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LATE VICTORIAN JOURNALISTIC CRITICISM:

A STUDY OF GOSSE, LANG, SAINTSBURY, AND CHURTON COLLINS

DISSERTATION

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By

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Chapter

1 A NOT SO SACRED WOOD
2 CRITICISM FOR THE "MANY-HEADED"
3 "IT IS POETRY THAT DOES NOT DIE"
4 AFTER THE THREE-DECKER—WHAT?
5 ON THE THEATER'S PERIPHERY
6 TOWARD AN "ENTENTE CORDIALE"
7 THE ADDRESS TO THE "MANY-HEADED"
8 CONCLUSION
INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Because Gosse, Lang, Saintsbury, and Collins wrote so long and so much, I have imposed somewhat arbitrary standards upon my material—considering mainly essays originally published between 1875 and 1900 and subsequently reprinted in collected editions. Because these critics produced most of their critical journalism in these years, I think it is fair to state that they are late-Victorian and not Edwardian critics—at least it is the late-Victorian aspect of their work with which I deal. I have used only republished works on the assumption that each man, or his editor, would collect those pieces which he felt best represented his own work and theories. Within these limits I hope to reconstruct a fairly accurate picture of the kinds of criticism published in magazines and newspapers at the end of Victoria's reign and to deal with that part of it which has the most value for the modern reader.
Chapter 1  A NOT SO SACRED WOOD

The letters, journals, and essays of the 1880's and 1890's are filled with laments over the low state of contemporary criticism in Great Britain. The commentators were not sure whether the fault lay in popular journalism, a lower level of reading taste, or poorly trained critics. What they did agree upon was the dismal superficiality of most criticism. In 1888 Henry James complained to Robert Louis Stevenson, "Nothing lifts its hands in these islands save blackguard party politics. Criticism is of an abject density and puerility—it doesn't exist—it writes the intellect of our race too low."1

Everybody, it seemed, was writing about books. Office boys, editors' maiden aunts, country clergymen, fresh young Oxford and Cambridge graduates, all shared in the packet from the publisher. A glance at the most influential magazines of the day, the Saturday Review, the Fortnightly, the Cornhill, the Nineteenth Century, the Athenaeum, and the Spectator, at the editorial pages of newspapers like the Pall Mall Gazette or the Daily News; at even the more popular magazines like Longman's or Macmillan's, reveals the extent to which literature was talked about. Every journal had its critical articles, its department of books, or its pages of literary chitchat.

To fill these literary columns required, beyond the occasional amateur reviewer, a host of highly professional men of letters. For the period 1870-1890 the Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature

identifies sixty-eight of these "Critics and Essayists," most of them highly prolific. George Saintsbury, on his own testimony, produced the equivalent of one hundred volumes of magazine material during his twenty years as a critical journalist; Andrew Lang published at least a thousand identifiable articles and reviews between 1875 and 1912. Indeed, sheer bulk makes a thorough study of late nineteenth century journalistic criticism almost impossible within the limits of a single dissertation. The best that can be done is to take samples.

Such a sampling is found in the work of four journalistic critics who belong to what Arnold Bennett called the "professorial squad": Edmund Gosse (1849-1928), George Saintsbury (1845-1933), Andrew Lang (1844-1912), and John Churton Collins (1848-1908). With perhaps the exception of Collins, the names, if not the work, of these men are fairly familiar to modern students. All of them but Lang, who declined several appointments, obtained, at least partially upon the strength of their critical abilities, appointments of varying length at British universities. Gosse, who has become a byword for inaccurate scholarship, is now remembered mainly for the sardonic sparkle of his conversation and for over-imaginative pen portraits of contemporary writers. Lang is known as a translator of Homer, a compiler of fairy stories, and an early student of folklore. As a critic he is usually dismissed as the man who preferred She to Tess of the d'Urbervilles. Saintsbury is that eminent Edinburgh professor, wine expert, and unreconstructed Tory of literature whose weighty, multi-
volumed histories are excellent crib material. That he was for twenty years a practicing journalist is often forgotten, the road to academic heights having somewhat changed since his time. Collins is remembered, if at all, as a pedantic but sincere scholar, the critic who first drew attention to Gosse's faults as a literary historian and a leader in the battle to loosen the philologist's hold on literary studies in the universities. All were contributors of essays and reviews to the prominent journals of the eighties and nineties. Gosse with his interest in personality, Saintsbury with his catholic taste and style-oriented judgment, Lang with his philistine literary standards and familiar-essay technique, and Collins with his vicious critical attacks and rather niggling source hunting scholarship offer a fairly complete representation of the types of criticism which the average Englishman of the age read. These men were not "great" critics, but they did have influence and they did help to define and maintain the role of literature in a rapidly changing society.

1. Late-Victorian "abstracts and brief chronicles"

Whether it took the form of scholarly article, causerie, or book review, most of the criticism of the eighties and nineties was first published in periodicals. Such was the genesis of landmarks of the era like Leslie Stephen's *Hours in a Library*, Oscar Wilde's "The Critic as Artist," William Ernest Henley's *Views and Reviews*, and Walter Pater's *Appreciations*. The critic who wished to make a book
gathered his magazine and newspaper contributions, sometimes wrote a
new introduction, perhaps edited or expanded work originally done in
haste, and republished the material. As a result there was a very real
connection between the state of criticism at large and the limitations
and requirements of the periodical and daily press.

No one of the many periodicals which published material about
books can be singled out as the influential organ in these two dec­
ades. Circulation figures are of little help, even when available,
and may, in truth, be quite misleading. Thus although the Fortnightly
under John Morley (1867-1882) was the undisputed leader of progressive
thought on science, politics, ethics, religion, and literature, its
circulation, according to its editor, was a mere 2,500.² Frequently,
too, the individual critic was more influential than the organ in
which he published. Andrew Lang could make or break a book with a
leader in the Daily News or an "At the Sign of the Ship" column in
Longman's. Sometimes a particularly striking essay, no matter where
printed, could cause reverberations in other periodicals. Churton
Collins' chastisement of Edmund Gosse in the pages of the Quarterly
raised critical hackles everywhere, in spite of the fact that the
Quarterly had but a limited circulation. Finally, knowledge of the
material in these periodicals was pretty generally distributed; many
of the publications themselves devoted several columns an issue to
reviewing the contents of their rivals.

