a sorrow which establishes the near-monotone which renders 'The bases of my life' inactive.

By muffling motion, the rhythm of section XLIX conspires with the monotonous inactivity of the grieving man, and seems to render impossible the conception of a will, or in Peter Sacks' terms a 'vigour' or 'energy', which might enable the speaker to overcome his becalmed state. Yet that will is the psychic faculty which *In Memoriam* invokes as the primary means by which its speaker can rescue the bases of his life from drowning in sorrow. The will, too, can perform a social function, in providing a sort of moral evidence for the refutation of the passivity, even sloth, which afflicts so many characters in Tennyson, by dwelling on the virtues of those – like the A. H. H. of the poem's title – who are morally and temperamentally active.

The importance of will in *In Memoriam* has been current in discussion of the poem since at least FitzGerald's comments. A. C. Bradley's *Commentary* on the poem suggested that there are three responses to grief: simply forgetting; a state where 'the wound remains unhealed'; or, the preferred option, the eventual turn to will and the struggle towards 'the conquest of the soul over its bondage to sense'.[12] William Brashear extends this, by stating that in the poem 'the self . . . pits its will to live against the Dionysiac force, endures the tragic struggle, maintains its own identity, and grows'.[13] Discussion of the poem by Isobel Armstrong, Timothy Peltason and Alastair Thomson has emphasised the workings of will in it, if never to the status of Brashear's victorious subjectivism.[14] Yet elegies are involved in another sort of will when they ostensibly see themselves functioning as memorials for those that they elegise. When, as in the case of Edward King ('Lycidas'), John Keats (*Adonais*) or Arthur Henry Hallam (*In Memoriam A.H.H.*), their subject dies prematurely, their reason for existing may be more a memorial of promise than achievement. Of these three major English elegies, all dealing with the deaths of those who have yet to achieve their full potential, *In Memoriam* is the most involved with making the will of its intestate subject. Tennyson's will is, of course, the one that is shattered and then gradually put back together again in the poem, and it is primarily a portrayal of its poet/speaker's drift back to power. But Tennyson belonged to a family aware to the point of neurosis of the two-sided nature of inheritance and disinheritance that often seemed willed upon them. By accident, or

'random influence', as section XLIX might put it, the actions and aspirations of this family were profoundly affected by factors outside their control.[15] With the death of Arthur Hallam, the most important of these circumstances, Tennyson is prompted to make his own, as well as Hallam's, will. *In Memoriam*, and the great monologues, 'Ulysses' and 'Tithonus', make a personal fiction out of this process.

In the 1860 version of 'Tithonus', an addition to the earlier manuscript brings out in relief Tithonus' difficulty in making a will. He is a man who has been granted immortality by his lover, the goddess of the dawn. Yet he has not been granted eternal youth. As a result he ages deathlessly, deprived of power over his destiny, unable to die. The action described in this monologue is all worked from outside him, and upon him. There can be no legal will, since there can be no death, only perpetual ageing:

> But thy strong Hours indignant worked their wills,
> And beat me down and marred and wasted me,
> And though they could not end me, left me maimed
> To dwell in presence of immortal youth,
> Immortal age beside immortal youth,
> And all I was in ashes. (18–23)

Tithonus is Aurora's 'choice' (12), and her 'chosen' (13), the close proximity of the two words adding to a tautology which deepens the irony of his predicament as one acted upon, unable to act. Making a will in this monologue, to prepare for death, Tithonus has only the Hours *working* their wills on him.

'Ulysses' describes an attempt to respond to Hallam's death in a contrary direction. This dramatic monologue shows its protagonist making his will. There is the same restlessness in Ulysses, who objects to the idle claustrophobia of his home life. In this instance his position is heightened by a sense of an heroic former life, and consequently, of activity denied to him. His experience has resulted in a vast knowledge:

> I am a part of all that I have met;
> Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough
> Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades
> For ever and for ever when I move. (18–21)

The shifting horizons of possible knowledge of the unknown, and perhaps unknowable, provide the compelling reasons why Ulysses resolves to take his voyage. It is to be an exercise of will towards the end of 'something more' (27), 'something ere the end' (51) or 'Some work of

noble note' (52), a succession of vague, supposed aspirations or inarticulable purposes which may amount to very little. The mimicry of the *In Memoriam* stanza, in the internal rhymes of '*all* that I have *met*; / *Yet all'* in these lines, instils a procrastinating monotone into the vistas of future experience. The monologue is a bequest of sorts. In the fiction of the imagined situation, it is both an abdication speech and the making of a will, in favour of his son. To this extent, it actually does business: 'This is my son, mine own Telemachus, / To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle' (33–4). 'To whom I leave', the formulaic words of the will, certain and assured.

In Memoriam engages in allusive argument with these concerns with facing an end and making arrangements for the society that has been left behind. 'Ulysses' begins, 'It little profits that an idle king, / By this still hearth, among these barren crags'. The second stanza of *In Memoriam* CVIII has the words 'profit' and 'barren' in even closer proximity, and alludes, within a breathtaking two lines, to the extremes of height and depth which Ulysses yearns for:

> What profit lies in barren faith,
> And vacant yearning, though with might
> To scale the heaven's highest height,
> Or dive below the wells of Death? (5–8)

Section CXIII makes explicit this sceptical commentary on Ulysses' aspirations, by referring to the abilities of the poet's friend in words which directly mimic the last line of 'Ulysses':

> For can I doubt, who knew thee keen
> In intellect, with force and skill
> To strive, to fashion, to fulfil –
> I doubt not what thou wouldst have been . . . (5–8)

Timothy Peltason, who draws this comparison, says that our attention is called to the difference between Hallam and Ulysses, and further, to the relationship between Ulysses and Telemachus.[16] Indeed, the virtues that Telemachus represents are essentially civic and domestic. Ulysses says that his son will 'make mild / A rugged people, and through soft degrees / Subdue them to the useful and the good' (36–8). Hallam, in section CXIII, is seen as one who could have pursued 'A life in civic action warm', and, by the same process of gradualist reform, effect a liberal prevention of revolution. This is the will that Hallam could have made for his own English people. *In Memoriam* LXXXIV, on a similar theme,

moves from a vision of Hallam in domestic 'bliss' (6), to one of him profoundly affecting his own society, and the society to come, 'Leaving great legacies of thought' (35), a contributor to the future cultural history of the nation.

Legacies or bequests are contracts between the dead and the living. The possessions of the dead are left behind, to be disposed of by society for the living. In a contract with the dead, who are in no position to oversee their wishes, the social or legal system cooperates to ensure the will is executed. The elegy and the memorial poem perform the same social, legal function. That is presuming you have something to leave. Ulysses could leave his kingdom, and the Duke of Wellington, subject of Tennyson's first published poem after *In Memoriam,* left the memory of the example of his great career. But Arthur Hallam died when he was twenty-two. Apart from a few tantalising essays and some immature poetry he left nothing but his memory. Those who had memories of Arthur Hallam went on to give their society much, for example as Prime Minister and Poet Laureate: Gladstone was Hallam's best friend at Eton, Tennyson at Cambridge. But in those sections of *In Memoriam* where Tennyson thinks of the virtues of his friend, we find virtues close to those of the Duke of Wellington which made England great.

Section XCVI commemorates Hallam's virtues, and while it ends locating virtue in doubt and the courage to face that doubt, it does so only with an image of deferred deliverance:

> And Power was with him in the night,
> Which makes the darkness and the light
> And dwells not in the light alone,
>
> But in the darkness and the cloud,
> As over Sinaï's peaks of old,
> While Israel made their Gods of gold,
> Although the trumpet blew so loud. (18–24)

Hallam's moral virtues are to dwell in the 'the darkness and the cloud' with Moses, as a deliverer, indeed the bringer of God's law to a people who are easily led astray. While Hallam died too soon to deliver his people, *In Memoriam* makes a bequest for him. Between it and its completion in the *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington* it leaves the legacy of the memory of virtue. Acting in memory of the dead, England is reminded of the virtues of those who have died, and of how those virtues might save it. These are private, inward – facing the spectres of the mind – and public or civic: the Duke has 'an iron

nerve', he 'stood four-square to all the winds that blew!' (37–9). Both Arthurs, Hallam and Wellesley, in both of their poems represent the same saving Englishness for the people who must be kept 'whole',[17] until as Cecil Lang has told us, the third Arthur, in *Idylls of the King*,[18] presides over the dissolution of that wholeness. The lost friend was given 'Power' in the night, and feeling little but its own bereaved powerlessness, Tennyson's elegiac poetry attempts to recreate the lost power as the faculty which will enable him to overcome the debilitating effects of his bereavement.

Arthur Hallam left only a small legacy of poems and essays, apart from which he died intestate. Those who succeeded him found themselves bereft, with little to commemorate his memory. The elegy of *In Memoriam A.H.H.* exists to perform this function, and to work towards these moral and civic virtues which will enable him to be remembered. However, the difficulties with this elegy lie in the fact that while it is more 'personal' than, say, *Lycidas* or *Adonais,* its object is a rather shadowy figure, while the subjectivity of the elegist is often presented with all the detailed self-consciousness of a diary. This is part of the central formal problem of *In Memoriam.* The elegist feels, by formal convention, that he should represent the virtues of the person mourned, virtues of strong will and resolute thought and belief. Yet the corresponding grief effected by the absence of this person should also be expressed. While the memorial poem should commemorate the dead, elegy is less about the dead, and more about the fact of loss. *In Memoriam* consistently doubts its own sincerity and ability with regard to these criteria. As the poet mourns for his dead friend, there is a persistent urge to wallow in tears, just as there is a corresponding attempt poetically to will the self out of such a static situation. The poem's movements often consist of strenuous exertions to carry the self forward, followed by emotional checks which set it back. Conversely, these movements may contain a knowingly self-indulgent despair, either set in the terms of a willed conceit, or followed by a wilfully irresponsible idea. Although the sections of *In Memoriam* are organised to bring us from grief, through doubt and despair, to trust, faith and hope, at local moments within its texture it allows us to see little of such patterning. Even when it is most concerned with the exercise of, or making, a will, it appears aimless. It often appears to drift.

The drift of *In Memoriam* is performed within a frame which begins by asking the 'Strong Son of God, immortal Love' of its prologue to make

the poet 'wise', and ends with an invocation of a living, free will and an act of assent in the 'I will' of marriage. Between these points, it charts little of the directness of course that might exemplify such assent. But such drifting is essential to the intuitive method (if this is not a contradiction) of the poem. The Prologue itself initiates the tentative refusals of the poet to engage in the definitive consolations available in philosophy. Its tone-setting is not an elucidation of the themes which lead the self triumphantly through loss to a greater faith. It is rather a prelude to the infirm and non-categorical feeling after truth through the trust that comes of faith. This faith is in the dark, 'we, that have not seen thy face' (2); helpless, 'Believing where we cannot prove' (4); and ignorant, 'Thou madest man, he knows not why' (10).

Just as the consolations of philosophy are seen as possible ways of organising this elegy, so they are excised as the poem is characterised as a formless, uncontrolled entity:

> Forgive these wild and wandering cries,
> Confusions of a wasted youth;
> Forgive them where they fail in truth,
> And in thy wisdom make me wise. (Prologue, 41–4)

The poem is presented in the ambiguous light of the wasting of its speaker's youth, and as mere cries from a youth who has been wasted. The waste of his time and energy on grief and the 'wild and wandering cries' of the sections of the poem will hopefully end up in the achievement of wisdom. Yet this recuperative movement, in which even the experience of waste might be turned to the ends of growth, is often difficult to discern in the poem.[19]

The finished artefact of *In Memoriam* does not correspond to any notions we might have of the concept Matthew Arnold takes from Goethe, *'Architectonice* in the highest sense; that power of execution, which creates, forms, and constitutes. . .'[20] There is hardly a grand design followed through with a consistency of purpose here. The poem was published, anonymously, announcing itself here as 'Confusions of a wasted youth', after seventeen years of sporadic fits of writing, in the more or less consistent tetrameters of a four-line abba stanza, with many of the sections no longer than twelve lines long. The distancing effect of the anonymous publication is added to by Tennyson's pronouncements on his own poem:

> It must be remembered. . .that this is a poem, *not* an actual biography. . .It was meant to be a kind of *Divina Commedia,* ending with happiness. The sections

were written at many different places, and as the phases of our intercourse came to my memory and suggested them. I did not write them with any view of weaving them into a whole, or for publication, until I found that I had written so many. The different moods of sorrow as in a drama are dramatically given, and my conviction that fear, doubts, and suffering will find answer and relief only through faith in a God of Love. 'I' is not always the author speaking of himself but the voice of the human race speaking thro' him.[21]

We might suspect some strategy in this deliberate vagueness, claiming only small aspirations for the poem. And these are limited claims for 'a kind of *Divina Commedia*', representing only 'phases' and 'moods', only grouped together when 'I found that I had written so many'. The dramatic monologue warning is made too: '"I" is not always the author speaking of himself'.

Timothy Peltason says of these 'phases of our intercourse' which have suggested the sections of the poem, that Tennyson 'described a drifting responsiveness to circumstance. . . Even in the rearranged finality of the poem, the sense of drifting persists. . .'[22] Tennyson returns to this idea of 'drift' time and again when describing his poetry. Whether it is a calculated choice or simply a verbal tick, it shows his concern that his poetry not be seen as system. So, for instance, he says that he added songs to the second edition of *The Princess* to clarify it because originally he 'thought that the poem would explain itself, but the public did not see the drift'. On *Maud*, Tennyson's favourite among his poems, the public's mystified reaction is referred to thus: 'its meaning and drift were widely misunderstood even by educated readers . . .' And on *Idylls of the King*, where Tennyson reacted most strongly to readings which over-systematised his poem ('I hate to be tied down to say "*This* means *that*", because the thought within the image is much more than any one interpretation'), he refers to its 'allegorical drift', its 'parabolic drift' and its 'general drift'.[23]

The poet's relationship with the logically argued certainties of philosophy is a problematic one. Section XLVIII raises the matter explicity.

> If these brief lays, of Sorrow born,
> Were taken to be such as closed
> Grave doubts and answers here proposed,
> Then these were such as men might scorn:
>
> Her care is not to part and prove;
> She takes, when harsher moods remit,
> What slender shade of doubt may flit,
> And makes it vassal unto love:

And hence, indeed, she sports with words,
But better serves a wholesome law,
And holds it sin and shame to draw
The deepest measure from the chords:

Nor dare she trust a larger lay,
But rather loosens from the lip
Short swallow-flights of song, that dip
Their wings in tears, and skim away.

This lyric serves as both apology and refusal. It is taken up with the generic limitations of the elegy, involving both an act of self-deprecation and a desire to demonstrate the modest aspirations of the grieving poet. The section admits of no certainty, and wilfully opens itself out to accusations that the larger poem, *In Memoriam,* contains no refutations of doubt, or propositions which might at least answer such doubt, that it is a merely drifting response to its speaker's situation. The poet's anxiety throughout *In Memoriam* is that the cessation of the pain of grief might be accompanied by the cessation of his love for the dead Hallam. It strives towards a belief in a personal immortality where love may be continued after death, by a resistance of closure or any movement towards some alternative system. Thus the rhyme of 'closed' and 'proposed', taken in the context of the whole poem, stands out as a separate semantic unit, as embodying not only what the poet apologises for not being able to do, but also the thing he fears most, the explaining away of definitive consolation.

As it looks for solace, *In Memoriam* also fears consolation. Tennyson's anxiety is not concerned only with the preservation of love for his friend, but also for the continued existence of his lyrics. Sorrow begets these poems: the 'brief lays' are 'of Sorrow born'. Sorrow is wilfully indirect, 'Her care is not to part and prove', so she uses doubt to further love. This wilfulness, whether it belong to the personification Sorrow, or Tennyson himself, is a vital aspect of *In Memoriam.* The writing of the poem is a central part of the exercise of the will in its deliberately self-limiting play. Here, Sorrow 'sports with words', but in a 'wholesome' fashion. This exertion is virtue compared to the 'sin and shame' of full explication. Section LIX, also addressed to Sorrow, has a condition placed upon the poet's cohabitation with her, that he will 'have leave at times to play'. This sporting with words is manifest in the last stanza of section XLVIII, where the versification presents a quick flexing of poetic muscle in the sudden compactness of the image, imitated in the late

caesura in the penultimate line, and the departing cadence of the final words: 'Short swallow-flights of song, that dip / Their wings in tears, and skim away'. The sudden muscular movement of the wings of song, dipping wilfully into sorrow, makes us aware of the capabilities of a rhythm of will, just as the lyric appears to be drifting to rest.

The difficulty with such achievements is that they may be merely local, self-contained exercises which give the speaker of the poem only small victories in his struggle against passivity and the lack of power. Yet the experience of reading *In Memoriam* gives an impression of a poem consciously arranged into certain groupings which may take issue with each other, in close proximity, or as distant echoes across the expanse of the whole poem. Discussing what he perceives as a problem on the part of critics of discerning 'unity' in the poem, Timothy Peltason observes, in a key passage, that the 'anteriority of mood to argument – the sense that even our experiences of inwardness may be passively discerned as much as willed or created or rationally chosen – is essential to the distinctively Tennysonian feel of *In Memoriam* and militates against attempts to explain the poet's progress as the working-through of a necessary and rational plan'.[24] This, of course, does not rob the poem of all method. So for instance the famous sections on geology come together from LIV to LVI, striving to contain the power of the doubts expressed, quoting each other, setting up arguments and answering with varying degrees of rhetorical strength. The intellectual difficulties that dwelling on these ideas present to the poet are then simply avoided, silenced by the opening of section LVII, 'Peace; come away: the song of woe / Is after all an earthly song'. The return to the subject again though, sixty or so sections later, in sections CXVIII, CXX, CXXIII and CXXVII, pursues a more calm and assured portrayal of the problems of science. Where in the first instance, the subject was of an impacted and unanswerable strength, the second time it is raised in the poem, the matter can be discussed in a more diffuse and less urgent way.

As I have quoted him before, Tennyson characterises the drift of *In Memoriam* as gaining its impetus from the 'phases' of his friendship with Hallam, and the 'moods of sorrow' that he experiences. Between one treatment of the subject of science, and the return to that theme later in the poem, we have a shift of mood, a consolidation of faith acquired in tonal terms, which typifies the poem. A look at one group of lyrics linked in 'mood', and representing a particular 'phase', in this instance at the start of the poem, demonstrates this tonal aspect of a lyrical will which the poem explores. Section IV has will-lessness as its theme. It represents

its speaker in a dream, aimless and drifting, conducting a conversation with his own heart:

> To Sleep I give my powers away;
> My will is bondsman to the dark;
> I sit within a helmless bark,
> And with my heart I muse and say:
>
> O heart, how fares it with thee now,
> That thou shouldst fail from thy desire . . . (1–6)

Here we have a grief-stricken man surrendering his will to the reliefs of sleep. What might later be treated as unhealthy introspection is here viewed as a failure which is expected to result in the final disintegration of the poet's heart: 'Break, thou deep vase of chilling tears' (11). The lyric attempts to wake up out of this sick dream:

> Such clouds of nameless trouble cross
> All night below the darkened eyes;
> With morning wakes the will, and cries,
> 'Thou shalt not be the fool of loss' . . . (13–16)

The opening of this section, 'To Sleep I give my powers away', suggests an habitual and self-perpetuating state of mind, rather than the immediacy of present, instantaneous, lyric time. The section's penultimate line, presenting the supposed resuscitation of the will, and the re-establishment of its control, weighs so precipitously on its final, isolated, iamb, 'and cries', which rhymes so closely with 'eyes', that tears begin to well up in the verse. A second before the will's imagined speech, we feel that it has given up.

The conclusion of this section is an unsteady and nervous thing: the resolution of the last line gives little cause for hope. Section v continues with just such a shakiness of tone, as it considers the consoling powers of language. The poet's guilt concerns his engagement in the writing of words which can never express the depth of his feelings: 'For words, like Nature, half reveal / And half conceal the Soul within' (3–4). These words are at once precise and vague, the qualifier 'half' suggesting not so much a whole when the two halves are put together, but the partial nature of two distinct entities. An obvious aid to this vagueness might be found in theories of language in transcendental idealism. For instance, Thomas Carlyle's fictional philosopher, Teufelsdrockh, sees language as a system of symbols, and symbols as evidence of transcendental experience: 'In a Symbol there is concealment and yet revelation: here

therefore, by Silence and by Speech acting together, comes a double significance. . .' Yet Teufelsdrockh's 'concealment and yet revelation' have a symbiotic relationship to which Tennyson's 'half reveal / And half conceal' can only aspire.[25]

The next line of this section comes with one of *In Memoriam's* great Buts:

> But, for the unquiet heart and brain,
> A use in measured language lies;
> The sad mechanic exercise,
> Like dull narcotics, numbing pain. (5–8)

The 'But' conjunction, which gives this stanza its impetus, is not a wheeling round of argument, the wilful setting up of a thought which will illogically contradict the previous statement. It is rhythmically assured, but where the iambic rhythm of the poem imitates 'rhythm' as the subject of the poem ('A use in measured language lies' is perfectly iambic), it also diverges. This line has a hidden doubt sown into it. The final stress falls on the word 'lies', which the following semi-colon shores up. The word begins to suggest divergent purposes of poetry, useful or dishonest. The line can then be read, 'A *use* in measured language lies' or 'A use in measured language *lies*'. The ambiguity is deepened by the possible sense that writing measured language may be useful, but it also uses. The consolations of poetry and the exercise of it, even when seen in its most morally unassertive function, are severely doubted here. The near parasitic relationship of the poet to the words that he 'uses', as user and used, or a useful liar, continues in its uneasy progress through this lyric, words telling only half-truths, or outlining truth 'like weeds' and 'coarsest clothes against the cold'. The narcotic rhythm of the mechanical motions through which this writing goes is, like the 'muffled motions' of section XLIX, writing without intention written in the rhythm of an activity which seems to operate without will.

In Memoriam VI represents a change of tone, but not necessarily of subject. It is assertive about the untruths inherent in assertive language. After the falling rhythm, and final spondee at the end of section V, 'Is given in outline and no more', we have a tonal shift to where the poet becomes disputing and ironic; he takes issue:

> One writes, that 'Other friends remain,'
> That 'Loss is common to the race' –
> And common is the commonplace,
> And vacant chaff well meant for grain.

That loss is common would not make
My own less bitter, rather more:
Too common! Never morning wore
To evening, but some heart did break. (1–8)

Christopher Ricks suggests that this section was written between Summer 1840 and Christmas 1841[26] and it does contain links with some of the later sections which contemplate a return to human contact, and the making of new friendships. The reference to the breaking of hearts though, refers us back to section IV, and the request to the heart to break there, just as its concern with language as consolation continues from the previous section. The poet here objects not to language which half reveals and half conceals, but language which is vacant and hollow, which expresses, but represents nothing. He coins his own commonplace, the ironic generalisation, 'Never morning wore / To evening, but some heart did break'. The symmetry of this statement, carried across the line-ending, 'morning. . . / To evening', and the caesura which is followed by the delivery of the cruel fact, gives the headlong rush of his irony a classical poise. Consoling moral platitudes are dismissed in their own 'measured language'. The section ends, after a brief view over a number of possible bereavements, by asking for answers to two abstract questions of purpose, teleological and ethical, in this tragic overview: 'O what to her shall be the end? / And what to me remains of good?' (41–2). These attempted abstractions can be answered by fact alone, not as a methodical way of providing refutation, as they seem to ask for, but in a way which accords with the tonal imperatives of the poem itself. The poet limits himself to only two answers, the despair apparent through the irony: 'To her, perpetual maidenhood, / And unto me no second friend' (43–4).

The drift of *In Memoriam* gathers its momentum from the wilful juxtapositions I have shown in these three sections. These lyrics contradict each other, take issue with each other's claims, making rapid turns of tonal direction, or slow absorptions into themselves. As do the 'moods' and 'phases' of the consciousness of the bereaved poet. It has become a critical orthodoxy that such a pattern constitutes a dialectical movement of thought throughout the poem. Contraries may be said to have been set up, to be resolved later in the poem. So, possible opposites here are the inarticulacy of the poet versus the consolatory power of language. This in turn may contribute to a more fundamental set of opposites, overwhelming grief versus gradual consolation.[27] *In Memoriam*

does not work this way. If we look at sections v and vi as proposing the opposites of a dialectic on the nature of language in its relation to the honest representation of feeling, we can see only a severely doubted set of attitudes, bearing out the poet's suspicion of his argument. The second stanza of section v shows nothing but a kind of dissipated half-faith in a poetic language which carries little conviction other than the compulsion to dally with the commonplace while knowing it to be inadequate. Nothing is resolved or resolvable. Yet the lyric carries the drift of meaning, it does engage in its own problems, regardless of the barrenness of the final conclusion, the bald facts of death.

Section xvi is explicit about the problem of resolving opposites. Its second line refers to section xi, 'Calm is the morn without a sound', and line 15 of the previous section, 'The wild unrest that lives in woe'. It is concerned with the problem of unity:

> What words are these have fallen from me?
> Can calm despair and wild unrest
> Be tenants of a single breast,
> Or sorrow such a changeling be?
>
> Or doth she only seem to take
> The touch of change in calm or storm;
> But knows no more of transient form
> In her deep self, than some dead lake
>
> That holds the shadow of a lark
> Hung in the shadow of a heaven?
> Or has the shock, so harshly given,
> Confused me like the unhappy bark
>
> That strikes by night a craggy shelf
> And staggers blindly ere she sink?
> And stunned me from my power to think
> And all my knowledge of myself;
>
> And made me that delirious man
> Whose fancy fuses old and new,
> And flashes into false and true,
> And mingles all without a plan?

