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Cover Montage (clockwise from upper left):

John Ruskin, Ayad Aktar (Photograph taken by Larry D. Moore), Algernon Charles Swinburne, Lord George Gordon Byron, Ralph Waldo Emerson

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Please visit our website frequently. Back editions of the journal, as well as memberships, will be available soon. Prices will be listed on the website. We are excited about the 2016 APA Conference hosted by Arkansas State University-Beebe. The dates and location of the 2016 APA Conference will be posted on the website.

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## The Rhythm of Truth: Byron and John Ruskin

Phillip B. Anderson

George Bernard Shaw once pointed out that people often find John Ruskin unbelievable because they cannot “bring themselves to believe that he meant what he was saying, and indeed shouting” (Kemp 486). Among Ruskin’s many statements and writings that have been treated in this dismissive or unregarding way, there are two brief and related comments that I would like to consider for a moment. In 1887, Ruskin was asked what books had most influenced him. His replies to this inquiry appeared in the form of two brief letters printed in the *British Weekly*. In the first of these, Ruskin gives a short list of works important to him, among which appears the entry: “Byron, all; but most *Corsair*, *Bride of Abydos* and the *Two Foscari*” (*Works* 34: 605). Ruskin states: “But what I suppose to be best in my own manner of writing has been learned chiefly from Byron and Scott: (*Works* 34: 606). Now, at this point one may remember Ruskin’s comment in the Eighth Chapter of the First Book of *Praeterita* that, as a boy, he took Byron as his “master in verse” as he took Turner as his master of color ( *Works* 35: 144). But these two 1887 statements go much further than this. Ruskin is no longer speaking of himself as a budding poet, nor does he in any way limit Byron’s influence to his early years. On the contrary, Ruskin seems to be asserting in 1887 that Byron was simply one of his great intellectual and literary masters.

I think Ruskin was quite serious in these assertions, but many Ruskin scholars and critics have paid them little heed. Quentin Bell, for instance, finds it odd that Ruskin “should have pre-

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ferred Byron to Wordsworth” (Bell 34). Peter Quennell, who wrote two books on Byron, hardly so much as mentions him in his book on Ruskin. Joan Abse speculates in detail about Byron’s appeal to John James Ruskin, but has nothing to say about John Ruskin’s relationship to his great Romantic predecessor. Wolfgang Kemp devotes considerable space to a double portrait of Byron and Ruskin as contrasting cultural, social, and sexual types, but he too says nothing about Byron’s influence on Ruskin or Ruskin’s views of Byron.

When Byron and Ruskin are discussed, it is most often in relationship to Byron’s importance in Ruskin’s early imaginative and literary experience. As Ruskin tells us in *Praeterita*, he was introduced to Byron’s works very early on by his father (*Works* 35: 141). By 1834, Ruskin knew Byron “pretty well all through” (*Works* 35: 142). Ruskin’s own early poetry shows the constant influence of Byron. Ruskin’s “Farewell” is an imitation of Byron’s “Dream”. Ruskin’s “Bed-Time” is written in Byronic ottava rima, while “The Site of Babylon” and “The Destruction of Pharaoh” echo Byron’s *Hebrew Melodies*. Most importantly, perhaps, Ruskin’s “A Scythian Banquet Song” is a tribute to Byron’s oriental romances, and his 1835 “A Tour Through France” is self-consciously written in the combined styles of *Childe Harold* and *Don Juan*. Much of Ruskin’s early life was deeply colored by Byronism, and the Ruskin family trips to Europe in 1825, 1833, and 1835 were in a sense Byronic pilgrimages. That Salvador, the Ruskins’ courier, carved young John Ruskin’s name on the pillar at Chillon where Byron had once carved his is altogether indicative (Hilton 26).

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Perhaps the most revealing and important record of Ruskin's early love of Byron, however, is an essay which he wrote in 1836, probably as a school exercise. In 1836, the youthful Ruskin had been put to study under the Reverend Thomas Dale. Among his other accomplishments, Dale had published an edition of John Todd's popular *Student's Guide*, a volume which warned young people against bad literature in general and Byron in particular. Ruskin presumably wrote his 1836 essay on literature in response to a topic set by Dale. In any case, Ruskin's essay was found in Dale's desk after his death and published in 1893. This "Essay on Literature," as it was called in the first publication, is a remarkable document. Precociously extravagant in both style and substance, the essay defends imaginative literature in general, Sir Walter Scott, Edward Bulwer, and, most passionately, Lord Byron.

Despite its youthfully florid manner, Ruskin's essay is a substantial commentary on Byron. Ruskin begins with one of Byron's oriental romances:

But when we pronounce the name of "The Bride of Abydos," we feel that the case is altered.... The name hath touched us with its finger, and our brain is burning, our heart is quivering, our soul is full of light. Oh the voice, the glory, the life, that breathes through the bursts of melody which fall upon our ear! Oh, what a heaven of agonized spirit was that, whose night was meteored with the rush of its inspiration.... We do not hesitate to affirm that, with the sole exception of Shakespeare, Byron was the greatest poet that ever lived, because he was perhaps the most miserable man (*Letters* 37-39).

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Ruskin goes on to comment on the universality of Byron's genius:

We have said that he was the greatest poet that ever lived, because his talent was the most universal....He was overwhelming in his satire, irresistible in the brilliancy ...of his wit, unequaled in depth of pathos, or in the melancholy of moralizing contemplation. We may challenge every satirist and every comic poet that ever lived to produce specimens of wit or of comic power at all equal to some that might be selected from "Don Juan" (*Letters* 39).

The adolescent critic goes on with concrete citations to prove Byron's greatness as a lyric, tragic, and contemplative poet, finally asserting that "in every branch of poetry he is supereminent" (*Letters* 40). In other passages, Ruskin considers but dismisses as essentially irrelevant Byron's "occasional immorality"; he asserts that Byron's greatness is founded upon a mighty mind capable of experiencing unique depths of agony; he reiterates the overwhelming power of Byron's metrical music, and finally, Ruskin subjects Byron's attackers to a blisteringly indignant dismissal, in which those insensitive to Byron's magic are condemned as "pismires," "dogs," and "snails" (*Letters* 38-43).

This essay has importance quite beyond its prophetically fluent and energetic prose style. Much that Ruskin says here about Byron will be repeated and developed throughout his later comments on his Romantic predecessor. More specifically, Ruskin will later consistently emphasize Byron's metrical and musical power and genius, his agonized spirit as a source of unique greatness, and his poetic adequacy in the face of the entire range and variety of human experi-

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ence. Moreover, Ruskin shows in this early essay much that will be characteristic of his later “approach” to Byron. Byron is Ruskin’s poet of choice whenever the general nature of poetry is to be discussed. Ruskin, even at this early stage, takes Byron’s poetic corpus seriously *as a whole*. That is, Ruskin always shows himself intimately familiar with and at home with the entire range of Byron’s work. There is no attempt to assert that only the “Romantic” Byron or only the “satiric” Byron is authentic and great. For Ruskin, almost uniquely among Byron’s Victorian critics, Byron is *all* of Byron: Oriental Romances, plays, lyrics, *Childe Harold*, later Romantic verse narratives, satires, and even diaries and journals. So too, Ruskin always shows a concrete and detailed knowledge of Byron’s total output, compared with which Matthew Arnold seems vague and Swinburne superficial.

Finally, even in this early essay, Ruskin is aware of Byron as a figure who requires vigorous defense. This sense was not simply a response to Thomas Dale. Ruskin shows every awareness that Byron was a poet under attack, and in this he was quite correct. Byron was, of course, a favorite target of early Victorian prudery, but even important and intelligent voices were dismissing Byron by 1836. In the decade or so before 1836 writers as significant as Macaulay, Newman, Henry Taylor and Thomas Carlyle had noted Byron’s declining reputation (Chew 228-255). In short, in this early essay, Ruskin appears in the role of Byron’s defender against the stupidity and perverse blindness of general society. This situation not only sets the tone for much of his later writings on Byron, it also is an important rehearsal for Ruskin’s later roles as defender of Turner,

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Gothic architecture, Pre-Raphaelite painting, and his own views of economics. Here, as in later years, Ruskin's writing about Byron often leads to important acts of self-definition.

Ruskin also discusses Byron in his early "Letters to a College Friend," and his use of a passage from the *Siege of Corinth* to illustrate the necessarily vague suggestiveness of poetry is both sensitive and convincing, but Byron appears much more significantly in the major works of Ruskin's first maturity, *Modern Painters* and *The Stones of Venice*. Tim Hilton says quite rightly of *The Stones of Venice*, "We can say with justice that it is inspired by Milton and Byron" (Hilton 150). Indeed, the Byron of *Childe Harold*, IV and the Venetian tragedies is a decisive influence on Ruskin's great work. But while Ruskin pays tribute to Byron and his vision of Venice, he also is at great pains to point out Byron's essential ignorance of Venetian History and the fundamental sentimentalism of his treatment of Venice. Many years later, in his 1881 Epilogue to *The Stones of Venice*, Ruskin will virtually retract his harsh assessment of Byron's "ignorant sentimentalism," but it is important to note the mixture of tribute and criticism that marks much of Ruskin's writing about Byron during the decade of the 1850s.

In the last three volumes of *Modern Painters*, This mixture is evident in a particularly complex and interesting way.

Perhaps the best known treatment of Byron in *Modern Painters* appears in the First Chapter of Volume III, Ruskin's discussion of the "Grand Style." Here, Ruskin analyzes four lines of Byron's *Prisoner of Chillon* in order to demolish Reynolds' theories of poetical painting depending on general and universal nature devoid of detail. The discussion is brilliantly effective in its

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way, but curious in relationship to Byron himself. On the one hand, Byron *is* poetry for Ruskin here, and Ruskin clearly relishes the felicity and force of Byron's lines. On the other hand, Ruskin characterized Byron's "A thousand feet in depth below" as "simply false" and his "fathom line" as, at least, careless (*Works* 5: 25). In a work so devoted to truth in the observance of nature as *Modern Painters*, these "slips" seem ominous.

The other treatments of Byron in *Modern Painters* show this same ambivalence. Ruskin sees Byron as one of the key figures of the nineteenth century, but also as a figure who reflects both the strengths and the weaknesses of the age. His intense love of nature, his idealism, and his feeling for all that is noble are balanced by his misanthropy, his lack of faith, and his lack of moral will. He is at the head of that poetic school which describes and analyzes emotion, but his subjectivity and emotionalism are inferior to the objectivity and clear-sighted vision of Scott. Byron's feeling for color is strong and healthy, and his treatment of human suffering and sadness in *Childe Harold* is comparable to Turner's depth of vision. On the other hand, Byron lacks Turner's "perfect" sense of beauty. In the fifth volume of *Modern Painters*, Ruskin seems to have reached the view that Byron's weaknesses and faults are mainly reflections of his unhappy moment in history, but that his greatness was a gift which was rejected and thwarted by his age. Thus, Ruskin asserts that Byron, like the other great men of his time, was fed on bitterness by an iron-hearted England and then left to die without hope. Ruskin significantly closes Volume Five with a warning that England may be held to account for her misuse of Byron and other prophetic voices (*Works* 7: 455).

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Ruskin's treatment of Byron in *Modern Painters* is interesting in a number of ways. First, at a period when Byron's reputation was at its lowest ebb in the nineteenth century, Ruskin enshrines him as a prophet. Secondly, Ruskin's portrait of Byron here as an embittered and neglected seer who is also strongly identified with Turner seems strangely prophetic of Ruskin's soon-to-begin career as embattled and neglected sage. Here, as elsewhere, Ruskin strongly identifies with Byron, and his delineations of Byron amount virtually to self-definitions. Finally, the general presentation of genius thwarted by a hostile and corrupt age in *Modern Painters* is strongly Byronic. Throughout Ruskin's life, he had a special and deep love for Byron's early narrative poems such as *The Giaour*, *The Corsair*, and *The Bride of Abydos*. This love is perhaps inexplicable if we think of these poems as exercises in oriental escapism. Such modern Byronists as Robert Gleckner and Jerome McGann, however, have shown definitively that Byron's verse romances are really symbolically complex treatments of nobility thwarted and twisted by the destructive conditions of a fallen and corrupt Europe. In reading many passages of *Modern Painters*, one can hardly escape the feeling that Ruskin has translated Byron's dark vision into his own terms. In *Modern Painters*, Byron, in his greatness, his faults, and his tragedy becomes an artistic version of his own Conrad and Giaour.

After Volume five of *Modern Painters*, Ruskin's extended discussions of Byron appear in three late works, the *Elements of English Prosody*, *Fiction*, *Fair and Foul*, and *Praeterita*. Apart from these works, Ruskin's discussions of Byron are scattered and often brief but sometimes of real importance. In *The Turner Bequest* (1857), for instance, Ruskin discusses Turner's painting,

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*Childe Harold*, but finds it in one sense disappointing: “And the illustration is imperfect, just because *it* misses the *manliest* characters of Byron’s mind” (Works 13: 143). Ruskin goes on to explain that Turner:

...joins in the injustice too many have done to Byron in dwelling rather on the passionate than the reflective and analytic elements of his intellect. I believe no great power is sent on earth to be wasted, but that it must, in some sort, do an appointed work: and Byron would not have done this work if he had only given melody to the passions, and majesty to the pangs, of men. His clear insight into their foibles; his deep sympathy with justice, kindness, and courage; his intense reach of pity, never failing, however far he had to stoop, to lay his hand on a human heart, have all been lost sight of...(Works 13:144)

Finally, Ruskin tells us that Turner was deeply influenced by Byron’s love of nature, but that he failed to understand Byron’s profundity:

...but it is curious how unaware he [Turner] seems of the sterner war of his will and intellect; how little this quiet and fair landscape...does in reality express the tones of thought into which Harold falls oftenest, in that watchful and weary pilgrimage (Works 13:144).

