

Chapter Four:

Lyrical Poetics, Lyric History and Lyric Poetry in the Nineteenth Century

The lyric includes the song, but it occupies a far wider field than that held by the song-writer. Spenser, whose "Epithalamion" is the most rapturous love-lyric in the language, did not write a song.

John Dennis (*English Lyrics* viii-ix)

The second part of this thesis is less restricted in its investigations than the first half, and ranges widely across criticism and poetic practice of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to outline their essentially lyrical nature.

This chapter investigates a number of different areas, which nevertheless all feed into the lyrical understanding of poetry, and of human experience embodied in poetry, which developed in the nineteenth century. Firstly I look at two well-known and early formulations of the explicit view that poetry can only consist of short poems, those of J.S.Mill and Edgar Allan Poe. These views, together with the "transcendentalist" views of Emerson and others, influenced by Higher Criticism, can be seen to lie behind the Aesthetic/Symbolist movement of the later nineteenth century. At the same time as this was making its appearance a decisive break occurred in poetic practice, which saw the virtual abandonment of longer poems, in favour of shorter forms. Finally, by the end of the century, a lyrical history of poetry had become an orthodoxy and was made a fact by the emergence of critical histories. These were founded upon a new lyrical reading of the poetry of many poets, both Romantic and pre-Romantic. The most famous instance of this is the "Shelley Myth", the transformation of the complex historical figure of Shelley into the simpler figure of the dreamy lyriskt. As a parallel to this I offer, in the next chapter, a reading of the "Clare Myth", a process by which the work of John Clare is similarly transformed into a lyric corpus, and Clare himself into a Romantic lyriskt.

J.S Mill and Poe

These two figures, eminent in their separate spheres (of Liberalism and horror-story writing respectively) are not normally considered together, but they make an interesting comparison and are useful for my purposes. For they both, very early in the “post-Romantic” period¹ provide arguments for a poetics based on the shorter poem. One of the apparent problems with my diagnosis of modernity itself, and within it Romantic poetics, as lyrical is that the first generation of Romantic poets, although they wrote notable lyrics, also continued to write long poems. But as we saw with Coleridge, Romantic lyricism does express itself in their works, in fragmentary structures, in unfinished (or, in the case of Coleridge, unstarted) poems, in poems of ambiguous genre, in poems which, like *The Prelude* are explicitly a pendant to other, uncompleted works and so forth. In fact, any long poem within Romanticism, it is clear, will be read lyrically, that is, will be read in terms of a dialectic between the lyrically heightened passages and the longer stretches of “passage work”. The problematics of the first generation Romantics’ long poems are repeated with the longer poems of Tennyson, Browning and Arnold, and again with Modernist longer poems, and will no doubt appear again with any future “post-modernist” long poems, if they have not already done so. The appearance of an explicit interest in shorter poems, then, so soon after the first generation of Romantics is a deconstruction of their poetics.²

Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Poetic Principle” is undoubtedly one of the most famous and influential formulations of the view that poetry should consist only of shorter poems. Certainly if this essay had no immediate effect on critical opinion in Britain, it was to have a great effect later, when mediated through French symbolist poetry and criticism.³ His influence since then, as Foust argues, has been profound, but often unacknowledged (21). Nor should we forget, that just as Poe was one of the earliest critics to give an explicit recommendation of the short poem, his major literary achievement was to create and establish the short story as a literary form (Foust 17).

What is most interesting about Poe’s formulation is that, in contrast to almost all the other formulations, it has very little to say about either personality or timelessness; Poe deals in the essay with several Romantic lyrics, but from his position all are “modern”, insofar as the oldest is less than thirty years old. As Yvor Winters points out Poe “reserv[es] the field of English poetry very largely to Coleridge, Tennyson, Thomas Moore, himself, and R.H Horne” (180). But Poe fails to make any

pronouncements about the authors of the poems he does include in his account; instead he concentrates almost wholly on the way in which lyric poetry can embody “the all in all” of Beauty—this is the “principle” of the title. He is most definite about this property of poetry when he discusses one of Thomas Moore’s poems:

I allude to his lines beginning—“Come rest in this bosom.” The intense energy of their expression is not surpassed by anything in Byron. There are two of the lines in which a sentiment is conveyed that embodies the *all in all* of the divine passion of love—a sentiment which, perhaps, has found its echo in more, and in more passionate, human hearts than any other single sentiment.... (Prescott 245)

Rather comically, Poe does not reveal which two of the twelve lines of the poem he means, no doubt assuming that they are self-evident.⁴ It is a typical procedure of a lyrical criticism to assume that the intensity of the true poem needs no pointing out, other than the assertion of its existence. Another typical feature is the opening of the essay where Poe, in a mock-modest style, manages to be deprecatory about its object, whilst at the same time underlining its vital importance:

While discussing ... the essentiality of what we call Poetry, my principal purpose will be to cite for consideration, some few of those minor English or American poems which best suit my own taste, or which, upon my own fancy, have left the most definite impression. By “minor poems” I mean, of course, poems of little length. And here ... permit me to say a few words in regard to a somewhat peculiar principle, which ... has always had its influence on my own critical estimation of the poem. I hold that a long poem does not exist. (228)

Another familiar trope we meet with here is the insufficiency, despite its elevation, of poetry:

thus when by Poetry ... we find ourselves melted into tears—we weep then—not as the Abbate Gravina supposes—through excess of pleasure, but through a certain petulant, impatient sorrow at our inability to grasp *now*, wholly, here on earth, at once and for ever, those divine and rapturous joys, of which *through* poetry ... we attain to but brief and indeterminate glimpses. (236)

Margaret Alterton, in her book *Origins of Poe’s Critical Theory* has traced the ideas of “The Poetic Principle” back to Poe’s reading of *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* in the 1830s and 40s (41-42) and thus back to the common discourses of Romanticism. In a survey of this magazine I have not found the sort of engagement with poetic theory that Alterton suggests. Indeed, although the magazine does feature poetry largely during this period and is very concerned with the Classics, for example Greek Drama, the Homeric Hymns, *The Greek Anthology* and so on,⁵ the only two major articles on poetic theory are scrupulously pragmatic, despite their use of common Romantic ideas.⁶ However in this and in the often embarrassingly facetious tone of

much of the literary comment in its pages, as in its satirical column "Noctes Ambrosianae", or in its hostile review of Tennyson's *Poems* of 1833 (721-23), or in the first article of its series on *The Greek Anthology* (865-67), we can at least see a possible model for Poe's highly rational impatience with an earlier Romantic aesthetic and his insistence on lyricised generic form (Hallberg 88).