Opposites, it may be said, suggest each other. This lyric's 'calm despair and wild unrest. . . calm or storm . . . old and new . . . false and true', may, through the consolations of a dialectical philosophy, be said to exist with a sort of resolvable balance. The grief-stricken poet here will have none of that: the apparently innocent artistic metaphors of fusing

and flashing are not the products of a controlling will, but of 'that delirious man', making only the confused connections of profound mental instability or madness. This lyric is back in the 'helmless bark' of section IV, drifting without purpose. The figure of the reflecting lake, which represents the 'self' of sorrow, has a delayed echo in the word 'shelf', that which causes the self of the poet to founder. We have here a description of a passivity which 'fuses' and 'flashes' with the terrifying, perspectiveless, immediacy of utterance that the present tense brings here. Even as the poem courts the resolution of opposites, it can see no means to bring them together. There is a result, though. We have a completed lyric, which has established itself as new and true. A poetic will has been exercised, in that it has faced the irony of the situation and discovered a form for it.

Section XLIV is a remarkable lyric of the turning round and turning inside out of supposed opposites through a wilfulness which points a way towards coping with such despair.

> How fares it with the happy dead?
> For here the man is more and more;
> But he forgets the days before
> God shut the doorways of his head.
>
> The days have vanished, tone and tint,
> And yet perhaps the hoarding sense
> Gives out at times (he knows not whence)
> A little flash, a mystic hint;
>
> And in the long harmonious years
> (If Death so taste Lethean springs),
> May some dim touch of earthly things
> Surprise thee ranging with thy peers.
>
> If such a dreamy touch should fall,
> Oh turn thee round, resolve the doubt;
> My guardian angel will speak out
> In that high place, and tell thee all.

An almost whimsical limitation is set against the insolent inversion of a position where the man on earth presumes to give advice to the soul in heaven. It is the 'turn thee round' in the last stanza, spoken to accepted limitations, which fuels the lyric and its tone.

The first stanza begins in the loss of knowledge, something presumably effected at birth, regainable only in death. Yet, in small and deliberately limited ways, this lyric contemplates a mystic recuperation,

through reopening what Tennyson called 'the sutures of the skull, the fontanelles of the head'. [28] Before the sealed mind, no longer a party to eternal knowledge, can be given the frail insight of 'A little flash, a mystic hint', we have to overcome 'the hoarding sense'. The phrase is charged with a possible threefold meaning to the word 'sense', given the severe limitations of its epithet, the temporal perpetuity of the present participle, 'hoarding'. The 'sense' here is firstly that which receives, in act of perception, the impressions of the phenomenal world, our link with the external forms of nature, distinct from our soul. In this category it can also be, in Wordsworthian terms, that which teaches us of the world and forms our personality. As such, it may then be the source of what we call 'common sense', which if it hoards, tends to limit our aspiration, being practical, sensible, not dealing in non-sense. Finally the word refers to our 'sense' of understanding something, thinking or feeling it. Yet, if it hoards, with all the connotations of miserliness, and beyond, to solitariness that the word holds, it seems to exist cut off from all external things. Tennyson would like to propose, 'yet perhaps', that this miserly quality of man might be a thing which 'Gives out at times'. As gifts or 'gives out' as in goes out or gives up? The ambiguity makes us unsure how the sense can give us flashes or hints, or whether they should come from another source. The key word, 'sense', is rhymed with the archaic 'whence', which is placed in parentheses on the page. The rhyme sounds forced in the context of what is a 'conversational' poem. The parentheses suggest a half-committed afterthought, and the delicate and complex semantic range of the previous lines is deliberately reduced by this seeming evidence of failure in the execution of the poem.

There is a double act of insolence here. The first lies in the way Tennyson deals with the serious concepts troubling the speaker's mind. The second is in the context of the dead man he is speaking to. Arthur Hallam, in his essay on 'The Characteristics of Modern Poetry' of 1832, associated his friend Tennyson with Keats and Shelley as a poet 'of sensation rather than reflection'. A sort of literary theoretical joke is hidden in the poem, reasserting an intimacy which the small matter of death is not going to upset. This enables the speaker to communicate with his own poem in much the way he speaks to his friend in heaven: 'Oh turn thee round'. In two short stanzas the way is paved for the main conceit of the lyric, where the 'little flash, a mystic hint', is never revealed, not as a glimpse of the immortal, but inverted to 'some dim touch of earthly things'. The parentheses appear a second time on the page, and this time deal with the forgetfulness, not of man on earth, but

the soul in heaven: '(If Death so taste Lethean springs)'. The forgetting of birth is seconded by the forgetting of death. The speaker wills his way towards a self-assured scenario in a heaven where he imagines the movement of the soul of his friend, and advice from an angel which will 'resolve' *heavenly* 'doubt'. The sections of the poem drift towards such moments of 'resolve'.

In Memoriam LXXXV, an important act of retrospect in the poem, clears the ground for the vision of section XCV. It refers to another imagined conversation with the dead, conversation which will reach its climax in the great trance in the garden at Somersby.

> So hold I commerce with the dead;
> Or so methinks the dead would say;
> Or so shall grief with symbols play
> And pining life be fancy-fed. (93–6)

These words are insecure, doubting even those exercises of the poetic will, or playing, which serve to console the grieving poet. Yet this playing with words and symbols is one of the central ways in which Tennyson presents the mourner working his way from a passive sorrow which breeds doubt, towards an active will which clears the ground for a continuing faith.

Section LXXXV puts this directly:

> Yet none could better know than I,
> How much of act at human hands
> The sense of human will demands
> By which we dare to live or die. (37–40)

Borrowing a distinction from F. D. Maurice, between 'system' and 'method', A. Dwight Culler states that *In Memoriam* 'is certainly an unsystematic poem, but it is not an unmethodical one'. He describes the influence on Tennyson of the Broad Church school which so typified the thought of the Cambridge Apostles, and which is shown in Coleridge's *Aids To Reflection* (1825), Julius Hare's *Guesses at Truth* (1827) and Maurice's *The Kingdom of Christ* (1838: the second edition of 1842 was subtitled *Hints to a Quaker)*. Culler writes, '*Hints, Aids, Guesses* – this is what the Broad Church theologian attempted to provide, not a definitive system of truth but a method which would place one in the way of finding that truth for himself.'[29] The stanza above is a non-systematic assertion presented with the bones of a tentative method. 'Yet none

could better know than I' is the Tennysonian poet appealing to the sympathetic reader's knowledge of his concern with will. Yet that knowledge casts us back to the problems of knowing and proof in the poem's Prologue, 'We have but faith: we cannot know' (21), or 'Believing where we cannot prove' (4). The limits of power in that repeated 'cannot' turn to wilful assertions of faith: 'we will not know', or 'we will not prove'. But the wilful 'demand' is from 'The sense of human will': the will itself does not do the demanding. While its 'sense' is not exactly necessity, it is an imperative imposed, *a priori*, upon the will's responsibility.

At such a crucial point (the stanza has wheeled the section round with a 'Yet' conjunction from a reflection on the death of friendship and his dead friend's soul), Tennyson's assertion is non-systematic, but does suggest a method towards faith and action. Dolores Rosenblum writes that 'the poetry repeatedly demonstrates that language acts, specifically the writing of this poem, can modify feeling and behaviour'.[30] The poem that is being written accords with its eponymous subject's conception of poetry:

> Poetry, indeed, is seductive by exciting in us that mood of feeling, which conjoins all mental states, that pass in review before it, according to the congruity of sentiment, not agreement of conceptions: and it is with justice, therefore, that the muses are condemned by the genius of profound philosophy. But though poetry encourages a wrong condition of feeling with respect to the discovery of truth, its enchantments tend to keep the mind within that circle of contemplative enjoyment, which is not less indispensably necessary to the exertions of a philosophical spirit. We may be led wrong by the sorcery; but that wrong is contiguous to the right.[31]

Hallam's position here is not far from a theology which praises the non-systematic. Indeed, poetic method may even exceed, and not be 'condemned by the genius of profound philosophy'. Its 'enchantments', or 'sorcery', need to be controlled. Sometimes that is beyond the artist's power. *In Memoriam* LXX, attempting to capture the features of the lost one's face is wilfully protracted over its central two stanzas in a fantasy world of danger, chaos, shadows, crowds and lazy shores, until it is relieved by a vision:

> Till all at once beyond the will
> I hear a wizard music roll,
> And through a lattice on the soul
> Looks thy fair face and makes it still. (13–16)

This 'wizard music' can only be delivered by the enchantments and sorcery of a nonsystematic poetry.

I have suggested that the drift of *In Memoriam*, shown in moments such as the one above, either causes features to fall into place or instigates the demand for the exercise of power. This intuitive method is not without its dangers. As the poem progresses away from grief towards consolation, its poet describes a double course, steadily re-emphasising the active while still dependent on his passive reception of the experiences which are to be given to him. Concerned with exercising his remade will, he needs to be given the circumstances within which it can demonstrate its recuperation and the new knowledge, the wisdom, which has been given him by intuition and experience. Certain achievements can be won by effort, but others rely upon a supplication to have at least 'An hour's communion with the dead' (XCIV, 4). What the vigorous dead can tell the poet in this 'communion' will free him from the passive enchainment to such an unwilled circumstance.

In Memoriam XCV marks the point to which grief leads, and from which an effective consolation may ensue. Alone at night, rereading the letters of his dead friend, the poet comes upon the resilient intellectual will of that friend, as if for the first time:

> and strangely spoke
>
> The faith, the vigour, bold to dwell
> On doubts that drive the coward back,
> And keen through wordy snares to track
> Suggestion to her inmost cell. (28–32)

The poet's own responses to his position have been in the drifting terms of mood. Following Peltason we can say that *In Memoriam* demonstrates the 'anteriority of mood to argument' that has been apparent throughout the preceding sections. The poet has to understand that he cannot argue his way out of his situation, and that is,

> Deep folly! yet that this could be –
> That I could wing my will with might
> To leap the grades of life and light,
> And flash at once, my friend, to thee. (XLI, 9–12)

A flash will occur, but not with the poet as agent. To prepare himself for this he becomes acquainted with, as if for the first time ('strangely spoke'), a key characteristic of his dead friend: his attempt to ensure that argument will overcome mood, via faith, vigour, boldness in doubt and keenness of language.

It is this intellectually vigorous dead man who will 'touch' the poet who is the recipient, not instigator, of the flash.

> So word by word, and line by line,
> The dead man touched me from the past,
> And all at once it seemed at last
> The living soul was flashed on mine,
>
> And mine in this was wound, and whirled
> About empyreal heights of thought,
> And came on that which is, and caught
> The deep pulsations of the world,
>
> Aeonian music measuring out
> The steps of Time – the shocks of Chance –
> The blows of Death. At length my trance
> Was cancelled, stricken through with doubt.
>
> Vague words! but ah, how hard to frame
> In matter-moulded forms of speech,
> Or even for intellect to reach
> Through memory that which I became . . . (33–48)

'That which is', 'that which I became', or 'Tò óv, the Absolute Reality', as Hallam Tennyson glossed the phrase. The problem, though, is whether a gloss is possible of a concept which has no image, is not stated in even abstract terms, and can only be expressed in the terms of a demonstrative ('that'), a relative pronoun ('which'), and either the present tense of the verb to be ('is') or a past tense of a modified self ('I became'). Alan Sinfield calls this a 'conspicuously pure indicative',[32] and the lyric admits as much itself, 'Vague words!'

As well as 'that which is', something else is caught, 'The deep pulsations of the world'. These deep pulsations, vigorous and vital, remind us of Athene's offer to Paris in 'Oenone', discussed in chapter one here, and how her 'vigour' will strike within his 'pulses' to grant him 'a life of shocks / Dangers, and deeds, until endurance grow / Sinewed with action' (158–62). The organism of representative man, Paris, and the organism intuited through 'The deep pulsations of the world', are both vital. In section XCV, these deep pulsations, unreachable through intellect as they are to the poet, are Time, Chance and Death, the forces which are ranged against the poet's struggle towards self-determination. Yet they are also the emergence of the 'muffled motions' of 'measured language', an exercise which is no longer mechanic or narcotic, into meaning. The speaker's intuitions of the rhythm of the will of his own

sense of self and that of the world, come together in these deep pulsations. Passively 'wound, and whirled', the intimation is that, granted experience of the 'empyreal heights of thought', with all their terrifying evidence of power ranged against man, the speaker has gained some dominion over both deep pulsations and empyreal heights. This cannot be expressed. With a daring candidness, the great abstractions are allowed to rest within the verse, granted only the rhythmic modifications of their status as 'Aeonian music' and no other assimilation into the poet's diction.[33] This is a rhythm of will, but one which is abruptly stopped with a heavy caesura after 'Death': 'At length my trance / Was cancelled'. The trance which has been so awaited, and so spontaneously received, can now hardly be reached by memory.

The achievement of *In Memoriam* XCV is in its admission that it cannot sustain its own rhythms of will. Self-reliance is seen to be not enough, and sounding the will of the world, the poet admits the inadequacy of his 'matter-moulded forms of speech'. Matter provides images, symbols and metaphors, but 'Tò óv, the Absolute Reality' can have none. The speaker must recognise the abnegation of his will before he states that the breeze had spoken to him and had said,

> 'The dawn, the dawn', and died away;
> And East and West, without a breath,
> Mixt their dim lights, like life and death,
> To broaden into boundless day. (61–4)

On this Lincolnshire summer night the darkness lasted for such a short time that dusk and dawn appeared to blend into one another; the poet can state that East and West may cooperate in the reconciliation of the past (about which he is so passionate) and the future (upon which alone a will can be used). Section XCV's final stanza is a return back to the artifice of a will which the poem as a whole needs so strenuously to make, so that the object of the poet's volition can balance a diction of death ('died away . . . without a breath . . . life and death') with the shoulders that are rhythmically squared in the final line, 'To broaden into boundless day'. We can hear a resolution which is an echo of Milton's mourning shepherd at the end of *Lycidas*, as he turns to face the afternoon: 'At last he rose and twitched his mantle blew: / Tomorrow to fresh fields and pastures new.'

Section XCV admits the denial of the powers of the will to effect the vision for which the poem craves, but through that denial, it intuits the will's existence. From that point, the will of poem, poet and 'dead man'

is made. Timothy Peltason is sceptical of the lyric's pivotal position, finding that the immediately succeeding sections return us to the 'drifting responsiveness' which he describes motivating the earlier parts of the poem.[34] Indeed sections XCVI to XCVIII, which we may think should comment upon the vision, focus on the epigrammatic ('There lives more faith in honest doubt, / Believe me, than in half the creeds', XCVI, 11–12), the domestic ('She dwells on him with faithful eyes, / "I cannot understand: I love"', XCVII, 35–6) and then on a journey, which will not take him to the place of death ('I have not seen, I will not see / Vienna', XCVIII, 11–12). It is as if the poem itself is exhausted, like the breeze at the end of XCV, 'without a breath'.

The diminishing of intensities as the poem moves towards a close has resulted in a lack of critical interest in these final sections, which their, admittedly variable, quality does not entirely deserve. Yet it is in these sections that the speaker's remade and reconditioned will is put on show. Section L, with its picture of the complete enervation of body, mind and sense, is a vertiginous moment hanging over the surrender to mood, 'on the low dark verge of life' (15). Section CVII returns us to a hostile winter environment initially at odds with the Christmas lyric which has preceded it. Indeed it returns us to the indirection of 'the drifts that pass / To darken on the rolling brine / That breaks the coast' (13–15). Here though, language is used to step in with a great wheeling conjunction, wilfully changing the mood: 'But fetch the wine, / Arrange the board and brim the glass' (15–16). James Kincaid finds this section 'callous and insincere',[35] but the imperative which it contains echoes the opening of section L,

> Be near me when my light is low,
> When the blood creeps, and the nerves prick
> And tingle; and the heart is sick
> And all the wheels of Being slow.

The wrecked will is wilfully answered by the injunction to

> Be cheerful-minded, talk and treat
> Of all things even as he were by . . . (19–20)

The poem can echo itself across fifty sections, striving for the sonic achievement of a progress in the self which had earlier seemed inconceivable. This is conversant with the greater imperative of what the sense of human will demands, and if none could better know than him, then Tennyson is claiming a privileged sincerity.

Before settling on *In Memoriam A.H.H.* as the title for his poem, Tennyson had toyed with the idea of calling it *Fragments of an Elegy* or *The Way of the Soul*.[36] Both alternative titles are, in their way, contradictory. 'Fragments' suggests an absence of continuity or 'sequence' in a poem which needs to assert the drifting continuance of the identity of the self through the steps of time and the shocks of chance, and past even the blows of death. *The Way of the Soul*, portentous as it is, describes something which may go too much in the other direction, over-emphasising the purpose behind the soul which has a way or a direction. Yet in the drift which appears to be the organising principle of *In Memoriam*, there is, as I have suggested above, a sense of returning later in the poem to issues which may previously have appeared to defeat all attempts by the soul to form any clear intellectual conception of them. The wild and wandering cries of the wasted youth, or the infant crying for the light (LIV, 19), images as they are of the poet de-evolving, receding away from engagement with the world back into the immature or the infantile, are answered later by the experience of one who has been made 'wise'.

One of the great issues which threatens this wisdom is the process of growth itself. Much has been made of Tennyson's engagement with the new sense of time that geology was revealing over the period in which his poem was being written, and which would finally result in a biological conception of growth in Darwin's *Origin of Species*, published nine years after *In Memoriam*. Whatever in the 1830s and 40s Tennyson understood by the concept of 'evolution', the poems he is writing in that time do contemplate change across time, a sense of process which is greater than self or type:

> Eternal process moving on,
> From state to state the spirit walks;
> And these are but the shattered stalks,
> Or ruined chrysalis of one. (LXXXII, 5–8)

'One' at the end of this stanza refers at once to the poet, and to the concept of 'oneness', uniqueness in nature or history. The shattered stalks are the sections of the poem, but stalks left behind as traces of something which is 'Eternal process'. It has motion, and seems to have spirit, no matter how the iambic walk of the poem is challenged in the pyrrhic thrown into the sibilants which cause the last line of the stanza to slur: 'Or ruined chrysalis of one' (∪ / ∪ / ∪ ∪ ∪ /).

The poet must ensure that the stalks of the poem have meaning, and are not just rhythmic energy or power without purpose. Possibility, the

future, the possibilities of change in the future, are issues with which the poets in this book are concerned. Faced with mounting evidence of long process in the past working to determine the biology of the acting self, the options of freedom for the self seem to grow even less. The danger now is that all human action becomes a similar exercise of power for its own sake, undiscriminatingly working towards the 'ruined chrysalis of one'. Tennyson must solve this question for himself by assuming that in mankind there is, at one and the same time, triumphant evidence of the evolution of a higher physical and intellectual being within this determined system, as well as a means of transcendence above it. Otherwise, all the activity that *In Memoriam* tells itself is necessary for remaking the shattered self, would simply be idle energy. Humanity must

> show
> That life is not as idle ore,
>
> But iron dug from central gloom.
> And heated hot with burning fears,
> And dipped in baths of hissing tears,
> And battered with the shocks of doom
>
> To shape and use. Arise and fly
> The reeling Faun, the sensual feast;
> Move upward, working out the beast,
> And let the ape and tiger die. (CXVIII, 19–28)

Idleness is the great enemy of the will in Tennyson's poems as the source of the vice which shores up the melancholy which is so dangerous for the mourner and his identity. If life is mere 'idle ore', then it can be easy prey to the determinism which will overwhelm the passively conceived self. Experience works on 'life' so that it becomes something that can be shaped and used, as well as having shape and use. Life, like the syntactic ambiguity of 'To shape and use' (possibly both nouns and verbs), is something which suffers, but also something which acts. It is simultaneously in the element of action and picture. The suffering which leads to the growth of the self is the active, physical power of agent and acted upon.

The future that Tennyson contemplates as he looks at the work of time in the past is, of course, less certain. Working out the beast, activity as it is, embraces an extinction of the bodily forms of the past which this poet elsewhere cannot so blithely accept. As soon as it has imagined an end for evolution in the transcendence of the physical, assisted by the work of man, *In Memoriam* returns to the past which is so debilitating for

its speaker's present. The poem's great statement of intuited truth can only be given as a willed assertion in the past tense. In the trial edition of *In Memoriam,* section CXXIV read thus:

> If e'er when faith hath fallen asleep,
> I heard a voice 'believe no more'
> And heard an ever-breaking shore
> That tumbled in the Godless deep;
>
> A warmth within the breast would melt
> The freezing reason's colder part,
> And like a man in wrath the heart
> Stood up and answered 'I have felt.'
>
> And what I am beheld again
> What is, and no man understands;
> And out of darkness came the hands
> That reach through nature, moulding men.

Christopher Ricks gives the variant 'hath' in the first line above as an error, silently corrected to 'had' in subsequent editions in accordance with the Lincoln manuscript.[37] But there is another slip of tense in the lyric. At the key moment, in the eighth line above, the conditional begun with 'A warmth within the breast would melt', is not followed by a further conditional. Rather than the expected 'the heart / Would stand up and answer', or a possible imperfect tense, we are given a simple past tense, 'Stood up and answered "I have felt"'. Alan Sinfield says that 'the subjunctive is used to set up an assertion',[38] and this is an assertion of what has not been willed, but felt. The 'e'er' of the opening line suggests such doubting moments have happened more than once. The 'Stood up' of line 8 suggests a single willed declaration of belief.

For Henry Sidgwick, A. C. Bradley and indeed for Tennyson, that was not enough. 'Feeling must not usurp the function of Reason', Sidgwick said,[39] and Tennyson softened the authority of the wilful moment with an inserted stanza.

> No, like a child in doubt and fear:
> But that blind clamour made me wise;
> Then was I as a child that cries,
> But, crying knows his father near. . . (CXXIV, 17–20)

This humbles the assertion, but need its own stressed 'No' to make its humility felt. Humility was, in section LIV, 'no language but a cry',[40] and not the stentorian answer 'I have felt'. Yet again, the reconstructed will

must play down its own wilfulness. If feeling cannot usurp reason, neither can system be asserted against an intuitionist method. The moment of seeing again 'What is, and no man understands', may be, as Herbert Tucker points out, a Victorian rather than Romantic moment, as typified by this section.[41] It is, as the revision shows, a move back into the childlike, and towards the authority given by the New Testament: 'Except ye . . . become as children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself like this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 18, 1–4). As a child, 'the hands / . . .moulding men' can be faithfully received. Embracing a sort of de-evolution, the will must give in or up to the 'What is'. *In Memoriam* makes its will out of that which is bequeathed to it.

In a return to a favourite construction, Tennyson glossed the opening line of section CXXXI, 'O living will that shalt endure', as *'That which* we know as Free-will in man'[42] (my emphasis). The line itself contains a variation on the indeterminate phrase, 'that shalt', crucially modified into the future tense. According to Hazlitt, quoted in chapter two of this book, 'all action proceeding from a will. . .must relate to the future'. The lyric itself endured from an early draft which appears in Harvard Notebook 17.

> O living will that shalt endure
> When mountains shock
> Rise in the spiritual rock
> Flow thro' our deeds to make them pure
>
> That we may speak from out the dust
> As unto one that hears & see
> Some little of the vast to be
> & trust
>
> With ever[growing] more of strength & grace
> The truths that never can be proved
> And come to look on those we loved
> And That wh made us, face to face.[43]

This seems a frail thing indeed, timidly moving towards 'That which made us', assured capitalisation and abbreviation notwithstanding. Here the meeting is 'face to face', and not the published version's last line 'And all we flow from, soul to soul'. Yet the earlier version contains an echo of 1 Corinthians 13, where St Paul, having put away childish things, can say that 'now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to

face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as I am known'. It is as if the lyric is kept breathing, as the Biblical allusion, combined with the prosodic certainties of rhyme words which are merely sketched in, strives to complete the faithful prayer of its first line. The revised last stanza, beginning 'With faith that comes of self-control', makes explicit the faltering correction of 'evergrowing strength & grace' or 'ever more of strength & grace', neither lines happy in the virtues of power with humility that they counsel. The eventual closing with the loved one in the final version is here only a looking. The lyric has to be revised willingly into the conclusive status that it seems to demand, but between this draft and the final poise of the will remade before an uncertain future, lies the struggle of Tennyson's will.

In Memoriam leads us away from death towards a marriage, where 'Her sweet "I will" has made you one' (Epilogue, 56). The 'one music' or monotone of the prologue is made with an act of will, not of the poem's speaker's making. The reintegration of the self is accompanied by a reintegration with the forms of society. The poet does 'retire' (Epilogue, 105) from the wedding ceremony, but only to think of his final reintegration with the lost one in heaven. Returning to the 'face to face' meeting of 1 Corinthians 13, *In Memoriam* ends looking forward to immortality, confident in the powers of its speaker's remade will:

> A soul shall draw from out the vast
> And strike his being into bounds,
>
> And moved through life of lower phase,
> Result in man, be born and think,
> And act and love, a closer link
> Betwixt us and the crowning race
>
> Of those that, eye to eye, shall look
> On knowledge . . . (Epilogue, 123–30).

CHAPTER 7

Incarnating elegy in The Wreck of the Deutschland

In Memoriam A.H.H. is an elegy which drifts towards a conclusion which is premised on another's act of consent, 'Her sweet "I will"', which makes the poet's sister sacramentally 'one' with another in marriage. The poem ends with an active choice for union, no matter how the means of getting there have so passively courted disunity and possible annihilation. Gerard Manley Hopkins' elegy *The Wreck of the Deutschland* is involved with no such drifting. It begins with the assent required of the human in another type of sacramental union, Holy Orders, and goes on to test the integration of the human and divine will in its account not of drift but of wreck. Hopkins seeks out the annihilation of the self in order to demonstrate the ways in which that self can only come to fulfilment through its own powers of will. Before Hardy's poetry confronts volitional powers with a necessity which is pictured determining all through the Immanent Will, Hopkins attempts to work the choices and decisions of the consenting human will into the will of a benign God.

Hopkins' career as a theologian was thwarted by his Jesuit superiors, and, for one so preoccupied by the importance of consent, it was beset by the procrastination and fear of publication which meant that he delivered little. He followed none of his theological work through to publication, and gave up, too, a brief and unsuccessful career as a preacher. We do have his notes and sermons in the form in which he first made them, and they provide remarkable, and unorthodox, writing about metaphysics and theology. But it is his poems, also unpublished, but prepared with immense care, which give body to his insistence on the importance of the active powers of all things, and the importance of key moments of choice in the formation of the self before circumstance and God. *The Wreck of the Deutschland* is a drama of choice. It is a poem of will, and in Hopkins' great discovery of sprung rhythm, it is marked with a rhythm of will. Chapter two of this book discussed how the sonnet 'Harry Ploughman' gives us activity, and to do this it must give us a will.