This is an altogether revealing discussion. Ruskin sees Byron as a poet of great depth, force, and intelligence who is too often loved or rejected for superficial qualities. For Ruskin, Byron is not a melancholy melodist; rather, he is a profound and wise seer whose greatest qualities are misunderstood by most and inadequately understood even by the great Turner. Ruskin

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always views Byron as a “difficult” poet, a poet easily misunderstood, and this may help explain another 1857 reference to Byron, this time in *The Elements of Drawing*. Here, Ruskin is recommending readings for the prospective student of drawing. After dismissing Coleridge as “sickly and useless” and Shelley as “shallow and verbose,” Ruskin cautions that Byron should be studied only when “your taste is fully formed, and you are able to discern the magnificence in him from the wrong” (*Works* 15:227).

The tendency of people, even intelligent people, to misunderstand Byron produces another interesting discussion. In 1869, Ruskin writes a letter to Charles Eliot Norton, in which he responds to Norton’s characterization of Byron as “insincere”: “Why do you call Byron insincere?...I should call him one of the sincerest...of men...and the more I know, whether of scenery or history, the truer I find him.” Ruskin often identifies very strongly with Byron, and the letter to Norton ends rather touchingly: “If he [Byron] were only at Venice now I think we should have got on with each other” (*Works* 36:574). All of the elements in this letter—Ruskin’s sense of personal identification with Byron, his instinct to defend Byron, and his increasing respect for Byron’s depth and truth—will be important in Ruskin’s later treatments of Byron.

I have commented on Ruskin’s tendency to value Byron’s work as a whole and on his familiarity with even Byron’s most minor work. This thoroughgoing Byronism is often combined with Ruskin’s intense defensiveness about Byron. Thus, in *Proserpina* Ruskin quotes a lyric from *The Deformed Transformed* and adds a note that it is “a careless bit of Byron” but that “Byron’s most careless work is better, by its innate energy, than other people’s most labored” (*Works*

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25:405). So too, at another point in *Proserpina*, Ruskin quotes “The Wild Gazelle” from *The Hebrew Melodies* and then adds to his own copy in manuscript: “Learn the whole poem those of you who have ever even heard of such a person as BYRON” (*Works* 25:220).

In his *Ducalion*, a work contemporary with *Proserpina*, Ruskin suggests why, perhaps, Byron has little appeal for the modern reader. Here, Byron is seen, along with such writers as Goethe and Carlyle, as one who sees the world in profoundly spiritual terms and who is keenly aware of spiritual evil in the world; indeed, Byron is viewed as one whose sense of the “diabolic” in the world puts him at odds with the materialism and smugness of the “scientific mind of modern days” (*Works* 26:345).

Ruskin’s growing sense of both Byron’s importance and his shrinking stature in late Victorian literary culture accounts at least in part for his intense preoccupation with Byron in the 1880s. Ruskin’s first work dealing with Byron during this period is his often neglected *Elements of English Prosody* (1880). This work is by turns brilliant and confusing, incisive and inconsistent, but it treats Byron’s poetry extensively and with great sensitivity. Indeed, *Elements of English Prosody* might almost be described as a handbook of Byron’s prosodic practice. Ruskin’s account of this practice is consistently laudatory. Thus the opening of Byron’s *The Corsair*, Canto III offers a perfect example of what Ruskin calls the “epic iamb” (*Works* 31:335). So too, Byron’s “Song of Saul,” provides “perfect examples of dactylic cadence” (*Works* 31:337-338). “The Destruction of Sennacherib” shows anapestic verse in its full energy, and one line of the poem “is an entirely faultless anapestic tetrameter” (*Works* 31:340). At another point in this work, Ruskin

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pronounces Byron to be the author of the most “purely constructed” and “errorless” iambic tetrameters in English. So too, he is cited as a “perfect model” for “all forms of dactylic and anapestic” verse (*Works* 31:368).

Ruskin’s emphasis on Byron’s prosodic genius is very important. From his earliest years Ruskin found Byron’s melodies overwhelming, and he always views melody and music as the essence of poetry. Ruskin’s concern for meter and rhythm, however, goes far beyond mere melody. Throughout *Elements of English Prosody*, Ruskin insists that rhythm is a key to the truth of the poet and that in the greatest poets it is always used as an aid to truth. Thus, he quotes the lines from *Don Juan* beginning: “You have the Pyrrhic dance-as yet” and then comments:

There is not a forced accent, nor a transposed syllable, nor a so-called Poetic expression, throughout this sentence. But it cannot be read in truth of ordinary feeling and understanding, without falling into march-music (*Works* 31:348). For Ruskin, Byron and other great poets construct their verse in such a way that the reader’s proper understanding of the poet’s truth will always lead to a proper accent, rhythm, and meter. This is so because that finest poets subordinate “their song to their saying” while the lesser poet reverses this emphasis (*Works* 31:351). In contrast to Byron, Ruskin cites Coleridge’s *Christabel* as a poem in which the meter is “pretty and flowing” but unrelated to and even subversive of what is being said (*Works* 31:350). In his insistence on Byron’s greatness as a craftsman, Ruskin is obviously at odds with such contemporary Byronic critics as Arnold and Swinburne. This is so, in part, I think, because Arnold and Swinburne insist on felicity and sheer beauty of phrase, while Ruskin admires in Byron a sense of

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rhythm which always registers the pressure of experiential truth and reality. Byron, for Ruskin, is never just a melodist; he is a seer whose rhythms underscore the truths of his vision and of the world he sees. Since Arnold and Swinburne are so often quoted against Byron's craftsmanship as a poet, it might be worth noting that George Saintsbury, the most learned of English prosodists, later echoes Ruskin's praise of Byron's meter (*Prosody* 300). Also it is fair to say that Ruskin here, as in other Byronic matters, is simply much more careful and detailed than either Arnold or Swinburne. Thus, Ruskin sensitively comments on Byron's success in achieving a beautiful cadence by breaking a hexameter into "triplets of dimetre" in his "Last Verses" (*Works* 31:373). Also, Ruskin comments accurately and subtly on Byron's love of lines arranged into double amphibrachs (*Works* 31:345). W. H. Auden once said that his ideal reader would be one sensitive to "curious prosodic fauna like bacchics and choriambes" (*Auden* 369). By this definition, Byron finds his ideal reader, not in Arnold or Swinburne, but in Ruskin.

If *Elements of English Prosody* is concerned with the rhythms of Byron's truth, *Fiction, Fair and Foul* (1880, 1881) is primarily concerned with the truths that are revealed in his rhythms. *Fiction, Fair and Foul* has not been so much neglected as abused by most Ruskin critics, but it is often a striking and illuminating work. The key to understanding *Fiction, Fair and Foul* is the recognition that it is a study of the relationship between imaginative fiction in all of its forms and the cultural, social, and spiritual circumstances that give rise to fiction. Ruskin begins with an account of the decay and horror of modern life and then moves naturally to an account of modern fiction. This fiction is portrayed in sharp and vivid terms as the corrupt and ugly

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product of a corrupt and ugly world. Ruskin contrasts with this modern fiction the moral and imaginative sanity of Sir Walter Scott. At the end of the first paper of *Fiction, Fair and Foul*, Ruskin promises a technical account of the styles of Scott and Byron in order to show how they differ from “our fashionably recent dialects and rhythms” and also how they are founded upon “certain unalterable views of theirs concerning the code called ‘of the Ten Commandments’” (*Works* 34: 301-302). In his second paper, Ruskin does not exactly deliver on his promise, but he does give us an extraordinarily interesting account of the origins of rhyme. For Ruskin, rhyme is essentially Christian, It is the musical expression of a joy and faith which was denied the rhymeless classical world. He then traces the evolution of Christian poetry, fiction, and rhyme down to the eighteenth century. In the secular and skeptical eighteenth century, Christian poetry withers, but the complacently prosaic eighteenth-century itself dies in the catastrophe of the French Revolution.

Ruskin then tells of the rise of a new poetry in the world created by the French Revolution; this poetry was to be found in “three troubadours” whose songs were “virtually, always songs of praise, though by no means psalmody in the ancient keys” (*Works* 34:317). These three “bards” were Scott, Burns, and Byron. For Ruskin, their poetry is crucial because it is opposed alike to the secular complacency of the eighteenth century, the destructive horrors of the French Revolution, and the puritan religiosity of conventional England. Ruskin calls Byron, Scott, and Burns “troubadours” because he sees their melodious styles and romantic imaginations as a continuation of the Christian poetic tradition into the turbulent modern world. However, it is equally

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important for Ruskin that these writers, and especially Byron, are intensely engaged by the realities of revolutionary Europe. As Ruskin continues, he develops a contrast between Byron and Wordsworth which has to do with the rhythms and truths of these two poets as they relate to the realities of modern European history. In this contrast, Ruskin sees Wordsworth as provincial, withdrawn, limited, and lowly—a safe poet who is bounded by his own cozy conceptions and pieties. Wordsworth is a real poet, Ruskin admits, but one whose sense of both melody and reality are narrow and flawed.

Byron, for Ruskin, is in every way a grander figure. He is the Andes, Ruskin suggests, to Wordsworth's Skiddaw; he is Samian wine to Wordsworth's water. He is Europe to Wordsworth's Lake Country. Also, in the third paper of *Fiction, Fair and Foul*, Ruskin develops the idea that Byron is superior to Wordsworth in the truth of his moral imagination. Ruskin suggests that Byron is less limited by egotism than Wordsworth and that he has a deeper sense of justice. Thus, Wordsworth's celebration of holy carnage in the "Thanksgiving Ode" is contrasted with the wisdom of Byron's attack on that poem in *Don Juan*. Byron's depth of feeling and moral insight are indicated by his being "the first great Englishman who felt the cruelty of war" (*Works* 34:326-327).

Byron's greatness, though, is not just in his largeness or his depth of feeling, it is also in his specifically poetic powers. Ruskin invites his reader to look at the eighty-fifth and eighty-sixth stanzas of the third canto of *Don Juan* and states, "you will find—what will you *not* find, if only you understand them!" What *Ruskin* finds in this passage, as he does in many others from

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Byron, is what he terms “concentrating and foretelling power” (*Works* 34:329). In other words, Byron brings together the best and truest insights that can be said about a thing and then molds those concentrated insights into such perfectly rhythmic and resonant utterance that they have a power that transcends the occasion and becomes universal and prophetic.

After quoting and analyzing several passages from Byron, Ruskin asks his reader if he does not find in “these fragments of chant some element in their passion, no less than in their sound, different, specifically, from that of [Wordsworth]? Is it profane, think you—or more tender—nay, perhaps, in the core of it more true” (*Works* 34: 332)?

Throughout *Fiction, Fair and Foul*, Ruskin praises many elements in Byron—his compassion, his indignation, his idealism, and his love of natural beauty--, but it is finally his ability to see the essential truth of a thing and give that truth melodious and rhythmic utterance that he most admires and praises. In the third paper, for instance, Ruskin quotes a passage from Byron’s *The Island* describing a waterfall. Ruskin then adds:

Now, I beg, with such authority as an old workman may take concerning his trade, having also looked at a waterfall or two in my time, and not unfrequently at a wave, to assure the reader that here is entirely first-rate literary work.... The thing is itself good, and not only so, but unsurpassably good, the closing line being probably the best concerning the sea yet written by the race of the sea-kings (*Works* 34: 333).

In notes for the completion of *Fiction, Fair and Foul*, Ruskin continues his discussion of this passage. He contrasts it with Southey’s “Cataract of Lodore” and Shelley’s *Sensitive Plant*.

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Southey's poem he dismisses as a "disgrace to...language and landscape" while Shelley's work is "false, forced, and foul." Byron's passage, by contrast, is perfect in both its truth and rhythm. At its best, it shows "the perfect use of a great nation's language at its utmost power." Ruskin then invites us to consider how "the perfectness of...metrical skill in this group of lines is shown by their reserves and irregularities, just as much as by their melodies", Ruskin continues:

Byron will not put out his whole force till the last line, and for the noblest piece of his subject; restricting and partly thwarting the measure at first, he gives his closing diapason with the ease of one of those Atlantic waves itself. But through all the restriction his every word tells, in thought and accent together (*Works* 34: 396).

Ruskin goes on to analyze Byron's metrics in this passage with exceptional sensitivity and skill, but he is also insistent on the truth of Byron's description; "I know in a moment by his first couplet that he has watched the course of *high* waterfalls," and then Ruskin concludes:

Observe finally, --and with all this lovely investing light of feeling, Byron never loses sight of the absolute fact. What qualities are in the stream *like* girl or fawn, he sees intensely; he never forgets that it is but a stream after all...What it *is*, he perfectly feels, perfectly shows—no more. And in like manner what everything is. He is the truest, the sternest, Seer of the Nineteenth Century. No imagination dazzles him, no terror daunts, and no interest betrays ( *Works* 34: 397).

Ruskin's comments on Byron in *The Art of England* (1883) and *The Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century* (1884) mostly echo those in *Fiction, Fair and Foul*. For instance, in *The Art of England* Byron is discussed as a true "Romantic," as one who regards "the external and real

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world as a singer of Romaunts would have regarded it”; this is obviously consistent with Byron as “troubadour” in *Fiction, Fair, and Foul* (Works 33: 269). In *The Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century*, Ruskin again asserts the power of Byron’s truth: “Byron never uses an epithet vainly—he is the most accurate, and therefore the most powerful, of all modern describers” (Works 34:44). Ruskin demonstrates this accuracy and power with two long quotations from *Sardanapalus*, one an address to the sunset and the other to morning. In these passages Ruskin sees again Byron’s “concentrating power”: “Byron gathers into the bitter question all the sorrow of former superstition, while in the lines italicized, just above, he sums in the briefest and plainest English, all that we yet know, or may wisely think, about the Sun” (Works 34: 46).