² Alvar Ellegard, "The Readership of the Periodical Press in Mid-
Victorian Britain," Göteborgs Universitets Arsskrift, LXIII, no. 3
(1957), 27.
No longer did the great reviews, the Edinburgh (1803-1929), the Quarterly (1809-date), or the Westminster (1824-1914), dominate the critical scene as they had done earlier in the century. Addressed as they always had been to the more highly educated classes, they made little attempt to keep abreast of new books or to adapt themselves to a public grown accustomed to the new journalism. Bastions of traditional values, the quarterlies were in the main conservative and dogmatic in their treatment of literature. Ostensibly reviews, their articles were based as always upon a group of books, usually scholarly, on a certain subject in history, politics, travel, economics, morals, or literature. The length of the article, twenty to sixty pages, gave its writer the opportunity to do more than a mere book review—more often than not he used his basic books merely as a starting place for an original essay of his own. A reader who wished to keep abreast of current literature would have been ill advised to subscribe to either the Edinburgh or the Westminster. The latter was no longer the important critical organ it had been when it championed utilitarianism, and aside from a few pages devoted to current reviewing it published very few articles on belles-lettres. The Edinburgh, too, much softened since the days of extreme Whiggism, dogmatic criticism, and Jeffrey, no longer had a high critical standing, although its political and social articles were still first rate. Under the editorship of Henry Reeve (1852-1895) and Arthur D. Elliot (1895-1912), fewer than one-eighth of the articles in the Edinburgh con-

3 I am indebted for many of the following statements to Walter Graham, English Literary Periodicals (New York, 1930).
cerned belles-lettres. By contrast, the Quarterly was still the literary organ for those whose interests lay in Toryism, the Church of England, and the older critical values. It seems to have taken over literary subjects as its two major rivals dropped them; by 1900 almost half of its contents dealt with literature. Although its vituperative air was softened in this age of gentlemen, its reviewers behind their cloak of anonymity frequently lashed out at their enemies. Because of its growing attention to literature and its generally solid and carefully written articles, it remained an important organ for traditional criticism addressed to a limited audience of the upper intellectual classes.

The general literary magazines, those which published original fiction and verse as well as essays, have little relevance to the history of criticism except in so far as they illustrate the movement toward the lighter touch in literary matters. The most important of these were the Cornhill (1860-date), Macmillan's (1859-1907), Blackwood's (1817-date), and Longman's (1882-1905). None made any attempt to be a review organ and none was at all consistent in its use of literary subjects. Longman's vacillated from issue to issue, sometimes including critical articles, sometimes not. Primarily devoted to first-rate serial stories of a popular kind, Longman's took its tone from Andrew Lang, whose department at the end of each issue was popular criticism at its best: easy, informal, digressive, witty chitchat about books.

The Cornhill at the beginning of the last quarter of the nineteenth century was unquestionably the most important of these mis-
cellarries. Even Matthew Arnold preferred to publish in it because it had he said the "best" readers and paid the highest rates.\(^4\) Although certainly not so profound or serious as the quarterlies, the \textit{Cornhill}, nevertheless, published criticism of a consistently high order. It too echoed the critical tone of its editor, Leslie Stephen, whose series "Hours in a Library" is one of the high points of late nineteenth century criticism. One must realize, however, that only a small portion of the magazine's pages contained such material. Sensitive to public taste, the \textit{Cornhill} was publishing a more "popular" kind of writing about books as the century closed. For example, Stephen's serious, somewhat traditional essays had been replaced by a new department, "Conferences on Men and Books" by "Urbanus Sylvan": humorous talk about such subjects as impressionism, the comic view, and Irish legend.

\textit{Blackwood's}, its circulation in the mid-nineties down to a few hundreds,\(^5\) was having a difficult time. Like the \textit{Cornhill}, "Maga" contained among its serials, poetry, and general articles a sprinkling of critical essays by eminent men of letters. It also made some attempt to review current books, particularly fiction in the department "New Novels." Other critical series which appeared occasionally were "The Old Saloon," a chatty consideration of new books; "Odd Volumes," by Sir Herbert Maxwell; and Charles Whibley's


"Musings Without Method," which sometimes touched on literature. Always a champion of a "nimble and more familiar" kind of criticism, its contents were still of a high quality. In spite of its few readers, Blackwood's remained a great maker of modern reputations.

Although there was some falling off toward the end of the century, Macmillan's printed more solid material about literature by more eminent contributors than either the Cornhill or Blackwood's. The scope of its interests was almost as wide as that of the Quarterly. In the volume for 1880-1881, for example, its readers found Arnold on Byron, Miss M. Bentham Edwards on the novels of Fernan Caballero, Mrs. Oliphant on Carlyle, Saintsbury on Etienne Dolet, Alfred Austin on Swinburne's criticism, Sidney Colvin on Tennyson, H. Buxton Forman and Stopford Brooke on Shelley, and Sebastian Evans on a lost Spenserian poem. As is true of all the general magazines, of course, the pages in Macmillan's devoted to criticism are but a slight percentage of the whole. In addition, the magazine avoided the gossipy column and made little effort to review new books.

These older reviews and literary miscellanies, however, had little more than a side effect upon literary thought in the late nineteenth century. It was left to the newer monthly and weekly reviews to carry most of the weight. Pre-eminent among the monthlies was the Fortnightly, which under Morley's editorship showed the way to breaking the pattern of the older reviews. Taking the best of both worlds, it combined the quarterlies' serious articles on profound subjects with the serial story and poetry of the literary monthlies. Although it did not pretend to appeal to any but an intellectual reader, the
inroads of journalism are evident in its pages. Its articles embraced a somewhat more popular subject matter and were considerably shorter than those in the older reviews. But most important for the evolution of critical style was Morley's insistence on clear, organized writing. He gave one of his contributors, Frederic Harrison, the following advice:

Light judicial philosophic politics in easy undress; a mixture of the jaunty and severe. Above all things direct, not allusive; no esoteric smirks for this party or that; but a manly downright sort of stroke, taking all things seriously but not solemnly, putting events in their place and due proportion. An artistic whole certainly ought to be aimed at.