It seeks for the source, the origin, of this activity. In Hopkins' terms, the poem seeks for its inscape. Quite often, this is the activity of a fecund, reproducing Nature, in which a virile figure like Harry Ploughman, quite unlike the celibate priest Gerard Manley Hopkins, plays his part. For Hopkins, the will for this activity originates in the individual subject, but must then choose to match itself with necessity. To paraphrase Milton, with whom Hopkins would not have been in complete theological accord, God will eventually demonstrate his uncontrollable intent. Hopkins' poetry is caught between these two versions of necessity, the sense of controlled activity in the natural, and the sense of a mystical or spiritual assistance over and above that. Without the suggestion of pantheism, it must allow the natural to be free in order to fulfil the essential character which the divine, by grace, has deemed necessary.

According to the idiosyncracies of what we might call Hopkins' aestheticised theology, by 'instress' – an active, self-forming power – the things of this world, all 'selves', work their distinctness, their particularity, their 'inscape'. It is necessary that they fulfil this, since they have been given this faculty from the point of their own creation: they are free to do this, with a freedom given by God. It is well documented by critics, editors and theologians how this seeming theological paradox was solved for Hopkins through the other discovery of his intellectual life, which rivals that of sprung rhythm, his acquaintance with the medieval scholastic Dun Scotus.[1] The conviction that anything – an object, an event, a body, a thought – which has inscape can be allowed to work its own individual rhythm through its instress, led Hopkins the priest back to poetry. As an artist, he was led to an attempt to lay his discovery about rhythm into his own particular perception of the activity of the objects of the world. Then he could theologically justify a mode of aesthetic apprehension which is based in a perception which has as its objects not inert matter but things which actively 'selve'.

In a sonnet of 1877, 'As kingfishers catch fire', Hopkins states,

> 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 *What I do is me: for that I came.* (5–8)

As seen so frequently in the poetry discussed in this book, the Victorian conception of the self is caught up in that self's sense of its active powers, its will. Hopkins has 'Each mortal thing' crying '*What I do is me*'. This is the natural, 'mortal' counterpart of God's statement of His identity on

Mount Horeb, 'I AM THAT I AM'.[2] Hopkins' version of this stresses the necessity of action in any conception of the identity of natural things, the necessity of all objects to do. Consciousness of the identity of the self and will are indistinguishable, we might say tautological: I am what I do; I do what I am. The verbs which Hopkins coins, 'to self', 'selve' or the related construction, 'goes itself', represent the active power of self-consciousness which all things possess, which only they know, and which all perceivers, but most especially the artist, must seek to represent.

From the evidence that remains of Hopkins' early academic career, Daniel Brown has persuasively described a typical mid-nineteenth-century Oxford synthesis of an ongoing dispute between idealism and empiricism constructing a coherence in Hopkins' metaphysics and theology at which much earlier criticism has only hinted.[3] Yet Hopkins' career developed into poetry and not systemised philosophy. Like Tennyson, he was a rhythmic thinker. His poetry works to write out the rhythm which is already in the objects of a divinely created universe and which are now in turn the objects of his perceptions and thought. Of course, that poetry does work with the positions that Hopkins attempted to reach in his theological writing, no matter how unfinished that can be. Hopkins' theology exists in sketches, 'Notes', sermons, hints at projects in the letters which he never brought to fruition. Yet we can see in this writing the structures of thought and the basis of a spirituality to which the poetry gives body.

Many influential discussions of Hopkins' sense of self, of which Brown's is the most exhaustive, have begun with the notes that he made on the 'First Principle and Foundation' of St Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, that man is created. The celebrated account of the taste of the self and the 'unspeakable' experience that that is, have frequently formed the starting point for discussion of Hopkins' seeming modernity, indeed post-modernity, in his sense of an isolated unrepresentable self-consciousness.[4] Later in these notes though, Hopkins suggests his participation in more Victorian notions of self and act, as he meditates on his own self as created:

> whatever can with truth be called a self . . . is not a mere centre or point of reference for consciousness or action attributed to it, everything else, all that it is conscious of or acts on being its object only and outside it. Part of this world of objects, this object-world, is also part of the very self in question, as in man's case his own body, which each man not only feels in and acts with but also feels and acts on. If the centre of reference spoken of has concentric circles round it,

one of these, the inmost, say, is of it, the rest are to it only. Within a certain bounding line all will be self, outside of it nothing: with it self begins from one side and ends from the other. I look through my eye and the window and the air; the eye is my eye and of me and me, the windowpane is my windowpane but not of me nor me. A self then will consist of a centre *and* a surrounding area or circumference, of a point of reference *and* a belonging field . . .[5]

Brown writes that this passage indicates 'Hopkins' wish to establish the grounds for knowledge of a noumenal self [which] flies in the face of Kant, who regards such speculations as entirely illusory'.[6] Yet beyond this, the passage works through the noumenal into the active. The 'field' which belongs to the self, the world of perception which is the boundary and bound up with the self, is Hopkins' version of the surrounds of 'Mariana' absorbed in her feelings, of Arthur Hallam's 'sympathy' and his account of Keats and Shelley, *Sordello*'s first class of poets and their gift of becoming the thing they perceive, or Thomas Hardy's admitted attraction to a concept in which he couldn't quite bring himself to believe, W. K. Clifford's 'mind-stuff'.[7] Hopkins' theology meets the post-Kantian psychological dilemma which confronts the problem of the object blending with the subject in the physiological act of perception. Hopkins, though, cannot admit utter absorption by the external 'object-world'. Boundaries are placed on it by the limit of perception itself, and the self is still conceived as having inherent qualities ('of it') and distinct objects acting on and around it ('to it'). Within these limits we have two distinct faculties, of consciousness and action. These are both in the centre of self, and in its circumference, or 'belonging field'.

Like Tennyson and Browning before him, Hopkins attempts to write within this 'belonging field', writing the consciousness and will of the self as he attempts to write with his perception of the consciousness and will of other selves. Describing an approach to questions of identity, point of view and perception that Hopkins would have found in Ruskin, Patricia Ball has this to say about his notions of idea and experience. He 'maintains within the one idea the autonomy of the object and its conversion into an experience. He sees the pure fact as charged and potent, not passive. It is separate, vital in its independent being, but because of this very vitality, it as it were solicits the eye which can respond to it.'[8] 'Harry Ploughman' begins its sestet, 'He leans to it, Harry bends, look.' This is the 'fact' demanding that it be looked at, and as it solicits the viewer's eye, so the viewing poet demands attention of the reader. The Notes on the First Principle of the *Spiritual Exercises* famously ask at an earlier point, 'What must it be to be someone else?',[9]

and rather like the writer of dramatic monologue, Hopkins tries to capture in his rhythms the distinctness of the objects of his perception in the terms which they set out actively for themselves.

I have said that a prosodic discovery led Hopkins back to poetry, but this is not entirely true. In Easter 1868, he eventually decided that he had a vocation to become a Jesuit priest. Before he entered the novitiate at Manresa House, Roehampton, he took a holiday in the Alps and on his return wrote to Robert Bridges, telling him of his impending entry into the seminary, and then, rather baldly, that he would not be sending a requested poem, since he had burnt his poetry. But of course Hopkins did not destroy all of his verses, and actually includes in the letter to Bridges a new version of an old poem.[10] This is based on the story of the martyrdom of St Dorothea. It is an odd, unachieved poem, by turns monologue and dialogue in two of its versions. St Dorothea, tortured by the governor of Caesarea, says that God is everywhere, and that heaven is full of perpetually flowering apples and roses. Just before she is to be executed the androgynous figure of an angel ('How to name it, blessed it! / Suiting its grace with *him* or *her*?', 25–6) comes down and presents the heavenly fruits to her inquisitors. After some wonder at the event, the Romans continue killing Christians.

The Easter 1868 version of the poem, Hopkins says, has had a 'peculiar beat' introduced into it, a beat which he says can be found in Shakespeare. Catherine Phillips suggests that the first version was written in 1864, and was, in 1866, the first poem that Hopkins showed to his friend Bridges.[11] It had begun,

> I bear a basket lined with grass;
> I am so light, I am so fair,
> That men must wonder as I pass
> And at the basket that I bear,
> Where in a newly-drawn green litter
> Sweet flowers I carry, – sweets for bitter.

Four years later, the poem began with these sparing modifications made to its first stanza:

> I bear a basket lined with grass.
> I′ am so′ light and fair′
> Men are amazed to watch me pass
> With′ the básket I bear′,
> Which in newly drawn green litter
> Carries treats of sweets for bitter.

The changes in sense are slight, but by adding stress marks, thinning out the punctuation, and pointing up the internal rhyme in the last line, Hopkins sounds his peculiar beat. The poem has been rewritten in sprung rhythm, and that is suddenly a poetic form adapted to the movements of a spiritual life seeking the body of an art in which to sound itself. 'I am so light, I am so fair' (1864) nestles comfortably into the rising rhythm of its speaker's bliss, four regular iambs divided by a conventionally placed caesura. 'I′ am so′ light and fair′' (1868), with the stress marks forcing the voice to sound a falling and then swinging rhythm, seeks to establish a sonic form which will dare to mimic the grace of the speaker.

Hopkins' letter to Bridges is slight, self-effacing even, as it should be for one who is about to face the momentous change that a vocation would make to the pattern of his life. But at the same time as it tells his friend of this vocation, it contains this first fully-fledged experiment of English verse consciously written in the accentual metre Hopkins remembers from Shakespeare and Milton. Of course, Hopkins would have been aware of the importance of the nineteenth-century example of the verse which followed Coleridge's preface to *Christabel*, and while he was ambivalent to the example of Swinburne, he was an admirer of the prosodic innovations of Christina Rossetti.[12] The final sprung rhythm version of the St Dorothea poem, though, is aware that beyond the achievements of his precursors, it works quite self-consciously in an aesthetic medium that its poet deliberately describes as 'new'. Hopkins went into the novitiate, became a priest and didn't write again for seven years. But during this time, as he wrote to Richard Watson Dixon, 'I long had haunting my ear the echo of a new rhythm.'[13]

Hopkins never got right the 'Lines on a Picture of St Dorothea',[14] but they were his first and last effort at accentual verse in sprung rhythm before he finally found the chance to get back to poetry seven years later. This chance is well documented: in an offhand comment, a superior wondered whether someone would write on the shipwreck of the *Deutschland*, in December 1875. Given half a hint of an orthodox religious subject, the new rhythm which had haunted Hopkins for so long now comes out in all its sophisticated inventiveness. Like *Paradise Lost* or *Samson Agonistes*, *The Wreck of the Deutschland* is a theodicy, it exists to justify the ways of God to man. Like Tennyson's *In Memoriam* it is also an elegy, and following the patterns of verse of Milton and Tennyson, it tries to find rhythmic form within itself to express the physical form of the experience it describes. After such a long time away from poetry, the

author of *The Wreck* achieves fully his new rhythm. The poem also opens fully with Hopkins' consistent preoccupations with the difficulty of representing the self, objects and the divine through a medium which must convey the relations of consciousness, body, will and power. This medium must be a form suited to the representation of the movement of God's grace through the acting self.

After title and dedication, the poem's first part begins with the self, grammatically and physically wrenched into subservience to its maker:

> Thou mastering me
> God! giver of breath and bread;
> World's strand, sway of the sea;
> Lord of living and dead;
> Thou hast bound bones and veins in me, fastened me flesh,
> And after it almost unmade, what with dread,
> Thy doing: and dost thou touch me afresh?
> Over again I feel thy finger and find thee.

Much of this is passive and grateful, submissive even. The pronoun 'me' is used four times in the stanza, at all times the object of the sentence. The first time it is pushed awkwardly against the mastery of 'Thou', 'God', and the last time to rhyme against another pronoun for God, 'thee'. These pronouns are intimately related, grammatically and spiritually. The self of the poet, then, would appear to be confessing powerlessness before God, as if it were only the grammatical object of an all-creating God. But this would be a heresy, because it ignores the main faculty of the human which makes for the distinctness of self, the freedom to choose.

Hopkins held that God places before the active, and therefore desiring and discriminating, human 'an infinity of possible worlds'.[15] These can be determined by the choices made by the human in creating them, choices which are assisted by God's grace. In order to choose, 'assisting grace'[16] will lead the self through three steps, all of which are part of the completion of an act dependent on will. In the first instance desire, or the 'affective will', naturally turns to the good of the self, as it may be surrounded by many objects of desire. Secondly, a rational deciding power, the 'elective will', may correct the initial impetus of desire, and make for a discrimination in coming to a decision. But thirdly the act becomes transcendent when it is informed by 'Grace' in Christ, as the self realises that it has chosen to act with the will of God. When this happens, Hopkins says, 'this is truly God's finger touching the very vein

of personality, which nothing else can reach and man can respond to by no play whatever, by bare acknowledgement only, the counterstress which God alone can feel ('subito probas eum'), the aspiration in answer to his inspiration'.[17] The speaker of *The Wreck* feels the finger of God, and finds Him also. He doesn't do the feeling, the finger of God does, but passively felt, he can now 'find' God. So too does the choosing self, finding God's grace assisting its act, aware that a decision made with grace is a decision beyond the natural in its completeness.

From the initial conflict of 'desire' and 'choice', towards the finger of God touching personality in the act, this is a movement of psychological realism towards transcendental or spiritual belief. Isobel Armstrong has said that the misreading of Hegel by Hopkins and his contemporaries is 'indirectly helpful',[18] and there is evidence here for a Christianising of a nineteenth-century notion of a *geist* moving through human affairs and directing the course of action. Hopkins would have read in Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero-Worship* of the determination of great men by fact, and their subsequent influence on the course of history. Indeed the first part of *The Wreck* looks to the example of the conversions of St Paul and St Augustine as evidence of the work of God's grace – cataclysmic and gradual respectively – in the history of the Church, assisting the humans to come to their decisions. The nun in the poem too, as discussed below, is seen making an act of assent to her own death similar to Mary's when she assents to be conceived of the son of God. The sense that the affective and elective will, desire and choice, may work against each other, is also apparent in the sense of antagonism of self and nature inherent in anti-mechanical psychology. John R. Reed shows that this tradition had a briefly Anglo-Catholic moment, when John Henry Newman's sense of freedom of will was taken up in William George Ward's defence of free will as psychological reality against what he called the 'spontaneous impulse' of the will.[19] Much of this would have had a bearing on Hopkins, particularly since the theological position which he reaches is so influenced by psychological imperatives along its way.

But Hopkins did not wholly need the apparatus of Victorian vitalism or psychology to reach this conception of will. Defending St Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* from Roland Barthes' accusations of endless separating and divison, Walter Ong points to what he calls their 'flexible particularism'.[20] This very flexibility of a spiritual programme which worked by dividing meditation into separate parts for a process which was built up over anything up to an eight-week period, was congenial both to the

amateur naturalist/artist Hopkins' attention to minute particulars, and his poetic attention to the processes of choice in the individual object. Thus when this 'flexible particularism' meets long-held Ruskinian habits of close observation, and the Scotist attachment to the *haeccitas*, 'thisness', of things, we have a mode of apprehension of the world which is made up of complementary theological and aesthetic considerations. In any act, will must have what Hopkins calls 'freedom of field'. Then the chooser can act as he or she sees fit, with 'freedom of play', and so demonstrate the faculty of self-determination or 'freedom of pitch'.[21] Hopkins separates out the elements involved in perception, consciousness and will in order to describe his own activity and that which he sees in the things around him. This can go to crippling extremes: Christopher Devlin says that Hopkins exaggerated the sense of opposition between the elective and affective wills which he found in Scotus, and as a result courted the heresy of the untramelled human choice which led to the damnation of Lucifer.[22] Much of Hopkins' later poetry suffers from this sense of a will exercising itself in isolation, calling for grace to inform it. Indeed will without the possibility of action, desire without choice, is Hell for Hopkins. But *The Wreck*, working within the generic expectations of elegy, seeks for a poetic description of choice and what follows it, and it attempts to give us the particularities of the activity involved.

No matter how the poem's first stanza appears submissive, it does feel the finger of God touching the very vein of personality. Then it can make its act of assent. This assent occurs in the second stanza of the poem, saying yes to the divine imperative which is perceived moving through the poet-priest's life, or his 'vocation'. It is here that Hopkins turns both to his own body and his own sense of spirituality and fuses them together. This results in a bodily spirituality, and one which is then scanned in the sprung rhythm of the verse. The poetic effect is an attempt to capture the physical effect of the spiritual experience. These different categories of experience and apprehension – spiritual, sonic, physical – eliding the noumenal, the phenomenological and the mystical all meet in this verse. For Hopkins, God literally springs this on him: in sprung rhythm he attempts to sound the active struggle in the body to such a spiritual imperative.

The Wreck as a whole tries to find sonic form for 'grace', which is apprehended as the will of God working through the fallen wills of men and women. This is the second stanza of the poem, testifying to the choice made after the flesh has been touched by the finger of God:

I did say yes
O at lightning and lashed rod;
Thou heardst me truer than tongue confess
Thy terror, O Christ, O God;
Thou knowest the walls, altar and hour and night:
The swoon of a heart that the sweep and the hurl of thee trod
Hard down with a horror of height:
And the midriff astrain with leaning of, laced with fire of stress.
(9–16)

An act of communication initiates this stanza, communication which is assent, saying 'yes'. Yet this saying is not written in the usual rhythms of English poetry. 'I did say yes / O at lightning', might have been recognisable and accepted at the time. Two iambs, and an anapaest: these things have the accepted interplay of regularity and variety conventional in English verse.

'Lashed rod' destroys all of this. In a letter to Robert Bridges, in the midst of a great apologia for his poetry to his friend and future editor, Hopkins justifies his choice of metrical form.

> Why do I employ sprung rhythm at all? Because it is the nearest to the rhythm of prose, that is the native and natural rhythm of speech, the least forced, the most rhetorical and emphatic of all possible rhythms, combining as it seems to me, opposite and, one wd. have thought, incompatible excellences, markedness of rhythm – that is rhythm's self – and naturalness of expression – for why, if it is forcible in prose to say 'lashed : rod', am I obliged to weaken this in verse, which ought to be stronger, not weaker, into 'láshed birch-ród', or something.[23]

For Hopkins, prose, the natural rhythm of speech, is not forced, but it is rhetorical and emphatic. The naturalness of the rhetorical possibilities of prose is not the seeming paradox that it might be. The 'self' of rhythm, 'rhythm's self', is its markedness, and sprung rhythm assists this in gaining 'naturalness of expression'. Like the working of desire in nature and choice in the elective will, the natural and the expressive become one in the act. The aesthetic discriminations of the rhythm-writing poet cohere with the natural rhythms of speech. 'Lashed rod' as it appears in the second stanza of *The Wreck*, is no arbitrary choice to demonstrate this: the stresses of the poet gain a fitting metrical beat as they are rubbed up against one another following the rhetoric and emphasis of a poetry which wishes to give us the nature of the experience. That is violent and the body suffers, just as the poem shows us the moment of the self's physical assent to God.

The heavy stresses on 'lashed rod' weigh us so firmly into the end of

the line, that the syllables get a beating just as the poet is saying that he has suffered a spiritual beating. Insubstantial experience, here the spiritual, is given heavy sonic form. To continue with the scansion of the stanza, the iambs return – 'Thou heardst me truer than tongue confess' – but then collapse into the dramatic and metrical uncertainties of the next line: 'Thy terror, O Christ, O God'. These lines have to convey the sublimity of an experience of God, and in doing so they become metrically uncontainable. 'Terror' slurs out across its two syllables. 'O Christ, O God', are similarly metrically indeterminate, and semantically ambiguous. Do we read it, 'O Chríst, O Gód': two iambs, the stress lying in the security of the divine? Or 'Ó Chríst, Ó Gód': two spondees, the stress yoked back on to the exclamation, and the possibility of the terrified speaker simply uttering two involuntary curses on the names of a God taken in vain?

The rhythm is uncertain, and the thought needs certainty at this moment of assent. The 'yes' that the stanza speaks needs an answer. So the body of the speaker is picked up, and then thrown down again:

> Thou knowest the walls, altar and hour and night:
> The swoon of a heart that the sweep and the hurl of thee trod
> Hard down with a horror of height:
> And the midriff astrain with leaning of, laced with fire of stress.

'Stress' here rhymes with 'yes' and 'confess'. And it does take the stress in the stanza. Yet that stress is something which has been distributed across the verse in a sequence which accords with the experience and not necessarily the expectations of the poem. The form of the poem, its stresses which work to record the traumatic stress of its speaker's life, adapts to the form of the experience. The verbs carry emphasis so far as to suggest movement: 'swoon . . . sweep . . . hurl . . . trod'. This swinging verse then picks up the body of its speaker, and drops it. The poem falls down hard with a horror of height, and the stomach is left painfully behind. Rather like bumping over an unseen hump-backed bridge, the sudden unexpected jump of the poem leaves poet and reader with butterflies in the stomach.[24] The individual experience here is written in the terms of the musical stress at the centre of the word in poetry carrying experience itself. In the spiritual, what happens, happens only to the soul. But this stanza strives to give that spiritual experience body. To do this it uses words, and words which are weighed down with a horror of height.

In making representations of his own consciousness and will working

with the consciousness and will that he perceives in the world around him, Hopkins strives for a poetry which will give weight to these things. The poetry seeks to write this weight not only in the spiritual facts he sees informing all natural things, but also his experience of these things. It is as if the attachment of weight to a word will enable it to obey physical laws of gravity which will hurl it to the solid ground of perceptible experience. There are aesthetic as well as semantic difficulties with this. In a lecture on accent and stress, Hopkins wrote,

> we speak of the accent of words, that is of syllables; for the accent of a word means its strongest accent, the accent of its best accented syllable. This is of two kinds – that of *pitch* (tonic) and that of *stress* (emphatic). We may think of words as heavy bodies, as indoor or out of door objects of nature or man's art. Now every visible palpable body has a centre of gravity round which it is in balance and a centre of illumination or *highspot* or *quickspot* up to which it is lighted and down from which it is shaded. The centre of gravity is like the accent of stress, the highspot like the accent of pitch, for pitch is like light and colour, stress like weight, and as in some things as air and water the centre of gravity is either unnoticeable or unchangeable so there may be languages in a fluid state in which there is little difference of weight or stress between syllables or what there is changes and again as it is only glazed bodies that shew the highspot well so there may be languages in which the pitch is unnoticeable.
>
> English is of this kind, the accent of stress strong, that of pitch weak – only they go together for the most part.[25]

Hopkins needs to think of words as bodies, since only then can the body of a poem approach the bodily experience of which it speaks. He is on shaky ground: bodies are described as both visible and palpable when they show a centre of gravity, and words are quickly enlisted as having the same substantial form. In English pitch is weak, the highspot is perceived only with difficulty; stress, the weight on the word, always carries English verse down to earth. The sound of words may be closer to air and water than clods, sinews or falling human bodies, but in English, Hopkins claims, the sound of the words carries weight more than weightlessness.

One difficulty with this is that it appears to demonstrate everything that critics since Johnson had levelled against the practice of Milton. For Hopkins, this amounts to the wilful courting of harshness and dissonance as a necessary part of English verse after the Augustan couplet and the Tennysonian line had done much to move the sound of English in the direction of classical form. The objection to this perceived harshness of accentual metre is made most strongly by George Saintsbury, in the

midst of his discussion of Robert Bridges' (and by extension Hopkins') account of Milton's rhythms in *Milton's Prosody*.

> I have compared scansion of this kind before to a drunkard staggering from post to post; and it also much resembles an unskilful hurdle-racer taking his jumps now too short and now too long. But the most perfect simile to my fancy is one the material of which most people know who have been unlucky enough to be quartered in a railway hotel on the side overlooking a shunting yard. They will remember how, in the dead waist and middle of the night, they were aroused, and kept awake till it was time to get up, by something like this –
>
> RAM! ----- ra-RAM! --- ra-ra-ra-RAM! ----- RAM-ra-RAM! -- ra-RAM-ra! --RAM!
>
> That is the tune of accentual scansion in its altitudes.[26]

The drunken or clumsy crashing dissonance which might have disturbed Saintsbury from his claret-induced sleep is a comic modification of Yeats' complaint against the rhythms of the will which are like a man running. Sprung rhythm, though, uses dissonance when it thinks of due purposes for its employment. In the case of Hopkins, it conveys the weighted collisions of the human in suffering, trauma or ecstasy. In *Milton's Prosody*, Bridges reminds us,

> The relation of the form of the verse to the sense is not to be taken exactly; it is a matter of feeling between the two, and is misrepresented by any definition. Poetry would be absurd in which there was perpetual verbal mimicry of the sense; but this is not to deny that matter and form should be in live harmonious relation.[27]

In Hopkins, this is the relation between the physicality of his spiritual experience and the verse which strives to sound it. We can say that the sound is wedded to the sense, in the sense that while not all marriages have their couples agreeing all the time, they can still be in 'live harmonious relation'.

For Hopkins and Bridges, such a relation means that poetry moves to touch the human heart, and at the centre of *The Wreck of the Deutschland* is the human heart.

> Ah, touched in your bower of bone
> Are you! turned for an exquisite smart,
> Have you! make words break from me here all alone,
> Do you! – mother of being in me, heart.
> O unteachably after evil, but uttering truth,
> Why, tears! is it? tears; such a melting, a madrigal start!
> Never-eldering revel and river of youth,
> What can it be, this glee? the good you have there of your own?
>
> (stanza 18, 137–44)

Interrupting the narrative of shipwreck and martyrdom which comprises the second part of the poem, this stanza constitutes a dramatic pause, a turning back to the moved poet, and the moved readers. It is the eighteenth stanza of thirty-five: it is at the centre of gravity of the poem. It finds that centre of gravity within the bower of bone, the rib cage, with the mother of being, the human heart.