Ruskin’s last and one of his greatest commentaries on Byron is , of course, in *Praeterita*. Ruskin’s account of his early reading of Byron is often cited by biographers, but what he actually says *about* Byron is less frequently attended to. First, Ruskin tells us that he was from youth impressed by Byron’s accuracy and concentration: “His truth of observation was the most exact, and his chosen expression the most concentrated, that I had yet found in literature” (Works 34: 144). Ruskin goes on to say that Byron’s form of concentration was never labored or obscure: “Byron wrote, as easily as a hawk flies, and as clearly as a lake reflects, the exact truth in the precisely narrowest terms; nor only the exact truth, but the most central and useful one” (Works 34: 145). Throughout his many discussions of Byron, Ruskin rarely makes such a statement as this without offering concrete evidence for his claims. Here, from Byron’s letters, Ruskins gives us

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three passages which he analyzes with great penetration. In his discussion of what he beautifully calls “the brevities and amenities” of these passages, Ruskin shows the essential nobility of Byron’s style as resting on the concentrated truth of his writing; he brings together “The utmost number that will come together into the space of absolutely just, wise and kind thoughts” (*Works* 34: 146-147). Moreover, Byron manages this concentrated truth with “the serene swiftness of a smith’s hammerstrokes on hot iron” (*Works* 34:146). Ruskin goes on to suggest that Byron’s use of language is always such as to imply more than is said or more than the words “mean in the dictionary” (*Works* 34: 146). Thus, Ruskin points out that, in a passage defending Pope, Byron not only speaks truth regarding Pope but also manages effortlessly to outline the essential qualities of all great poetry.

Finally, Ruskin sees Byron as a Romantic realist. Byron has a “reverent love of beauty,” whether in people or nature, but he never lets his longing for beauty blind him to the truth. His stern vision of “measured and living *truth*” is founded upon the realities of history and offers no false consolations. Ruskin sees Byron as saying always: “That *is* so; --make what you will of it” (*Works* 34: 149)!

In the final analysis, it is perhaps Byron’s combination of idealism and truthfulness that most strongly appealed to Ruskin. Many readers today are drawn to Byron’s honesty, but they sometimes pay less attention to his Romantic idealism. We must remember that Byron once defined poetry as: “The feeling of a Former world and of a Future” (*Byron* 338). The Romantic

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tragedy shadowed forth in this definition was Ruskin's fate as well as Byron's. That Ruskin understood this is made perfectly clear in a passage from *Fiction, Fair and Foul*:

In Byron, the indignation, the sorrow, and the effort are joined to the death: and they are parts of his nature (as of mine also in feebler forms), which the selfishly comfortable public have, literally, no conception of whatever; and from which the piously sentimental public, offering up daily the pure oblation of divine tranquility, shrink with anathema not unembittered by alarm (*Works* 34: 344).

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## The American Scholar: The New Man Thinking

John Hansen

In his address on the American Scholar, Ralph Waldo Emerson sets forth a clear agenda on what he believed were the essential attributes of the true scholar. In order to bring a sense of intellectual independence from past European literature, it was Emerson's desire for the American scholar to engage primarily in creating new forms of literature which were original in thought (Emerson 57-58). However, as will be seen, the current state of modern literary scholarship has moved towards pragmatism and pluralism with the scholar being occupied in large part with analyzing and interpreting past literature. But if the literary scholar's goal is to adhere to Emerson's objective of creating original thought in conjunction with Emersonian transcendentalism, then modern scholarship may have missed this goal. That is, the modern scholar who relies on pragmatism and pluralism, and who is primarily engaged in analyzing literature is fundamentally at odds with the idea of the American Scholar who – in reliance on his contemplations with his God – aims to look ahead in creating new ideas.

At this juncture, it would be helpful to have a working definition for Emerson's ideas of "originality" and "creativity." For the most part, these terms are used interchangeably by Emerson and are most likely related to the same core concept of "newness" of ideas (Emerson 57-58). This essay will adopt the same definitional basis as did Emerson who stated that "creation is always the act of men of genius... because it has *something new to say*" (Journal Notebooks of Ralph Emerson 341-42; emphasis added). Thus, for Emerson, the creation of new ideas was the very essence of his idea of originality in literature. For the true scholar, Emerson believed that in

order to create new ideas it was important for the scholar to distance himself from imitating past models that were not exclusively the scholar's own idea (Journal Notebooks of Emerson 335).

As stated above, this essay will address the applicability of Emerson's concept of originality to modern scholarship. In that regard, Ralph Emerson was himself a prolific reader in all aspects of the arts and sciences, and as such was constantly comparing past literature with the circumstances of 19<sup>th</sup> Century American society (Emerson 57-58). Most likely, Emerson would have readily admitted that the pursuit of creative individualized thought must have a firm understanding of past literature (Tauber 3). From an epistemological standpoint, there would be a very limited basis for forming new literary expressions without having a broad understanding of history and human experience to draw from. Nevertheless, as will be seen, the hallmark of Emerson's American Scholar was originality and the expression of truly creative scholarship –through his spiritual communications with the Over-soul.

According to Emerson, the paradigm for the American Scholar was "Man Thinking." The Man Thinking was not to be identified by his particular occupation because the image of a man relegated by his occupational function does disservice to his higher calling, that is, to be a "whole man." As Emerson put it:

You must take the whole society to find the whole man. Man is not a farmer, or a professor, or an engineer, but he is all... The planter, who is Man sent out into the field to gather food, is seldom cheered by any idea of the true dignity of his ministry. He sees his bushel and his cart, and nothing beyond, and sinks into the

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farmer, instead of Man on the farm... In this distribution of functions, the scholar is delegated intellect. In the right state, he is, Man Thinking. In the degenerate state, when the victim of society, he tends to become a mere thinker, or still worse, the parrot of other men's thinking. (Emerson 54)

In other words, to lay the groundwork for the calling of the American Scholar, Emerson was careful to distinguish between the occupational scholar and the true Scholar. The occupational scholar – the “mere thinker” – had a particular function, delegated by society, to spend their time engaged in studying and analyzing the written word of other thinkers:

Hence, instead of Man Thinking, we have the bookworm. Hence, the book-learned class who value books, as such; not as related to nature and the human constitution, but as making a sort of Third Estate with the world and the soul. Hence, the restorers of readings, the emendators, the bibliomaniacs of all degrees. (Emerson 57)

Emerson believed that the American Scholar as “Man Thinking” has his highest calling by communicating original sentiments, melodious verse and creative thoughts (Emerson 63). In order to reach his calling as Man Thinking, Emerson urged the Scholar to commit to the virtue of self-trust – that is, to look within and trust in his own God-given instincts and intuition (Emerson 63). Regarding Emerson's idea of “spiritual intuition,” this term must be viewed in the context of the Universal Man who has accessibility to the entire mind of the Creator. That is, man as being part of the creation is part of God. Man Thinking should trust his intuitive impulses, which

are the voice of God – and by trusting them absolutely he becomes one with God (Emerson 70-71). Thus, for Emerson, the scholar must beckon to his subjective impulsive nature in the act of creating poetry or prose. Interestingly, Emerson seems to recognize that such creative impulses are only temporary in nature – as flashes of light or epiphanies: “the thought... appears to men, or it does not appear. But there it is. To perceive it, is to take one’s stand in the absolute” (Early Lectures of Emerson 226). From a contemporary standpoint, the idea of trusting in one’s spiritual “intuition” or “impulses” might be viewed with skepticism. At a minimum, there would be metaphysical and psychological difficulties in accepting Emerson’s view of the Universal Man or with the Over-soul. However, regardless of the time period, one can make a cogent argument that these are simply *matters of faith* that one is free to accept or reject. The point is, at least for Emerson, Man Thinking’s intuition and his creative impulses are spiritually inspired based on his relationship with the Over-soul (Emerson 70-71).

In his essay “Emerson on the Scholar,” Merton Sealts documents the importance that the issue of creativity had on Emerson’s view of the American Scholar. According to Sealts, Emerson’s address to his Phi Beta Kappa audience was not so much an exercise in literary nationalism as it was an address on the fundamental issue of creativity for the American Scholar (Sealts 186). Sealts points out that Emerson began formulating his idea of the creative scholar several years before his oration at Cambridge:

What he said in Cambridge was addressed as much to himself as to his Phi Beta Kappa audience, putting to both the fundamental issue of creativity and originality

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that he had already posed in *Nature* (1836): Why should not every generation, instead of imitating some past model, “enjoy an original relation to the universe?” As early as 1834 Emerson resolved never to “utter any speech, poem, or book that is not entirely and peculiarly my work.” (Sealts 186)

Thus, from an early time in his literary career Emerson had determined that being creative and original were the most important attributes of the true scholar.

In his essay “Literary Vocation as Occupational Idealism,” Rob Wilson categorizes the modern literary intellectual as being “novelists, poets, critics, and scholars” (Wilson 91). Wilson also adheres to Frank Lentricchia’s definition of the literary scholar as being “people who read, analyze and produce what criticism calls ‘representations’ and ‘interpretations’” (Wilson 91 quoting from Lentricchia, *Criticism and Social Change*, p.6 (University of Chicago Press, 1983)). Thus, Wilson has grouped the literary author who *creates* the text with the scholar who *analyzes* the writing. In a literary sense, this distinction is fundamental: By virtue of the act of writing original prose and poetry we are being creative in the Emersonian sense. However, by engaging in analysis or criticism of past literature, the scholar is perpetuating the cycle of being an occupational scholar as a “mere thinker” who is bound to the past (Emerson 57). It was Emerson’s desire that the American Scholar strive to look forward with the goal of creating original literature:

The soul active sees absolute truth; and utters truth, or creates. In this action, it is genius; not the privilege of there and there a favorite, but the sound estate of every

man. In its essence, it is progressive. The book, the college, the school of art, the institution of any kind, stop with some past utterance of genius. This is good, say they, - let us hold by this. They pin me down. They look backward and not forward. But genius looks forward; the eyes of man are set in his forehead, not in his hind head: man hopes: genius creates... Genius is always sufficiently the enemy of genius by over influence. The literature of every nation bear me witness. The English dramatic poets have Shakspearized now for two hundred years. (Emerson 57-58)

In order to better understand Emerson's idea of original thought, his notion of "Man Thinking" and how it affected the innovative mindset for the scholar, these matters should be further examined by modern scholarship today. According to Alfred Tauber's "Revisiting Emerson's 'Declaration of Independence,'" the concept of creativity is contingent on the scholar being able to comprehend and analyze both past and present texts:

The American intellectual must appreciate the world from several perspectives, and to do so, requires a broad understanding of the natural world and a critical ability to read the past and decipher contemporary discourses. (Tauber 3)

However, this interpretation appears to be inherently different from Emerson's vision of the scholar. That is, Emerson believed that "books were for the scholar's idle times" and that the scholar should "not be subdued by his instruments" (Emerson 58). In short, Emerson wanted his

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scholars to refrain from becoming “bookworms” or spending all of their time merely analyzing books, but rather envisioned them actively creating original thought (Emerson 58).

Tauber appears to be misinterpreting how Emerson’s delegated intellect is to attain the status of Man Thinking. He seems to be ignoring the fact that Emerson never would have wanted his scholar to fall into becoming a type of learned technician or literary analyst who becomes enthralled in studying massive amounts of past literature (Emerson 57). Thus, if the modern scholar were to follow Tauber’s philosophy of engaging in literary analysis of past literature, then the scholar would morph into a kind of specialist or an individual who researches in one particular area. As a result, today’s occupational scholar would be bogged down and become stuck in a perpetual cycle of examining texts for other specialists like himself to evaluate and critique, which would not be promoting the attribute of creativeness Emerson would have wanted his scholar to attain.

The essential flaw in Tauber’s perspective may lie in his misinterpretation of “the Past,” which was one of Emerson’s three influences on his scholar. Tauber states that “The exchange of ideas through history is critical for Emerson, but when he advocates study he does so in a particular manner, namely the inspiration that past books and ideas offer for creative *advancement*” (Tauber 2). Not only is Tauber vague in his definition of “advancement,” but also fails to adequately explain how the modern scholar can ever attain this flash of creativity through past books. Nowhere in his essay does he elaborate on this idea of books enabling the scholar to ultimately reach the element of originality. It is also interesting to note that he does not mention

or even reference Emerson's discussion of where the creativity of Man Thinking stems from. That is, not once in his essay does Tauber mention the importance of spiritualism in Emerson's concept of originality. As will be discussed later in this essay, the spiritual aspects of Emerson's Man Thinking cannot be rightly separated from his intellectual capacity or his ability to create new ideas (Sealts 193).

In the latter half of his essay, Tauber claims that literary analysis is not only needed for the scholar to systematically understand the past and its books, but considered this methodology an absolute necessity in enabling the scholar to reach originality: "The American intellectual rested on the twin attributes of creativity built from older traditions and action based in critical individualized thought. The two, at least for Emerson, are inextricable" (Tauber 3).

While Tauber states this claim with emphasis, he never provides any sufficient details within his essay as to how creativity for the scholar can derive from having a more knowledgeable background of the past. Consequently, Tauber cannot fully comprehend or clearly explain Emerson's spiritualistic approach as to how the modern scholar can achieve creative writing other than stating that the scholar must be well versed in being familiar with texts written from an earlier period. In all fairness to Tauber, however, even if we assume that modern literary analysis is largely devoted to the study of past literature, Tauber is probably correct that without a good understanding of prior literature the scholar would have difficulty in addressing the social and political issues that pertain to our present society. It would be somewhat naïve to assert that one could be creative in fashioning new ideas without comparing one's intuition or insight with past literature.