Because of Morley's predilections, the Fortnightly was somewhat over-weighted on the political side. Even so, fully one-tenth of its pages was devoted to literary subjects. Making no attempt to keep pace with current book publication, it did maintain a balance between old and new, British and foreign, literary subjects in articles by such critics as Grant Allen, William Minto, Swinburne, Colvin, Dowden, Gosse, Pater, Saintsbury, Symons, Collins, and Lang. With such a proportion of clearly written criticism and with such contributors, the Fortnightly was a major organ for the dissemination of literary opinion among the upper-and upper-middle class readers.

A comparable position was held among the weeklies by the Saturday Review. It, too, until the death of Beresford Hope in 1887,

was one of the leaders of literary taste. Not only could a Saturday article determine the success or failure of a new book, but also the Saturday's opinions frequently determined the attitude of lesser reviews. Nevertheless, its most important enduring effect upon criticism was, like the Fortnightly's, probably stylistic. A typical issue of the Saturday contained closely printed political leaders, miscellaneous leaders, and book reviews, the latter forming the bulk of the weekly's contribution to criticism. A Saturday subscriber could expect to find many important opinions by the outstanding men of letters of the late nineteenth century, opinions characterized by a frankness reminiscent of an older critical day.

With the exception of a brief renaissance (1894-1898) under the general editorship of Frank Harris, the Saturday's influence decreased as the century closed. Its place was taken by other weekly papers: the Spectator (1818-date), the Academy (1896-1916), and the Athenaeum (1828-1920), whose somewhat specialized reputation had remained high during the reign of the Saturday. The Spectator reached an exceptional height of prosperity for a critical weekly and held its position well into the new century. Its pages show its similarity to the Saturday as well as some important differences, which probably could explain its

8 Ibid., pp. 323f.
9 Graham, p. 323.
growing circulation. Purporting to be "a truthful and attractive record of all social movements, and of all that was accomplished in art, science, or literature" it published articles which were somewhat more varied and belletristic as well as more popularly written. Mainly a review of current books, the Spectator was more fair minded and less belligerent than its rivals, finding merit in such writers as Samuel Butler, Henley, Kipling, Pater, Stevenson, George Moore, and Hardy. On the whole, it was representative of the newer, more tolerant criticism which became popular toward the end of the century.

The Athenaeum and the Academy were more exclusively literary organs in that neither devoted space to politics or current affairs. The Athenaeum, which enjoyed a reputation in the seventies and eighties for fairmindedness and accuracy, was considered necessary reading by both literary and scientific men. A review of literature, music, science, fine arts and drama, it was actually five publications in one. The literary section, which occupied the bulk of the pages, consisted of reviews of current literature, poetry, a column of book trade gossip, and several original papers. The scholarly tone of these and the fact that the Athenaeum published meeting dates for learned societies indicate that its readers were mainly professional men.

The Academy is particularly interesting because its evolution

10 Ibid., p. 324.
shows the trend toward specialization in the review organ. At threepence it was somewhat slighter than its fellows, but in its pages literature was the central interest. In the eighties it contained three sections--literature, science, and art; by the end of the century it was devoted almost exclusively to literature. Thus a typical issue in the nineties contained several reviews, a section on current novels, a foreign letter, notes and news of the literary scene, the "Book Market," correspondence, and a review of reviews. Particularly relevant to criticism was the inclusion in each number of three or four brief essays about such subjects as "Soldier's Songs," "Hymns," "What People Read," and "Was Byron a Dandy?" This was the sort of material which after 1891 filled the pages of the completely specialized and lavishly illustrated monthly Bookman.

The market for critical essays was thus quite varied and part of the task in becoming a professional critic lay in learning to tailor one's style to these various editorial requirements. Although most critics did not limit their work to a single periodical, they did have favorites, and the subject matter and style of these certainly had an effect upon their individual criticism. A critic who could make the scholarly, traditional approach would find a welcome in the older quarterlies; one who could write clearly and frankly would turn to the newer monthlies and weeklies; one who could chat like an urbane gentleman to a somewhat general audience would turn to the Academy, the Bookman, and the literary magazine.
2. The rules of the game

One of the favorite literary activities of any generation is the attempt to assess the value of current criticism, usually in somewhat despondent terms. Certainly the last two decades of the nineteenth century had its share of critical doom criers. In an age characterized by the encroachment of journalism and alleged "Americanization" upon even the most staid periodical, the inclination of most commentators on the genre was to tar with the same brush an outspoken review in the Saturday and a long essay in the Fortnightly. A few writers like Henry James and Grant Allen distinguished between day to day reviewing and a higher sort of criticism, but for the most part other writers considered the critic a reviewer and the review criticism. It was a "craft" or "trade" with rules for working.

The various critics of criticism, however, found it extremely difficult to arrive at any specific set of rules, mainly because of the growing "personal" element in the critical act and the resultant variegation of practice. While Leslie Stephen could, in 1876, concede that Newman's illative sense came into play in the critical process, he still asserted that the decisions of the


greater critics formed a kind of case law against which further 
judgments could be tested. But, as the years passed, even the "case
law" seems to have been forgotten as criticism became more and more
an individual matter. A further difficulty in the attempt to arrive
at specific rules lay in the belief, in some quarters at any rate,
that true criticism existed in and for itself and not as a service
to a reader who wished to select a book or to better understand one
he was reading. A Cornhill writer in 1900 ironically summed up
this particular trend:

I prophesy in sober seriousness that this season will be
remembered in the annals of publishing as the epoch of the
final enfranchisement of literary criticism. Let me ex-
plain what I mean. In its humble origin criticism was
nothing but the appraisement of a work of art for the con-
venience of customers, a form in which it still survives in
the ex cathedra pronouncements of Messrs. Sotheby, Wilkinson,
& Hodge, or Christie and Manson. The next step was to take
on style, and in this stage, which has persisted through
the latter half of this waning century, criticism began to
be valued for its own sake. . . . The criticism of books
has been conducted lately on the same eloquent principles.
It has ceased to be of consequence what a critic has to say,
for no one ever buys a book in deference to his criticism;
what has come to matter is how he says it; and if he says it
well, his own book or essay will be bought.11