Sprung rhythm can be light as well as heavy. Hopkins' first great critic, W. H. Gardner, has written beautifully of the first four lines here: 'No rhythmic device could be more natural than the overflow in these lines. As with a sob, each line stumbles and falters over the threshold of the next, and the regularity of this encroachment sets up a vertical cross-current of pure expressional rhythm without disturbing the basic metre.'[28] He echoes a similar observation made about the lightness of touch available to Milton's blank verse in an article written by J. A. Symonds, which impressed Hopkins:

> It not unfrequently happens that a portion at least of the sound belonging to a word at the commencement of a verse is owed to the cadence of the preceding lines, so that the strain of music which begins is wedded to that which dies, by indescribable and almost imperceptible interpenetrations. The rhythmic dance may therefore be prolonged through sequences and systems of melody, each perfect in itself, each owing and lending something to that which follows and which went before, through concords and affinities of sound.[29]

And this is Hopkins on how to scan *The Wreck of the Deutschland*:

> Remark also that it is natural in Sprung Rhythm for the lines to be *rove over*, that is for the scanning of each line immediately to take up that of the one before, so that if the first has one or more syllables at its end the other must have so many the less at its beginning; and in fact the scanning runs on without a break from the beginning, say, of a stanza to the end and all the stanza is one long strain, though written in lines asunder.[30]

Like the word 'stress', Hopkins is not slow to work the musical term 'strain' into its other meaning, of physical suffering, here a strain which courts disunity, 'written in lines asunder'. Gardner's stumbling and faltering and sobbing lines, Symonds' indescribable and almost imperceptible interpenetrations of the rhythmic dance, and Hopkins' own 'one long strain', all suggest a verse which will not allow itself to settle with any determinate weight. Sprung rhythm may stress its syllables hard down into the ground, but their gravity may sometimes be defied. The picture of the human heart in this stanza is a picture of fallen and evil human emotion. But it is also an uplift in that human emotion,

which can respond to the tragic tale which the poem tells. The poem must turn to glee, after all of its falling. Seeking the ways of God, it must find a rhythmic dance which might flow with all the insubstantiality of the grace which informs it.

The heart's turn from suffering to glee is a moment which is generic to elegy, but also one turned to Hopkins' particular use of that genre. Working towards consolation, Hopkins wants to go towards theodicy and away from wreck. Yet if Tennyson's movement in the face of unwilled bereavement in *In Memoriam* is a matter of psychically holding the drifting self together until its will can be remade, Hopkins' is a matter of finding the grace of God which will touch both this seeming accident and the human heart which can gain strength from it. He moves to martyrdom and its choices. There he must find the lightness, the insubstantiality of the incarnate moment, the mystical joining of the act of will with a divine, atemporal, immaterial scheme. In the options before a nun facing her death there may be no freedom of field or no freedom of play, but there Hopkins must demonstrate freedom of pitch, the only essential in an act. There can only be one outcome facing the nuns on *The Deutschland*, death. This is the seeming paradox of necessity and free will which Hopkins' poem tries to solve, that the nuns must choose death. Further, in resolving this paradox, Hopkins has also a poetic and linguistic problem in finding form which can attempt to represent this mystical, transcendent moment of the act.

In newspaper reports of the last moments of *The Deutschland*, Hopkins read of the call which one of the nuns had made for a quick death. He brings himself and the nun together as he speaks of this moment, the nun about to drown at the same time as he was tucked up in bed. Given this juxtaposition, Hopkins tries to bring together her words and his faltering interpretation of them.

> Away in the loveable west,
> On a pastoral forehead of Wales,
> I was under a roof here, I was at rest,
> And they the prey of the gales;
> She to the black-about air, to the breaker, the thickly
> Falling flakes, to the throng that catches and quails
> Was calling 'O Christ, Christ, come quickly':
> The cross to her she calls Christ to her, christens her wild-worst Best.
>
> (Stanza 24, 185–92)

Calling on Christ could be taking His name in vain. This is possible in the 'O Christ, O God' of stanza 2 and explicit in the last line of 'Carrion Comfort', with its speaker abject before a God with whom he is physically fighting, 'I wretch lay wrestling with (my God!) my God'. Exclamations of the name of God can be blasphemy as well as calls for succour. The pun in 'christens', turning the name of Christ into lowercase to suggest the naming, the word-making, of the nun, suggests an interpretative dilemma. The 'wild-worst', death, now becomes her 'Best', a capitalised immortality. Those rhymes, 'west . . . rest . . . Best', work out the nun's westward journey from an East in which she is persecuted. In the midst of this Hopkins allows in a poor joke, 'wild-worst', to add allusive and punning indeterminacy to these problems of meaning. This is not Shelley's 'wild West wind' which is regenerating, not destroying; neither is it the Wild West, since the west here is loveable.[31] The nun goes west, to death.

Doing so, she 'christens' her own fate. The nun, according to Hopkins, is not speaking with the ambiguity that we might detect in her words. Rather, she is naming her act, her death, calling it, and in the act of calling linking self, language and fate in this christening. Even for the poet this is difficult, if not blasphemous: only Christ could, from his own will, have desired his own death. The next stanza opens, 'The majesty! what did she mean?' and calls for inspiration to interpret it: 'Breathe, arch and original Breath' (stanza 25, 193–4). Yet he gets it wrong for the next two stanzas, as he asks after her call for the martyr's crown. The poem still founders before its central mystery,

> What by your measure is the heaven of desire,
> The treasure never eyesight got, nor was ever guessed what for the hearing?
>
> (stanza 25, 207–8)

The 'heaven of desire' is the desire for heaven, the heaven which is desire, and the desire which is heaven. Yet it is hidden from the mortal, it is beyond 'measure'. Lines of verse have 'measure', or 'quantity'. This verse is concerned with measuring the action that it describes, and in the elegiac pattern, finding consolation in it. Here the heaven which is higher than all on this earth, particularly one in which the heavens have opened in storm and shipwreck, is beyond the will of this poem. John Kerrigan points out that this is the only point in the poem where the poet addresses the reader, as 'you'. He says that this human concern about measurement, height, weight and number is contrasted with the next stanza but

one's vision of Christ working in Nature, '*Ipse*, the only one, Christ, King, Head': (221).[32] The capitals return in the naming, the 'Christening' of the mystery which resolves the question about the physical world and the poet's own attempts poetically to measure it into 'one'.

Assistance is required, if only to return the poem to the linguistic stability which it may be losing before the ambiguities and puns suggested by this event, the calling on Christ before death. Grace assists, and it is introduced by thinking about the Incarnation. Jesus 'hadst glory' (236) of both the nun and his mother. Mary, when told that she would conceive the son of God, had assented, and only then did conception take place. The telling had received her assent: 'be it done unto me according to thy word'.[33] Like the nun on the *Deutschland* she had no other option but had chosen what was before her. For Hopkins, both the individual act and the history of the world works around this event, the point at which the divine becomes human. This is how Hopkins reaches the point of interpretation, how he can 'word' the meaning of the nun's event, how he can turn her doom into her own action:

> Ah! there was a heart right!
> There was single eye!
> Read the unshapeable shock night
> And knew the who and the why;
> Wording it how but by him that present and past,
> Heaven and earth are word of, worded by?
> (stanza 29, 225–30)

The nun has seen singly, not doubly, ambiguously or punningly, just what is before her. The sublimity of the storm, 'unshapeable shock night', has been 'read' by her, and it has been read according to the divine word, or logos, which, in Hopkins' coinage, 'words'. It is done unto her according to the word. As a moment of 'present and past', defined by the divine in time, it is incarnate.

In his notes on the Spiritual Exercises' meditation on the Incarnation, Hopkins says this about the moment of the Incarnation and its occurrence at what Loyola calls 'the fullness of time'. Falling and weight and physical strength are its conditions.

> The divine Persons see the whole world at once and know where to drive the nail and plant the cross. A 60-fathom coil of cord running over the cliff's edge round by round, that is, say, generation by generation, 40 fathom already gone and the rest will follow, when a man sets his foot on it and saves both what is hanging and what has not yet stirred to run. Or seven tied by the rope on the

Alps; four go headlong, then the fifth, as strong as Samson, checks them and the two behind do not even feel the strain.[34]

Walter Ong says that the image here 'again fits the Victorian fascination with focal centres of power'.[35] The passage thinks about the intervention of God into time, the moment of Incarnation which will bring about the redemption of man through a virile, muscular act. The falling humans, 'hard down with a horror of height' indeed, are saved with effortless strength: 'the two behind do not even feel the strain'.

Hopkins' metaphor for the point at which the divine enters history can only describe a weightless thing, the will of God, or the Holy Spirit, which is shown by 'grace', defined by him thus:

For grace is any action, activity, on God's part by which, in creating or after creating, he carries the creature to or towards the end of its being, which is its self-sacrifice to God and its salvation. It is, I say, any such activity on God's part; so that so far as this action or activity is God's it is divine stress, holy spirit, and, as all is done through Christ, Christ's spirit . . . It is as if a man said: That is Christ playing at me and me playing at Christ, only that is no play but truth; That is Christ *being me* and me being Christ.[36]

This leaps wonderfully from 'play' to 'truth', in its way the kind of instinctive grasping for the 'word' which Hopkins' theological writing now and again succeeds in making. The self is created, it can gain assistance from grace, and it must act 'towards the end of its being'. Yet what effects this is 'holy spirit', the 'divine stress' which leads us only with lightness back to 'truth'. Then the terms of self become the terms for belief in Christ, 'Christ *being me* and me being Christ', where the near tautology of two distinct entities, self and God, are, more than definition for each other, interchangeable.

At the end of 'That Nature is an Heraclitean Fire and of the Comfort of the Resurrection', after imagery of shipwreck and redeeming vision, Hopkins says,

> I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am, and
> This jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal diamond,
> Is immortal diamond. (22–4)

Evidence of the human soul is evidence of the Incarnation. The time when Christ became human is the time when the human became Christ. Those recurring constructions of the verb to be, interchanging definitions of one thing in terms of the other, 'I am . . . Christ is . . . he

was . . . I am', result in the final tautology, 'immortal diamond, / Is immortal diamond'. The poem ends with more than rhyme; it ends with full-blown repetition, winding up those echoes of definition of self. Like God's 'I AM THAT I AM', the repeated 'I am' is hidden in the perfection of soul, 'immortal d – I am – ond'. Writing of such 'self-repetition', Peter McDonald says that Hopkins 'ceases to be himself, or merely himself'.[37] There is a further tautology of proof of Incarnation and soul with which Hopkins is obsessed, though. It occurs where the self is refined in inscape to a point beyond which it can no more be cut. This is as close to unity, oneness in Nature, as Hopkins can allow.

In the terms of the theology of the Roman Catholic Church, this is a 'mystery', and as such a spiritual fact barely to be held in words. A diamond may be nearly perfect in its refinement, but it is not immortal. It is a thing of Nature, not heaven. And even that contains an 'I am' within itself, a self distinct from its external shape, body or word. Earlier in *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, describing his own conversion and vocation, Hopkins is as careful as he can be to correct possible errors around this question of incarnation and self. The difficulty is that while divine grace acts in human affairs, the will of the human must still be free to choose it.

6
Not out of his bliss
Springs the stress felt
Nor first from heaven (and few know this)
Swings the stroke dealt –
Stroke and a stress that stars and storms deliver,
That guilt is hushed by, hearts are flushed by and melt –
But it rides time like riding a river
(And here the faithful waver, the faithless fable and miss.)

7
It dates from day
Of his going in Galilee;
Warm-laid grave of womb-life grey;
Manger, maiden's knee;
The dense and the driven Passion, and frightful sweat;
Thence the discharge of it, there its swelling to be,
Though felt before, though in high flood yet –
What none would have known of it, only the heart, being hard at bay,

8
Is out with it! (41–57)

The 'stress', 'stroke', 'Stroke and a stress', is at first sight the physical, battering entity which we so often hear Hopkins' poetry sounding. With the intervention of the Samson-like God who brings humanity to salvation, the masculine sense of saving strength is here flushed and melted.

In the St Dorothea poem, the angel who appears with the heavenly unseasonal fruit is described without gender, and with some uncertainty over its identity: 'How to name it, blessed it?' Here the third person pronoun is reserved for the grace which informs the saved world. The 'it' here, which 'rides time', which has a 'date', and is thus historical fact, is at once substantial and floating, actual and mysteriously unnamed. 'It' partakes of grave and womb, and it knows physical pain. Describing Hopkins' 'frantic attempts to cross over into the feminine by inscribing the female body at the centre of his text', Thais E. Morgan still finds that these stanzas define 'Artistic inspiration . . . in acts of sheer power – "the stroke dealt" that "rides time like riding a river" – tumescence, and orgasmic "discharge"'.[38] But the discharge of grace here also comes with the temporal telescoping of the moment of a violent ending into a female body in which a prior historical pattern had begun with conception, gestation and birth. Sharing mortality, grace swells like womb and wound. It has a bodily discharge which it shares with that of semen and the breaking of the waters before birth. From here it carries through metaphors of overflow and flood, metaphors which swivel between pain and release as they describe their hermaphrodite subject. Finally they burst out over the constraints even of this poem's elaborate containing stanza. The 'heart', seat of intuitive knowledge, hard as it is, is now touched, and 'out with it!' As in a moment of childbirth, grace bursts 'out' with itself, coming to knowledge for the poet and a self which he now wishes to work to the end of his being. At the point at which the abject meets the divine, we are given the moment of mystic apprehension. Hopkins attempts to tell us that the transcendent act of his own saying 'yes' is placed against the incarnate moment of history when the human gave birth to the divine.

This is the equivalent in *The Wreck of the Deutschland* of Tennyson's consoling 'I have felt' in *In Memoriam* CXXIV, except that here it is not followed by the check back into 'doubt and fear' that Tennyson allows to qualify the terms of his emotional apprehension. Yet Tennyson too has spoken of a heavenly touch, 'the hands / That reach through nature, moulding men'. In a similar moment of mystic apprehension, Hopkins lays the ground for his own elegy's consolation by linking his own conversion with the act of the nun, the saying yes to her own death

in what has now been recognised as a providential scheme. Once grasped as such, the dominant sense of the metaphors and rhythms can now become light and delicate. In exchange for Samson, we now get the delicate, erotic even, finger of God again touching the very vein of personality. The submission of the priest at the beginning of the poem now becomes the submission of priest and elegiac subject before Providence, now in intimate relationship with a personal God:

> lovely-felicitous Providence
> Finger of a tender of, O of a feathery delicacy, the breast of the
> Maiden could obey so, be a bell to, ring of it, and
> Startle the poor sheep back! is the shipwrack then a harvest,
> does tempest carry the grain for thee? (stanza 31, 245–8)

The line describing the finger of God holds its five marked stresses against sixteen unstressed syllables, and two caesurae. It courts emptiness, as if it wants to let air in, a delicate draught on which its feathery delicacy can float. Even the exclamatory capital letter 'O', unstressed as it is, seems to call the eye of the reader into the empty space in its middle. It is syntactically ambiguous too, since we are unsure whether it is the breast of the maiden which is delicate, or the caressing finger, an intimacy of touching and being touched. It is as if the poem at this point wants to effect an erotic interchange of the feelings of two close bodies. It is an interchange of tender mutuality, no longer one of power, which can lead on to the elegy's consolation, the harvest of souls which should follow the example of the martyrdom of the nun.

Such a consolation is made in terms of a question. And Hopkins then adopts a formality of address, as he turns to 'admire' his vision of the saving God who explains this loss to him. What he perceives is rhythm.

> I admire thee, master of the tides,
> Of the Yore-flood, of the year's fall;
> The recurb and the recovery of the gulf's sides,
> The girth of it and the wharf of it and the wall;
> Stanching, quenching ocean of motionable mind;
> Ground of being, and granite of it; past áll
> Grásp Gód, thróned behind
> Death with a sovereignty that heeds but hides, bodes but abides . . .
> (stanza 32, 249–56)

The tides and seasons are the rhythms of days and years. The ocean is contained, it has sides, wharves, walls. Within its containment it has motion, and that is the activity which tempts tautology in the internal

rhyme, 'ocean of motionable mind'. Against this motion, delicate, fluid, yet contained, we must set the solid and the weighty, that which is 'Ground of being, and granite of it'. The floating and the weighty meet here, no matter how they are describing the mystery which is beyond the powers of human mind or language to contain. This is 'pást áll / Grásp Gód', four packed stresses, which 'rove over' the end of the line as they convey a rhythmic apprehension of something which we cannot grasp, something beyond knowledge. Yet the mystery is of a God who is sensed, whose sovereignty is felt, and who has chosen to free us in our actions in the rhythm he has granted to the world. God 'heeds but hides, bodes but abides', keeping his self out of the act of the selves of the world, allowing them to do the right thing. In the elegy which is *The Wreck of the Deutschland* that is to call for Christ, to choose death.

This is a poetic as well as theological and moral matter. It shows what Peter McDonald, talking about Hopkins' rhymes and repetitions, calls 'a matter of determination', acknowledging

> the Wordsworthian 'consciousness of the inadequacies of our own powers' and an act of trust in the patterns of relationships existing outside the individual in the language and its particular chains of coincidence. The authorial will, under such circumstantial constraints, is not altogether free, but is subject to a discipline that may be considered ultimately an act of faith: poetry is therefore a matter of determination, in both senses of that word . . . [a] paradoxical meeting of submission and mastery (for to be determined is to be self-willed, but it may also be to find oneself willed into something) . . .[39]

The poetic self must have trust both in God and language. Given the temptations of puns, ambiguities, repetitions and tautologies, Hopkins suggests ways in which we might doubt that trust. His 'act of faith' is eventually shown in how, through rhythm and rhyme, he might catch or grasp the 'ocean of a motionable mind' which is a world assisted by grace of God. Hopkins eventually does not worry that his 'authorial will' is 'not altogether free', since free will and necessity can become, like self and God, the same thing for one with faith. The poem exists to find an aesthetic form for the spiritual fact which will work beyond the seeming paradox of the nun's predicament, and write it as a free act. This is a meeting of submission and mastery, both before God and in poetic language.

In the summer of 1884, Hopkins wrote to Robert Bridges of his version of an Irish joke, overheard on the cricket field.

> I must tell you a humorous touch of Irish Malvolio or Bully Bottom, so

distinctively Irish that I cannot rank it: it amuses me in bed. A Tipperary lad, one of our people, lately from his noviceship, was at the wicket and another bowling to him. He thought there was no-one within hearing, but from behind the wicket he was overheard after a good stroke to cry out 'Arrah, sweet myself!'[40]

The usual Irish curse would be 'Sweet Jesus', I suppose, but for Hopkins this young priest's attempt not to swear is no less a blasphemy: the self and Christ are one in the act. The concentration of desire, choice and then stroke on the cricket field amuses Hopkins, because this is the concentration of self which is that self's act. As a draft of one of his later poems, 'On the Portrait of Two Beautiful Young People', asks,

> Ah, life, what's like it? – Booth at Fairlop Fair
> Men/boys brought in to have each our shy there, one
> Shot, mark or miss, no more. I miss; and 'There! –
> Another time I' . . . 'Time' says Death 'is done'.
>
> Man lives that list, that leaning in the will
> No wisdom can forecast by gauge or guess,
> The selfless self of self, most strange, most still,
> Fast furled and all foredrawn to No or Yes.[41]

Making the stroke, hitting the mark, action itself, whether done in error or with assisting grace is 'The selfless self of self, most strange, most still'. Self must fulfil itself as it moves to say 'No or Yes'. The poet-priest, author of *The Wreck of the Deutschland* had to say 'Yes', in order to make his stroke or have his shy. More often than not, he missed the mark, but his subsequent poetic career, even in its darker moments, finds in the human heart and the human will which inhabit the body, the patience to seek a deliverance from the weight of self-tormenting thought. The heart and will must be physically bent to God:

> We hear our hearts grate on themselves: it kills
> To bruise them dearer. Yet the rebellious wills
> Of us wé do bid God bend to him even so.
>
> And where is he who more and more distills
> Delicious kindness? – He is patient. Patience fills
> His crisp combs, and that comes those ways we know.
>
> ('Patience, hard thing', 9–14)

CHAPTER 8

The mere continuator: Thomas Hardy and the end of elegy

The third scene of Act v of the second part of Thomas Hardy's *The Dynasts* relates the winning of the assent of the Princess Maria Louisa to a marriage to the monster, Napoléon Bonaparte. Metternich says that it is her father the Emperor Francis' 'privilege to pronounce / Which track stern duty bids you tread therein'. Francis understands exactly Metternich's object: to effect an alliance, through marriage, of the empires of France and Austria, and so isolate the other great competing dynasty of mainland Europe, that of Russia. But like much of Hardy's epic drama, the scene plays so well because it rubs the Immanent Will, which drives the conflict of great dynasties in world history, against a little human drama, in this case a sad family scene. The Emperor Francis refuses to compel his daughter to marry Napoléon:

> Without constraint or prompting I shall leave
> The big decision in my daughter's hands.
> Before my obligations to my people
> Must stand her wish.

For Hardy, of course, such big decisions are rarely made by mere humans in the great plan which is *The Dynasts*.

For Maria Louisa herself 'The big decision' is hedged round with equal parts of historical necessity and the sense of duty which comes with the obligations of her noble birth. Her father cannot speak to her in person, so he sends Metternich to announce the forthcoming marriage and to achieve her consent. After her brief compunction about marrying a man whom she had previously defamed and said that she hated (such words were mere 'bubbles', according to Metternich), she gives her assent thus:

> My wish is what my duty bids me wish.
> Where a wide Empire's welfare is in poise,
> That welfare must be pondered, not my will.
> I ask of you, then, Chancellor Metternich,

> Straightway to beg the Emperor my father
> That he fulfil his duty to the realm,
> And quite subordinate thereto all thought
> Of how it personally impinge on me.

(Hardy cannot resist a small piece of apocalypse in the stage direction which follows: '*A slight noise as of something falling is heard in the room. They glance momentarily, and see that a small enamel portrait of* MARIE ANTOINETTE, *which was standing on a console-table, has slipped down on its face.*')

One of the great achievements of *The Dynasts* is the competing choral gloss given by the gathered Spirits which watch such human scenes. The Spirit of the Years comments on this scene: '*The Will must have its way*.' In making her 'big decision' Maria Louisa serves history, behaving only in the way in which the Immanent Will determines her so to do. In Hardy, this Immanent Will is a blind impersonal force, unconscious of its effects on the historical events which unfold before it. It is part Schopenhauerian Will, in which lives must either struggle or acquiesce, and part Hegelian Geist, an immoveable power directing the course of a history over which the human subject has little or no influence. Only Napoléon himself is shown to have knowledge of this force, and that is only of a destiny which he is simply compelled to follow. Yet in this scene Hardy blasphemously crosses the workings of the Will with another version of history, the point at which, in the gospel of St Luke, Christ was conceived and became man. Metternich serves his master like the angel Gabriel serves God, and Maria Louisa plays the part of Mary. Both women have to make a 'big decision', but in both Hardy and Luke, as in Hopkins, the decision is theirs. Of course the terms are limited: the Princess says 'My wish is what my duty bids me wish', and Mary says 'Be it done unto me according to thy word.' Yet in both cases there is choice, the free choosing of the human subject to play a part in history or Providence. Once taken, this choice will then limit the possibility of any future freedoms.

As in *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, there are aesthetic implications for this positioning of human activity within a frame which allows only slight freedom of choice when faced with a 'big decision'. For the artist, any formal or thematic decisions may very well end up simply transcribing a pattern of activity which has already been, providentially or otherwise, determined. The possibilities of originality, novelty, the new, indeed any change, appear to be denied to an artist like Hardy, who felt so strongly that what he perceived to be the failures of his predecessors, as much as the failures of his own life, cruelly limited the scope for

creativity or action available to poetry. Scope there is, but within narrow limits.

Hardy held that the 'cunning irregularity' which is of 'enormous worth' in architecture is also important in verse. He learnt this, he says, from the 'Gothic art-principle in which he had been trained – the principle of spontaneity, found in mouldings, tracery, and such like – resulting in the "unforeseen" (as it has been called) character of his metres and stanzas, that of stress rather than syllable, poetic texture rather than poetic veneer'.[1] The Gothic, I suggested in chapter two, was a way in which, after Coleridge, we might think of the forms of some of the poetry which borrows from a conception of aesthetic form which places variety and vigour – 'cunning irregularity' – before a mellifluous classical style. James Richardson has pointed out that this style was no more new to Hardy than it was to Coleridge.[2] Hopkins heard it in Shakespeare and Milton, and the Brownings, the Rossettis and Hopkins among others could be said to have worked within this mode, placing the voicings of will in a form which must be calibrated to respond to it. Yet the possibility of such calibration, preparing the machine which is the stanza for doing the business of thought, feeling and will, is one which raises a host of questions which Hardy's poetic career took many years to solve.

The example of his predecessors led Hardy to work self-consciously in the rhythms that they had bequeathed to him, as well as in the rhythms of ballad and church. These rhythms are inhabited by a proclaimed attachment to a monist determinism which allows none of the vigour or importance of individual will that Hardy's poetic antecedents professed. Writing about his own metres, he places the word 'unforeseen' in inverted commas to describe their character: they contain surprises, if never what he could not admit, originality. They cannot follow Sordello, whose 'big decision' is to write a poetry which 'intends / New structure from the ancient' (v, 642–3). Hardy's greatest poems inhabit lyric forms, but many of them are borrowed, hand-me-down. Often these forms do not quite fit and show in their cunning irregularity an outline which does not quite accord with their cut. This gives his poems at one and the same time their sense of terminating a Victorian preoccupation with form, and action in that form, as well as initiating the unmistakably modern sensibility that English poets after W. H. Auden have found in him.[3] Even if the lyric forms have already been worn, they appear to be new.

'The Pedigree', published when Hardy was seventy-seven, is about

the determination of the human form by the forms of the past. It is a poem which inhabits great irregular Gothic stanzas, and indulges in some odd behaviour, certainly not that of an elderly Edwardian gentleman. This is how it begins:

I

I bent in the deep of night
Over a pedigree the chronicler gave
As mine; and as I bent there, half-unrobed,
The uncurtained panes of my window-square let in the watery light
Of the moon in its old age:
And green-rheumed clouds were hurrying past where mute and cold it globed
Like a drifting dolphin's eye seen through a lapping wave.

