

SEX, SYMBOLISM, AND PSYCHOLOGY  
IN LITERATURE



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By

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*To My Mother*



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ROY P. BASLER



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# The Psychological Interpretation of Literature

## I

I RECOGNIZE that some of the ideas which will be set forth in this book will received a mixed reception from the reader. When the editors of the most widely read and perhaps most literate weekly news magazine of our day admit that the very idea of homosexuality gives them "the creeps" (*Time*, February 16, 1948), one must suspect that among the readers of this book there will be not a few who may react similarly to any discussion of Lesbianism, for example, as a theme in literature. And yet literature which treats of such subjects cannot be intelligently read and criticized without a frank recognition of the validity of the theme and of the fact that great art has been wrought out of it. So also with other aspects of sex which the superstition of the past has decreed to be taboo. Without any intention of dwelling either more or less than necessary on sex, I must admit that sex is the subject of these essays, not merely because I, or the poets about whom I am writing, have chosen sex as a theme, but because sex is as inescapable in literature as it is in life.

To this one may add that we achieve neither goodness nor understanding by ignoring any aspect of reality. Psychologically as well as biologically, health is not only the absence of disease but also the immunity acquired from disease. Thomas

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Mann's comment on Dostoevsky's psychopathic novels bears quoting on this point:

. . . Life is not finical and never thinks of making a moral distinction between health and infirmity. It seizes the bold product of disease, consumes and digests it, and as soon as it is assimilated, it is health. An entire horde, a generation of open-minded, healthy lads pounces upon the work of diseased genius, genialized by disease, admires and praises it, raises it to the skies, perpetuates it, transmutes it, and bequeaths it to civilization, which does not live on the home-baked bread of health alone. They all swear by the name of the great invalid, thanks to whose madness they no longer need to be mad. Their healthfulness feeds upon his madness and in them he will become healthy.

I am concerned in this book with what I have called the psychological interpretation of literature. It is my belief that we cannot, without violation of our intellectual perspective in the twentieth century, cling to an inadequate aesthetic criticism or to an equally inadequate moral criticism. I do not mean to imply that aesthetic and moral considerations are no longer relevant to criticism, but rather that it is necessary for such considerations to be integrated as they have not been heretofore. The aesthetic need not be adopted at the expense of the moral, nor the moral at the expense of the aesthetic, if both are considered in a larger frame of reference, which for want of a better term I have called "psychological."

That this is not the first psychological study of literature, I certainly need not emphasize. Reference to the works of others, both contemporaries and predecessors, will be found often in the following pages. Nor is this a pioneer study in the adaptation of Freudian theory to the interpretation of literature, unless it be considered that none of the specific works which are treated in what follows has been heretofore extensively ex-

amined in the light of nonrational psychology. It is rather a personal quest for meaning and appreciation which has developed in its own way. That Freudian psychology has played an unusually heavy rôle in the quest can be attributed chiefly to the fact that it provided integration to what would otherwise have remained to a large degree disintegrate. That psychology, in the broadest sense of the term, provides the only frame of reference in which the ancient art of criticism can find its modern expression without remaining antiquated or becoming intellectually esoteric, seems to me highly probable.

Intellectual criticism of the present day, although in many instances owing much to psychology, lacks both the accuracy of description and the pregnancy of meaning which Aristotelian criticism achieved. The breadth of knowledge which Aristotle brought to bear on literature in his day has seldom if ever been equaled by his successors. In applying the best scientific thought of his epoch to the interpretation of what had been in his time as in ours regarded as a non-scientific or even an anti-scientific sphere, he rendered particular service. Although the modern critic may profitably study Aristotle as well as other critics, if he would emulate the master he should study other disciplines more, rather than less, than literature, and literary criticism least of all. That this is heresy I am fully aware, but without heresy there would be little criticism of any sort.

A fundamental duty of criticism is explication. Each of the major writers whose work is studied somewhat minutely in this volume has been evaluated by critics whose criteria often betray little relevance to the writer's creative purpose and accomplishment. The duty of explication has been dismissed lightly or ignored entirely. Somewhere in the nineteenth century, perhaps with the advent of Matthew Arnold, criticism became

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obsessed with the function of passing judgment on the merits of poetry and poets.

Certainly the Romantics in general, and Coleridge in particular, recognized explication as the primary art of the critic. The distinguished Johnson and Addison, no less than Dryden, wrote their most sought-for passages when they undertook to explain the art of a poet or a type of poetry as they understood it. Their judgments are today often less interesting than their analyses, and their explication, even when unsatisfactory, is always stimulating to better reading. I believe anyone familiar with Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* must recognize this fact. Who by explication helps us to understand and enjoy Wordsworth so much as Coleridge? Though Milton has been explicated more fully and minutely by others, yet Addison's analysis of *Paradise Lost* has hardly been equaled within the space he devoted to it, and Dryden can still do more to help the general reader understand and enjoy plays than can most "critics" of drama who have succeeded him.

Hence the reader may be forewarned that this book is concerned less with evaluation than with interpretation. If the particularity of my analyses seems too minute, then I must say that it was not meant for those who do not need or want what I have always wanted in criticism—a satisfactory because detailed understanding of the work which I should like to appreciate as fully as possible. I prefer to make my own judgments, and hence I shall leave the assessment of the poet largely to the reader, while I concentrate on what seems to me to need explication.

I may admit also, that I am in one way, if not in all ways, of an old school which believes that a poem, as a work of art, should and does *mean* as well as *be*. Although I recognize that meaning does not make a poem, I believe that all art is com-

munication. It is impossible to write nonsense, as Gertrude Stein's admirers will demonstrate to anyone who will listen, and the least literate of readers, as well as writers, discovers meanings that confound the wise whose wisdom weighs so heavily that it cannot be unloaded. Until we have been at some labor to *invest* a thing with meaning its meaning cannot be discovered. Psychologically considered, discovery is never an accident, though it may have the appearance of accident. The meaning was planted by the same power that found it, and Einstein or Columbus did but dig up what an earlier spade had buried, not to hide it forever, but to guide him who could read the sign "Dig Here."

To understand literature one must understand life, but also, in order to understand life one may take clues from literature. Freud "discovered" his theories of non-rational psychology not in the data of his clinic merely, but in the poetry of all ages and cultures with which he had made acquaintance. Much of what he discovered had been formulated by Aeschylus and Sophocles, Aristotle and Plato, each after his fashion, and before their time by what now unknown intelligence! Shakespeare taught Freud some things which Shakespeare failed to teach critics of drama until Freud formulated unorthodox observations about *Hamlet* which no later critic can afford to ignore, even if he chooses to speak of the play as a play rather than as life.

Freud's indebtedness to literature has sometimes been the occasion for skepticism about his scientific soundness. That he took to his study of literature the same intelligence which he took into the clinic is remarkable chiefly in that too few students of literature (or of science) have done likewise. The notion that literature and science should be studied in separate schools and by scholars who must choose the one discipline to

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the exclusion of the other is a fallacy which threatens to damn our civilization in the twentieth century. Indeed, our only salvation lies in the fact that human intelligence cannot be wholly regimented to the discipline of the schools and will find the key that unlocks life or literature in any fact or experience which proves effective in furthering understanding.

In order that I may not be misunderstood at the start, I wish to state categorically that I do not conceive Freudian psychology to be *the* key to the mansion of literature, but rather *a* key to certain doors which often have remained shut in a mansion of many rooms. The frosted glass of the panes has revealed to the visitor only vague outlines of light and shadow, and upon these vague perceptions he has ventured his interpretations, often with faint success, of what lies within. Conscious of his uncertainty, he has remained perturbed; or he has become disgruntled and bad-tempered, blaming the door for being locked and fitted with glass through which he cannot see. Unless, of course, he enjoys mystery, in which case he praises the fuzzy vision as "the ineffable." To such as he, that which can be understood is of little worth, while to his counterpart—the hardheaded—that which cannot be understood is worthless. Of the two, my affections go to the latter, albeit I insist first upon trying the supposedly meaningless for its meaning. I do not admit that any genuine poet has written lines which cannot be understood, even though I have not understood them. It is seldom the poet who is at fault when meaning is in question; more likely it is his impercipient critic. And all judgment of value which is based on incomplete understanding is itself worthy only in proportion to the degree of understanding.

A good deal has been written about the influence of Freud and Jung on modern literature. Many modern writers have acknowledged their indebtedness, and some have not needed

to, the fact being patent whether admitted or not. With James Joyce, Franz Kafka, Sherwood Anderson, or Conrad Aiken, it has been apparent even to hostile critics that no understanding or judgment of their writings which fails to take into account the modern concept of sex, the unconscious, and the nonrational logic of dream imagery, can pretend to be valid criticism. And yet, but few critics have given either the study or the weight that is necessary to the understanding of the soul life as portrayed by these writers. It is difficult to find critical comprehension comparable to the creative comprehension which has recognized and seized upon the nonrational for the increase of human understanding. Among critics, scholasticism and philology reign supreme, even down to the weekly book reviews, and too often the critic has not been prepared to help the reader keep abreast of his own time.

No less a failure must be attributed to the critic in academic environment who preserves the literary creations of the past in a mummy wrapping of commentary which applies all of Aristotle or Taine but nothing of Freud or Jung. One may search in vain the courses in literary criticism offered in most colleges for evidence that Freud and Jung ever wrote a line that has pregnant meaning for the interpretation of literature.

One fallacy which accounts for this state of criticism is the notion that no literature of the past should be interpreted in the light of what we now know. Since Shakespeare could not have known Freud, the reasoning goes, therefore the theories of Freud cannot apply to Shakespeare's plays. It may be noted that, had Freud allowed such thinking to circumscribe his clinical observations, he would never have formulated either his interpretation of dreams through his understanding of literature and mythology, or his interpretation of *Hamlet* through his understanding of clinical cases.

A more intelligent point of view might be adopted by scholars and critics from their scientific colleagues—that good observation and study of nature or literature is valid whether recorded in the second century B.C. or in the twentieth century A.D., and that its validity in the twentieth century is to be interpreted in the light of twentieth-century understanding. If such an attitude can be adopted for a moment, it will be seen that whatever differences exist between Shakespeare and Freud are not differences in the basic phenomena of human nature which they observed, but differences in terms of analysis and presentation. Although *Hamlet* is certainly a work of art, it is also a portrait of the human soul, and as such it must be understood in any event if it is to be appreciated as art. The question is not whether we can appreciate *Hamlet* without an understanding of the soul, but whether less or more understanding of the soul can give more appreciation of the play. That either Shakespeare or Sophocles portrayed no more of the soul than was common to the philosophy of their respective eras, if true, would have consigned each to the oblivion shared by so many of his contemporaries. It is not merely the belief in myth but the understanding of myth which the poets bring across the years.

Nor does this point of view destroy beauty. A common fallacy of the romantic era held that understanding (disillusion) is antithetical to beauty (illusion). Who will say that the Joseph story has less beauty or credibility for Thomas Mann than it had for the Hebrew narrator who first recorded it? Or that Goethe's love of all that Helen of Troy symbolizes is less inspiring because less naïve than Homer's? The sense of awe has never been diminished by sincere understanding. No better illustration of this fact can be found than John Keats, whose finest art, achieved in the Odes, is beauty under-



stood in terms of the psychological, rather than the supernatural. And if further examples are needed we may look into Whitman's "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" or "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," where cognizance and awe are blended in beauty perhaps not surpassed in American poetry.

Naturally enough, the application of Freudian theory to literature has been attempted for the most part in an endeavor to psychoanalyze the author. Beginning with Freud himself, one of the chief recreations of the psychoanalytic fraternity has been the study of the artist's personality through the application of psychoanalytic criteria to his works and to the known facts of his life. The reception given to psychoanalytic biography and criticism by students of literature has been, to say the least, somewhat mixed. Ranging from simple dislike of the new psychoanalytic jargon to a violent rejection of psychoanalytic theory in general, literary critics have often failed to perceive that for the study of literature there may be much of value in the theory, if not in the jargon, which they feel has been too glibly applied to the personality of the artist. It is the writer's belief that, while psychoanalysis has indeed contributed much, and can contribute still more, to the understanding of individual artists as personalities, the most fruitful employment of Freudian theory by the student of literature lies in the interpretation of literature itself.

As any professional psychologist will observe, my use of the term "psychological" is literary and is not limited either by clinic or philosophy, and although indebted much to Freud and Jung I have accumulated a number of what seem to me relevant ideas from other sources. Among others, the works of Sir James G. Frazier, Havelock Ellis, and B. Malinowski have provided suggestions which seem to me no less stimulat-

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ing to the re-interpretation of literature because they have seldom been utilized. My reading of oriental literature and my perhaps inexpert ventures in comparative religion and folklore have contributed each in its own way. What has evolved gradually over the years as an answer to mysteries which no gloss explained and which the critic either ignored or patently misinterpreted, did not begin as a theory of criticism, and I have not let it become one except as theory seemed unavoidable. That it does not answer all questions will be obvious, but if it answers to satisfaction some questions hitherto unanswered and even unasked by critics of these several most misinterpreted and misunderstood masterpieces in the English language, I shall have ventured farther than was intended when the studies began as simple quests for meaning where little or none seemed to have been found by those whom I sought for guides.

I must admit, however, that these studies by no means mark the limits of the quest. The literature of Greece and Rome is full of passages and whole works that are little more than lacunae unless read with an awareness of the large scope of sex and an understanding of the symbolical working of the soul. Dante and Chaucer reach out into regions as yet unexplored by psychological criticism. Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a phantasy in depth of insight never yet explored in print, which may some day be recognized not only as the subtlest of all farces, but as being, in its own way, as profound as *Hamlet*. Even the "palpable-gross" symbolism of the Pyramus and Thisbe play-within-a-play tells a deeper story for mortals than Duke Theseus has led most of Shakespeare's readers to divine, and the tragedy of Oberon, King of the Fairies, has not yet been recognized, much less explicated, even so well as Coleridge explicated the tragedy of Prince

Hamlet more than a century ago. When Edwin Arlington Robinson in "Ben Jonson Entertains a Man from Stratford" has Jonson remark with wonder that Shakespeare alone would "put an ass's head in Fairyland" he truly sets forth the impercipience of Shakespeare critics who have not understood the preternatural realm of fairy half so well as Coleridge and Shakespeare did without benefit of Freud or Jung.

## II

FOR THE READER of this volume who has little or no acquaintance with nonrational psychology, its theory of sex and symbolism, perhaps a few general explanations should be given before he is asked to read what follows. Although the complexities of the psyche as understood by Freud are infinite, the theory which explains them is relatively simple. That is why Freud's theory has in general advanced the understanding of psychological phenomena in no less degree than the theory of evolution advanced the understanding of biological phenomena. The best scientific theory, or literary theory for that matter, is the simplest statement which can be found to give relatedness to observations.

Theories of the psyche prior to Freud failed to take into account the nonrational, except in terms of the supernatural, of madness or inspiration, demonism or divine afflatus, and psychology consisted of the philosophy of reason, through sense perception and the logical faculty of creating ideas out of other ideas. The scientific rationalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had attempted to throw away completely the witchcraft and theology, hagiography and mythology of the past, which at least had the virtue of recognizing a kind of reality in the very phenomena which rationalism ignored or believed it could dispel as "nonsense."

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To Freud, however, the study of sick minds presented a problem that could not be dispelled. The functioning of the sick mind as studied in clinical cases showed that something both less and more than reason controlled the psyche. And in all candor, Freud recognized that even the mind which passed for sane was only on its topmost level and for but little time, proportionately speaking, either conscious or rational. This was no new discovery, of course, but its significance was—that basic human motivations are *normally* something else than rational, but more than physical, though not supernatural. Certainly poets had known that love, hate, and fear were the powers that moved men and women, but the many words used in any language to name different aspects of emotion had tended to obscure the fact that fundamentally a single and simple force motivated all humanity, assuming protean forms. This life-force Freud chose to give one name, which in English is most nearly represented by the word *sex*. Like all words, *sex* has tended to have more than one meaning, and to be bad or good in particular, as it is associated with pleasure or pain, right or wrong.

This duality of man's attitude toward sex, a recurring theme in all experience, Freud observed and formulated in terms of a theory of love-hate, pleasure-pain, beauty-ugliness, which recognizes that the duality of experience stems from what he conceived as the life-death urge of the psyche. He further noted that dual aspects of sex, ever present in the dual experience of unconscious and conscious mind, are basically sex and secondarily masculine and feminine, but that biological criteria are not adequate for defining the psychological phenomena of masculine and feminine.

His unique concept, repression, grew out of his study of phenomena which seemed to be nonsense from a reasonable

point of view—for example, the unconscious wish on the part of a daughter to displace her mother in her father's affections, or the unconscious wish on the part of a son to love his mother and displace his father. From the beginning of recorded history such wishes have been restrained by the most powerful religious and social taboos, and as a result have come to be regarded as "unnatural." Freud found that such wishes are more or less characteristic of the normal emotional development of the infant and child, but also that in adults the wish sometimes persisted abnormally in what he termed a "fixation." In dreams particularly, Freud found ample evidence that such wishes persisted, and he found no little evidence in the conscious waking conduct of his patients, when this conduct was analyzed in terms of repression. Hence he conceived that natural urges, when identified as "wrong," may be repressed but not obliterated, inasmuch as they remain in the unconscious even when no longer recognized in the conscious mind. In the unconscious, these urges take on symbolic garb, regarded as nonsense by the waking mind which does not recognize their significance.

Freud's studies of phenomena of repression led to a definition of the psyche in terms of a duality which he termed the *ego* and *id*, or the I and the It, if English pronouns are preferred. The I is the predominantly conscious rational aspect of the psyche which thinks logically (sometimes at least) and guides (or should) the activity of human life. The It is the predominantly unconscious (sometimes termed "subconscious") nonrational aspect of the psyche which blindly quests for gratification. Pleasure is its goal, as understanding is the goal of the conscious I. Life is the nemesis of the It as death is the nemesis of the I. This duality of the psyche accounts for what happens when the conscious I says "no" to a

particular pleasure for reasons of moral or social expediency—the desire not permitted in consciousness is turned to a different object, or to an ideal, or is repressed by being willed out of consciousness to a tortured existence in the unconscious.

If the desire is turned to an ideal, what is termed “sublimation” takes place. A private, inner image is created by the psyche, which is in some respects far more satisfactory as a subject of desire and worship than any object of the external world can be. Through sublimation, as defined by Freud, art and religion, science and philosophy, have been developed by man, as aesthetic or theoretic escapes from or solutions for life, in symbolic patterns rather than in objective physical activity.

If the desire is turned to a “real” object a transference takes place which in the conscious activity may be relatively more or less satisfactory, depending upon the individual. Although no individual is without an admixture of both objectivity and subjectivity, the terms “extrovert” and “introvert” have been widely used to designate the two extremes of reaction to experience.

Although Freud’s dual definition described the psyche fairly well, it did not account for the phenomena of moral judgment. On what basis does the I say “yes” or “no” to the It? On the basis of pain and pleasure, primarily learned through experience but fixed in terms of a code and justified by something “higher” or “beyond” even the I, a sort of super-I (“superego” is the term) which is not unlike the familiar Christian “conscience,” or Socrates’ “god within,” but which is in all human experience conceived as existing not only within but somehow outside of self. Psychologically considered, the superego is a projection of the ego to an absolute and infallible power, perfect reason and all-consciousness, which may be and has

been by some writers recognized as the idea of deity, conceived particularly in Western theoretical religions as the all-knowing creator, fundamentally masculine (no doubt, as anthropologists suggest, because it characterizes and supports a patriarchal culture) and capable of creating rational form out of irrational void.

This is the theoretic deity which students of comparative religion tell us is characteristically Western as distinguished from the aesthetic deity (fundamentally feminine and concerned with the life-force) which antedates the oldest known Western mythology and which is predominantly Oriental. That Freud's theory of the psyche stems from the Hebraic-Hellenic rather than the Oriental tradition is worth noting, even though orthodox religion rejects the recognizable kinship as illegitimate. However, both Freud and Jung, as well as later theorists, have undertaken to emphasize the desirability of a fuller recognition of the importance of the aesthetic component along with the theoretic component in Western culture, and although Freud has been misrepresented as advocating surrender to the It he never ceased reiterating that only the I can guide, as only the It can empower, human personality or human civilization to an integrated whole.

As Freud found the psyche to be dual in nature, so he found all symbols in which the psyche interpreted experience. No image has one meaning alone. Always the image carries with it an obverse, and in the unconscious as revealed in dreams, as well as in the phenomena of insanity, the opposite is often the clue to the posit. Not only duality but also fusion is observed in symbols—that is, two apparently unrelated things are put together to form one image with peculiar significance. The unriddling of fused images, both in dream work and in aesthetic projections such as myth, poetry,

ritual, and indeed all forms of art, is one of Freud's signal achievements, and one which the student of literature can ill afford to neglect.

Basically considered, this duality or fusion appears in dreams with its own logic. Where the conscious mind would express the idea of A *and* B by use of the conjunction, the unconscious merely makes them one image. Thus a child, whose father on the same day both took him to a circus and punished him severely for a childish misdemeanor, dreams that night of riding on the back of a lion while rigid with fear that the beast will turn and rend him. Where the conscious mind would link two things causally (*because* A is desirable, B is desirable) the unconscious makes B stand for A: thus a young man courting a pretty girl dreams of making love to her mother (and wonders what the hell!). Where the conscious mind would reason that one could have A *or* B, not both, the unconscious would make A and B fit the same context: thus a business man who is afraid to go on his vacation because he may miss a particularly big deal, dreams that he discovers gold while fishing his favorite stream.

In poetry which utilizes symbols psychologically rather than allegorically, such patterns are often the only evident "meaning" inherent in the symbol. But since literary tradition and religious usage have tended so to fix certain relationships, we find recurrent myth taking the same significance across many centuries. For example, why is the carp sacred in Japanese myth and the cow in Hindu myth? Only the fixing of a once private association of ideas in a permanent folk-image representing the source of sustenance to be worshipped as the life-giver can explain this parallel meaning in such diverse symbols. Surely both fish and cow can symbolize, psychologically, quite otherwise, and yet the recognized meaning in each case



is accepted by Japanese or Hindu as *the* meaning. Differences in cultures, as Ruth Benedict has suggested in *Patterns of Culture*, may be boiled down ultimately to little more than veneration for particularly opposite interpretations of the same experiences and symbols of life.

Often the traditionally accepted interpretation of a symbol may be the wrong rather than the right clue to meaning in allegory. Shelley's allegories afford abundant pitfalls for the unwary in this respect. But it should be noted that there is a difference between symbolism, psychologically considered, and allegory. Symbolism is not necessarily controlled by rational logic as allegory is. In allegory, and in all conscious metaphor for that matter, reason designates a conscious analogy which is more or less precise and leads to a preconceived end. Symbolism, however, is not consciously fixed, but shifting and imprecise, and often seems to have no meaning. Psychologically a meaning can be found in any symbolism if one will but invest it, and the theories of nonrational psychology afford startling revelations for the meaningless as well as more pregnant meanings for the meaningful.

I am aware that this summary of Freudian theory is all too brief to afford the reader more than a few minimum essentials for reading what follows. More is desirable and can be found in several books by Freud, Jung, and others, if the reader is interested.

### III

BEFORE EMBARKING on the major investigations presented in the following essays, let us consider a single brief example which may serve as an illustration of what is to be done. It is a poem by William Blake, startling in imagery and pregnant with meaning, yet sometimes meaningless to those who read as they run.

## The Tiger

*Tiger! Tiger! burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?*

*In what distant deeps or skies  
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?  
On what wings dare he aspire?  
What the hand dare seize the fire?*

*And what shoulder, and what art,  
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?  
And when thy heart began to beat,  
What dread hand? and what dread feet?*

*What the hammer? what the chain?  
In what furnace was thy brain?  
What the anvil? what dread grasp  
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?*

*When the stars threw down their spears,  
And water'd heaven with their tears,  
Did he smile their work to see?  
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?*

*Tiger! Tiger! burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye  
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?*

Now, those readers who have studied this poem in academic environment know that a certain meaning has been attached to it. I merely ask that they withhold that meaning for the moment and examine the poem afresh. For any who have not

received this traditional interpretation through instruction, no impediment need be set aside.

Consider the image presented in the first stanza, and the question asked. What is the simplest communication made by the image? Terror in the beholder, power to harm in the image. Beyond this there is communication of something not wholly of this world. Tigers do not burn, though the color of the tiger may suggest fire; jungle forests may be so dark as to suggest night, but could not be with strict rational logic called "forests of the night." What we have in the image is of the mind surely, but not of the rational conscious mind wholly. It is something of a dream image, conveying terror before a symbol of power to harm, and, like all dream images, made of the stuff known to the conscious mind but given in a fusion of non-sequiturs (fire-tiger-forest-night) which have nevertheless linking associations and analogies: tigers roam the forests, and darkness and fire (light) are archetypal opposites in any language or experience. The communication of fear before power to harm lies in what the poet and reader see as a mental image.

Continuing with the question asked in the first stanza, we find a query which supposes that the image has been created, "framed" by a hand, instructed by an eye, even as a painter paints a picture, and that the creator is perhaps immortal (not of this world) and the image awe-inspiring in symmetry (perfection). But the query is not a statement, please note. As a question it asks rather than answers "Whence came this image?" We shall keep this in mind to apply to the other questions asked in following stanzas, for the poet is not necessarily positing anything beyond the images.

The questions which continue in the rest of the poem reiterate and elaborate the question of the first stanza, the elabo-

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ration suggesting the possibility of an other-worldly or non-natural creator. Not until the next-to-last stanza, however, is there any specific, undebatable reference to deity. There, in an allusion to the unsuccessful revolt of the angels which provides *Paradise Lost* with its antecedent action, the question is put: Did God smile at the victorious conclusion of the war in heaven and then create something more terrible than Satan's pride? The allusion to the lamb provides an obvious contrast with the tiger, but also introduces a possible clue to allegory, since the lamb is the traditional symbol of peace and Christ-like spirit. Biblical reference to the lion and the lamb as symbols of extremes in nature comes to mind at once, and the reader may leap to an interpretation of the tiger as the Antichrist, except that such an interpretation would be anticlimactic when the poet employs "dare" to replace "could" in repeating the first stanza as the poem's conclusion. There would be little daring involved for a supreme God who has smiled at the victorious conclusion of one struggle if he created nothing more terrible than the satanic power he had already vanquished. Surely the tiger does not represent Satan, but something more terrible, whether or not created by God. But perhaps the question is not meant by the poet to imply an affirmative answer, and we may do well to reconsider.

Upon reflection, the tiger may not represent the supernatural at all, but something within the soul of man. Blake's poetry testifies abundantly to the fact that he was most appalled by the infinite extremes of the human psyche, love-hate, trust-fear. Psychologically this symbolism has little that can be objected to. It provides a satisfactory symbolic climax in the poem's conclusion to match the dramatic climax of the rhetorical questions reached in the reference to deity in the next-to-last stanza, and, what is more significant, provides a

powerful meaning which turns on the new word "dare" which replaces the "could" used in the first stanza. The question at last is: Would an immortal deity dare create on earth something more fearful than the power he had thrown out of heaven? The question is left to the reader for answer.

This seems to me the most satisfactory reading of the poem. The traditional interpretation that the tiger symbolizes the "Wrath of God" does not make sense to me now and did not when I first read the poem years ago, although I had then no alternative. It fails to make sense, not because the tiger is inapropos as a symbol of divine wrath, but because the dramatic framework includes deity as a possible creator of the tiger, not as the tiger itself. The poet's inclusive question is: What creator can be conceived capable of perpetrating man's scope for fear and hate?

The psychological implications of the poem are satisfying whether one answers the poet's question with God as creator, or with life-force as creator. From a Freudian point of view, the psyche encompasses the extremes symbolized in tiger and lamb no less than does the mythology which Blake created in his poetry. The orthodox Christian mythology does not encompass both extremes in deity, but does in man. The relegation of Satan to a secondary power, permitted to pursue evil by an absolute God who is thus responsible for the continuation of what He could at any moment terminate, is an anomaly which theology has rationalized but has never made wholly acceptable to human intelligence.

Hence Blake's question in this poem, like his questions in other poems, was meant in the eighteenth century to challenge orthodox theology and at the same time the too simply rational deism which was in intellectual favor at the time. Both deism and orthodox Christianity failed Blake, apparently, because

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they divorced the dual aspects of the soul on a supernatural plane, and deism failed even further by its impossible attempt to dismiss the darker aspect from this world by insisting that since a reasonable deity created it, "Whatever is, is right." Blake understood in his fashion, no less than Freud, the duality ruling the realm of the psyche.

With this introductory investigation of a relatively simple but powerful piece of symbolism, we may embark on a longer and more fascinating quest for the meaning of one of the most intriguing poems in any language.

# Coleridge's *Christabel*

## I

IT HAS always seemed to me that Samuel Taylor Coleridge intended *Christabel* to be a medieval romance of innocent love hedged about by dark workings of the imagination and confused by the inscrutable power of sexual necessity which motivates not only the main action of the plot but also the devious, perverse counteraction and the sinister subactions in so far as they can be determined from the two parts of the poem which he actually completed. It has also seemed to me that the machinery of folklore, superstition, vampirism, and witchcraft, which revolves around the person of Geraldine, though entirely in keeping with the medieval background of the poem, is intended by Coleridge to be understood by mature readers as the romantic veil which "covers but not hides" the realistic psycho-emotional theme.

Since this point of view is related to a theory or interpretation of folk story and fairy tale, perhaps that theory should be stated. Medieval romance and balladry are much preoccupied with the mystery of human emotion in general, but particularly they are riddled with the mystery of sex as a powerful and inscrutable force which drives men and women into irrational emotional situations and strange actions almost beyond human comprehension. In attempting to deal with this phenomenon of sexual necessity, the folk utilized in song and story the preternatural realm of witchcraft and fairylore to ac-

count for the omnipresent mystery. It is no accident that the modern meanings of *enchancing*, *charming*, *bewitching*, etc. have usually an association (in describing women at least) with sexual attractiveness, for such association is plainly inherent in the words down through the years.

That Coleridge recognized the sexual significance of such words is obvious from the fact that he admitted being "bewitched" in the sexual sense as early as 1794, but more to the point in view of this study is the penetrating comment which he made in a letter to Washington Allston in 1815 that "The malignant witchcraft of evil passions reads good men's prayers backwards!" Furthermore, the notorious enchantresses and witches of ancient and medieval legend were almost invariably young and beautiful, though they were often represented as merely appearing so, while in their essential nature they were wrinkled hags, hideous monsters, or half-beast-half-human creatures. So also, the vampires of Balkan superstition have a quasi-sexual motivation in that they were constrained to attack those whom they had loved most while living, and the Lamia myth is hardly veiled in its sexual allusion.

This theme of sexual enchantment was certainly recognized by Coleridge, as it was by Keats (*Lamia* and *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*), for he used it specifically in *The Three Graves* and *The Ballad of the Dark Ladié*, and incidentally in the poem *Love*, and alluded to it in the "woman wailing for her demon lover" in *Kubla Khan*—all of which poems were begun in 1797-1798, contemporaneously with *Christabel*. In his prefatory note to *The Three Graves* Coleridge specified that his study of accounts of Oby witchcraft as practiced in the West Indies was responsible for the idea of the poem, and indicated that the sinister power of passion was adopted in lieu of witchcraft with "the design of showing that instances



of this kind are not peculiar to savage or barbarous tribes, and of illustrating the mode in which the mind is affected in these cases, and the progress and symptoms of the morbid action on the fancy from the beginning."

These mysterious creatures of the folk imagination are sometimes, but not always, represented in story as supernatural beings. Quite often, however, the representation is that they are themselves bewitched, and derive their traits and powers from a previous enchantment laid on them by a similar creature. In medieval legend, even when a supernatural origin of the enchantment is observed, it is fairly obvious that no concept of deity is involved. The source is not "above" nature as such, but "beyond" or "underlying" nature. Perhaps the coming of Christianity to the pagan world accounts for this apparent dichotomy in the medieval mythology, which separated the powers "above" from those "below" the merely earthly—the old pagan mythology sometimes holding on, as for example in the Tannhäuser legend, as an interpretation of sexual necessity, madness, hysteria, and psychological and physiological seizures in general. Chaucer's Wife of Bath opined sardonically that "limitours and othere holy freres" were responsible for the disappearance of fairies—

*For ther as wont to walken was an elf,  
Ther walketh now the limitour himself*

*Wommen may go saufly up and down,  
In every bush, or under every tree.  
Ther is noon other incubus but he,  
And he ne wol doon hem but dishonour.*

At any rate, the treatment of the witch-woman, the mermaid, the fay, the lamia, and the vampire in folk story generally observes something other than a strictly supernatural

origin for their powers. It is my belief that Coleridge had in mind not only this body of folklore and legend, with its underlying sexual mystery and suggestion, but also this distinction of the "preternatural" source of the mystery, when he specified in a letter to Thomas Poole that *Christabel* was a poem of the "preternatural" as distinguished from his poem of the "supernatural," *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.

In an intensive and largely authoritative study of *Christabel*, *The Road to Tryermaine* (Chicago, 1936), Professor Arthur H. Nethercot dismisses the sexual theme with a passing nod of acquaintance but without giving it the benefit of analysis, although he recognizes that a number of critics have detected such a theme from the date of the poem's publication. Detection of this theme was the occasion for contemporary criticism of the poem on grounds of obscenity, and furnished, as Professor Nethercot shows, the motivation of several parodies and "continuations." It is interesting that Coleridge took notice of the implication of obscenity in a curious letter to William Blackwood, tacitly admitting the grounds for satire on the sexual theme of *Christabel*, so long as no questions involving personal turpitude were raised; and again in a letter to Robert Southey, he merely shrugged off a vicious anonymous criticism in the *Edinburgh Review* which he attributed to William Hazlitt. In neither instance did Coleridge deny the sexual theme, though he was obviously desirous of avoiding personal calumny brought on by recognition of it. We need not be concerned here with the question of obscenity. No doubt those who find the suggestion of sexual mystery in *Christabel* to be obscene would also condemn on the same grounds a large portion of the myth, folklore, balladry, and legend which furnished the background of Coleridge's romance. What we are concerned with is the question: Does

what Professor Nethercot calls "the sexual interpretation" of *Christabel* furnish a tenable—perhaps the most tenable—and coherent reading of the poem from an aesthetic point of view?

The primary elements of plot structure developed in the two parts of the poem which Coleridge completed indicate such a theme clearly. These elements show that *Christabel* is the principal character (if the title does not!); that the main action is concerned as a whole with her passionate though thwarted love for her absent "betrothed knight"; that the complicating action is the preternatural psycho-emotional influence of Geraldine, who entrances Christabel, body and soul, and enchants Christabel's father as a necessary step in effecting the continuation of Christabel's entrancement; and that the counteraction on a supernatural plane, which presents the spirit of Christabel's mother hovering over the distressed girl and appearing to her in two visions in order to thwart the malign influence of Geraldine, is insufficient alone to free Christabel from the preternatural entrancement.