There is no doubt that Poe's essay differs substantially from more circumspect poetic theory (Herzberger 327); there are, for example few other critical accounts which are so nakedly interested in the shorter poem alone, and this difference has, I believe, caused a blindness among several critics of Poe, who, like Alterton, have been more interested in Poe's triad of Beauty, Truth and Duty, a far more common idea, than his interest in the shorter poem, which has been read as a personal idiosyncrasy, or ignored. Although we will find many formulations of lyrical poetics that draw on similar ideas we will find very few others that are so uninvolved with other discourses. However two very interesting studies, those of Hallberg and Hovey, allow us to take our account of Poe a little further. Hallberg reads Poe's criticism in general as reflecting a specifically American criticism. Hence his lack of interest in the longer poem, which was, when Poe was writing, the characteristic of the British tradition of poetry, particularly Wordsworth (86-87). Hence too Poe's lack of interest in poems of the past, the usual accompaniment to an interest in the lyric. Hallberg also reads Poe's insistence on the autotelic nature of the poem as an index of American isolationism at this period (89). Hovey takes Hallberg's ideas further and argues that Poe's literary theories are the result of his opposition to the northern literary establishment in Boston, whose chief figure, Longfellow, championed Wordsworth and the longer poem. Poe then, of necessity, chose Byron and the shorter poem (350). All these considerations are useful insofar as they stress the conservative, reactionary nature of this tradition. Indeed, with this in mind it seems rather odd that the contributors to *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* had not explored more fully the lyric and the discourse surrounding it which was under way by the 1840s.

Early though Poe's account is, we find it antedated by J.S Mill's formulation of similar ideas dating from the 1830s.⁷ Nor will we find Mill any less interested in a defensive kind of lyric criticism than Poe. In his essay "Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties" we have the famous definition: "All poetry is of the nature of a soliloquy" (349) which is amplified in a number of ways, such as:

Poetry, accordingly, is the natural fruit of solitude and meditation; eloquence, of intercourse with the world. The persons who have most feeling of their own, if intellectual culture has given them a language in which to express it, have the highest faculty of poetry; those who best understand the feelings of others, are the most eloquent. (349)

This is a distinction which will be heard again and again. These arguments and the tenor of the argument as a whole privileges the internal, private nature of poetry and represents a genuine retreat from the expansive aspirations of a Wordsworthian poetic. Five years later, in "The Writings of Alfred de Vigny", Mill even goes as far as to state:

the origin of rhythmic utterance in general, and verse in particular, naturally demands *short* poems, it being impossible that a feeling so intense as to require a more rhythmic cadence than that of eloquent prose, should sustain itself at its highest elevation for long together; and we think (heretical as this opinion may be) ... a long poem will always be felt (though perhaps unconsciously) to be something unnatural and hollow. (499)

The context of these remarks must be noted: Mill the liberal is reviewing the works of de Vigny, the discontented royalist, on the whole in a kindly way. But this particular pronouncement is in response to his failure to discern anything in de Vigny's work that will measure up to the above-mentioned standard: "Of the more considerable among them [the poems], that which most resembles what, in our conception, a poem should be, is 'Moïse'" (499). The melancholy of the discontented royalist wears off on to the as-yet not discontented liberal and provokes this defensive posture.

Although there are considerable differences between the poetics of Poe and Mill the similarities are more interesting. Specifically, as we have seen both critics are on the defensive in their pronouncements. And it matters little whether the critic is the conservative southerner, or the English liberal:⁸ the site of defence is the lyrical poem, the best expression of absolute and uncompromised identity. As we shall see in the next section a similar imperative governs reactions to the continued disintegrative influence of the Higher Criticism.

The Higher Criticism

In the first chapter we saw that the first generation of Higher Critics provided Coleridge with a challenge, in that they contested the accepted text and interpretation of Scripture by their critical researches into the textual history of the texts and the historical circumstances attending them. But Coleridge, like many of the critics themselves, ultimately drew comfort from the Higher Criticism. Its lyrical temporal-

ity coincided with other discourses of modernity, and offered the possibility of a “continuous revelation”, an idea that Coleridge was later to formulate as that of the “symbolic” interpretation of the text.

However, the later influence of the Higher Criticism was less benign, for several reasons. The first was that its influence was no longer restricted to a few German specialists, but became widely disseminated in Britain, in part owing to the new London University, and to a circle of intellectuals which formed in London in the first half of the century (Heyck 9). Furthermore the Higher Criticism of the Biblical texts became more and more revisionist as time went on (Burrow 180), so that, in contrast to the “safer” earlier criticism, such critics as Strauss and Renan began to question, for example, such explosive topics as the divinity of Jesus. It also began to make its influence felt in various other departments of criticism, such as Homeric and Shakespearian scholarship and philology, in both cases unsettling previously settled assurances. For example Gladstone’s lifetime preoccupation with the defence of the unity of the Homeric poems (Glasgow 63) can be viewed as the sublimation of his struggle against the disintegration of Scripture, about which he never admitted doubt. The efforts of the New Shakespeare [sic] Society in the 1850s, in investigating the metre and prosody of the Shakespearean text, were also strongly resisted (Grady 118), and the new philology was widely felt to challenge the Romantic, expressive idea of language (Wilson 28, Dowling 167).

The irony of all this is that the Higher Criticism, together with the Kantian “separation of the faculties” are pre-eminently discourses of modernity, and the Higher Criticism itself, in all its departments, substituted for a theology a Romantic humanism, which, by the end of the century had given rise to a number of separate, but equally lyrical disciplines (cf Dowling 161, 173 on philology). And we will see later in this chapter how such a “scientific” and evolutionary view of poetry, a lyrical history of poetry, had emerged by the end of the century. In view of this we must revise the commonly held view of the opposition in Victorian times of science and poetry, which are also widely held to have been fatally dissociated ever since. In fact this opposition was less a dramatic historical dilemma, than yet another strategic dialectic, of fullness (of signification, language &c), loss and subsequent lyric transcendence. In fact, as Ian Small, Ian Hunter and others have argued, it was the professionalisation of the teaching profession at the end of the nineteenth century which allowed many critics their speaking positions in the first place.

To give a more concrete example of this process we have only to look at Emerson, whose “transcendentalist” project, not essentially different from Coleridge’s (Cameron 30), of a rejection of ecclesiastical authority in favour of a “perpetual scripture” (Gruin 1-4, 76)⁹, was a matter of great personal distress to him, but at the same time the source of the personal creativity and transcendence he celebrated in his work. Clearly it would be inappropriate to go into great detail about Emerson’s life and work, especially in a thesis mainly concerned with British poetry and poetics, but Emerson is a key figure, and had a great influence on a number of British writers.