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From an analytic standpoint, it would be difficult at best to write prose or poetry without having some comparison to history and human experience.

Unlike Tauber, Emerson would not be as fixated with the scholar being occupied with reading substantial amounts of books in order to propel the scholar to a state of creativity. To be exact, he held the belief that “books are written on it by thinkers, not by Man Thinking” (Emerson 57). That is, he wanted the scholar to break away from constantly indulging in past literature and look towards the light within themselves to create original writing:

The one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul. Whatever talents may be, if the man create not, the pure efflux of the Deity is not his; — cinders and smoke there may be, but not yet flame. When he can read God directly, the hour is too precious to be wasted in other men’s transcripts of their readings. (Emerson 57-58)

Similar to Tauber’s pragmatic ideology, Paul Armstrong in “The American Scholar at Brown,” also seems to hold a view of how valuable books are to be used to aid in the scholar acquiring original thought. Yet, he adds even further to this notion by setting forth a pluralistic perspective of the university being a place of not only expressing ideas but a mixture of both cultural and ethnic diversities. Armstrong wants to establish an educational system at Brown University that will help promote more freedoms and move the scholar to a state of diverse creativity:

Brown is an institution defined by its commitment to a pedagogy of generative pluralism that teaches difference as an occasion for creativity, innovation, and ex-

change and that imagines community as a heterogeneous conversation of individuals who may not and need not all share common ground. (Armstrong 46)

Thus, Armstrong espouses the idea that a diverse academic environment will ultimately lead scholars away from merely evaluating a “core curriculum of great books” and will help foster a more liberal education (Armstrong 46). Furthermore, not placing requirements such as completing mandatory general coursework would be beneficial for the scholar at Brown. By not interfering or inhibiting the students from exploring their own educational agenda or pathway would help facilitate them into becoming more open-minded:

If our curriculum envisions teachers and students not as synthetically uniting into a single community but as engaged in dialogue across epistemological boundaries, then the sorts of citizens these American scholars are becoming should find it energizing to cross back and forth through the different communities that make up Brown. (Armstrong 47)

At this juncture, Armstrong is taking on a realist approach and wants the scholar at Brown University to be focused on strengthening social bonds with one another. He believes that this would help lessen misunderstandings with one another in the educational environment and facilitate a better definition of what the idea of “universally true” means (Armstrong 44): “Demonstrating the power of the “open curriculum” and its vision of liberal education to foster such a community is, I would say, the civic responsibility of the American scholar at Brown” (Armstrong 47). From this statement, it is clear that Armstrong wants to focus on the

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conventions, beliefs, and values that can “be irreconcilably at odds with one another” in order to strengthen social bonds and the community, rather than looking at an individual’s private emotions or a universal spirit (Armstrong 45).

Therefore, Armstrong’s idealism is grounded in a pluralistic world. That is, he is ultimately treating the different ethnic groups and their range of perspectives or experiences as tangible objects within the classroom. As a result, these differences can help broaden other student’s views and allow them to understand differing perspectives which will assist them in becoming more creative in nature and strengthening this ideal community. For example, Brown University has put into practice various activities and procedures to create a liberal education for its scholars:

So as to make the challenge of “building understanding across differences” an explicit theme of what it means to come to Brown. Extending this theme beyond orientation, a year-long program of activities to create community among our communities has also begun: changes in the residence halls so that students’ experiences outside the classroom reinforce the encouragement to think critically and creatively about difference that they receive in the classroom. (Armstrong 47)

However, as with Tauber, a similar problem arises in Armstrong’s fundamental evaluation. That is, Armstrong also applies a pragmatic ideology when interpreting the attributes of the scholar. Armstrong claims that Brown University’s protocol for its students is based on a fundamental objective of having personal introspection on values and assumptions, which would foster

a variety of practical ways the scholar could both think and create: “We encourage students to construct a liberal education for themselves by exploring the relations between different ways of making meaning, constructing knowledge, and understanding the world” (Armstrong 47). The trouble that Armstrong faces is that he overlooks the approach that has been implemented at his own school of Brown University, which is essentially forcing its students to employ a pluralistic mindset and look at the practicality of various theories. But this is problematical for numerous reasons because students become subjected to a methodology that doesn’t profess to look towards the future of producing originality in scholarship. It is simply reviewing and evaluating the practical consequences of past theories and cultures, and asking the student to live in a state of “diverse” harmony with one another. In short, no evidence is presented to show how such pluralism will result in scholars being creative and original.

In defense of Tauber’s pragmatism and Armstrong’s pluralistic approach, and given the advent of technological advances from Emerson’s time to the present, it is clear that the modern scholar has much more accessibility to different ideas than did Emerson’s scholar. If we just consider the advent of computer technology in causing global literature being easily accessible, the modern scholar has a much broader range of information to utilize (than did Emerson), and arguably more literary perspectives with which to formulate new ideas (Armstrong 46). Moreover, given Emerson’s desire for the scholar to actively engage in the society he finds himself living in (Emerson 68-69), the modern scholar has distinct advantages for the creation of new ideas that were not available during Emerson’s time. That is, the modern research university has

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a whole contingent of resources and career paths that assist the scholar in being creative and original (Tauber 3). In addition, many of the English department's throughout the United States have courses specifically designed to foster creativity in literature, including creative writing, fiction writing, and nonfiction writing – to name a few. Finally, many American graduate programs encourage the creative aspects of learning through diverse cultural and religious programs that promote originality and the creation of new ideas (Armstrong 46).

While it was useful to see how a modern university has developed its policies, procedures and overall philosophy in relation to assisting the scholar today, it also may be useful to further explore other scholars who have interpreted Emerson's scholar. In "The American Scholar: In 1837 and the Present," Donald Walhout first examines the three characteristics that Emerson used in describing the scholar and begins with nature: "But we can well imagine a modern scholar paraphrasing Emerson's words like this: "Perhaps the first after retirement, but now the least in importance, of the influences upon the mind is that of nature" (Walhout 300). Here, Walhout is alluding to how different some people in society view nature and its importance on the intellect of the scholar. Also, this passage makes known that the schedule of earlier scholars drastically differs in comparison to the modern scholar due to extracurricular activities and obligations of everyday life both in and out of the classroom (Walhout 300). In short, today's scholar is out of sync with nature because of the demands of scholarship and more important affairs that usually never pertain to nature.

Walhout then goes on to discuss the second characteristic of the past. He believes that one of the benefits of today's scholar is the effortless accessibility of being able to acquire a wide variety of books. Yet, a problem arises from this because it forces the modern scholar to specialize in a particular area due to the impossibility of mastering the material from various disciplines (Walhout 300). Thus, it seems that this is a negative aspect on the scholar today because it places an undue burden on the scholar to use valuable time sifting through substantial amounts of texts while deciphering what is useful and not, instead of using that valuable time to create original writing:

He must examine a dozen textbooks before choosing one. He must throw away a dozen advertisements to find one announcement that will bring a useful book to him. He must first clear off his desk; he can then study what is left, if there is time. (Walhout 301)

Not only has the modern intellect become inundated with examining numerous readings, but also feels the pressure of colleges and universities requiring professional publication(s) from them (Walhout 301). Scholars today have a demanding quota they must meet each year, which leads them to become an occupational scholar. "Nevertheless it is almost axiomatic today, and partly from necessity, that to be a scholar is to be a specialist, so that if one is not a specialist one is not a scholar" (Walhout 301). From this, it appears that Walhout has difficulty in deciding whether an academic specialist should even be considered a scholar today. Again, this is referring back to the idea of the modern scholar not being able to be highly competent in several aca-

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demical subjects. For Walhout, it appears that the modern scholar has no alternative but to conform to the idea of becoming a specialist in a particular academic field.

In regard to Emerson's third characteristic, Walhout states, "Scholarship has its final goal in its relation to a more livable world, and that the scholar ought to be concerned about this end and act accordingly whenever he can do so compatibly with his calling as a scholar" (Walhout 302). It seems that Walhout is espousing the idea of modern scholars not taking on a dualistic role of both influencing the world and performing their academic duties. Rather, he believes that the modern intellectual should provide scholarship through the "pursuit of knowledge and not through direct action" (Walhout 302). That is, scholars should not be concerned with how their scholarship might transform society, but rather if it can nurture their fellow man to seek knowledge.

In the latter half of his essay, Walhout moves on to explain how the modern scholar is shaped by relativism and pluralism: "Little did Emerson realize when he bade scholars burrow into every cranny of truth that some of them would come up with the idea that truth is an illusion, a relative and changing thing, or that the term itself would be called a 'dirty word'" (Walhout 303). Walhout appears to be using the term relativism to mean that there is not an absolute truth for scholars to find. Due to the constant changing of opinions, modifications to theories and knowledge increasing, the modern scholar may have difficulty acknowledging a concrete definition of what truth is or how to even pursue this idea in their activities (Walhout 302).

The modern scholars, as Walhout explains, are responsible for finally showing that the concept of truth depends on one's own personal views and behaviors and should be sought after by these innate principles:

The thought that the Emersonian scholar was pursuing, namely truth, is not really there, anywhere; that the pursuit of truth is a pseudo-pursuit and should be replaced by the pursuit of adjustment, maturity, happiness. Young scholars are often reared in this atmosphere. (Walhout 302)

This segment alludes to the idea of the scholar being unable to ascertain what truth exactly is, and that the scholar needs to put it into some kind of context. That is, instead of trying to use a standard definition of truth, scholars need to search for this idea in a way that is delightful to their own personal perspectives and beliefs of the world around them.

The idea of pluralism and how it has formed the scholar today is then discussed by Walhout who asserts:

The modern scholar is shaped most of all by books but little if any by nature or action; and, what is new, he is under the shadows of the world situation, relativisms of various sorts, and many pluralisms within his *locus operandi*. (Walhout 304)

The modern scholar is inevitably caught in a tedious system of trying to become adequately knowledgeable about the variety of disciplines within the academic community, and has no

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choice but to morph into a occupational specialist who analyzes books that help comprehend these differences:

This pluralism is itself diverse in its manifestations; but certainly race, nationality, and religion are among the most obvious of these. The phenomenon is, of course, a change in degree, for not since the beginning has America been uniform. (Walhout 303-04)

Consequently, the modern scholar doesn't have enough time to read about all of the cultural or historical differences in society. Yet, the scholars are being coerced into reading about various topics and subjects because this is the only way they can possibly learn about these communities of differences. As a result, this leads to the scholar not having enough time to transcend into a purely Emersonian vision of Man Thinking and produce original writing.

Regarding the issue of creative scholarship and dealing with time constraints, Walhout's (and Emerson's) thesis may have missed the practical side of academics. There is no logical reason that the modern scholar could not utilize some of his time to create new literature, while devoting different times in analyzing and interpreting past literature. Indeed, it is the practice of many academic scholars to take sabbaticals to develop new styles of workmanship (Tauber 3). Even from a spiritual sense, there is nothing to keep Emerson's Man Thinking from having epiphanies from the Over-soul, and the very next moment engaging in literary analysis. Emerson himself recognized that the creative flashes of the poet or the philosopher were temporary in nature (Emerson 57-58). Finally, there is nothing necessarily inconsistent with being creative while

engaging in literary criticism. That is, while engaging in literary criticism on a given text, one may very well be *creative* in interpreting facets of the text which may not have been considered by the original author.

For Walhout, the modern scholar is bound into accepting the role of occupational scholar by virtue of the vast array of books he is required to decipher. Although reaching a different conclusion, Rob Wilson posits that the scholar is also trapped by the instruments of his occupation – by virtue of repeating Emersonian tropes and symbolism over the last two-hundred years. According to Wilson, this has resulted in the literary world becoming bound into Emersonian idealism as “occupational idealists.” In his essay, Wilson argues that the occupational idealism which has been the result of the “Emerson effect” needs to be *resisted* by the literary scholar:

The occupational idealism of this deep-rooted “Emerson effect” needs to be resisted lest we perpetuate a cultural transcendentalism that remains benignly impotent before the commodified real as the uncontested American Way and subsequently alienation becomes the normative affect of the literary profession. (Wilson 105)

In other words, it is Wilson’s view that our “impotent” literary professions receive some cultural acceptance in a market-driven materialistic society (Wilson 87). In order to do that, Wilson proposes – as a means of rhetorical “liberation” – that the literary scholar avoid Emerson’s use of symbolic tropes and move toward the pragmatism of William James (Wilson 91, 111). As an example, Wilson points to the career of Harvard poet Elizabeth Bishop who changed her ap-

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proach from an “imagistic obsession” (Emersonian idealism) to one of “tenderly describing” human poverty in Brazil (Wilson 113). Bishop’s career change is the paradigm of what Wilson believes would liberate the literary profession from occupational idealism:

It is exactly this sense of a life of the mind of well-integrated into a cultural community of work and of transpersonal commitment that is lacking for American intellectuals... they must retreat as the poet-critic Jarrell did, into tactics of satire, lament, self-mockery, criticism, and evasion, or invoke visions of other cultures or other American times. (Wilson 113)

Ironically, while lamenting the life of the occupational idealist having been alienated from American culture and desiring to move toward a vision of clear-speaking pragmatism, Wilson’s idea of literary reform is closely aligned to what Emerson himself was urging the American scholar to describe:

The literature of the poor, the feelings of the child, the philosophy of the street, the meaning of the household life, are the topics of the time. It is a great stride. It is a sign – is it not? Of new vigor, when the extremities are made active, when currents of warm life run into the hands and the feet. I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic; what is doing in Italy or Arabia... *I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar and the low.* (Emerson 68-69; emphasis added)

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Thus, in addressing the proper attributes of the American scholar, Emerson was clearly promoting a literature that sought to describe the condition of the ordinary man in our society. However, Emerson believed that the vehicle to draw man out of his pit was through the scholar's act of creative writing – which, for Emerson, was the spiritual mechanism to speak life into the void:

The new deed is yet part of life – remains for a time immersed in our unconscious life. In some contemplative hour, it detached itself from the life like a ripe fruit, to become a thought of the mind. Instantly, it is raised, transfigured; the corruptible has put on incorruption. (Emerson 61)

Thus, Emerson's theory of originality is based upon his spiritual belief that the creative source for the American Scholar was through his contemplations with the Over-soul. While he may have agreed with Wilson that it is important to have a pragmatic engagement of the social world in which the scholar finds himself (by adhering to “the literature of the poor and the philosophy of the street”), Emerson was *not* urging his scholar to become a pragmatist or a pluralist. Rather, the focus was on creating new ideas in literature through the scholar's spiritual epiphanies from the Over-soul.