The elements of plot which are clearly forecast for later development in the unfinished remainder of the poem show that Christabel is to be freed from the entrancement—

*A star hath set, a star hath risen,  
O Geraldine! since arms of thine  
Have been the lovely lady's prison—*

and that there is to be a wedding, as prophesied by Christabel's mother on her death bed—

*I have heard the grey-haired friar tell  
How on her death-bed she did say,  
That she should hear the castle-bell  
Strike twelve upon my wedding-day.*

That Coleridge had the plot outlined fully in mind and had estimated the approximate length of the poem, is indicated by

his comment in 1800 that it had "swelled into a poem of 1400 lines" and again in 1815 that it "will be 5 Books."

## II

IF SEXUAL NECESSITY and the emotional complex, inscrutable and dark in their mystery, illusionment, and power to "transform" mortals, underlie many of the folk tales and literary adaptations which furnish the prototypes of Geraldine and Christabel, then Coleridge's use of them in the several poems mentioned heretofore would seem to indicate clearly enough his perception of the theme and his willingness to use it with the customary man and woman sexual relationship. In *Christabel*, however, he ventured into dangerous though fascinating territory by making Geraldine apparently a woman (with a hint of the androgynous) and thus giving the theme an added "turn of the screw," which would effect a situation even more capable of wringing the last drop of mystery, suggestion, and horror from an old device. In this he anticipated Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*, which likewise utilizes the theme of sexual necessity and perversion for developing a psychologically realistic ghost story of two children "haunted" by the evil spirits of two deceased servants who had perverted their innocence through sexual "enchantment."

Let us examine the situation with which Coleridge begins, follow the actions of Christabel and Geraldine, and seek for the meaning of certain passages. Christabel is presented as a young and beautiful girl deeply in love and pining for her absent betrothed. She has had disturbing and vivid dreams which arouse her fears for his safety. For a reason not specifically stated, though there is the obvious hint of pagan superstition, she goes into the forest at midnight to pray for him

beneath "the huge oak tree" with its "rarest mistletoe." One presumes that Coleridge deliberately uses the definite article in designating *the* tree, in order to suggest specific association of the tree and its preternaturally significant mistletoe with Christabel's immediate purpose of praying for "her lover that's far away." Anyone familiar with folklore is aware of the significance of the oak with its mistletoe; and that the "midnight wood" is the appropriate place for such rites, as well as for making the acquaintance of preternatural creatures, is amply recorded in both ancient myth and medieval legend.

Into this situation appears the beautiful but sinister Geraldine. She claims to have been kidnapped by "five warriors" who after a furious ride covering at least part of two days and an intervening night released her "underneath this oak." In a voice "faint and sweet" she asks Christabel's pity on her "sore distress," with the specific request that Christabel "stretch forth" her hand "and help a wretched maid to flee." The reader is made aware of a peculiar faintness in Geraldine, which at first perhaps suggests that she is suffering from exceedingly great fatigue, but which with later developments may seem to have been a first step toward fulfilling her desire for physical contact with Christabel, on which Coleridge insists with good authority. Geraldine is merely beginning to effect the familiarity of touch which culminates in her taking Christabel in her arms in bed and working "a spell" over her. This action Coleridge later apostrophizes in the "Conclusion to Part I" with these lines:

*O Geraldine! one hour was thine—  
Thou'st had thy will! . . .*

Accompanying these advances are various mysterious manifestations which suggest that all is not well with Geraldine.

Some of these seem little more than mysterious portents of evil based on popular superstitions: namely, the moaning of the mastiff bitch, the animal-like shining of Geraldine's eyes in the dark, and the flaring of the brand in the dying fire as she passes. But in her strange weakness of body at the threshold, one perceives the suggestion that Geraldine cannot gain her ends without the assistance of the innocent Christabel herself. The old belief that an evil and (or) preternatural spirit could not enter a dwelling which had been properly blessed by Christian rites except when brought in through mortal aid has an obvious psychological, if not a moral, implication in the story. Likewise, Geraldine's apparent inability to pray to the Virgin and her strange faintness when she observes the carved angel in the bedchamber suggest the essential weakness of evil and preternatural creatures in the presence of prayer or a symbol of divine power, which is again authoritative use of medieval belief. These suggestions reach their climax in the dire struggle between Geraldine and the hovering spirit of Christabel's mother, in which Geraldine temporarily gains possession of the girl.

Thus far the suggestions have been fairly vague, but no doubt has been left that Christabel, all innocently but deliberately, has brought into her bedchamber, not merely a beautiful woman, but a preternatural creature with strange powers and stranger characteristics, and that the creature's designs are in conflict with all that is good and holy. But then, amazingly, Geraldine speaks the following lines:

*'All they who live in the upper sky,  
Do love you, holy Christabell  
And you love them, and for their sake  
And for the good which me befel,  
Even I in my degree will try,  
Fair maiden, to requite you well.*

*But now unrobe yourself; for I  
Must pray, ere yet in bed I lie.'*

These lines do not necessarily imply that Geraldine is hypocritically pretending piety and an association of holy purposes with her designs, though they may be so interpreted. Rather, they simply state Geraldine's recognition of Christabel's essential goodness and "difference" in nature, her gratefulness for the good fortune of being befriended by Christabel, and her willingness to try to requite the girl well in so far as her preternatural compunction permits; and her prayer is a genuine plea for success in what she is constrained to do, though it is not necessarily addressed to those "who live in the upper sky." Geraldine's apparent hope is that through Christabel she will derive some influence which will effect a "transformation" in her own nature, which, as one observes in the next passage in the poem, would be highly desirable. The ancient, and to some extent modern, superstitions concerning the magic potency of sexual contact with youth and beauty in rejuvenating the elderly, curing illness, and remedying all sorts of deficiencies, are so well known that it seems hardly necessary to labor over the authority in folklore for Geraldine's anticipation.

At this point it becomes clear why Coleridge stated, as recorded by Thomas Allsop, that while writing *Christabel* he had certain lines of Crashaw's *Hymn to Saint Teresa* in mind, "if, indeed, by some subtle process of the mind they did not suggest the first thought of the whole poem." The gist of the passage in Crashaw's poem which Allsop cites is that the devout Teresa is bent on bringing "Christ's name" to the Moors in order to effect her own martyrdom in emulation of Christ:

*Since 'Tis not to be had at home,  
She'll travail to a martyrdom.*

As Teresa would go to the Moors, Christabel goes into the forest—the traditional domain of preternatural creatures and pagan gods—and as Teresa would become a martyr for her love of Christ, Christabel becomes a quasi-martyr for love of her knight “that’s far away.” As Teresa would offer herself to the Moors to die for her love, so Christabel offers herself to the preternatural powers, but not necessarily to die for her love—after all, Coleridge was not writing a saint’s legend, but a romance, and complete martyrdom for the “lovely lady” would have been both illogical and unnecessary.

Linked with this idea of martyrdom is the possibility of Geraldine’s deriving some “good” from Christabel by means of a “transformation” in her nature. The parallel with Teresa is again obvious: as the Moors might derive a spiritual “transformation” or salvation from Teresa, so Geraldine might derive a kind of salvation from Christabel. But in either case, this eventuality is of less importance than the martyrdom itself. What both Teresa and Christabel are desirous of achieving is a trial or test of love, through adoration of the loved one, and where Teresa’s is a purely spiritual love, Christabel’s is a sexual (albeit “romantic”) love for her knight. The question concerning the effect of Christabel’s mission on the preternatural creatures of the wood—to wit, Geraldine—we cannot know certainly, for Coleridge did not complete what he had begun; but if he had followed Crashaw’s “first thought,” we may be sure that he would not have been concerned with Geraldine except as an agent for effecting the trial of Christabel’s love. Either he would present Christabel’s innocence and beauty destroyed for love (a pointless martyrdom in a romance), or he would present a limited martyrdom with a final rescue, which would be entirely in keeping with the tradi-



tional pattern of folk story and with psychological reality.

There is the didactic interpretation of this possibility which both Derwent Coleridge and Dr. James Gillman put forth: namely, that the vicarious suffering of Christabel is for the redemption of her lover, who is in some unspecified manner sinful and in need of grace, rather than for the redemption of Geraldine. I find nothing in the poem to substantiate the idea. Furthermore, this view violates the parallel with Teresa's love of Christ and wish for martyrdom for his sake. Nethercot, following Derwent Coleridge, misinterprets Crashaw's poem, as well as *Christabel*, for Crashaw's "first thought" is not that Teresa will atone for the sins of the pagan Moors (and certainly not for the sins of her Christ!), but that she will because of her love of Christ emulate his suffering and death. The psychology of martyrdom, which was clear to Crashaw, was apparently not understood by Derwent Coleridge. Crashaw leaves no doubt that the main motive is martyrdom for Christ's sake, an immolation of pure love, with the salvation of the Moors a merely secondary consideration.

It is, of course, possible that Coleridge may have intended to bring about Geraldine's "transformation" from an evil to a good being, and to develop a moral theme of goodness suffering for the salvation of the wicked. His practice in other poems, however, would seem to indicate that he would merely utilize the moral theme in developing the aesthetic pattern of the story, as he did, for example, in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. It is true that the legend of Lamia as given by Burton in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* recognizes the possibility of an evil ophidian creature being transformed through love. Keats' *Lamia* fully develops the idea that Lamia may not be an essentially evil being bent on seducing the youth Lycius,

but may be herself entranced and placed under an evil compunction which may be removed by the unquestioning and innocent love of the young man.

This theme of true love overcoming evil enchantment (which is merely a polite version of the more vulgar superstitions concerning the potency of sexual contact for producing physical miracles) is common in numerous folk tales and ballads such as *Beauty and the Beast* and *Kemp Owyne*, but though it would work well enough in effecting the rescue of Christabel from Geraldine's enchantment, it could not well apply to the possible rescue of Geraldine from a hypothetical previous enchantment laid on her by another creature; for the folk-tale tradition, as well as medieval theology and morality, would have been against it. The fundamental distinction between the human and the preternatural is usually absolute in folk story, and as such is generally recognized in literary adaptations, whether the poet be Shakespeare (*The Tempest* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Matthew Arnold (*The Forsaken Merman*), or Coleridge. Likewise, the fundamental distinction between the essentially good and the essentially evil is absolute in orthodox theology and morality. Though appearances may vary to the extent of a "good" being seeming to be "evil" or an "evil" being seeming to be "good," no essentially evil being can change essence and become good, except, of course, through divine election.

If Geraldine is essentially both a preternatural creature and an evil being, her nature is unalterably fixed in both characters, however much she may strive through her magic of enchantment to transform her essence. This theme is reluctantly followed by Keats (after Burton) when he makes the illusion of Lamia's goodness and beauty vanish as her essential nature is exposed by the rationalism of the philosopher Ap-

polonius. Only in the instance of an essentially good being who is merely suffering an evil enchantment—again recall *Kemp Owyne* or *Beauty and the Beast*—may the power of innocent and true love be of any efficacy. Chaucer's *The Tale of the Wyf of Bath* is an exception to the usual treatment. Significantly, however, the Wife of Bath is garbling a folk tale, as well as orthodox morality, in order to spin a love parable to her own liking. According to her version, not true love, but submission, works the miracle of transformation, and the wrinkled hag becomes "as fair to sene/ As any lady" regardless of preternatural or moral antecedents.

To continue with our story, following Geraldine's prayer, pretended or actual, Christabel with thoughts of "weal and woe" watches the lady disrobe, and observes the deformity of "her bosom and half her side." The passage which follows requires no psychiatrist to reveal its psychological implications. The psycho-emotional impasse of "Desire with loathing strangely mixed" is portrayed with specific realism. Aware of her own "sorrow and shame," fearing repulse and failure, agonizing alternately between abasement and pride, but constrained by preternatural necessity, Geraldine lies down in appropriately medieval nudity and takes the equally naked Christabel in her arms to work the "enchantment":

*Ah! what a stricken look was hers!  
 Deep from within she seems half-way  
 To lift some weight with sick assay,  
 And eyes the maid and seeks delay;  
 Then suddenly, as one defied,  
 Collects herself in scorn and pride,  
 And lay down by the Maiden's side!—  
 And in her arms the maid she took,  
 Ah wel-a-day!*

*And with low voice and doleful look  
 These words did say:  
 'In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell,  
 Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabell  
 Thou knowest to-night, and wilt know to-morrow,  
 This mark of my shame, this seal of my sorrow;  
     But vainly thou warrest,  
     For this is alone in  
     Thy power to declare,  
     That in the dim forest  
     Thou heard'st a low moaning,  
 And found'st a bright lady, surpassingly fair;  
 And didst bring her home with thee in love and in charity,  
 To shield her and shelter her from the damp air.'*

The trance into which Christabel then passes in Geraldine's embrace, and in which she continues through THE CONCLUSION TO PART I, is very specifically connected with the prayer which she had said under the oak, when she was completely "resigned to bliss or bale." Clearly, Christabel did not go to the oak unaware of the risk she ran, and Coleridge emphasizes the connection as well as the contrast between the prayer scene and the trance scene. The trance is vividly and realistically described in the following lines:

*With open eyes (ah woe is me!)  
 Asleep, and dreaming fearfully,  
 Fearfully dreaming, yet, I wis,  
 Dreaming that alone, which is—  
 O sorrow and shame! Can this be she,  
 The lady, who knelt at the old oak tree?*

The essence of these vividly suggestive lines seems to be but poorly understood either as childish fear or merely magic spell cast by a merely mythical vampire. Like the preceding passage describing Geraldine's desire, it is too realistic psychologically,

and Coleridge's apostrophe to shame and sorrow and the broken reference to the nature of Christabel's dream are too specifically vague, under the circumstances described, for one to avoid an erotic implication. What else, may one ask, could Coleridge have expected his reader to infer? Surely not Professor Nethercot's merely sanguinary vampire! And yet the preliminary emphasis on physical contact and the culminating embrace make equally difficult one's acceptance of any purely psychic variety of vampirism. If Coleridge had meant this passage to suggest either, he need certainly have been at no pains to emphasize the "sorrow and shame" of the circumstance, or to use such a phrase as "Thou'st had thy will," or to have described Christabel's "after-rest" as she

*Gathers herself from out her trance;  
Her limbs relax, her countenance  
Grows sad and soft; the smooth thin lids  
Close o'er her eyes; and tears she sheds—  
Large tears that leave the lashes bright!  
And oft the while she seems to smile  
As infants at a sudden light!*

Even if one presumes that Coleridge might have composed such a passage as THE CONCLUSION TO PART I without awareness of any sexual suggestion in it, one cannot well imagine a mind so keenly receptive to suggestive language perusing the phraseology unaware of the concupiscence of human imagination—in which case he would necessarily have revised his language unless content that the suggestion remain. None of his revisions indicate that he desired to avoid the suggestion at any point in the poem, though one of them, to be noticed presently, did remove an unsavory detail from a particular image.

In spite of the sorrow and shame to Christabel, what has happened to Geraldine?

*And lo! the worker of these harms,  
That holds the maiden in her arms,  
Seems to slumber still and mild,  
As a mother with her child.*

And on the following morning, as she first appears to Christabel, Geraldine is even more beautiful than on the night before, but in a specific detail which Coleridge almost italicizes, as it were, her figure has become more distinctly feminine. Her breasts seem to swell and

*. . . her girded vests  
Grew tight beneath her heaving breasts.*

Here is a physiological detail which is important because it cannot be satisfactorily accounted for except we assume that Geraldine is undergoing in body a "transformation" that symbolizes a change in her inner being. In the early manuscript version of the poem, Coleridge had described her bosom as "lean and old and foul of hue." Although he later deleted this line and substituted the vaguer but more effective "A sight to dream of, not to tell"; he failed to delete the specific reference in PART II which suggests that this physiological deficiency is being fully remedied under the transforming power of Christabel's embrace. Now, Professor Nethercot would have it that this is simply the revitalizing of a shrunken vampire who has no particular sexual significance, but it seems strange that Coleridge should have at first included a line which suggests so specifically a lack of feminine character, and then portrayed this deficiency as being remedied through Christabel's embrace, unless he expected the inference to be drawn that the transformation symbolized something essentially sexual in Geraldine's mystery. In short, it seems too difficult to suppose that Coleridge was unaware of the sexual implications of Geraldine, when one considers that it would have been the upper-

most thought in the mind of any reader cognizant of the traditionally sexual mystery of vampires, lamias, mermaids, fairies, elves, and witch-women in general.

### III

IN PART II of *Christabel* the complicating action of the plot enters a new phase. As Geraldine becomes more lovely and loses something of the physical appearance of her "sorrow and shame," Christabel begins to manifest certain ophidian characteristics under the influence of the spell. The occurrence of these traits is understood, however, merely as the outward symbolizing of the inner working of the evil entrancement, just as the similar traits in Geraldine symbolize her inner evil. Geraldine, it appears, is not merely one sort of preternatural creature but displays the characteristics of a lamia as well as those of the vampire and fairy, and Christabel is well on the way to becoming like her. As Christabel struggles against the influence of Geraldine, revolted but unable to break the spell, Geraldine proceeds to work her entrancement of Sir Leoline—a necessary step if she is to continue her entrancement of the girl without arousing his suspicion. The Baron is portrayed as emotionally quite susceptible, and again the theme is love—this time parental love—perverted and twisted into an evil manifestation by a conflicting passion. His inordinate fondness for his daughter has been brought out in PART I, with suggestions that this fondness is coupled with a not unusual though scarcely normal parental jealousy and dominance over his daughter. Christabel's obvious fear of being detected in her nocturnal adventure indicates her awareness of the Baron's emotional instability. As we see him in PART II, we can well understand Christabel's caution in PART I.

This trait of emotional instability is represented as the Baron's essential characteristic. The story of his estrangement in youth from his friend Sir Roland de Vaux of Tryermaine is introduced not merely as a device to assist Geraldine in wriggling her way into the Baron's embrace, but also as a parallel to the primary action of PART II. Evil influences had in that early episode in his life turned friendship into hate, just as an evil influence now is turning his love for Christabel into something strangely like hate, for

*. . . to be wroth with one we love  
Doth work like madness in the brain.*

Sir Leoline is further conditioned for falling under Geraldine's entrancement by reason of his laudable but nevertheless somewhat psychopathic devotion to the memory of his dead wife. His action in having the matin bell tolled each day after the manner of a funeral bell, as a warning that it "Knells us back to a world of death," is significant of emotional morbidity. So, too, is his reaction to Christabel's adjuring him in her dead mother's name to send Geraldine away. His resentment is understandable as occasioned simply by his disappointment at Christabel's seeming lack of courtesy, but the emotional conflict portrayed in the lines which follow Christabel's adjuration is understandable only in terms of the Baron's resentment of what he considers a desecration of his memory of his dead wife, and the implication that his excessive feeling for Geraldine is improper. Thus the memory of his wife brings about a psychic complication that

*. . . only swelled his rage and pain,  
And did but work confusion there.*

Of course, as Professor Nethercot slyly remarks, the Baron probably tells himself that the feelings aroused by Geraldine's



embrace are "almost paternal," and perhaps he thinks that Christabel is conducting herself like a jealous child; but the point is, as Coleridge indicates in *THE CONCLUSION TO PART II*, that the Baron's emotions are one thing and his understanding of them quite another. Here the psychology of human emotion is analyzed in one of the most penetrating passages Coleridge ever wrote. He poetically anticipates modern psychiatry in the theory of the emotional complex as he analyzes what is going on in Sir Leoline's brain. The question is: How are love and hate akin, and how is it that the pure and good emotion of love so often turns into evil manifestations? The answer in *THE CONCLUSION TO PART II* is that

*. . . pleasures flow in so thick and fast  
 Upon his heart, that he at last  
 Must needs express his love's excess  
 With words of unmeant bitterness.  
 Perhaps 'tis pretty to force together  
 Thoughts so all unlike each other;  
 To mutter and mock a broken charm,  
 To dally with wrong that does no harm.  
 Perhaps 'tis tender too and pretty  
 At each wild word to feel within  
 A sweet recoil of love and pity.  
 And what, if in a world of sin  
 (O sorrow and shame should this be true!)  
 Such giddiness of heart and brain  
 Comes seldom save from rage and pain,  
 So talks as it's most used to do.*

These lines are in a sense the key to *PART II*, interpreting psychologically the plot development of the Part as a whole. They function in this respect much as *THE CONCLUSION TO PART I* functions in its place, to comment on and interpret what has happened up to this point in the story. It is singular

that Nethercot and a number of other critics have judged these lines to have no connection with PART II. Only the failure to perceive (or refusal to accept) the implications of sexual necessity and the emotional complex which furnish the psychological pattern of the poem could permit the opinion that Coleridge simply tacked the lines on as an afterthought, perhaps because of a similarity in meter. Their contemporaneity is obvious, however, from their inclusion in a letter written in 1801, and to suppose that Coleridge could have printed them in 1816 as a part of the poem without their having been conceived as integral to his theme is to take Coleridge at much less than his worth as an artist.

We cannot doubt that the meaning of these lines is as represented here, for so Coleridge applied them to himself in a letter which he wrote to Robert Southey. Coleridge's little son Hartley was not an exceptionally healthy child, but he was bright and exceedingly beloved of his father. Coleridge expressed his sentiment in a letter dated May 6, 1801, as follows: "Dear Hartley! we are at times alarmed by the state of his health, but at present he is well. If I were to lose him, I am afraid it would exceedingly deaden my affection for any other children I may have." Following this comment he copied THE CONCLUSION TO PART II, and termed it "A very metaphysical account of fathers calling their children rogues, rascals, and little varlets, etc."

The connection between Coleridge's application of the lines to his own state of emotion concerning Hartley and his application of them to Sir Leoline's emotional complex seems obvious. In each instance excessive emotion of father for child becomes twisted into a wildly irrational manifestation. Harsh treatment and (or) brutal words come as a result of "love's excess." Coleridge doubts that he could love any other child if

he should lose Hartley. Sir Leoline is cruelly unreasonable toward Christabel because of his love for his dead wife, whose death occurred at Christabel's birth be it remembered, but further, because his perhaps unconscious identification of his loss with his love for the child has produced the emotional complex in which he both loves her dearly and treats her with harsh unreasonableness. The difference between the emotional complex which Coleridge intimates that he would be capable of experiencing in the event of Hartley's death and the emotional complex portrayed in Sir Leoline, is merely a difference in the source of frustration, the loss of a wife on the one hand and the loss of a child on the other. The resulting complex would be similar in the two men.

There is evidence abundant in Coleridge's letters that his domestic difficulties and emotional attachments aroused his speculations and what he termed "metaphysical" explanations of the strange ways of human emotion. The psychological realism of *Christabel* seems to suggest that Coleridge was using his own observation of life and his bitterly bought personal experience no less than his fantastic knowledge of occult lore in weaving the plot of the poem. This is not so say, however, that there is any direct attempt at self-portraiture, not even in the famous passage on friendship, but rather that Coleridge conceived Sir Leoline as a distinctly human personality whose emotions were keyed by his past as well as his present experiences, and were as appalling in some of their twists as were Coleridge's own.

#### IV

THERE REMAINS the question of how this plot with its psycho-emotional theme, vaguely but undoubtedly sexual, would have been resolved had Coleridge completed the poem. One can-

not presume to do more than state the bare outline of what is implied by that portion which we have. First, and most important for Christabel, the "lover that's far away" must return, for only the lover can rectify the "entrancement" of Christabel if the poem is to be psychologically resolved and if the traditional "rescue" of the folk tale is to be effected. It is worth noting that both the realistic psychological elements and the traditional elements of folklore and myth demand the lover's return for the resolvment of the complications. Secondly, either Geraldine's transformation from her own state of enchantment must be effected, provided that she is an essentially human and good being, rather than an essentially preternatural and evil being, in her primary character; or she must be made to appear as the indubitably preternatural and evil creature who must vanish when her spell is broken by the power of true love upon the lover's return. Although there is no alternative for the resolvment of Christabel's difficulty, there are these two possibilities for Geraldine's. What Coleridge would have done one can only guess on the basis of probability as shown in PART II.

In PART II Geraldine is portrayed with progressive certainty as an evil creature, as well as a preternatural creature, whatever intentions she may have held in PART I when she insisted that:

*Even I in my degree will try,  
Fair maiden, to requite you well.*

It is true that, in so far as outward appearances are concerned, Geraldine is becoming even more seductively beautiful and feminine. But no doubt is left that Christabel—

*The maid, devoid of guile and sin,  
I know not how, in fearful wise,*

*So deeply had she drunken in  
That look, those shrunken serpent eyes,  
That all her features were resigned  
To this sole image in her mind:  
And passively did imitate  
That look of dull and treacherous hate!*

If Geraldine is to be henceforth an essentially evil being who is deriving enhanced beauty and apparent goodness at the expense of the unfortunate Christabel, who in turn is acquiring the appearance of Geraldine's essential evil through the power of enchantment, then there is only one possible conclusion: Geraldine must be dispelled.

Had Coleridge finished *Christabel* in the way he had thus far gone, we may be sure that he would have effected Christabel's rescue, Sir Leoline's return to emotional stability, and the mother spirit's quiescence. The return of the "lover that's far away" is the only possible means of effecting this denouement psychologically, morally, and traditionally, and a wedding is the only logical conclusion.

Dr. James Gillman, in whose home Coleridge resided during his later years while undergoing treatment for his addiction to opium, claimed that Coleridge told him what would have been the essential plot of the remainder of the story if it had ever been finished. We need not be concerned with the dubiousness of some of the minor details of the account which Gillman gave. He may even have invented a few items in his own imagination. But in its essentials the story for which he claimed Coleridge's authority must be recognized as the logical conclusion for the plot complications developed in PART I and PART II. Gillman's story is as follows:

. . . Over the mountains, the Bard, as directed by Sir Leoline, "hastes" with his disciple; but in consequence of one of those

inundations supposed to be common to this country, the spot only where the castle once stood is discovered,—the edifice itself being washed away. He determines to return. Geraldine being acquainted with all that is passing, like the Weird Sisters in *Macbeth*, vanishes. Re-appearing, however, she waits the return of the Bard, exciting in the meantime, by her wily arts, all the anger she could arouse in the Baron's breast, as well as that jealousy of which he is described to have been susceptible. The old Bard and the youth at length arrive, and therefore she can no longer personate the character of Geraldine, the daughter of Sir Roland de Vaux, but changes her appearance to that of the accepted though absent lover of Christabel. Next ensues a courtship most distressing to Christabel, who feels—she knows not why—great disgust for her once favored knight. This coldness is very painful to the Baron, who has no more conception than herself of the supernatural transformation. She at last yields to her father's entreaties, and consents to approach the altar with this hated suitor. The real lover returning, enters at this moment, and produces the ring which she had once given him in sign of her betrothment. Thus defeated, the supernatural being Geraldine disappears. As predicted, the castle bell tolls, the mother's voice is heard, and to the exceeding great joy of the parties, the rightful marriage takes place, after which follows a reconciliation and explanation between the father and daughter.

## V

IF THE READER has followed the analysis thus far, perhaps he can bear a further statement in conclusion of these speculations. Granted that the sexual theme cannot be dismissed from the interpretation of the poem, then do we not have perhaps, in part at least, the answer to the mystery of *Christabel's* never having been completed?

On July 6, 1833, Coleridge gave the following reason for not having finished it: "The reason of my not finishing *Christabel* is not, that I don't know how to do it—for I have, as

I always had, the whole plan entire from beginning to end in my mind; but I fear I could not carry on with equal success the execution of the idea, an extremely subtle and difficult one." The "extremely subtle and difficult" problem of weaving out of the maze of emotional and moral complexity which he had conceived in PART I and PART II a solution which would be artistically, psychologically, and morally acceptable, was not so much an aesthetic or intellectual difficulty; for one cannot well doubt that he had his plot and theme clearly in mind from the beginning. Aside from his physically debility, his chief difficulty perhaps lay in executing the remainder of the plan without incurring both for the poem and for himself charges of moral turpitude. From 1801 until his death, the delicacy of his moral reputation, as well as his health, though largely brought on by his own emotional instability and his addiction to opium, was a constant source of fear and regret. No man ever feared calumny more keenly or blamed himself for his own shortcomings more harshly. And yet no man of his era held a higher or more "metaphysical" philosophy of love, or a more penetrating understanding of the emotional complexity of human nature. One cannot read his letter to Henry Crabb Robinson written in March, 1811, or the letter to the Reverend John Dawes written in 1822, in which he analyzed the tragically complex personality of his beloved Hartley, without realizing that Coleridge probed deeper into the psychological mystery of the emotions than perhaps any writer before Freud and Havelock Ellis. He analyzed himself, his wife, children, and friends, and studied the psychological implications of the preternatural elements in folklore and legend, but what he brought up from the depths could not be utilized artistically in the instance of *Christabel* without endangering the precious remnants of respectability to which he

clung as did the proverbial drowning man to his straw. It may even be doubted that he ever got the consent of his conscience to the work which he conceived, for though his unorthodox speculations intrigued his intellect, his theological and moral orthodoxy tended to forestall his acceptance of them.

If Coleridge had fears concerning the popular interpretation of sexual suggestions inherent in the poem, they were fully justified when the fragment was published in 1816. Charges of obscenity, with implications of personal turpitude, greeted the poem from the pages of the *Edinburgh Review*, and parodies and vulgar continuations of the poem made the most of leering improbabilities. Concerning one of these anonymous continuations appearing in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* for June, 1819, Coleridge wrote to William Blackwood, expressing enjoyment and admitting, "Let only no poison of personal moral calumny be inserted, and a good laugh is a good thing; and I should be sorry, by making a wry face, to transfer it from my Lady Christabel to myself." Clearly, his chief pleasure in the perusal of the piece lay in his gratitude that there was no "moral calumny" implied to himself, as there had been in the *Edinburgh Review*. It is significant that in none of his comments does he deny the central sexual motivation of the poem's plot. All that he would ask of a critic or parodist who recognized the theme was that no personal insinuations be levelled at the author.

If Coleridge had, as Gillman indicates, intended to permit the creature Geraldine to continue her "enchantment" of Christabel in the guise of the absent lover, he could not well have avoided even more harrowing suggestions of a sexual nature. As he symbolically portrays the beginnings of evil in the innocent girl in PART II, his use of ophidian traits goes well enough, but what could he have done in the next steps?



His symbols could hardly have become less repulsive. The martyrdom of Christabel as it approached the poem's denouement would have come dreadfully close to the verge of unacceptability. Indeed, the solution was "an exceedingly subtle and difficult one." A man who feared calumny and valued the love and respect of his contemporaries all the more strongly because of what he termed his own "moral ideocy" could ill afford to publish, even if he had managed to complete, a poem which would place his name at the mercy of vituperative defenders of British morality.

# Christabel

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

## PART I

'TIS the middle of night by the castle clock,  
And the owls have awakened the crowing cock;  
Tu-whit! -- Tu-who!  
And hark, again! the crowing cock,  
How drowsily it crew.

Sir Leoline, the Baron rich,  
Hath a toothless mastiff bitch;  
From her kennel beneath the rock  
She maketh answer to the clock,  
Four for the quarters, and twelve for the hour;  
Ever and aye, by shine and shower,  
Sixteen short howls, not over loud;  
Some say, she sees my lady's shroud.

Is the night chilly and dark?  
The night is chilly, but not dark.  
The thin gray cloud is spread on high,  
It covers but not hides the sky.  
The moon is behind, and at the full;  
And yet she looks both small and dull.  
The night is chill, the cloud is gray:  
'Tis a month before the month of May,  
And the Spring comes slowly up this way.

The lovely lady, Christabel,  
Whom her father loves so well,  
What makes her in the wood so late,  
A furlong from the castle gate?  
She had dreams all yesternight  
Of her own betrothed knight;  
And she in the midnight wood will pray  
For the weal of her lover that's far away.

She stole along, she nothing spoke,  
The sighs she heaved were soft and low,  
And naught was green upon the oak  
But moss and rarest mistletoe:  
She kneels beneath the huge oak tree,  
And in silence prayeth she.

The lady sprang up suddenly,  
The lovely lady, Christabel!  
It moaned as near, as near can be,  
But what it is she cannot tell.—  
On the other side it seems to be,  
Of the huge, broad-breasted, old oak tree.

The night is chill; the forest bare;  
Is it the wind that moaneth bleak?  
There is not wind enough in the air  
To move away the ringlet curl  
From the lovely lady's cheek—  
There is not wind enough to twirl  
The one red leaf, the last of its clan,  
That dances as often as dance it can,  
Hanging so light, and hanging so high,  
On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky.

Hush, beating heart of Christabel!  
Jesu, Maria, shield her well!  
She folded her arms beneath her cloak,

And stole to the other side of the oak.  
What sees she there?

There she sees a damsel bright,  
Drest in a silken robe of white,  
That shadowy in the moonlight shone:  
The neck that made that white robe wan,  
Her stately neck, and arms were bare;  
Her blue-veined feet unsandal'd were,  
And wildly glittered here and there  
The gems entangled in her hair.

I guess, 'twas frightful there to see  
A lady so richly clad as she—  
Beautiful exceedingly!

Mary mother, save me now!  
(Said Christabel,) And who art thou?

The lady strange made answer meet,  
And her voice was faint and sweet:—  
Have pity on my sore distress,  
I scarce can speak for weariness:  
Stretch forth thy hand, and have no fear!  
Said Christabel, How camest thou here?  
And the lady, whose voice was faint and sweet  
Did thus pursue her answer meet:—

My sire is of a noble line,  
And my name is Geraldine:  
Five warriors seized me yestermorn,  
Me, even me, a maid forlorn:  
They choked my cries with force and fright,  
And tied me on a palfrey white.  
The palfrey was as fleet as wind,  
And they rode furiously behind.

They spurred amain, their steeds were white:  
 And once we crossed the shade of night.  
 As sure as Heaven shall rescue me,  
 I have no thought what men they be;  
 Nor do I know how long it is  
 (For I have lain entranced I wis)  
 Since one, the tallest of the five,  
 Took me from the palfrey's back,  
 A weary woman, scarce alive.  
 Some muttered words his comrades spoke:  
 He placed me underneath this oak;  
 He swore they would return with haste;  
 Whither they went I cannot tell—  
 I thought I heard, some minutes past,  
 Sounds as of a castle bell.  
 Stretch forth thy hand (thus ended she),  
 And help a wretched maid to flee.

Then Christabel stretched forth her hand,  
 And comforted fair Geraldine:  
 O well, bright dame! may you command  
 The service of Sir Leoline;  
 And gladly our stout chivalry  
 Will he send forth and friends withal  
 To guide and guard you safe and free  
 Home to your noble father's hall.

She rose: and forth with steps they passed  
 That strove to be, and were not, fast.  
 Her gracious stars the lady blest,  
 And thus spake on sweet Christabel:  
 All our household are at rest,  
 The hall as silent as the cell;  
 Sir Leoline is weak in health,  
 And may not well awakened be,  
 But we will move as if in stealth,  
 And I beseech your courtesy,  
 This night, to share your couch with me.

They crossed the moat, and Christabel  
Took the key that fitted well;  
A little door she opened straight,  
All in the middle of the gate;  
The gate that was ironed within and without,  
Where an army in battle array had marched out.  
The lady sank, belike through pain,  
And Christabel with might and main  
Lifted her up, a weary weight,  
Over the threshold of the gate:  
Then the lady rose again,  
And moved, as she were not in pain.