Emerson is also useful to consider when we think about the specific effects of the Higher Criticism. We have seen how the Higher Criticism, itself a Romantic discourse, can give rise to the supposed opposition of science and poetry, but this is a very generalised description of a more complicated historical phenomenon. We can discern on a closer inspection several different possible reactions to an historical investigation of texts, whether scriptural or not. Firstly there is the Coleridgean reaction of discerning, amidst the ruins of time, some sort of underlying form in the text, which has a symbolic import. For example the great German Homeric scholar, and ardent Romantic, Wolf wrote in his *Prolegomena to Homer* (1795):

Once I gave up hope ... that the original form of the Homeric Poems could ever be laid out, save in our minds, and even there only in rough outlines. (47)

But afterwards he reveals that his critical works have been the sublimation of this desire. And this is the level at which Emerson would have understood his lyricised scripture.

The second level of transcendental analysis is the appropriation of a set of (usually poetic) texts, from which to form a “perpetual scripture”. This is the sort of project that John Sterling, friend of Emerson and disciple of Coleridge (Harding “Sterling” 269, 279), wished to carry out. According to Anthony Harding, Sterling wished to fuse aesthetics and religion, and looked for the appearance of a poet who would effect this, a sort of “Christian Shelley” (270, 284).

These two levels of transcendentalism are not uncommon, indeed they are, in one form or another, practically articles of belief in the nineteenth century and beyond in literary circles. These levels are lyrical by any definition, but a further stage of transcendentalism is what might be called the overtly lyric stage, one in which the con-

siderations outlined above lead, in a similar way to Poe and J.S Mill's definitions, to an exclusive approbation of the shorter poem, or excerpted passages from longer poems. Emerson was a critic who at times did privilege, in a similar way to Poe, shorter poems or lines from longer poems, as here, for example:

I see in a moment, on looking into our new *Dial*, which is the wild poetry, and which the tame, and see that one wild line out of a private heart saves the whole book. (quoted in Pritchard 129)

But I should like to consider now his poem "The Test", for a better understanding of the modes of operation of a lyrical poetic under the influence of Higher Criticism:

The Test (Musa Loquitur)

I hung my verses in the wind,
Time and tide their faults may find.
All were winnowed through and through,
Five lines lasted sound and true;
Five were smelted in a pot
Than the South more fierce and hot;
These the siroc could not melt,
Fire their fiercer flaming felt,
And the meaning was more white
Than July's meridian light.
Sunshine cannot bleach the snow,
Nor time unmake what poets know.
Have you eyes to find the five
Which 500 did survive? (*Poems* 247)

This poem is apparently an amusingly flippant expression of the common Romantic idea that poems contains some lines which are of more worth than others, because of their dynamic properties. So the muse asks the reader to pick out the five lines of lasting value from a poem, but which poem? Is it this poem? or is it a description of some other poem? It is not clear. The reader is being addressed as though he/she is either a poet or a critic, but the poem collapses the difference between the two, since the speaker is the Muse, traditionally the figure who inspired the poet. Furthermore, although the description of the hardships endured by the five lines in question, the ones which survived, is a figurative description of human sufferings, and also, by metonymy, the sufferings that the reader endured, whilst keeping the lines bright in his/her mind, thus proving their worth, we must also think of them as the literal hardships which occur to old manuscripts over time.

So what we have found so far in the poem is a description of a poet, searching through some pre-existent reality to extract from it, as the reward for his/her physical sufferings, five bright lines of genuine poetry, but the poem could also refer to

the critical work of a Higher Critic, searching for poetic riches in an battered, and largely illegible manuscript. That is, a description of a lyric poetics, or a lyric criticism.

However one further thing to note, and one which will be useful to us in delineating further the progress of what might be termed the lyric consensus of the later nineteenth century, is that we can relate this poem to one of the most important pronouncements in Romantic criticism. As Ian Hunter has pointed out, a passage from Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* can be said without too much exaggeration to sum up Romantic aesthetics (*Culture and Government* 24-25). Here Schiller argues that the aesthetic "form" of a work of art is a given, and any response to it which fails to detect this form is evidence not of the formlessness of the work of art, but of the reader's aesthetic lumpishness:

If he is either too tense or too languid, if he is accustomed to read either with his intellect alone, or with his senses alone, he will get no further with the parts even with the most felicitous whole, and no further with the matter even with the most beautiful form.... His interest in it is either solely moral or solely physical; only precisely what it ought to be—aesthetic—it is not. (Schiller 107)¹⁰

So, in Emerson's poem, there is never any doubt as to the genuineness of the five true lines, but the point of the poem is the finding of them. And the fact that they are not really there at all only adds to the sense of the importance of the aesthetic response in the reader/poet/critic. This understanding is also of crucial importance in assessing the tropes of lyric criticism, such as the insistence upon the fact of poetic worth in poetry and protestations about the superfluity of criticism.

A Break in Poetic Theory and Practice

The term "Transcendentalism" can properly be applied only to certain figures such as Emerson who were concerned with all its problematics. However what might be called a general transcendentalism becomes, by the mid nineteenth century, the dominant cultural attitude across a wide range of disciplines and discourses, of which a fully lyrical poetics is only one, though one of the most basic and literal-minded. Despite Raymond Williams' warning:

if the 'eighties and 'nineties in England had really produced a new aesthetics, it might have stood greatly to their credit. But what was called, from Pater in the late 'sixties, the new doctrine of 'art for art's sake', was really little more than a restatement of an attitude which properly belongs to the first generation of the Romantics. (*Culture & Society* 166)

it is nevertheless useful to describe a break in criticism and poetry at around 1860-70, as several critics have done (Armstrong 54-56, Shaw *Lucid Veil* 7).¹¹

What this break represented was the replacement in common expectation of the longer poem, by the shorter, and lyrical poem.¹² We have already seen that Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* was one text which, perhaps more than any other, accomplished this in terms of the popular market. But we must also understand that it was not simply in anthologies, or criticism, that the changes occurred, but in the actual appearance of collections of new poetry. This change was foreshadowed by Browning's *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1843) and signalled by Meredith's *Modern Love and Poems and Ballads* (1862) and Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* (1866). Within a few years the appearance of books of poems of Henley¹³, Stevenson, Blunt, Meynell, Bridges in periodicals, and the (not then yet published) poems of Hopkins and Hardy bear witness to it.¹⁴

By the 1890s we see a flood of lyric poetry, with collections by Yeats (1890), Dowson (1892), Laurence Binyon (*Lyric Poems* 1894), John Davidson (*Ballads and Songs* 1894), Johnson (1895), Housman (*A Shropshire Lad* 1896), Newbolt (1897), Belloc (1896) and T.S Moore (1899). In the early years of the next century similar collections by Alfred Noyes (1902), W.H.Davies (1905), W.W Gibson (1905), de la Mare (1906), Ralph Hodgson (1907), J.C.Squire (1909), Brooke (1911), Blunden (1913) and Charlotte Mew (1916) appear, to confine the list only to pre-war poetry.