In order to have a complete understanding of Emerson's American Scholar, it is absolutely necessary to consider the spiritual aspects of his “Man Thinking.” Emerson's creativity theory is strictly based upon the Man Thinking receiving his original thoughts from the Over-soul. As Emerson puts it:

*The American Scholar: The New Man Thinking*

Each philosopher, each bard, each actor, has only done for me, as by a delegate, what one day I can do for myself. The books which once we valued... we have quite exhausted. What is that but saying, that we have come up with the point of view which the universal mind took through the eyes of one scribe; we have been that man, and have passed on... The human mind cannot be enshrined in a person, who shall set a barrier on any one side to this unbounded, unboundable empire... It is one light that beams out a thousand souls. It is one soul which animates all men. (Emerson 67)

In short, the creative source for Emerson's Man Thinking is the Over-soul. According to Merton Sealts, the spiritual aspects of Emerson's scholar cannot be separated from his intellectual capacity. That is, the American scholar must be an influential *spiritual* mentor who speaks not from past tradition or past literature, but is prompted by his own insight and revelation from the Over-soul (Sealts 193). Thus, the true scholar learns through experience to "link himself equally to the common life of mankind and to its ultimate spiritual source, doing full justice to both" (Sealts 193). Emerson felt that the scholar had a double obligation – one with God, and the other with common man. From a lecture he gave in the early 1830s regarding this dual role, Emerson stated:

The writer must draw from the infinite Reason on the one side and he must penetrate into the heart and mind of the rabble on the other. From one he must draw his strength; to the other he must owe his aim. (Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson II, 61-62; Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1959)

Thus, running from the early lectures through his address on the American Scholar, Emerson's desire was not only to transcend the world, but to transform it "by spiritual arms" as Emerson had said of Martin Luther's spiritual revolution (Sealts 192). To accomplish such a transformation, the true scholar was to work with "invisible tools to invisible ends" so that the individual could accomplish his spiritual "infinitude" (Sealts 192).

In comparing the Man Thinking with current scholarship, Emerson's brand of spiritual idealism is noticeably lacking as an attribute of the modern scholar. Rather, the focus on the proper attributes of the modern scholar appear to be a college-educated person with a well-rounded liberal education shaped by pragmatism and pluralism (Armstrong 47; Walhout 303-04). Several modern literary critics believe that pragmatism is a natural result of Emerson's basic concept of the American Scholar (Tauber 4; Walhout 303-04). The primary reason that pragmatism is claimed to be an offshoot of Emerson idealism is because the pragmatist embraces the idea of any intellectual movement that seeks action-based consequences (Tauber 4). Presumably, Emerson's scholar's commitment to action would form the basis of the pragmatist's acceptance of Emerson's idealism. But in the case of Emersonian transcendentalism, the goal is *not* any liberal communal project toward a prosperous human industry (Tauber 4); nor is the goal aimed at producing clear descriptions of the human condition (Wilson 113). Rather, Emerson's Man Thinking was to use his spiritual arms to enlighten the populace toward his ultimate spiritual source – the Over-soul (Emerson 67). Thus, if the pragmatist assumes no ideology and has as its goal the examination of the practical consequences of any given theory, then Emerson's vision of

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Man Thinking communing with his Deity would have little use to the true pragmatist or realist. The Man Thinking's spiritual communications and his epiphanies from the Over-soul could not be rightly measured or analyzed by the pragmatist because they are ultimately based on matters of faith. There could be no empirical basis to determine whether the spiritual aspects of Man Thinking were action-based. Even when Emerson's scholar formulated one of his epiphanies in writing, the pragmatist and the realist could only examine the writing itself without being able to measure its creative source against human experience. Thus, the disconnect between pragmatism and Emerson's idealism: one is based on measurable results; one is based on faith in a "spiritual infinitude."

In the end, the primary distinction between Emerson's American Scholar and the occupational scholar is one of creative inspiration and the source of knowledge. The modern version of Emerson's "mere thinker" would be the occupational scholar – the literary intellectual who is primarily engaged in analyzing and interpreting literature from the past. From a journal entry, Emerson stated though books may "provoke thoughts, but the office of reading is wholly subordinate... I get thereby a vocabulary for my ideas. I get no ideas" (The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Harvard Press, 343-44). As stated by Merton Sealts:

If imitation is the hallmark of the degenerate scholar, then originality, the consciously formulated objective of Emerson's own utterance, is the unmistakable sign of Man Thinking... Put negatively, Emerson's is a case against books and the

*John Hansen*

past; put positively, however, he is once again asserting the essential originality and timeliness of truly creative scholarship. (Sealts 194-195)

Therefore, the very essence of what Emerson was seeking to impart to his audience at Cambridge was that the scholar should strive to offer his own work, based on his own intuition, the sign of his relationship to the universe of souls. The one thing in the world of great intrinsic value “is the active soul,” which at first perceives truth and then “utters truth, or creates. In this action it is genius” (Emerson 57).

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## Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced* Proves Worthy of The Pulitzer Prize

T. Madison Peschock

Many may never have heard of writer Ayad Akhtar, although he has been a writer for more than twenty years. His credits include writing for both television and the stage, and he has even been a director. He has directed and written “Life Document 2: Identity” (2002), *The War Within* (2005), “Long After” (2006), “FCU: Fact Checkers Unit” (2008), and *Too Big to Fail* (2011). However, he may soon become a household name thanks to his recent win of the Pulitzer Prize for his play *Disgraced*, which has been all the buzz lately. *Disgraced* opened in Chicago in 2012 and had a successful run at Lincoln Center. It just completed another successful run at the Bush Theater in London in October 2012. While the play is simplistic in terms of plot, it is very thought-provoking and discusses an important issue—post-9/11 racism.

Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced* is not just a play of great depth and controversy, but it proves, like the 2003 Tony Award-winning *Avenue Q*'s musical number, that “Everyone's a Little Bit Racist.” The difference between *Avenue Q*'s song and Akhtar's play is that no one puts the play down unchanged or leaves the theater laughing after seeing it. Akhtar examines touchy subjects—culture, religion, politics, racism, and identity—during the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and his play challenges many important beliefs that people are often afraid to admit. The play forces readers to confront these issues and leaves room for much discussion after the curtain closes.

The play, although short—a mere seventy-six pages—addresses controversial themes. *Disgraced* begins in 2011 and is told in four scenes. In scene one, readers are introduced to protagonist, Amir Kapoor, an ex-Muslim, Manhattan lawyer who has renounced his faith and who is

trying to achieve the American dream—to climb the corporate ladder of success in a law firm. He has high hopes of becoming a partner in Leibowitz, Bernstein, and Harris. He and his artist wife, Emily, a white American, live in a New York apartment on the Upper East Side. The play begins with the two having a conversation about Emily's painting of Amir; it is a copy of Velazquez' *Juan de Pareja*.

The couple is discussing how they were stereotyped during a recent visit at a café. Readers are not exactly sure what has transpired during their time at the café, but it is clear that the couple was treated unfairly or stared at because they are an interracial couple. Emily states, "You made him [the waiter] see that gap. Between what he was assuming about you, and what you really are" (4). From this dialogue, readers understand that Amir has been stereotyped as a terrorist by the waiter, but Amir seems to be used to this treatment and this incident does not bother him. He explains to his wife, "Honey, it's not the first time" (4). Amir even admits that he understands that "all men are not created equal" (5). Thus, Amir appears unfazed by the incident and is determined to do whatever is needed to become a partner in the law firm he works for, even if that means he is performing most of his boss's duties. It appears that he is willing to do anything to advance.

In the same scene, Amir's nephew, Abe, visits to ask his uncle for a favor. This favor is what drives the entire plot of the play. Abe, who has changed his name from Hussein Malik to assimilate into American culture and to hide his religious views, asks his uncle to defend Imam Fareed, a man who has been wrongfully imprisoned and accused of plotting a terrorist attack. Although

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Imam already has a legal team, none of the lawyers defending him are Muslim; that is why Abe wants his uncle to defend Imam. However, Amir refuses, stating, "I'm not gonna be part of a legal team just because your Imam is a bigot" (12). Quickly, Abe explains, "He's not a bigot. He'd just be more comfortable if there was a Muslim on the case, too" (12). It is evident here that one of the major themes/questions of the play is revealed: are people racist because they prefer to be friends with or work with their own kind, or is this idea itself racist?

As the play continues, another major theme is revealed—religion and one's commitment to heritage. As Amir and Abe continue to discuss whether Amir will assist Imam's legal team, Amir reveals his true feelings about his Muslim heritage—that he has renounced his faith because he was disrespected all of his life because of it. For instance, Amir tells Abe a story about his first crush on a Jewish girl and how his mother forbade him to see her. Amir explains that his mother said, "'You will end up with a Jew over my dead body.' Then she spat in [his] face'" (13). It is here that the play reveals another major theme—that everyone learns racist ideologies from parents, but not everyone believes these ideologies. Amir further explains to Abe and his wife that his mother didn't like Emily at first either because she thought "'White women have no self-respect,'" but Emily "'won her over'" (14). It is through this conversation that readers see another major theme—judging someone based on his religion or race can be misleading. As Scene One comes to a close Amir agrees to go to the prison to talk to Imam at the urging of both his wife and his nephew. By the time Scene Two begins, readers understand that Amir has decided to assist Imam in an unofficial capacity.

Scene Two begins two weeks later. Emily is reading an article in *The New York Times* about Imam's case. The article reads, "The defendant, surrounded by a gauntlet of attorneys, struck a defiant tone. He spoke eloquently of the injustices he'd experienced, and what he called an 'unconscionable lack of due process'" (18). Amir Kapoor of Leibowitz, Bernstein, Harris supported the Imam, stating: 'As far as anybody knows, there isn't a case. And if the Justice Department has one, it's time they started making it'" (18). Amir, who is not an official member of the legal team, has been quoted in the article and associated with Imam because they are both assumed to be Muslims. After seeing the article, Amir is agitated by it and believes that his association with this case will affect his chances of becoming a partner in the law firm. He tells his wife, "I'm one of the gauntlet of attorneys" (18). Emily reassures him that he did the right thing by counseling Imam, but Amir can't be reasoned with.

As Scene Two comes to a close, another character, Isaac, a Jewish curator, is introduced. He is assisting Emily with her art collection by offering her criticism on many of her paintings. He visits to view more of Emily's art work, and finds that Emily is only interested in painting Islamic forms. Isaac reveals to Emily that he is afraid she will be accused of Orientalism; however, Emily insists, "We've forgotten to look at things for what they really are" (25). Emily further explains that each culture has added something of value to the world and that it is "[t]ime we stop paying lip service to Islam and Islamic Art. We draw on the Greeks, the Romans...but Islam is part of who we are, too. God forbid anybody remind us of it" (25). As Scene Two comes to a close, Isaac agrees with Emily and expresses continuing interest in her work.

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Scene Three, which takes place three months later, is the most important and revealing in terms of showing major themes and character development. For instance, Amir is revealed to be a hypocrite, because like his nephew Abe, whom he lectured in Scene One for changing his name, Amir has changed his last name from Abdullah to Kapoor; he has done this to mislead his colleagues and bosses at work about his cultural heritage. He told people his parents were born in India rather than Pakistan, and he has changed his social security number so he won't be stereotyped as a terrorist. From these actions it is clear that Amir wants people to believe he is Indian in order to advance. Thus, he was born into one culture but embraces another—American culture—another theme of the play.

In this scene racist attitudes come to the forefront when Emily has Isaac and his African American girlfriend, Jory, who is one of Amir's colleagues, over for dinner. In this scene, Amir reveals his obsession to advance his career and his jealousy over those born into the Jewish culture, such as his boss, Mort. Amir suggests to Jory, that he and she form their own partnership—Kapoor, Brathwaite. He tells Jory, "That's why Jews were doing it. And then mergers and acquisitions became all the rage. And guys like Steven and Mort became the establishment. We are the new Jews" (34). Amir continues to explain that the "firm will never be ours. It's theirs. And they're always going to remind us that we were just invited to the party" (34). In Amir's speech, Akhtar presents another perspective: From Amir's perspective, minorities have a more difficult time advancing in professional positions than white Americans do. As the scene progresses, Isaac announces that he is going to include Emily among several artists in his next art

exhibit, “Impossible Heroes.” He likes how she paints Islamic forms. However, Amir points out that “what a few artists are doing, however wonderful, does not reflect the Muslim psyche” (45). To this comment Jory asserts that Islamic people are not the “only people to have suffered in a desert for centuries” pointing out the similarities between Jewish and Muslim history (46).