So free from danger, free from fear,  
They crossed the court: right glad they were.  
And Christabel devoutly cried  
To the lady by her side,  
Praise we the Virgin all divine  
Who hath rescued thee from thy distress!  
Alas, alas! said Geraldine,  
I cannot speak for weariness.  
So free from danger, free from fear,  
They crossed the court: right glad they were.

Outside her kennel, the mastiff old  
Lay fast asleep, in moonshine cold.  
The mastiff old did not awake,  
Yet she an angry moan did make!  
And what can ail the mastiff bitch?  
Never till now she uttered yell  
Beneath the eye of Christabel.  
Perhaps it is the owlet's scritch:  
For what can ail the mastiff bitch?

They passed the hall, that echoes still,  
Pass as lightly as you will!  
The brands were flat, the brands were dying,

Amid their own white ashes lying;  
But when the lady passed, there came  
A tongue of light, a fit of flame;  
And Christabel saw the lady's eye,  
And nothing else saw she thereby,  
Save the boss of the shield of Sir Leoline tall,  
Which hung in a murky old niche in the wall.  
O softly tread, said Christabel,  
My father seldom sleepeth well.

Sweet Christabel her feet doth bare,  
And jealous of the listening air  
They steal their way from stair to stair,  
Now in glimmer, and now in gloom,  
And now they pass the Baron's room,  
As still as death, with stifled breath!  
And now have reached her chamber door;  
And now doth Geraldine press down  
The rushes of the chamber floor.

The moon shines dim in the open air,  
And not a moonbeam enters here.  
But they without its light can see  
The chamber carved so curiously,  
Carved with figures strange and sweet,  
All made out of the carver's brain,  
For a lady's chamber meet:  
The lamp with twofold silver chain  
Is fastened to an angel's feet.

The silver lamp burns dead and dim;  
But Christabel the lamp will trim.  
She trimmed the lamp, and made it bright,  
And left it swinging to and fro,  
While Geraldine, in wretched plight,  
Sank down upon the floor below.

O weary lady, Geraldine,  
 I pray you, drink this cordial wine!  
 It is a wine of virtuous powers;  
 My mother made it of wild flowers.

And will your mother pity me,  
 Who am a maiden most forlorn?  
 Christabel answered—Woe is me!  
 She died the hour that I was born.  
 I have heard the grey-haired friar tell  
 How on her death-bed she did say,  
 That she should hear the castle-bell  
 Strike twelve upon my wedding-day.  
 O mother dear! that thou wert here!  
 I would, said Geraldine, she were!

But soon with altered voice, said she—  
 'Off, wandering mother! Peak and pine!  
 I have power to bid thee flee.'  
 Alas! what ails poor Geraldine?  
 Why stares she with unsettled eye?  
 Can she the bodiless dead espy?  
 And why with hollow voice cries she,  
 'Off, woman, off! this hour is mine—  
 Though thou her guardian spirit be,  
 Off, woman, off! 'tis given to me.'

Then Christabel knelt by the lady's side,  
 And raised to heaven her eyes so blue—  
 Alas! said she, this ghastly ride—  
 Dear lady! it hath wildered you!  
 The lady wiped her moist cold brow,  
 And faintly said, ' 'tis over now!'

Again the wild-flower wine she drank:  
 Her fair large eyes 'gan glitter bright,  
 And from the floor whereon she sank,



The lofty lady stood upright:  
She was most beautiful to see,  
Like a lady of a far countrée.

And thus the lofty lady spake—  
'All they who live in the upper sky,  
Do love you, holy Christabel!  
And you love them, and for their sake  
And for the good which me befel,  
Even I in my degree will try,  
Fair maiden, to requite you well.  
But now unrobe yourself; for I  
Must pray, ere yet in bed I lie.'

Quoth Christabel, So let it be!  
And as the lady bade, did she.  
Her gentle limbs did she undress,  
And lay down in her loveliness.

But through her brain of weal and woe  
So many thoughts moved to and fro,  
That vain it were her lids to close;  
So half-way from the bed she rose,  
And on her elbow did recline  
To look at the lady Geraldine.

Beneath the lamp the lady bowed,  
And slowly rolled her eyes around;  
Then drawing in her breath aloud,  
Like one that shuddered, she unbound  
The cincture from beneath her breast:  
Her silken robe, and inner vest,  
Dropt to her feet, and full in view,  
Behold! her bosom and half her side—  
A sight to dream of, not to tell!  
O shield her! shield sweet Christabel!

Yet Geraldine nor speaks nor stirs;  
 Ah! what a stricken look was hers!  
 Deep from within she seems half-way  
 To lift some weight with sick assay,  
 And eyes the maid and seeks delay;  
 Then suddenly, as one defied,  
 Collects herself in scorn and pride,  
 And lay down by the Maiden's side!—  
 And in her arms the maid she took,  
     Ah wel-a-day!  
 And with low voice and doleful look  
 These words did say:  
 'In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell,  
 Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel!  
 Thou knowest to-night, and wilt know to-morrow,  
 This mark of my shame, this seal of my sorrow;  
     But vainly thou warrest,  
     For this is alone in  
     Thy power to declare,  
     That in the dim forest  
     Thou heard'st a low moaning,  
 And found'st a bright lady, surpassingly fair;  
 And didst bring her home with thee in love and in charity,  
 To shield her and shelter her from the damp air.'

THE CONCLUSION TO PART I

It was a lovely sight to see  
 The lady Christabel, when she  
 Was praying at the old oak tree.  
     Amid the jagged shadows  
     Of mossy leafless boughs,  
     Kneeling in the moonlight,  
     To make her gentle vows;  
 Her slender palms together prest,  
 Heaving sometimes on her breast;  
 Her face resigned to bliss or bale—

Her face, oh call it fair not pale,  
And both blue eyes more bright than clear,  
Each about to have a tear.

With open eyes (ah woe is me!)  
Asleep, and dreaming fearfully,  
Fearfully dreaming, yet, I wis,  
Dreaming that alone, which is—  
O sorrow and shame! Can this be she,  
The lady, who knelt at the old oak tree?  
And lo! the worker of these harms,  
That holds the maiden in her arms,  
Seems to slumber still and mild,  
As a mother with her child.

A star hath set, a star hath risen,  
O Geraldine! since arms of thine  
Have been the lovely lady's prison.  
O Geraldine! one hour was thine—  
Thou'st had thy will! By tairn and rill,  
The night-birds all that hour were still.  
But now they are jubilant anew,  
From cliff and tower, tu-whooh! tu-whooh!  
Tu-whooh! tu-whooh! from wood and fell!

And see! the lady Christabel  
Gathers herself from out her trance;  
Her limbs relax, her countenance  
Grows sad and soft; the smooth thin lids  
Close o'er her eyes; and tears she sheds—  
Large tears that leave the lashes bright!  
And oft the while she seems to smile  
As infants at a sudden light!

Yea, she doth smile, and she doth weep,  
Like a youthful hermitess,  
Beauteous in a wilderness,

Who, praying always, prays in sleep.  
 And, if she move unquietly,  
 Perchance, 'tis but the blood so free  
 Comes back and tingles in her feet.  
 No doubt, she hath a vision sweet.  
 What if her guardian spirit 'twere,  
 What if she knew her mother near?  
 But this she knows, in joys and woes,  
 That saints will aid if men will call:  
 For the blue sky bends over all!

## PART II

Each matin bell, the Baron saith,  
 Knells us back to a world of death.  
 These words Sir Leoline first said,  
 When he rose and found his lady dead:  
 These words Sir Leoline will say  
 Many a morn to his dying day!

And hence the custom and law began  
 That still at dawn the sacristan,  
 Who duly pulls the heavy bell,  
 Five and forty beads must tell  
 Between each stroke—a warning knell,  
 Which not a soul can choose but hear  
 From Bratha Head to Wyndermere.

Saith Bracy the bard, So let it knell!  
 And let the drowsy sacristan  
 Still count as slowly as he can!  
 There is no lack of such, I ween,  
 As well fill up the space between.  
 In Langdale Pike and Witch's Lair,  
 And Dungeon-ghyll so foully rent,  
 With ropes of rock and bells of air

Three sinful sextons' ghosts are pent,  
Who all give back, one after t'other,  
The death-note to their living brother;  
And oft too, by the knell offended,  
Just as their one! two! three! is ended,  
The devil mocks the doleful tale  
With a merry peal from Borodale.

The air is still! through mist and cloud  
That merry peal comes ringing loud;  
And Geraldine shakes off her dread,  
And rises lightly from the bed;  
Puts on her silken vestments white,  
And tricks her hair in lovely plight,  
And nothing doubting of her spell  
Awakens the lady Christabel.  
'Sleep you, sweet lady Christabel?  
I trust that you have rested well.'

And Christabel awoke and spied  
The same who lay down by her side—  
O rather say, the same whom she  
Raised up beneath the old oak tree!  
Nay, fairer yet! and yet more fair!  
For she belike hath drunken deep  
Of all the blessedness of sleep!  
And while she spake, her looks, her air  
Such gentle thankfulness declare,  
That (so it seemed) her girded vests  
Grew tight beneath her heaving breasts.  
'Sure I have sinn'd!' said Christabel,  
'Now heaven be praised if all be well!'  
And in low faltering tones, yet sweet,  
Did she the lofty lady greet  
With such perplexity of mind  
As dreams too lively leave behind.

So quickly she rose, and quickly arrayed  
Her maiden limbs, and having prayed  
That He, who on the cross did groan,  
Might wash away her sins unknown,  
She forthwith led fair Geraldine  
To meet her sire, Sir Leoline.

The lovely maid and the lady tall  
Are pacing both into the hall,  
And pacing on through page and groom,  
Enter the Baron's presence-room.

The Baron rose, and while he prest  
His gentle daughter to his breast,  
With cheerful wonder in his eyes  
The lady Geraldine espies,  
And gave such welcome to the same,  
As might beseem so bright a dame!

But when he heard the lady's tale,  
And when she told her father's name,  
Why waxed Sir Leoline so pale,  
Murmuring o'er the name again,  
Lord Roland de Vaux of Tryermaine?

Alas! they had been friends in youth;  
But whispering tongues can poison truth;  
And constancy lives in realms above;  
And life is thorny; and youth is vain;  
And to be wroth with one we love  
Doth work like madness in the brain.  
And thus it chanced, as I divine,  
With Roland and Sir Leoline.  
Each spake words of high disdain  
And insult to his heart's best brother:  
They parted—ne'er to meet again!  
But never either found another

To free the hollow heart from paining—  
They stood aloof, the scars remaining,  
Like cliffs which had been rent asunder;  
A dreary sea now flows between;—  
But neither heat, nor frost, nor thunder,  
Shall wholly do away, I ween,  
The marks of that which once hath been.

Sir Leoline, a moment's space,  
Stood gazing on the damsel's face:  
And the youthful Lord of Tryermaine  
Came back upon his heart again.

O then the Baron forgot his age,  
His noble heart swelled high with rage;  
He swore by the wounds in Jesu's side  
He would proclaim it far and wide,  
With trump and solemn heraldry,  
That they, who thus had wronged the dame,  
Were base as spotted infamy!  
'And if they dare deny the same,  
My herald shall appoint a week,  
And let the recreant traitors seek  
My tourney court—that there and then  
I may dislodge their reptile souls  
From the bodies and forms of men!'  
He spake: his eye in lightning rolls!  
For the lady was ruthlessly seized; and he kened  
In the beautiful lady the child of his friend!

And now the tears were on his face,  
And fondly in his arms he took  
Fair Geraldine, who met the embrace,  
Prolonging it with joyous look.  
Which when she viewed, a vision fell  
Upon the soul of Christabel,  
The vision of fear, the touch and pain!

She shrunk and shuddered, and saw again—  
 (Ah, woe is me! Was it for thee,  
 Thou gentle maid! such sights to see?)

Again she saw that bosom old,  
 Again she felt that bosom cold,  
 And drew in her breath with a hissing sound:  
 Whereat the Knight turned wildly round,  
 And nothing saw, but his own sweet maid  
 With eyes upraised, as one that prayed.

The touch, the sight, had passed away,  
 And in its stead that vision blest,  
 Which comforted her after-rest  
 While in the lady's arms she lay,  
 Had put a rapture in her breast,  
 And on her lips and o'er her eyes  
 Spread smiles like light!

With new surprise,

'What ails then my beloved child?'  
 The Baron said—His daughter mild  
 Made answer, 'All will yet be well!'  
 I ween, she had no power to tell  
 Aught else: so mighty was the spell.

Yet he, who saw this Geraldine,  
 Had deemed her sure a thing divine:  
 Such sorrow with such grace she blended,  
 As if she feared she had offended  
 Sweet Christabel, that gentle maid!  
 And with such lowly tones she prayed  
 She might be sent without delay  
 Home to her father's mansion.

'Nay!

Nay, by my soul!' said Leoline.  
 'Ho! Bracy the bard, the charge be thine!



Go thou, with music sweet and loud,  
 And take two steeds with trappings proud,  
 And take the youth whom thou lov'st best  
 To bear thy harp, and learn thy song,  
 And clothe you both in solemn vest,  
 And over the mountains haste along,  
 Lest wandering folk, that are abroad,  
 Detain you on the valley road.

'And when he has crossed the Irthing flood,  
 My merry bard! he hastes, he hastes  
 Up Knorren Moor, through Halegarth Wood,  
 And reaches soon that castle good  
 Which stands and threatens Scotland's wastes.

'Bard Bracy! bard Bracy! your horses are fleet,  
 Ye must ride up the hall, your music so sweet,  
 More loud than your horses' echoing feet!  
 And loud and loud to Lord Roland call,  
 Thy daughter is safe in Langdale hall!  
 Thy beautiful daughter is safe and free—  
 Sir Leoline greets thee thus through me!  
 He bids thee come without delay  
 With all thy numerous array  
 And take thy lovely daughter home:  
 And he will meet thee on the way  
 With all his numerous array  
 White with their panting palfreys' foam:  
 And, by mine honour! I will say,  
 That I repent me of the day  
 When I spake words of fierce disdain  
 To Roland de Vaux of Tryermaine!—  
 —For since that evil hour hath flown,  
 Many a summer's sun hath shone;  
 Yet ne'er found I a friend again  
 Like Roland de Vaux of Tryermaine.'

The lady fell, and clasped his knees,  
Her face upraised, her eyes o'erflowing;  
And Bracy replied, with faltering voice,  
His gracious Hail on all bestowing!—  
'Thy words, thou sire of Christabel,  
Are sweeter than my harp can tell;  
Yet might I gain a boon of thee,  
This day my journey should not be,  
So strange a dream hath come to me,  
That I had vowed with music loud  
To clear yon wood from thing unblest,  
Warned by a vision in my rest!  
For in my sleep I saw that dove,  
That gentle bird, whom thou dost love,  
And call'st by thy own daughter's name—  
Sir Leoline! I saw the same  
Fluttering, and uttering fearful moan,  
Among the green herbs in the forest alone.  
Which when I saw and when I heard,  
I wonder'd what might ail the bird;  
For nothing near it could I see,  
Save the grass and green herbs underneath the old tree.

'And in my dream methought I went  
To search out what might there be found;  
And what the sweet bird's trouble meant,  
That thus lay fluttering on the ground.  
I went and peered, and could descry  
No cause for her distressful cry;  
But yet for her dear lady's sake  
I stooped, methought, the dove to take,  
When lo! I saw a bright green snake  
Coiled around its wings and neck.  
Green as the herbs on which it couched,  
Close by the dove's its head it crouched;  
And with the dove it heaves and stirs,  
Swelling its neck as she swelled hers!

I woke; it was the midnight hour,  
The clock was echoing in the tower;  
But though my slumber was gone by,  
This dream it would not pass away—  
It seems to live upon my eye!  
And thence I vowed this self-same day  
With music strong and saintly song  
To wander through the forest bare,  
Lest aught unholy loiter there.'

Thus Bracy said: the Baron, the while,  
Half-listening heard him with a smile;  
Then turned to Lady Geraldine,  
His eyes made up of wonder and love;  
And said in courtly accents fine,  
'Sweet maid, Lord Roland's beauteous dove,  
With arms more strong than harp or song,  
Thy sire and I will crush the snake!'  
He kissed her forehead as he spake,  
And Geraldine in maiden wise  
Casting down her large bright eyes,  
With blushing cheek and courtesy fine  
She turned her from Sir Leoline;  
Softly gathering up her train,  
That o'er her right arm fell again;  
And folded her arms across her chest,  
And couched her head upon her breast,  
And looked askance at Christabel—  
Jesu, Maria, shield her well!

A snake's small eye blinks dull and shy;  
And the lady's eyes they shrunk in her head,  
Each shrunk up to a serpent's eye,  
And with somewhat of malice, and more of dread,  
At Christabel she looked askance!—  
One moment—and the sight was fled!  
But Christabel in dizzy trance

Stumbling on the unsteady ground  
Shuddered aloud, with a hissing sound;  
And Geraldine again turned round,  
And like a thing, that sought relief,  
Full of wonder and full of grief,  
She rolled her large bright eyes divine  
Wildly on Sir Leoline.

The maid, alas! her thoughts are gone,  
She nothing sees—no sight but one!  
The maid, devoid of guile and sin,  
I know not how, in fearful wise,  
So deeply had she drunken in  
That look, those shrunken serpent eyes,  
That all her features were resigned  
To this sole image in her mind:  
And passively did imitate  
That look of dull and treacherous hate!  
And thus she stood, in dizzy trance,  
Still picturing that look askance  
With forced unconscious sympathy  
Full before her father's view—  
As far as such a look could be  
In eyes so innocent and blue!

And when the trance was o'er, the maid  
Paused awhile, and inly prayed:  
Then falling at the Baron's feet,  
'By my mother's soul do I entreat  
That thou this woman send away!  
She said: and more she could not say:  
For what she knew she could not tell,  
O'er-mastered by the mighty spell.

Why is thy cheek so wan and wild,  
Sir Leoline? Thy only child  
Lies at thy feet, thy joy, thy pride,

So fair, so innocent, so mild;  
 The same, for whom thy lady died!  
 O by the pangs of her dear mother  
 Think thou no evil of thy child!  
 For her, and thee, and for no other,  
 She prayed the moment ere she died:  
 Prayed that the babe for whom she died,  
 Might prove her dear lord's joy and pride!  
     That prayer her deadly pangs beguiled,  
             Sir Leoline!  
 And wouldst thou wrong thy only child,  
     Her child and thine?

Within the Baron's heart and brain  
 If thoughts, like these, had any share,  
 They only swelled his rage and pain,  
 And did but work confusion there.  
 His heart was cleft with pain and rage,  
 His cheeks they quivered, his eyes were wild,  
 Dishonoured thus in his old age;  
 Dishonoured by his only child,  
 And all his hospitality  
 To the wronged daughter of his friend  
 By more than woman's jealousy  
 Brought thus to a disgraceful end—  
 He rolled his eye with stern regard  
 Upon the gentle minstrel bard,  
 And said in tones abrupt, austere—  
 'Why, Bracy! dost thou loiter here?  
 I bade thee hence!' The bard obeyed;  
 And turning from his own sweet maid,  
 The aged knight, Sir Leoline,  
 Led forth the lady Geraldine!

#### THE CONCLUSION TO PART II

A little child, a limber elf,  
 Singing, dancing to itself,

A fairy thing with red round cheeks,  
That always finds, and never seeks,  
Makes such a vision to the sight  
As fills a father's eyes with light;  
And pleasures flow in so thick and fast  
Upon his heart, that he at last  
Must needs express his love's excess  
With words of unmeant bitterness.  
Perhaps 'tis pretty to force together  
Thoughts so all unlike each other;  
To mutter and mock a broken charm,  
To dally with wrong that does no harm.  
Perhaps 'tis tender too and pretty  
At each wild word to feel within  
A sweet recoil of love and pity.  
And what, if in a world of sin  
(O sorrow and shame should this be true!)  
Such giddiness of heart and brain  
Comes seldom save from rage and pain,  
So talks as it's most used to do.

## Tennyson's Maud

ALTHOUGH critics have generally agreed that Tennyson is a supreme master of lyrical finesse, many have expressed grave doubts concerning his intellectual capacity and penetration. Yet, more often than not, aspersions on the quality of Tennyson's mind reveal the critic's rather than the poet's deficiency. Much of the criticism of *Maud*, at any rate, is vitiated by the critic's attempt to read the poem in terms of romantic concept, orthodox ethic, and outmoded psychology, rather than to analyze the poem's complex psycho-emotional theme. Hence the opinion that the hero of *Maud* is merely another Werther, and Tennyson a latter-day escapist wallowing indiscriminately in Rousseauistic sentimentality and Byronic cynicism fraught with moral inconsistencies which testify to his well-meaning but shallow intellect. It is the purpose of this essay to show that Tennyson is worthy, as a psychologist as well as an artist, of better study than his critics have usually afforded.

It seems probable, unfortunately, that the failure of Tennyson's contemporaries to understand *Maud* deflected the poet's genius from a deep curiosity about psychological phenomena and a bent toward psychological naturalism; for although he remained consistently a speculative artist, he never again pioneered the uncharted frontiers of psychological phenomena with such acumen. Thereafter his predilection for scientific

didacticism was more or less confined to the statement of truths that would only mildly disturb the intellectual complacency of his public, or would at most prod a hopefully awakening interest in the ethical significance of Darwin's theory of evolution. The amazing thing about *Maud*, however, is not that it antedates by a few years Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, but that it antedates by half a century the writings of Sigmund Freud. It is therefore hardly strange that contemporary testimony to the poem's soundness was confined pretty largely to poets like Browning and Rossetti, who were themselves playing (albeit somewhat charily) with relativistic ethics and the complexities of the human psyche. But it was a scientist who gave the poem something like an adequate contemporary assessment. Dr. Robert James Mann's *Tennyson's "Maud" Vindicated* (1856) stands, largely neglected by critics and biographers, not only as the most satisfactory commentary on *Maud*, but as one of the most significant critical essays of the century. Mann's essential thesis, which Tennyson approved, is here considerably expanded in the light of modern nonrational psychology.

Tennyson conceived *Maud* as a study in psychic frustration. This is attested by the fact that the poem grew from the original germ developed in a lyric of frustrated love, which stands in section IV of PART II as the climax of the poem, and which was composed several years earlier than *Maud*. This original lyric alludes to, or implies, every phase of the plot development as Tennyson later expanded it, with the exception of the brief conclusion in PART III, and contradicts, incidentally, such opinions as Hugh I'Anson Faussett's that *Maud* "is invertebrate in its structure" and "represents a chance aggregation of moods" (*Tennyson: A Modern Portrait*, 1923). Tennyson conceived and carried out, it appears, each single lyric



in PART I and PART II as a logical step in the development of his psychological theme. By *logical*, however, one must understand not merely the logic of John Locke's eighteenth-century rational psychology, but also the logic of the nonrational psychology of the unconscious which was never adequately formulated until Freud developed his theories. If one assumes that Tennyson had observed no more of the human psyche than John Locke, one will arrive at the remarkably imperceptive opinion that Tennyson in comparison with Browning "was neither a dramatist nor an imaginative psychologist of much complexity or depth" (Raymond M. Alden, *Alfred Tennyson*, 1917). The truth is that Tennyson reveals in *Maud* a penetration of the very depths of being which Browning habitually skimmed, but seldom plumbed, with his well-worn, neo-Platonic axioms of the soul.

Of course, one cannot assume Tennyson's full understanding of theories developed later by the Freudian school, but the evidence in *Maud* is that he was remarkably familiar with the phenomena of nonrational as well as rational mental behavior, and that as an artist he undertook to use them realistically in developing his theme. In so far as Tennyson anticipates Freud, he does so chiefly by recognizing the complex phases of self in his hero, by giving due weight to the unconscious, and by crediting the essentially nonrational causality in psychic phenomena in general. Dr. Mann's contemporary testimony to the poem's authentic portrayal of psychosis should forestall anyone's doubt that a poet in Tennyson's day could have understood the intricacies and implications of complex mental phenomena, even though not one in a thousand of his contemporaries had the wit to follow him.

In the opening stanzas of the poem, Tennyson presents his hero as a personality whose conscious thought processes are

distinctly instable. This instability is grounded in the fear of incertitude. The hero's religio-ethical system has been largely undermined by the new science of the nineteenth century, which presents a nonethical view of life with force reigning supreme. He cannot without painful doubt keep his traditional ethic in the face of science, nor yet can he be content with the data of science; for, although science reveals man as the biological brother of all nature, it affords no satisfactory ethical meaning, and although traditional Christianity affords him a satisfactory meaning bolstered by an absolute god, the hero cannot reconcile it with the scientific fact which he knows and must recognize. This much is the element of conscious conflict, in which sex and all physical aspects of human life are identified with nature and rapine, and in which his own ego is identified with the absolute ethic and spiritual dignity of orthodox Christianity. His wish to resolve this conflict leads him to attempt, however futilely, to adopt an impossible attitude of cynicism, from which he can observe, without becoming involved in, the miserable spectacle of human existence: "I will bury myself in myself, and the Devil may pipe to his own."

In the hero's conscious analysis of his own experience, there is much that substantiates his cynical view of life. His father has met a violent death after being financially ruined by a dog-eat-dog economic and social order. His mother has suffered penury and want, and his own life has been severely circumscribed. Wherever he looks he sees with his morbid predilection evidence to support the view that human existence is little better than that of animals.

Underlying this conscious conflict, however, is an essentially unconscious conflict which largely accounts for his morbidity. He is an only child whose earliest recollections are

centered upon the horror surrounding his father's death: "I remember the time, for the roots of my hair were stirr'd." His whole personality has been complicated by this psychic shock and the adoration with which he clings to the memory of his mother, whose life was so gentle and good, and whose death has left him—

*Living alone in an empty house,  
Here half-hid in the gleaming wood,  
Where I hear the dead at midday moan,  
And the shrieking rush of the wainscot mouse,  
And my own sad name in corners cried*

*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-turn'd to stone.*

In numerous passages in the early portions of the poem, the hero's allusions and reflections indicate the overpowering influence of the tragic episode in his childhood. The importance of this emotional shock (*trauma* is the Freudian term) cannot be overlooked in the development of the hero's personality, for, as Tennyson clearly indicates, it is the very source of the hero's complex, in which sex and love are linked with bloodshed and death and in which women (with the significant exceptions of his mother and Maud's mother) no less than men are identified with nature that is "one with rapine." Although his conscious does not immediately dredge it up, his unconscious holds the memory of the birth of Maud and the agreement between her father and his own father that the girl and boy will be betrothed. Thus, she is the person with whom he has identified sexual love from early childhood; but, as the result of his father's violent death, for which he holds

her father morally if not legally responsible, she is also identified with hatred, bloodshed, and death. Tennyson makes the most of the power which an outworn tradition of family solidarity and blood feud holds in the hero's mind. The hero's complex, then, is one in which love and hate are inextricably bound together, with hate centered on the one person (aside from his mother) whom his childish ego has chosen to love.

Even under fortuitous circumstances the hero might have experienced difficulty in making an adjustment to the "cruel madness of love," for his is essentially an introvertish ego. His dominant wish is to hide, to bury himself in himself. From the time of his father's death his life has been isolated by wish as well as by circumstance, and he resents the return of Maud's family to the neighboring Hall because of an unconscious fear of Maud herself as a source of danger to all that is his. This dominant wish to hide (the psychoanalyst might identify it with the wish to return to the womb) is the essential obsession which throughout the poem marks his reaction to fear and pain, and culminates in PART II in dementia, the diagnostic of which is that he is dead and buried. This introversion is at the root of his attempt to adopt the cynical pose in which he will observe human affairs but not participate in them. But, more important, it is at the root of his attempt to rationalize the conflict between good and bad, ethic and fact, spirit and nature. All of the objective world about him, the world of nature and of human society, he identifies with scientific natural law and with evil, but the subjective world of his ego he identifies with absolute ethic and Christian deity.

Into the realm of the unconscious, following the terrific shock of his father's death and its attendant circumstances, the hero has repressed his early love of Maud, and there it has

seethed until the event of her return to the Hall, with which the poem opens. The plot which evolves thereafter is in every step the logical outcome of as strict a chain of causality as ever linked a Greek tragedy. The question which Tennyson poses at the beginning of the poem is: What will love do for a personality so warped by circumstance? Can it provide balm to heal a psychic wound so deep that it has all but destroyed the delicate balance of the hero's personality? Tennyson's tentative answer in Part I is affirmative, as he presents in carefully executed sequence the stages through which the hero is gradually drawn out of himself by Maud. But, in the nonrational complex of his being throbs the psychic scar which not even love can wholly erase.

It has been observed that *Maud* is hardly an indicative title for the poem, inasmuch as the heroine is never materialized, but appears only through the hero's highly wrought vision. Yet one who follows Tennyson's theme cannot carp at a title so justly given; for Maud, the object of desire, is most realistically presented (psychologically speaking) as the dominant force in the drama which involves the inner conflict between the phases of the hero's soul as his personality seeks adjustment to the circumstances of life. From the beginning to the end of the poem, she largely controls, with alternating attraction and repulsion, the hero's psychic quest for the meaning of existence. The hero means nothing intelligible, either to the reader or to himself, except through her.

The plot of the poem, however, is not based primarily upon the conventional love theme, as has often been supposed, but rather upon the theme of psychic conflict between the phases of the hero's personality. This view is substantiated by Tennyson's own statement that the poem is a drama of the soul in which "different phases of passion in one person take the place

of different characters." Furthermore, it is clear that if the love theme were meant to be central, the turning points of the plot would have been quite different, and the elaboration of scenes should, of necessity, have included portions of the story which are wholly neglected or at most only mentioned. Thus the climax would have been reached with the tryst in the garden, and the denouement would have begun with the fatal duel, with Maud's pining and subsequent death perhaps weaving the appropriately romantic last act in the hero's misfortune. But as the poem stands, the garden scene is merely the second turning point, the first being the hero's proposal and Maud's acceptance, with their significance for the inner conflict of the hero (PART I, sections XVII-XVIII).

Although the gradual and subtle stages of adjustment through which the hero's love for Maud leads him are in themselves minutely exquisite in perception and execution, the limits of this essay do not permit their full analysis. It must suffice to say that the hero's infantile fear of incertitude, his obsession with escape and death, and his cynical hatred of life give way to love of Maud, and that he approaches a balanced personality and a stable philosophy that is centered outside self.

The psychological motivation of this development is the struggle of self against the repressive mechanism of an infantile conscience which has identified all humanity and all nature as evil enemies and has identified in particular the emotion of sexual love with brutal cruelty and pain. This inner struggle results in the gradual substitution of fear-born hatred for love as the emotion which must be repressed, and the hero resolves to bury "all this dead body of hate." But unfortunately the psycho-emotional process which has brought about this adjustment is still beyond control of the hero's rational resolve.

His unconscious identification of love with death still dominates his feeling and tells him in the height of his ecstasy that the greatest expression of his love for Maud would be for him to die for her sake (section xviii). Hence, when the brother of Maud spies upon their tryst in the garden, the hero's love for Maud unites with his pride to arouse a psychic storm in which love and hate are blended into one impulse—to kill the offending brother. Maud has brought about a temporary and limited adjustment in which the hero's personality has turned outward and has begun to find life good. The hero has rationally determined to repress hate, but has hardly made a beginning. He has achieved something like psychic balance, but it is at best a precarious balance which may not sustain a shock of any consequence. Hence, at the second turning point, the hero's pattern of adjustment is shattered by the discovery, the challenge, and the duel, and he reverts momentarily to the habitual pattern of fear and hate which is so deeply rooted in his being.

The action that follows in PART II is concerned with whether the hero's budding extrovertism can survive this shock without any hope of love's consummation. The answer is, of course, negative. The hero passes gradually into a state of insanity that becomes more and more nearly complete, though complete derangement never arrives, largely because of Maud's continued domination of the hero's psyche as a symbol identified with absolute truth and goodness. Where Maud the person fails, Maud the vision succeeds, obliquely, in rescuing him from an introvertish madness through a symbolism of sacrifice and atonement. The hero's last thread of sanity in the third stage of the plot is the remnant of reason which seeks to distinguish between right and wrong—between "lawful and lawless war"—but which cannot free him from the vision of Maud

which stands constantly "here at my head, not beautiful now, not even kind," never once having left him after the duel in the wood.

The continuation of Maud's influence by means of this ghostly presence is no mere literary device, but psychological necessity. The crime of taking a life to avenge a "private blow" is, in the conscious rationale of the hero, a crime against his absolute ethic; but more fundamentally, in the unconscious, it is a crime against Maud—a betrayal of her love. Psychologically, the hero has killed the one he loves as actually as if he had shot her instead of her brother. This is recognized in the opening lines of PART II, when, although the brother has admitted his own responsibility for the duel, the hero's conscience cannot accept absolution from guilt, because the essence of his crime is self-love, which has betrayed other-love. In this light the following lines are something more than a figment of the hero's mental derangement:

*'The fault was mine,' he whisper'd, 'fly!'  
Then glided out of the joyous wood  
The ghastly Wraith of one that I know;  
And there rang on a sudden a passionate cry,  
A cry for a brother's blood:  
It will ring in my heart and my ears, till I die, till I die.*

Thenceforth, throughout PART II, his mind is never free of the wraith or shadow, not of the brother, but of Maud. Although her bodily demise does not occur, apparently, until long after, the hero's mind accepts her death as a psychic fact immediately after the fatal shot is fired.

The psychological motivation of PART II is again the struggle of self with conscience, which culminates in the self's defeat, derangement, and flight into death. The obsession with escape from pain which has marked the hero's thoughts from the be-



ginning now becomes the diagnostic which marks his insanity. He conceives the hallucination that he is dead and buried. But even in this figurative and vicarious death of the self there is no release, for there remains the unconscious, a repository of all that has been experienced, and above all conscience. As conscience had in childhood repressed other-love, and in PART I has striven to keep it repressed as a feeling identified with pain and death, so now with a modified symbolism in which self is identified with pain and death and Maud with absolute good, the conscience attempts to repress self-love and to encourage adoration of Maud, or rather the spirit of Maud.

The hero's self does not give up, however, without striving still further for self-justification: at first in a return to the early cynicism, and in the next step—the subtle passage of the shell—in self-pity. The tiny, empty sea shell is a prophetic symbol of his impending insanity. The full symbolic significance of this lyric has not, however, always been correctly interpreted. The poor creature which had once inhabited the shell is the hero's introvertish ego, lovely, soft, and snug, which ventured forth into "his dim water-world" and died. Tennyson's comment that the shell "undestroyed amid the storm, perhaps symbolizes to him (the hero) his own first and highest nature preserved amid the storms of passion" corroborates this interpretation. From the beginning of the poem, as has been pointed out, the hero has identified his ego with all that is highest and best in contrast with all that is low and evil in the physical world. Hence, his self-pity finds an appropriately pathetic symbol in the fragile shell—

*Void of the little living will  
That made it stir on the shore.  
Did he stand at the diamond door  
Of his house in a rainbow frill?*

*Did he push, when he was uncurl'd,  
A golden foot or a fairy horn  
Thro' his dim water-world?*

Yet, the shell has survived—

*. . . a work divine,  
Frail, but of force to withstand,  
Year upon year, the shock  
Of cataract seas that snap  
The three decker's oaken spine  
Athwart the ledges of rock,  
Here on the Breton strand!*

Even so, the hero's existence is not a thing to be destroyed by the tempest and shock through which it has passed.