A primary concern in almost all contemporary surveys of the
state of late nineteenth century criticism was the attitude the
critic should adopt. Should he attack flawed work wherever he found
it or should he be tolerant of even the bad book? Frequently, right
to the end of the century, one finds both the waspish attack and the
overestimate in almost all the prominent review organs. Both
practices were widely decried, even though slating as a "national

11 "The New Criticism," Cornhill, VIII n.s. (1900), 116f.
sport" was clearly on the wane. In 1876, Leslie Stephen pro-
claimed the critic's right to attack any book which was immoral or
obviously bad. By 1900, many critics simply refused to write about
a book they did not like. This change to a softer critical attitude
did not meet with unqualified approval. Even though most writers
agreed that the movement away from vicious and high-handed attack
was salutary, many felt the swing from the "hanging judge" attitude
had gone too far. "We cannot believe," wrote William Watson in 1891,
"that he criticiseth best who loveth best all styles both great and
small."1

A second point of discussion was whether the critic should, in
Leslie Stephen's words, "anticipate the judgment of posterity" by
considering new writers or whether he should take the safer path and
focus upon writers with established reputations. The problem was
a very real one to the professional critic. Faced with lengthening
publishers' lists and the experimentation of newer writers, he might
in his bewilderment be tempted to rationalize that time could take
the place of critical acumen. Indeed most modern scholars attack
the criticism of the turn of the century on these grounds. Frank
Swinnerton describes the rage of young Edwardian authors against the

15 Watson, pp. 792ff.
16 "Thoughts on Criticism, By a Critic," Cornhill, XXXIV (1876),
556ff.
17 Pp. 792f.
18 "Thoughts on Criticism, By a Critic," p. 560.
critical "mandarins" who had "dropped a curtain between the great and good and the merely current."¹⁹ Most of these "mandarins" had learned their practice in the late-Victorian era. Malcolm Elwin asserts that critical "pundits" like Gosse, Lang, and Collins "rarely risked a judgment on anybody who had not been dead sufficiently long to have passed through the fire of posthumous criticism."²⁰

Such assertions, however, are not quite the whole truth. Certain critics like Edward Garnett maintained that the principal business of criticism was to deal with modern books, to account for them and to explain the contemporary scene through them.²¹ In addition, most practicing critics did write reviews of new authors; material, still buried in the pages of periodicals, which frequently contains forthright and intelligent opinions on current literature. It is true, however, that the critics did somewhat ignore modern English books in their full dress critical essays, those, for example, which might be published in the Cornhill or the Fortnightly. "It is a characteristic of our higher criticism in England at the present day," wrote Grant Allen in 1882, "that it confines itself mainly to the past or to made reputations. It publishes solid books and essays, but it does not descend into the arena of the current journalistic press."²²

²⁰ Old Gods Falling, p. 119.
The critical contents of almost any periodical except the weekly reviews buttress the point.

A third area of discussion concerned itself with the character of the "true," "real," or "master" critic. To some, like Walter Besant and Stephen, he was a calm magistrate, administering literary judgment from his elevated bench; to others, like the aesthetic critics, he was a highly sensitive being with the power of vividly communicating his sensations. A very few like Henry James and Edward Garnett thought his function was sacrificial because he offered himself as a "general touchstone." Most critics of criticism, however, were much more "practical" in their characterization of the ideal critic. Normally he was considered as having the abilities of a good reviewer magnified. William Knight's comment in 1896 is typical:

"...the qualifications of the critic are as great, [sic] and are perhaps rarer, than those of the original author. Chief amongst them is a knowledge of the subject discussed, as full as, if not fuller than, that of the author; next, the power of sifting materials, and a sense of proportion; in addition, judicial impartiality and the power of appraisal, of which fairmindedness is the dominant note; and, finally, the readiness to appreciate what is new, if it be a genuine development of tendencies which have been lying latent for a time."

In all the attempts to outline the critical personality and its proper mode of working there is agreement on but two points: the function of the true critic is an exceptionally high one, and the true critic is very rare.

23 "Criticism as Theft," Nineteenth Century, XXXIX (1896), 266.
Matthew Arnold was one of the two major seminal influences in late nineteenth century literary thought. Accorded even in his own lifetime the rank of a great British critic, he was a force to be reckoned with. Even so, he did not stand at the head of any definite school. Perhaps because of his growing interest in religion and politics in his last years, which diverted him from specifically literary criticism, younger critics thought of him as a voice from the past. Invariably when commentators wrote about Arnold in the nineties, their praise was tempered. It appears his reputation suffered because he was a transitional figure. In his championship of Sainte Beuve, his avowed desire to see the object as it really is, his urging that fresh intelligence be brought to bear upon the work of art, he anticipated the newer attitudes in criticism. But in his touchstones, his concept of the grand style, his insistence upon the morality of the artist, he was still regarded as a dogmatic critic of mid-century with fixed moral, artistic, and political standards.

Extending as he did the definition of criticism to include the "disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate" not only the best of all literary work but also the best of all knowledge, Arnold constructed a somewhat too ideal theory of criticism for the practicing critic. For if all literature must be judged in terms of the "high seriousness" of the classics and if only the "best" is to be propagated, the professional critic in his day-to-day dealings with books could have practically nothing positive to say. Arnold, himself,
recognized this objection in "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" but still maintained that the critic's duty was to consider only the best. Faced with this high concept of the critical function as a force for creating a climate of ideas, it is small wonder that none who came after him could fulfill his hopes. His importance to later critics, then, rests not in such concepts as his touchstones—the whole movement of criticism was away from such testing in the late nineteenth century—but in his attitude that a critic should approach a work of art with no preconceived notions.