At this point in the play a heated debate between Isaac and Amir breaks out over cultural heritage, in which Isaac explains that there is a distinct difference between religion and politics. Isaac believes that the two are separate; however, Amir doesn’t agree and tempers flare between the two. To his girlfriend, Isaac disrespects Amir, calling him a “Fucking closet jihadist” (57). Clearly, Akhtar highlights here not only cultural differences but also how defensive people can become about their religious beliefs. As the scene continues, Amir learns of two devastating incidents. First, he has not been promoted into a partnership in the law firm he works in as he had hoped because of his association with Imam’s case. Surprisingly, Jory, Isaac’s girlfriend, received the partnership. While Jory tells Amir this in private, Isaac tells Emily this and explains, “There is not a lot to understand. They like her. They don’t like him” (60). Clearly, Jory’s promotion isn’t fair since Amir has been there “twice as long as she has” (60). But, that’s the point of this play—to show the lack of justice in society. The second devastating fact Amir learns is that his wife has been unfaithful to him and has slept with Isaac to advance her own career. Amir is devastated by Emily’s action and he responds violently by hitting her across the face as the scene ends. Amir’s life has been turned upside down by both of these incidents as he questions his own identity.

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The final scene begins six months later, when it is revealed that Emily and Amir are separated and living apart. Also, Amir has lost his job and is struggling. However, in this scene Amir learns valuable life lessons and Akhtar presents his final major theme. Abe comes to visit his uncle to tell him he is in trouble. Abe has been racially profiled by the FBI when he was sitting in a Starbucks with his friend Tariq; they both were wearing Kufi hats—headwear that some Muslims wear. They were stereotyped as Muslim terrorists because of their hats. The play ends with Amir giving Abe advice on how to handle this situation; however, it is Amir who learns a valuable lesson from Abe.

Abe displays his dislike of his uncle's viewpoints and shares his own views of the world. He states: "It's disgusting. The one thing I can be sure about with you? You'll always turn on your own people. You think it makes these people like you more when you do that? They don't. They just think you hate yourself. And they're right. You do!" (73). Abe continues, "For three hundred years [Westerners have] been taking our land, drawing new borders, replacing our laws, making us want [to] be like them. Look like them. Marry their women. They disgraced us. And then they pretend they don't understand the rage we've got" (74). It is here that Amir seems to realize finally that he should be proud of his identity and not try to hide it in order to advance. He tells Emily, "I'm finally understanding your work" (75). Clearly, Amir has had an epiphany and realized the importance of being himself, but it appears too late where his marriage is concerned.

The play ends with the certainty that Emily and Amir will divorce, and he realizes his career and desire for the American dream blinded him. He tried too hard to assimilate into American culture in order to advance and didn't care about who he was. This obsession with advancement caused his tragic downfall. He renounced his faith and changed his name and identity to fit in, but in the end, Akhtar is showing readers the importance of being true to one's self.

This play places race, religion, politics, and identity under a magnifying glass and forces readers to think about their own ideologies in this post-9/11 age. It is a play that can be read in one sitting, but like John Patrick Shanley's 2005 Pulitzer Prize-winning play *Doubt*, it can be discussed for days. This is because like *Doubt*, the best scenes have not been written. John Patrick Shanley once said about his play, "The last act of the play took place after the play was over when people walked out and discovered that the person they had gone with—their wife, their husband, their friend—didn't see the same play they did" ("From Stage to Screen"). This same idea can be seen in *Disgraced*. Readers can see the play from different angles based on their own heritage and ideologies about racism. That's why this play is so good. In short, *Disgraced* is clearly one that is worthy of the Pulitzer Prize and will make Akhtar a household name. Akhtar has written a second play, *The Invisible Hand* (2012) and one novel, *American Dervish* (2012). Currently, he is writing his second novel. Readers can only hope that it and his future works will also fare as well as *Disgraced*.



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## The Deconstruction of a Wrathful God: Swinburne's Benign Gods

Jean Witherow

After his “deconversion” at Oxford following his strict “quasi-Catholic” upbringing (*Letters* 4.13), Swinburne rejected the dichotomy of a God of love and wrath who created the universe and the sacramental system (Louis 3). Rather, Swinburne grew to believe that man created a dualistic God of love and wrath, then disciplined himself by inventing self-imposed creeds. While Swinburne's extensive early knowledge of the Bible influenced his writing positively, the dichotomies he found in such a God tormented him and permeated his poetry. His rebellion against Catholic dogma contributed to his steady if erratic progress from his early inversion of the sacrament as a challenge to man's self-imposed morality; to the abrogation of false hierarchies in “Hertha” (1871), in which he replaces the wrathful God with a benign goddess; to the appropriation of God's promise of salvation by the poets in “Thalassius” (1880); and finally to a transcendent, pantheistic (re)union with nature in “The Lake of Gaube” (1889).

Of seminal importance throughout Swinburne's career was this deconversion to antitheism during his Oxford days, accompanied by a simultaneous passionate involvement in the outspoken Republicanism of “The Old Mortality,” an organization that revered Mazzini's doctrine of revolution and liberalism in Italy. Besides Mazzini, Julia F. Saville notes that Victor Hugo and Walt Whitman were also prominent among the many free thinkers who influenced Swinburne's emerging philosophy (Saville 694). However, Saville points out that Swinburne found irresolvable dichotomies even in these thinkers, differing, for example, in his belief that life should not be “muted in compliance with an overbearing moral or political authority” (695). Such a belief perhaps explains why Swinburne, while accepting these thinkers' “resistance to secular and reli-

gious tyranny,” sees man as essentially flawed, unlike Mazzini, who espouses “freedom as the goal of humanity’s perfectibility”; sees a dearth of hope in place of Hugo’s “republican optimism”; and imagines sensual passion as a counterbalance to imposed morality, in conflict with Whitman’s idea of “sexual convention” (Saville 695).

Upon joining the Anti-Catholic council of Naples in 1869, Swinburne articulates to his long time friend, William Rossetti, what would seem to presage his life’s work:

I wish to be understood as professing myself not merely a freethinker, but a democrat, not merely a democrat, but a freethinker. I have in my head a sort of Hymn for this Congress . . . to sing the human triumph over ‘things’—the opposing forces of life and nature—and over the God of his own creation, till he attain his own truth, self-sufficiency, and freedom. It might end somehow thus with a cry of triumph over the decadence of a receding Deity:

‘ . . . Glory to Man in the highest! For man is the master of things.’ (*Letters* 2. 35, 37)

In order to express this inversion of God and Man and to reveal his frustration with irresolvable dichotomies of the Christian God, Swinburne turns to the antimetabole. In “Hymn to Proserpine” (1866), for example, Swinburne reveals that the “Galilean’s” day is ending:

Though these that were Gods are dead, and thou being dead art a God,  
.....  
Yet thy kingdom shall pass, Galilean, thy dead shall go down to thee dead.

(72-74)

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Although Swinburne faced stark criticism from contemporary critics for such antitheism, J. Hillis Miller makes a convincing argument, in an examination of five Victorian period authors, including Browning, Arnold, and Emily Brontë, that would suggest Swinburne is not alone among contemporaries in questioning God's existence. Victorian England, Miller argues, faced an era in which "God is no more present and yet not again present . . . [a] time of no longer and not yet" (Miller 2). "Modern times," he continues, "begin when man confronts his isolation, his separation from everything outside himself," a time of "subjectivism." The "disappearance of God . . . [initiates a] moment of self-awareness . . . not possible until the self draws into itself and sets itself against the surrounding world" (Miller 7, 20). Although each of the five authors Miller examines differs in his or her coping method, each has apparently come to a crossroads in belief typical of the era. For each, Miller explains, "God exists but he is out of reach. . . . He no longer inheres in the world as the force binding together all men and all things" (1, 2). Such disillusion in a God that "can only be experienced negatively" would seem to parallel on some level Swinburne's more radical disillusion with a dual God of love and wrath. Yet Swinburne would go much further than his contemporaries and exclaim that the dual God exists only as an invention of man to discipline himself against any lapses in accepted morality.

Swinburne's controversial challenges to accepted moral and spiritual value judgments at times elicited incisive criticism as "debauched" (Garland 637), "sodomasochistic" (Young-Bryant 304), or at the very least, "rather disturbing" (Levin, "Dark Month" 662). Nonetheless, as

critics generally point out, the purpose of his highly charged lyrics was to juxtapose freedom from moral judgment with what he saw as corrupt in political and religious systems. According to Yisrael Levin, his first goal, during a period of “nihilistic anti-Christian rage,” was to deconstruct the wrathful divisive God. Only then could he, in later poems, “develop an alternative myth of origin” in an attempt to “free himself from Christian theology and metaphysics” (Levin, “Solar Erotica” 55).

Two early phases of what might be called his deconstruction poetry, first, “The Sacrament of Violence,” and second, “The Sacrament of Harmony,” as delineated by Margot Louis, embody Swinburne’s attempts to deconstruct the tyranny of the evil invented God. Particularly during these periods, Tony W. Garland notes, “Swinburne divulges an interest in the tension and compatibility between extreme responses as well as a desire to produce an outraged reaction” (Garland 634). To elicit such a response, Swinburne employs inversions of the Christian sacrament into sacraments of violence and cannibalism, as well as sacraments of eroticism and sexual union. In “The Cup of God’s Wrath,” written at Oxford and published posthumously by Thomas Wise in *The Complete Works* (1925), we find shocking imagery of the tormented Eucharist of an angry and vengeful God:

God’s anger hath made red its throat and side;  
Choice of quaint spices hath he mixed therein,  
And poisoned honey of a bitter juice (8-10)

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.....  
What man hath will to whet his lips between,

The wine is poured and trodden for his use.

As one mows down to burn dead grass and weeds (13-15)

.....  
So are the churches and broad halls burned up;

The priests and princes gathered into sheaves

And bound for burning. (23-25)

In his widely discussed poem, "The Triumph of Time" (1866), expressing the pain and hopelessness of unrequited love, we find an example of the Eucharist of erotic union:

I have given no man of my fruit to eat;

I trod the grapes, I have drunken the wine,

Had you eaten and drunken and found it sweet,

This wild new growth of the corn and vine,

This wine and bread without lees or leaven,

We had grown as gods, as the gods in heaven,

Souls fair to look upon, goodly to greet,

One splendid spirit, your soul and mine.

(25-32)

*Jean Witherow*

Sacraments were inverted in transgressive parody of the Christian sacrament. Since man created God, then it was man, not a mythical God, who created the Eucharist and who created meaning. In “Hymn to Proserpine” (1866), Swinburne reveals the wrathful, disciplinary nature of this invention of man:

For the Gods we know not of, who gave us our daily breath,  
We know they are cruel as love or life, and lovely as death.  
O God dethroned and deceased, cast forth, wiped out in a day!  
From your wrath is the world released, redeemed from your chains men say.

(11-14)

After purging what is vile to him by essentially “denounce[ing] the Judeo-Christian myth of creation” (Levin, “Solar Erotica” 55), Swinburne proceeds toward resolving, at least partially, his early bitterness toward an invented and divisive God with his creation of “Hertha,” a centrally thematic poem in *Songs Before Sunrise* (1871), and a “return to pre-Christian pagan myth that associated creation with birth” (55). Swinburne deconstructs the Christian God, asking that we, “Behold now your God that ye made you, to feed him with faith of your vows” (165). To William Rossetti, Swinburne writes:

I have begun . . . another mystic atheistic democratic anthropologic poem called ‘Hertha’; . . . I think of making her say—as being that womb of nature whence came forth all spirits upper and under of life stronger or weaker—‘Before God

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was, I am'; a parody on the claims of a deceased Hebrew notoriety which will I trust find favour with the religious world. (*Letters* 2. 45-46)

Hertha, the tree-goddess, at once unifying and creative, thus becomes the kinder communal force out of which all else, including God, flows:

I am that which began;

Out of me the years roll;

Out of me God and man;

I am equal and whole;

God changes, and man, and the form of them bodily; I am the soul.

(1-5)

A similarity to Whitman's "Song of Myself" is immediately evident in these lines. Swinburne, both indebted to and ambivalent toward Whitman, expressed to Rossetti that the name of his later collection, *Songs of the Springtides* (1880), of which "Thalassius" is the first major poem, was a compliment to Whitman and Whitman's similarly titled "Songs before Parting" (1865) (Goede 19). Swinburne's "Hertha" opens with lines evoking Whitman's unifying and self-celebratory opening lines:

I celebrate myself and sing myself,

And what I assume you shall assume

For every atom belonging to me as well belongs to you. (1-3)

Though an affinity is apparent, whereas Whitman's atoms are one with the atoms of humankind, Swinburne's Hertha begets and contains all atoms and all gods, thus encompassing Whitman's all.

Perhaps an explanation inclusive of both poems would examine the influence of Hindu and Eastern philosophies on both poets. Swinburne's study of Eastern writings is well-documented by critics such as Margot Louis and Jerome McGann. As McGann points out, "the ideas laid out in the Upanishads seem absolutely fundamental" to "Hertha," and illustrate an association to the Brahman "I," understood as the "Universal Soul" (287, 291), an association that the first stanza would seem to suggest. Similarly, Whitman "asserts that he had read 'the ancient Hindoo poems,' among other important works of world literature, in preparation for writing the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* and "shows a deeper knowledge of Hinduism than most critics have given him credit for" (Preston 394). The all-inclusive "I" of both poems can easily be translated as the Brahman "I," the "Universal Soul."

Yet besides mythologizing the Universal Soul of past and present, Hertha also contains dichotomies, as revealed again in antimetabole:

First life on my sources  
    First drifted and swam;  
Out of me are the forces  
    That save it or damn;

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Out of me man and woman, and wild beast and bird; before God was, I am. (11-15).

.....

Beside or above me

Nought is there to go;

Love or unlove me,

Unknow me or know,

I am that which unloves me and loves; I am stricken and I am the blow.

(11-20)

Since Hertha both creates and destroys all, she too has a dual nature. Yet while she can both “save” and “damn,” she lacks the wrath and discipline of God. Swinburne’s word “unlove” connotes a difference from his word “hate,” used, for example, in *Atalanta in Calydon*, when Æneus tells Atalanta, “Yea, with thine hate, O God, thou hast covered us” (1152).