But what needs to be made clear is that this change is definitely not to be taken simply as the replacement of the idea of poetry as longer, non-lyrical poems, with shorter, lyrical poems. It is instead the case that, as David Shaw argues, this rupture was above all a time at which genres began to lose their definition in the face of a more and more extreme Romanticism:

As poetry tries to chart (and even cross) the boundaries of the sayable, new theories of presentative or indeterminate form threaten to make genres too intrinsic for theorists to investigate or define. Generic criticism is by definition a labelling or naming; it establishes boundaries, limits, ends. But if new poetic genres try to cross the limits of what logic can formulate and what words can say, then the generic critic would be in the indefensible position of denying what he labels. ("Philosophy and Genre" 495)

Longer poems, lyrically considered, begin to be more and more difficult to achieve, either literally or figuratively. Indeed it is a commonplace that long Victorian poems tend to be gloomy, morose, despairing and so forth. Their generic instability, perhaps more than their subject-matter, is the principal cause of this, and it is noteworthy that the writers of long poems often anticipate the lyric break. Herbert Tucker, for example, has an interesting argument about Tennyson's use of lyric voices in the

Poems of 1842 (189), and it is arguable that this could be extended to *In Memoriam* and *Maud*, to name only the two most obvious examples. Rhoda Flaxman goes even further than this when she describes Tennyson as a proto-modernist who incorporated the lyric mode explicitly into his longer poems, and lyricised them (74). The most literal abandonment of the longer poem, of course, occurred when Arnold rejected his *Empedocles on Etna*, though he was subsequently to write other long poems.

In another view of this break, Graham Hough, in his book *Image and Experience*, describes an older form of Romantic poetry, typified for him by Arnold's "Dover Beach", where the description of the sea and the sky is then given an explicit moral, "The Sea of Faith/ Was once, too...". A Symbolist, Hough argues, would leave this out, would allow the poem, language itself, to speak (16). However I would argue, along with Christopher Clausen (55, 65), that, influential as Symbolism was, the break has more to do with the move towards lyric poetry, which occurred at the time, where it is not only language, but genre too, that speaks. And in any case, I am arguing that Symbolism is simply a well-defined part of a larger, lyric cultural space. In the works of Arthur Symons, the most famous mediator of French Symbolism, for example, the aesthetics of Symbolism are frequently related specifically to the form of the lyric (eg *Symbolist Movement* 9, 87, 90, 137), and as Murray Pittock has pointed out, in this work Symons supplements the corpus of French Symbolist poetry with a body of English, pre-Romantic lyric poems (71). As we shall see Symbolism itself is a more elaborate form of the "general transcendentalism" we diagnosed earlier.

Mention of Matthew Arnold is apposite in this context, for despite a few overt lyric leanings (notably in "On Translating Homer, Last Words" (189, 209-10)) the lyric was for him *not* the most important poetic form (Warren 166); indeed as a proponent of the High Seriousness and Grand Style of Epic and Tragedy he was opposed to the lyric on principle (Wimsatt and Brooks 436). But when in "The Study of Poetry" (167-171) he outlines his theory of poetic "touchstones" ("short passages, even single lines") we can discern an urge towards the safety and unity of the short, intense poetic moment. And this interpretation is made more cogent when we consider that, as John Eells argues, these are passages from longer poems which are fragmentary in the context of Arnold's citations and are mostly taken from contexts which make little sense in terms of Arnold's ostensible purposes (208-09). Their function is precisely their lack of cogency, their fetishistic identity.

If we examine the Prefaces to the first (1853) and second (1854) editions of his *Poems* we can explore further Arnold's relations with the lyric. In the first Preface, famously, Arnold explains his decision not to reprint *Empedocles on Etna*. There are, he explains "situations, from the representation of which, though accurate, no poetical enjoyment can be derived" (655-56); these are those:

in which the suffering finds no vent in action; in which a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope, or resistance; in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done. In such situations there is inevitably something morbid, in the description of them something monotonous. (656)

The solution for Arnold is to prefer poetry which embodies "actions: human actions" (656) and this is the quality which he finds in older poetry and which he finds lacking in more modern poetry, his principal objection to which is its lack of consistent form (661). For, he goes on,

We have poems which seem to exist merely for the sake of single lines and passages; not for the sake of producing any total impression. We have critics who seem to direct their attention to detached expressions, to the language about the action, not the action itself. (661-62)

(a passage which recalls Coleridge's similar strictures (*BL II* 13-14)). The rest of Arnold's Preface is devoted to explaining how the young poet can avoid this danger, principally by imitating Shakespeare. Thus this Preface can be described as rejecting some form of lyricised narrative, in favour of a narrative characterised by an underlying aesthetic form.

When we turn, however, to the second Preface, we find that Arnold, although he continues to clarify his original position, has been forced to consider the lyric *per se*. For in his opening remarks he is driven to acknowledge that his previous strictures on lyricised narrative are incomplete, insofar as they do not apply to the majority of poetry now written:

[The first Preface] leaves untouched the question, how far, and in what manner, the opinions there expressed respecting the choice of subjects apply to lyric poetry—that region of the poetic field which is chiefly cultivated at present. But neither do I propose at the present time to supply these deficiencies, nor indeed would this be the proper place for attempting it. (672)

Arnold in fact never returned to this specific question, leaving it unanswered, and we might conclude from this that as the overt lyric had by then become the dominant poetic form, any subject matter was available to it and Arnold's putative question becomes an absurdity.¹⁵

Symbolism, Aestheticism and Cultural Criticism

At this point I should acknowledge that many of the manifestations of the lyric break that occurred mid-century find their most obvious expression in the well-known movements of Symbolism and Aestheticism, although to put it this way is probably to reverse the true order of events: Aestheticism and Symbolism should be seen rather as cultural movements inhabiting an already-established lyrical space.

Moreover it is recognised that to Poe and earlier lyric poetic theory Symbolism owes a great deal. We have already seen that Arthur Symons, in his critical pronouncements about poetry, relies heavily on the lyric. Thus in the Preface to *The Romantic Movement in English Poetry* he begins by stating: "I have tried to get at one thing only: the poet in his poetry, his poetry in the poet; it is the same thing" (1). And in his Introduction he asserts, against an earlier, Romantic belief that poetry is not a form characterised by metre but a mode of psychological being (Warren 6): "only one thing would have been lacking [from fine prose], the form of verse. It would have been poetical substance, not poetry" (3). He then maps out an extensive, but familiar, argument, which I can best summarise in quotations:

The very form of verse is a concentration; you can load every rift with ore. (5)

The region of poetry will thus be always the beyond, the ultimate, and with the least possible chance of any confusion of territory. (9)

poetry is a reality, an essence, and is unchanged by any change in fashion; and it is the critic's business to find where it is, to proclaim it for what it is, and to realise that no amount of historical significance or adaptability to a former fashion can make what is bad poetry in the present century good poetry in any century of the past. (10)