Much more important an influence was Walter Pater, the inadvert­ent and somewhat embarrassed founder of the aesthetic school. In his attempt to find the "formula," that special quality which the mind of the artist imposes upon his art, Pater worked empirically. Both the formula technique and the appeal to experience permeate the criticism of his followers. Next, although indebted to Arnold, he refused to impose any preconceived standards upon literature and avoided literary types for which he had no sympathy; so too did many late nineteenth century "gentleman" critics. Particularly influential, however, was Pater's concept of style. His belief that beauty is caused by perfect form, that perfect form is the result of painstaking effort, and that form and matter are identical is echoed again and again in the criticism of his followers.24

Pater's major influence upon criticism was one he never intended.

24 For Pater's ideas about style see "Style," Appreciations (London, 1889).
By the time of Marius he had come to believe "that art actually enlarges and purifies the soul, by developing the emotions and intellect and by holding up a vision of the ideal." But it was the earlier Pater of the Renaissance to whom the aesthetic critics turned. Advocating in this early book the life of the senses, the power of art to give the beholder intellectual and emotional excitement, Pater was interpreted by a group of young artists, including Oscar Wilde and Arthur Symons, as having issued a carte blanche invitation to kick over the traces of conventional mid-Victorian artistic standards. In his interest in the sensuous elements in art, in his mingling of the arts, in his love for the exotic, and in his melancholy, he was typical of this whole movement. Pater remained aloof, however, from the more adolescent aesthetes, those who loved to épater le bourgeois by deliberately flouting tradition.

To some of his contemporaries and to more modern critics such as T. S. Eliot, Paul Elmer More, and Irving Babbit, Pater was a mere impressionist whose norm is the notorious "Mona Lisa" passage in the "Leonardo Da Vinci." This kind of Swinburnian impressionism is in truth but a small part of Pater's work. The reason it is overemphasized lies undoubtedly in the work of Oscar Wilde, who repudiated his master's main critical goal: the communication of the "virtue" by which a work of art gives joy. It was Wilde whom the British


26 Ibid., p. 136.
public took to be typical of the aesthetic critic. Pater, returning to a more traditional English morality in his mature criticism, wrote well into the nineties but seems not to have had much late influence.

The cul-de-sac into which the decadents led criticism is thus best illustrated by Oscar Wilde. As expressed in "The Critic as Artist," first published in the Nineteenth Century (1890) as "The True Function and Value of Criticism," his ideas are a compound of good sense and foolish tautology. Much of the essay restates Arnold. Ernest, Wilde's spokesman in the dialogue, maintains that we owe to the Greeks the critical spirit, the recognition that the two highest arts are life and literature, "life and the perfect expression of life." Criticism is necessary for creation because it constructs "fresh forms" from which the artist may work. The end of criticism is to assist the reader by making him cosmopolitan, by helping him rise above nationalism, and by showing him that no position is final. In this much there is little to quarrel with, at least on the grounds of good sense. But when Wilde tries to elevate criticism above art itself, he loses his head by asserting that the critic is a creative force who uses the products of the arts as the artist uses "the visible world of form and colour, or the unseen world of passion and of thought." This idea led him to believe that criticism is "the record of one's soul," and that the critic is not at all interested in seeing the object as it really is. "Who cares

27 XXVII (July, September 1890), 123-147; 435-459.
if Mr. Ruskin's views on Turner are sound or not? What does it matter?" The true critic "will look upon art as a Goddess whose mystery it is his province to intensify, and whose majesty his privilege to make more marvellous in the eyes of men."

The second part of the essay, "Remarks Upon the Importance of Doing Nothing," is an attack upon English values. Art, Wilde claims, dismissing four hundred years of British tradition, is amoral. The "elect," he maintains, exist "to do nothing"; so much for British energy. The critic cannot be fair, because art is a passion, and what one prefers today one may not prefer tomorrow. The critic cannot be sincere, because sincerity borders upon the ethical and there is no morality in art. The critic must have "a temperament exquisitely susceptible to beauty" and must live in an environment which will cultivate this beauty. His aim is to exist and to perfect himself.

Although criticism as a personal record was quite common in the late nineteenth century, aesthetic criticism as such fell into considerable disfavor. With Wilde it split into two segments of belief. The one, following a misreading of Pater, saw art as simply another stimulus for the individual who tried to live according to his sensations. The other, following William Morris, and much more valuable in the long run, felt art should be used to add beauty to the common and useful things of life. Nevertheless, to the average Briton the typical aesthete was the "greenery-yallerly" Bunthorne with his "languid love of lilies."
The critical attack upon aestheticism as "unmanly" was led by William E. Henley and his devoted coterie on the National Observer. His life a never-ending fight against illness, Henley developed a strong activist philosophy; man was put on earth to exercise his "unconquerable soul" in the "gymnasium" of time. Objecting to the aesthetes as effeminate, he yet adopted many of their techniques and beliefs; rejecting mid-Victorian "humbug" in art, he still was quite close to Ruskin. The best literature was that of the British eighteenth century, the kind which followed Anglo-Saxon tradition. He had no use for Richardson; Pamela was a "walking Phallus," "an essay in vulgarity--of sentiment and morality alike--which has never been surpassed."28 Fielding was "the heroic man of letters" "worthy to dispute the palm with Cervantes and Sir Walter."29

Henley drew a good bit of theory from mid-Victorian aesthetic, even as he damned much of mid-Victorian literary practice. Like Ruskin he believed that the artist with his power to see into and interpret the life of things is essentially moral. The artist is a communicator and his product is best judged by his ability to make it correspond with reality and by his power of arousing a sympathetic receptivity in the mind of his auditor.30 Henley objected strongly to the "humbug" of mid-Victorianism, but he did not believe, as

Wilde did, that art was above morals. His disgust at Richardson, his attempt in 1897 to rescue Burns from the "moral prudes," his objection to Stevenson's entombment as a "seraph in chocolate" in the Balfour biography are all attacks on "humbug," that which must be swept away before art can return to a truly moral base. "Which is to be pitied?" he cried in his essay on Fielding. "The artist of Amelia and Jonathan Wild, the creator of the Westerns and Parson Adams and Colonel Bath? or we the whipper-snappers of sentiment—the critics who can neither read nor understand?"31