Unlike a hateful God, Hertha invites rather than judging or disciplining, aspiring only to an autonomous freedom:

Be the ways of thy giving

As mine were to thee;

The free life of thy living,

Be the gifts of it free;

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Not as servant to lord, nor as master to slave, shalt thou give thee to me.

(81-85)

In the last line of the stanza, Swinburne wrestles with the dialectic inherent in language itself. Although Hertha asks only for an autonomous freedom, the stanza ends with the phrase, “shalt thou give thee to me” (85), a phrase advocating free choice but connoting ownership. But since man has chosen to “give” himself to an invented wrathful God, he may now choose to give himself instead to “The free life of thy living.” In this final line, David G. Riede explains, “Swinburne is simply calling for submission to the laws of nature” . . . and “casting off . . . other bonds of political and religious repression” (111, 112).

“Hertha,” both an antitheistic and a politically revolutionary poem, establishes the possibility of a new mythical deity to replace the rejected mythical deity, following Swinburne’s reconciliation between the intellectual and the spiritual realms. Upon reaching a political and spiritual union, humankind, if they so choose, need only to look inward to realize spiritual union without tyranny in Hertha, the mythical deity in and of the self: “I am thou, whom thou leekest to find him; find thou but thyself, thou art I” (35). Only when the soul is free to cast off self-imposed restraints can the invented, internalized God be replaced by this republican “I,” the Universal Soul of love that survives because it offers freedom, not because it imposes constraints:

Thought made him and breaks him,

Truth slays and forgives;

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But to you, as time takes him,

This new thing it gives,

Even love, the beloved Republic, that feeds upon freedom and lives. (186-190)

In "Hertha," Edmund Gosse tells us, Swinburne uses the term freedom "as the name for the soul, when it succeeds in breaking and casting off shackles of its dead rudiments and survivals" (Gosse 195). The Republic, then, is Swinburne's controversial marriage of spiritual with politico-intellectual freedom. Yet Swinburne suggests that even this freedom of the soul is dualistic because of man's self-destructive sense of duty to self-imposed constraints along with his antithetical desire to be free:

O my sons, O too dutiful

Toward Gods not of me,

Was not I enough beautiful?

Was it hard to be free?

For behold, I am with you, am in you and of you; look forth now and see.

(171-175)

Existing even before God, Hertha symbolically encompasses the benign Universal Soul of humankind, but only if man chooses to accept it over the wrathful God. Swinburne has evolved beyond sacramental inversions and perversions through his all-encompassing Republican deity.

However, in ascribing all authority of knowing to Hertha, Swinburne has not yet fully realized his own aesthetic, spiritual appropriation of that authority. In a letter to Edmund Goose, Swinburne said of the forthcoming “Thalassius,” “I once thought of a symbolical quasi-autobiographical poem. . . . It would be a pretty subject, but when should I hear the last of my implied arrogance and self-conceit?” (*Letters* 4. 106). Thus, in what William Wilson has called an “allegory of [Swinburne’s] spiritual growth” (Wilson 383), “Thalassius” would become an allegorical appropriation of spiritual authority, not only from the Christian God, but from Hertha as well, as a continuation and expansion of Swinburne’s evolutionary process.

Louis discusses three sections of “Thalassius,” each containing one period of Thalassius’ life and paralleling phases of Swinburne’s life. The first section, I would add, consists of three distinct and non-chronological subsections in each of the three first stanzas. In stanza one, the sea-child “with flower-soft face” is born in April, “the flowery forefront of the year,” coincidentally, Swinburne’s birth month. Thalassius is born at the water’s edge, “Along the foam-flowered strand / Breeze brightened, something nearer sea than land” (6-7).

The second subsection, a flashback to Apollo’s seduction of Cymothoe and the conception in July of the “sea-flower,” illustrates little more of mortal properties than a nine-month gestation period. Cymothoe, or “wave-swift,” one of the Nereids in the *Iliad*, takes on god-like proportions, “passing forth of her fair heaven / With goodlier gifts than all save gods can give” (402-403).

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Cymothoe beheld Apollo, “The live sun’s very God,” shining “brighter than the sunbright sphere” (21, 19). Apollo is the one god Swinburne accepts over other rejected gods. In a letter to Edwin Harrison, here referring to his earlier poem, “The Last Oracle” (1878), but reflective of his evolving philosophy, Swinburne explains, “Apollo-Paian, . . . and not the Galilean, is established as the Logos which was not with but before God in the beginning” (*Letters* 3. 143). Andrew Fippinger explains that “Swinburne always works the Apollonian sun, using Apollo’s status as god of the sun, nature, and song to bridge the natural world and poetic song. Thus when Swinburne finds ecstasy in the rising sun he is finding ecstasy in both nature and poetry” (Fippinger 682).

Swinburne further conflates nature and song in the son of Apollo, conceived by sea-nymph and sun-god, the synesthetic marriage of nature and song: “Where depth is one with height, / Light heard as music, music seen as light” (30-31). At the moment of conception, the possibility of Thalassius’ being mortal ends. Half nymph, half god, Thalassius is born a sea-flower, nurtured by light and air.

In the third subsection of section one, “A warrior grey with glories . . . [and] free born as winds and stars and waves are free” found Thalassius “and took to foster like a graft of earth” (38-39). In these three subsections, though not chronologically, Thalassius, the sea-child, is conceived, born of sea, sun, and flower, and adopted by the “free born” warrior. Within these stanzas, the “flower” trope appears five times, at once uniting the child, the season, and the loca-

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tion: The “sea-child” with “flower-soft face” (9) is born in April, “The flowery forefront of the year” (1), at water’s edge, “along the foam-flowered strand” (6). Not yet a god, Thalassius has been endowed with god-like properties at birth:

So birdlike slight and light, it seemed  
Nor man nor mortal child of man, but fair  
As even its twin-born tenderer spray-flowers were,  
That the wind scatters like an Oread’s hair. (12-15)

The flower trope appears also in “Hertha,” also in the spring, sprouting from Hertha as the free soul of “manhood”:

In the spring-coloured hours  
    When my mind was as May’s,  
There brake forth of me flowers  
    By centuries of days,  
Strong blossoms with perfume of manhood, shot out from my spirit as rays.

And the sound of them springing  
    And the smell of their shoots  
Were as warmth and sweet singing  
    And strength to my roots;  
And the lives of my children made perfect with freedom of soul were my fruits.

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Riede argues that in “Hertha,” “living man, the temporal, ever-changing body, is the fruit, and man dying, like fruit, provides the seed for new growth of the universal soul of life” (111). It follows then that Thalassius, the sea-flower, might be simply a flower of the free soul sprouting on Hertha, the tree of life, “Nor man nor mortal child of man” (13). Flowers hold significance for Swinburne, for their fragrance, their beauty, and their symbolic purity, as reflected in a letter to Henry Arthur Bright, in which Swinburne unites the beauty and fragrance of the flower with the song of the poets:

I quite agree with you about Keats, whom I put next to Shakespeare (if I may not say beside him) as a flower-singer. . . . I have Mr. Ruskin with me against you in admiring as deeply and subtly accurate Milton's epithet of 'glowing' for the warm profound purple of the commoner violet. . . .

Let me add a parting word of thanks for the adorable fragment of provincial verse . . . and express my sense of your goodness in gathering a flower of amusement instead of a thorn of resentment off the hedge of my Shakespearean garden [*A Study of Shakespeare*]. (*Letters* 4. 122)

Thalassius, the “sea-flower,” is Swinburne's allegorical flower-singer, who encompasses these past flower-singers and carries on the eternal flower-song.

In Louis's section two, the sea-flower, “born of man's most highest and heavenliest birth / Free-born as winds and stars and waves are free” (40-41), receives his education at the hands not of the professor or the theologian but of the warrior/foster-father, who offers him a Eucharist:

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And at his knees his fosterling was fed  
Not with man's wine and bread  
Nor mortal mother-milk of hopes and fears,  
But food of deep memorial days long sped;  
For bread with wisdom and with song for wine. (49-52)

With these sacraments of wisdom and song, Swinburne again inverts and parodies the Christian Eucharist. The foster-father's Eucharist teaches Thalassius that it is the song that is immortal: "how the breath / Too frail for life may be more strong than death" (67-68). Thus the immortal collective song of past poets and philosophers converges in the foster-father and is bestowed on Thalassius. As Richard D. McGhee explains, the foster father could be "*any* visionary poets whose songs serve as food and wine for young poets who desire to enter into the divine communion of artistic vision" (128):

A singer that in time's and memory's care  
Should leave such words to sing as all his peers  
Might praise with hallowing heat of rapturous tears  
Till all the days of human flight are fled. (44-47)

However, since "more of years than change the quick to dead / Had rained their light and darkness on his head" (42- 43), the mortal foster-father must pass the knowledge of the ages on to Thalassius, the new bearer of knowledge, the new "flower-singer."

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As in "Hertha," the most important lessons the "high song" teaches are that freedom is the "One thing stronger and more high than God" (86) and that "all of all that is / Were one man free in body and soul, were his" (93-94). This "one man free," being "all of all," is the Universal Soul about which Hertha too sings.

The song Thalassius learns at once "softens" and "confuses":

Softens, from sunnier down to starrier light,  
And with its moonlight breath  
Blessed life for death's sake, and for life's sake death.  
Till as the moon's own beam and breath confuse  
In one's clear hueless haze of glimmering hues  
The sea's line and the land's line and the sky's  
And light for love of darkness almost dies,  
As darkness only lives for light's dear love  
Whose hands the web of night is woven of. (96-104)

To "soften" the horizon of sea, land, and sky would "confuse," or fuse, the three into one convergence, just as Thalassius' song is becoming [con]fused with the collective soul of the poets. The antimetabole opens Thalassius to the dichomoties of life and death, light and darkness, day and night, as language, like God and the poets, at once rends and unites.

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By softening the dichotomies of life and mortality, dichotomies that only the song can [con]fuse, Thalassius is granted a more god-like acceptance of those cruel dichotomies. At the same time, Thalassius maintains and so can convey some mortal traits, such as passion, since by the song,

Was all the bright heat in the child's heart stirred  
And blown with blasts of music into flame  
Till even his sense became  
Fire . . .  
And in the soul within the sense began  
The manlike passion of a godlike man,  
And in the sense within the soul again  
Thoughts that make men of gods and gods of men. (120-128)

Once the song teaches him that man can both deconstruct God and make “gods of men,” Thalassius can invert the hierarchy and place himself not on a plane with God, but above God. If man creates gods, then God flows out of man’s consciousness. This moment of partial resolution is of seminal importance to Swinburne’s reconciliation with his own evolving antitheism. By inverting the hierarchy, Swinburne enables Thalassius to know both physical and spiritual truths available to poets, truths apparently built on antitheses. He learns of love that lives “for love’s sake of itself alone” (143) a lesson that affords Thalassius both the vision of immortality and the condo-

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latory strength of the poet, since “only” the immortal soul of poets can soften and confuse the fear of death and darkness for humankind:

As such men dying outlive themselves in man,  
Outlive themselves forever . . .  
How shall not something of that soul relive,  
That *only* soul that had such gifts to give  
As lighten something even of all men's doom  
Even from the laboring womb  
Even to the seal set on the unopening tomb?  
And these the loving light of song and love  
Shall wrap and lap round and impend above,  
Imperishable.           (150-165, italics added)

Similarly in “Hertha,” we saw love equated with freedom of the soul, with the difference that Hertha equates the soul with freedom of the Republic, which surfaces as truth after man deconstructs God. In both poems, then, truth can replace the invented God and its constraints with the love of freedom. A significant difference is that in “Thalassius,” “only” inspired poets have “such gifts to give” in their salutary and immortal wisdom and song.

As Thalssius' education continues, he also learns “hate,” the antithesis of love:

hate of all

*Jean Witherow*

That brings or holds in thrall  
Of spirit or flesh, free-born ere God began,  
The sacred body and the sacred soul of man. (170-173)

He is not taught to hate God, but only to hate the thralldom men have self-imposed and endured from their invented gods.

Thalassius also learns “hope” and its optimistic vision of freedom, since hope “can see the days of man, the birth / Of good and death of evil things on earth / Inevitable and infinite” (193-195).

Finally Thalassius learns “fear,” not the Christian fear of God, but rather the fear of being unworthy, and the antithesis of hope:

fear to be  
Worthless the dear love of the wind and sea . . .  
Fear to go crownless of the flower he wore  
When the winds loved him. (203-215)

Unfortunately, Thalssius’ fear is not unfounded since his education at the hands of the foster-father does not protect him from temptation. Donald C. Stuart makes the claim that “The ‘high song’ that the foster-father teaches the child is devoid of any human element,” instead maintaining “the level of conceptual abstraction. . . . And for this reason the ‘great god Love’ will

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be the destruction of the high song's education" (121). In section three, if we recall Thalassius' earlier development of the mortal properties of "manlike passion" that "made men of gods," we can predict his fall from grace. His first temptation is by the false "great god Love" (272), in a homoerotic conflation of flower and beautiful young man: ". . . and his mouth / Was the very rose of all men's youth, / One rose of all the rose-buds of the world" (257-259). Following the introduction of one "lovelier than all men may be" (245), the image reverses to reveal the dual god, and ". . . round his brow the curls were snakes that curled, / And like his tongue a serpent's; and his voice / Speaks death" (260-262). This dual god remains mute, having "Only the saddest smile of all things sweet, / Only the sweetest smile of all things sad" (281-282). Finally, among images of darkness and a red sky, the dual god speaks:

I make the night more dark, and all the morrow  
Dark as the night whose darkness was my breath;  
O fool, my name is sorrow;  
Thou fool, my name is death. (300-303)

This dual god of love and death disappears before Thalassius' gaze. Disillusioned by the duality of the false god, Thalassius turns his back on the education of his foster-father and begins a blind search for the missing pieces in his life. He forgets now his "fear to go crownless," and instead, ". . . he set / His pale mouth to the brightest mouth it met / That laughed for love against his lips and bade follow" (376-378).