Although he would not have known the poem, Hardy's stanza has some visual similarities with the stanza of *The Wreck of the Deutschland*. The architectural arrangement on the page assists in the same working of voice into patterns which are set against expected emphasis and beat. To this Hardy adds a typical trick of delaying the moment when the reader discovers the metrical pattern.[4] But metrical pattern it does have: while Hardy says that the 'Gothic art-principle' of his poetry emphasises spontaneity, stress and texture, this still does not mean that it is written in sprung rhythm. In his invaluable study of Hardy's metres, Dennis Taylor describes the poem's prosodic variations as being 'written in four septets and a final octave, each stanza with a different rhyme scheme and metrical form'. Despite such variation, the metrical system is still accentual-syllabic. The look of the stanza is crucial too, a good example of Hardy's 'use of the visual stanza as a mimetic tool'.[5] It is what is *seen* that constitutes the innovation of this poem, the half-showing and half-hiding of a pattern which a subsequent vision allows and then retracts. Pattern is established and denied, just like the stanza itself.

Hardy cannot restrain himself from some distinctly grim humour in showing this. Twice in the first three lines he tells us that 'I bent', the first time in a position of extreme metrical indeterminacy. Iamb, trochee or spondee, the foot goes three ways with at least two senses: I *bent*, a simple description of posture; or *I* bent, the stress pushed on to the first-person pronoun. The effect then is of an ironic conception of self as imperious, master of this castle or even seer (five years later in *The Waste Land*, T. S. Eliot plays with the visionary possibility of the construction, 'I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives', 218). The doubt is whether we are in the presence of a Romantic lyric, speaking from the self, or

whether this poem is narrating the self, presenting a view of it. And 'point of view', as well as the whole perceptual machinery of view and hearing, is played here with some discomfort. However we choose to read the phrase, we are given no punctuation to help decide the rhythm until the verb is repeated after an early caesura. Then we get detail about the bending subject, and that it is 'half-unrobed', in front of 'uncurtained panes' which let light in. Why does Hardy tell us about his state of dress, or rather undress? And why are the curtains open? For light, but also to show this bending, half-dressed old man awake in the middle of the night showing himself to world and reader. While this is not quite the insomniac midnight walk undertaken by the speaker of *Maud*, it is a different kind of exhibition, framing the body in a Gothic 'window-square' in the light of the moon. Light comes in and goes out, and in the shadow world of this stanza, something is shown and not shown. The vision is half-exhibited. The bad behaviour continues, with the extraordinary mucus colour of 'green-rheumed clouds' emphasised with the clearing of the reader's throat at the end of the stanza's longest line at 'cold it globed'. The l's in 'dolphin' and 'lapping' echo this sound just as they tell us of the half-revealed dolphin's eye, simultaneous viewer of surface and depth. The stanza lets in light and sound, and with some discomfort lets in, while letting out, the sounds and sights of the elderly male body.

Hardy's stanza deliberately refuses to wear its chosen form over the scene that it narrates. Resolutely past tense, it narrates a self going through the slightly shameful behaviour of which it is eccentrically unaware. The poet must remind himself of his own eccentricity as the preamble to a sort of vision. It does not occur in the lyric time of the poem itself: it had occurred before and is now closed, only to be reopened in this satiric-lyric form. Hardy goes on to describe himself 'scanning' his family tree. In Hardy, this word denotes sight and sound, something the eyes are described doing, and the voice of the poet and reader must do as they sound the poem.[6] The family tree is described gradually coming into understandable form, from hieroglyphs to maps to lineage and then the branches which describe the 'seared and cynic face' (12) of his family. This is as close as Hardy will allow to vision, yet that is only something which 'winked and tokened towards the window' (13). In turn, he cheekily works an enchantment on himself 'to gaze' (14) at his own face in a window which has now become a mirror. That face is now revealed as having been 'inked down' (19), written just as these ancestors have. Doomed to repeat their cynicism, winking and token-

ism, he gains a vision of heredity as the biological determinant of the present and future of the self.

Hardy's terms for describing what this means are now terms for describing activity. They shift into his seared and cynical version of a rhythm of will, no matter how they begin with the brutal pun on the means of apprehending this vision of the self at the end of a tunnel of possibility in the verb to 'divine'.

IV

And then did I divine
That every heave and coil and move I made
Within my brain, and in my mood and speech,
Was in the glass portrayed
As long forestalled by their so making it;
The first of them, the primest fuglemen of my line,
Being fogged in far antiqueness past surmise and reason's reach.

V

Said I then, sunk in tone,
'I am merest mimicker and counterfeit! –
Though thinking *I am I,*
And what I do I do myself alone.
– The cynic twist of the page thereat unknit
Back to its normal figure, having wrought its purport wry,
The Mage's mirror left the window-square,
And the stained moon and drift retook their places there.

The fourth stanza brings us iambically into two lines of vigorous metrical activity: 'And then did I divine' (∪ / ∪ / ∪ /) is followed by a beat which mimics a predominantly iambic rhythm of will. 'That every heave and coil and move I made' (∪ / ∪ ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ /) throws in the faintest anapaest in order to launch into, as well as shore up, the effort of the poet's life and the poem's metre to carry out their activity. The lines continue iambically, seeming to count a regular rhythm, the Tennysonian beat of an internalised 'steps of Time, – the shocks of Chance / The blows of Death' (*In Memoriam*, XCV), or the last line of 'Ulysses', 'To strive, to seek, to find and not to yield'. Yet Hardy works on the quantity of the stresses in the line, lengthening and dwelling on them in order to lead us into the cynic vision. Across two enjambed lines he brings us slowly over the line ending, 'the glass portrayed', into what has been 'long forestalled by their so making it'. The line lengthens and then shuts up quickly, and it is the only line in the stanza which ends with an

emphatic pause. It is also the only one which doesn't rhyme (although the sound is picked up mockingly in the next stanza at 'counterfeit' and 'unknit'). The whole movement of these lines is on to what has been 'long forestalled'. With an effort at order the voice is dragged into the concept, and then confronted by the inevitability of it.

It is with some surprise then that we now find the poet 'sunk in tone'. The poem was published by a man in his seventies: after so long, what did he expect of himself? 'The Pedigree' is not so much triumphant proof of the unconscious determinants of personality, in the way that 'The Convergence of the Twain' takes the sinking of the *Titanic* as proof of the workings of the Immanent Will. It is a moment of vision of such determination, of effort in spite of itself. For all its cynic twisting of metre and expectation, it does consider its own heave and coil and move. It finds the impulse for that activity outside the self, in the mirror or in the pedigree, which is the first mover in the poem. Hardy says that he is 'merest mimicker and counterfeit' in the published version. But in a manuscript version he is the 'mere continuator'. As Tom Paulin points out, this word 'continuator' also occurs in 'Wessex Heights' where he is 'a strange continuator'. That poem was published in 1914, but dated December 1896, twenty years before the publication of 'The Pedigree'. Its metre, Paulin observes, works far different rhythmic effects than are mocked here: it 'sounds what it is – a speech delivered by someone in a state of such acute depression that he has almost totally lost his own will'.[7] To admit the total loss of will might be virtuous clear-mindedness for Hardy, and not lead to the speaker of 'The Pedigree' being 'sunk in tone' at all.

If Hardy toyed with the idea that he was a 'mere continuator', he is predominantly speaking of the position of his personality as dominated by the cynical humour of his familial ancestors. But 'The Pedigree' is also what Hardy could not quite allow the printed version of the poem to admit, a continuation, not just an imitation, of a Romantic and Victorian poetry of self, consistently worrying over questions of identity and volition. The elderly Hardy still says that he had continued to think that '*I am I, / And what I do I do myself alone*'. The poem voices a blasphemous disappointment in its denial of the self as a solitary subject, originator of its own actions. The text with which Hardy blasphemes, Tim Armstrong suggests, is God's 'I AM THAT I AM' of Exodus 3,14. Hopkins works around this in his human version, 'What I do is me.' Armstrong also suggests Tennyson's 'Ulysses', 'that which we are, we are'.[8] Autonomous self, or mere continuator, Hardy's picture of his

vision of necessity in 'The Pedigree' knits his lyric into satire, back into lyric and then out to satire again. The cynic twist of the unknitting page, the 'purport wry' and the return of the hand-me-down Gothic scenery of moon and clouds is, if not quite a disabusing of vision, a replacement of vision into a view of the world which contains only visions of necessity. It is a mere continuation of what has become obsolete.

For Dennis Taylor, the imagery of the tangling branches of Hardy's family tree as contemplated in 'The Pedigree' demonstrates a concern with patterns and patterning which turns inwards and actively courts obsolescence. This, according to Taylor, is a paradox, shown by the fact that these patterns 'grow more clear as they grow more obsolescent; the outlines of the pattern grow sharper and simultaneously skeletal until the final definitive pattern is an epitaph of the experience in which it grew'.[9] The paradoxical movement, beginning in experience, moving through a recognisably patterned outline and ending in a moment of understanding which is coterminus with the epitaph for the experience, is also the movement of elegy. With consolation, the end of the form comes at the point at which that form is realised. Consequently, the elegist gains the finality of the trauma which has gone before. While this process of patterning is a sort of consolation to Hardy, someone always officially tugged into showing the determining power which is the web of the Immanent Will, it is also a great temptation to the literary historian. The temptation is to see Hardy's poetry as the means by which the formal innovations within a recognisable metrics, and the emphasis on the self-determining subject of Victorian poetry, is rendered obsolete.

Into his early seventies, Hardy himself tended to fall for that temptation. Taylor describes Hardy as late as 21 November 1912, aged seventy-two, writing 'The Bird Catcher's Boy' in a determination to 'expose' the consolations granted by immortality in Wordsworth's Lucy poems and to work in a primarily satiric mode. The death of Emma Hardy, six days later, disabused Hardy of such a notion and provided, according to Taylor, 'the final clarification of his art'.[10] Even so, the *Poems of 1912–13* which followed Emma's death still appeared in a volume entitled *Satires of Circumstance.* Caught between the satiric and the competing claims of the elegiac mode, just as in the previous decade he had toyed with the tragic, Hardy questions his position as 'mere continuator' of what had gone on before, or wonders whether he is one whose poems, even at this late stage, might mark change. Dennis Taylor puts the aesthetic significance of the event this way:

The exposer became the exposed, and Hardy found himself walking into the intenser drama of his own life. The scales fell, and Hardy discovered the profound way in which a poem comes out of a man's life, as the final clarification and epitaph of an experience which has formed over the years. The satire of circumstance was implicit, Hardy discovered, in the inmost working of a lyrical sensibility.[11]

This knitting of the satiric into the lyric provides the main mode of Hardy's elegiac verse, a verse which comes from experience, but exists only as an epitaph marking the loss of that experience. Despite his avowedly anti-pragmatic views, and grim opinions of freedom and novelty, Hardy in his seventies does write a new poetry, no matter how it is caught up in the obsolescence of the forms of its Romantic and Victorian lyrical pedigree.

To the paradox of an understanding which only comes with the extinction of the thing to be understood, of knowledge as loss, there is another paradox to be added. That concerns the Immanent Will and the position of elegy, or indeed tragedy, within an aesthetic supposedly governed by it. The work into which Hardy put the most effort in all of his career, the three volumes of *The Dynasts*, published between 1904 and 1908, quite deliberately thinks of its characters as 'puppets'. It gives to one of its choral figures, the Spirit of the Pities, what we might now call 'humanist' arguments about tragedy and sympathy which are no match for the commentary of its fellow observers of the human scene of history below, the Spirits Ironic and Sinister and the Spirit of the Years. After the long drawn out death of Nelson at Trafalgar, the Spirit of the Pities finds something missing with the 'Mode' in which the action of history is unfolding before it:

> *But out of tune the Mode and meritless*
> *That quickens sense in shapes whom, thou hast said,*
> *Necessitation sways! A life there was*
> *Among these self-same frail ones – Sophocles –*
> *Who visioned it too clearly, even the while*
> *He dubbed the Will 'the gods'. Truly said he,*
> *'Such gross injustice to their own creation*
> *Burdens the time with mournfulness for us,*
> *And for themselves with shame' – Things mechanized*
> *By coils and pivots set to foreframed codes*
> *Would, in a thorough-sphered melodic rule,*
> *And governance of sweet consistency,*
> *Be cessed no pain, whose burnings would abide*
> *With That Which holds responsibility,*
> *Or inexist.* (I, v, iv)

Hardy has Sophocles ask him a difficult question: if all is necessity, then why does humanity feel pain about something over which it has no control? There are related questions, about being crushed by the inevitability of a pattern which calls itself tragic, and beyond that of why such a representation as the Verse Drama/History/Tragedy which is *The Dynasts* itself need be made. Further, Hardy's own definition of the best tragedy, 'the WORTHY encompassed by the INEVITABLE',[12] allows no sense of individual 'responsibility' into the mode: 'encompassed' suffocates the heroic.

In *The Dynasts*, 'That Which holds responsibility' (a teasingly prosaic version of *In Memoriam* XCV's 'That which is'), the Immanent Will, is the unconscious impulse behind a faulty machine, in which the foreframed codes produce not melody but mourning. The Spirit of the Years is not without pity as it answers this question by relating the unfortunate doom of humans to feel:

> *The cognizance ye mourn, Life's doom to feel,*
> *If I report it meetly, came unmeant,*
> *Emerging with blind gropes from impercipience*
> *By listless sequence – luckless, tragic Chance,*
> *In your more human tongue.* (I, v, iv)

Hardy refuses the tragic here, despite his invocation of Sophocles and his play with the spectacle which is heroism in this drama. It does exist, in Nelson's reckless parade about the deck of the *Victory* in full view of the sniper who shot him, and Marshall Ney's incessant charges and refusal to lie to the troops at Waterloo.[13] Still, the questioning about mechanism, and related issues of code, rule, governance, consistency and responsibility is answered only by the 'blind gropes' and 'listless sequence' which led to feeling. In *The Dynasts*, this is placed between the tragic and the ironic. Humanity's attraction to the heroic, to be heroic or just to view it, is a figment of the blind groping which led to the curse of feeling.

The paradox needs only a slight adjustment to be asked of the mode of Hardy's writing which followed *The Dynasts*, the elegiac. Jahan Ramazani asks the question again:

> The dispassionate stare of the Immanent Will would seem to be anathema to elegy: the genre had always depended on involvement, its pathos being borne of resistance to loss. To look on loss from a great height and see it as part of a fated pattern is to reduce mournful feelings to ironic twinges. How could a poet whose 'natural voice' is 'elegiac' have written poems that scorn and belittle loss?

The answer of the Spirit of the Years concerning 'Life's doom to feel', spoken from a position above the clouds which gather round the Battle of Trafalgar is not one of scorn, but it is belittling. A pattern – human or literary – which demonstrates nothing but remorseless, blind and unconscious Will, determining the fate of humanity would be one with little scope for vigour and variety. There is faint consolation in that humanity being given the extra pain of feeling its own determinism. Ramazani answers his question about the possibility of elegy in such conditions by saying that Hardy's 'vulnerability to loss gives rise to his invulnerable detachment, his "democratic" empathy spurs into being his "absolutist" emphasis on pattern, or to switch to literary historical terms, his late Romantic pathos occasions his modern irony'.[14] This critical description of the existence of feeling and therefore irony, dualist empathy creating monist necessity, establishes a set of contradictions in which most criticism locates the virtue of Hardy's poetry. The sense is, as Dennis Taylor says of 'At Castle Boterel', of poems with a 'double plot',[15] a sense of the self governed by the unflinching rigour of Time yet filled full of regret at opportunities missed and time lost. It is as if Hardy's poems look back at the past and, thinking about its unchangeability, apply this as the model of how little they can affect the future.

The question of how Hardy's work survives an intellectual encounter with a Schopenhauerian Will as a literary event at all has vexed many critics of Hardy's poetry and fiction.[16] For Ramazani and Taylor, the temptation is to find in this poetry an Apocalypse, elegies for the end of an era, something complete and therefore immediately obsolete. Yet for Hardy, there is one way in which the dead might live again and in which the supposedly irrecoverable Victorian era, which has passed along with his wife Emma, might be reheard. He sounds this aspiration in the ghostly rhythms of his poetry, a poetry which unavoidably resuscitates the forms of his dead poetic ancestors. He may be the 'mere continuator' of their metres, but as they ghost through his poetry he attempts to sound the 'substance' (as 'At Castle Boterel' would have it) of a poetry which strives for more presence than the bereaved actual brings.

'Places' addresses this issue of the insubstantiality of the present compared with the vividness of the past in memory. It is the penultimate lyric in the original ordering of *Poems of 1912–13*, and in its final stanza the poet finds that he is alone in his memories, and can share them only in the memory of the dead wife for whom he grieves.

Nay: one there is to whom these things,
That nobody else's mind calls back,
Have a savour that scenes in being lack,
And a presence more than the actual brings;
To whom today is beneaped and stale,
And its urgent clack
But a vapid tale. (22–8)

That 'urgent clack' is a resolution of the rhymes of the stanza in thoughts of one who could call 'back' a 'lack' which is in the 'actual'. Yet the poem is concerned with making those 'back, lack, actual, clack' sounds vapid. In the harshness of the rhymes, savour and presence is missing from them. Where the previous poem in the sequence, 'At Castle Boterel', had realised that 'to me, though Time's unflinching rigour, / In mindless rote, has ruled from sight / The substance now' (26–8), the figure of the dead person still haunts the places where they have been. The 'mindless rote' of time, or the 'urgent clack' of the present, are rhythmic entities, but rhythmic entities which lack 'substance', which are part of the 'vapid tale' of the present. It is the absent for whom the poet grieves that is given a rhythmic presence in the poem.

'Places' calls back the rhythms of a lost relationship, by ghosting them along a line of poetry. The 'things' it describes 'Have a savour that scenes in being lack', and the line ripples through two initial anapaests into clumsiness over 'scenes in being', as it moves out to the thought of one who would appreciate the 'thing': ∪ ∪ / ∪ ∪ / ∪ / ∪ /. The next line initially launches into a repetition of the same rhythm, but is pulled quickly into an iamb with an upsetting stress on 'more', before a returning anapaest which allows an emphasis to fall on the 'act' of 'actual': 'And a presence more than the actual brings', ∪ ∪ / ∪ / ∪ ∪ / ∪ ∪ /. The lines attempt to find a rhythm for the voice of the ghost which speaks in these poems, but which the poet says he never hears. Triple and duple feet are interchanged throughout 'Places' with a restlessness of metre which carries the poet's unhappiness with his poetry's means of timing his grief in the rhythms of a ghost's voice. The poet must speak and write in the rhythms given by time, rhythms of the present which merely function in the mechanical dissonance of an 'urgent clack', or like machines, in 'mindless rote'. In Hardy's false etymological pun, a 'rote' is a mechanical wheel-like movement, from the Latin *rota*; but the word comes from the Middle English, describing a habitual or repetitive action, as in 'speaking by rote', which might be mindless anyway.

'Places' is stuck with the 'urgent clack', or 'mindless rote' of an unchanging and unchangeable present informed only by an unrecoverable past. Where Tennyson, Browning and Hopkins attempt to find a similar rhythmic form for change in the future, Hardy, governed by the determinations of events in the past, can only find a mechanical and insubstantial present. Like other poems considered in this book, 'Places' is engaged with a perception of the materiality of sonic form. This is intuited through a conception of the importance of will when sounding human consciousness. More often than not, in the struggle to free the absorbed soul in *Sordello*, or in the fugitive sonic echoing of the self-rhyming monodramatist in *Maud*, these poems suffer great distress in their search for their rhythms of will. Hardy's elegies are, as Jahan Ramazani has said, elegies for elegy, and they take their part in a genre which 'develops by feeding off a multitude of new deaths, including the body of its own traditions'.[17] Yet while Hardy's elegies do mourn the loss of the great prosodic project of the nineteenth century, they also continue to work within its pedigree. As they seek after the rhythms of the voice of the mourned one, they also seek after the rhythms of the voices of their predecessors. It is in the act of this continuation that Hardy finds them gone.

The measuring of distress in the calm of metre is something that *Poems of 1912–13* tries to learn from other poets who also appear as ghosts in these elegies, and who also wondered about finding a rhythm in which the voices of the dead might be heard. The voices include those of Keats[18] and Wordsworth, but Hardy engages most strongly in a sort of conversation with one dead voice, that of Tennyson, and the conversations with the dead for which many of that precursor's poems attempt to find a rhythm. Dennis Taylor has exhaustively listed Hardy's considerable notations in his own copy of *In Memoriam*, all of which suggest close and careful reading. Taylor's article suggests that even the final four lines of each irregular stanza of 'The Going' replicate the *In Memoriam* stanza. 'The Going', though, marks the irreparable division of a marriage while Tennyson had, much to the older Hardy's regret, found his consolation in 'a highly respectable middle class wedding'.[19] In a parody of the rhyme scheme of the *In Memoriam* stanza, 'A Sign Seeker', Hardy had earlier stated his unsuitability for the role of visionary,

> – There are who, rapt to heights of trancelike trust,
> These tokens claim to feel and see,
> Read radiant hints of times to be -
> Of heart to heart returning after dust to dust.
> Such scope is granted not to lives like mine . . . (37–41)

This does not so much take issue with Tennyson as use him against Hardy's own views of immortality and intimations of it. Trust, tokens, hints are not enough for this agnostic.

What Hardy did find in the *In Memoriam* stanza was its attraction to the static, not the sceptical purposes he puts it to here. In his copy of Tennyson, he double-lined this stanza in section v,[20] where the speaker finds that his use of metre reassures him of the usefulness of his elegy.

> But, for the unquiet heart and brain,
> A use in measured language lies;
> The sad mechanic exercise,
> Like dull narcotics, numbing pain. (5–8)

It is not doubted, at this early point in *In Memoriam*, that the consolations provided by metrical form in the writing of elegy exist, but the quality of those consolations is questioned. As I have said in chapter six, iambic metre itself carries a description of the therapies of elegy, of how we can use poetry when facing the deaths of those who are close to us: 'A use in measured language lies' is regular iambic tetrameter. The speaker attempts a tonal achievement, using metre as the means of calming an unquiet heart and brain. Hardy's 'mindless rote', or 'urgent clack', are part of a similar mechanic exercise, which is here simply 'sad'.

In another elegiac sequence, in 'Strange Fits of Passion', Wordsworth had shown the circumstances in which this could work. Dread is soothed by a carefully measured rhythm, carrying itself in a sad mechanic imitation of the movement of the poet's horse along a well-known route:

> My horse moved on; hoof after hoof
> He raised and never stopped:
> When down behind the cottage roof,
> At once, the bright moon dropped.[21]

'Hoof after hoof / He raised and never stopped' carries an inversion which tricks us out of and back into the iambic feet. While we now gain an imitation of the feet of the horse carrying the lover to knowledge of the death of Lucy, the return of the iambs acts to calm the dread of the speaker, until 'At once, the bright moon dropped' works an early caesura into the iambs in order to pull metre and horse up short.

The consolation of this sequence is gained by facing a death and enabling the poem to carry the possibility of transcendence over that death, where the speaker is consoled by the sound of the ghost of Lucy participating in a larger rhythm, 'Rolled round in earth's diurnal

course'('A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal', 8). The rhythms of both *In Memoriam* and *Maud*, and later those of *Poems of 1912–13*, contain the ghosts of those they mourn, yet, unlike *In Memoriam* v, they often find little reassurance in a beat for a strange fit of passion which is well away from the consolations which we might gain from a rhythm of immortality. In 1837, Tennyson's 'Oh! that 'twere possible' introduced the Victorian reading public for the first time to his own particular loss, that of his friend Arthur Hallam. They were also introduced to Tennyson's experience of being haunted in poetry.

> A shadow flits before me –
> Not thou, but like to thee.
> Ah God! that it were possible
> For one short hour to see
> The souls we loved, that they might tell us
> What and where they be.
>
> . . .
>
> Then the broad light glares and beats,
> And the sunk eye flits and fleets,
> And will not let me be.
> I loathe the squares and streets,
> And the faces that one meets,
> Hearts with no love for me;
> Always I long to creep
> To some still cavern deep,
> And to weep, and weep and weep
> My whole soul out to thee. (11–16; 55–64.)

These stanzas attempt to carry the voice of the haunted in time and in rhyme with its haunter. The speaker is being haunted by a 'shadow', which 'flits' before him, a flitting which is done by a ghost which is, as the speaker addresses the dead one, 'Not thou, but *like* to thee'. It fuels the speaker's desire for contact with the dead, as it alone gives the speaker the chance of any action, leading him on.

Body and community impress a rhythmic sense of loss, as the poem comes together in a sequence of intense rhyming. In the second extracted stanza above, the rhymes are incessantly beaten out, just as the first rhyming word tells us of the physical beating which the bereaved man is getting: the light 'beats', the enervated eye of the dead man 'fleets', his loathing is directed against the 'streets', and it is only faces, not people, that he 'meets'. As the rhymes are carried further, with other rhyme words in the stanza, they allow only a slight variation of the dominant

vowels in 'beat'. 'Creep . . . deep . . . weep' are slightly varied, but the pure sound of 'be . . . me . . . thee' gives us the full rhyming horror of the passage. Tennyson works a pun around 'let me be', which is sounded as a series of petulant requests to be let alone, to be allowed to be himself, or just to be allowed to be. Consequently, the semantically precarious verb of existence, 'be', is sounded strongly as a rhyme with two pronouns, 'me' and 'thee'. The 'me' of the speaker is held closely against the thee of the haunter, and the rhymes read 'be me thee'. This is more than an echo, this is the ghost as mirror of the self,[22] and in such close sonic association with the ghost, the speaker becomes the origin of a sonic other, an other which impresses its existence in rhyming sound. The lost one is admitted back into the speaker's mind by hearing the spoken verse. 'Thee' exists in the sound of the speech of the poem's grief-stricken speaker, and rhymes, as a ghost, with that speaker's articulation of lonely existence, 'let me be', and selfhood, 'me'. Rhyme is the ghost.