In his blindness to the values of introspective art, Henley differed from the aesthetes. But in much of his critical practice, he was indebted to them, particularly to Pater. Henley's major concern was also style: "restraint of expression and purity of form."32 He organized his essays around the "master quality of the artist" and worked with epigrams Wilde might have claimed and with passages of impressionism reminiscent of Swinburne. But philosophically he was far from the aesthete's faith in art as an escape from social conflict. Literature to Henley was valuable only in so far as it could be turned back to the practical realities of life. It was this attitude which served as a basis for Edwardian realism.33

Many of the critics of the late nineteenth century wrote from the security of a university chair. Hardly typical, but certainly one of

31 P. 211.
32 P. 72.
33 P. 179.
the best of these professor critics, was Edward Dowden, whose essays show both the subjective critic and the academic scholar at work. Perhaps more than any other critic in his day he had a deep faith in democracy and in the critic's role in leading that democracy. In neither theory nor practice had he withdrawn into an ivory tower.

The great value of democracy to literature, Dowden believed, lay in its ability to assimilate all kinds of talents, in its creation of "vigorous character," and in a social atmosphere conducive to the widest play of individual minds. Every thinker in such a society can get a hearing from a group of men large enough to give him sympathy and encouragement. The great danger from democracy, however, lies in the tendency of a free people to think in abstractions. In his own criticism Dowden tried to combat this tendency by using exact knowledge and clear thought. It is always necessary for a critic in a democracy, he proclaimed, to challenge current notions, phrases, and sentiments, be the public willing or unwilling to listen. In a way, Dowden furnishes a raison d'être for what Stanley Hyman calls the translator critic, one interested in interpreting a work of art for a less learned reader.

Dowden's debt to Arnold is somewhat limited. He conceded the older critic's contribution to the self-knowledge of the British people but believed that in the hands of Arnold's disciples national self-disparagement of such things as brutal journals, provinciality,

insular narrowness, and intellectual caprice had become an affectation. He admired Arnold's "happy malice of the pen," "his knack of inventing catch-words" and his moral vigor. But for Arnold's basic critical technique, Dowden had no use; no less than Leigh Hunt's search for "beauties," Arnold's judgment by touchstones obscured the total impression of a piece of literature.

Dowden was somewhat torn between regarding criticism as the self-expression of the critic and regarding it as an exact science. Although not elevating criticism into a new artistic creation as Wilde did, Dowden did maintain that criticism was considerably more than the mere reporting of facts gained through scholarly study. The critic had to make use of data garnered by research, but he should not mistake these for the end of criticism. On the other hand, the democratic critic had to be concerned with truth, even if it meant sacrificing some of the emotional quality of highly subjective criticism. Dowden wrote: "The subordination of self to the faithful setting forth of the entire truth of one's subject will be some compensation for the absence of the passion, the raptures, the despairs, the didactic enthusiasm of one great English critic; some compensation even for the quickening half-views and high-spirited, delightful wilfulness of another."

36 "Literary Criticism in France," ibid., p. 390.
38 "Introduction," ibid., p. 31.
39 "Literary Criticism in France," p. 418.
Dowden's central critical creed was thoroughness, a thoroughness which meant no man could master more than five major writers in a single lifetime. Beyond this, Dowden's approach to art and the artist is much like Pater's. Faced with a piece of literature, the critic must assume a passive aspect, and to do so he must put restraint upon his own vivacity and play of mind. His aim is now to obtain a faithful impression of the object. His second movement of mind will be one of recoil and resilience, whereby having received a pure impression of the object, he tries to surprise and lay hold of the power which has produced that impression.

Following a thorough and complete reading of all of an artist's work, the critic then attempts to find its central motive by scientifically setting up a hypothesis, testing, rejecting, trying a new hypothesis. He will not, of course, let the reader see the process involved; the method merely determines the final point of view. When he finds the central motive, the minutest fact about the piece will fall into place and become interesting.

Austin Dobson also had the temperament and faculties of a scholar. But unlike Dowden, whose critical method required a thorough study of great authors, Dobson was usually content in his shorter pieces with the by-paths and seldom trodden ways. His

41 Ibid., pp. 254ff.
42 Ibid., p. 262.
subjects were little known authors, Bramston, Puckle, or Hanway, and limited aspects of great ones, Gray's library or Fielding's "A Voyage to Lisbon." These essays, which were usually quite brief, illustrate a kind of writing about literature which was popular in newspapers and weekly reviews—witty chats replete with anecdotes, which required no particular mental effort to comprehend.

Dobson, of course, did not pretend to be a critic in these short essays. He sometimes seems to deny that any great work of the past can be criticized. Henry Esmond, he stated, has passed "from the domain of criticism" and is no longer "a book 'under review.'"

"Little remains therefore for the gleaner of today save bibliographical jottings, and neglected notes on its first appearance."  

To sum the matter then:—My aim
Is modest. This is all I claim:
To paint a part and not the whole.
The trappings rather than a soul.

The result in Eighteenth Century Vignettes and in other Dobson collections is a series of charming, disconnected essays, full of quaint knowledge. To call them literary criticism would be to stretch the term.

Quite similar to Dobson, at least as an adherent to the "old," as a writer of brief causeries, and as a symbol of the newer informal spirit in literary criticism, is Augustine Birrell, who in the midst

of a busy professional life as a lawyer found time to write quite voluminously about literary matters. Personal taste was the basis for Birrell's judgments. Good taste, he felt, was a faculty of the mind which allowed the critic to discover "excellence" in literature. To be valuable, it had to be catholic, something more than a love for blue china or Japanese fans. It could also be developed by using such devices as "Mr. Arnold's pocket scales for testing poets." "We must study models," Birrell wrote, "we must follow examples, we must compare methods, and (above anything else) we must crucify the natural man. If there is one thing to be dreaded in these matters, it is what is called the unaided intelligence of the masses."