No great poet ever owed any essential part of his genius to his age; at the most he may have owed to his age the opportunity of an easy achievement. (11)

[the critic] must cast aside all theories of evolution or of the natural growth of genius, and remember that genius is always the exception.... He must clear his mind of all limiting formulas, whether of *milieu*, *Weltschmerz*, or mode.... He must seek, in short, only poetry, and he must seek poetry in the poet and nowhere else. (14)

To the supreme Elizabethan it was life, every action of the will, the mind, and the soul; and there is not so much poetry to be found anywhere in the world, but it is more often than not in scattered splendours and fragments severally alive. (15)

Thus it may be affirmed that in studying this period we are able to study whatever is essential in English poetry; that is, whatever is essential in poetry. (20)

However when we come to the body of the work, a broadly biographical catalogue of Romantic poets, well-known, less well-known and not known at all, Symons' task

is superseded by an everyday one of biographical and evaluative criticism. His lives of many of the poets, for example Landor (172-89) and Coleridge (123-47), are orthodox explorations of the poet in the poems without its customary reflex and we find traces only here and there of an obvious lyric interest, his praise of the lyrics of Blake (38, 49) and Shelley (284), for example, or his praise of "Kubla Khan" which "comes nearer than any other existing poem to that of the ideal of lyric poetry which has only lately been systematised by theorists like Mallarmé" (140), or his criticism of Wordsworth's diffuseness (80-81) and so on.

If, at first, we are puzzled by this descent into the humdrum, it is understandable, after all, as we have seen from numerous critical pronouncements already that it should have been the lyric, and through the lyric the poet, that was the first and last preoccupation of this criticism. But it is important to realise that in the later nineteenth century what emerged was not only an explicitly lyrical poetic criticism, focussing on the timeless moment of the short poem, but also a Romantic evolutionary criticism, which could reconcile timeless moments with a teleological evolutionary meliorism. We should remember that even Darwin, who by introducing the mechanism of natural selection into the theory of evolution did more than anyone to establish a contingent and haphazard evolutionary history for the planet, at times toyed with meliorism.

And indeed against the traditional reading of Aestheticism as concerned with the problematics of transcendental form (Chai xii) we must set Carolyn Williams' reading of Pater's "aesthetic historicism", in which she argues that Pater was also concerned with establishing a Hegelian history in which transcendent form could manifest itself (3). Or, as Oscar Wilde usefully described "the new aesthetics":

So far from being the creation of time, [they are] usually in direct opposition to it, and the only history that [they] preserve for us is the history of [their] own progress. (319)

What I should like to demonstrate in the last part of this section is that in the latter half of the nineteenth century a version of Romantic evolutionary criticism became established. This was a general cultural criticism which had as its first achievement the creation of the idea of the literary (Small "Literary" 446). As we have already seen in chapter three, where I argued that the prestige of *The Golden Treasury* provided the momentum for a critical project, carried out by Palgrave and others, to describe the history of the lyric, and locate it in a lyric history, the best expression of this lyric criticism is with the form of the lyric itself.

It is not, in fact, hard to come across such tell-tale passages in the writings of Pater himself. In the Preface to *The Renaissance*, for example, he quotes Blake approvingly: “The ages are all equal, but genius is always above its age” (x). And his espousal of the view that the height of aesthetic experience is “To see the object in itself as it really is” (viii) has the same effect as the protestations about the superfluity of criticism we have already seen. Elsewhere in the same book his concern with the intensity of the aesthetic experience leads him to the following description of the unity of one of Browning’s poems:

we have a single moment of passion thrown into relief after this exquisite fashion.... But to discriminate that moment, to make it appreciable to us, that we may “find” it, what a cobweb of allusions, what double and treble reflexions of the mind upon itself, what an artificial light is constructed and broken over the chosen situation; on how fine a needle’s point that little world of passion is balanced! Yet, in spite of this intricacy, the poem has a clear ring of a central motive. We receive from it one imaginative tone, of a single creative act. (214-15)¹⁶

And earlier he had emphatically privileged the lyric mode in poetry:

lyrical poetry, precisely because in it we are least able to detach the matter from the form, without a deduction of something of the matter itself, is, at least artistically, the highest and most complete form of poetry. (137)

He goes on from this to mention the “most imaginative compositions of William Blake” and the songs of Shakespeare as some of the best examples of the lyric.¹⁷ Finally, although Pater’s insistence on impersonality militates against an over-explicit espousal of the idea of the personality of the poet in the poem, we can yet find traces of this idea in his writing; in his essay “Wordsworth”, for example he consistently fails to distinguish between the historical William Wordsworth and the Romantic idea of an essence called “Wordsworth” inhering in the poetry. In this passage note that the terms that valorise the poetry are those that can apply to personality:

For nowhere is there so perplexed a mixture of character as in Wordsworth’s own poetry, of work touched with intense and individual power, with work of almost no character at all.... And those who wish to understand his influence, and experience his peculiar savour, must bear with patience the presence of an alien element in Wordsworth’s work, which never coalesced with what is really delightful in it, nor underwent his special power [sic]. (53)

This scheme structures the entire essay, the concluding paragraph of which begins: “such is the figure of the powerful and original poet, hidden away, in part, under those weaker elements in Wordsworth’s poetry...” (65). And those “weaker elements” in his reading of Wordsworth are, more exactly, those which indicate a diffuseness and a lack of intensity.

Pater's work, then, though extreme in its formulations, is typical of critical work of its time, and only its eccentricities hide this. In fact when we come to look at the work of any one of a number of Victorian critics, concentrating as always on those moments where the lyrical disrupts their texts, we will find such an aesthetic pattern.

One early example of such a critical project is E.S.Dallas, who provides an interesting study of the split in Romantic ideology that was occurring at the time he wrote. In his *Poetics* (1852) he adheres to the older view that poetry is a mode of psychological being, rather than of form (9). Yet later when he comes to elaborate an intricate three-fold schema, based on the epic/dramatic/lyric distinction, where, in his version, lyric is the highest of the three, signifying, amongst other things, "Future, Unity, I, Immortality, Life, Good" (119), the modes of expression he uses are almost those of later attempts to valorize the form of the lyric: "In the drama, outward shows are represented; in the epic these are represented while the hidden life is also exhibited; in the lyric is represented the inward life alone" (146). And his assertion that "the English have so signally failed in the lyric that you can almost count on the fingers of one hand all the songs in the English language that are worthy of the name, at least, all those written by Englishmen...." (147) is a typical trope, which describes the existence of a small, select treasure of true poems, as against the multitude of worthless ones.¹⁸

In his 1868 study of Blake, Swinburne divides the canon between "lyrical poems" and "Prophetic Books" and prefers the former to the latter. He describes the lyrics as the equal of the Elizabethan lyrics (9) and goes on:

These [poems] for example, sound singularly plain however sweet, on first hearing; but in time, to a reader fit to appreciate the peculiar properties and merits of a lyric, they come to seem as perfect as well can be.... So beautiful indeed is the structure and choice of language that its author's earlier and later vagaries and erratic indulgences in the most lax or bombastic habits of speech become hopelessly inexplicable.... (10)

Later he speaks of: "the perfect sweetness and sufficiency of Blake's best lyrics" (183). Swinburne was of course one of the poets whose "new poetry" of the 1860s led to the new lyric poetics we have been describing. As such it is highly significant that his, and other "new poets" poetry, found a home in the periodical *The Academy*, which attempted to be the general periodical of the new Victorian critic, man of science and man of letters (Roll-Hansen 179), for the new (lyric) poetry is a fitting accompaniment to the new (lyric) sciences.