In poems such as these the 'beat' is all-important. It assumes a presence in the verse comparable to that verse's heartbeat.[23] Even as 'Oh! that 'twere possible' deals with the ghost of an absent friend, the presence of rhyme is used to present at least the possibility of the echoing material existence of that ghost. It is dependent upon sonic effects to be understood, and its 'beat' takes on a life of its own. For writers on the rhythms of poetry in English, like those discussed in chapter two, Coventry Patmore, or later W. B. Yeats, the existence of a rhythmic beat as a material thing, that which physically beats Tennyson's speaker, was doubted. For Yeats, varying the scansion of the first line of *Paradise Lost*, there is an older rhythm discernible: 'the folk song is still there, a ghostly voice, an unvariable possibility, an unconscious norm. What moves me and my hearer is a vivid speech that has no laws except that it must not exorcise the ghostly voice.'[24] As well as marking the ghost of a lost pre-medieval rhythm in Milton's line, Yeats' distinction is also between metrical form and its spoken intonation, what he calls, in a term borrowed from Robert Bridges, a 'contrapuntal' movement between a written text and its performance. Yeats cannot lose the metre when he reads blank verse. Yet that metre has a doubtful material existence in the voice which speaks it, or to the ear which apprehends its rhythm as memory is exercised in order to catch the rhymes. The only metaphor that Yeats can establish for the presence of an unvariable, though unconscious, norm is that of a ghost. In the line of *Paradise Lost*, the ghostly metre of the unvariable verse form will never be exorcised,

no matter how a performance of the line might emphasise the prosiness to which that verse form may tend.

Dennis Taylor has told us that Thomas Hardy made notes on an earlier version of this anxiety in Coventry Patmore's 'Essay on English Metrical Law' of 1886,[25] where Patmore had resuscitated concern about the 'ictus' of Greek versification, and its use for measuring poetic language. Yeats' folk tune has a measure, an alternation of beat and space which enables us to feel its rhythm. This measure may not be strictly regular, although it does hold to what Yeats calls 'an unvariable possibility'. The problem is that we can't hold up a unit of metrical measurement, say an iambic pentameter, and proclaim, 'this is what will measure the rhythm of *Paradise Lost*'. The iambic pentameter is not a material thing: it is something which we sense as we might a ghost. According to Patmore, 'time measured implies something which measures, *and is therefore itself unmeasured*'. From this position, we can repeat his dismissal of the materiality of any time-beater.

> These are two indispensable conditions of metre, – first, that the sequence of vocal utterance, represented in written verse, shall be divided into equal or proportionate spaces; secondly, *that the fact of that division shall be made manifest* by an 'ictus' or 'beat,' actual or mental . . . Yet, all important as this time-beater is, I think it demonstrable that, for the most part, *it has no material and external existence at all*, but has its place in the mind, which craves measure in everything, and, wherever the idea of measure is uncontradicted, delights in marking it with an imaginary 'beat'.[26]

When Patmore says that the beat of poetry has no material or external existence at all, he is coming close to Yeats' description of the beat of English poetry as something sensed as a 'ghostly voice, an unvariable possibility', but still 'an unconscious norm'.[27] Yet Tennyson's speaker in 'Oh! that 'twere possible' might not delight in marking his imaginary beats. *In Memoriam* v also imagines words 'Like coarsest clothes against the cold' (10), except that for Tennyson this is a mere hiding in the processes of consolation, and no consolation in itself. Metre, for Patmore, is an adornment, comforting the mind which craves measure in everything, and can find the use that lies in measured language. For Tennyson, and later for Hardy, measured language can often be of little comfort.

In 'Oh! that 'twere possible', the verse seems to have too much materiality: 'flits and fleets', or 'squares and streets', are noticeably emphasised; but they are 'beating' the speaker. So, for instance, we could scan these lines thus:

∪ ∪ / ∪ / ∪ /
Then the broad light glares and beats,
∪ ∪ / ∪ / ∪ /
And the sunk eye flits and fleets,
∪ / ∪ / ∪ /
And will not let me be.

(I can also hear the possibility of the added strain of the heavy stresses of two middle spondees: 'light glares', and 'eye flits'. Tennyson loses the possibility of a second spondee in *Maud* in 1855, 'sunk eye flits', being replaced by 'shadow flits'.) The opening of the lines with triple feet (the anapaests, 'Then the broad', 'And the sunk') draws attention to them in their irregularity, and also causes a semantic emphasis to fall on the calming iambs, even if they can bring no relief in their regular measure, since they only speak of a claustrophobic hounding, 'And will not let me be'. For Patmore, the 'beat', of itself, does not exist. For Tennyson and after him, Yeats, an effect like this shows how sounding the verse provides the material experience not only of that verse in its own time, but also the ghosts of other rhythms from the past. If the rhythm is the ghost, the speaker is taking a beating. It will not let him be.

In his comments on Milton's line, Yeats is giving an account of himself making a decision early in his dramatic apprenticeship not to use blank verse, but of course the challenge to an imagined English tradition in the seemingly random selection of the first line of Milton's epic as his instance of the folksiness of the English line is anything but random. Neither is the selection of Milton in the context of the term borrowed from music, 'contrapuntal', an accident. Yeats credits Robert Bridges with the adoption of the term,[28] but Bridges and Yeats point out that two things are felt when performing a line of poetry: the expected as well as the actual fall of the beat. The experience of these two phenomena may not coincide, so we have a 'contrapuntal' effect. This was not an exclusively nineteenth- or early twentieth-century concern. Derek Attridge has pointed out that it is also very much a Renaissance anxiety, at least as old as Sidney and Puttenham,[29] but Dennis Taylor has shown that there was a significant resurgence of debate in the nineteenth century, among poets as well as prosodic theorists, over the existence, ghostly or material, of an unvarying metrical pattern, and the effects on an actual voice, and its listeners, of a rhythm which departs from this pattern.

For Thomas Hardy, this play of action and pattern, of event and its performance, provides the peculiar means of performing his poetry. His

suggestions about performing *The Dynasts* emphasise this mixing of folk song, heroic metre and dispassionate performance:

> In respect of such plays of poesy and dream a practicable compromise may conceivably result, taking the shape of a monotonic delivery of speeches, with dreamy conventional gestures, something in the manner traditionally maintained by the old Christmas mummers, the curiously hypnotizing impressiveness of whose automatic style – that of persons who spoke by no will of their own – may be remembered by all who ever experienced it.[30]

This calls for the ghostly performance of something which, if it isn't obsolete, is barely remembered, the automatic style, of speaking with no will of their own. Bearing in mind Yeats' hearing of the folk song in *Paradise Lost*, Hardy's mummers suggest the irony of the folk tune which could perform the great dynastic wars of the early nineteenth century. This characterisation of poetry as two activities happening concurrently, rhythm and metre, present and past, automatic and expressive, is close to Hardy's characterisation of the lack of consciousness of the Will:

> *like a knitter drowsed,*
> *Whose fingers play in skilled unmindfulness,*
> *The Will has woven with an absent heed*
> *Since life first was; and ever will so weave.* (Fore Scene)

This drowsing knitter, while it has an impulse for movement, is unconscious. It is absent of mind. The impulse for the rhythm of the events of *The Dynasts* – 'The Will has woven with an absent heed', ∪ / ∪ / ∪ ∪ ∪ /∪/ – drops a stitch at the anapaest in the centre of the line. Movement and change come only from a ghostly unconscious being, drowsing through history.

Hardy participates fully in this concern with tracking the presence of the immaterial ghost of a discernible English metre through both the history of rhythm, and the actual occurrences of the phenomena of a voiced rhythm in particular poems. When this concern joins in the tracking of the ghosts of the dead in Victorian elegy, we find the imagined places where prosody attempts to hold up the presence of the dead in verse. There is a prosodic debate, conducted in poems, and between poets, which is concerned with recapturing the rhythms of the lost in elegy, and the rhythms of the past between elegies. From Tennyson's 'Oh! that 'twere possible', his first published elegy on the death of Arthur Hallam, through *In Memoriam*, and as far as Hardy's *Poems of 1912–13* and *Moments of Vision*, there is an attempt to give the ghosts of their dead an unexorcisable beat. Hardy knew that the Victorian elegy

had become the literary form most suited to expressing not only the sense of loss of the origin of feeling, or even the origin of feeling being loss, but also a sense of losing that which, in language, politics or the natural world, connected the elegist with sense as well as sound. While the death of Hallam provided the Victorians with an originating event for their grief and confusion in the face of what was happening to their world in that representative poem *In Memoriam*, it also set the terms for how the elegy might respond. It suggested ways in which there might be some sort of recuperation, after the pains of the forced partings of death, how there might be 'one' who could 'call back' the savour and the presence that is missing from the 'actual'. Whether this calling back is actually wanted might be seen in the ambivalent attitude to the ghosts of the dead which gain rhythms in these poems.

Hardy's great poem about voicing a meeting with a voiceless ghost, 'After a Journey', contains a number of allusions to Tennyson's 'Oh! that 'twere possible', and carries the same sort of 'converse with the dead' that Tennyson's speaker in *In Memoriam* so longs for. Like 'The Pedigree', it also carries a converse with the past of the lyric genre within which it is written. In *Poems of 1912–13*, 'After a Journey' is joined by other ghosts, in 'The Voice' and 'The Haunter', but in it, like 'Oh! that 'twere possible', and the second part of *Maud*, the ghost plays a ghastly parody of the leading on, or the pre-courtship, by which Tennyson's speaker is beaten. It also conducts its own engagement with the metre of the language in which, to borrow from Yeats, the ghost is embodied. 'After a Journey' comes complete with its own prosodic vocabulary: Hardy turns the vehicle of the poem, and the beat of versification, against himself, into an agreement with Patmore that the 'ictus' or beat has no material or external existence at all. He asks the ghost to speak to him of the past, and asks the ghost to speak in this poem:

> Yes: I have re-entered your olden haunts at last;
> Through the years, through the dead scenes I have tracked you;
> What have you now found to say of our past -
> Scanned across the dark space wherein I have lacked you?
> Summer gave us sweets, but Autumn wrought division?
> Things were not lastly as firstly well
> With us twain, you tell?
> But all's closed now, despite Time's derision. (9–16)

The poet asks the ghost to speak to him of a past about which he has such mixed feelings of remembered love and long years of silence, and

about which he can feel only regret. The silences of his actual relationship with his dead wife are mimicked in the silence of the ghost.

The lyric carries such silence only as it uses the jargon of versification, the means by which the utterance of the poet gains a voice. So, what is 'found' by the ghost, which has been asked to speak of what is no more, is never spoken. The haunter, the poet imagines, has looked through the 'dark space' of knowledge after death, has, he might imagine further, tasted of the finding that immortality brings. The means of doing this is with the greater view that one might have in the light of such knowledge. The increased perceptual apparatus of the dead may enable them to 'scan' spaces, to find out their truth. But this space is dark, and the only thing that either the poet, or we, can scan are the rhythms of this poem itself. It is only the metrical apparatus of the poem which can be scanned, the rhythmical utterance of the speaker of the lyric.[31] And that, at this point, is a scanning of something, Hardy would have found in his reading of Patmore, with 'no material and external existence'. Ghost and metre are dead of themselves. In 'Where the Picnic Was', the concluding elegy to the second edition of the sequence, the poet scans, but there with an acknowledgement of death: '[I] scan and trace / The forsaken place / Quite readily' (7–9). Donald Davie has asked that we be sceptical of such readiness,[32] but 'After a Journey' does work from such scanning to a position where the actual past can be addressed after this silence is recognised. 'Summer gave us sweets', and here the heavy caesura falls, 'but Autumn wrought division?' The line itself is an example of such a division, and the question mark which will bring a rise into the reading voice – 'diVIsion' – turns us into the final syllables of the line and says that the vision of the scanning dead takes place only in darkness. The sibilant internal echoing of 'lastly as firstly' lead us into the closure of a derisory Time: derision is turned on the division of a marriage (in life as in death), and the division of the line of poetry (the caesura) is willingly held in an agnostic suspense against the rhythms that strive to make the ghost material.

In the present of this poem, an absent past is recreated. The re-entering of the place of love is accomplished in a reality which only haunts the poem. As soon as the first line, this is admitted as silent: the ghost is voiceless, and the scenes through which the poem tracks are dead. Like the speaker of 'Oh! that 'twere possible', the poet is drawn by the whims of that which haunts him. Action is visited upon him from without: he is no longer a willing agent. Yet the page self-consciously admits the rhythmic exercise which is being undertaken in order to

capture the experience of being haunted, giving voice to that which is voiceless.

The beat of 'After a Journey' is an ironic agent and it tries to carry the voices not only of the elegised, but of other elegists.

> Ignorant of what there is flitting here to see,
> The waked birds preen and the seals flop lazily;
> Soon you will have, Dear, to vanish from me,
> For the stars close their shutters and the dawn whitens hazily.
> Trust me, I mind not, though life lours,
> The bringing me here; nay, bring me here again!
> I am just the same as when
> Our days were a joy, and our paths through flowers.
> *Pentargan Bay* (25–32)

Hardy takes issue with Tennyson's haunted man, who though he may have been terrorised by his imagined ghost, does find some comfort in the flitting of his shadowy companion. The flitting in 'After a Journey' works closely with the diction of 'Oh! that 'twere possible': Tennyson uses the word 'flit' twice, Hardy pointedly at the beginning of the last stanza. Here it mimics the tune of Tennyson's poem. The third stanza of 'Oh! that 'twere possible' begins:

> A shadow flits before me –
> Not thou, but like to thee.

Hardy's final stanza opens:

> Ignorant of what there is flitting here to see . . .

With a faint middle pause after 'what' this line provides a rhyme with Tennyson's lines:

> A shadow flits before me – Not thou but like to thee.
> Ignorant of what there is flitting here to see . . .

Ghosts haunt two poems. If we can hear rhymes containing the spirit of a voice which haunts a sequence of rhyme words, we hear a striving after the material existence of those phenomena through the textual medium of verse. John Hollander calls this effect 'transumption' or 'metalepsis', 'a metatrophe, or figure of linkage between figures . . . a trope of a trope'. In it, 'an image or fable is being presented as a revision of an earlier one'.[33] Whether or not his image be new, Hardy's 'flitting', in its revisionary power, is in active sonic engagement with Tennyson's. The echo worked here is a previous poet's diction and tune haunting

another text which is half-recognisable to the ear and memory, yet half-wrenched into the service of an unbelieving irony.

'After a Journey' does take solace in the ghastly, ghost-led, discovery that it makes about the rhythms of immortality. It can approach the disdain of the birds and the seals who are ignorant of the flitting of the ghost before the poet, and move into the rhythms and rhymes of the closeness of love. Poet and reader can gain a solace from the rhythms of a parting confirmed, and then a place named on the page, *Pentargan Bay*. The poem, as it finds dialogue with its ghost refused, is engaged in a dialogue with another ghost, that of Tennyson's poetry of death. Like Tennyson, Hardy dearly wanted to believe in immortality, to gain the conversation with the dead which, in 'After a Journey', he denies himself and his readers. *In Memoriam* XCV had contained just such a dialogue. If it doesn't quite butt in to this conversation, Hardy's lyric still must have its say.

The elegy is involved in the formal problem of balancing the grief of the elegist with a commemoration of the elegised, and elegies depend for their very existence on the absence of the dead and the sustaining of grief. In Hardy's *Poems of 1912–13*, the two spirits which haunt the poems are not only those of his dead wife or the regret at a rekindled love which the poet thought was lost, but the feeling of grief itself, that which prompts the 'being' of a text which is taken up with non-being, or death. If, for Hardy, there can be no 'mere' continuation of life beyond death, the elegies of the older poet mark at least a sonic memory. Hardy's late poetry strives to sound those who haunt him – family, former lovers and immediate poetic predecessors – in poetic rhythm. Whatever the eventual possibility of making material the irrevocably lost, of making vocal the lost sounds of the voices of the dead, Hardy's poetry after the death of his wife mourns for the loss of the closeness of the sounds, sights and touch of the actual. Simultaneously, within its own text, and in the voice of its performer, it sounds 'a presence more than the actual'. Hardy does this in rhythm, a continuation of the rhythm of will which he knows he may be sounding for the last time.

After Emma Hardy's death, her husband found two notebooks that she had kept of their time together. It is hard to blame anyone, no matter how culpable of harm in their relationship, for destroying a dead wife's notebook called *What I Think of My Husband*. However, Hardy did preserve his wife's *Some Recollections* of their early life together.[34] Where many of the poems which follow Emma's death are involved with poetic

antecedents, rereading and rewriting the sounds of other men, these are of course fused with another memory, that of a divided and then lost relationship. The derision which time works on the divisions of marriage and then death is the satiric note caught in the elegiac mode. It is the impact of Emma Hardy's written memories which brings the seemingly competing generic imperatives of these modes together. In Emma's memory, and from Emma's memory, Hardy undertook to create in old age the new forms that he could never admit were possible.

In his book *Memory and Writing,* Philip Davis has written of Hardy's conception of memory in terms of the idealism of W. K. Clifford and others.[35] Hardy came across Clifford's notion of 'mind-stuff' through an article by W. H. Mallock in the *Edinburgh Review* of April 1880. There Mallock quotes Clifford's view that 'we shall have along the line of the human pedigree a series of imperceptible steps connecting inorganic matter with ourselves'. In order to do this, Clifford presupposes that there can be no 'sudden break', or crucially for Hardy, 'breach of continuity', between the human and the inorganic, between consciousness and matter. Clifford's idealist solution to the problem of material discontinuity is to suggest that since matter only exists in consciousness, it 'is a mental picture, in which mind-stuff is the thing represented'. While matter has no 'mind' or 'consciousness', when it 'takes the complex form of a living human brain, the corresponding mind-stuff takes the form of a human consciousness, having intelligence, and volition'.[36] The aesthetic appeal of this mind-stuff to an artist like Hardy would be that it suggests something like Patmore's idealist conception of insubstantial rhythm, where consciousness, intelligence and will need to be represented in order to gain substance. It has a phenomenal existence only, where it is intuited as a fusing, synthesising power, which dissolves divisions within the self, and between self and world, and so doing brings together a unity in perception. This is a version of the idealism so radically questioned in Browning and Hallam's absorbing soul in the 1830s, and then worked into the dualism of Hopkins' instress and inscape. For the Victorian poet this working of the self into the world provides a way of representing the thing to be represented by simultaneously becoming a part of it.

Hardy, though attracted to Clifford's idea, was unconvinced. In April 1892 he wrote to Roden Noel:

> if the body be only sensations plus perceptions & concepts, then to hold that the ego may be related to many more forms of corporeity than the one our senses

inform us of at present is a gratuitous assumption without ground. You may call the whole human race a single ego if you like; & in that view a man's consciousness may be said to pervade the world; but nothing is gained. Each is, to all knowledge, limited to his own frame. Or with Spinoza, & the late W.K. Clifford, you may call all matter mind-stuff (a very attractive idea this, to me) but you cannot find the link (at least I can't) of one form of consciousness with another.[37]

Hardy could not overcome his scepticism. Twenty years after the letter to Noel, these questions of continuity, pedigree and division came back to him as he wondered about the two great intertwined human breaches around which his late poetic life was centred, that within his marriage, and that which followed his wife's death. In domestic elegy, attempting to overcome the divisions between more than one consciousness, between present and past and indeed between living and dead, Hardy places himself as a poetic continuator.

In Memoriam xcv records that its speaker had achieved an intuition of personal immortality through reading the letters of his dead friend. Reading *Some Recollections*, Hardy, one who claimed he could not be granted visions of unity with the past, gains this too. Hardy wonders about Emma's version of the past, and her memories, which do not appear in *Poems of 1912–13*, become a ghost which frequently speaks in poems published outside that sequence. In 'Under the Waterfall', placed before *Poems of 1912–13* in *Satires of Circumstance*, he shows us a sudden overcoming of the breach with the past. Her voice is recreated describing the extraordinary facility which is the power of recall of her memory:

> Whenever I plunge my arm, like this,
> In a basin of water, I never miss
> The sweet sharp sense of a fugitive day
> Fetched back from its thickening shroud of gray.
> Hence the only prime
> And the real love-rhyme
> That I know by heart,
> And that leaves no smart
> Is the purl of a little valley fall
> About three spans wide and two spans tall
> Over a table of solid rock,
>
> . . .
>
> And as I said, if I thrust my arm below
> Cold water in basin or bowl, a throe
> From the past awakens a sense of that time
> And the glass we used, and the cascade's rhyme.
>
> (1–11; 39–42)

Tim Armstrong annotates the experience of Hardy and Emma losing a bowl under a waterfall as being 'one of the epiphanic moments in his romance'.[38] But this is not strictly true. It is one of the epiphanic moments of Emma's romance, of which the remorseful husband has now been reminded. The poem is an act of recall, but one which is written around the instant associative recall of its female speaker, in turn recalling her voice and character.

Hardy cannot complete his written recall of events without the residue of some slight matrimonial impatience. The female voice in the poem is insistently prosaic: it is chatty. There are hints of the remnants of a misogynistic resentfulness in the echo of the lines in Wordsworth's 'The Thorn' which famously drew Coleridge's opprobrium. 'About three spans wide and two spans tall' is precise in her memory, but it deliberately echoes 'I've measured it from side to side / 'Tis three feet long and two feet wide.' According to Coleridge, these lines 'are felt by many unprejudiced and unsophisticated hearts as sudden and unpleasant sinkings from the height to which the poet had lifted them'.[39] Thomas Hardy's memory of Emma Hardy's memory has served to recall the moment for the poem's male poet, even if along the way it has also unavoidably revived some bitterness. An associative continuity is set up between past and present, passing across the memory of two people, one of whom is dead, just as it also passes across between two poets via one perceptive critic. The continuity begins in the event (in March 1870) which is kept in her memory and written in her memoirs (which she stopped writing in 1911). After her death these memoirs are read by her husband (1912) and he is reminded of the event which is recalled in the published poem (1914). The link is across forty-four years, in many of which this formerly united couple have known nothing but division.

Few of Hardy's poems are in couplets, but the couplets here are the couplets of close rhyme, of a reader's memory constantly being jogged. They are the couplets which can rhyme the speaker's 'only prime . . . real love-rhyme', or the 'sense of that time' and 'the cascade's rhyme', the linking form of the person's memory remembered by the poet in the recall back to a moment of unity. Hardy reserves a word for impulsive bodily movement to describe how that works: 'a throe / From the past awakens a sense of that time'. A throe, according to *OED*, is 'a violent pang', involuntary and often painful. It is close to the unseen impulses of the Immanent Will, or even the wind and tide. Hardy's exquisite late tongue-twisting performance piece, 'Weathers', reserves the word for the reader's most challenging line: 'And hill-hid tides throb, throe on

throe' (14). In 'Under the Waterfall', the throe is into memory, and enjambed into a line which takes some time metrically to recollect itself. 'From the past awakens a sense of that time', is accented into the woman's voice, but also a voice recollecting, bringing a throe into order as sense is woken. The line's eleven syllables begin with an anapaest which suggests voiced stress rhythms, but an iamb crucially steadies them into the joy of the final two anapaests. After this rhythmic exercise of will – a speaker and poem finding conscious form for a sudden unconscious 'throe' – it is fitting that the word which provides the full rhyme of the next line is 'rhyme' itself.

'Under the Waterfall' is spoken by one who can recreate the past in memory. Hardy provides rhythms which move that person back into the unity of that time. Yet the poem relates an incident of a cup falling irrecoverably into a pool, so that it is 'past recall' (35), and for the grieving poet the speaker's recall can never be total, because she is dead. Donald Davie makes a crucial point about such memories, when he says, speaking of 'At Castle Boterel', and its vision of the ghosts of the poet's self and wife together, that these poems remember the 'quality' of their originating occasions.[40] Like Browning's 'Two in the Campagna', that other great poem about the impossibility of finding form for the 'good minute', 'At Castle Boterel' testifies to the fact that though 'fled', the 'feeling' that 'filled but a minute' (15–16) existed. It is a memory of feeling, with no form, no details, no material or substantial existence at all. After reading *Some Recollections,* Hardy attempts to recall the 'quality'.

Hardy's record of success or failure in this task is written, at best, with some ambivalence. The opposing version of 'Under the Waterfall' is a recall which only serves satirically to mark not such continuity, but division. In serving the poet's attempt to get back to what has been lost, Emma Hardy's memories serve also to remind him that all has been lost. Many readers would agree with Tom Paulin that 'During Wind and Rain' is 'one of the best poems [of] this [twentieth] century'.[41] Hardy would have appreciated the irony, because in its form and content, the poem is a frightening reminder of what had been lost from the previous, nineteenth, century. The lyric is marked by great ripping elisions in the stanzas across the speaker's memories, varying refrains and closing lines of meteorological as well as metrical confusion. The nearly unscannable final line of the first stanza, with its four consecutive stresses wreaks havoc on any consoling powers of pathetic fallacy as it pictures only a grimly punning entropy: 'How the sick leaves reel down in throngs!' (7). 'Sick leaves reel down' pushes the voice with staccato insistence into the

challenge to the reader not to trip over the long consonants which open 'throngs'. The challenge to a Ruskinian version of the link between the feelings of the viewer and the dead objects of nature – mind-stuff indeed – in 'sick leaves' is matched only by the challenge to Tennyson. In *In Memoriam* XCV, the speaker had been rereading 'those fallen leaves which kept their green', the pages of his dead friend's letters. Hardy is recounting Emma's memories of past houses through the leaves of her memoirs. These are sick and utterly disordered.