This empty existence is haunted by a

*. . . hard mechanic ghost  
That never came from on high  
Nor ever arose from below,  
But only moves with the moving eye,*

which, in other words, is a hallucination of the hero's dis-tempered mind—a mere figment which the self recognizes but is powerless to dispel. Such observation on the part of the self is merely an attempt to avoid the true though symbolic condemnation which the ghost stands for as agent of conscience, and in the passages that follow, the self futilely dallies with the thought that Maud may be alive and may love him still—in fact, that perhaps even the brother is not actually dead. But this avenue of escape is finally recognized as forever closed (section III), and the climax of the poem is reached in the ballad of complete frustration and grief (section IV), which marks the utter defeat of the self and culminates in the passage:

*Always I long to creep  
Into some still cavern deep,*

*There to weep, and weep, and weep  
My whole soul out to thee.*

The hero then becomes insane (section v). The obsession with escape has brought wish fulfillment in the dementia's diagnostic fallacy, death, and the grave, but not the desired release from pain; for so long as the self exists there can be no escape from the strict chain of causality in the hero's psyche. The grave is the madhouse in which the other inmates are identified as spirits of those who like him are "dead" but not released from life. In so far as the hero recognizes them in his derangement, he recognizes them as marked, each by his own peculiar "maggot born in an empty head." This recognition is linked, according to the logic of his own insanity, in each separate case (section v, stanzas *three* and *four*) with the idea that "each is at war with mankind."

This is the key to the human tragedy as the hero has seen it all along, sane or insane, and as he had insisted earlier in the poem that the "bitter springs of anger and fear" must be "cut off from the mind" before man can achieve peace with his fellow men or within himself, so now in his insanity he links the fatal episode of his father's death, with the later episode of the duel, into the eternal chain of hate and fear which is the human heritage. The cunning of his dementia literally leaps at the recognition that this is the clue to the brother's discovery of the tryst in the garden. The importance of this recognition of a human agency in the fatal discovery is that it enables the hero's psyche to hold to his concept of human responsibility. There is no simple accident of circumstance by which his fate has been spun, no impersonal, deterministic casualty that brings him pain. Human action, rooted in the dark recesses of a human brain and heart, is the very source of his misery. "Who told *him* we were there?" he asks. The nameless in-

former who without personal motive assisted in bringing on the tragedy is merely another of "the whole weak race of venomous worms" motivated consciously or unconsciously by suspicion, hate, and fear.

As this sequence of obsessively logical perceptions draws to a close in the last lines of the madhouse scene, the hero's vestige of reason clings desperately to his absolute ethic, and attempts to distinguish between "lawful and lawless war," as the solution to human tragedy. It is not the spilling of blood which is sin, but the motive of the human heart. Hence, the conception that a blow struck against "the public foe" for public good is noble, whereas the "red life spilt for a private blow" is sin. Psychologically this distinction is of vast importance, for upon it hinges the hero's return to sanity in PART III. It is the remnant of his earlier mind which has survived the storm, and to it he owes the reintegration of his personality as it is revealed in the brief conclusion, which is PART III.

Structurally, the poem has perhaps one major defect, and that is the recapitulative device employed in PART III. Instead of presenting dramatically the final phase of the hero's struggle, following the fourth and last turning point in the plot (Maud's appearance in a vision), Tennyson employs the device of an epilogue in which the hero recounts the circumstance and rationalizes his psychic experience into a new philosophy of life. It is possible that Tennyson's confidence in his ability to portray dramatically the subtle process of sublimation and reintegration broke down at this point. Although Tennyson saw clearly the necessary resolution, perhaps he could not trace the steps leading away from dementia with an imagination equal to that which sustained his portrayal of the steps leading to it. His failure in this is in reality an amazing intellectual and imaginative success, considering the fact that

he was exploring hitherto uncharted areas of human knowledge. The clinical techniques of psychoanalysis and psychiatry in general are still today largely experimental, and their therapeutic successes perhaps scarcely outnumber their failures. Although Freudian psychology has done much to clarify the pattern of nonrational causality in psychosis and dementia, the techniques of psychoanalysis, as well as the various other therapeutic methods of psychiatry, have left much to seek in understanding how the mentally ill become well.

Herein lies one of the most significant facts about the poem, which the critic has seldom understood. The hero has not in PART III gained a normal psychic balance, although he (and perhaps the unwary reader) may think he has. He is not completely cured of psychic illness, but has merely exchanged one obsession, self-destruction, for another, self-sacrifice in a noble cause. The extent of his sanity in PART III is wholly relative to his new obsession. Although his condition is nowise as acute as it has been in the madhouse scene, it is still psychopathic, and acceptance of what he says and does must be relative to his condition.

What is required, Tennyson asks finally, to restore the hero's mind to the relative self-direction which is sanity? The answer lies, in part, in what the psychoanalyst calls "sublimation." Maud appears to him in a dream, not as the hard mechanic ghost of his insanity, but

*She seem'd to divide in a dream from a band of the blest,  
And spoke of a hope for the world in the coming wars—  
'And in that hope, dear soul, let trouble have rest,  
Knowing I tarry for thee,' and pointed to Mars  
As he glow'd like a ruddy shield on the Lion's breast.*

Thus, for the first time since the fatal duel, the hero achieves a point of view that is relatively extrovertish rather than in-

trovertish. He is ready to act rather than brood over the troubles of the human heart. For those readers who have failed at this point to perceive that (given the original problem of human nature and the peculiar pattern of character which is the hero's) this is the only intelligible conclusion to which Tennyson could have brought the poem without violating psychological truth, the last lines of the poem produce a jarring effect. The ethical blather which many of the critics condemn is insidious only if it is misunderstood.

*It is better to fight for the good, than to rail at the ill;  
I have felt with my native land, I am one with my kind,  
I embrace the purpose of God, and the doom assign'd.*

Such platitudes are open to condemnation only if they are taken out of their context and made to appear as a final revelation of divine wisdom. It is interesting to observe in this respect that the hero's moral preachments are nauseous to the critics for the very same reason that the moral preachments of the Quaker in the poem, "the broad-brimm'd hawker of holy things," are nauseous to the hero, because they are absolutes which do not fit all the facts of human life, impossible ideals which but poorly cover up the chaotic condition of the speaker's psyche. In the mind of the hero, however, as an expression of his reintegrated personality, they are certainly truth (for him) and perhaps (again, for him) indeed wisdom. One cannot underestimate Tennyson so unfairly as to suppose that he of all persons was unaware of the peculiar limitations of these truths which his hero utters. Like the moral verses with which Coleridge concludes *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, they become nauseous if they are taken out of the context of the poem and are applied as a general nostrum for the universal sickness of the human spirit. Thus the Reverend Stop-

ford A. Brooke objects that Tennyson fails to distinguish "between war and war," ignoring the fact that if anyone fails it is the hero, not Tennyson, and that the moralizing of the hero is entirely limited in value by the very mind which it represents. Gladstone in his first criticism of the poem made the same mistake, but admitted years later that he had at first "failed to comprehend rightly the relation between particular passages in the poem and its general scope," and likened the "design" which he had come to perceive in the poem to "that of *Ecclésiastes* in another sphere." Similar failures (generally without later recantations) have been common among Tennyson's critics.

In Tennyson's day and ours the critic's difficulty has been much more his own than Tennyson's failure to find a philosophy which would satisfactorily encompass the complexity of nature and human nature and yet not undermine the absolute ethic to which, apparently, he must cling as frantically as Tennyson's madman. The critic cannot accept the possibility that an ethic may be relative and still be meaningful; he no less than Tennyson's hero must have his absolute. As the hero sees humanity hypocritical and base, motivated by brute impulse and passion, but frenziedly mouthing absolute moralities, so the critic sees the hero, and through him, Tennyson. As the hero longs for the "simple great ones gone" and the golden age when, as he conceives, men lived surely in their belief and there was no discrepancy between ethical truth and scientific fact, creed and practice, ideal and reality; so the critic longs for the simple and absolute morality of the Ten Commandments and a poem which will "justify the ways of God to man" in spite of obvious discrepancies in human experience. As the hero is disgusted with the human experience which life presents, so the critic is disgusted with the picture of life which

the poem presents. Nor does the parallel end here, for in order to preserve his own variety of intellectual stability, the critic takes the same road that the hero takes in escaping madness: he enlists on the side of "right" to fight for the "good" and takes up arms against the "evil" implications of the poem, contending for the absolute which he believes in, even if he does not know it any better than Tennyson.

The philosophical structure or design of the poem against which the critic rebels is essentially empirical and naturalistic. Tennyson presents the human psyche as a phenomenon of nature which seeks to understand and control the world into which it comes and of which it is a part. The sum of its experience and its wisdom is the only means by which it can work, but though this experience and wisdom is cumulative, it is never sufficient to enable the psyche to achieve more than a relative control of the nonrational sequence of reactions which is its fate. The greatest barrier to better understanding and control is the unfathomed complexity of the psyche itself. Although love is the power which generates, and is generated by, the psyche, its obverse and alternating manifestations of fear and trust, pain and pleasure, hate and desire, are relative and not open to absolute understanding or control in terms of an absolute ethic; but since the supposedly individual psyche is one made up of several, and is bitterly aware of the relativity within, it seeks for oneness in an absolute outside self. Without such an absolute of faith and love there seems to be no possibility of unity in personality. This is the essential design, as Gladstone surmised, of *Maud* and perhaps of *Ecclesiastes*; and regardless of how much it is elaborated it always boils down to the paradox that man's experience is finite and his understanding relative, but that he must seek truth and do good, and that in seeking and doing he needs faith and love.



Why should such didacticism seem objectionable to the critic? Perhaps in part the answer lies in the fact that the poem does not assert the existence of an absolute at all, but treats it merely as a psychological phenomenon necessary to the ego of the hero. Tennyson implies that his hero clings to an absolute ethic because of the wish to escape from the frustrating complexity of experience and the pain of trial and error, but that however much he may believe in his absolute it does not banish frustration and pain. One cannot suppose that Tennyson was unaware of the irony of his poem's conclusion in effecting the hero's reintegration of personality by means of sublimation and a complete swing from an extreme indulgence in private hysteria to a modified indulgence in public madness. The problem with which the poem opens is, in other words, only partly solved at the close. There may be an absolute answer, but the poet cannot find it in an absolute ethic and makes clear that the reader cannot pretend so to find it in the poem itself.

Perhaps it is this which the critic resents—that Tennyson examined with such penetration the essential relativity of all psychic phenomena, including the ethical concepts which his critics wish above all to keep absolute as divine revelation. Perhaps also they dislike the poem's implication that so long as modern man (typified in the hero) clings to an absolute primitive ethic he is doomed to remain in a state of psychological barbarism, compensating for actual imperfections of ethical practice by belief in impossible ethical ideals and clinging to an infantile certitude instead of acquiring a mature recognition of incertitude and accepting the necessity of getting along with truth and error, good and bad, right and wrong, that are merely relative. Although such an implication would not frighten a modern scientist and philosopher like Julian Hux-

ley, and apparently not a nineteenth-century scientist like Robert James Mann, it definitely ruined the poem's contemporary reception at the hands of the general public. With few exceptions later critics have been unable, when they recognize it at all, to accept such didacticism as anything more than a proof of Tennyson's intellectual irresponsibility. It is something more than a curiosity that Tennyson has been condemned for ideas which, under the name of "science," have established large reputations in the twentieth century.

In the light of these observations, it would seem that as a poet and philosopher Tennyson was far more naturalistic than his critics have usually recognized. It would be difficult to find a twentieth-century writer who penetrates so deeply or handles so subtly, for all the accumulation of scientific knowledge during the intervening years, the complex problem that is man. The intellectual content of *Maud* is scarcely dwarfed by comparison with the parthenogenetic intellectualism of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. On the other hand, the "scientific" philosophy of Julian Huxley or Bertrand Russell has little to add to what Tennyson perceived, except their insistence that later achievements in thought afford considerably more light than Tennyson supposedly could have had in his day.

In this connection one cannot fail to observe that Tennyson put to use in *Maud* most of the psychological theories which Julian Huxley and others seem to believe hold out hope for man's control of his nonrational nature (see, for example, "The Biologist Looks at Man," *Fortune*, December, 1942). Furthermore, Tennyson's essential philosophy seems more advanced, psychologically speaking, than Julian Huxley's in that it recognizes the psychological significance of the absolute to each man, whether he be biologist, poet, or whatnot. Where Julian Huxley would categorically dispense with belief in absolute

ethic and absolute deity, Tennyson perhaps more scientifically (psychologically) recognizes that human personality by reason of the very principle of causality in its nonrational nature does not either know or act in terms of knowledge or ethic except as it assumes (believes) an absolute and seeks to formulate it in terms of whatever theory or truth seems most adequate. As a philosopher if not as a scientist Julian Huxley is, in spite of his recognition of the value of Freudian theories, limited by his fundamentally materialistic concepts. Tennyson, on the other hand, not only anticipates much of Freud and Jung but also perceives the essential difference in interpretation to which their later theories lead.

The evidence in *Maud*, as well as in other poems, is that Tennyson leaned toward the complex "constructive method" later developed (not with complete success) by Jung, rather than to the simple "reductive method" developed by Freud, as the way to further understanding. He would not, as the Freudians have seemed to do, seek to replace the religious and philosophical needs of man by their more elementary components; but would seem, as Jung has phrased it, to "accept the developed aspirations as indispensable components, essential elements, of spiritual growth" and to seek to build toward rather than reduce back to a theory of the psyche. Inasmuch as the psyche is, even after Freud and Jung, still largely a dark continent, one may well marvel at what Tennyson achieved as an artist so long before their epochal discoveries, and perhaps admit that as the years continue to take the measure of the giants of other days, Tennyson requires more distance than most of his contemporaries.

# Maud; A Monodrama

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON

## PART I

• I •

*i*

I HATE the dreadful hollow behind the little wood,  
Its lips in the field above are dappled with blood-red heath,  
The red-ribb'd ledges drip with a silent horror of blood,  
And Echo there, whatever is ask'd her, answers, 'Death.'

*ii*

For there in the ghastly pit long since a body was found,  
His who had given me life—O father! O God! was it well?—  
Mangled, and flatten'd, and crush'd, and dinted into the  
ground:  
There yet lies the rock that fell with him when he fell.

*iii*

Did he fling himself down? who knows? for a vast speculation  
had fail'd,  
And ever he mutter'd and madden'd, and ever wann'd with  
despair,  
And out he walk'd when the wind like a broken worldling  
wail'd,  
And the flying gold of the ruin'd woodlands drove thro' the  
air.

*iv*

I remember the time, for the roots of my hair were stirr'd  
 By a shuffled step, by a dead weight trail'd, by a whisper'd  
 fright,  
 And my pulses closed their gates with a shock on my heart as  
 I heard  
 The shrill-edged shriek of a mother divide the shuddering  
 night.

*v*

Villainy somewhere! whose? One says, we are villains all.  
 Not he; his honest fame should at least by me be maintained:  
 But that old man, now lord of the broad estate and the Hall,  
 Dropt off gorged from a scheme that had left us flaccid and  
 drain'd.

*vi*

Why do they prate of the blessings of Peace? we have made  
 them a curse,  
 Pickpockets, each hand lusting for all that is not its own;  
 And lust of gain, in the spirit of Cain, is it better or worse  
 Than the heart of the citizen hissing in war on his own hearth-  
 stone?

*vii*

But these are the days of advance, the works of the men of  
 mind,  
 When who but a fool would have faith in a tradesman's ware  
 or his word?  
 Is it peace or war? Civil war, as I think, and that of a kind  
 The viler, as underhand, not openly bearing the sword.

*viii*

Sooner or later I too may passively take the print  
 Of the golden age—why not? I have neither hope nor trust;  
 May make my heart as a millstone, set my face as a flint,  
 Cheat and be cheated, and die: who knows? we are ashes and  
 dust.

*ix*

Peace sitting under her olive, and slurring the days gone by,  
 When the poor are hovell'd and hustled together, each sex,  
 like swine.

When only the ledger lives, and when only not all men lie;  
 Peace in her vineyard—yes!—but a company forges the wine.

*x*

And the vitriol madness flushes up in the ruffian's head,  
 Till the filthy by-lane rings to the yell of the trampled wife,  
 And chalk and alum and plaster are sold to the poor for  
 bread,

And the spirit of murder works in the very means of life,

*xi*

And Sleep must lie down arm'd, for the villainous centre-bits  
 Grind on the wakeful ear in the hush of the moonless nights,  
 While another is cheating the sick of a few last gasps, as he  
 sits

To pestle a poison'd poison behind his crimson lights.

*xii*

When a Mammonite mother kills her babe for a burial-fee,  
 And Timour-Mammon grins on a pile of children's bones,  
 Is it peace or war? better, war! loud war by land and by sea,  
 War with a thousand battles, and shaking a hundred thrones.

*xiii*

For I trust if an enemy's fleet came yonder round by the hill,  
 And the rushing battle-boat 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 yard-  
 wand, home.—

*xiv*

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 shatter'd limbs and a wretched swindler's lie?

*xv*

Would there be sorrow for *me*? there was *love* in the pas-  
 sionate shriek,  
 Love for the silent thing that had made false haste to the  
 grave—  
 Wrapt in a cloak, as I saw him, and thought he would rise  
 and speak  
 And rave at the lie and the liar, ah God, as he used to rave.

*xvi*

I am sick of the Hall and the hill, I am sick of the moor and  
 the main.  
 Why should I stay? can a sweeter chance ever come to me  
 here?  
 O, having the nerves of motion as well as the nerves of pain,  
 Were it not wise if I fled from the place and the pit and the  
 fear?

*xvii*

Workmen up at the Hall!—they are coming back from abroad;  
 The dark old place will be gilt by the touch of a millionaire:  
 I have heard, I know not whence, of the singular beauty of  
 Maud;  
 I play'd with the girl when a child; she promised then to be  
 fair.

*xviii*

Maud with her venturous climbings and tumbles and childish  
 escapes,  
 Maud the delight of the village, the ringing joy of the Hall,  
 Maud with her sweet purse-mouth when my father dangled  
 the grapes,

Maud the beloved of my mother, the moon-faced darling of all,—

xix

What is she now? My dreams are bad. She may bring me a curse.

No, there is fatter game on the moor: she will let me alone. Thanks, for the fiend best knows whether woman or man be the worse.

I will bury myself in myself, and the Devil may pipe to his own.

• II •

LONG have I sigh'd for a calm: God grant I may find it at last! It will never be broken by Maud, she has neither savor nor salt,

But a cold and clear-cut face, as I found when her carriage past, Perfectly beautiful: let it be granted her: where is the fault?

All that I saw (for her eyes were downcast, not to be seen)

Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null,

Dead perfection, no more; nothing more, if it had not been

For a chance of travel, a paleness, an hour's defect of the rose,

Or an underlip, you may call it a little too ripe, too full,

Or the least little delicate aquiline curve in a sensitive nose,

From which I escaped heart-free, with the least little touch of spleen.

• III •

COLD and clear-cut face, why come you so cruelly meek,

Breaking a slumber in which all spleenful folly was drown'd,

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,

Luminous, gemlike, ghostlike, deathlike, half the night long



Growing and fading and growing, till I could bear it no more,  
 But arose, and all by myself in my own dark garden ground,  
 Listening now to the tide in its broad-flung shipwrecking roar,  
 Now to the scream of a madden'd beach dragg'd down by the  
     wave,  
 Walk'd in a wintry wind by a ghastly glimmer, and found  
 The shining daffodil dead, and Orion low in his grave.

• IV •

*i*

A MILLION emeralds break from the ruby-budded lime  
 In the little grove where I sit—ah, wherefore cannot I be  
 Like things of the season gay, like the bountiful season bland,  
 When the far-off sail is blown by the breeze of a softer clime,  
 Half-lost in the liquid azure bloom of a crescent of sea,  
 The silent sapphire-spangled marriage ring of the land?

*ii*

Below me, there, is the village, and looks how quiet and small!  
 And yet bubbles o'er like a city, with gossip, scandal, and  
     spite;  
 And Jack on his ale-house bench has as many lies as a Czar;  
 And here on the landward side, by a red rock, glimmers the  
     Hall;  
 And up in the high Hall-garden I see her pass like a light;  
 But sorrow seize me if ever that light be my leading star!

*iii*

When have I bow'd to her father, the wrinkled head of the  
     race?  
 I met her to-day with her brother, but not to her brother I  
     bow'd:  
 I bow'd to his lady-sister as she rode by on the moor;  
 But the fire of a foolish pride flash'd over her beautiful face.  
 O child, you wrong your beauty, believe it, in being so proud;

Your father has wealth well-gotten, and I am nameless and poor.

*iv*

I keep but a man and a maid, ever ready to slander and steal;  
 I know it, and smile a hard-set smile, like a stoic, or like  
 A wiser epicurean, and let the world have its way:  
 For nature is one with rapine, a harm no preacher can heal;  
 The Mayfly is torn by the swallow, the sparrow spear'd by the  
 shrike,  
 And the whole little wood where I sit is a world of plunder  
 and prey.

*v*

We are puppets, Man in his pride, and Beauty fair in her  
 flower;  
 Do we move ourselves, or are moved by an unseen hand at a  
 game  
 That pushes us off from the board, and others ever succeed?  
 Ah yet, we cannot be kind to each other here for an hour;  
 We whisper, and hint, and chuckle, and grin at a brother's  
 shame;  
 However we brave it out, we men are a little breed.

*vi*

A monstrous eft was of old the Lord and Master of Earth,  
 For him did his high sun flame, and his river billowing ran,  
 And he felt himself in his force to be Nature's crowning race.  
 As nine months go to the shaping an infant ripe for his birth,  
 So many a million of ages have gone to the making of man:  
 He now is first, but is he the last? is he not too base?

*vii*

The man of science himself is fonder of glory, and vain,  
 An eye well-practised in nature, a spirit bounded and poor;  
 The passionate heart of the poet is whirl'd into folly and vice.  
 I would not marvel at either, but keep a temperate brain;  
 For not to desire or admire, if a man could learn it, were more

Than to walk all day like the sultan of old in a garden of  
spice.

## viii

For the drift of the Maker is dark, as Isis hid by the veil.  
Who knows the ways of the world, how God will bring them  
about?

Our planet is one, the suns are many, the world is wide.  
Shall I weep if a Poland fall? shall I shriek if a Hungary fail?  
Or an infant civilization be ruled with rod or with knout?  
I have not made the world, and He that made it will guide.

## ix

Be mine a philosopher's life in the quiet woodland ways,  
Where if I cannot be gay let a passionless peace be my lot,  
Far-off from the clamor of liars belied in the hubbub of lies;  
From the long-neck'd geese of the world that are ever hissing  
dispraise

Because their natures are little, and, whether he heed it or not,  
Where each man walks with his head in a cloud of poisonous  
flies.

## x

And most of all would I flee from the cruel madness of love,  
The honey of poison-flowers and all the measureless ill.

Ah Maud, you milk white fawn, you are all unmeet for a wife.  
Your mother is mute in her grave as her image in marble  
above;

Your father is ever in London, you wander about at your will;  
You have but fed on the roses and lain in the lilies of life.

## · V ·

## i

A VOICE by the cedar tree  
In the meadow under the Hall!  
She is singing an air that is known to me,  
A passionate ballad gallant and gay,

A martial song like a trumpet's call!  
 Singing alone in the morning of life,  
 In the happy morning of life and of May,  
 Singing of men that in battle array,  
 Ready in heart and ready in hand,  
 March with banner and bugle and fife  
 To the death, for their native land.

*ii*

Maud with her exquisite face,  
 And wild voice pealing up to the sunny sky,  
 And feet like sunny gems on an English green,  
 Maud in the light of her youth and her grace,  
 Singing of Death, and of Honor that cannot die,  
 Till I well could weep for a time so sordid and mean,  
 And myself so languid and base.

*iii*

Silence, beautiful voice!  
 Be still, for you only trouble the mind  
 With a joy in which I cannot rejoice,  
 A glory I shall not find.  
 Still! I will hear you no more,  
 For your sweetness hardly leaves me a choice  
 But to move to the meadow and fall before  
 Her feet on the meadow grass, and adore,  
 Not her, who is neither courtly nor kind,  
 Not her, not her, but a voice.

• VI •

*i*

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 bow'd

Caught and cuff'd by the gale:  
I had fancied it would be fair.

*ii*

Whom but Maud should I meet  
Last night, when the sunset burn'd  
On the blossom'd gable-ends  
At the head of the village street,  
Whom but Maud should I meet?  
And she touch'd my hand with a smile so sweet,  
She made me divine amends  
For a courtesy not return'd.

*iii*

And thus a delicate spark  
Of glowing and growing light  
Thro' the livelong hours of the dark  
Kept itself warm in the heart of my dreams,  
Ready to burst in a color'd flame;  
Till at last when the morning came  
In a cloud, it faded, and seems  
But an ashen-gray delight.

*iv*

What if with her sunny hair,  
And smile as sunny as cold,  
She meant to weave me a snare  
Of some coquettish deceit,  
Cleopatra-like as of old  
To entangle me when we met,  
To have her lion roll in a silken net  
And fawn at a victor's feet.

*v*

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 seem'd,  
And her smile were all that I dream'd,  
Then the world were not so bitter  
But a smile could make it sweet.

*vi*

What if tho' her eye seem'd full  
Of a kind intent to me,  
What if that dandy-despot, he,  
That jewell'd mass of millinery,  
That oil'd and curl'd Assyrian Bull  
Smelling of musk and of insolence,  
Her brother, from whom I keep aloof,  
Who wants the finer politic sense  
To mask, tho' but in his own behoof,  
With a glassy smile his brutal scorn—  
What if he had told her yestermorn  
How prettily for his own sweet sake  
A face of tenderness might be feign'd,  
And a moist mirage in desert eyes,  
That so, when the rotten hustings shake  
In another month to his brazen lies,  
A wretched vote may be gain'd.

*vii*

For a raven ever croaks, at my side,  
Keep watch and ward, keep watch and ward,  
Or thou wilt prove their tool.  
Yea, too, myself from myself I guard,  
For often a man's own angry pride  
Is cap and bells for a fool.

*viii*

Perhaps the smile and tender tone  
Came out of her pitying womanhood,

For am I not, am I not, here alone  
 So many a summer since she died,  
 My mother, who was so gentle and good?  
 Living alone in an empty house,  
 Here half-hid in the gleaming wood,  
 Where 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-turn'd to stone.

## ix

O heart of stone, are you flesh, and caught  
 By that you swore to withstand?  
 For what was it else within me wrought  
 But, I fear, the new strong wine of love,  
 That made my tongue so stammer and trip  
 When I saw the treasured splendor, her hand,  
 Come sliding out of her sacred glove,  
 And the sunlight broke from her lip?

## x

I have play'd with her when a child;  
 She remembers it now we meet.  
 Ah well, well, well, I *may* be beguiled  
 By some coquettish deceit.  
 Yet, if she were not a cheat,  
 If Maud were all that she seem'd,  
 And her smile had all that I dream'd,  
 Then the world were not so bitter  
 But a smile could make it sweet.

## · VII ·

*i*

DID I hear it half in a doze  
 Long since, I know not where?  
 Did I dream it an hour ago,  
 When asleep in this arm-chair?

*ii*

Men were drinking together,  
 Drinking and talking of me;  
 'Well, if it prove a girl, the boy  
 Will have plenty: so let it be.'

*iii*

Is it an echo of something  
 Read with a boy's delight,  
 Viziers nodding together  
 In some Arabian night?

*iv*

Strange, that I hear two men,  
 Somewhere, talking of me;  
 'Well, if it prove a girl, my boy  
 Will have plenty: so let it be.'

## · VIII ·

SHE came to the village church,  
 And sat by a pillar alone;  
 An angel watching an urn  
 Wept over her, carved in stone;  
 And once, but once, she lifted her eyes,  
 And suddenly, sweetly, strangely blush'd  
 To find they were met by my own;  
 And suddenly, sweetly, my heart beat stronger  
 And thicker, until I heard no longer



The snowy-banded, dilettante,  
 Delicate-handed priest intone;  
 And thought, is it pride, and mused and sigh'd  
 'No surely, now it cannot be pride.'

• IX •

I WAS walking a mile,  
 More than a mile from the shore,  
 The sun look'd out with a smile  
 Betwixt the cloud and the moor  
 And riding at set of day  
 Over the dark moor land,  
 Rapidly riding far away,  
 She waved to me with her hand.  
 There were two at her side,  
 Something flash'd in the sun,  
 Down by the hill I saw them ride,  
 In a moment they were gone:  
 Like a sudden spark  
 Struck vainly in the night,  
 Then returns the dark  
 With no more hope of light.

• X •

*i*

SICK, am I sick of a jealous dread?  
 Was not one of the two at her side  
 This new-made lord, whose splendor plucks  
 The slavish hat from the villager's head?  
 Whose old grandfather has lately died,  
 Gone to a blacker pit, for whom  
 Grimy nakedness dragging his trucks  
 And laying his trams in a poison'd gloom  
 Wrought, till he crept from a gutted mine  
 Master of half a servile shire,

And left his coal all turn'd into gold  
 To a grandson, first of his noble line,  
 Rich in the grace all women desire,  
 Strong in the power that all men adore,  
 And simper and set their voices lower,  
 And soften as if to a girl, and hold  
 Awe-stricken breaths at a work divine,  
 Seeing his gewgaw castle shine,  
 New as his title, built last year,  
 There amid perky larches and pine,  
 And over the sullen-purple moor  
 (Look at it) pricking a cockney ear.

*ii*

What, has he found my jewel out?  
 For one of the two that rode at her side  
 Bound for the Hall, I am sure was he:  
 Bound for the Hall, and I think for a bride.  
 Blithe would her brother's acceptance be.  
 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?  
 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.

*iii*

Last week came one to the country town,  
 To preach our poor little army down,  
 And play the game of the despot kings,  
 Tho' the state has done it and thrice as well:  
 This broad-brimm'd hawker of holy things,  
 Whose ear is cramm'd with his cotton, and rings  
 Even in dreams to the chink of his pence,

This huckster put down war! can he tell  
 Whether war be a cause or a consequence?  
 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.

*iv*

I wish I could hear again  
 The chivalrous battle-song  
 That she warbled alone in her joy!  
 I might persuade myself then  
 She would not do herself this great wrong,  
 To take a wanton dissolute boy  
 For a man and leader of men.

*v*

Ah God, for a man with heart, head, hand,  
 Like some of the simple great ones gone  
 For ever and ever by,  
 One still strong man in a blatant land,  
 Whatever they call him, what care I,  
 Aristocrat, democrat, autocrat—one  
 Who can rule and dare not lie.

*vi*

And ah for a man to arise in me,  
 That the man I am may cease to be!

## • XI •

*i*

O LET the solid ground  
 Not fail beneath my feet

Before my life has found  
 What some have found so sweet;  
 Then let come what come may,  
 What matter if I go mad,  
 I shall have had my day.

*ii*

Let the sweet heavens endure,  
 Not close and darken above me  
 Before I am quite quite sure  
 That there is one to love me;  
 Then let come what come may  
 To a life that has been so sad,  
 I shall have had my day.

## • XII •

*i*

BIRDS in the high Hall-garden  
 When twilight was falling,  
 Maud, Maud, Maud, Maud,  
 They were crying and calling.

*ii*

Where was Maud? in our wood;  
 And I, who else, was with her,  
 Gathering woodland lilies,  
 Myriads blow together.

*iii*

Birds in our wood sang  
 Ringing thro' the valleys,  
 Maud is here, here, here  
 In among the lilies.

*iv*

I kiss'd her slender hand,  
 She took the kiss sedately;

Maud is not seventeen,  
But she is tall and stately.

*v*

I to cry out on pride  
Who have won her favor!  
O Maud were sure of Heaven  
If lowliness could save her.

*vi*

I know the way she went  
Home with her maiden posy,  
For her feet have touch'd the meadows  
And left the daisies rosy.

*vii*

Birds in the high Hall-garden  
Were crying and calling to her,  
Where is Maud, Maud, Maud?  
One is come to woo her.

*viii*

Look, a horse at the door,  
And little King Charley snarling,  
Go back, my lord, across the moor,  
You are not her darling.

• XIII •

*i*

SCORN'D, to be scorn'd by one that I scorn,  
Is that a matter to make me fret?  
That a calamity hard to be borne?  
Well, he may live to hate me yet.  
Fool that I am to be vex't with his pride!  
I past him, I was crossing his lands;  
He stood on the path a little aside;

His face, as I grant, in spite of spite,  
 Has a broad-blown comeliness, red and white,  
 And six feet two, as I think, he stands;  
 But his essences turn'd the live air sick,  
 And barbarous opulence jewel-thick  
 Sunn'd itself on his breast and his hands.

*ii*

Who shall call me ungentle, unfair,  
 I long'd so heartily then and there  
 To give him the grasp of fellowship;  
 But while I past he was humming an air,  
 Stopt, and then with a riding whip  
 Leisurely tapping a glossy boot,  
 And curving a contumelious lip,  
 Gorgonized me from head to foot  
 With a stony British stare.

*iii*

Why sits he here in his father's chair?  
 That old man never comes to his place:  
 Shall I believe him ashamed to be seen?  
 For only once, in the village street,  
 Last year, I caught a glimpse of his face,  
 A gray old wolf and a lean.  
 Scarcely, now, would I call him a cheat;  
 For then, perhaps, as a child of deceit,  
 She might by a true descent be untrue;  
 And Maud is as true as Maud is sweet:  
 Tho' I fancy her sweetness only due  
 To the sweeter blood by the other side;  
 Her mother has been a thing complete,  
 However she came to be so allied.  
 And fair without, faithful within,  
 Maud to him is nothing akin:  
 Some peculiar mystic grace  
 Made her only the child of her mother,

And heap'd the whole inherited sin  
 On that huge scapegoat of the race,  
 All, all upon the brother.

*iv*

Peace, angry spirit, and let him be!  
 Has not his sister smiled on me?

## · XIV ·

*i*

MAUD has a garden of roses  
 And lilies fair on a lawn;  
 There she walks in her state  
 And tends upon bed and bower,  
 And thither I climb'd at dawn  
 And stood by her garden-gate;  
 A lion ramps at the top,  
 He is claspt by a passion-flower.

*ii*

Maud's own little oak-room  
 (Which Maud, like a precious stone  
 Set in the heart of the carven gloom,  
 Lights by herself, when alone  
 She sits by her music and books  
 And her brother lingers late  
 With a roystering company) looks  
 Upon Maud's own garden-gate:  
 And I thought as I stood, if a hand, as white  
 As ocean-foam in the moon, were laid  
 On the hasp of the window, and my Delight  
 Had a sudden desire, like a glorious ghost, to glide,  
 Like a beam of the seventh Heaven, down to my side,  
 There were but a step to be made.

*iii*

The fancy flatter'd my mind,  
 And again seem'd overbold;  
 Now I thought that she cared for me,  
 Now I thought she was kind  
 Only because she was cold.