Thus was the lyric lyricised by these, and other, critics, and if it seems strange that this should be necessary we should remember that at the same time other poetic genres were being lyricised. As I demonstrate in my Appendix, from about this time the epigram was related to the lyric by a number of critics. So too was the Sonnet, notably by John Dennis in his *Studies in English Literature*, where he declared:

In the Sonnet every word should have meaning, every line add to the beauty of the whole; and the exquisite delicacy of the workmanship should not lessen, but should rather assist in increasing the stability of the structure. A sonnet, brief though it be, is of infinite compass. (395-96)

The lyric history to go with this is not hard to find. Palgrave, for example, has a passage in his "Summary of Book Fourth" in *The Golden Treasury*, on the French Revolution, which seems remarkably similar to the more famous problems that Matthew Arnold had with it:

The first French Revolution was ... one result,—the most conspicuous indeed, yet itself in great measure essentially retrogressive,—of that wider and more potent spirit which through enquiry and attempt, through strength and weakness, sweeps mankind round the circles (not, as some too confidently argue, of Advance, but) of gradual Transformation: and it is to this that we must trace the literature of Modern Europe. (432)

Edmund Gosse's *A Short History of English Literature*, which in an older, wider definition of literature includes a section on Darwin and other Victorian scientific thinkers, uses the idea of poetry thus:

I make no apology for the prominence given throughout to the art of poetry, for it is in verse that style can most definitely and to greatest advantage be studied, especially in a literature like ours, where prose has been mainly written without any other aim than the naive transference of ideas or statement of facts ... while our national poetry, which is one of our main national glories, has been a consecutive chain of consciously elaborated masterpieces. (vi)

Gosse uses this idea as the structuring principle of his *History*, the chapters of which are titled "The Age of Chaucer", "The Age of Wordsworth" &c. And the Epilogue rounds off this presentation of what is to be a common compromise between the claims of literature and evolution, that there exists a series of works, excellent of their own time and instructive in ours: "Every producer of vital literature adds an offshoot to the unrolling and unfolding organism of literary history in its ceaseless processes of growth" (395).¹⁹

When we turn back to Arthur Symons' *The Romantic Movement in English Poetry* we find the other side of the coin. Here, in his Introduction, Symons sets out the appar-

ently ubiquitous belief that “the poetry of the eighteenth century has no fundamental relation with the rest of English poetry” (12).²⁰ He then goes on to attempt to show how the Romantic movement reconstituted the lost tradition of English poetry and in what way it brought it back to its pre-eighteenth century level, an argument that his belief that “the principles of poetry are eternal” (12) necessitates. However he has a difficult task because, whilst he must characterise the nineteenth-century poetry that is the subject of his book, he must at the same time not praise it so much that earlier poetry is wholly lost sight of. This dilemma produces an extraordinarily contradictory passage of attempted theorisation of the literary object:

The quality which distinguishes the poetry of the beginning of the nineteenth century ... is the quality of its imagination, and this quality is seen chiefly as a kind of atmosphere, which adds strangeness to beauty.... I was walking one afternoon along one of the slopes of Hampstead Heath ... and I saw close beside me a line of naked autumn trees, every twig brown and separate: a definite, solid thing, beautiful in structure, sober and admirable in colour.... But at some distance ... there was another line of naked trees, and over their whole outline there was a soft, not quite transparent, veil of mist like the down on fruit: you saw them and the general lines of their structure, but you saw them under a more exquisite aspect, like an image seen in a cloudy mirror. Nothing that was essential in their reality was lost, but they were no longer the naked, real thing; nature had transformed them, as art transforms nature. So imagination, in the English poets, transforms the bare outlines of poetic reality, clothing them with an atmosphere, which is the actual atmosphere of England. (14-15)

But all this is to little avail in sorting out the problems that the progression of history causes Symons. A little later he adds, confusingly: “The best poetry of the nineteenth century is identical, in all essential respects, with the best poetry of every other but the eighteenth century” (15) and subjoins a catalogue of the peculiar excellences of the various periods of English poetry, all of which the Romantic movement sums up and supplements, by adding “strangeness to beauty” (16).

A more robust treatment of this problem is given in Arthur Quiller-Couch’s lecture “On the Terms ‘Classical’ and ‘Romantic’”. His view is that the best literature of all periods, apart from an unfortunate lapse into the pure classicism of the eighteenth century (85), is simultaneously Romantic and Classical, embodying the better parts of both:

I think if you will look into ‘classicism’ and ‘romanticism’ for yourselves, with your own open eyes, you will find—though the whole pother about their difference amounts to nothing that need trouble a healthy man—it amounts to this: some men have naturally a sense of form stronger than their sense of colour: some men have a sense of colour stronger than their sense of form. (87)

So it is that Quiller-Couch proceeds through the rich, romantic-and-classical heritage of English poetry, and in a way similar to Gosse picks out a succession of master-

pieces such as *Hamlet*, “Lycidas” and “The Cenci” (72), grounding them in a romantic-classical past: “I exhibit the passionate verses of Sappho ... beginning [quotes “To me he seems like a god” &c in Greek], or a speech of Phaedra, or Catullus’s lyric of Acme and Septimius” (86-87).²¹

Walter Raleigh’s *On Writing and Writers*, in a chapter entitled “Romanticism in 19th Century Poetry”, first echoes the common judgement of this period on eighteenth-century poetry: “whatever other work the 18th century had done in England it had done little for poetry” (193) and then goes on with a sweeping judgement on the nineteenth century: “in their revival of the beliefs of other ages, the Romantic poets attain, for all the beauty of their poetry, only to make-believe” (199). After this he discusses Browning and Tennyson in terms of the philosophical and literary climate of the mid-nineteenth century. However, his professed purpose is to discover in the nineteenth century the equals of Shakespeare and Milton, which he does in Keats and Shelley.