Moving old furniture to a new location might be another way of thinking about Hardy's echoing rhythmic practice, but 'During Wind and Rain' doesn't even bring it into the house:

> They change to a high new house,
> He, she, all of them – aye,
> Clocks and carpets and chairs
> On the lawn all day
> And brightest things that are theirs . . .
> Ah no, the years, the years;
> Down their carved names the rain-drop ploughs. (22–8)

The slow work of nature blindly defacing an epitaph might be another image of the workings of the Immanent Will, but it is shown working within this lyric form, which rubs the elegiac against the satiric, the memorial against the forgetful. Yet still the memory remains: aged eighty-five, Hardy could end *Human Shows* facing the 'mechanic repetitions' of his writing by answering the question,

> When shall I leave off doing these things? –
> When I hear
> You have dropped your dusty cloak and taken your wondrous wings
> To another sphere,
> Where no pain is: Then shall I hush this dinning gear.
> ('Why Do I?', 6–10)

A 'din', of course, is a distracting noise, but 'to din' is also to assail the listener's ears with incessant sonic repetition. For this poet, his rhythms will only be silenced along with his feelings.

In *The Life*, Florence Emily/Thomas Hardy tell of an incident of 1870 which Hardy was to recall and make the matter of a poem in 1915.

> On the day that the bloody battle of Gravelotte was fought they were reading Tennyson in the grounds of the rectory. It was at this time and spot that Hardy was struck by the incident of the old horse harrowing the arable field in the

valley below, which, when in far later years it was recalled to him by a still bloodier war, he made into the little poem of three verses entitled 'In Time of "the Breaking of Nations".'[42]

This puts forward a memory of the self set against great moments in history continuing through a long life. The sense of continuity also has a context: the battle of Gravelotte, reading Tennyson, and now forty-five years later, Europe breaking up in the Great War. Tennyson opens the first section of *In Memoriam* by saying that he had formerly 'held it truth' with Goethe, 'That men may rise on stepping stones / Of their dead selves to greater things' (3–4). Hardy's memory is, if not of a dead self, one which convinces him of the curse of his position as a mere continuator, now perhaps seeing the continuity of the cultural tradition in which he has worked coming to a final breach. The resultant poem comes from a throe from the past which awakens an irrecoverable time remembered only in the sick and limping rhythms of the once vigorous rendered obsolete.

I
Only a man harrowing clods
  In a slow silent walk
With an old horse that stumbles and nods
  Half asleep as they stalk.

II
Only thin smoke without flame
  From the heaps of couch-grass;
Yet this will go onward the same
  Though Dynasties pass.

III
Yonder a maid and her wight
  Come whispering by:
War's annals will cloud into night
  Ere their story die.
    1915

Notes

PREFACE

1 John Hollander, *Visions and Resonance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).
2 G. L. Trager and H. L. Smith, *An Outline of English Structure* (Norman, OK: Battenburg Press, 1951); Derek Attridge, *The Rhythms of English Poetry* (London: Longmans, 1982); Philip Hobsbaum, *Metre, Rhythm and Verse Form* (London: Routledge, 1996).
3 David Baker, ed., *Meter in English: A Critical Engagement* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1996).

1 INTRODUCTION: TWO DECISIONS

1 Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson, A Memoir By His Son*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1897), vol. 1, p.317.
2 John R. Reed, *Victorian Will* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1989), p. 9. On muscular Christianity, see Norman Vance, *Sinews of the Spirit: The Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
3 Quoted from *Selected Poems of Rudyard Kipling*, ed. T. S. Eliot (London: Faber, 1942).
4 Samuel Smiles, *Self Help* (London: John Murray, 1859), p.2.
5 Thomas Carlyle, *Heroes and Hero-Worship* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1898), p.225.
6 Quoted from *The Poems of Arthur Hugh Clough*, ed. A. L. P. Norrington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968).
7 Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (London: Longman, 1993), the early chapters of which are concerned with establishing 'the critical necessity of will'.
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9 'Leda and the Swan', from *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 1950).

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11 *The Letters of Alfred Lord Tennyson*, ed. Cecil Y. Lang and Edgar F. Shannon, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982–90), vol. I, pp. 175–6. The letter is dated 24 October 1839.

2 RHYTHMS OF WILL

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2 Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, ed. W. J. Bate and A. B. Strauss (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), vol. IV, p.380. Here *Rambler*, no. 140 (20 July 1751).
3 *Rambler*, no. 94 (9 February 1751), p.139.
4 *Rambler*, no. 86 (12 January 1751), p.89.
5 Alexander Pope, *The Poems*, ed. Bonamy Dobree (London: Dent, 1924).
6 Robert Wallace, 'Meter in English', in David Baker, ed., *Meter in English: A Critical Engagement* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1996), p.9.
7 William Hazlitt, *An Essay Concerning the Principles of Human Action* (1805) (Gainsville: Scholars' Facsimiles and reprints, 1969), p.20.
8 *The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Christopher Devlin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), p.149.
9 William James, *Pragmatism, A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (1907), ed. F. T. Bowers and I. K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 60–1.
10 Tennyson, *Poems*, vol. II, p.487.
11 Robert Bridges, *Milton's Prosody* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921), p.51.
12 *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, ed. C.C. Abbott (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), pp. 267–8 (6 November 1887).
13 *Ibid*, p.262.
14 *Ibid.*, p.263.
15 *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Humphrey House and Graham Storey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), p.240. See also R. K. R. Thornton, ed., *All My Eyes See: The Visual World of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Sunderland: Ceolfrith Press, 1975). The Walker pictures are in the Tate Gallery, London.
16 F. R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry*, 3rd edn. (Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1963), p.151.
17 Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (London: Longman, 1993), p.92.
18 *Ibid.*, p.93.
19 Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by His Son*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1897), vol. I, p. 42. Hallam records his father's final forgiveness

of Coleridge only in 1890, when he was eighty-one.

20 W. H. Auden, *Tennyson, An Introduction and A Selection* (London: Faber, 1946), p. x.

21 *William Allingham, A Diary*, ed. H. Allingham and D. Radford (1907) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p.344. Tennyson's example of poetry written 'for the intellect' is Browning's.

22 Arthur Pollard, who first printed these translations, says they date from 1822. See 'Three Horace Translations by Tennyson', *Tennyson Research Bulletin*, vol. 4, no. 1 (1982), pp. 20–1.

23 See Tennyson, *Poems*, vol. II, p.492. Tennyson may have been toying with the idea of giving Wellington similar virtues to the Augustus who is praised by Horace in the Third Ode, but the suggestion of a Republican turned Emperor may have been too close to Wellington's great rival, Napoleon.

24 See *Ibid.*, p. 493n. Also *The Tennyson Archive*, ed. Christopher Ricks and Aidan Day, 30 vols. (New York: Garland, 1987), vol. XII, p.348.

25 See Tennyson, *Poems*, II, p.493.

26 Quoted by Christopher Ricks, *Tennyson*, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 1989), p.227.

27 *Ibid.*; John Bayley, 'Tennyson and the Idea of Decadence', in Hallam Tennyson, ed., *Studies in Tennyson* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p.205.

28 See William R. Brashear, *The Living Will: A Study of Tennyson and Nineteenth Century Subjectivism* (The Hague: Mouton, 1969). Brashear does not discuss 'Will', as he places Tennyson, and Romantic and Victorian poetry, in the contexts of the conceptions of will held by nineteenth-century German subjectivism.

29 Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (1783), trans. H. J. Paton, 3rd edn (London: Harper and Row, 1956), ch. II, p.95.

30 J. L. Austin, 'A Plea for Excuses', in *Philosophical Papers*, 3rd edn., ed. J. O. Urmson and G. J. Warnock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 198. See the footnote: 'Plato, I suppose, and after him Aristotle, fastened this confusion on us, as bad in its day and way as the later, grotesque confusion of moral weakness with weakness of will. I am very partial to ice-cream, and a bombe is served divided into segments corresponding one to one with the persons at High Table: I am tempted to help myself to two segments and do so, thus succumbing to temptation and even conceivably (but why necessarily?) going against my principles. But do I lose control of myself? Do I raven, do I snatch the morsels from the dish and wolf them down, impervious to the consternation of my colleagues? Not a bit of it. We often succumb to temptation with calm and even with finesse.'

31 Plato, *Protagoras*, 357, trans. W. R. M. Lamb (London: Loeb, 1947), p.243.

32 Aristotle, *The Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross, rev. J. L. Ackrill and J. O. Urmson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 7, 3(c), p.165.

33 Donald Davidson, *Essays on Action and Events* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 21–43.

34 'Merlin and Vivien', 186.

35 J. L. Austin's 'Three Ways of Spilling Ink', *Philosophical Papers*, pp. 272–88.
36 *A Memoir*, vol. II, p.518.
37 Geoffrey H. Hartman, 'Words, Wish, Worth: Wordsworth', in *Deconstruction and Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1979), p.203.
38 Quoted from *The Prelude (Text of 1805)*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt, corr. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).
39 Hartman, 'Words, Wish, Worth', pp. 194–5.
40 John Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p.22.
41 Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, rev. Ernest De Selincourt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1904), p.753.
42 Quoted by John Hollander, *Vision and Resonance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p.21.
43 Michael Cooke, *The Romantic Will* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p.51.
44 Christopher Ricks, 'William Wordsworth I: "A Pure Organic Pleasure from the Lines",' in *The Force of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p.94.
45 Hallam Tennyson, *A Memoir*, vol. I, p. 153.
46 James Smith, 'Wordsworth: A Preliminary Survey', in *Scrutiny*, vol. 7, no. 57 (June 1938), pp. 53–4.
47 The discussion is early in Hartman's classic *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787–1814* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964). It involves the placing of imagination in opposition to nature in order to reclaim the heroic or the sublime, a courting of the virtues of strong will which will diminish the natural. See p.39. On Wordsworth's Miltonic ambitions, see the 'Prospectus' to *The Excursion*, 24–41, in *Poetical Works*.
48 Mary Jacobus, '"Dithyrambic Fervour": The Lyric Voice of *The Prelude*', in *Romanticism, Writing and Sexual Difference: Essays on 'The Prelude'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.160.
49 Jacobus, *ibid.*, p.159, ends her quotation from the passage at l.9, not discussing Wordsworth's subsequent account of composition.
50 *Ibid.*, p.168.
51 Paul De Man, 'The Rhetoric of Blindness', in *Blindness and Insight*, 2nd edn. (London: Methuen, 1983), p.117.
52 Jacobus, '"Dithyrambic Fervour"', p.160.
53 Lane Cooper, *A Concordance to the Poems of William Wordsworth* (London: Smith, Elder, 1911). Cooper uses the 1907 Hutchinson Oxford Edition of the *Poems*.
54 Florence Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840–1928*, one vol. edn. (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 368.
55 Joyce Zonana, 'The Embodied Muse: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* and Feminist Poetics', in Angela Leighton, ed., *Victorian Women Poets: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).
56 Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, ed. Kerry McSweeney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

57 Zonana, 'The Embodied Muse', p.65.
58 Thomas Carlyle, *Heroes and Hero-Worship* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1898), p.225.
59 Carlyle, 'Characteristics', in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, 5 vols. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1899), vol. III, p.9.
60 E. Warwick Slinn, *Browning and the Fictions of Identity* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p.16.
61 John R. Reed, *Victorian Will* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1989), p.177.
62 Eric Griffiths, *The Printed Voice of Victorian Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Dennis Taylor, *Hardy's Metres and Victorian Prosody* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
63 Francis Berry, *Poetry and the Physical Voice* (London: Routledge, 1962).
64 See Griffiths, *Printed Voice*, p.75.
65 The most polemical account is by Donald Davie in *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry* (London: Routledge, 1973).
66 Allingham, *Diary*, pp. 94–5.
67 *Ibid.*, p.93; See Tennyson, *Poems*, vol. II, pp. 651–5. The poems are 'On Translations of Homer', 'Milton', 'Hendecasyllabics', 'Specimen of a Translation of the Iliad in Blank Verse'.
68 See Allingham, *Diary*, p. 344: 'He once spoke a good deal about the want of some fixed standard of English pronunciation, or even some way of indicating a poet's intention as to the pronunciation of his verses . . .'
69 Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, p.753; the quotation is from Wordsworth's own 'A Poet's Epitaph' in *Lyrical Ballads*.
70 *Ibid.*, p.739.
71 See Roman Jakobson, 'Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics', in T. A. Sebeok, ed., *Style in Language* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960).
72 'A General Introduction For My Work', in *W.B. Yeats: Selected Criticism and Prose*, ed. A. Norman Jeffares (London: Pan, 1980), pp. 267–8.
73 Coventry Patmore, 'Essay on English Metrical Law' (1856), Appendix to *Poems*, 2nd edn, 2 vols. (London: George Bell, 1886), vol. II, pp. 230–1.
74 *Ibid.*, p.221.
75 R. H. Horne, *The Poems of Geoffrey Chaucer Modernized* (London: Whittaker, 1841), p. lxxxiv; Leigh Hunt, 'What is Poetry?', *Imagination and Fancy*, in *Works* (1844), (London: Smith, Elder, 1883), p. 33; Derek Attridge, *The Rhythms of English Poetry* (London: Longman, 1982), p.77.
76 Amittai Aviram, *Telling Rhythm: Body and Meaning in Poetry* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p.7.
77 Florence Hardy, *The Life*, p.335.
78 S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. Engell and W. J. Bate, 2 vols. (London: Routledge, 1983).
79 See, eg. Scott, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, and Byron's oriental tales.
80 T. S. Omond, *English Metrists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921), p.12.
81 *Coleridge, Poetical Works*, ed. E. H. Coleridge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912), p. 215.

82 The term is Omond's: see *English Metrists*, chapter IV, pp. 114–65.
83 Quoted from *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti*, 3 vols., ed. R. W. Crump (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1979.).
84 See Taylor, *Hardy's Metres*, pp. 258–66. See also Wallace in Baker, ed., *Meter in English*, p. 19, taking issue with Timothy Steele's description of the metre of the poem as 'a sort of rhymed accentual verse' (in *Missing Measures: Modern Poetry and the Revolt against Metre* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1990), p. 23.). Subsequent contributors to the book answer Wallace's criticism, and John Frederick Nims repeats at one point John Crowe Ransom's description of the rhythm of 'Neutral Tones' as 'folk rhythm'. Taylor and Wallace are historically right if we hear the poem's innovations sounding a meeting of accentual-syllabic metre and a pastiche of classical, rather than folk, form.
85 In addition to the Tennyson poems mentioned above, see Clough's *Essays in Classical Metres*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'The Deserted Garden' and Browning's 'Ixion'.
86 *Selected Poems of Thomas Hardy*, ed. G. M. Young (London: Macmillan, 1940), p. xii.
87 William Empson, *Argufying: Essays on Literature and Culture*, ed. John Haffenden (London: Hogarth Press, 1988), p. 422.
88 *Ibid.*
89 Tom Paulin, *Thomas Hardy and the Poetry of Perception* (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 71.
90 See Davie, *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry*, pp. 13–40.
91 Florence Hardy, *The Life*, pp. 300–1.
92 John Ruskin, 'The Nature of Gothic', *The Stones of Venice*, in *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and A. Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1904), vol. x, pp. 206–7.

3 TENNYSON, BROWNING AND THE ABSORBING SOUL

1 W. B. Yeats, *Selected Criticism and Prose*, ed. A. Norman Jeffares (London: Pan, 1980), pp. 48, 51 and 52.
2 Ezra Pound, 'Mesmerism' (1908), in *Selected Poems* (London: Faber, 1959).
3 Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (London: Longman, 1993), p. 81 and generally pp. 41–135.
4 *Ibid.*, p.102, on the seventh stanza of 'The Lotos-Eaters': 'a sequence of forms without causal dependence on one another – the fate of the passive consciousness'.
5 See Tennyson, *Poems*, vol. I, p.436, where Ricks gives an account of the arguments over who the poem is addressed to.
6 According to *OED*, the word 'empathy' only comes into English psychological thought as a term in 1904, as a self-conscious attempt to translate the German concept of *einfühlung*.

7 David Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Duty, and His Expectations*, 2 vols. (London: Leake and Frederick, 1749), and James Mill, *Analysis of the Phenomena of Human Mind*, ed. John Stuart Mill and Alexander Bain (London: Longman, 1869).
8 See *The Letters of Arthur Henry Hallam*, ed. J. Kolb (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1981), p.379.
9 *The Writings of Arthur Henry Hallam*, ed. T. H. Vail Motter (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), p.137.
10 William Hazlitt, *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (1805), facsimile reproduction (Gainsville: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1969). There is no record of Hallam reading Hazlitt in the otherwise well-documented accounts of his reading or that of his circle. But the similarities are remarkable: in particular cf. Hazlitt on identity, 'some . . . connection between my present and future self, in consequence of which I am considered as the same being, the different events of my life constituting one regular succession of conscious feeling' (p.10), with Hallam's 'ultimate fact of consciousness that the soul exists as one subject in various successive states'.
11 '*Pauline*', *The Monthly Repository*, April 1833, pp. 252–62, quoted in *The Brownings' Correspondence*, ed. P. Kelley and R. Hudson (Winfield, KS: Wedgestone, 1984–), vol. III, p.343.
12 *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E.T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, 39 vols. (London: George Allen, 1903–12), vol. III, *Modern Painters*, p. 201. By the publication of *Modern Painters* (1855), Ruskin could confess himself tired of the vocabulary of this debate, famously opening his chapter by placing an interdiction on the words 'subjective' and 'objective'.
13 Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry*, p.81.
14 See W. David Shaw, *The Lucid Veil: Poetic Truth in the Victorian Age* (London: Athlone Press, 1987), pp. 48–52.
15 J. F. Ferrier, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Consciousness*, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, vols. 43–5 (February 1838 – April 1839), vol. 44, p. 244.
16 *Ibid.*, p. 550.
17 *Ibid.*, p. 552.
18 Hallam, 'On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry and on the Lyrical Poems of Alfred Tennyson', in *Writings*, p.186.
19 *Writing*, pp. 191–2.
20 Matthew Arnold, 'Preface' to the first edition of *Poems* (1853), in *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, ed. Kenneth Allott, 2nd edn ed. Miriam Allott (London: Longmans, 1979), pp. 655–6.
21 This point is made by Christopher Ricks, *Tennyson,* 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 44–5.
22 Harold Bloom, *Poetry and Repression* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 150, and Herbert Tucker, *Tennyson and the Doom of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 71–2.
23 Bloom, *Poetry and Repression*, p. 150.

24 Eric Griffiths, 'Tennyson's Idle Tears', in Philip Collins, ed., *Tennyson: Seven Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1992), p.43. This essay's account of the undeveloped Kantianism of Arthur Hallam's thought at this period is complemented in the same collection by John Beer's 'Tennyson, Coleridge and the Cambridge Apostles'.
25 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1950), A 79, p. 112.
26 Hazlitt, *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action*, pp. 76–7.
27 Sir William Hamilton, *Lectures on Metaphysics and Logic*, 4 vols., ed. H. L. Mansel and John Veitch (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1859), vol. I, Lecture viii, p.150.
28 P. B. Shelley, *Poetical Works*, ed. T. Hutchinson, new edn, ed. G. M. Matthews (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970) p.206.
29 Browning, 'Essay on Shelley', in *The Poems*, pp. 1001–13. Cf. also T. S. Eliot on the 'dissociation of sensibility': comparing Tennyson and Browning to Donne, Eliot says 'A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility.' *Selected Prose*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber, 1975), p.64.
30 S.T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. Engell and W. J. Bate, 2 vols. (London: Routledge, 1983), vol. I, p. 80.
31 Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, ed. E. de Selincourt (Oxford University Press, 1936), p.735.
32 A. Dwight Culler, *The Poetry of Tennyson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), p.42.
33 John Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p.34.
34 Hallam, *Letters*, p.401.
35 George Brimley, 'Tennyson's Poems' (1855), in *Essays* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1858), pp. 12–13. See also Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson, A Memoir By His Son*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1897), vol. I, pp. 408–9.
36 Cf. 'The Sea-Fairies': 'Shrill music reached them on the middle sea' (6); 'The Mermaid': 'And I would look like a fountain of gold / Springing alone / With a shrill inner sound' (19–21); 'Kate': 'Her rapid laughters wild and shrill' (13); 'Oenone': 'shrill happy laughter' (254). Tennyson's antipathy to sibilants is well recorded: of the opening line of *The Rape of the Lock* he exclaimed '"Amrus causiz springs", horrible! I would rather die than write such a line!!' Recounting this in the *Memoir*, vol. II, p.286, Hallam Tennyson recalls his father as saying that Archbishop Trench was the only critic of his first volume who commented on 'a singular absence of the "s"!'
37 Ricks, *Tennyson*, p. 44.
38 Bloom, *Poetry and Repression*, p.153.
39 Tucker, *Tennyson*, p.73.
40 Ricks, *Tennyson*, p.45.
41 'Preface' to *Paracelsus* (1835), *The Poems*, vol. I, p.1029.
42 Ferrier, *Philosophy of Consciousness, Blackwood's*, vol. 44 (October 1838), p.544.
43 Herbert Tucker, *Browning's Beginnings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), p.42.

44 Browning, *The Poems*, vol. I, p.1028n.
45 J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), p.84.
46 *The Brownings' Correspondence*, p.341.
47 Donald Latané, *Browning's Sordello and the Aesthetics of Difficulty* (British Columbia: University of Victoria Press, 1987), pp. 41 and 48.
48 John Woolford, *Browning the Revisionary* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 45.
49 See, eg., Tucker, *Browning's Beginnings*, pp.94–6.
50 *Ibid.*, pp. 86–7. Tucker is writing about *Sordello*, III, 593–607.
51 Edward Dowden, 'Mr Browning's *Sordello*', in *Transcripts and Studies* (London: K. Paul, Trench, 1888), pp. 479 and 482–3.

4 BROWNING AND THE ELEMENT OF ACTION

1 Henry James, 'The Novel in *The Ring and the Book*', *The Quarterly Review*, vol. 217 (July 1912), pp. 69, 68 and 78.
2 *The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and R. W. Dixon*, ed. C.C. Abbott (London: Oxford University Press, 1935) (12 October 1881).
3 James, 'The Novel in *The Ring and the Book*', p.70.
4 Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson, A Memoir By His Son*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1897), II, p.331. The text of the letter is given in Tennyson, *Poems*, vol. III, p.149. See also the dedication to the volume which contains 'Locksley Hall Sixty Years After', where Tennyson first uses the term 'dramatic monologue'. See A. Dwight Culler, 'Monodrama and the Dramatic Monologue', *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, vol. 90, no. 3 (May 1975).
5 Quoted in W. Robertson Nicholl and Thomas J. Wise, eds., *Literary Anecdotes of The Nineteenth Century*, 2 vols. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1895), vol. I, p.39. Notes written by Elizabeth Barrett in 1843 towards Richard Henry Horne's *A New Spirit of the Age* (1844).
6 Wilfrid Meynell, 'The Detachment of Browning', *The Athenaeum*, no. 3245 (4 January 1890).
7 *The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Barrett, 1845–1846*, ed. Elvan Kintner, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1969, vol. II, p.731.
8 Alan Sinfield, *Dramatic Monologue* (London: Methuen), 1977, pp. 25 and 30. See the qualifications placed upon such a position in his *Alfred Tennyson* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 105–6: 'The split between first and third-person voices in dramatic monologues corresponds to the two standard ways of propounding the author's authority (directly, or as the master mind behind dramatic characters).'
9 *Letters*, II, pp. 731–2.
10 *Ibid.*
11 See Geoffrey Tillotson, A *View of Victorian Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 23–55; p.24: 'earnestness was seriousness in action'.

12 Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience* (New York: Random House, 1957), pp. 75–108.
13 Linda K. Hughes, *The Many-Faced Glass: Tennyson's Dramatic Monologues* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1987), p.10. The elements of this 'literary event' Hughes, following Langbaum, gives as 'the poet who composes, the speaker, and the reader who responds – all of whom meet and interact through the text or the "spoken"'.
14 See particularly Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience*, chapter 3, '*The Ring and the Book*: A Relativist Poem', pp. 109–36.
15 Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience*, pp. 82, 36 and 94.
16 Quoted in *Ibid.*, p.79.
17 Cf. Tennyson's title 'St Simeon Stylites'. This not only plays with an admission of the canonisation that the speaker craves, but exists distinct from the monologue that follows.
18 The usual point of comparison with this passage is the 'Essay on Shelley'. See Browning, *Poems*, vol. 1, p.1003: 'For it is with this world, as starting point and as basis alike, that we shall always have to concern ourselves: the world is not to be learned and thrown aside, but reverted to and relearned.'
19 Herbert Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.89: 'Lippo persuades the men of the watch not only to sympathize with his sexual exploits, but to share his artistic principles.' These men have a 'silent agreement' with Fra Lippo. This reading not only skates over the generic significance of silent auditors in the monologue form, but also fails to see the danger of arrest.
20 Aristotle, *Nichomachaean Ethics,* trans. David Ross, rev. J. L. Ackrill and J. O. Urmson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), chapter 7, sect. 3 (c), p. 165.
21 See Constance W. Hassett, *The Elusive Self in the Poetry of Robert Browning* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1982), p. 135. Stating that Browning does allow his monologists to scrutinise themselves, Hassett argues that Fra Lippo 'knows from the start the form his revelation should take and is denied the release he needs. Browning does not allow him to achieve confidence by a single act of will.'
22 Cf. the punning significance in the notion of being 'bound' to speak, with Browning's 'A Forgiveness', set in the confessional: 'You have a right to question me, as I / Am bound to answer' (34).
23 See Sinfield's own warning about this in *Alfred Tennyson*, pp. 106–7.
24 Eric Griffiths, *The Printed Voice of Victorian Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 75–6.
25 G. K. Chesterton, *Robert Browning* (London: Macmillan, 1903), p.109. See also A. K. Cook, *A Commentary Upon Browning's The Ring and the Book* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1920), p.115.
26 See Jeremy Horder, *Provocation and Responsibility* (Oxford: Oxford University

Press, 1992), p.84. The phrase 'sudden and temporary loss of self-control' is Lord Devlin's definition of the effects of provocation given in the case of *Duffy* (1949), quoted in J. C. Smith and B. Hogan, *Criminal Law*, 7th edn (London: Butterworth, 1992), p.351. See also Horder, *Provocation*, on *Walsh*: 'This amounts to a new way of understanding desert of mitigation. Henceforth the law no longer endeavours to set down, nor does it invite the jury to consider, what provocations can and cannot be supposed to produce genuine losses of self-control. Instead, the law requires the jury to evaluate the reasonableness of retaining self-control in the face of the provocation in the issue' (p. 84).