*iv*

I heard no sound where I stood  
 But the rivulet on from the lawn  
 Running down to my own dark wood;  
 Or the voice of the long sea-wave as it swell'd  
 Now and then in the dim-gray dawn;  
 But I look'd, and round, all round the house I beheld  
 The death-white curtain drawn;  
 Felt a horror over me creep,  
 Prickle my skin and catch my breath,  
 Knew that the death-white curtain meant but sleep,  
 Yet I shudder'd and thought like a fool of the sleep of death.

## • XV •

So DARK a mind within me dwells,  
 And I make myself such evil cheer,  
 That if *I* be dear to some one else,  
 Then some one else may have much to fear;  
 But if *I* be dear to some one else,  
 Then I should be to myself more dear.  
 Shall I not take care of all that I think,  
 Yea ev'n of wretched meat and drink,  
 If I be dear,  
 If I be dear to some one else.

## • XVI •

*i*

THIS lump of earth has left his estate  
 The lighter by the loss of his weight;



And so that he find what he went to seek,  
And fulsome Pleasure clog him, and drown  
His heart in the gross mud-honey of town,  
He may stay for a year who has gone for a week:  
But this is the day when I must speak  
And I see my Oread coming down,  
O this is the day!  
O beautiful creature, what am I  
That I dare to look her way;  
Think I may hold dominion sweet,  
Lord of the pulse that is lord of her breast,  
And dream of her beauty with tender dread,  
From the delicate Arab arch of her feet  
To the grace that, bright and light as the crest  
Of a peacock, sits on her shining head,  
And she knows it not: O, if she knew it,  
To know her beauty might half undo it.  
I know it the one bright thing to save  
My yet young life in the wilds of Time,  
Perhaps from madness, perhaps from crime,  
Perhaps from a selfish grave.

*ii*

What, if she be fasten'd to this fool lord,  
Dare I bid her abide by her word?  
Should I love her so well if she  
Had given her word to a thing so low?  
Shall I love her as well if she  
Can break her word were it even for me?  
I trust that it is not so.

*iii*

Catch not my breath, O clamorous heart,  
Let not my tongue be a thrall to my eye,  
For I must tell her before we part,  
I must tell her, or die.

## · XVII ·

Go not, happy day,  
     From the shining fields,  
 Go not, happy day,  
     Till the maiden yields.  
 Rosy is the West,  
     Rosy is the South,  
 Roses are her cheeks,  
     And a rose her mouth  
 When the happy Yes  
     Falters from her lips,  
 Pass and blush the news  
     Over glowing ships;  
 Over blowing seas,  
     Over seas at rest,  
 Pass the happy news,  
     Blush it thro' the West;  
 Till the red man dance  
     By his red cedar-tree,  
 And the red man's babe  
     Leap, beyond the sea.  
 Blush from West to East,  
     Blush from East to West,  
 Till the West is East,  
     Blush it thro' the West.  
 Rosy is the West,  
     Rosy is the South,  
 Roses are her cheeks,  
     And a rose her mouth.

## · XVIII ·

*i*

I HAVE led her home, my love, my only friend.  
 There is none like her, none.  
 And never yet so warmly ran my blood

And sweetly, on and on,  
Calming itself to the long-wish'd-for end,  
Full to the banks, close on the promised good.

*ii*

None like her, none.  
Just now the dry-tongued laurels' pattering talk  
Seem'd her light foot along the garden walk,  
And shook my heart to think she comes once more;  
But even then I heard her close the door,  
The gates of Heaven are closed, and she is gone.

*iii*

There is none like her, none,  
Nor will be when our summers have deceased.  
O, art thou sighing for Lebanon  
In the long breeze that streams to thy delicious East,  
Sighing for Lebanon,  
Dark cedar, tho' thy limbs have here increased,  
Upon a pastoral slope as fair,  
And looking to the South, and fed  
With honey'd rain and delicate air,  
And haunted by the starry head  
Of her whose gentle will has changed my fate,  
And made my life a perfumed altar-flame;  
And over whom thy darkness must have spread  
With such delight as theirs of old, thy great  
Forefathers of the thornless garden, there  
Shadowing the snow-limb'd Eve from whom she came.

*iv*

Here will I lie, while these long branches sway,  
And you fair stars that crown a happy day  
Go in and out as if at merry play,  
Who am no more so all forlorn,  
As when it seem'd far better to be born  
To labor and the mattock-harden'd hand,

Than nursed at ease and brought to understand  
 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.

*v*

But now shine on, and what care I,  
 Who in this stormy gulf have found a pearl  
 The countercharm of space and hollow sky,  
 And do accept my madness, and would die  
 To save from some slight shame one simple girl.

*vi*

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.

*vii*

Not die; but live a life of truest breath,  
 And teach true life to fight with mortal wrongs.  
 O, why should Love, like men in drinking-songs,  
 Spice his fair banquet with the dust of death?  
 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.'

*viii*

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 past 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 stol'n 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 splendors that you look so bright?  
 I have climb'd 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.

• XIX •

*i*

HER brother is coming back to-night,  
 Breaking up my dream of delight.

*ii*

My dream? do I dream of bliss?  
 I have walk'd awake with Truth.  
 O when did a morning shine  
 So rich in atonement as this  
 For my dark-dawning youth,  
 Darken'd watching a mother decline  
 And that dead man at her heart and mine:

For who was left to watch her but I?  
Yet so did I let my freshness die.

*iii*

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 I did not speak  
Of my mother's faded cheek  
When it slowly grew so thin,  
That I felt she was slowly dying  
Vext with lawyers and harass'd with debt:  
For how often I caught her with eyes all wet,  
Shaking her head at her son and sighing  
A world of trouble within!

*iv*

And Maud too, Maud was moved  
To speak of the mother she loved  
As one scarce less forlorn,  
Dying abroad and it seems apart  
From him who had ceased to share her heart,  
And ever mourning over the feud,  
The household Fury sprinkled with blood  
By which our houses are torn:  
How strange was what she said,  
When only Maud and the brother  
Hung over her dying bed—  
That Maud's dark father and mine  
Had bound us one to the other,  
Betrothed us over their wine,  
On the day when Maud was born;  
Seal'd her mine from her first sweet breath.

Mine, mine by a right, from birth till death.  
Mine, mine—our fathers have sworn.

## v

But the true blood spilt had in it a heat  
To dissolve the precious seal on a bond  
That, if left uncancell'd, had been so sweet:  
And none of us thought of a something beyond,  
A desire that awoke in the heart of the child,  
As it were a duty done to the tomb,  
To be friends for her sake, to be reconciled;  
And I was cursing them and my doom,  
And letting a dangerous thought run wild  
While often abroad in the fragrant gloom  
Of foreign churches—I see her there,  
Bright English lily, breathing a prayer  
To be friends, to be reconciled!

## vi

But then what a flint is he!  
Abroad, at Florence, at Rome,  
I find whenever she touch'd on me  
This brother had laugh'd her down,  
And at last, when each came home,  
He had darken'd into a frown,  
Chid her, and forbid her to speak  
To me, her friend of the years before;  
And this was what had redded her cheek  
When I bow'd to her on the moor.

## vii

Yet Maud, altho' not blind  
To the faults of his heart and mind,  
I see she cannot but love him,  
And says he is rough but kind,  
And wishes me to approve him,  
And tells me, when she lay

Sick once, with a fear of worse,  
 That he left his wine and horses and play,  
 Sat with her, read to her, night and day,  
 And tended her like a nurse.

## viii

Kind? but the deathbed desire  
 Spurn'd by this heir of the liar—  
 Rough but kind? yet I know  
 He has plotted against me in this,  
 That he plots against me still.  
 Kind to Maud? that were not amiss.  
 Well, rough but kind; why let it be so:  
 For shall not Maud have her will!

## ix

For, Maud, so tender and true,  
 As long as my life endures  
 I feel I shall owe you a debt,  
 That I never can hope to pay;  
 And if ever I should forget  
 That I owe this debt to you  
 And for your sweet sake to yours;  
 O then, what then shall I say?—  
 If ever I *should* forget,  
 May God make me more wretched  
 Than ever I have been yet!

## x

So now I have sworn to bury  
 All this dead body of hate,  
 I feel so free and so clear  
 By the loss of that dead weight,  
 That I should grow light-headed, I fear,  
 Fantastically merry;  
 But that her brother comes, like a blight  
 On my fresh hope, to the Hall to-night.



• XX •

*i*

STRANGE, that I felt so gay,  
 Strange, that *I* tried to-day  
 To beguile her melancholy;  
 The Sultan, as we name him,—  
 She did not wish to blame him—  
 But he vexed her and perplexed her  
 With his worldly talk and folly:  
 Was it gentle to reprove her  
 For stealing out of view  
 From a little lazy lover  
 Who but claims her as his due?  
 Or for chilling his caresses  
 By the coolness of her manners,  
 Nay, the plainness of her dresses?  
 Now I know her but in two,  
 Nor can pronounce upon it  
 If one should ask me whether  
 The habit, hat, and feather,  
 Or the frock and gipsy bonnet  
 Be the neater and completer;  
 For nothing can be sweeter  
 Than maiden Maud in either.

*ii*

But to-morrow, if we live,  
 Our ponderous squire will give  
 A grand political dinner  
 To half the squirelings near;  
 And Maud will wear her jewels,  
 And the bird of prey will hover,  
 And the titmouse hope to win her  
 With his chirrup at her ear.

*iii*

A grand political dinner  
 To the men of many acres,  
 A gathering of the Tory,  
 A dinner and then a dance  
 For the maids and marriage-makers,  
 And every eye but mine will glance  
 At Maud in all her glory.

*iv*

For I am not invited,  
 But, with the Sultan's pardon,  
 I am all as well delighted,  
 For I know her own rose-garden,  
 And mean to linger in it  
 Till the dancing will be over;  
 And then, oh then, come out to me  
 For a minute, but for a minute,  
 Come out to your own true lover,  
 That your true lover may see  
 Your glory also, and render  
 All homage to his own darling,  
 Queen Maud in all her splendor.

## • XXI •

RIVULET crossing my ground,  
 And bringing me down from the Hall  
 This garden-rose that I found,  
 Forgetful of Maud and me,  
 And lost in trouble and moving round  
 Here at the head of a tinkling fall,  
 And trying to pass to the sea;  
 O Rivulet, born at the Hall,  
 My Maud has sent it by thee  
 (If I read her sweet will right)  
 On a blushing mission to me,

Saying in odor and color, 'Ah, be  
Among the roses to-night.'

• XXII •

*i*

COME into the garden, Maud,  
For the black bat, night, has flown,  
Come into the garden, Maud,  
I am here at the gate alone;  
And the woodbine spices are wafted abroad,  
And the musk of the rose is blown.

*ii*

For a breeze of morning moves,  
And the planet of Love is on high,  
Beginning to faint in the light that she loves  
On a bed of daffodil sky,  
To faint in the light of the sun she loves,  
To faint in his light, and to die.

*iii*

All night have the roses heard  
The flute, violin, bassoon;  
All night has the casement jessamine stirr'd  
To the dancers dancing in tune;  
Till a silence fell with the waking bird,  
And a hush with the setting moon.

*iv*

I said to the lily, 'There is but one  
With whom she has heart to be gay.  
When will the dancers leave her alone?  
She is weary of dance and play.'  
Now half to the setting moon are gone,  
And half to the rising day;

Low on the sand and loud on the stone  
The last wheel echoes away.

## v

I said to the rose, 'The brief night goes  
In babble and revel and wine.  
O young lord-lover, what sighs are those,  
For one that will never be thine?  
But mine, but mine,' so I sware to the rose,  
'For ever and ever, mine.'

## vi

And the soul of the rose went into my blood,  
As the music clash'd in the hall;  
And long by the garden lake I stood,  
For I heard your rivulet fall  
From the lake to the meadow and on to the wood,  
Our wood, that is dearer than all;

## vii

From the meadow your walks have left so sweet  
That whenever a March-wind sighs  
He sets the jewel-print of your feet  
In violets blue as your eyes,  
To the woody hollows in which we meet  
And the valleys of Paradise.

## viii

The slender acacia would not shake  
One long milk-bloom on the tree;  
The white lake-blossom fell into the lake  
As the pimpernel dozed on the lea;  
But the rose was awake all night for your sake,  
Knowing your promise to me;  
The lilies and roses were all awake,  
They sigh'd for the dawn and thee.

*ix*

Queen rose of the rosebud garden of girls,  
 Come hither, the dances are done,  
 In gloss of satin and glimmer of pearls,  
 Queen lily and rose in one;  
 Shine out, little head, sunning over with curls,  
 To the flowers, and be their sun.

*x*

There has fallen a splendid tear  
 From the passion-flower at the gate.  
 She is coming, my dove, my dear;  
 She is coming, my life, my fate;  
 The red rose cries, 'She is near, she is near';  
 And the white rose weeps, 'She is late';  
 The larkspur listens, 'I hear, I hear';  
 And the lily whispers, 'I wait.'

*xi*

She is coming, my own, my sweet;  
 Were it ever so airy a tread,  
 My heart would hear her and beat,  
 Were it earth in an earthy bed;  
 My dust would hear her and beat,  
 Had I lain for a century dead;  
 Would start and tremble under her feet,  
 And blossom in purple and red.

## PART II

## • I •

*i*

'THE fault was mine, the fault was mine'—  
 Why am I sitting here so stunn'd and still,

Plucking the harmless wild-flower on the hill?—  
 It is this guilty hand!—  
 And there rises ever a passionate cry  
 From underneath in the darkening land—  
 What is it that has been done?  
 O dawn of Eden bright over earth and sky,  
 The fires of Hell brake out of thy rising sun,  
 The fires of Hell and of Hate;  
 For she, sweet soul, had hardly spoken a word,  
 When her brother ran in his rage to the gate,  
 He came with the babe-faced lord;  
 Heap'd on her terms of disgrace,  
 And while she wept, and I strove to be cool,  
 He fiercely gave me the lie,  
 Till I with as fierce an anger spoke,  
 And he struck me, madman, over the face,  
 Struck me before the languid fool,  
 Who was gaping and grinning by:  
 Struck for himself an evil stroke;  
 Wrought for his house an irredeemable woe;  
 For front to front in an hour we stood,  
 And a million horrible bellowing echoes broke  
 From the red-ribb'd hollow behind the wood,  
 And thunder'd up into Heaven the Christless code,  
 That must have life for a blow.  
 Ever and ever afresh they seem'd to grow.  
 Was it he lay there with a fading eye?  
 'The fault was mine,' he whisper'd, 'fly!'  
 Then glided out of the joyous wood  
 The gastly Wraith of one that I know;  
 And there rang on a sudden a passionate cry,  
 A cry for a brother's blood:  
 It will ring in my heart and my ears, till I die, till I die.

ii

Is it gone? my pulses beat—  
 What was it? a lying trick of the brain?

Yet I thought I saw her stand,  
 A shadow there at my feet,  
 High over the shadowy land.  
 It is gone; and the heavens fall in a gentle rain,  
 When they should burst and drown with deluging storms  
 The feeble vassals of wine and anger and lust,  
 The little hearts that know not how to forgive:  
 Arise, my God, and strike, for we hold Thee just,  
 Strike dead the whole weak race of venomous worms,  
 That sting each other here in the dust;  
 We are not worthy to live.

• II •

*i*

SEE what a lovely shell,  
 Small and pure as a pearl,  
 Lying close to my foot,  
 Frail, but a work divine,  
 Made so fairly well  
 With delicate spire and whorl,  
 How exquisitely minute,  
 A miracle of design!

*ii*

What is it? a learned man  
 Could give it a clumsy name.  
 Let him name it who can,  
 The beauty would be the same.

*iii*

The tiny cell is forlorn,  
 Void of the little living will  
 That made it stir on the shore.  
 Did he stand at the diamond door  
 Of his house in a rainbow frill?  
 Did he push, when he was uncurl'd,

A golden foot or a fairy horn  
Thro' his dim water-world?

*iv*

Slight, to be crush'd with a tap  
Of my finger-nail on the sand,  
Small, but a work divine,  
Frail, but of force to withstand,  
Year upon year, the shock  
Of cataract seas that snap  
The three-decker's oaken spine  
Athwart the ledges of rock,  
Here on the Breton strand!

*v*

Breton, not Briton; here  
Like a shipwreck'd man on a coast  
Of ancient fable and fear—  
Plagued with a flitting to and fro,  
A disease, a hard mechanic ghost  
That never came from on high  
Nor ever arose from below,  
But only moves with the moving eye,  
Flying along the land and the main—  
Why should it look like Maud?  
Am I to be overawed  
By what I cannot but know  
Is a juggle born of the brain?

*vi*

Back from the Breton coast,  
Sick of a nameless fear,  
Back to the dark sea-line  
Looking, thinking of all I have lost;  
An old song vexes my ear;  
But that of Lamech is mine.



*vii*

For years, a measureless ill,  
For years, for ever, to part—  
But she, she would love me still;  
And as long, O God, as she  
Have a grain of love for me,  
So long, no doubt, no doubt,  
Shall I nurse in my dark heart,  
However weary, a spark of will  
Not to be trampled out.

*viii*

Strange, that the mind, when fraught  
With a passion so intense  
One would think that it well  
Might drown all life in the eye,—  
That it should, by being so overwrought,  
Suddenly strike on a sharper sense  
For a shell, or a flower, little things  
Which else would have been past by!  
And now I remember, I,  
When he lay dying there,  
I noticed one of his many rings  
(For he had many, poor worm) and thought  
It is his mother's hair.

*ix*

Who knows if he be dead?  
Whether I need have fled?  
Am I guilty of blood?  
However this may be,  
Comfort her, comfort her, all things good,  
While I am over the sea!  
Let me and my passionate love go by,  
But speak to her all things holy and high,  
Whatever happen to me!  
Me and my harmful love go by;

But come to her waking, find her asleep,  
Powers of the height, Powers of the deep,  
And comfort her tho' I die.

• III •

COURAGE, poor heart of stone!  
I will not ask thee why  
Thou canst not understand  
That thou art left forever alone:  
Courage, poor stupid heart of stone.—  
Or if I ask thee why,  
Care not thou to reply:  
She is but dead, and the time is at hand  
When thou shalt more than die.

• IV •

*i*

O THAT 'twere possible  
After long grief and pain  
To find the arms of my true love  
Round me once again!

*ii*

When I was wont to meet her  
In the silent woody places  
By the home that gave me birth,  
We stood tranced in long embraces  
Mixt with kisses sweeter, sweeter  
Than anything on earth.

*iii*

A shadow flits before me,  
Not thou, but like to thee;  
Ah Christ, that it were possible  
For one short hour to see

The souls we loved, that they might tell us  
What and where they be.

*iv*

It leads me forth at evening,  
It lightly winds and steals  
In a cold white robe before me,  
When all my spirit reels  
At the shouts, the leagues of lights,  
And the roaring of the wheels.

*v*

Half the night I waste in sighs,  
Half in dreams I sorrow after  
The delight of early skies;  
In a wakeful doze I sorrow  
For the hand, the lips, the eyes,  
For the meeting of the morrow,  
The delight of happy laughter,  
The delight of low replies.

*vi*

'Tis a morning pure and sweet,  
And a dewy splendor falls  
On the little flower that clings  
To the turrets and the walls;  
'Tis a morning pure and sweet,  
And the light and shadow fleet;  
She is walking in the meadow,  
And the woodland echo rings;  
In a moment we shall meet;  
She is singing in the meadow  
And the rivulet at her feet  
Ripples on in light and shadow  
To the ballad that she sings.

*vii*

Do I hear her sing as of old,  
 My bird with the shining head,  
 My own dove with the tender eye?  
 But there rings on a sudden a passionate cry,  
 There is some one dying or dead,  
 And a sullen thunder is roll'd;  
 For a tumult shakes the city,  
 And I wake, my dream is fled;  
 In the shuddering dawn, behold,  
 Without knowledge, without pity,  
 By the curtains of my bed  
 That abiding phantom cold.

*viii*

Get thee hence, nor come again,  
 Mix not memory with doubt,  
 Pass, thou deathlike type of pain,  
 Pass and cease to move about!  
 'Tis the blot upon the brain  
 That *will* show itself without.

*ix*

Then I rise, the eavedrops fall,  
 And the yellow vapors choke  
 The great city sounding wide;  
 The day comes, a dull red ball  
 Wrapt in drifts of lurid smoke  
 On the misty river-tide.

*x*

Thro' the hubbub of the market  
 I steal, a wasted frame,  
 It crosses here, it crosses there,  
 Thro' all that crowd confused and loud,  
 The shadow still the same;

And on my heavy eyelids  
My anguish hangs like shame.

*xi*

Alas for her that met me,  
That heard me softly call,  
Came glimmering thro' the laurels  
At the quiet evenfall,  
In the garden by the turrets  
Of the old manorial hall.

*xii*

Would the happy spirit descend,  
From the realms of light and song,  
In the chamber or the street,  
As she looks among the blest,  
Should I fear to greet my friend  
Or to say, 'Forgive the wrong,'  
Or to ask her, 'Take me, sweet,  
To the regions of thy rest'?

*xiii*

But the broad light glares and beats,  
And the shadow flits and fleets  
And will not let me be;  
And I loathe the squares and streets,  
And the faces that one meets,  
Hearts with no love for me:  
Always I long to creep  
Into some still cavern deep,  
There to weep, and weep, and weep  
My whole soul out to thee.

• V •

*i*

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,  
With never an end to the stream of passing feet,  
Driving, hurrying, marrying, burying,  
Clamor and rumble, and ringing and clatter,  
And here beneath it is all as bad,  
For I thought the dead had peace, but it is not so;  
To have no peace in the grave, is that not sad?  
But up and down and to and fro,  
Ever about me the dead men go;  
And then to hear a dead man chatter  
Is enough to drive one mad.

*ii*

Wretchedest age since Time began,  
They cannot even bury a man;  
And tho' we paid our tithes in the days that are gone,  
Not a bell was rung, not a prayer was read;  
It is that which makes us loud in the world of the dead;  
There is none that does his work, not one;  
A touch of their office might have sufficed,  
But the churchmen fain would kill their church,  
As the churches have kill'd their Christ.

*iii*

See, there is one of us sobbing,  
No limit to his distress;  
And another, a lord of all things, praying  
To his own great self, as I guess;  
And another, a statesman there, betraying  
His party-secret, fool, to the press;

And yonder a vile physician, blabbing  
 The case of his patient—all for what?  
 To tickle the maggot born in an empty head,  
 And wheedle a world that loves him not,  
 For it is but a world of the dead.

## iv

Nothing but idiot gabble!  
 For the prophecy given of old  
 And then not understood,  
 Has come to pass as foretold;  
 Not let any man think for the public good,  
 But babble, merely for babble.  
 For I never whisper'd a private affair  
 Within the hearing of cat or mouse,  
 No, not to myself in the closet alone,  
 But I heard it shouted at once from the top of the house;  
 Everything came to be known.  
 Who told *him* we were there?

## v

Not that gray old wolf, for he came not back  
 From the wilderness, full of wolves, where he used to lie;  
 He has gather'd the bones for his o'ergrown whelp to crack;  
 Crack them now for yourself, and howl, and die.

## vi

Prophet, curse me the blabbing lip,  
 And curse me the British vermin, the rat;  
 I know not whether he came in the Hanover ship,  
 But I know that he lies and listens mute  
 In an ancient mansion's crannies and holes:  
 Arsenic, arsenic, sure, would do it,  
 Except that now we poison our babes, poor souls!  
 It is all used up for that.

*vii*

Tell him now: she is standing here at my head;  
 Not beautiful now, not even kind;  
 He may take her now; for she never speaks her mind,  
 But is ever the one thing silent here.  
 She is not *of* us, as I divine;  
 She comes from another stiller world of the dead,  
 Stiller, not fairer than mine.

*viii*

But I know where a garden grows,  
 Fairer than aught in the world beside,  
 All made up of the lily and rose  
 That blow by night, when the season is good,  
 To the sound of dancing music and flutes:  
 It is only flowers, they had no fruits,  
 And I almost fear they are not roses, but blood;  
 For the keeper was one, so full of pride,  
 He linkt a dead man there to a spectral bride;  
 For he, if he had not been a Sultan of brutes,  
 Would he have that hole in his side?

*ix*

But what will the old man say?  
 He laid a cruel snare in a pit  
 To catch a friend of mine one stormy day;  
 Yet now I could even weep to think of it;  
 For what will the old man say?  
 When he comes to the second corpse in the pit?

*x*

Friend, to be struck by the public foe,  
 Then to strike him and lay him low,  
 That were a public merit, far,  
 Whatever the Quaker holds, from sin;  
 But the red life spilt for a private blow—



I swear to you, lawful and lawless war  
Are scarcely even akin.

*xi*

O me, why have they not buried me deep enough?  
Is it kind to have made me a grave so rough,  
Me, that was never a quiet sleeper?  
Maybe still I am but half dead;  
Then I cannot be wholly dumb;  
I will cry to the steps above my head,  
And somebody, surely, some kind heart will come  
To bury me, bury me  
Deeper, ever so little deeper.

PART III

• VI •

*i*

MY LIFE has crept so long on a broken wing  
Thro' 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 a time of year  
When the face of night is fair on the dewy downs,  
And the shining daffodil dies, and the Charioteer  
And starry Gemini hang like glorious crowns  
Over Orion's grave low down in the west,  
That like a silent lightning under the stars  
She seem'd to divide in a dream from a band of the blest,  
And spoke of a hope for the world in the coming wars—  
'And in that hope, dear soul, let trouble have rest,  
Knowing I tarry for thee,' and pointed to Mars  
As he glow'd like a ruddy shield on the Lion's breast.

*ii*

And it was but a dream, yet it yielded a dear delight  
 To have look'd, tho' but in a dream, upon eyes so fair,  
 That had been in a weary world my one thing bright;  
 And it was but a dream, yet it lighten'd my despair  
 When I thought that a war would arise in defence of the right,  
 That an iron tyranny now should bend or cease,  
 The glory of manhood stand on his ancient height,  
 Nor Britain's one sole God be the millionaire:  
 No more shall commerce be all in all, and Peace  
 Pipe on her pastoral hillock a languid note,  
 And watch her harvest ripen, her herd increase,  
 Nor the cannon-bullet rust on a slothful shore,  
 And the cobweb woven across the cannon's throat  
 Shall shake its threaded tears in the wind no more.

*iii*

And as months ran on and rumor of battle grew,  
 'It is time, it is time, O passionate heart,' said I  
 (For I cleaved to a cause that I felt to be pure and true),  
 'It is time, O passionate heart and morbid eye,  
 That old hysterical mock-disease should die.'  
 And I stood on a giant deck and mix'd my breath  
 With a loyal people shouting a battle cry,  
 Till I saw the dreary phantom arise and fly  
 Far into the North, and battle, and seas of death.

*iv*

Let it go or stay, so I wake to the higher aims  
 Of a land that has lost for a little her lust of gold,  
 And love of a peace that was full of wrongs and shames,  
 Horrible, hateful, monstrous, not to be told;  
 And hail once more to the banner of battle unroll'd!  
 Tho' many a light shall darken, and many shall weep  
 For those that are crush'd in the clash of jarring claims,  
 Yet God's just wrath shall be wreak'd on a giant liar;  
 And many a darkness into the light shall leap,

And shine in the sudden making of splendid names,  
And noble thought be freer under the sun,  
And the heart of a people beat with one desire;  
For the peace, that I deem'd no peace, is over and done,  
And now by the side of the Black and the Baltic deep,  
And deathful-grinning mouths of the fortress, flames  
The blood-red blossom of war with a heart of fire.

v

Let it flame or fade, and the war roll down like a wind,  
We have proved we have hearts in a cause, we are noble still,  
And myself have awaked, as it seems, to the better mind;  
It is better to fight for the good than to rail at the ill;  
I have felt with my native land, I am one with my kind,  
I embrace the purpose of God, and the doom assign'd.



## Poe's Ligeia

ALTHOUGH a number of biographers, psychoanalytical and otherwise, have employed the data and theories of several schools of thought in nonrational psychology in attempting to interpret the personality of Poe, and have indicated the need for such an approach in the interpretation of much of his writing, no one, as far as I am aware, has undertaken to point out the specific bearing of nonrational psychology on the critical interpretation of a number of Poe's stories which in their entire context seem to indicate that Poe dealt deliberately with the psychological themes of obsession and madness. Such a story is "Ligeia," the most important of a group of stories, generally but inadequately classified as "impressionistic," which includes the kindred pieces "Morella" and "Berenice." Each of these three tales shows a similar preoccupation with the *idée fixe* or obsession in an extreme form of monomania which seems intended by Poe to be the psychological key to its plot. Even a casual comparison of these stories will reveal not merely the similar theme of obsession but also the dominant concepts which provide the motivation in all three: the power of the psychical over the physical and the power of frustrate love to create an erotic symbolism and mythology in compensation for sensual disappointment. Although Poe grinds them differently in each story, they are the same grist to his mill.

In the interpretation of "Ligeia" particularly, an under-

standing of the nonrational makes necessary an almost complete reversal of certain critical opinions and explanations which assume that the story is a tale of the supernatural. Clayton Hamilton's analysis of "Ligeia" in his *Manual of the Art of Fiction* (1918) is a rationalization which outdoes Poe's rationalization of "The Raven" in its attempt to show how Poe chose with mathematical accuracy just the effect and just the word which would make the perfect story of the supernatural. Unfortunately, Hamilton's basic assumptions seem obviously erroneous when he takes for granted that Ligeia is the main character, that the action of the story is concerned primarily with her struggle to overcome death, that the hero (the narrator) is "an ordinary character" who functions merely as an "eyewitness" and as a "standard by which the unusual capabilities of the central figure may be measured," and that Ligeia is "a woman of superhuman will, and her husband, a man of ordinary powers." These assumptions ignore the obvious context with its emphasis on the hero's obsession, madness, and hallucination. Actually, the story seems both aesthetically and psychologically more intelligible as a tale, not of supernatural, but rather of entirely natural, though highly phrenetic, psychological phenomena.

Perhaps the naïveté and excesses of certain psychoanalytical biographies of Poe have militated against the recognition of the value of nonrational psychology in the study of Poe. At any rate, scholarly critical biographers have hesitated to credit the indubitable data of the science; and even recent critical studies following the traditional interpretation, ignore the most obvious evidence of the nonrational theme and motivation of "Ligeia" and undertake to analyze the story again as a tale of the supernatural. Although we need not consider here either the value of nonrational psychology as a means of understand-

ing Poe's personality or the mistakes of broad assumption and overconfidence which the analysts of Poe have made, it must be recognized that, if nonrational psychology provides a better means of understanding the structure and effect of a tale like "Ligeia" and enables the reader to appreciate better what Poe accomplished as an artist, then the critic who refuses to accept nonrational psychology does so at the risk of his entire critical principle.

Let us examine the personality of the hero of "Ligeia," the narrator whose psycho-emotional experience weaves the plot. He is presented in the first paragraph as a man with an erotic obsession of long standing; his wife is presumably dead, but his idolatrous devotion to her has kept her physical beauty and her personality painfully alive in his every thought. That this devotion approaches monomania becomes more clear with every statement he makes about her. She is the acme of womanly beauty and spiritual perfection. From the time of his first acquaintance with her he has been oblivious of all but her beauty and her power over him: "I CANNOT, for my soul, remember how, when, or even precisely where, I first became acquainted with the Lady Ligeia." Furthermore, there is his interesting admission that "I have *never known* the paternal name of her who was my friend and my betrothed, and who became the partner of my studies, and finally the wife of my bosom." In view of the fact that she was of an exceedingly ancient family and had brought him wealth "very far more, than ordinarily falls to the lot of mortals," these admissions are more than strange. Though the hero half recognizes the incongruity of his unbelievable ignorance, he dismisses it as evidence of a lover's devotion—a "wildly romantic offering on the shrine of the most passionate devotion."

Beginning with the second paragraph, we see more clearly

the degree of his obsession. Although he makes much of the power of Ligeia's intellect, his imaginative preoccupation with her physical beauty is highly sensuous, even voluptuous, in its intensity. He seems to be a psychopath who has failed to find the last, final meaning of life in the coils of Ligeia's raven hair, her ivory skin, her "jetty lashes of great length," and, above all, in her eyes, "those shining, those divine orbs!" But his imaginative desire has outrun his capabilities. Though his senses have never revealed the final meaning of the mystery which has enthralled him, his imagination refuses to accept defeat. The key to his failure is hinted in the paragraph which reveals his symbolic deification of Ligeia as a sort of personal Venus Aphrodite who personifies the dynamic urge of life itself but who, because of the hero's psychic incapacity, cannot reveal to him the "forbidden knowledge":

There is no point, among the many incomprehensible anomalies of the science of the mind, more thrillingly exciting than the fact—never, I believe, noticed in the schools—that in our endeavors to recall to memory something long forgotten, we often find ourselves *upon the very verge* of remembrance, without being able, in the end, to remember. And thus how frequently, in my intense scrutiny of Ligeia's eyes, have I felt approaching the full knowledge of their expression—felt it approaching—yet not quite be mine—and so at length entirely depart! And (strange, oh, strangest mystery of all!) I found, in the commonest objects of the universe, a circle of analogies to that expression. I mean to say that subsequently to the period when Ligeia's beauty passed into my spirit, there dwelling as in a shrine, I derived, from many existences in the material world, a sentiment such as I felt always aroused within me by her large and luminous orbs. Yet not the more could I define that sentiment, or analyze or even steadily view it. I recognized it, let me repeat, sometimes in the survey of a rapidly-growing vine—in the contemplation of a moth, a butterfly, a chrysalis, a stream of running water. I have felt it in the ocean—in the falling of a meteor.



I have felt it in the glances of unusually aged people. And there are one or two stars in heaven (one especially, a star of the sixth magnitude, double and changeable, to be found near the large star in Lyra) in a telescopic scrutiny of which I have been made aware of the feeling. I have been filled with it by certain sounds from stringed instruments, and not unfrequently by passages from books. Among innumerable other instances, I well remember something in a volume of Joseph Glanville, which (perhaps merely from its quaintness—who shall say?) never failed to inspire me with the sentiment: "And the will therein lieth, which dieth not. Who knoweth the mysteries of the will, with its vigor? For God is but a great will pervading all things by nature of its intentness. Man doth not yield him to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will."

In this passage it is not difficult to perceive the oblique confession of inadequacy and to trace the psychological process of symbolism, which compensates for the failure of sense by apotheosis of the object of desire. Although sensuous delight leads the hero to "the very verge" of a "wisdom too divinely precious not to be forbidden," final knowledge of the secret of Ligeia's eyes is blocked by an obstacle deep within the hero's own psyche, and the insatiable imagination seeks for a realm of experience not sensual and mortal and identifies Ligeia with the dynamic power and mystery of the entire universe. She becomes not merely a woman but a goddess, through the worship of whom he "feels" that he may "pass onward to the goal of a wisdom too divinely precious not to be forbidden." There is for him, however, no possibility of fathoming the mystery which she symbolizes, though in the height of passionate adoration he feels himself to be "*upon the very verge*," which experience he likens to that of almost but not quite recalling something from the depths of his unconscious.