Standards of taste are to be found in older authors; thus a good essay on Shakespeare is the best evidence of critical competence. Too much immersion in modern literature is as destructive to a true literary sense as a London evening party is to the social one. In his own practice, then, Birrell almost always criticized traditional authors. Even so, like Dowden, he recognized that criticism in a

46 "Is It Possible to Tell a Good Book from a Bad One?" Collected Essays and Addresses, III (London, 1922), 325.
48 "Is It Possible to Tell. . .?" p. 329.
49 Ibid., p. 327.
51 "Is It Possible to Tell. . .?" p. 319.
democracy should be essentially educative and have as an ultimate goal the discovery of standards to apply to contemporary literature. "If you teach me or help me to think aright about Milton," he wrote, "you can leave me to deal with 'The Light of Asia' on my own account."52

Because literature exists only to please, the critic's job is to communicate the pleasure of these older books, to consider the question, "Does it read?"53 To impart this pleasure the critic has to be essentially sympathetic. Birrell praised Arnold for not being, like many critics, "a savage," and objected to Whitwell Elwin as an editor of Pope because "it is something of a shame to hate him and edit him too."54 Finally, although Birrell believed an ultimate standard of taste existed somewhere, he eschewed the idea in practice. For the most part he considered each work of art on its individual merits and avoided erecting standards.

The major critical lines of the end of the nineteenth century are thus pretty clearly drawn. Arnold fused two techniques--judgment by rule and judgment by personal impression--in criticism aimed at being an organ of middle class education. Pater, on the other hand, was interested in the effect of literature on the individual rather than on society, and most of his criticism was an attempt to account for that effect. His "impressionism" influenced such critics as Wilde to turn their backs on critical

54 "Pope," ibid., I, 53.
"translation" and to assert that the critic should merely record
the movement of his own soul in the presence of art. Henley,
objecting strenuously to this practice as unmanly, still borrowed as
much of his critical thought from the aesthetes as he did from the
mid-Victorians. His major objective was to undermine the humbug
of mid-century prudery and sentimentalism and to reconstruct
literature on a truly moral foundation. Dowden, the most democratic
of these critics, tried to find a middle way between academic and
impressionistic criticism, to assert truth in opposition to the mob's
love for abstractions. Dobson illustrates the movement toward
"popular" criticism as journals became more and more "Americanized."
Birrell, finally, looked to the past in his belief that there were
canons of judgment; he was allied to the aesthetes in his faith in
personal taste and in his refusal to make rules in practice. As
we proceed, we shall see almost all of these traits at least echoed
in the work of the four critics to whom we now turn.

4. Four "popular" critics

Any late nineteenth century list of ten best critics would have
included Gosse, Saintsbury, Lang, and perhaps Churton Collins.\(^{55}\)

Both praised and blamed by their contemporaries, and in our day no

55 The Bookman, for example, in a series on "Living Critics"
(1896) included sketches of the following: Henley, Hutton,
Lang, Patmore, Stephen, Theodore Watts, Gosse, James,
Saintsbury, and Dowden.
longer accorded much critical respect, they nevertheless published a
tremendous amount of "popular" criticism and had a wide and respectful
following. Their work warrants study not so much for its intrinsic
value as for its illustration of periodical criticism in a time when
journalism was encroaching upon letters. These men were professionals,
writers who depended upon the sale of their criticism for much of
their livelihood. They were also lovers of literature. Their interest
lies in their attempt to be both popular and serious at the same time.

No man had an unlikelier training for professional literary
criticism than Edmund Gosse. Personally instructed by his natu­
rolist father Philip, Gosse was deeply acquainted with marine biol­
ogy, the Bible, and the Plymouth Bretheren but hardly at all with
literature. He came to London in 1866, seventeen years old,
untrained for a career but determined to find something more en­
chanting than the oppressive science which his father pursued. Those
first years he stewed in that "hell of rotten morocco," the cat­
aloguing department of the British Museum, at a job made tolerable
only by occasional glimpses of the great (Tennyson and Swinburne
in the reading rooms above) and by his friendships with younger London
men of letters. In 1871 he gained a temporary reprieve. Wishing to
find material suitable for publication, he followed the advice of
R. H. Hutton, editor of the Spectator, and made a trip to Scandinavia,
which resulted in his first printed article (Fraser's, 1871). In

56 See Father and Son (London, 1907) for an account of Gosse's
early life. Most of the details in the following paragraphs
are drawn from Charteris, Gosse.
1873 he was writing about Scandinavia for the Spectator and contributing regularly to Fraser's and the Academy. In 1875 he obtained at the Board of Trade the sort of job all writers dream about. Not only did the hours, eleven to five, give him a great deal of time to write, he was also working closely with his friend Austin Dobson. He published his first critical book, Studies in the Literature of Northern Europe, in 1879. As the decade closed he was in much demand as a critic in many of the prominent monthly and weekly reviews and, incidentally, was earning more than £250 a year from his writing.

Gosse's first substantial success as a critic came in the eighties, only to be followed by his first critical misfortune. Things went well until the middle of the decade. John Morley sent him to Paris in 1881 to write articles on the Salon for the Pall Mall Gazette. At the urging of William Dean Howells, he made a lecture tour of the United States in 1884. Warmly welcomed in America Gosse considered the trip a success: he made a good deal of money, was offered, but turned down, a professorship at Johns Hopkins, and published his lectures (From Shakespeare to Pope, 1885). After his return he replaced Leslie Stephen as Clark Lecturer at Cambridge.

But his reputation as a man of letters had grown too fast; demands were made upon him as a scholar which both his lack of formal training and impatience with detail had unfitted him to satisfy. Churton Collins, once a friend of Gosse's, was bitterly disappointed at his own failure to receive the Merton Professorship at Oxford in 1885 and, according to contemporary gossip, was motivated by jealousy.
over Gosse's Cambridge appointment when months after the book had slipped from public memory, he attacked *From Shakespeare to Pope* in the *Quarterly* (October, 1886). Gosse's book was not a good one and did contain enough factual errors to arouse the ire of a scholar whose *sine qua non* was accuracy in literary matters. Still, most of Gosse's contemporaries found it difficult to consider Collins' clearly felt relish in his own viciousness as honest criticism of the work at issue. The game was just not worth the candle. Charge and counter-charge followed, Gosse gaining support from not only his Cambridge colleagues but many leading men of letters. Although he tried to remain aloof, the critic, as his letters attest, was seriously hurt by the attack; he learned what it meant to be tarred and feathered in the press. The onslaught also damaged his reputation as a critic; most reviewers thereafter paid particular attention to his accuracy and, it must be confessed, had little difficulty in finding frequent scholarly slips.