27 This is the result of a scan made of the *English Poetry, Full Text Poetry Database*, CD-ROM (Cambridge: Chadwyck Healey, 1995).

28 Quoted in Horder, *Provocation*, p.84.

29 Wedgewood's letter to Browning is quoted in Daniel Karlin, *Browning's Hatreds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 218–19. She complains to Browning that her 'small, white figure' is overwhelmed by the evil around her. On Caponsacchi and Guido, see also Chesterton, *Robert Browning*, pp.107–10, James, 'The Novel in *The Ring and the Book*,' pp. 94–5, Cook, *Commentary*, pp. 112–18, and Karlin, *Browning's Hatreds*, p.203. On Pompilia as centre see Ann Brady, *Pompilia: A Feminist Reading of Robert Browning's The Ring and the Book* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1988), and Susan Brown, 'Pompilia: The Woman (in) Question', *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 34, no. 1 (Spring 1996). On pp. 28–9, Brown points out that the rescue is Pompilia's initiative, and that Caponsacchi 'dithers for two days' before he chooses to help her.

30 Chesterton, *Robert Browning*, p. 107.

31 James, 'The Novel in *The Ring and the Book*', p.76.

32 Richard Holt Hutton, 'Mr Browning', in *Literary Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1896) p.232.

33 Brown, 'Pompilia: The Woman (in) Question', p. 30.

34 Karlin, *Browning's Hatreds*, p.225.

35 Paul Fussell, *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form*, rev. edn (New York: Random House, 1979), p.43.

5 ''TIS WELL THAT I SHOULD BLUSTER': TENNYSON'S MONOLOGUES

1 Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson, A Memoir By His Son*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1897), vol. I, p.11.

2 See Tennyson, *Poems*, vol. III, p. 31n; and Joshua Adler, 'Tennyson's "Mother of Sorrows": "Rizpah",' *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 12, no. 4 (Winter 1974), pp. 363–9. Adler enumerates biblical allusions in 'Rizpah' from Ecclesiastes, Galatians, Psalms, Mark, Deuteronomy and Genesis.

3 Quoted in Christopher Ricks, *Tennyson*, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 207.

4 Linda K. Hughes, *The Many-Faced Glass: Tennyson's Dramatic Monologues*

(Athens: Ohio University Press, 1987), pp. 14ff. Hughes draws her definitions of consciousness from *Webster's Dictionary*, which defines the word in its third sense, 'the totality of sensations, perceptions, ideas, attitudes, and feelings of which an individual or group is aware' and makes it tell against 'personality', sense 4a, 'the condition or fact of relating to a particular thing'.

5 See Tennyson, *Poems*, vol. I, p.594.
6 Hughes, *The Many-Faced Glass*, p. 23.
7 Hallam Tennyson, *A Memoir*, vol. I, pp. 304–5.
8 Quoted by Ricks in Tennyson, *Poems*, vol. I, p. 613.
9 See Ricks in *Tennyson*, p.72. He hears that 'underneath' the final line, 'striving to utter itself but battened down by will, is another line, almost identical, and yet utterly different: "To strive, to seek, to yield, and not to find."'
10 See Tennyson, *Poems*, vol. II, p. 609n.
11 Alan Sinfield, *Alfred Tennyson* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p.108.
12 Ralph Wilson Rader, *Tennyson's Maud: The Biographical Genesis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), pp. 2 and 115–16.
13 T. S. Eliot did not find that the objective correlative had been attained, which may be apt for a poem which its author compared to *Hamlet*. Cf. Hallam Tennyson, *A Memoir*, vol. I, p.396: 'The poem is a little *Hamlet*.'
14 T. S. Eliot '*In Memoriam*', in *Selected Prose*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber, 1975), p. 242.
15 Hallam Tennyson, *A Memoir*, vol. I, p.396.
16 William E. Buckler, 'Tennyson's *Maud:* New Critical Perspectives', in *The Victorian Imagination: Essays in Aesthetic Exploration* (Brighton: Harvester, 1980), p. 215.
17 George Brimley, *Essays* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1858), p. 77.
18 See John D. Jump, ed., *Tennyson, The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1974), p. 335.
19 Brimley, *Essays*, p.69.
20 I am grateful to Eric Griffiths for pointing this out to me.
21 Aubrey de Vere, paraphrasing Tennyson's description of the poem. For an account of the bibliographical arguments surrounding the process of composition, see Tennyson, *Poems*, II, pp. 514–15.
22 This technique is used in other Tennyson poems, not just monologues. See the narrator pivoting on his own voice in *The Lover's Tale*, I, 71–2: 'She was dark-haired, dark-eyed: / Oh, such dark eyes!' which prompts a ten-line single sentence description of the eyes. 'Locksley Hall', 63: 'Well – 'tis well that I should bluster!'. *In Memoriam,* VII, 4–5: 'waiting for a hand // A hand that can be clasped no more -'. Also, 'Merlin and Vivien', where Vivien discusses Merlin's choice of words, e.g. 'this full love of mine / . . . may merit well / Your term of overstrained' (530–3), 'Thy tongue has tript a little' (600) and 'The lady never made *unwilling* war' (601, refers back to 569). Vivien gets carried away, and to show even her lack of power over speech,

Tennyson's narrator states that after she has defamed the knights of the Round Table, 'Her words had issue other than she willed' (804). Vivien needs more than argument and speech to seduce Merlin.

23 Cf. I, 21–52.

24 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 4.002, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge, 1961), p. 19.

25 See also the questioning not in the term, but *of* the term, 'if I be dear' in this canto. It is used four times in a lyric of only ten lines, 'I' is italicised twice and the phrase appears on its own in line 535.

26 Hallam Tennyson, *A Memoir*, vol. I, p.397.

27 Jump, *Tennyson*, pp. 209 and 199. Tennyson asked for Mann's essay on the poem to be put among his papers after his death, and an extract from it opens Hallam Tennyson's account of the poem. See *A Memoir*, vol. I, p.394.

28 Hallam Tennyson, *A Memoir*, vol. I, p. 404.

29 Compare a similar modification in the gap between the stanzas of *In Memoriam,* XVIII: 'The life that almost dies in me; // That dies not but endures with pain' (16–17).

30 Cf. *In Memoriam,* XLIX, 13–14: 'Beneath all fancied hopes and fears / Ay me, the sorrow deepens down'.

31 Jump, *Tennyson*, pp. 198–9.

32 See *Poems*, vol. II, pp. 516–17. See also (in *Poems*) Tennyson in a letter to Archer Gurney (6 December 1855), 'How could you or anyone suppose that if I had to speak in my own voice my own opinion of this war or war generally I should have spoken with so little moderation.' Cf. this letter's 'I do not mean that my madman does not speak truths too', with 'some of my thought may come out into the poem'.

33 See, for instance, Gladstone's modification of his criticism of the martial spirit, given in Tennyson, *Poems*, vol. II, p.518; and John Killham's account of the arguments, 'Tennyson's *Maud* – The Function of the Imagery', in his *Critical Essays on the Poetry of Tennyson* (London: Routledge, 1960).

34 Joseph Bristow, 'Nation, Class and Gender: Tennyson's *Maud* and War', in Rebecca Stott, ed., *Tennyson* (London: Longman, 1996), p.140.

35 Tennyson, *Poems*, vol. II, p. 584n.

36 W. E. Fredeman, '"A Sign Betwixt the Meadow and the Cloud": The Ironic Apotheosis of St Simeon Stylites', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, vol. 38 (1968), p.71.

6 THE DRIFT OF *IN MEMORIAM*

1 Tennyson, *Poems*, I, p. 296.

2 William Brashear, *The Living Will: A Study of Tennyson and Nineteenth-Century Subjectivism* (The Hague: Mouton, 1969), pp. 66 and 102.

3 See Robert Pattison, *Tennyson and Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), p.107, on the public verse of the classical elegy, and Tennyson's use of it in creating the *In Memoriam* stanza.

4 Henry James, 'Tennyson's Drama' (1875), in *Views and Reviews*, ed. Le Roy Phillips (1908), facsimile reprint (New York: AMS, 1968), p.171.
5 *The Letters of Edward FitzGerald*, ed. A. M. Terhune and A. B. Terhune, 4 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), vol. I, p.696.
6 *Ibid.*, vol. I, p.486.
7 *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber, 1975), pp. 245 and 242.
8 Peter Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1985), p. 202.
9 Herbert Tucker, *Tennyson and the Doom of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), p.379.
10 *In Memoriam A.H.H.* was seventeen years in the writing before publication. *Idylls of the King* had an even longer period of gestation: see my 'Tennyson's Epic Procrastination', *English*, vol. 45, no. 181 (Spring 1996), pp. 44–61.
11 See Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson, A Memoir By His Son*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1897), vol. I, p. 187n.
12 A. C. Bradley, *A Commentary on In Memoriam*, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 1902), pp. 39–42.
13 Brashear, *The Living Will*, p.102.
14 Isobel Armstrong, *Language as Living Form in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), pp. 172–205; Timothy Peltason, *Reading In Memoriam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), Alastair W. Thomson, *The Poetry of Tennyson* (London: Routledge, 1986). See also discussions of the subject in K. W. Grandsden, *Tennyson, In Memoriam* (London: Arnold, 1964), p.25, and pp. 30–1, and James R. Kincaid, *Tennyson's Major Poems, The Comic and Ironic Patterns* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), pp. 86–109.
15 See Sir Charles Tennyson and Hope Dyson, *The Tennysons: Background to Genius* (London: Macmillan, 1974), for Tennyson family anxieties over inheritance and name, and the melancholic 'black blood of the Tennysons'.
16 Peltason, *Reading In Memoriam*, p.32.
17 *Ibid.*, p. 161.
18 Cecil Y. Lang, *Tennyson's Arthurian Psycho-Drama* (Lincoln: Tennyson Society, 1983).
19 See Jeff Nunokowa, '*In Memoriam* and the Extinction of the Homosexual', in Rebecca Stott, ed., *Tennyson* (London: Longman, 1996), pp. 197–209. Writing about *In Memoriam*, and the death of male youth, Nunokowa argues that Tennyson's loss of the homoerotic is replaced in the poem by a growth towards the heterosexual. In Tennyson's terms here, the 'wasted youth' is made 'wise'.
20 'Preface to the First Edition of *Poems'*, in *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, ed. Kenneth Allott, 2nd edn ed. Miriam Allott (London: Longman, 1979), p. 664.
21 Hallam Tennyson, *A Memoir*, vol. I, pp. 304–5.
22 Peltason, *Reading In Memoriam*, p.23.

23 Hallam Tennyson, *A Memoir*, vol. I, pp.308, 254 and 393; II. pp. 123 and 127. The word is, conversely, used rarely in the poetry. The only significant use is in *Maud*, I, 144: 'For the drift of the Maker is dark, an Isis hid by the veil.'

24 Peltason, *Reading In Memoriam*, p.11; he is taking issue with Christopher Ricks, *Tennyson* (London: Macmillan, 1972), p. 214.

25 Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1897), p.175. This passage is quoted by Peltason, *Reading In Memoriam*, p.42, but he finds that Tennyson 'evokes' Carlyle's words in a similar fashion. Also Isobel Armstrong, *Language as Living Form*, pp. 181–2, before discussion of this section, states that 'idealist language . . . is found to be most capable of keeping words in play and enables the poem to grow . . .'

26 Tennyson, *Poems*, vol. II, p. 323n.

27 See Allen Danzig, 'The Contraries: A Central Concept in Tennyson's Poetry', PMLA, vol. 77, no. 5 (December 1962), pp. 577–85; and Robert Langbaum, 'The Dynamic Unity of *In Memoriam*', in *The Modern Spirit* (London: Chatto, 1970), pp. 51–75. On p.60 Langbaum states that *In Memoriam* 'has a dynamic unity of thought and feeling dependent on a dialectical principle of growth in a single consciousness'. Tucker, *Tennyson and the Doom of Romanticism*, pp. 376–80, deals with the poem's resolving of opposites. See also Daniel Albright, *Tennyson, The Muses' Tug Of War* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1987).

28 *Poems*, vol. II, pp. 361–2.

29 A. Dwight Culler, *The Poetry of Tennyson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), pp. 158–9. See Peter Allen, *The Cambridge Apostles: The Early Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), which deals with the importance of Coleridgean thought on Tennyson's contemporaries in Cambridge, and particularly the influence of F. D. Maurice. Eric Griffiths, in *The Printed Voice of Victorian Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.113, also discusses the importance of Maurice's theology for Tennyson, particularly its 'ambiguity of drift'.

30 Dolores Ryback Rosenblum, 'The Act of Writing *In Memoriam*', in *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 18 (1980), p. 119.

31 'Essay on the Philosophical Writings of Cicero', in *The Writings of Arthur Henry Hallam*, ed. T. H. Vail Motter (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), pp. 150–1.

32 See *Poems*, vol. II, p. 413n. Also Alan Sinfield, '"That Which Is": The Platonic lndicative in *In Memoriam* XCV', *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 14 (1976), p.249, and Tucker, *Tennyson and the Doom of Romanticism*, pp. 396–7. Susan Shatto and Marion Shaw, in their edition of *In Memoriam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 255–6, give other examples of Tennyson's use of the phrase. Donald Hair, '"Matter-moulded forms of speech"', *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 27 (1989), p.4, says that in using this phrase 'Tennyson exploits the essential nature of the pronoun'.

33 See Peltason's complaint against this, *Reading In Memoriam*, p.113: 'The language of the trance itself is the least exciting in the poem, dragged down

by the knowledge of its own inevitable failure to capture the uncapturable experience'; also Culler, *The Poetry of Tennyson*, p.182: 'It is unfortunate that in this passage Tennyson's language does not rise to the incantatory height to do for the reader what Hallam's language did for him.'

34 See Peltason, *Reading In Memoriam*, p.119, on why section XCV is not singled out by Tennyson: he 'is willing to grant no moment that sort of authority'.

35 Kincaid, *Tennyson's Major Poems*, p.106. See also p. 109 on the 'series of skilful but inadequate substitutes' for a conclusion, which these sections show.

36 *Poems*, vol. II, p. 309.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 444n.

38 Sinfield, '"That Which Is"', p.252.

39 See Hallam Tennyson, *A Memoir*, vol. I, p.303. Also Bradley, *Commentary*, p.60: 'It does not suffice to take the stanza ending "I have felt", and to reply: Tennyson thinks that the emotions or "heart" cannot be satisfied without a belief in God and immortality, and that is the sole ground of his belief.'

40 Culler, *The Poetry of Tennyson*, p.188, points out this echo.

41 See Tucker, *Tennyson and the Doom of Romanticism*, pp. 403–4. He finds that 'I have felt' is an allusion to Tennyson's favourite passage in Wordsworth from 'Tintern Abbey', 'and I have felt / A presence' (93–4), but seeing Tennyson immediately invoke the childlike, he finds that Wordsworthian growth is reversed in Tennyson.

42 *Poems*, vol. II, p. 451n.

43 Reproduced in *The Tennyson Archive*, ed. Christopher Ricks and Aidan Day, 30 vols. (New York: Garland, 1987), vol. III, p. 49.

7 INCARNATING ELEGY IN *THE WRECK OF THE DEUTSCHLAND*

1 See W. H. Gardner, *Gerard Manley Hopkins (1884–1889), A Study of Poetic Idiosyncrasy in Relation to Poetic Tradition*, 2 vols. (London: Secker and Warburg, 1944–9), vol. I, pp. 21–37; *The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Christopher Devlin, S. J. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 338–51; Walter Ong, *Hopkins, The Self and God* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), pp. 106–12.

2 Exodus 3, 14.

3 Daniel Brown, *Hopkins' Idealism: Philosophy, Physics, Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

4 See also J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 270–3; Isobel Armstrong, *Language as Living Form in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), pp. 4–20; Ong, *Hopkins*, p.24.

5 *Sermons*, p.127.

6 Brown, *Hopkins' Idealism*, pp. 59–60.

7 For Hardy on Clifford, see the last section of chapter eight.

8 Patricia Ball, *The Science of Aspects: The Changing Role of Fact in the Work of Coleridge, Ruskin and Hopkins* (London: Athlone Press, 1971), p.109.

9 *Sermons*, p.123.
10 *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, ed. C. C. Abbott (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), p. 24 (7 August 1868).
11 See *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Phillips, pp. 48, 84 and 90.
12 Hopkins wrote a response to Rossetti's 'The Convent Threshold' in Latin elegiacs, as well as adopting the logaoedic rhythm of the 'When the Hounds of Spring' chorus of Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon* for his 'Ad Mariam'.
13 *The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and R. W. Dixon*, ed. C. C. Abbott (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), p.14 (5 October 1878).
14 There are three versions in *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Phillips. Norman MacKenzie, in *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 56–9, gives four versions, ordered differently from Phillips.
15 *Sermons*, p.151.
16 *Ibid.*, p.157
17 *Ibid.*, p.158.
18 Armstrong, *Language as Living Form,* pp. 18–20.
19 John R. Reed, *Victorian Will* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1989), p.49.
20 Ong, *Hopkins*, pp. 77–8. He is refuting Barthes' *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (1971), and says that the Spiritual Exercises finally emphasise 'the ultimate particularization', that of the self.
21 *Sermons*, p.149. I have reversed Hopkins' order, which reads, in his parentheses, '(This is the natural order of the three: freedom of pitch, that is self-determination, is in the chooser himself and his choosing faculty; freedom of play is in the execution; freedom of field is in the object, the field of choice)'.
22 *Ibid.*, p.120. Cf. Tennyson's disapproval of Milton's characterisation of the freedom of Satan in these terms, as discussed in chapter two.
23 *Letters*, p. 46 (21 August 1877).
24 This is a serious matter for Hopkins, since his views of the self were conditioned by his experience of chronic indigestion. His persistent tasting of himself is one of his proofs of a cruelly isolated experience of individuality. See the 'Notes' on the Spiritual Exercises discussed above, and 'I wake and feel the fell of dark not day', line 9, 'I am gall, I am heartburn.'
25 'Rhythm and the Other Structural Parts of Rhetoric – Verse', in *The Note-Books and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins,* ed. Humphrey House (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p.223–4.
26 George Saintsbury, *A History of English Prosody*, 3 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1906–10) vol. II, p.255; Robert Bridges, *Milton's Prosody* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921). On p. 51, Bridges credits Hopkins with discovering the metric system of the choruses of *Samson Agonistes*. This he conveyed to Bridges in the letter of 21 August 1877 discussed above.
27 Bridges, *Milton's Prosody*, p.63.
28 Gardner, *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, vol. I, p.48.
29 J. A. Symonds, 'The Blank Verse of Milton', *Fortnightly Review*, vol. 16

(December 1874), pp. 767–81. See Hopkins, *Letters*, 3 April 1877.
30 Hopkins, 'Author's Preface', in *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Phillips, pp. 107–8.
31 Shelley, 'Ode to the West Wind' (1); according to *OED*, the 'Wild West' of the USA is referred to as early as 1849, by Charlotte Brontë in *Shirley*.
32 John Kerrigan, 'Writing Numbers: Keats, Hopkins and the History of Chance', in Nicholas Roe, ed., *Keats and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.292.
33 Luke 1, 38. Hopkins would also have repeated these words in 'The Angelus', recited during the day at noon and 6 pm.
34 *Sermons*, p.169.
35 Ong, *Hopkins*, p.84.
36 *Sermons*, p.154.
37 Peter McDonald, 'Rhyme and Determination in Hopkins and Edward Thomas', *Essays in Criticism*, vol. 63, no. 3 (July 1993), pp. 238–9.
38 Thais E. Morgan, 'Violence, Creativity and the Feminine: Poetics and Gender Politics in Swinburne and Hopkins', in A. H. Harrison and B. Taylor, eds., *Gender and Discourse in Victorian Literature and Art* (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992), pp. 92 and 90.
39 McDonald, 'Rhyme and Determination', p.239.
40 *Letters*, p. 197 (21 August 1884).
41 See *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Phillips, pp. 176 and 381.

8 THE MERE CONTINUATOR: THOMAS HARDY AND THE END OF ELEGY

1 Florence Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840–1928*, One vol. edn (London: Macmillan, 1962), p.301.
2 James Richardson, *Thomas Hardy and the Poetry of Necessity* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1977), pp. 76–7.
3 See Donald Davie, *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry* (London: Routledge, 1973).
4 See Richardson, *Thomas Hardy*, p.84, on the importance of 'last lines' for Hardy.
5 Dennis Taylor, *Hardy's Metres and Victorian Prosody* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp.165–6.
6 See discussions of this word in 'After a Journey' and 'Where the Picnic Was', later in this chapter.
7 Tom Paulin, *Thomas Hardy and the Poetry of Perception*, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 1986), p.128.
8 Tim Armstrong, in *Thomas Hardy, Selected Poems*, ed. Armstrong (London: Longman, 1993), p. 214n.
9 Dennis Taylor, *Hardy's Poetry, 1860–1928* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p.47.
10 *Ibid.*, pp. 24–5.
11 *Ibid.*, p.25.
12 Florence Hardy, *The Life*, p.251.

13 Of course this heroism is not shared by the two main players in the drama, Wellington and Napoléon. Around Ney, for instance, they behave in the most pragmatic ways: Napoléon, lacking conscience, has none of Ney's qualms about lying to the troops about possible reinforcements at Waterloo, and Wellington, despite his admiration of Ney's heroism later refuses, we are pointedly told, to speak up against his execution.

14 Jahan Ramazani, 'Hardy's Elegies for an Era: "By the Century's Deathbed"', *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 29, no. 2 (Summer 1992), pp. 131–43.

15 Taylor, *Hardy's Poetry*, p.27.

16 The question of Hardy and Schopenhauer was active in Hardy's day, the cause of anger from Hardy himself who protested to Helen Garwood about her *Thomas Hardy: An Illustration of the Philosophy of Schopenhauer* (Philadelphia: John Winston, 1911). There is a full and sceptical discussion in Walter F. Wright, *The Shaping of The Dynasts* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), pp. 38–55. This scepticism is fully apparent in chapter two of Harold Orel's *Thomas Hardy's Epic-Drama: A Study of The Dynasts* (Laurence: University of Kansas Press, 1963) if less so in Paulin, *Thomas Hardy*, pp. 41 and 195.

17 Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994), p.8.

18 See Taylor, *Hardy's Poetry*, p. 23. Taylor argues that in *Poems of 1912–13*, Hardy is resolving a preoccupation with the spurned speaker of Keats' 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', (most notably in the ending to the original ordering of the sequence, 'The Phantom Horsewoman').

19 Dennis Taylor, 'Hardy's Use of Tennyson's *In Memoriam*', *Tennyson Research Bulletin*, vol. 7, no. 1 (1997), p.39.

20 *Ibid.*, pp. 35–6, and Wright, *The Shaping of The Dynasts*, p.20.

21 Quoted from Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, revd. Ernest De Selincourt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1904).

22 A point made by Aidan Day, '"The Archetype that Waits": *The Lover's Tale, In Memoriam* and *Maud*', in Philip Collins, ed., *Tennyson, Seven Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 76– 101.

23 See R. H. Horne, *The Poems of Geoffrey Chaucer Modernized* (London: Whittaker, 1841), p. lxxxiv; Leigh Hunt, 'What is Poetry?', *Imagination and Fancy*, in *Works* (1844), (London: Smith, Elder, 1883), p. 33; Derek Attridge, *The Rhythms of English Poetry* (London: Longman, 1982), p. 77.

24 'A General Introduction For My Work', in *W.B. Yeats: Selected Criticism and Prose*, ed. A. Norman Jeffares (London: Pan, 1980) pp. 267–8.

25 Taylor, *Hardy's Metres*, pp. 18–33.

26 Coventry Patmore, 'Essay on English Metrical Law' (1856), Appendix to *Poems*, 2nd edn, 2 vols. (London: George Bell, 1886), vol. II, pp. 230–1.

27 Yeats, 'A General Introduction For My Work'.

28 See Robert Bridges, *Milton's Prosody* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921), pp. 50–66, where Bridges notes that it was 'Gerard Hopkins' who first noticed the 'stress prosody' and the 'free rhythms' of Milton's poetry. The term 'contrapuntal' figures in Hopkins' own prosody.

29 See Derek Attridge, *Well-Weighed Syllables*: *Elizabethan Verse in Classical Metres* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).
30 'Preface' to *The Dynasts*.
31 This is a moot point. Donald Davie, *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry*, p.57, while stressing the musical form of the poem, asks for a 'sensitive prosodist' to scan the poem, because it is 'so overlaid with cunning irregularities'. He scans it first as 'four-foot trochaic-dactylic', but then settles for 'English hendecasyllabics'. Dennis Taylor, *Hardy's Metres*, p.82, prefers the latter 'intuition'.
32 In 'Hardy's Virgilian Purples', *Agenda*, vol. 10 (1972), Davie argues that the addition of the final three poems to the second edition makes the ghost appear only in 'psychological reality', a reading which he considers 'with a sort of fury'. Tim Armstrong, 'Hardy's Dantean Purples', *The Thomas Hardy Journal*, vol. 7, no.2 (May 1991), pp. 47–55, speaks of these additions as an attempt to conform with the generic expectations of elegy.
33 John Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), pp. 114 and ff.
34 Emma Hardy, *Some Recollections*, ed. Evelyn Hardy and Robert Gittings (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).
35 Philip Davis, *Memory and Writing from Wordsworth to Lawrence* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1983), pp. 394–8.
36 Quoted in *The Literary NoteBooks of Thomas Hardy*, ed. L. A. Björk, 2 vols. (Gothenburg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1974), vol. 1, p. 364.
37 *Ibid.*, p.365.
38 Armstrong, *Selected Poems*, p.150.
39 S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. Engell and W. J. Bate, 2 vols. (London: Routledge, 1983), vol. II, pp.50–2.
40 Davie, 'Hardy's Virgilian Purples', pp. 233–5.
41 Paulin, *Thomas Hardy*, p.205.
42 *The Life*, pp. 78–9.

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