Yet there are many traces of lyric preoccupations in his historicising, for example, the way in which he differentiates the later Romantics from the earlier, and describes their new art: “The older Romantics taught rebellion: the later poets—Meredith, Kipling, Henley, Housman—celebrate Law” (212), by which I understand him to be describing the apparent difference between earlier Romantic poetic practice, and the stabilisation of their lyric elements later in the century. A little later Meredith is praised for condensing in his poetry “most of the wisdom and reflection that appears in his novels” (213). In another article in the same book we find the sort of praise of the dangerous essence of poetry that is typical of a lyric poetics:

Parents and masters are careful to keep children away from the frontiers of life, because the frontiers are dangerous; but “out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, poetry.” All the great literature of the world has been the attempting of something new. The novelty of the attempt was the motive and meaning of it. It cannot be understood by those who see in it only an established model, who feel nothing of the original excitement of the poet. (217)

John Addington Symonds is a critic who has always been described as one embodying an “evolutionary” criticism and indeed passages like the following are easy to find in his work:

In short, bibliography, linguistic studies, questions of dates and sources, are only important as ancillary to the real work of criticism, which is to interpret the workings of the human spirit by its monuments in arts and letters.

The revolution affected by the romantic movement has delivered us from pseudo-classicism. At the same time spirituality has been restored to the material universe by science, which forces us to regard the cosmos as a single whole, penetrated throughout with life-producing energy. (*Essays* 76, 314)

Yet in the same volume we find an elaborate passage celebrating the fact that the "natural" poetry of the Victorian age has been lyrical:

No literature and no age has been more fertile of lyric poetry than English literature in the age of Victoria. The fact is apparent. I should superfluously burden my readers if I were to prove the point by reference to Byron, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, Rossetti, Clough, Swinburne, Arnold, Tennyson.... our poets of a later day have had to sing from their inner selves, subjectively, introspectively, obeying impulses from nature and the world.... They could not forgo what made them individuals; tyrannous circumstances of thought and experience rendered their sense of personality too acute. When they sang, they sang with their particular voice; and the lyric is the natural channel for such song. (376)

At the same time he celebrates, in a long and fulsome eulogy, the complexity and variety of the lyric (376-77).

This opposition between transhistorical perfection and spiritual evolution can be found surprisingly often, and often in the most naked terms, such as this from Oliver Elton's *The English Muse*:

I have here spoken of [poetry] chiefly as an art, and of the finished work; saying little about origins, surroundings, sources, formative influences, and the like. All that is most important and illuminating; and some of us who have laboured in corners of the vineyard will make light of it. But the ultimate fact, the *unit*, and the real matter in hand, is the individual poem, and behind the poem, the artist. (vii)

By the end of the century it had become a critical commonplace to praise the lyrical character of the nineteenth century, without any apparent tension between history and poetry: the lyric is simply the embodiment of the age. Here for example is Lionel Johnson's view:

Such works ["of prolonged elaboration"] have certainly not been wanting, but they seem less characteristic of the century, which in this matter has tended more and more toward the conclusion of Poe, and [has] inclined to value most highly the verse which is a brief flight of music. ("Poets of the Nineteenth Century" 125)

Harold Monro is also typical in his eulogy of Tennyson, who "has brought modernity to its acme of lyrical expression" (Quoted in Grant 15).

A more extended paean to the lyrical character of the age is found in Henry Newbolt's war-time lecture "What is Poetry?". After the introductory pages, in which he searches for the essence of poetry and finds it in a Bergsonian develop-

ment-of-the-human-spirit, he quotes from *Antony and Cleopatra* and then turns the lecture, definitely and, as it turns out, finally towards the lyric: "Is not lyrical poetry, too, the outcry of the spirit in sorrow because of earthly limitations, or in joy because for a moment they are powerless?" (*New Study* 16). A little later he demarcates a canon for the Lyric, including Shakespeare's Sonnets, Meredith's *Modern Love*, the *Songs and Sonnets* of Donne, the *Dramatic Lyrics* of Browning and the *Wessex Poems* of Hardy (18). Finally as he moves towards the climax of his lecture he has this passage, which is worth quoting at length for its full-hearted acceptance of lyricism as the index of spiritual growth, and for its useful description of the lyric canon of the early twentieth century:

These lyric poems then are among the greatest, and also among the nearest to everyday life. They are so great and so near, that they seem to give in brief eternal moments that very insight and purification which tragedy gave to an earlier world. The growing recognition of this, the growing preference for lyrical poetry, is from time to time deplored by some of our contemporary critics. I do not myself think a reader unreasonable if he prefers a fine lyric, perfect in itself, to a fine passage from an epic or a play of much larger bulk but of unequally sustained beauty. The intuition or the dramatic power expressed in the one may be as great as that elaborated in the other: as Whistler once said, when his etching was rejected as too small, a work of art is not estimated by its acreage. In any case the poets should escape condemnation, for many of the best now living amongst us—Mr Binyon, Mr Bridges, Mr Doughty, Mr Hardy, Mr Hewlett, Mr Sturge Moore, Mrs Woods and Mr Yeats, have written poems of orthodox form and size, and of much more than orthodox beauty. It is true that in their shorter poems they have almost all moved us with an even greater because more concentrated power. My reading of that fact is that it is a sign of the return of man upon his too hurried trail, the advance in which he gained so much, but threw away so much upon the march: a return to the way of intuition, to rapture, to direct swift vision: to a more instinctive joy at the sound of every voice from the Land of Heart's Content. (19)

Two books which appeared in 1913 seem, fittingly, to set the seal on the nineteenth century's view of the lyric and of itself as lyrical. They are also impeccably historical and so unite the two strands of lyric history which we have been pursuing. They are Ernest Rhys' study *Lyric Poetry* and a book by the American critic Felix Schelling, *The English Lyric*, which shares many of Rhys' methods and assumptions. Rhys' outlook is very much one that privileges the lyric above other genres; after a few paragraphs of the Foreword, in which he grapples with the problem of whether the original nature of the lyric as song can still be valid and how this might upset the Romantic, transcendental one he is setting forth, he nevertheless continues:

This need not interfere with our conviction that the art has its separate provenance and works towards a specific ideal of perfection in form. After watching its course in the maze of a given language and a literature like the English, we are only strengthened in our belief of its heaven-sent grace. With Shelley, we accept the transcendent idea of its powers, as moving towards the creative embodiment of a beauty, higher than nature herself, that adds to the ideal wealth of mankind. (vi)

And his book then follows a historical path through the course of English poetry, right from the Anglo-Saxon poems, searching out the lyrical quality immanent in it, as exemplified in this remark at the beginning of the fourth chapter, "The New Poetry": "So far we have had the promise of an art, rather than the art itself; lyric fragments broken from the early saga-like verse ... but not a single complete lyric" (31).