This analogy of the will's inability to dictate to the uncon-

scious and its inability to dictate to love reveals something more than the hero's vague awareness of a psychic flaw which thwarts his desire; it reveals the source of the obsession which dominates in a compensatory process his struggle to achieve by power of mind what he cannot achieve through love. The passage from Glanvill is the key, the psychic formula, which he hopes may open to him the very mystery of being, his own as well as Ligeia's, in which as he conceives lies the source of the dark failure and frustration of his senses. From this psychic formula derives, then, the megalomania that he can by power of will become god-like, blending his spirit with the universal spirit of deity symbolized in the divine Ligeia, who possesses in apotheosis all the attributes of his own wish, extended in a symbolic ideal beyond the touch of mortality and raised to the absoluteness of deity—intensity in thought, passion, and sensibility; perfection in wisdom, beauty, and power of mind. It is worth noting that Poe had earlier used the name Ligeia in *Al Aaraaf* for a divinity representing much the same dynamic beauty in all nature.

But the hero's approach to power is thwarted by Ligeia's death. Just at the point when triumph seems imminent, when he feels "that delicious vista by slow degrees expanding before me, down whose long, gorgeous, and all untrodden path, I might at length pass onward to the goal of a wisdom too divinely precious not to be forbidden"—just then Ligeia dies, because of the weakness of her own mortal will and in spite of the fervor with which the hero himself "struggled desperately in spirit with the grim Azrael."

At this point it may be noted that the obsession with the *idée fixe* expressed in the passage from Glanvill begins with the hero himself and does not express Ligeia's belief. It is his will to conquer death that motivates the rest of the story, not hers. Even when she recites the formula on her deathbed, the

lines are but the echo of his wish, given in antiphonal response to the materialistic creed which she has avowed in her poem "The Conqueror Worm," which represents her philosophy and is read by the hero merely at her peremptory request. This fact is always overlooked in the rational interpretations of the story, which assume that Ligeia's struggle is the primary motivating action of the tale. Thus, in spite of her power and beauty and her passionate desire for life, "*but* for life," the earthly body of Ligeia dies—perhaps, as the obsessed hero conceives, because she has not believed in her power to conquer death. Her failure of spirit, however, is not the end. Nor is the hero's failure as he "struggled desperately in spirit with the grim Azrael" the end, but rather the beginning of the grim mania in which he is resolved to bring her back to life.

In following all that the hero says, the reader must keep constantly in mind that, if the hero is suffering from obsession, his narrative cannot be accepted merely at its face value as authentic of all the facts; and he must remember that incidents and circumstances have a primary significance in terms of the hero's mania which is often at variance with the significance which the hero believes and means to convey. This is to say that Poe's psychological effect in "Ligeia" is similar to that of later delvers in psychological complexity like Henry James, whose stories told by a narrator move on two planes. There is the story which the narrator means to tell, and there is the story which he tells without meaning to, as he unconsciously reveals himself.

Hence, the important elements in the hero's description of Ligeia are of primary significance as they reveal his feeling of psychic inadequacy, his voluptuous imagination, and his megalomania and fierce obsession with the idea that by power of will man may thwart death through spiritual love. Likewise, the narrative of the circumstances of Ligeia's death is of sig-

nificance, not merely as it reveals her love of life and her struggle to live, but as it reveals the psychological crisis in which the hero's psychic shock and frustration bring on final and complete mania, the diagnostic fallacy of which is that his will is omnipotent and can bring Ligeia back to life. Up to the point of her death the hero's obsession has taken the form of adoration and worship of her person in an erotomania primarily sensual (though frustrated by a psychic flaw which he is aware of but does not understand) and hence projected into a symbolic realm of deity and forbidden wisdom. Following her death, however, his obsession becomes an intense megalomania motivated by his will to restore her to life in another body through a process of metempsychosis.

It is of particular importance that, with the beginning of the second half of the story, the reader keep in mind these two planes of meaning, for the primary significance of what the hero tells in this part is never in any circumstance the plain truth. It is rather an entirely, and obviously, fantastic representation of the facts, which justifies his obsessed psyche and proves that he has been right and Ligeia (and perhaps the gentle reader) wrong in the assumption that mortality is the common human fate—the old story of the madman who knows that he is right and the rest of the world wrong.

Thus even the hero's admission of his "incipient madness" must be recognized as the cunning condescension of the megalomaniac to the normal mind, which would not otherwise understand the excesses of his peculiar "childlike perversity" in choosing such macabre furnishings for his bridal chamber or in debauching his senses with opium—both of which "perversities" he dismisses with pseudo-naïveté as minor "absurdities." The contempt which he feels for people of normal mentality almost leads him to give himself away in his blistering ques-

tion: "Where were the souls of the haughty family of the bride, when, through thirst of gold, they permitted to pass the threshold of an apartment so bedecked, a maiden and a daughter so beloved?" In other words, why could not the parents of Rowena perceive in the macabre furnishings—the "ebony couch" with draperies of gold "spotted all over, at regular intervals, with arabesque figures . . . of the most jetty black," the "sarcophagus of black granite," and the "endless succession of the ghastly forms which belong to the superstition of the Norman, or arise in the guilty slumbers of the monk"—why could they not perceive the obvious death chamber which he intended the bridal room to be? Likewise, one must recognize the maniacal condescension which prompts the hardly disarming naïveté with which he confesses the pleasure he derived from Rowena's dread avoidance of him in the "unhallowed hours of the first month of our marriage" and with which he testifies, "I loathed her with a hatred belonging more to demon than to man."

Perhaps he relies on this imperciency of the normal mind to befuddle also the moral equilibrium of his audience into a sentimental acceptance of the phrenetic devotion of his spirit to the memory of Ligeia, which in his madness justifies, of course, his ghastly treatment of Rowena in terms of a pure, ethereal love for Ligeia. Thus he concludes his introductory statement in the second half of the story on a plane which, while utterly sincere in its obsessional idealism, is highly equivocal in its moral and psychological implications and reveals the fact that underlying his mad persecution of Rowena lies his frustrate desire for and worship of the lost Ligeia:

. . . My memory flew back (oh, with what intensity of regret!) to Ligeia, the beloved, the august, the beautiful, the entombed. I revelled in recollections of her purity, of her wisdom, of her

lofty—her ethereal nature, of her passionate, her idolatrous love. Now, then, did my spirit fully and freely burn with more than all the fires of her own. In the excitement of my opium dreams (for I was habitually fettered in the shackles of the drug), I would call aloud upon her name, during the silence of the night, or among the sheltered recesses of the glens by day, as if, through the wild eagerness, the solemn passion, the consuming ardor of my longing for the departed, I could restore her to the pathways she had abandoned—ah, *could* it be forever?—upon the earth.

Up to this point in the second half of the story, the hero has unintentionally mixed a generous amount of obliquely truthful interpretation with the facts of his story; but from this point to the end he narrates events with a pseudo-objectivity that wholly, though not necessarily intentionally, falsifies their significance. He tells what he saw and heard and felt, but these things must be understood as the hallucinations of his mania, as wish-projections which arise from his obsession with the idea of resurrecting Ligeia in the body of Rowena. He tells the effects but ignores or misrepresents the causes: he wants his audience to believe that the power of Ligeia's will effected her resurrection in the body of Rowena but does not want his audience to recognize (what he himself would not) that he was the actual agent of Rowena's death and his perceptions mere hallucinations produced by obsessional desire.

In brief, it must be recognized that the hero has murdered Rowena in his maniacal attempt to restore Ligeia to life. Although his narrative of the "sudden illness" which seized Rowena "about the second month of the marriage" avoids anything which suggests a physical attempt at murder, there are unintentional confessions of deliberate psychological cruelty in the macabre furnishings of the apartment and in the weird sounds and movements designed to produce ghostly

effects. The hero mentions with apparent casualness and objectivity that, "in her perturbed state of half-slumber, she spoke of sounds, and of motions, in and about the chamber of the turret, which I concluded had no origin save in the distemper of her fancy, or perhaps in the phantasmagoric influences of the chamber itself." But by his earlier confession he had calculated these "sounds" and "motions" in advance, as instruments of mental torture for the young bride, by so arranging the figured draperies as to produce optical illusions of motion and by introducing "a strong current of wind behind the draperies." He further confesses that as her dread and fear began to produce symptoms of hysteria and physical collapse he "wished to show her (what, let me confess it, I could not *all* believe) that those almost inarticulate breathings, and those very gentle variations of the figures upon the wall, were but the natural effects of that customary rushing of the wind." But he did not tell her!

At this point he narrates how he became aware of a "presence" in the chamber, a supernatural agency at work. This is the wish-illusion that not he but the ghost of Ligeia, vampire-like, is preying upon the distraught and febrile body of Rowena. The details of resuscitation and relapse he wishes to believe evidence of the struggle of Ligeia's spirit to drive Rowena's spirit out of the body and to reanimate it herself. Hence arises the hallucination of the shadow on the carpet—"a faint, indefinite shadow of angelic aspect—such as might be fancied for the shadow of a shade." But, as he admits immediately, he had indulged in "an immoderate dose of opium, and heeded these things but little, nor spoke of them to Rowena." Such deprecation of his own perception is again the cunning of the maniac who must tell his story and must equally not tell it wholly, lest he spoil it by supplying evidence of a sort likely to

encourage suspicion that there is something more than opiumism in his madness.

Then comes the crux of the death scene. Here, in the *mélange* of fact and hallucination, is *the fact* which betrays him: "I saw, or may have dreamed that I saw, fall within the goblet, as if from some invisible spring in the atmosphere of the room, three or four large drops of a brilliant and ruby colored fluid." Impatient for results and fearful that the apparent progress of Rowena's hysteria and physical collapse will not suffice, doubting the power of his will alone to effect his purpose, he has resorted to actual poison, which, however, his obsession adapts into the pattern of hallucination by perceiving that it is distilled from the atmosphere rather than dropped from a bottle held in his own hand. He cannot in his obsession recognize the bottle or the poison as physical facts, for then the power of the spirit must bow to the greater power of a merely physical drug.

The deed is accomplished, and the remainder of the narrative reveals the final stage of his mania. As the body of Rowena writhes in the throes of death, his wish takes complete command of his brain. As he watches, his mind is filled with "a thousand memories of Ligeia." The shadow on the carpet disappears, and he hears "a sob, low, gentle, but very distinct," which he "*felt* . . . came from the bed of ebony." As evidence of returning life appears in the corpse, he feels it necessary that "some immediate exertion be made; yet the turret was altogether apart from the portion of the abbey tenanted by the servants—there were none within call—I had no means of summoning them to my aid without leaving the room for many minutes—and this I could not venture to do." With this obviously satisfactory explanation made, he relates how he strug-



gled alone to call back "the spirit still hovering," only to fall back with a shudder and resume his "passionate waking visions of Ligeia."

Again and again the symptoms of life appear and diminish, and each time the hero testifies that he "sunk into visions of Ligeia," with the result that each period of struggle "was succeeded by I know not what of wild change in the personal appearance of the corpse," until finally his obsessed brain and senses perceive their desire-wish accomplished. The phrenetic tension of hallucination mounts in the concluding paragraph to an orgasm of psychopathic horror and wish-fulfilment in the final sentence: "'Here, then, at least,' I shrieked aloud, 'can I never—can I never be mistaken—these are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes—of my lost love—of the Lady—of the Lady Ligeia!'"

This conclusion is artistically perfect and unassailable if the story is understood to be that of a megalomaniac, a revelation of obsessional psychology and mania. If, however, the story is taken to be a rational narrative of the quasi-supernatural told by a man in his right mind, the conclusion is not a conclusion but a climax, the proper denouement of which would be the corpse's reassumption of Rowena's lineaments and its final lapse into certain death, recognized this time as complete and final by the mind of the hero. Philip Pendleton Cooke, presuming the entirely rational interpretation to be the one Poe intended, called Poe's attention to this supposed weakness of the ending in a letter otherwise filled with large praise for the story's effect. Cooke's comment is as follows:

There I was shocked by a violation of the ghostly proprieties—so to speak—and wondered how the Lady Ligeia—a wandering

essence—could, in quickening *the body of the Lady Rowena* (such is the idea) become suddenly the visible, bodily Ligeia.

Poe's answer takes full cognizance of the justice of Cooke's criticism and tacitly admits the rational interpretation to be the one he intended, making the somewhat lame excuse that

. . . it was necessary, since "Morella" was written, to modify "Ligeia." I was forced to be content with a sudden half-consciousness, on the part of the narrator, that Ligeia stood before him. One point I have not fully carried out—I should have intimated that the *will* did not perfect its intention—there should have been a relapse—a final one—and Ligeia (who had only succeeded in so much as to convey an idea of the truth to the narrator) should be at length entombed as Rowena—the bodily alterations having gradually faded away.

It is possible that Poe meant in this statement merely to bow to Cooke's praise and accept a criticism which completely misses the primary significance of the entire story, in order to avoid the necessity of explaining to an admirer the painful truth that he had missed the point. Poe was avid for the praise that came all too seldom, and he may have avoided controversy with his appreciative correspondent somewhat out of gratitude. That he could not have held seriously or for long the opinion that the story needed an added denouement seems obvious from the fact that, although he made careful and detailed revisions of the story afterward, he did not alter the nature of the conclusion. That he would have done so without hesitation had he actually believed the conclusion defective, we may be sure from his indefatigable practice of revising his favorite pieces even in the minor details which did not fulfil his wishes.

There seem to be two alternatives here: either Poe meant the story to be read as Cooke read it, and failed to provide the

sort of conclusion which he admitted to be necessary, or he meant it to be read approximately as we have analyzed it, and merely bowed to Cooke's criticism out of gratitude for appreciation. Possibly there is a third alternative, however, which is not incompatible with Poe's genius. Perhaps the intention in the story was not entirely clear and rationalized in Poe's own mind, preoccupied as he was with the very ideas and obsessions which motivate the hero of the story. Anyone who has studied Poe's rationalization of "The Raven" in "The Philosophy of Composition" must recognize that in its *post hoc* reasoning Poe largely ignores the obvious psycho-emotional motivation of his own creative process. In his offhand and casual comments on his writings, however, he sometimes admitted the essentially "unconscious" source of his compositions. An example of this admission is his comment written in a copy of the *Broadway Journal* which he sent to Mrs. Sarah Helen Whitman:

The poem ["To Helen"—of 1848] which I sent you contained all the events of a *dream* which occurred to me soon after I knew you. Ligeia was also suggested by a *dream*—observe the *eyes* in both tale and poem.

As an artist Poe depicted the functioning of both rational and nonrational processes in a character obsessed by a psychopathic desire. But, since Poe was not entirely clear in his own mind concerning the nonrational logic of the unconscious which he used as an artist, he accepted Cooke's criticism as justified, even though he felt the "truth" and appropriateness of the conclusion as he had written it, in part, at least, out of his own unconscious. Poe's penciled comment on the manuscript copy of one of his later poems, as quoted by Mrs. Whitman, is again indicative of the source of his artistic if not of his critical certainty:

"All that I have here expressed was actually present to me. Remember the mental condition which gave rise to 'Ligeia'—recall the passage of which I spoke, and observe the coincidence . . . I regard these visions," he says, "even as they arise, with an awe which in some measure moderates or tranquillizes the ecstasy—I so regard them through a conviction that this ecstasy, in itself, is of a character supernal to the human nature—is a *glimpse of the spirit's outer world.*"

Thus, when he came to revise the story, his artistic sense, rooted deeply in his own unconscious processes (or, if one chooses, in "the spirit's outer world"), did not permit the alteration of the conclusion to fit an interpretation essentially superficial and incomplete in its perception of the psychological origin of the story. Had Poe been able to understand the nonrational processes of the psyche as fully as Freud did later, he might have written a reply to Cooke that would have outdone "The Philosophy of Composition" in logical analysis of the creation of a work of art out of both rational and nonrational mental processes, but it is not likely that he could have written as an artist a more effective psychological story than "Ligeia."

The merits of this analysis must, of course, stand or be dismissed on the evidence within the context of the story itself, and the evidence in this case is—what it is not in the case of Poe's personality—complete. The hero of the story either is or is not to be completely trusted as a rational narrator whose account can be accepted with the meaning which he wishes it to have, and Poe either does or does not give the reader to understand which point of view he must take. To me, at least, Poe makes obvious the fact of the hero's original obsession in the first half of the story and his megalomania in the second half. The concluding paragraph remains aesthetically as ut-

terly incomprehensible to me as it was to Philip Pendleton Cooke, if the story is merely a story of the supernatural designed to produce an impression. And I cannot think that Poe, fully aware of the justice of Cooke's criticism in that view, would have left the denouement as it was originally written unless he believed that there was more artistic verisimilitude in the story as he had created it than there was in the story as Cooke had interpreted it.

# Ligeia

EDGAR ALLAN POE

*And the will therein lieth, which dieth not. Who knoweth, the mysteries of the will, with its vigor? For God is but a great will pervading all things by nature of its intentness. Man doth not yield himself to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will.*

JOSEPH GLANVILL

I CANNOT, for my soul, remember how, when, or even precisely where, I first became acquainted with the Lady Ligeia. Long years have since elapsed, and my memory is feeble through much suffering. Or, perhaps, I cannot *now* bring these points to mind, because, in truth, the character of my beloved, her rare learning, her singular yet placid cast of beauty, and the thrilling and entralling eloquence of her low musical language, made their way into my heart by paces so steadily and stealthily progressive, that they have been unnoticed and unknown. Yet I believe that I met her first and most frequently in some large, old, decaying city near the Rhine. Of her family—I have surely heard her speak. That it is of a remotely ancient date cannot be doubted. Ligeia! Ligeia! Buried in studies of a nature more than all else adapted to deaden impressions of the outward world, it is by that sweet word alone—by Ligeia—that I bring before mine eyes in fancy the image of her who is no more. And now, while I write, a recollection flashes upon me that I have *never known* the paternal name of her who was my friend and my betrothed, and who became the partner of my studies, and finally the wife of

my bosom. Was it a playful charge on the part of my Ligeia? or was it a test of my strength of affection, that I should institute no inquiries upon this point? or was it rather a caprice of my own—a wildly romantic offering on the shrine of the most passionate devotion? I but indistinctly recall the fact itself—what wonder that I have utterly forgotten the circumstances which originated or attended it? And, indeed, if ever that spirit which is entitled *Romance*—if ever she, the wan and the misty-winged *Ashtophet* of idolatrous Egypt, presided, as they tell, over marriages ill-omened, then most surely she presided over mine.

There is one dear topic, however, on which my memory fails me not. It is the *person* of Ligeia. In stature she was tall, somewhat slender, and, in her latter days, even emaciated. I would in vain attempt to portray the majesty, the quiet ease of her demeanor, or the incomprehensible lightness and elasticity of her footfall. She came and departed as a shadow. I was never made aware of her entrance into my closed study, save by the dear music of her low sweet voice, as she placed her marble hand upon my shoulder. In beauty of face no maiden ever equalled her. It was the radiance of an opium-dream—an airy and spirit-lifting vision more wildly divine than the phantasies which hovered about the slumbering souls of the daughters of Delos. Yet her features were not of that regular mold which we have been falsely taught to worship in the classical labors of the heathen. "There is no exquisite beauty," says Bacon, Lord Verulam, speaking truly of all the forms and *genera* of beauty, "without some *strangeness* in the proportion." Yet, although I saw that the features of Ligeia were not of a classic regularity—although I perceived that her loveliness was indeed "exquisite," and felt that there was much of "strangeness" pervading it, yet I have tried in vain to detect the irregularity and to trace home my own perception of "the strange." I examined the contour of the lofty and pale forehead—it was faultless—how cold indeed that word when applied to a majesty so divine!—the skin rivalling the purest ivory, the commanding extent and repose, the gentle prominence of the regions above

the temples; and then the raven-black, the glossy, the luxuriant, and naturally-curling tresses, setting forth the full force of the Homeric epithet, "hyacinthine!" I looked at the delicate outlines of the nose—and nowhere but in the graceful medallions of the Hebrews had I beheld a similar perfection. There were the same luxurious smoothness of surface, the same scarcely perceptible tendency to the aquiline, the same harmoniously curved nostrils speaking the free spirit. I regarded the sweet mouth. Here was indeed the triumph of all things heavenly—the magnificent turn of the short upper lip—the soft, voluptuous slumber of the under—the dimples which sported, and the color which spoke—the teeth glancing back, with a brilliancy almost startling, every ray of the holy light which fell upon them in her serene and placid yet most exultingly radiant of all smiles. I scrutinized the formation of the chin—and, here too, I found the gentleness of breadth, the softness and the majesty, the fulness and the spirituality, of the Greek—the contour which the god Apollo revealed but in a dream, to Cleomenes, the son of the Athenian. And then I peered into the large eyes of Ligeia.

For eyes we have no models in the remotely antique. It might have been, too, that in these eyes of my beloved lay the secret to which Lord Verulam alludes. They were, I must believe, far larger than the ordinary eyes of our own race. They were even fuller than the fullest of the gazelle eyes of the tribe of the valley of Nourjahad. Yet it was only at intervals—in moments of intense excitement—that this peculiarity became more than slightly noticeable in Ligeia. And at such moments was her beauty—in my heated fancy thus it appeared perhaps—the beauty of beings either above or apart from the earth—the beauty of the fabulous Houri of the Turk. The hue of the orbs was the most brilliant of black, and far over them, hung jetty lashes of great length. The brows, slightly irregular in outline, had the same tint. The "strangeness," however, which I found in the eyes was of a nature distinct from the formation, or the color, or the brilliancy of the features, and must, after all, be referred to the *expression*. Ah, word of no meaning! be-



hind whose vast latitude of mere sound we intrench our ignorance of so much of the spiritual. The expression of the eyes of Ligeia! How for long hours have I pondered upon it! How have I, through the whole of a midsummer night, struggled to fathom it! What was it—that something more profound than the well of Democritus—which lay far within the pupils of my beloved. What *was* it? I was possessed with a passion to discover. Those eyes! those large, those shining, those divine orbs! they became to me twin stars of Leda, and I to them devoutest of astrologers.

There is no point, among the many incomprehensible anomalies of the science of mind, more thrillingly exciting than the fact—never, I believe, noticed in the schools—that in our endeavors to recall to memory something long forgotten, we often find ourselves *upon the very verge* of remembrance, without being able, in the end, to remember. And thus how frequently, in my intense scrutiny of Ligeia's eyes, have I felt approaching the full knowledge of their expression—felt it approaching—yet not quite be mine—and so at length entirely depart! And (strange, oh, strangest mystery of all!) I found, in the commonest objects of the universe, a circle of analogies to that expression. I mean to say that subsequently to the period when Ligeia's beauty passed into my spirit, there dwelling as in a shrine, I derived, from many existences in the material world, a sentiment such as I felt always aroused within me by her large and luminous orbs. Yet not the more could I define that sentiment, or analyze, or even steadily view it. I recognized it, let me repeat, sometimes in the survey of a rapidly-growing vine—in the contemplation of a moth, a butterfly, a chrysalis, a stream of running water. I have felt it in the ocean—in the falling of a meteor. I have felt it in the glances of unusually aged people. And there are one or two stars in heaven (one especially, a star of the sixth magnitude, double and changeable, to be found near the large star in Lyra) in a telescopic scrutiny of which I have been made aware of the feeling. I have been filled with it by certain sounds from stringed instruments, and not unfrequently by passages from books. Among

innumerable other instances, I well remember something in a volume of Joseph Glanvill, which (perhaps merely from its quaintness—who shall say?) never failed to inspire me with the sentiment: “And the will therein lieth, which dieth not. Who knoweth the mysteries of the will, with its vigor? For God is but a great will pervading all things by nature of its intentness. Man doth not yield him to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will.”

Length of years and subsequent reflection have enabled me to trace, indeed, some remote connection between this passage in the English moralist and a portion of the character of Ligeia. An *intensity* in thought, action, or speech was possibly, in her, a result, or at least an index, of that gigantic volition which, during our long intercourse, failed to give other and more immediate evidence of its existence. Of all the women whom I have ever known, she, the outwardly calm, the ever-placid Ligeia, was the most violently a prey to the tumultuous vultures of stern passion. And of such passion I could form no estimate, save by the miraculous expansion of those eyes which at once so delighted and appalled me—by the almost magical melody, modulation, distinctness, and placidity of her very low voice—and by the fierce energy (rendered doubly effective by contrast with her manner of utterance) of the wild words which she habitually uttered.

I have spoken of the learning of Ligeia: it was immense—such as I have never known in woman. In the classical tongues was she deeply proficient, and as far as my own acquaintance extended in regard to the modern dialects of Europe, I have never known her at fault. Indeed upon any theme of the most admired because simply the most abstruse of the boasted erudition of the Academy, have I *ever* found Ligeia at fault? How singularly—how thrillingly, this one point in the nature of my wife has forced itself, at this late period only, upon my attention! I said her knowledge was such as I have never known in woman—but where breathes the man who has traversed, and successfully, *all* the wide areas of moral, physical, and mathe-

matical science? I saw not then what I now clearly perceive that the acquisitions of Ligeia were gigantic, were astounding; yet I was sufficiently aware of her infinite supremacy to resign myself, with a child-like confidence, to her guidance through the chaotic world of metaphysical investigation at which I was most busily occupied during the earlier years of our marriage. With how vast a triumph—with how vivid a delight—with how much of all that is ethereal in hope did I *feel*, as she bent over me in studies but little sought—but less known—that delicious vista by slow degrees expanding before me, down whose long, gorgeous, and all untrodden path, I might at length pass onward to the goal of a wisdom too divinely precious not to be forbidden.

How poignant, then, must have been the grief with which, after some years, I beheld my well-grounded expectations take wings to themselves and fly away! Without Ligeia I was but as a child groping benighted. Her presence, her readings alone, rendered vividly luminous the many mysteries of the transcendentalism in which we were immersed. Wanting the radiant lustre of her eyes, letters, lambent and golden, grew duller than Saturnian lead. And now those eyes shone less and less frequently upon the pages over which I pored. Ligeia grew ill. The wild eyes blazed with a too-too glorious effulgence; the pale fingers became of the transparent waxen hue of the grave; and the blue veins upon the lofty forehead swelled and sank impetuously with the tides of the most gentle emotion. I saw that she must die—and I struggled desperately in spirit with the grim Azrael. And the struggles of the passionate wife were, to my astonishment, even more energetic than my own. There has been much in her stern nature to impress me with the belief that, to her, death would have come without its terrors; but not so. Words are impotent to convey any just idea of the fierceness of resistance with which she wrestled with the Shadow. I groaned in anguish at the pitiable spectacle. I would have soothed—I would have reasoned; but in the intensity of her wild desire for life—for life—*but* for life—solace and reason were alike the uttermost of folly. Yet not until the

last instance, amid the most convulsive writhings of her fierce spirit, was shaken the external placidity of her demeanor. Her voice grew more gentle—grew more low—yet I would not wish to dwell upon the wild meaning of the quietly uttered words. My brain reeled as I hearkened, entranced to a melody more than mortal—to assumptions and aspirations which mortality had never before known.

That she loved me I should not have doubted; and I might have been easily aware that, in a bosom such as hers, love would have reigned no ordinary passion. But in death only was I fully impressed with the strength of her affection. For long hours, detaining my hand, would she pour out before me the overflowing of a heart whose more than passionate devotion amounted to idolatry. How had I deserved to be so blessed by such confessions?—how had I deserved to be so cursed with the removal of my beloved in the hour of her making them? But upon this subject I cannot bear to dilate. Let me say only, that in Ligeia's more than womanly abandonment to a love, alas! all unmerited, all unworthily bestowed, I at length, recognized the principle of her longing, with so wildly earnest a desire, for the life which was now fleeing so rapidly away. It is this wild longing—it is this eager vehemence of desire for life—*but* for life—that I have no power to portray—no utterance capable of expressing.

At high noon of the night on which she departed, beckoning me, peremptorily, to her side, she bade me repeat certain verses composed by herself not many days before. I obeyed her. They were these:—

*Lo! 'tis a gala night  
 Within the lonesome latter years!  
 An angel throng, bewinged, bedight  
 In veils, and drowned in tears,  
 Sit in a theatre, to see  
 A play of hopes and fears,  
 While the orchestra breathes fitfully  
 The music of the spheres.*

*Mimes, in the form of God on high,  
 Mutter and mumble low,  
 And hither and thither fly;  
 Mere puppets they, who come and go  
 At bidding of vast formless things  
 That shift the scenery to and fro,  
 Flapping from out their Condor wings  
 Invisible Wo!*

*That motley drama!—oh, be sure  
 It shall not be forgot!  
 With its Phantom chased for evermore,  
 By a crowd that seize it not.  
 Through a circle that ever returneth in  
 To the self-same spot;  
 And much of Madness, and more of Sin  
 And Horror, the soul of the plot!*

*But see, amid the mimic rout  
 A crawling shape intrude;  
 A blood-red thing that writhes from out  
 The scenic solitude!  
 It writhes!—it writhes!—with mortal pangs  
 The mimes become its food,  
 And the seraphs sob at vermin fangs  
 In human gore imbued.*

*Out—out are the lights—out all!  
 And over each quivering form,  
 The curtain, a funeral pall,  
 Comes down with the rush of a storm—  
 And the angels, all pallid and wan,  
 Uprising, unveiling, affirm  
 That the play is the tragedy, "Man,"  
 And its hero, the Conqueror Worm.*

"O God!" half shrieked Ligeia, leaping to her feet and extending her arms aloft with a spasmodic movement, as I made

an end of these lines—"O God! O Divine Father!—shall these things be undeviatingly so?—shall this Conqueror be not once conquered? Are we not part and parcel in Thee? Who—who knoweth the mysteries of the will with its vigor? Man doth not yield him to the angels, *nor unto death utterly*, save only through the weakness of his feeble will."

And now, as if exhausted with emotion, she suffered her white arms to fall, and returned solemnly to her bed of death. And as she breathed her last sighs, there came mingled with them a low murmur from her lips. I bent to them my ear, and distinguished, again, the concluding words of the passage in Glanvill: "*Man doth not yield him to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will.*"

She died: and I, crushed into the very dust with sorrow, could no longer endure the lonely desolation of my dwelling in the dim and decaying city by the Rhine. I had no lack of what the world calls wealth, Ligeia had brought me far more, very far more, than ordinarily falls to the lot of mortals. After a few months, therefore, of weary and aimless wandering, I purchased and put in some repair, an abbey, which I shall not name, in one of the wildest and least frequented portions of fair England. The gloomy and dreary grandeur of the building, the almost savage aspect of the domain, the many melancholy and time-honored memories connected with both, had much in unison with the feelings of utter abandonment which had driven me into that remote and unsocial region of the country. Yet although the external abbey, with its verdant decay hanging about it, suffered but little alteration, I gave way, with a child-like perversity, and perchance with a faint hope of alleviating my sorrows, to a display of more than regal magnificence within. For such follies, even in childhood, I had imbibed a taste, and now they came back to me as if in the dotage of grief. Alas, I feel how much even of incipient madness might have been discovered in the gorgeous and fantastic draperies, in the solemn carvings of Egypt, in the wild cornices and furniture, in the Bedlam patterns of the carpets

of tufted gold! I had become a bounden slave in the trammels of opium, and my labors and my orders had taken a coloring from my dreams. But these absurdities I must not pause to detail. Let me speak only of that one chamber, ever accursed, whither, in a moment of mental alienation, I led from the altar as my bride—as the successor of the unforgotten Ligeia—the fair-haired and blue-eyed Lady Rowena Trevanion, of Tremaine.

There is no individual portion of the architecture and decoration of that bridal chamber which is not now visibly before me. Where were the souls of the haughty family of the bride, when, through thirst of gold, they permitted to pass the threshold of an apartment so bedecked, a maiden and a daughter so beloved? I have said, that I minutely remember the details of the chamber—yet I am sadly forgetful on the topics of deep moment; and here there was no system, no keeping, in the fantastic display, to take hold upon the memory. The room lay in a high turret of the castellated abbey, was pentagonal in shape, and of capacious size. Occupying the whole southern face of the pentagon was the sole window—an immense sheet of unbroken glass from Venice—a single pane, and tinted of a leaden hue, so that the rays of either the sun or moon passing through it, fell with a ghastly lustre on the objects within. Over the upper portion of this huge window, extended the trellis-work of an aged vine, which clambered up the massy walls of the turret. The ceiling of gloomy-looking oak, was excessively lofty, vaulted, and elaborately fretted with the wildest and most grotesque specimens of a semi-Gothic, semi-Druidical device. From out the most central recess of this melancholy vaulting, depended, by a single chain of gold with long links, a huge censer of the same metals, Saracenic in pattern, and with many perforations so contrived that there writhed in and out of them, as if endued with a serpent vitality, a continual succession of parti-colored fires.

Some few ottomans and golden candelabra, of Eastern figure, were in various stations about; and there was the couch, too—the bridal couch—of an Indian model, and low, and

sculptured of solid ebony, with a pall-like canopy above. In each of the angles of the chamber stood on end a gigantic sarcophagus of black granite, from the tombs of the kings over against Luxor, with their aged lids full of immemorial sculpture. But in the draping of the apartment lay, alas! the chief phantasy of all. The lofty walls, gigantic in height—even unproportionably so—were hung from summit to foot, in vast folds, with a heavy and massive-looking tapestry—tapestry of a material which was found alike as a carpet on the floor, as a covering for the ottomans and the ebony bed, as a canopy for the bed and as the gorgeous volutes of the curtains which partially shaded the window. The material was the richest cloth of gold. It was spotted all over, at irregular intervals, with arabesque figures, about a foot in diameter, and wrought upon the cloth in patterns of the most jetty black. But these figures partook of the true character of the arabesque only when regarded from a single point of view. By a contrivance now common, and indeed traceable to a very remote period of antiquity, they were made changeable in aspect. To one entering the room, they bore the appearance of simple monstrosities; but upon a farther advance, this appearance gradually departed; and, step by step, as the visiter moved his station in the chamber, he saw himself surrounded by an endless succession of the ghastly forms which belong to the superstition of the Norman, or arise in the guilty slumbers of the monk. The phantasmagoric effect was vastly heightened by the artificial introduction of a strong continual current of wind behind the draperies—giving a hideous and uneasy animation to the whole.

In halls such as these—in a bridal chamber such as this—I passed, with the Lady of Tremaine, the unhallowed hours of the first month of our marriage—passed them with but little disquietude. That my wife dreaded the fierce moodiness of my temper—that she shunned me, and loved me but little—I could not help perceiving; but it gave me rather pleasure than otherwise. I loathed her with a hatred belonging more to demon than to man. My memory flew back (oh, with what intensity



of regret!) to Ligeia, the beloved, the august, the beautiful, the entombed. I revelled in recollections of her purity, of her wisdom, of her lofty—her ethereal nature, of her passionate, her idolatrous love. Now, then, did my spirit fully and freely burn with more than all the fires of her own. In the excitement of my opium dreams (for I was habitually fettered in the shackles of the drug), I would call aloud upon her name, during the silence of the night, or among the sheltered recesses of the glens by day, as if, through the wild eagerness, the solemn passion, the consuming ardor of my longing for the departed, I could restore her to the pathways she had abandoned—ah, *could* it be for ever?—upon the earth.