Thus Thalassius falls from truth, abandoning his education and the youthful idyllic landscape of flowers and the sea. He loses his way and finds himself “On many a moon-bewildering mountain-height / Where he rode only by the fierier light / Of his dread lady’s hot sweet hungering eyes” (387-389).

However, it is a fortunate fall, for Thalassius ultimately returns to his mother, the sea, and the “great same joy” of innocent childhood (437). According to McGhee, the “dread lady” who tempts him is the “fatal muse,” from whom Thalassius “escapes his enslavement by turning away from physical reality and turning it into spiritual reality” (134, 129). This turning point, according to Stuart, begins “the second stage of the child’s education,” the necessity of “reconciliation with his mother, the sea,” so that he may begin to see himself as one with nature, and see his art as “no longer identified with reason” (124-125). Until this reconciliation, Thalassius has lacked the visionary song that would immortalize him. His communion with nature and the sea, a (re)union with what he has left behind, grows in intensity as he finds it possible finally to commune with his own soul. As John A. Walsh notes, Thalassius finally undergoes a “transfiguration from singer to song, . . . from human to musical and textual form” (50):

The tidal throb of all the tides keep rhyme  
And charm him from his own soul’s separate sense  
With infinite and invasive influence  
That makes strength sweet in him and sweetness strong,

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Being now no more a singer but a song. (470-474)

The return to an innocent state finally enables Thalassius to appropriate the wisdom and song of the ages and become an all encompassing source of freedom, much like Hertha. This moment illuminates his embodiment of the past and present divine inspiration of the poets, specifically, as has been suggested, such poets as Milton, Wordsworth (Wilson 382), and Blake (McGhee 131, Wilson 381), and including all the great poets as far back as the ancients: "It is about Shelley, Landor, Hugo, Aeschylus, and Sappho, and all poets and singers" (Walsh 51).

Once Thalassius has been reunited with his "mother-hearted sea" (488) and has found within himself the song, Apollo returns to him, praising him, "Because thou hast set thine heart to sing, and sold / Life and Life's love for a song, God's living gold" (489-490). In his benediction, Apollo completes the formation of the deity by bestowing on Thalassius "The sound of song that mingles north and south, / The song of all the winds that sing of me, / And in thy soul the sense of all the sea" (498-500). Apollo's praise, Walsh notes, is for his "retreat from the life of experience [and] an embrace of a life of words" (Walsh 51).

Swinburne has finally completed deconstruction of both God and Hertha and appropriated properties of the deity for Thalassius, and symbolically for himself, as his use of the term "quasi-autobiographical" would suggest. Significantly, Thalassius' appropriation is consummated in a Romantic return to and marriage with nature, wedding his sweet song to the higher con-

tent. This apocalyptic, pantheistic reunion with the natural world, aided by the sea-mother and the sun god, is the moment after which Thalassius becomes immortal and can begin to resolve the dialectic of his past and to impart a subjective visionary insight to the future body of poets.

Even before publishing *Songs of the Springtides*, Swinburne too had had what might be considered a “fortunate fall” in London, revealing by implication in “Thalassius” that he has returned (recovered) from the dissolution that nearly destroyed him. After his physical and emotional deterioration, Theodore Watts-Dunton took Swinburne “by force” to his home in Putney in September, 1879, where Swinburne would spend the rest of his life serenely (McGhee 244), writing to Lord Houghton in November, 1879, “I keep no chambers in town henceforth, or (probably) for ever—finding after too many years’ trial that in the atmosphere of London I can never expect more than a fortnight at best of my usual health and strength” (*Letters* 4. 111). Although Lady Swinburne would never witness a return to “the religious faith of his youth” that she continued to hope for (*Letters* 4. 166), in these later, quieter years away from London, a recovery of sorts emerges, evident for example, in *Songs of the Springtides* (1880), specifically, as we have seen, in “Thalassius.”

At Putney, Gosse explains, “All the charming part of his character blossomed forth anew, his gallantry, his tenderness, his loyalty. The caprices and irritabilities which had marred the surface of his nature disappeared. . . . He became less amusing and stimulating, although perhaps more lovable, than in his tumultuous youth” (268). At the close of “Thalassius,” we get a semi-

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nal sense of serenity beginning its formation, significantly with Thalassius' return to the sea. Walsh explains that "Thalassius" alludes to Swinburne's "personal transitional period . . . between a turbulent time of ill health and alcoholism, and a calmer span of recovery, renewal, health and rest" (34).

Finally equipped with a lasting if atypical serenity, apocalyptic visionary insight, and the symbolic benediction of the sun god Apollo, Swinburne could now both venture forward and look backward to a salutary reunion with nature and a hopeful resolution of dichotomies that had plagued him. The culmination of this resolution appears in "The Lake of Gaube" (1889), a late poem appearing in *A Channel Passage and Other Poems* (1904) and combining elements prevalent throughout Swinburne's career into a divine Romantic apotheosis emanating from the song of the ages. "The Lake of Gaube" in fact recalls a memory of Swinburne's youthful swim across that lake while on a family trip to the Pyrenees in 1862, "to the horror of the natives, who had a tradition that to bathe in Gaube was to court certain death" (Gosse 97).

Calling to mind Thalassius' return to the sea, Swinburne's love for swimming remained with him through his dotage. At Putney, he swam daily, and wrote often to friends and family about the transcendent experience. In two letters to his sister Alice, he wrote: "To-day when I was in the sea it was like swimming into heaven—the glorious sunlight on and in the splendid broad rolling waves made one feel for the minute as if one was in a better world . . ." (*Letters* 4. 274); and two weeks later:

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I had to get my plunge at 4 P.M. or thereabouts, just before the sun took *its* plunge behind a great blue-black rampart of cloud. I saw I could only be just in time—and I ran like a boy, tore off my clothes, and hurled myself into the water. And it was but for a few minutes—but I was in Heaven! The whole sea was literally golden as well as green—it was liquid and living sunlight in which one lived and moved and had one’s being. And to feel that in deep water is to feel—as long as one is swimming out, if only a minute or two—as if one is in another world of life, and one far more glorious than even Dante ever dreamed of in his Paradise. (*Letters* 4. 275)

One senses the profound impact that might have led the older Swinburne to recapture his childhood memory of exultation in the lake, culminating in a visceral sense of acceptance at nearing his own final transcendence, especially when we consider the central symbolic presence and essence of the sea and sun throughout his career. Yet clearly, as his letter would suggest, the poem presents a literal experience, and thus falls into the category that Stephanie Kuduk Weiner calls his “descriptive,” “referential” poems, as opposed to his “anti-referential” “sound-driven poems” (12). His descriptive poems, Weiner explains, “investigate the knowledge that can be gained by attending to the experience of the real world” (12), and in doing so, I would add, bring the antitheistic poet closer to real-world acquiescence to the inevitable end of corporeal life.

Capturing this acquiescence, the first stanza of “The Lake of Gaube” is characteristically framed and unified by the sun god Apollo, glorifying the natural world:

The sun is lord and god, sublime, serene,  
And sovereign on the mountains: earth and air  
Lie prone with passion, blind with bliss unseen

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By force of sight and might of rapture fair

As dreams that die and know not where they were.

The lawns, the gorges, and the peaks are one

Glad glory, thrilled with sense of unison

In strong compulsive silence of the sun. (1-9)

These lines illuminate a measure of fulfillment and acceptance we have not yet sensed in Swinburne. All nature is “thrilled with the sense of unison” precisely because of the “strong compulsive silence of the sun.” Apollo has finally placed all in alignment, significantly for Swinburne, an analogous experience to literal immersion in the waters, the sea-mother.

Fippinger argues that “By the North Sea” completes Swinburne’s progress toward the sea-mother, as he finally unites “nature with man’s song” (677). However, whereas “By the North Sea” (1880) is also a reunion with the sea-mother, I see a more optimistic resolution in “The Lake of Gaube” than Fippinger suggests of that earlier poem, a poem that, although it perhaps provides some limited sense of final solace, is darkened by lonely and barren images of death with no offer of solace throughout its lengthy bulk:

A land that is lonelier than ruin

A sea that is stranger than death

Far fields that a rose never blew in,

Wan waste where the winds lack breath;

Waste endless and boundless and flowerless

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But of marsh-blossoms fruitless as free  
Where earth lies exhausted, as powerless  
To strive with the sea. (1-8)

.....

A land that is thirstier than ruin;  
A sea that is hungrier than death;  
Heaped hills that a tree never grew in;  
Wide sands where the wave draws breath;  
All solace is here for the spirit  
That ever for ever may be  
For the soul of thy son to inherit,  
My mother, my sea. (267-274)

The poem, Fippinger explains, “comes closer than any of his works to achieving his desire to mingle bleak nature and ecstatic song” (677). While I agree that the poem contains some of “Swinburne’s most powerful lyrics” (675), “The Lake of Gaube,” I would contend, with its less bleak and less hopeless nature, indicates progress beyond hopelessness and both symbolically and literally returns Swinburne full circle to the serenity, even innocence in some sense, of his youth, wherein he discovers in nature, not an infinite heaven that does not exist for Swinburne, but at least “The likeness of infinite heaven” (54). Yet Fippinger clearly delineates a conscious and systematic progression toward a desired end, a view contested by Louis, who sees in Swinburne’s oeuvre no “steady progress to a foreordained end” (Louis 3).

Clearly both poems illustrate that Swinburne’s genius is not slipping during his years at Putney, as some critics have suggested. Levin agrees, arguing that “contrary to common belief,

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the Putney period did not mark the end of Swinburne's intellectual development nor of his poetic experimentalism," citing both "By the North Sea" and "The Lake of Gaube" as "great poems of the Putney period" (Levin, "Dark Month" 672). Significantly, however, "The Lake of Gaube," lacking the bleak images of loss that we see in all but the final seven stanzas of "By the North Sea," indicates that this later poem at last realizes a serenity that was still evolving in the earlier poem. Thus in "By the North Sea," as George P. Landow notes, the final "paean to the sun . . . cannot dispel the gloom that he has labored so well to create, and raising his eyes to the sun therefore seems perfunctory and even evasive." Conversely, "The Lake of Gaube" opens immediately with a triumphant "paean to the sun" as "lord and god, sublime, serene, / And sovereign" (1-2).

Neither is the "Lake of Gaube" "flowerless." Flower imagery is present again, as it was at the birth of Thalassius, framing the next antimetabole: "Flowers dense and keen as midnight stars aflame / And living things of light like flames in flower" (9-10). The flowers take on symbolic significance in light of their personification of the soul of humankind in earlier poems, with the difference that now serenity softens the earlier tension. Swinburne seems finally at peace and ready to accept the hope that the lake, a symbol of "infinite heaven," offers him. Rikky Rooksby notes that "Many of the late elegies show Swinburne, albeit tentatively, moving away from his earlier position that death is annihilation" (138).

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In the midsection of the poem, the meter slows to a soothing anapestic heptameter as Swinburne acknowledges and recreates in words his peace and preparedness:

Each limb and each pulse of the body rejoicing, each nerve of the spirit at rest,  
All sense of the soul's life rapture, at passionate peace in its blindness blest.

.....

Might life be as this and death be as life that casts off time as a robe.

The likeness of infinite heaven were a symbol revealed by the lake of Gaube.

(41-42, 53-54)

Swinburne's corresponding descriptions in his letters of the transformative effects of his literal swims would seem to indicate that Swinburne can now abandon his fears and accept the immortality of the song:

But well shall it be with us ever  
Who drive through the darkness here,  
If the soul that we live by never,  
For aught that a lie saith, fear! (67-70)

Finally, as Riede notes, "The diver is completely one with nature" (199). When he returns to the surface, he is "revivified by acceptance of death" and "ready to sing again" (202, 203). In the poem, Riede explains, Swinburne "does not contemplate the void, he experiences it; his consola-

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tion is not philosophical but experiential, emotional, mythopoeic. After the experience he can return from the void to the ever shifting surface and live without fear" (198). His final acceptance is a culmination of his search throughout his life, a resolution anticipated progressively in "Hertha" and "Thalassius," but not fully realized until "The Lake of Gaube."

While Louis describes Swinburne's development as an "unpredictable process, not an unfolding of what is implicit from the beginning, and not a steady progress to a foreordained end" (6), I would agree that while his development was as erratic as his condition, perhaps as illustrated in dichotomies he wrestled with throughout his career and continuing through "By the North Sea," we finally see a logical unfolding to a more peaceful and salutary acceptance. Clearly, neither Swinburne nor any of his acquaintances could have predicted the outcome of his erratically evolving acquiescence. Louis at last declares that "The most helpful way of viewing Swinburne's career is to see it as a connected series of brilliant experiments in Romantic art" (194). Yet, as we look back objectively at brief moments in the evolution towards that Romantic art, specifically at how Swinburne deconstructed the dual God of love and wrath, how two centrally thematic poems, "Hertha" and "Thalassius," helped define a way to resolve those dichotomies, and how elements in "The Lake of Gaube" bring the artist full circle to an innocent, pantheistic acceptance, it becomes apparent that his growth was logically, if erratically, progressive. Certainly we see almost insurmountable challenges along the path, just as Swinburne delineates challenges to Thalassius, but a clear pattern exists in his controversial unwillingness to

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accept the dichotomy of a cruel and divisive God. Those challenges were indeed a necessary part of the evolution to what I see as a somewhat more hopeful serenity in later years. In song, if in no other sense, Swinburne finally balances the deconstruction and re-imagining of God with the desire for immortality that seemed to torment his life.

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