Rhys' likes and dislikes are predictable; he is harsh on the writers of the eighteenth century (237, 241, 247, 249 &c) and celebrates the Romantic poets as revivers of poetry, who returned to "life and human nature" (264). The conclusion to the book is of interest too. The final chapter is titled "The Lyric Canon—Conclusion" as though the conclusion required a reinforcement, at far greater length than the usual conclusion, of the historical argument of the book in order that it can cohere; and indeed he does seem to become bogged down again in the initial problem he started with, namely how the origin of the lyric in song compromises his own essential view of the Lyric. This occupies him for another few pages (361-69) before he concludes:

By these instances from the English anthology [sic] we are able to gain, if not a single conclusive type, a clear sense of the impulse that makes for lyric life and the organic forms to which music inevitably tends. We have seen it adjusting itself at every stage of growth to the instinctive delight in the forces of nature ... It is because it has in the exercise of its functions given a voice to the creative instinct and the generous energies of men ... that one is tempted to set it apart among the kinds of voice. (369-70)

A sib of Rhys' study is that of Felix Schelling, whose historical account is extremely similar to Rhys' ("The Lyrical Decline; from the Restoration to the Death of Cowper ... The Lyric and the Romantic Revival" (Contents' Page (xi))). Although his introductory chapter (1-8) is less Romantic in its formulations than Rhys'—in fact he is keen to place the Lyric in some sort of hierarchy of genres, rather than in a transcendental role—the ending of his book is similar to Rhys' insofar as he indulges in the same reinforcement, the telling of the story over again, lest it be misinterpreted (291-300). Although his attitude is a more reasonable one than Rhys' extreme position the same imperative towards finding an essence of the lyric is found in his text:

In this our study of the English lyric, we have been distraught with many considerations. For the lyric in one age was not the lyric of all, and our point of view has necessarily shifted with the changing procession of time. Two elements, however, remain permanent to distinguish the lyric from other kinds of poetry: that which makes the lyric an expression of the world within, and secondly, the element of song. (291-92)

Thus these two studies constitute the final academic confirmation of the lyrical history we have been describing in this chapter; generic criticism, which had become lyric criticism, is now simply criticism.

Notes:

¹ I understand, as will be apparent by now, modernity itself to be Romantic. So I see the distinction between “the Romantics” (Wordsworth/Coleridge/Shelley/Keats/Byron) and later poets as obfuscatory.

² It is interesting in this regard to note that in M.H Abrams’ famous account of Romanticism, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, which is very much Romanticism’s own history of itself, Abrams uses Mill as the example of an unequivocal Romanticism, after finding Wordsworth too eighteenth-century for his purposes (23).

³ Arthur Symons repeats Poe’s insistence on the shorter poem with approbation (*Symbolist Movement* 137).

⁴ My best guess is that he is alluding to these two lines:

“I know not, I ask not, if guilt’s in that heart,
But I know that I love thee, whatever thou art.”

⁵ The magazine was also an early champion of Shelley-the-lyrist (see Engelburg 155, 166 &c).

⁶ These are “The Philosophy of Poetry” by “S.” and the unsigned “A Prosing on Poetry”.

⁷ Lawrence Poston traces the idea of “lyric compression” back to Coleridge (162), but describes Mill’s literal interpretation of this idea as a new development (170, 181).

⁸ Bearing in mind the connections I have suggested in earlier chapters between the sort of lyrical discourses described here and those of economics, Mill’s work as an economist is apposite here.

⁹ I have also made use of Barbara Packer’s account in this section.

¹⁰ It is no accident, I believe, that Schiller ends this letter by mentioning Anacreon and Catullus as poets whose works are susceptible to a new, non-moral, aesthetic reading.

¹¹ Bourdieu has located a similar break at the same time in France, connecting it too with the emergence of Symbolist poetry (39, 49, 62).

¹² It is also worth remembering that it was at about this time that the short story first emerged as a recognised, and popular, form.

¹³ Henley was, interestingly enough, the first poet of note to use free verse in his short poems, a fact which I discuss in my treatment of Imagism in the last chapter.

¹⁴ The dates of first publication in book-form of collections predominantly lyrical poems by these authors are: Blunt (*Songs and Sonnets*) 1875, Meynell 1875, Henley 1888, Bridges (*Shorter Poems*) 1890, Stevenson 1896, Hardy (*Wessex Poems*) 1901, Hopkins (ed. Bridges) 1921. In the paragraph that follows the dates are similarly the first publication in book form of a substantially lyrical collection; periodical publication would in most cases have preceded this.

¹⁵ Arnold may well have been further behind the times than I have indicated. In an article on William Henry Smith, a minor critic of the 1830s, David Lantané argues that a major consideration for Smith was “the compression of poetic language and its connection with the inexpressible”, which Lantané describes thus:

With the rise of a view of language as a subtle tool for probing consciousness, many writers raised questions about the exact limits of the poem’s communicative powers, with some arguing that the pure poetry—inevitably lyrical—burst instantly in the reader’s mind.... [Smith] admires “those strains of poetry in which the meaning is conveyed in a flash, by bold types and fragmentary efforts of the imagination....” (161-62)

¹⁶ Raymond Williams has described these aesthetics in the following terms:

he embodies the negative element that is always latent in this position: the reduction of the whole process, characterised by its movement and interaction, to a fragmentary, isolated product—Pater's image of the contemplating being who has struggled 'with those forms till its secret is won from each and then lets each fall back into its place, in the supreme, artistic view of life.' (*Culture & Society* 168)

¹⁷ It is surprising how often these two groups of poems are used as example of the truest type of poetry. George Moore's *Anthology of Pure Poetry*, for example, a very late aesthetic anthology which designedly includes only poems displaying "no hint of subjectivity" (34-35), is largely made up of them.

¹⁸ By the time of his later work on Aesthetics, *The Gay Science* (1856), he had ceased to regard the lyric as the highest of the genres. However Winifred Hughes points out that the proto-psychological theory developed in this work can easily be assimilated to a Paterian aesthetics (17).

¹⁹ In his lecture "What is Poetry?" Henry Newbolt points out that the ideas used to describe poetry are always those of the age: Coleridge and Kant's in the early nineteenth century, Darwin's in the later. His own formulation of the essence of poetry relies heavily on Bergson (*New Study* 14-16).

²⁰ An idea which can be related to Coleridge's strictures on eighteenth-century poetry, which we examined in chapter one. In its more extreme form, however, it became an orthodoxy early on in the nineteenth century, for example, in a review of Tennyson's poetry by A.H Hallam in 1831 (620).

²¹ This war-time lecture ends with a pathological anti-German tirade, directed against the unfortunate Danish scholar Georg Brandes, which uses the lyric in an aggressive defence of the mother-country (88-89). The fact that Brandes was Jewish may also have fuelled "Q"s rancour.