About the commencement of the second month of the marriage, the Lady Rowena was attacked with sudden illness, from which her recovery was slow. The fever which consumed her rendered her nights uneasy; and in her perturbed state of half-slumber, she spoke of sounds, and of motions, in and about the chamber of the turret, which I concluded had no origin save in the distemper of her fancy, or perhaps in the phantasmagoric influences of the chamber itself. She became at length convalescent—finally, well. Yet but a brief period elapsed, ere a second more violent disorder again threw her upon a bed of suffering; and from this attack her frame, at all times feeble, never altogether recovered. Her illnesses were, after this epoch, of alarming character, and of more alarming recurrence, defying alike the knowledge and the great exertions of her physicians. With the increase of the chronic disease, which had thus, apparently, taken too sure hold upon her constitution to be eradicated by human means, I could not fail to observe a similar increase in the nervous irritation of her temperament, and in her excitability by trivial causes of fear. She spoke again, and now more frequently and pertinaciously, of the sounds—of the slight sounds—and of the unusual motions among the tapestries, to which she had formerly alluded.

One night, near the closing in of September, she pressed this distressing subject with more than usual emphasis upon my attention. She had just awakened from an unquiet slum-

ber, and I had been watching, with feelings half of anxiety, half of vague terror, the workings of her emaciated countenance. I sat by the side of her ebony bed, upon one of the ottomans of India. She partly arose, and spoke, in an earnest low whisper, of sounds which she *then* heard, but which I could not hear—of motions which she *then* saw, but which I could not perceive. The wind was rushing hurriedly behind the tapestries, and I wished to show her (what, let me confess it, I could not *all* believe) that those almost inarticulate breathings, and those very gentle variations of the figures upon the wall, were but the natural effects of that customary rushing of the wind. But a deadly pallor, over-spreading her face, had proved to me that my exertions to reassure her would be fruitless. She appeared to be fainting, and no attendants were within call. I remembered where was deposited a decanter of light wine which had been ordered by her physicians, and hastened across the chamber to procure it. But, as I stepped beneath the light of the censer, two circumstances of a startling nature attracted my attention. I had felt that some palpable although invisible object had passed lightly by my person; and I saw that there lay upon the golden carpet, in the very middle of the rich lustre thrown from the censer, a shadow—a faint, indefinite shadow of angelic aspect—such as might be fancied for the shadow of a shade. But I was wild with the excitement of an immoderate dose of opium, and heeded these things but little, nor spoke of them to Rowena. Having found the wine, I recrossed the chamber, and poured out a gobletful, which I held to the lips of the fainting lady. She had now partially recovered, however, and took the vessel herself, while I sank upon an ottoman near me, with my eyes fastened upon her person. It was then that I became distinctly aware of a gentle foot-fall upon the carpet, and near the couch; and in a second thereafter, as Rowena was in the act of raising the wine to her lips, I saw, or may have dreamed that I saw, fall within the goblet, as if from some invisible spring in the atmosphere of the room, three or four large drops of a brilliant and ruby colored fluid. If this I saw—not so Rowena. She swallowed the

wine unhesitatingly, and I forebore to speak to her of a circumstance which must, after all, I considered, have been but the suggestion of a vivid imagination, rendered morbidly active by the terror of the lady, by the opium, and by the hour.

Yet I cannot conceal it from my own perception that, immediately subsequent to the fall of the ruby-drops, a rapid change for the worse took place in the disorder of my wife; so that, on the third subsequent night, the hands of her menials prepared her for the tomb, and on the fourth, I sat alone with her shrouded body, in that fantastic chamber which had received her as my bride. Wild visions, opium-engendered, flitted, shadow-like, before me. I gazed with unquiet eye upon the sarcophagi in the angles of the room, upon the varying figures of the drapery, and upon the writhing of the parti-colored fires in the censer overhead. My eyes then fell, as I called to mind the circumstances of a former night, to the spot beneath the glare of the censer where I had seen the faint traces of the shadow. It was there, however, no longer; and breathing with greater freedom, I turned my glances to the pallid and rigid figure upon the bed. Then rushed upon me a thousand memories of Ligeia—and then came back upon my heart, with the turbulent violence of a flood, the whole of that unutterable wo with which I had regarded *her* thus enshrouded. The night waned; and still, with a bosom full of bitter thoughts of the one only and supremely beloved, I remained gazing upon the body of Rowena.

It might have been midnight, or perhaps earlier, or later, for I had taken no note of time, when a sob, low, gentle, but very distinct, startled me from my reverie. I *felt* that it came from the bed of ebony—the bed of death. I listened in an agony of superstitious terror—but there was no repetition of the sound. I strained my vision to detect any motion in the corpse—but there was not the slightest perceptible. Yet I could not have been deceived. I *had* heard the noise, however faint, and my soul was awakened within me. I resolutely and perseveringly kept my attention riveted upon the body. Many minutes elapsed before any circumstance occurred tending to

throw light upon the mystery. At length it became evident that a slight, a very feeble, and barely noticeable tinge of color had flushed up within the cheeks, and along the sunken small veins of the eyelids. Through a species of unutterable horror and awe, for which the language of mortality has no sufficiently energetic expression, I felt my heart cease to beat, my limbs grow rigid where I sat. Yet a sense of duty finally operated to restore my self-possession. I could no longer doubt that we had been precipitate in our preparations—that Rowena still lived. It was necessary that some immediate exertion be made; yet the turret was altogether apart from the portion of the abbey tenanted by the servants—there were none within call—I had no means of summoning them to my aid without leaving the room for many minutes—and this I could not venture to do. I therefore struggled alone in my endeavors to call back the spirit still hovering. In a short period it was certain, however, that a relapse had taken place; the color disappeared from both eyelid and cheek, leaving a wanness even more than that of marble; the lips became doubly shrivelled and pinched up in the ghastly expression of death; a repulsive clamminess and coldness overspread rapidly the surface of the body; and all the usual rigorous stiffness immediately supervened. I fell back with a shudder upon the couch from which I had been so startlingly aroused, and again gave myself up to passionate waking visions of Ligeia.

An hour thus elapsed, when (could it be possible?) I was a second time aware of some vague sound issuing from the region of the bed. I listened—in extremity of horror. The sound came again—it was a sigh. Rushing to the corpse, I saw—distinctly saw—a tremor upon the lips. In a minute afterward they relaxed, disclosing a bright line of the pearly teeth. Amazement now struggled in my bosom with the profound awe which had hitherto reigned there alone. I felt that my vision grew dim, that my reason wandered; and it was only by a violent effort that I at length succeeded in nerving myself to the task which duty thus once more had pointed out. There was now a partial glow upon the forehead and upon the cheek

and throat; a perceptible warmth pervaded the whole frame; there was even a slight pulsation at the heart. The lady *lived*; and with redoubled ardor I betook myself to the task of restoration. I chafed and bathed the temples and the hands, and used every exertion which experience, and no little medical reading, could suggest. But in vain. Suddenly, the color fled, the pulsation ceased, the lips resumed the expression of the dead, and, in an instant afterward, the whole body took upon itself the icy chilliness, the livid hue, the intense rigidity, the sunken outline, and all the loathsome peculiarities of that which has been, for many days, a tenant of the tomb.

And again I sunk into visions of Ligeia—and again (what marvel that I shudder while I write?) *again* there reached my ears a low sob from the region of the ebony bed. But why shall I minutely detail the unspeakable horrors of that night? Why shall I pause to relate how, time after time, until near the period of the gray dawn, this hideous drama of revivification was repeated; how each terrific relapse was only into a sterner and apparently more irredeemable death; how each agony wore the aspect of a struggle with some invisible foe; and how each struggle was succeeded by I know not what of wild change in the personal appearance of the corpse? Let me hurry to a conclusion.

The greater part of the fearful night had worn away, and she who had been dead once again stirred—and now more vigorously than hitherto, although arousing from a dissolution more appalling in its utter hopelessness than any. I had long ceased to struggle or to move, and remained sitting rigidly upon the ottoman, a helpless prey to a whirl of violent emotions, of which extreme awe was perhaps the least terrible, the least consuming. The corpse, *I* repeat, stirred, and now more vigorously than before. The hues of life flushed up with unwonted energy into the countenance—the limbs relaxed—and, save that the eyelids were yet pressed heavily together, and that the bandages and draperies of the grave still imparted their charnel character to the figure, I might have dreamed that Rowena had indeed shaken off, utterly, the fetters of

Death. But if this idea was not, even then, altogether adopted, I could at least doubt no longer, when, arising from the bed, tottering, with feeble steps, with closed eyes, and with the manner of one bewildered in a dream, the thing that was enshrouded advanced boldly and palpably into the middle of the apartment.

I trembled not—I stirred not—for a crowd of unutterable fancies connected with the air, the stature, the demeanor, of the figure, rushing hurriedly through my brain, had paralyzed—had chilled me into stone. I stirred not—but gazed upon the apparition. There was a mad disorder in my thoughts—a tumult unappeasable. Could it, indeed, be the *living* Rowena who confronted me? Could it, indeed, be Rowena *at all*—the fair-haired, the blue-eyed Lady Rowena Trevanion of Tremaine? Why, *why* should I doubt it? The bandage lay heavily about the mouth—but then might it not be the mouth of the breathing Lady of Tremaine? And the cheeks—there were the roses as in her noon of life—yes, these might indeed be the fair cheeks of the living Lady of Tremaine. And the chin, with its dimples, as in health, might it not be hers?—but *had she then grown taller since her malady*? What inexpressible madness seized me with that thought? One bound, and I had reached her feet! Shrinking from my touch, she let fall from her head, unloosened, the ghastly cerements which had confined it, and there streamed forth into the rushing atmosphere of the chamber huge masses of long and dishevelled hair; *it was blacker than the raven wings of the midnight!* And now slowly opened *the eyes* of the figure which stood before me. “Here then, at least,” I shrieked aloud, “can I never—can I never be mistaken—these are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes—of my lost love—of the Lady—of the Lady Ligeia.”

# Poe's Dream Imagery

## I

WHAT we have discovered in "Ligeia" to be a subtle psychological drama of insanity may suggest an approach to the poems of Poe which have been regarded as "sheer fudge," but which are in effect, no less than "Ligeia," symbolizations of psychic experience. As an artist Poe dredged up from the unconscious and put in rhythmic prose and verse imagery which may have puzzled him, but which he could and did subject to rational analysis in an effort both to give it coherence and meaning and to justify his creation to his readers. The rationalization of his composition of "The Raven" which he set down in "The Philosophy of Composition" is no doubt true to a large extent of what happened as he put the poem on paper, but it is certainly inadequate as an explication of whence and why the imagery came, even though it admits an emotional enigma as the source of the poem's inspiration.

The psychological themes and symbolism of some of Poe's poems and prose pieces have been recognized in a general manner from their first publication. With these commonly understood pieces we shall not be concerned, except for reference purposes and for parallels which aid in the interpretation of those symbolistic pieces which have not been adequately interpreted by critics. Had the symbolistic pieces been understood as dream imagery by his contemporaries, Poe would scarcely have been dismissed as a jingle man and an obfuscator whose work was "two fifths sheer fudge."

The prose poem, "Silence—A Fable," is one of his compositions commonly dismissed as a bit of rhythmical nonsense. The fable's psychological theme as well as its satiric intent is suggested by the title "Siope—A Fable [in the manner of the Psychological Autobiographists]," which Poe first gave the piece. Symbolically considered, the fable is an evocation of the loneliness and desolation of the realm of the unconscious inhabited by a fear-stricken, cynical, world-weary psyche. The imagery of psychic unrest characterizes a state of introversion in which (1) the self withdraws through fear into the unconscious, (2) insanity develops through fear and self-suspicion, and (3) the psyche ultimately flees, leaving dreamland under fear's final curse of "silence"—death. The "man" is the narrator's symbolization of his conscious, rational ego, desolate in the midst of a realm ruled by forces beyond understanding and control. The Demon is the id stricken by the fear of life which rules the vast unknown of the unconscious, and the lynx is a feline symbol, of mythological lineage traceable to ancient Egyptian religion, representing the deathless spirit (life-force) which knows no fear and is at home even in the tomb. Poe's savage humor in the concluding paragraph, with its cynical allusion to the mysteries of religious wisdom, is not by any means an entirely pointless comment on man's failure to comprehend the mystery of his own soul.

### Silence—A Fable

Ἐϋδοῦσιν δ' ὄρεων κορυφαὶ τε καὶ ψάραγγες  
Πρώονές τε καὶ χαράδραι.                      ALGMAN.

*The mountain pinnacles slumber; valleys, crags, and caves are silent.*

"Listen to me," said the Demon, as he placed his hand upon my head. "The region of which I speak is a dreary region in



Libya, by the borders of the river Zaïre, and there is no quiet there, nor silence.

“The waters of the river have a saffron and sickly hue; and they flow not onward to the sea, but palpitate forever and forever beneath the red eye of the sun with a tumultuous and convulsive motion. For many miles on either side of the river’s cozy bed is a pale desert of gigantic water-lilies. They sigh one unto the other in that solitude, and stretch towards the heaven their long and ghastly necks, and nod to and fro their everlasting heads. And there is an indistinct murmur which cometh out from among them like the rushing of subterrene water. And they sigh one unto the other.

“But there is a boundary to their realm—the boundary of the dark, horrible, lofty forest. There, like the waves about the Hebrides, the low underwood is agitated continually. But there is no wind throughout the heaven. And the tall primeval trees rock eternally hither and thither with a crashing and mighty sound. And from their high summits, one by one, drop everlasting dews. And at the roots strange poisonous flowers lie writhing in perturbed slumber. And overhead, with a rustling and loud noise, the grey clouds rush westwardly forever, until they roll, a cataract, over the fiery wall of the horizon. But there is no wind throughout the heaven. And by the shores of the river Zaïre there is neither quiet nor silence.

“It was night, and the rain fell; and, falling, it was rain, but, having fallen, it was blood. And I stood in the morass among the tall lilies, and the rain fell upon my head—and the lilies sighed one unto the other in the solemnity of their desolation.

“And, all at once, the moon arose through the thin ghastly mist, and was crimson in colour. And mine eyes fell upon a huge grey rock which stood by the shore of the river, and was lighted by the light of the moon. And the rock was grey, and

ghastly, and tall,—and the rock was grey. Upon its front were characters engraven in the stone; and I walked through the morass of water-lilies, until I came close unto the shore, that I might read the characters upon the stone. But I could not decipher them. And I was going back into the morass, when the moon shone with a fuller red, and I turned and looked again upon the rock, and upon the characters, and the characters were DESOLATION.

“And I looked upward, and there stood a man upon the summit of the rock; and I hid myself among the water-lilies that I might discover the actions of the man. And the man was tall and stately in form, and was wrapped up from his shoulders to his feet in the toga of old Rome. And the outlines of his figure were indistinct—but his features were the features of a deity; for the mantle of the night, and of the mist, and of the moon, and of the dew, had left uncovered the features of his face. And his brow was lofty with thought, and his eye wild with care; and, in the few furrows upon his cheek I read the fables of sorrow, and weariness, and disgust with mankind, and a longing after solitude.

“And the man sat upon the rock, and leaned his head upon his hand, and looked out upon the desolation. He looked down into the low unquiet shrubbery, and up into the tall primeval trees, and up higher at the rustling heaven, and into the crimson moon. And I lay close within shelter of the lilies, and observed the actions of the man. And the man trembled in the solitude;—but the night waned, and he sat upon the rock.

“And the man turned his attention from the heaven, and looked out upon the dreary river Zaïre, and upon the yellow ghastly waters, and upon the pale legions of the water-lilies. And the man listened to the sighs of the water-lilies, and to the murmur that came up from among them. And I lay close

within my covert and observed the actions of the man. And the man trembled in the solitude;—but the night waned and he sat upon the rock.

“Then I went down into the recesses of the morass, and waded far in among the wilderness of the lilies, and called unto the hippopotami which dwelt among the fens in the recesses of the morass. And the hippopotami heard my call, and came, with the behemoth, unto the foot of the rock, and roared loudly and fearfully beneath the moon. And I lay close within my covert and observed the actions of the man. And the man trembled in the solitude;—but the night waned and he sat upon the rock.

“Then I cursed the elements with the curse of tumult; and a frightful tempest gathered in the heaven, where before there had been no wind. And the heaven became livid with the violence of the tempest—and the rain beat upon the head of the man—and the floods of the river came down—and the river was tormented into foam—and the water-lilies shrieked within their beds—and the forest crumbled before the wind—and the thunder rolled—and the lightning fell—and the rock rocked to its foundation. And I lay close within my covert and observed the actions of the man. And the man trembled in the solitude;—but the night waned and he sat upon the rock.

“Then I grew angry and cursed, with the curse of *silence*, the river, and the lilies, and the wind, and the forest, and the heaven, and the thunder, and the sighs of the water-lilies. And they became accursed, and *were still*. And the moon ceased to totter up its pathway to heaven—and the thunder died away—and the lightning did not flash—and the clouds hung motionless—and the waters sunk to their level and remained—and the trees ceased to rock—and the water-lilies sighed no more—and the murmur was heard no longer from among them, nor

any shadow of sound throughout the vast illimitable desert. And I looked upon the characters of the rock, and they were changed;—and the characters were SILENCE.

“And mine eyes fell upon the countenance of the man and his countenance was wan with terror. And, hurriedly, he raised his head from his hand, and stood forth upon the rock and listened. But there was no voice throughout the vast illimitable desert, and the characters upon the rock were SILENCE. And the man shuddered, and turned his face away, and fled afar off, in haste, so that I beheld him no more.”

Now there are fine tales in the volumes of the Magi—in the iron-bound, melancholy volumes of the Magi. Therein, I say, are glorious histories of the Heaven, and of the Earth, and of the mighty Sea—and of the Genii that overruled the sea, and the earth, and the lofty heaven. There was much lore too in the sayings which were said by the Sibyls; and holy, holy things were heard of old by the dim leaves that trembled around Dodona—but, as Allah liveth, that fable which the demon told me as he sat by my side in the shadow of the tomb, I hold to be the most wonderful of all! And as the Demon made an end of his story, he fell back within the cavity of the tomb and laughed. And I could not laugh with the Demon, and he cursed me because I could not laugh. And the lynx which dwelleth forever in the tomb, came out therefrom, and lay down at the feet of the Demon, and looked him steadily in the face.

## II

A LESS subtle symbolization of insanity is presented in “The Haunted Palace,” but it may well be wondered whether an allegory of insanity would have been sufficiently evident to

Poe's contemporaries had Poe not provided the key to allegory by having the narrator in *The Fall of the House of Usher* comment that the poem symbolizes "the tottering of his [Usher's] lofty reason upon her throne."

## The Haunted Palace

*In the greenest of our valleys  
By good angels tenanted,  
Once a fair and stately palace—  
Radiant palace—reared its head.  
In the monarch Thought's dominion,—  
It stood there!  
Never seraph spread a pinion  
Over fabric half so fair!*

*Banners yellow, glorious, golden,  
On its roof did float and flow  
(This—all this—was in the olden  
Time long ago),  
And every gentle air that dallied,  
In that sweet day,  
Along the ramparts plumed and pallid,  
A wingéd odor went away.*

*Wanderers in that happy valley,  
Through two luminous windows, saw  
Spirits moving musically,  
To a lute's well-tuned law,  
Round about a throne where, sitting,  
Porphyrogene,  
In state his glory well befitting,  
The ruler of the realm was seen.*

## POE'S DREAM IMAGERY

*And all with pearl and ruby glowing  
 Was the fair palace door,  
 Through which came flowing, flowing, flowing,  
 And sparkling evermore,  
 A troop of Echoes, whose sweet duty  
 Was but to sing,  
 In voices of surpassing beauty,  
 The wit and wisdom of their king.*

*But evil things, in robes of sorrow,  
 Assailed the monarch's high estate.  
 (Ah, let us mourn!—for never morrow  
 Shall dawn upon him, desolate!)  
 And round about his home the glory  
 That blushed and bloomed,  
 Is but a dim-remembered story  
 Of the old time entombed.*

*And travellers, now, within that valley,  
 Through the red-litten windows see  
 Vast forms that move fantastically  
 To a discordant melody,  
 While, like a ghastly rapid river,  
 Through the pale door  
 A hideous throng rush out forever,  
 And laugh—but smile no more.*

## III

THE CENTRAL problem—object-love versus subject-love—which underlies the story “Ligeia” provides the key to another form of the same fable in “Ulalume.” The general symbolism of conflict has been recognized by many readers and has been described by Edwin Markham as a struggle between “an ignoble passion and the memory of an ideal love,” in which comment one may take exception chiefly to the word “ignoble.”

A more explicit psychological description would be that the poem narrates the struggle between a feared new passion for a flesh-and-blood woman and an old worship of an ideal image that is perfectly safe because separated long since from its objective reality. In the final stanza of the poem Poe comes as near as he could within the framework of an essentially Platonic idealism to unravelling the psychological mystery which many an idealist, from Buddha and Plato to Emerson and Whitman, has pondered and answered in his own way: namely, that the dream world of the psyche (the unconscious) holds the secret that love's object, however "real," is but the symbol of the soul.

Ulalume in death is the compensating symbol of the lover's psyche, and the lover's obsession is that he cannot love except in terms of this absolute ideal. Hence, the tomb is the inevitable destination of the lover's quest, to which his psyche leads him in order to prevent a spiritual disillusionment far more unbearable than his frustration. For, if the lover finds a second object of desire satisfying, not only is the absoluteness of the one symbol (Ulalume) challenged, but also the absolute power of the psyche itself. The ghouls (*i.e.* desires, but please note that they are "the pitiful, the merciful"), unable to resurrect Ulalume, have drawn up a supposedly false image of love "from the Hell of the planetary souls" in a futile effort to forestall the lover's discovery that love again leads inevitably to death and the tomb. This new love, however, frightens the lover's psyche because Ulalume has once been accepted as the only, absolute symbol of love, and because, perhaps, in death Ulalume satisfies the psyche as an absolute symbol even better than she had in life.

The poem thus symbolizes the human personality's quest for fulfillment in love. Frustrated by the death of the loved

one, the lover seeks again, but finds his way leading down the same familiar "alley" toward the inevitable frustration at the tomb. So, sooner or later, love must come to death, and since the power of the psyche lies in self-illusionment to avoid the fatal discovery of its own secret—the nothingness of its dream—the psyche warns against the new love and in desperation brings the lover to the tomb which represents the only full and final consummation of the spirit's flame.

It should be noted that in the last stanza both phases of the lover (the *I* and the *psyche*) speak in unison for the first time to ask the kindly question: Did the "merciful ghouls" try to cheat us of the sad self-knowledge that our love can find its perfect answer only in death? To this question the poem has already given an unequivocal affirmative answer.

The symbolism may be traced by stanzas in the following steps: (1) the realm of the unconscious, blighted by frustration and haunted by old desires that cling to buried love; (2) repressed, volcanic emotion, with familiar contrast of fire and ice; (3) rationalization preparatory to a new quest, complicated by a deep awareness that this region (experience) has been traversed before to a futile end; (4) recognition of a new love, warm and romantic; (5) conflict between the new and the old, with the new gaining in power in spite of unfavorable "signs"; (6) fear of a second frustration and disappointment; (7) rationalization of the fear; (8) consummation, symbolic, in which the tomb represents the final goal of love, death; (9) discovery of the meaning of this symbolic consummation, that self can find fulfillment only in death; (10) resignation, with "I" and "psyche" in full accord that the meaning of their quest lies beyond the door of the tomb in death, but asking then the meaning of love in life—is it to keep us from the dread discovery that absolute fulfillment means annihilation?



That Poe recognized a temporary alternative solution to the earthly quest of the lover is indicated in the symbolic phantasy "Eleanora," but in that story of guilty capitulation to unreal "reality," the psyche's quest is abandoned and the lover's sanity and strength of passion are represented in the concluding paragraphs as merely the obverse side of his psychic treason and weakness. Poe's most profound insight, like that of Freud in later years, came when he looked into the depths of soul sickness and symbolized in archetypal image the struggle of life and death in man's soul.

### Ulalume — A Ballad

*The skies they were ashen and sober;  
 The leaves they were crispéd and sere—  
 The leaves they were withering and sere:  
 It was night, in the lonesome October  
 Of my most immemorial year:  
 It was hard by the dim lake of Auber,  
 In the misty mid region of Weir—  
 It was down by the dark tarn of Auber,  
 In the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.*

*Here once, through an alley Titanic,  
 Of cypress, I roamed with my Soul—  
 Of cypress, with Psyche, my Soul.  
 These were days when my heart was volcanic  
 As the scoriac rivers that roll—  
 As the lavas that restlessly roll  
 Their sulphurous currents down Yaanek  
 In the ultimate climes of the Pole—  
 That groan as they roll down Mount Yaanek  
 In the realms of the Boreal Pole.*

*Our talk had been serious and sober,  
 But our thoughts they were palsied and sere—  
 Our memories were treacherous and sere;  
 For we knew not the month was October,  
 And we marked not the night of the year  
 (Ah, night of all nights in the year!)—  
 We noted not the dim lake of Auber  
 (Though once we had journeyed down here)—  
 We remembered not the dank tarn of Auber,  
 Nor the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.*

*And now, as the night was senescent  
 And star-dials pointed to morn—  
 As the star-dials hinted of morn—  
 At the end of our path a liquescent  
 And nebulous lustre was born,  
 Out of which a miraculous crescent  
 Arose with a duplicate horn—  
 Astarte's bediamonded crescent  
 Distinct with its duplicate horn.*

*And I said: "She is warmer than Dian;  
 She rolls through an ether of sighs—  
 She revels in a region of sighs.  
 She has seen that the tears are not dry on  
 These cheeks, where the worm never dies,  
 And has come past the stars of the Lion,  
 To point us the path to the skies—  
 To the Lethean peace of the skies—  
 Come up, in despite of the Lion,  
 To shine on us with her bright eyes—  
 Come up through the lair of the Lion,  
 With love in her luminous eyes."*

*But Psyche, uplifting her finger,  
 Said: "Sadly this star I mistrust—  
 Her pallor I strangely mistrust:*

*Ah, hasten!—ah, let us not linger!*  
*Ah, fly!—let us fly!—for we must.”*  
*In terror she spoke, letting sink her*  
*Wings till they trailed in the dust—*  
*In agony sobbed, letting sink her*  
*Plumes till they trailed in the dust—*  
*Till they sorrowfully trailed in the dust.*

*I replied: “This is nothing but dreaming:*  
*Let us on by this tremulous light!*  
*Let us bathe in this crystalline light!*  
*Its Sibyllic splendor is beaming*  
*With Hope and in Beauty to-night:—*  
*See!—it flickers up the sky through the night!*  
*Ah, we safely may trust to its gleaming,*  
*And be sure it will lead us aright—*  
*We surely may trust to a gleaming,*  
*That cannot but guide us aright,*  
*Since it flickers up to Heaven through the night.”*

*Thus I pacified Psyche and kissed her,*  
*And tempted her out of her gloom—*  
*And conquered her scruples and gloom;*  
*And we passed to the end of the vista,*  
*But were stopped by the door of a tomb—*  
*By the door of a legended tomb;*  
*And I said: “What is written, sweet sister,*  
*On the door of this legended tomb?”*  
*She replied: “Ulalume—Ulalume!—*  
*’Tis the vault of thy lost Ulalume!”*

*Then my heart it grew ashen and sober*  
*As the leaves that were crispéd and sere—*  
*As the leaves that were withering and sere;*  
*And I cried: “It was surely October*  
*On this very night of last year*  
*That I journeyed—I journeyed down here!—*

*That I brought a dread burden down here—  
 On this night of all nights in the year,  
 Ah, what demon hath tempted me here?  
 Well I know, now, this dim lake of Auber—  
 This misty mid region of Weir—  
 Well I know, now, this dank tarn of Auber,  
 This ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir."*

*Said we, then—the two, then: "Ah, can it  
 Have been that the woodlandish ghouls—  
 The pitiful, the merciful ghouls—  
 To bar up our way and to ban it  
 From the secret that lies in these wolds—  
 From the thing that lies hidden in these wolds—  
 Have drawn up the spectre of a planet  
 From the limbo of lunar souls—  
 This sinfully scintillant planet  
 From the Hell of the planetary souls?"*

#### IV

THE SYMBOLIC geography and topography of the unconscious as presented in "Dream-Land" parallel symbols already noticed in the preceding poems. The primary imagery is of psychic disquiet and fear, and yet there is recognized in the profound of the unconscious a peace and quietude which provide release from the stress of consciousness. Poe recognized that no line can be drawn between conscious and unconscious states and that indefinable degrees of both merge in psychic experience. His story "The Premature Burial" contains explicit comment on the "shadowy and vague" boundaries which divide life from death, drawn from his observation of the shadowy and vague boundaries between conscious and unconscious. In "Dream-Land" we find explicitly labeled the symbolism already observed in "Ulalume" and "Silence—A Fable."

## Dream-Land

*By a route obscure and lonely,  
 Haunted by ill angels only,  
 Where an Eidolon, named NIGHT,  
 On a black throne reigns upright,  
 I have reached these lands but newly  
 From an ultimate dim Thule—  
 From a wild weird clime that lieth, sublime,  
 Out of SPACE—out of TIME.*

*Bottomless vales and boundless floods,  
 And chasms, and caves, and Titan woods,  
 With forms that no man can discover  
 For the tears that drip all over;  
 Mountains toppling evermore  
 Into seas without a shore;  
 Seas that restlessly aspire,  
 Surging, unto skies of fire;  
 Lakes that endlessly outspread  
 Their lone waters—lone and dead,—  
 Their still waters—still and chilly  
 With the snows of the lolling lily.*

*By the lakes that thus outspread  
 Their lone waters, lone and dead,—  
 Their sad waters, sad and chilly  
 With the snows of the lolling lily,—  
 By the mountains—near the river  
 Murmuring lowly, murmuring ever,—  
 By the grey woods,—by the swamp  
 Where the toad and the newt encamp,—  
 By the dismal tarns and pools  
 Where dwell the Ghouls,—  
 By each spot the most unholy—  
 In each nook most melancholy,—*

*There the traveller meets, aghast,  
 Sheeted Memories of the Past—  
 Shrouded forms that start and sigh  
 As they pass the wanderer by—  
 White-robed forms of friends long given,  
 In agony, to the Earth—and Heaven.*

*For the heart whose woes are legion  
 'Tis a peaceful, soothing region—  
 For the spirit that walks in shadow  
 'Tis—oh, 'tis an Eldorado!  
 But the traveller, travelling through it,  
 May not—dare not openly view it;  
 Never its mysteries are exposed  
 To the weak human eye unclosed;  
 So wills its King, who hath forbid  
 The uplifting of the fringed lid;  
 And thus the sad Soul that here passes  
 Beholds it but through darkened glasses.*

*By a route obscure and lonely,  
 Haunted by ill angels only,  
 Where an Eidolon, named NIGHT,  
 On a black throne reigns upright,  
 I have wandered home but newly  
 From this ultimate dim Thule.*

## V

THE GEOGRAPHY of "Dream-Land" provides the frame of imagery which is primary to an understanding of another poem, much commented upon but little understood in its logical symbolization of the psyche's power to create a world of its own. "The City in the Sea" not only contains dream symbols parallel to those of "Dream-Land," it is conceived as a dream image *in toto*. The association of historical and legendary

sunken cities, although inevitable from the allusions in the poem itself and apropos in so far as the symbolism is concerned, is misleading in so far as the image is concerned. Poe's city is *in*, not *beneath*, the sea. Mirage-like it rests on the surface, its inverted reflection mirrored therein, its ground-level the level of the water, and its foundations nonexistent. This is the only conclusion compatible with the image of lines 30-31:

*There open fanes and gaping graves  
Yawn level with the luminous waves.*

The image is not of a sunken city, but a city about to sink in the last still moment when the unconscious dream sinks from dream world into the oblivion of absolute unconsciousness—death. The water level is conceived as the dividing line between the realm of dream and the realm of death. The darkness of the "strange city" is not submarine, but the darkness of the "ultimate dim Thule" which Poe describes in "Dream-Land" as lying "out of SPACE—out of TIME," and in the terminology of his story "The Premature Burial" as a sort of "psychal" night of the unconscious as opposed to the "psychal" day of the conscious. Of course, there is an alternative conclusion, long since avowed by critics who refuse to take Poe seriously as an artist—that the image is sheer nonsense perpetrated by a hoax-maker.

In short, the poem is a dream image, similar to "Dream-Land," "Ulalume," and "Silence—A Fable," but unlike them in that it represents a state of psychal quiescence, approaching the awful stillness of death. As an image of the complete and final dream, suspended momentarily until it sinks beneath the water of total unconsciousness, the city symbolizes all that Poe imagined of beauty and sin belonging in life to the dream-

land ruled by "an Eidolon, named NICHT," but here ruled by a more august power.

The priority of psychological symbolism over moral allegory in interpreting the poem is indicated not merely by the fact that symbolism provides more coherent meaning, but also by the fact that Poe's final choice of title for the poem provides the reader with an image key to its psychological interpretation rather than a moral key to allegory as suggested in the early titles "The Doomed City" and "The City of Sin." Each of the titles indicates Poe's rationalization of what he had written, but the final title indicates that he left his critics far behind. Most commentators have attempted with but faint success to make the poem coherent in terms of the early abandoned titles. Other associations within the poem lead to an identification of the city as a composite symbol of beauty and sin, pleasure and pain. The "condensed" or "composite" image as defined in nonrational psychology, with dual or multiple significances not always immediately clear in the association, is employed by Poe with authority that owes nothing to Freud, but which Freud's authority does much to clarify.

The myth, legend, and literature of all lands testify to the common human tendency to associate apparently unrelated (personally or privately related) experiences or facts (real or imagined) in such composite images. What are to us the most obvious composite images are those long fixed in their significance by special religious tradition and literary usage, among them this image of beauty-sin. Possibly the ancient literary sources suggested by scholars for this poem are themselves as much manifestations of a tendency to interpret Sodom and Gomorrah and other sunken cities as symbols of sinful beauty destroyed (Freudian repression of desire) as they are of literary imitation, although one does not doubt that Poe's literary



knowledge occasioned his allusions to these as well as to Babylon.

Poe's city is above all a symbol of the creative power of the psyche—a last recapitulative vision in the moment of death, spaceless and timeless, and embracing in its composite images a wide realm of archetypal imagery. In the last still moment when the psyche departs from the “ultimate dim Thule” (presumably for regions hitherto unvisited) the image remains, fixed for eternity as it sinks into oblivion. Confronted by this symbol of psychal power,

*Hell, rising from a thousand thrones,  
Shall do it reverence.*

The dream, if not the dreamer, is thus projected beyond life.

The reader may follow for himself the suggestions in phrase and association which round out the symbolism of repressed desire and profane art, defying destruction though ruled by death and doomed to hell, but one may remark in conclusion: in this light the poem may be considered a symbolic avowal (come hell or high water!) of Poe's poetic creed that the function of the poet is to create beauty rather than to moralize.

## *The City in the Sea*

*Lo! Death has reared himself a throne  
In a strange city lying alone  
Far down within the dim West,  
Where the good and the bad and the worst and the best  
Have gone to their eternal rest.  
There shrines and palaces and towers  
(Time-eaten towers that tremble not!)  
Resemble nothing that is ours.*

*Around, by lifting winds forgot,  
Resignedly beneath the sky  
The melancholy waters lie.*

*No rays from the holy heaven come down  
On the long night-time of that town;  
But light from out the lurid sea  
Streams up the turrets silently—  
Gleams up the pinnacles far and free—  
Up domes—up spires—up kingly halls—  
Up fanes—up Babylon-like walls—  
Up shadowy long-forgotten bowers  
Of sculptured ivy and stone flowers—  
Up many and many a marvellous shrine  
Whose wreathéd friezes intertwine  
The viol, the violet, and the vine.*

*Resignedly beneath the sky  
The melancholy waters lie.  
So blend the turrets and shadows there  
That all seem pendulous in air,  
While from a proud tower in the town  
Death looks gigantically down.*

*There open fanes and gaping graves  
Yawn level with the luminous waves;  
But not the riches there that lie  
In each idol's diamond eye—  
Not the gaily-jewelled dead  
Tempt the waters from their bed;  
For no ripples curl, alas!  
Along that wilderness of glass—  
No swellings tell that winds may be  
Upon some far-off happier sea—  
No heavings hint that winds have been  
On seas less hideously serene.*

*But lo, a stir is in the air!  
The wave—there is a movement there!  
As if the towers had thrust aside,  
In slightly sinking, the dull tide—  
As if their tops had feebly given  
A void within the filmy Heaven.  
The waves have now a redder glow—  
The hours are breathing faint and low—  
And when, amid no earthly moans,  
Down, down that town shall settle hence,  
Hell, rising from a thousand thrones,  
Shall do it reverence.*

## VI

TURNING to a poem less well known and even less understood, not to say often dismissed as meaningless, we find in "The Valley of Unrest" an almost purely psychological symbolism, without reference to the traditional terms of moral allegory which, although furnishing immediate but inadequate hints of meaning in "Ulalume" and "The City in the Sea," have tended to cloud the coherent pattern of psychological symbolism to the reader's perception.

Poe's successive revisions of this poem parallel his changes of title for "The City in the Sea" in eliminating suggestions of moral allegory in favor of pure dream imagery. The introductory lines of the earliest version, which Poe discarded, link the story of the valley to a hypothetical Syriac myth with suggestions of "Satan's dart" and a "broken heart" as more or less specific hints of guilt related to the "nameless grave." In the final version the sense of guilt underlying the symbolism is left entirely to the reader's inference, and the imagery conveys primarily the sense of repression and psychic unrest which

parallels that of "Silence—A Fable," "Ulalume," and "Dream-Land."

If one were attempting the risky business of psychoanalyzing Poe on the basis of this poem, one would insist on exhuming an object in the grave. Joseph Wood Krutch in *Edgar Allan Poe; A Study in Genius* has commented that if we knew who was buried in the tomb of the lost Ulalume we would have the key to the sexual incapacity which Krutch attributes to Poe, but which other competent scholars have denied on the basis of what seems to them satisfactory evidence. Fortunately, being interested merely in understanding the poem, we need make no conjectures beyond the confines of the poem itself. We may recognize Poe's archetypal imagery as being at no great variance from its common employment in poetry from antiquity to the present. The nameless grave contains the image of love that, for whatever fear or pain, lies buried because the superego has decreed that it shall be forgot; and the haunting awareness of this truth, vaguely apprehended by almost any reader, depends much less on Poe's particular experience than on the universal human experience that repression creates in the unconscious a genuine place of departed spirits, haunted by an intolerably real unrest.

Orthodox commentators have followed traditional concepts of the supernatural in interpreting this poem, as well as "The City in the Sea" and "Dream-Land," in terms of the "place of departed spirits"; and it should be admitted that a supernatural interpretation will satisfy some readers. The imagery and music of the poem, however, as well as the definitive significance of the word "unrest" in the title, suggest symbolism of a psychic state or condition; certainly the place described is "out of the world," as nearly all commentators have recognized. Efforts, however ingenious, to locate the valley geographically and historically testify to the assiduity of scholar-

ship but scarcely add to the understanding of the poem. The only geography entirely compatible with such imagery as

*Ah, by no wind are stirred those trees  
That palpitate like the chill seas*

must be either in the realm of the supernatural or in the realm of dream. That the latter is the more intelligible alternative seems apparent from an analysis of the symbols.

Although the symbolism was probably never intended by Poe to approximate the degree of allegory which he indicated in "The Haunted Palace," there is instructive comparison possible between the two poems. In each poem contrasting psychic states are symbolized. In "The Haunted Palace" Sanity and Insanity are represented on the conscious level of the psyche, whereas in "The Valley of Unrest" Expression and Repression are presented on the unconscious level.

In the first part ("Once")—the silent peaceful valley where the people did not dwell because they had gone into the outer world to war against their enemies—we have a symbol of the psychic state in which emotion, finding an objective, conscious activity under the approval of the superego, is expressed. The valley as a symbol of the soul's secret retreat appears also in Poe's story "Eleanora" as the "Valley of the Many-Colored Grass," in "The Sleeper" as the "universal valley," and in several other of Poe's poems and stories with similar connotation. So here the silent dell is the psyche's secret retreat, safe because unknown to the "enemy" in the outer world, but open to discovery by an enemy who defeats hate, turning it to love.

In the second part ("Now")—the troubled and restless valley, haunted by revenants of its former inhabitants (*i.e.* dream images), symbolized appropriately as motion without apparent cause—we have a symbol of the unconscious when emotion, denied objective play by the disapproval of the superego, is

repressed. In the symbol of fear (eternal watchfulness) presented in

*. . . the violets there that lie  
In myriad types of the human eye—*

and in the symbol of sorrow,

*. . . the lilies there that wave  
And weep above a nameless grave!*

we have the dual reaction of the psyche to repression—eternal sorrow for the dead (repressed) emotion whose betrayal of the secret valley made a martyrdom necessary, and eternal fear that the valley may be discovered again. The grave is nameless, because as key symbol of the act of repression (to repress is simply to will the censored feeling out of existence so far as consciousness is concerned) it is not consciously recognized for what it is. Poe presents the mysterious valley and grave as seen by “each visitor”—visitors being perceptions on the part of the conscious ego, which occasionally under emotional stress penetrate the realm of the id. It should be noted that in the earliest version of the poem “each visitor” is merely “the unhappy” and that in “Ulalume” and other poems of the unconscious Poe presents similar transient, halfway glimpses of the meaning of dreamland under emotional stress. The valley is perceived but not understood by the conscious psyche, a stranger to the realm.

### The Valley of Unrest

*Once it smiled a silent dell  
Where the people did not dwell;  
They had gone unto the wars,  
Trusting to the mild-eyed stars,*

*Nightly, from their azure towers,  
To keep watch above the flowers,  
In the midst of which all day  
The red sun-light lazily lay.  
Now each visitor shall confess  
The sad valley's restlessness.  
Nothing there is motionless—  
Nothing save the airs that brood  
Over the magic solitude.  
Ah, by no wind are stirred those trees  
That palpitate like the chill seas  
Around the misty Hebrides!  
Ah, by no wind those clouds are driven  
That rustle through the unquiet Heaven  
Uneasily, from morn till even,  
Over the violets there that lie  
In myriad types of the human eye—  
Over the lilies there that wave  
And weep above a nameless gravel  
They wave:—from out their fragrant tops  
Eternal dews come down in drops.  
They weep:—from off their delicate stems  
Perennial tears descend in gems.*

Others of Poe's poems are open to interpretation through their psychological symbolism, but generally they present less difficulty than those we have discussed here. The pattern varies in some details, and the imagery takes on meanings peculiar to the theme of the particular poem, but for the most part the frame of reference is not different from that of the poems discussed, nor from that familiar in the writings of twentieth-century poets who have been concerned with the unconscious and with the psychological enigmas of love. With or without benefit of Freud, the poet has always known his way around, after his own method of exploration, in the "wild weird clime . . . out of SPACE—out of TIME."





# Eliot's Prufrock

## I

THE bewilderment of T. S. Eliot's readers has been attributed to a number of causes. Among those most often mentioned are his farfetched allusions, his esoteric echoing of other writers, and his puzzling metaphors, which have been somewhat dubiously classified as conceits. But the basic cause of confusion to the reader, perhaps, has been what I. A. Richards has described as "the unobtrusiveness, in some cases the absence, of any coherent intellectual thread upon which the items of the poems are strung."

That there is sufficient ground for Richards' comment seems to be indicated by the fact that most of the critics and interpreters who have written their assessments of Eliot have left their readers uncomfortably possessed of hints which seem to suggest a possible unified meaning, but which fail to provide it. Upon returning to the particular poem with the hope of finding his questions answered, the reader struggles with many of the same old problems, still unable to find the unity and coherence which had been vaguely hoped for. The trouble with most of the criticisms and commentaries, including F. O. Matthiessen's valuable *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, is that they ignore or consider only incidentally the one thing which most needs clarification: namely, the psychological pattern which underlies the items in the poems, whether the items be figures of speech, allusions, or echoes. The nearest approach to a succinct general statement of this psychological

pattern that I have found in various commentaries is I. A. Richards' observation that "the central process in all Mr. Eliot's poems . . . [is] the conjunction of feelings which, though superficially opposed . . . yet tend as they develop to change places and even to unite." To this may be added the observation that this process involves what nonrational psychology has sometimes termed a "complex," in which experience is arranged in a set of "transferences" and "condensations"—which means simply that, in the unconscious, images tend to be related or associated, to come to represent each other, and to blend into a composite image which may have multiple significance.

The difference which sets much modern expressionism apart from other modes in literature lies less in its symbolistic manner than in the extent to which it employs and communicates nonrational experience as its basic substance. Literary critics, accustomed to dealing with rhetoric, have tended to expend their effort on the surface manner rather than on the communication; for, where they admit an understanding of rhetoric, they are hesitant to declare for better or for worse what it is all about, except of course those worthies who are sure that it is all nonsense. Although emotion has always furnished much of the stuff out of which the poet has woven his words, unless he has been a mystic of parts, he has usually rationalized his feelings into a communication which follows the conventional logic of his conscious mind in saying what to him, and he hopes to his reader, is a logical expression that may be rationally apprehended. Hence, even in the emotional poetry of the romantics there is usually a unity, coherence, and emphasis based upon the conventional logic (sometimes a pseudo-logic, but still conventional) of rational communication. And even though in an individual poem or passage this

logic may give way to "inspired" statement which flows from the well of intuition and feeling, it is most often "controlled" by the theme or idea which the poet has rationally determined upon as his communication. But in Eliot's poetry the structural pattern is often nonrational. Although the reader's comprehension demands the employment of reason, reason must be guided by an understanding of the coherence of the nonrational; and perception of a particular poem's unity, coherence, and emphasis demands what may at first glance seem to be a paradox—the rational perception of nonrational sequence.

Although numerous critics have seemed to suggest also that the difference in Eliot's poetry has something to do with sex, their interest seems to be centered on the poet rather than on the poetry. Edmund Wilson has noted that "the horror of vulgarity and the shy sympathy with the common life, the ascetic shrinking from sexual experience and the distress at the drying up of the springs of sexual emotion, with the straining after a religious emotion which may be made to take its place" is the reflection of "the peculiar conflicts of the Puritan turned artist." Perhaps these phrases are significant comments on the personality of the poet and perhaps they are merely a misuse of his poetry, but in either case they seem to miss the center of the target, the poetry itself, which seems more often dramatic than lyric in its essential communication, and provides, in those volumes which antedate the *Four Quartets* at least, representation of a character's experience rather than a subjective outpouring of the poet's own psyche. Even in the poems which are generally assumed to be Eliot's own expression one becomes aware of an analysis of character that is more or less objective and exploratory. It is this which distinguishes Eliot's poetry as a whole from that of the French Symbolists, whose poems usually lack the degree of psychological analysis

which dramatic presentation of a personality may achieve more completely than can lyrical expression of a poet's own psyche; and it is this which Eliot had in mind, perhaps, when he stated that "the form in which I began to write in 1908 and 1909, was directly drawn from the study of LaForgue together with the late Elizabethan drama." Edmund Wilson seems to misinterpret this statement to mean that Eliot derived his form from the similar devices of the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century and the French Symbolists; when it may, with better logic, be understood to mean that two diverse forms fused in Eliot's practice—the dramatic form of the late Elizabethans, with its naturalistic themes, and the symbolism of the French school.

In truth, the quality which distinguishes the greater part of Eliot's poetry from both the metaphysical poetry of the seventeenth century and the symbolist poetry of the nineteenth century is the consistently dramatic psychological analysis which underlies it. Eliot indulges in conceits in the manner of Donne or images in the manner of LaForgue, not as devices to express his own imagination but as psychological realities dictated by the imagination of the character whom he is presenting to the reader.

Of Eliot's best known poems, perhaps "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" has been most widely reprinted in anthologies and commented upon by critics, and yet one may look in vain for any satisfactory effort to analyze the poem's full meaning in the coherence and unity of its respective parts. In treatments given to it by Matthiessen, Wilson, and Richards, as well as by others, one finds so much assumed that seems untenable and so much ignored that seems germane, though perhaps judiciously omitted in the critic's broad scope and purpose of general appraisal, that one is tempted to wonder

whether the poem has been adequately digested. On the assumption that there is virtue in detail where complexity is involved, the following analysis is presented in the hope that it may provoke more careful attention to the psychological patterns which provide the structure of Eliot's poetry, and which have been largely ignored or casually dispensed with by his critics in their wish to assess his achievement.

## II

It is generally agreed that the title of the poem is ironic—that, as Matthiessen phrases it, “the point of calling the poem a ‘Love Song’ lies in the irony that it will never be sung; that Prufrock will never dare to voice what he feels.” Although one may agree on the irony, is there not a possibility that it lies rather in the fact that this *is* a “Love Song”—the only kind that Prufrock could sing—with self-love its dominant theme, dramatically revealed as Prufrock lulls himself into his spiritual nirvana?

The motto which serves as preface to the poem has specific bearing on the question. Guido da Montefeltro admits in the passage quoted from the *Inferno* that he would never divulge himself to Dante if he thought his story could get back to the world, for his pride burns as strongly in hell as it had burned on earth. Eliot is directly handing his reader the key to the poem; namely, that one must recognize all that Prufrock says to be the unintentional confession of a man who would never consciously lay bare even a small part of his precious, guarded psyche, which he so loves that he would keep it snug and secret from all other than himself.

There is also in Guido's sin of “false counsel” a possible analogy to Prufrock's advice to himself. Guido burns as a

flame in hell because his absolution, granted to him by the Pope prior to the commission of his sin, had no effect; for Guido did not repent. This is something more than an interesting theological technicality in its relation to Prufrock's condition; for the "I" of the poem has given deceitful counsel to the "you" throughout life, and has presumed with Guido that a trick of thought has obviated responsibility. As Guido's ego assumed that it was above the need for actual repentance, so Prufrock's "I" assumes that it is above responsibility, and self-love is in each case at the root of the psyche's deceit. But this is not to imply that Eliot necessarily expects his reader to understand Prufrock's condition to be that of an admitted sinner. In fact, there seems to be no ethical problem which Prufrock recognizes and admits. He is merely a human being whose two phases do not get along together.

Thus it seems hardly accurate to assume with Matthiessen that Prufrock is debating with his conscience. Neither the "I" nor the "you" is identified as a phase of self which judges and condemns in terms of right and wrong. The only terms in which the "I" effect repression of the actions of the "you" are fear and disgust—fear of the power of sex and disgust with the physical world which so contradicts the dream world of the "I." There is no evidence in anything said by the "I" of even a relative ethic, much less an absolute one. In this, Prufrock is the antithetical brother of Eliot's Sweeney, whose extrovertish animalism functions equally without benefit of an ethic, and leaves him, if we may adapt a phrase from "The Hollow Men," a "shape without form" which is the antithesis of the "shade without color" in Prufrock, who merely lives in "death's other kingdom" rather than in the "dead land" of Sweeney.

One can find no disagreement with Matthiessen's assumption, on the other hand, that the poem is a "soliloquy" in

which Prufrock debates with himself, somewhat after the manner of the old poem of the debate genre, "The Body and the Soul," and in which a psychoanalyst would no doubt identify the struggle between the "I" and the "It." Prufrock is addressing himself, nonchalantly and preciously. The mood is ostensibly one of intellectual sophistication and the language is ostensibly playful, but beneath the image of

*the evening is spread out against the sky  
Like a patient etherized upon a table*

lies Prufrock's psychic self-indulgence in the presence of the "outer" world, his addiction to the sensuously soft "inner" world of his precious self, which recurs again and again symbolized in other, but always recognizable, images throughout the poem. In contrast, there are the unpleasant symbols of the outer world: "restless nights in one-night cheap hotels" and

*Streets that follow like a tedious argument  
Of insidious intent  
To lead you to an overwhelming question . . .*

which are no less symbols of the outer world in all its grubby squalor because they are to the reader identifiable realities. It may be observed for future application that this twofold pattern of imagery is pursued throughout the poem. The figures which most readers would consider to be unintelligible, or at best vague associations, are the projections of Prufrock's private world, while the metaphors more readily grasped are those identified with the material world, in which the "you" has its being. It may also be noted that these opening lines give us the clue to the relationship between the "I" and the "you" in the fact that it is the "you" that is led to "an overwhelming question." For the "I" there is no question. What the question is, we should not, as the "I" suggests, ask at this point. We should

follow them as they make their visit, hypothetically of course, for Prufrock never leaves his easy chair.

In his mind's eye Prufrock visits the lady at tea time:

*In the room the women come and go  
Talking of Michael Angelo.*

From this vision—again a symbol of the intolerably inane world of the “you”—the “I” recoils immediately to take refuge in an image that provides Prufrock with an escape from reality and the reader with a projection of Prufrock's eternal paradise of self-satisfaction. Here is no mere conceit but a “condensation” representative of Prufrock's introvertish psyche, erotically infantile in its sensual self-sufficiency:

*The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,  
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes  
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,  
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,  
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,  
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,  
And seeing that it was a soft October night,  
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.*

There are two general types of conceit in the poem. The rational conceits, like those of Donne, are, even when grotesque, entirely clear in the image of experience which they present: thus, “I have measured out my life with coffee spoons,” or “when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin.” The nonrational conceits, on the other hand, are not equally clear in terms of the experience which they present unless they are referred to the realm of the unconscious where they have arisen and where their association lies: for example “The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,” or “the evening is spread out against the sky/ Like a patient etherized



upon the table." Here is nothing comparable to Donne's conceits. How and why is the fog like a cat, or the evening like an etherized patient? One can see easily enough the analogy of Prufrock's way of life and the measuring coffee spoon, or the analogy of what Prufrock's friends say of him and what the naturalist might say of a specimen, as well as the analogy of Prufrock's feelings and the specimen's feelings as they share the experience of "sprawling on a pin." But when one attempts to perceive a likeness between patient and evening, or smoke and cat, one finds a blurred effect that does not readily clarify. And if one attempts by a merely logical approach to perceive an analogy, one winds up with something so patently insufficient—as, for example, that at least the evening is calm like the patient, or that the smoke is quiet like the cat—that one cannot accept it as of any significance comparable to the significance of the coffee spoon or the specimen. One must either dismiss the conceits of patient and cat or find their significance in the nonrational, unconscious associations of Prufrock's dream world.

This need not be too difficult a matter. If one recognizes merely that Prufrock likes cats—soft, furry, quiet, self-contained, decorous, secretive beasts—and that he likes smoke, which by transference assumes the character of a cat in a condensation typical of dream imagery, then one has the pleasure basis for the private analogy. Behind this, however, is the psyche whose pleasure dictates the analogy and condenses two otherwise unrelated images into a single image which represents not only cat and smoke, but Prufrock's pleasure, just as in a similar but obviously conscious association the pain of the "you" dictates the image of persecution in the insect sprawling on a pin. The significance, then, becomes apparent as a projection of Prufrock's wish; the cat-fog and the evening-

patient are symbols out of the dream world in which Prufrock tenderly indulges his ego in self-love. They represent his self-contained pleasure in harmless sensualities, decorously private; his inner security in spiritual isolation; his freedom to "be" and to "create" without reference to external necessities.

In the snugness of introvertish isolation, there is always time, an eternity for continual deception and indecision. The "I" is not merely aware of the timeless quality of this private world, but takes pride in the feeling of power which results therefrom—the power that so sets the "I" apart from beings of the other world, enabling the contrivance of subtleties and deceptions, private murder and private creation—and which even changes (or *should*, that is the point for the "you") the significance of the outer world:

*Time for you and time for me,  
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,  
And for a hundred visions and revisions,  
Before the taking of a toast and tea.*

Then, with the recurrence of the vision of the room and the women "talking of Michael Angelo," the "I" returns to the spectacle of the outer world in which Prufrock lives as a middle-aged bachelor. The banter and ostensibly precious word-play shift to realistic satire in which the physical appearance of Prufrock is held up to ridicule. In this the "I" alternately adopts the point of view of the women and of the "you" ("They will say: 'How his hair is growing thin!'") for a few observations, and then asks mockingly:

*Do I dare  
Disturb the universe?*

Each of the next three sections of the poem repeat this pattern of satiric observation concluded by a mocking question. All

the observations of Prufrock and of the women are made from a realistic, even a naturalistic, point of view, with metaphors precisely drawn to pillory the physical appearance of human beings, the inanity of human society, and particularly the self-acknowledged inadequacy of Prufrock, the man, to house the omnipotent "I"; and each of the concluding questions mockingly probes the delicate emotion of Prufrock's tender spirit, while sneering (even spitting with cat-like decorum) at the vulgarity and inanity of the outer world:

*And should I then presume?  
And how should I begin?*

How should he begin to make love? Obviously the act is impossible, for the simple reason that it would mean death to Prufrock's "I." The meaning of love cannot be other than death to his introvertish psyche. Eliot's insistence on this axiom is evidenced in so many poems, both in love for women and love for deity, as to require no further comment here, other than to point out that the "overwhelming question" of the opening passage is the question of self-destruction. The later allusion to Prince Hamlet suggests far more than the general analogy of indecision that most critics have recognized. There is a precise analogy of the problem of the "I" in Hamlet's "to be or not to be," but it seems to be Prufrock's oblique interpretation of *Hamlet* as essentially a success story—the right kind of success in the wrong circumstances—which provides the deeper meaning of the allusion; for the "I," as we shall see in the poem's conclusion, seems wholly satisfied with Prufrock's own variety of success—the right kind of success in the right circumstances—which the world calls failure.

This association of love and death underlies the sinister meaning of women to Prufrock, and accounts for the revulsion

and disgust which accompanies his too-close-for-comfort acquaintance with feminine appurtenances:

*Arms that are braceleted and white and bare  
 [But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!]  
 Is it perfume from a dress  
 That makes me so digress?*

Likewise it accounts in a measure for the allusions to John the Baptist and Lazarus, as well as to Hamlet, each of whom is associated in Prufrock's mind with sex, women, and death, for the obvious reason that each had his sorrow of a woman who was more or less directly responsible for his death, with the peculiarly significant circumstance in the instance of Lazarus that his sister brought about his spiritual death in having him brought back to life in the flesh. In brief, woman means death to Prufrock's "I."

The psychological climax of the poem is reached with the brilliant passage in which the "I" makes the only statement of other-love possible to Prufrock's psyche, a declaration of an intellectual awareness of other men's need of love in their loneliness of heart. The futility of this abstraction drawn from observation of other men is overwhelming in its implication for the "you" of the poem:

*Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets  
 And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes  
 Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows? . . .*

*I should have been a pair of ragged claws  
 Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.*

Here is no simple self-pity, as some interpretations have found it, no mere feeling of inadequacy on the part of Prufrock's "I," symbolized in the lowly crab. Rather, it is a

scornfully proud denunciation of the "you" and the other world in general for its "nature." Instead of having a soul, says the "I," you should have had a pair of claws to clutch the offal of your lust. Likewise the apparent tenderness of the image of the lonely men is, as a beginning of a declaration of love, cynical in its sentimentality and its circumambient remoteness from the concrete necessities of love for a woman.

From this point the poem slides gradually downward to its only possible conclusion. First in a return to the private world—the snug, relaxed, sensuous delight of unadulterated self-hood, again represented in an image that is less a conceit than a psychological condensation:

*And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!  
Smoothed by long fingers.*

Satisfied that he has preserved inviolate his precious world of self, Prufrock relaxes in his easy chair to indulge with decorous sadism in the horror of what might have been. In this state of self-hypnosis, he can safely speculate on what might have happened. Suppose that he had had "the strength to force the moment to its crisis" and had thus destroyed his precious self-hood, "would it have been worth it, after all" if the lady had replied: "That is not what I meant at all"? In other words, suppose she had never been any more than he inclined to sacrifice, and had politely turned him aside with an evasion of his overt act? His adolescent fear of sexual failure magnifies the grotesqueness of the hypothetical spiritual suicide, making it a martyrdom without meaning. The pseudo-heroic proportions of this enormity are symbolized in the two remarkable images of persecution which gradually build toward the hyper-neurotic image of the lantern slide, which is all but insane in its frenzy. First is the image of the prophet, persecuted and

beheaded at the behest of a lascivious queen, which the "I" proposes but discards for the simple reason that, though the prophet is like the "I" (or shall we say, as Prufrock might have been had he forced the moment to its crisis) in the act of dying because of a woman's lust, he is unlike the "I" in that he had something worth dying for, his spiritual integrity. Spiritual integrity is just what the "I" is convinced it preserves at all costs in its dream world, and hence the whole logic of the prophet's martyrdom is upset. Thus derives the smugness with which the "I" admits fear of death, identifying life with death and death with life, and completely turning the tables on the "you" with a logic which is nonrational, but psychologically clear, in its implication:

*But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,  
 Though I have seen my head [grown slightly bald] brought in  
 upon a platter,  
 I am no prophet—and here's no great matter;  
 I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,  
 And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,  
 And in short, I was afraid.*

This logic of the nonrational in which life is identified with death and death with life leads to the second image in the allusion to Lazarus. For Prufrock to make love would require that he come back like Lazarus from the dead (the living) to say "I shall tell you all." But again the "I" discards the image as inadequate to convey the immensity of the sacrifice. Even Lazarus returning from spiritual bliss to the world of the flesh, merely to satisfy his sister's possessive affection, is an inadequate image to convey the abasement of the "I" before a woman who might not appreciate the immolation of spirit involved in saying "I love you." What if she, in the presence of such martyrdom,

*settling a pillow by her head,  
Should say: "That is not what I meant at all.  
That is not it, at all"?*

Frustrated in these chosen images of martyrdom, and deep in self-love, the "I" shifts in a third desperate attempt to picture the horror of sexual sacrifice, to the image of the magic lantern which throws a minutely detailed anatomy of nerves on the screen. This is the horror of horrors. Suppose that the psyche were revealed as precisely as the nervous system in a scientist's diagram, every tiny tingling detail exposed obscenely to the vulgar view of one who could not appreciate the act of immolation:

*It is impossible to say just what I mean!  
But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:  
Would it have been worth while  
If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,  
And turning toward the window, should say:  
"That is not it at all,  
That is not what I meant, at all."*

Of course it is impossible for the "I" to tell the vulgar "you" just what the "I" means, for the "you" lives in a world of values precisely the obverse of those of the "I." Hence the split, or dual, personality of Prufrock is incapable of integration. In this Prufrock is somewhat like Prince Hamlet, who could not resolve his own "to be or not to be" in terms of definitive action, but perforce had his question answered for him by circumstances calculated by his uncle. But the analogy between Hamlet and Prufrock breaks down, as the "I" recognizes, because there will be no death contrived for the "I" by anyone. Prufrock will grow old, the victim of physical decay in the very world of which the "I" is so contemptuous—unheroic and unlamented, but in full possession of the precious dream world

in which the "I" can linger, perpetually possessed of the only satisfaction which the "I" will admit.

The mood of "No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be" is not simply defeatist, as is commonly accepted, but smug. Here the "I" anticipates the possible rejoinder of the "you" that the "I" is frustrate and without decision, by admitting in the Hamlet analogy the worst that the world of the "you" can say, which is, of course, the highest tribute and testifies that Prufrock excels even Hamlet in this private system of values where Prufrock's insignificance as a man is but the obverse symbol of the absolute power and integrity of his spirit.

From this understanding, the conclusion of the poem is no "patch" as I. A. Richards has dubbed it in his *Principles of Literary Criticism*. It is rather a perfectly logical continuation of the dual symbolism of the opening passage (which Richards also considers to be a patch), in which the "I" has juxtaposed the worlds of the "you" and "I":

*I grow old . . . I grow old . . .  
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.*

*Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?  
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.  
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.*

*I do not think that they will sing to me.*

*I have seen them riding seaward on the waves  
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back  
When the wind blows the water white and black.*

*We have lingered in the chambers of the sea  
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown  
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.*



There remains for comment the progress of the image of the mermaids and the shift from "I" to "we." The image of the mermaids—here as always symbols of the preternatural power of sex—conveys the essential tragedy of Prufrock, which, if it is not heroic in the manner of *Hamlet*, is no less psychologically real. He has heard the mermaids "singing each to each," but not to him. They will never sing to him because even in his imagination there is no place for any love save self-love. The obsessed imagining of other men may picture mermaids singing to them of love, but Prufrock has slyly seen through this illusion to the truth (his truth) that what the mermaids sing as they flee seaward is just such a song as the "I" sings to the "you" (*i.e. internos*). And the sea itself, a symbol of life (death) and by association the dream realm of the "I" as well as of the mermaids, is friendly and inhabitable for Prufrock (both "you" and "I") only if it is kept inviolate, undisturbed even by the voices of the outer world. The circle of his logic closes, perfect and complete, when Prufrock recognizes that not merely the lady but all other human beings mean death to the "I." The only existence satisfactory to Prufrock is that of his dream life, inviolate and completely self-possessed, where, although sea-girls may wreath with seaweed the chambers of his aquatic and somewhat uterine state of being, they neither disturb nor demand with the intolerable avidity of life in the outer world. There he may exist—time past, time present, and time future—in a moment eternal, and, albeit by choice a choice a nonentity in human society, in this spiritual nirvana, veritably his own Brahma—sole, whole, and absolute.

### III

IF THIS analysis be not entirely amiss, it may suggest a means by which a coherent psychological thread may be discovered

in the majority of Eliot's poems. Although the anthropological and literary notes which Eliot has provided for *The Waste Land* indicate the meaning of much of the poem's symbolism, they do not provide the key to the pattern which, as in "Prufrock," is psychological. In the later poems, including the plays *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Family Reunion*, the multiple significance of symbol and allusion, as well as ambiguity of statement, seems to open to satisfactory solution only by means of an analysis of the psychological complexity of Eliot's characters. Even the apparently personal poems, such as "Ash Wednesday," may be read effectively as the representation of an imagined psyche, symbolistically presented in the spirit, if not in the idiom, of Browning's monologues.

Although an analysis of any of these other poems requires another venture, one may remark that analysis reveals a coherent psychological pattern in each, and what is even more interesting, an essentially empirical mind underlying all. What has generally been taken to be Eliot's reversion to medieval mysticism often appears to be a truly modern exploration of the psyche, and what has seemed to be a categorical declaration of belief seems more coherently a relativistic presentation of psycho-emotional experience. Eliot seems to have known throughout his endeavors as a poet what Rimbaud discovered only to abandon poetry—that the direction of symbolistic expressionism pointed toward the disintegration of creative sanity. But where others found the dead end of communication in private word play, Eliot perceived the possibilities of a dramatic exploration of the psyche which might be communicated, provided that the poet recognized the wilderness for what it was, carefully blazed his trail, and guarded against assuming that finding a new landmark or returning to an old one meant that he had mapped the continent. Although the

reader may follow at his own risk to a destination at the end of any particular poem, he may find there not the end but the beginning of a journey; for while Eliot's prose is intellectually authoritarian and occasionally supercilious, his poetry remains psychologically tentative, searching but diffident, even in the *Four Quartets*.

# The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock\*

T. S. ELIOT

*S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse  
A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,  
Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.  
Ma perciocche giammai di questo fondo  
Non torno vivo alcun, s'i' odo il vero,  
Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.*

LET us go then, you and I,  
When the evening is spread out against the sky  
Like a patient etherized upon a table;  
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,  
The muttering retreats  
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels  
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:  
Streets that follow like a tedious argument  
Of insidious intent  
To lead you to an overwhelming question. . .  
Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"  
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go  
Talking of Michelangelo.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,  
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes  
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,

\* From *Collected Poems 1909-1935* by T. S. Eliot, copyright, 1934, 1936, by Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc.

Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,  
 Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,  
 Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,  
 And seeing that it was a soft October night,  
 Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time  
 For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,  
 Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;  
 There will be time, there will be time  
 To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;  
 There will be time to murder and create,  
 And time for all the works and days of hands  
 That lift and drop a question on your plate;  
 Time for you and time for me,  
 And time yet for a hundred indecisions,  
 And for a hundred visions and revisions,  
 Before the taking of a toast and tea.

In the room the women come and go  
 Talking of Michelangelo.

And indeed there will be time  
 To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"  
 Time to turn back and descend the stair,  
 With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—  
 [They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!"]  
 My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,  
 My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin—  
 [They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!"]  
 Do I dare  
 Disturb the universe?  
 In a minute there is time  
 For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

For I have known them all already, known them all:—  
 Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,

I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;  
 I know the voices dying with a dying fall  
 Beneath the music from a farther room.

So how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known them all—  
 The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,  
 And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,  
 When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,  
 Then how should I begin  
 To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?  
 And how should I presume?

And I have known the arms already, known them all—  
 Arms that are braceleted and white and bare  
 [But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!]  
 Is it perfume from a dress  
 That makes me so digress?  
 Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.  
 And should I then presume?  
 And how should I begin?

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets  
 And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes  
 Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows? . . .

I should have been a pair of ragged claws  
 Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!  
 Smoothed by long fingers,  
 Asleep . . . tired . . . or it malingers,  
 Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.  
 Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,  
 Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?  
 But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,

Though I have seen my head [grown slightly bald] brought in  
upon a platter,  
I am no prophet—and here's no great matter;  
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,  
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and  
snicker,  
And in short, I was afraid.

And would it have been worth it, after all,  
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,  
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,  
Would it have been worth while,  
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,  
To have squeezed the universe into a ball  
To roll it toward some overwhelming question,  
To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,  
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"—  
If one, settling a pillow by her head,  
Should say: "That is not what I meant at all.  
That is not it, at all."

And would it have been worth it, after all,  
Would it have been worth while,  
After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,  
After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail  
along the floor—  
And this, and so much more?—  
It is impossible to say just what I mean!  
But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a  
screen:  
Would it have been worth while  
If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,  
And turning toward the window, should say:  
"That is not it at all,  
That is not what I meant, at all."

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;

Am an attendant lord, one that will do  
 To swell a progress, start a scene or two,  
 Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,  
 Deferential, glad to be of use,  
 Politic, cautious, and meticulous;  
 Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;  
 At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—  
 Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old . . . I grow old . . .  
 I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?  
 I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.

I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves  
 Combing the white hair of the waves blown back  
 When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea  
 By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown  
 Till human voices wake us, and we drown.