In the nineties, his reputation improved. Not yet fifty, he was nevertheless fast becoming one of the conservative "pundits." Somewhat blind to the newer forces in English literature, he did try to popularize modern French writing. He left Cambridge in 1889 and tried lecturing in West End drawing rooms, where he again became a rival of Collins. But it was criticism which occupied most of his interests. Secure now in his reputation, he was in the nineties a welcome contributor to almost all of the major periodicals, published four volumes of critical essays, a novel, a biography of his
father, and his most scholarly work, the two-volume life of Donne.

The years from the turn of the century were filled with literary friendships, assistance for young writers, criticism of literature, and frequent trips to France. An appointment as Librarian of the House of Lords at £1000 a year relieved him in 1904 from incessant journalism and gave him the leisure to complete his most polished work, the autobiographical *Father and Son* (1907). He tried his hand at editing for Northcliffe in 1906, taking over the literary supplement of the *Daily Mail*, but the position lasted a mere eighteen months. After his retirement from the Librarian-ship, in 1919 he became the "Sainte Beuve" of the *Sunday Times*, writing a weekly "sermon" for that newspaper until his death in 1928.

A history of Gosse's life is essentially that of his friendships and of the use to which he put them in his writing. An inveterate tuft hunter, he found his work in the House of Lords exactly suited to his personality. Here he could meet—and upon occasion snub—dukes, barons, and earls and use the library's stationery for his voluminous correspondence. He also made friends in the aristocracy of letters: Austin Dobson, Swinburne, Browning, Tennyson, Henry James, Hardy, Rider Haggard, Kipling, Wells, Gide, Howells, and Saintsbury. His social reputation was as great as his literary one. A witty and sometimes vicious conversationalist, he described himself as a cat whose claws frequently emerged from their velvet. These friendships were highly important to him as a critic. Essentially a portrait painter of literature, he used
his personal experience and conversation with authors as material for books and articles.

When George Saintsbury came to London in 1876, he was much better prepared to be a critic of literature than was Edmund Gosse. Trained at Merton, he had spent almost a decade teaching at Manchester and at Elizabeth College, Guernsey, in positions which gave him opportunity for "walking, waltzing, and whist" and for "immense" reading, mostly French fiction. His career as a journalist began in 1873 with signed reviews of English, French, and American literature for the Academy. His first full dress critical essay was the "Baudelaire" which Morley accepted for the Fortnightly in 1875 and which foreshadowed his later reputation as an expert on French literature.

He did not limit himself, however, to criticism of French writing. Introduced at the Daily News by Andrew Lang, he contributed non-political leaders there and other articles to Henley's Magazine of Art, the Pall Mall, the St. James, the New Review, the National Review, Blackwood's, and especially Macmillan's, where most of the essays he collected in the nineties first appeared. Again introduced by Lang, he joined the staff of the Saturday in 1880 and served under Pollock and Beresford Hope as literary sub-editor until the weekly was sold in 1894. According to Pollock,

57 Many of the details in the following paragraphs are drawn from the biographical memoir by A. Blyth Webster in George Saintsbury: The Memorial Volume (London, 1945).
Saintsbury was a first lieutenant who did his work without personal ambition and without friction.58

The growth of Saintsbury's reputation was somewhat slower than that of Gosse. Although he had done major biographical and editing work on Dryden in 1881-1883, it was not until about 1886 that he was recognized as an established man of letters.59 But even in the early nineties he was still being attacked in the Athenaeum, the Spectator, and the Fortnightly for having no aesthetic principles, no taste, no decorum, no moral grounds for literary judgment, and for "a curious slovenliness of thought."60 There were even some rumblings about the "journalist" becoming a professor when he received his appointment to Edinburgh in 1895.

With the exception of editing and introducing reprints, Saintsbury then stopped almost all journalistic activity not directly connected with his new professorship. He had enjoyed his twenty years in Grub Street but felt that writing for the press was beneath the dignity of an academic man. The years that followed were devoted to his longer books: the History of Nineteenth Century Literature (1896), the Short History (1898), the History of Crit-


60 "Mr. Saintsbury as a Critic," Saturday Review, LXX (Feb. 23, 1895), 258. See also Athenaeum, no. 3383 (Aug. 27, 1892), 277ff. and "Mr. Saintsbury's Miscellaneous Articles," Spectator, LXIX (July 16, 1892), 98f.
icism (1906-1910), the Peace of the Augustans (1916), and the History of the French Novel (1917-1919). In 1915 he retired from Edinburgh and went to Bath where he died, already a legend.

Though no recluse, Saintsbury did not have Gosse's unflagging interest in people; books, all kinds of books, were his world. Yet it appears that he had much the warmer personality. John Morley, William Blackwood III, and Frederick Macmillan, for example, went out of their way to help him in his journalism. "Last" of the Tories though he was, Saintsbury's infectious enthusiasm for life, for wine, and especially for literature gained him many friends whom he, unlike Gosse, never "used" in his critical writing.

Among Saintsbury's closest friends was Andrew Lang, in many ways the most remarkable man of letters the late nineteenth century produced. "Merry Andrew," "languid Lang," "the Divine Amateur": such were contemporary judgments. From 1876, when he flashed on London's journalistic scene "in all his panoply of graces," until the turn of the century, Lang was probably the most influential critic of his day. His books are an extensive library of their own, the list of periodicals which accepted his work almost a bibliography of contemporary magazines and newspapers, the range of his subjects encyclopedic, his tastes those of the great middle class who read him. Born on the Border in 1844, he prepared for his journalism much as Saintsbury had—St. Andrews, Oxford, and then the Merton

Open Fellowship for seven years. His journalism began sometime in
the middle seventies. In 1874 he was contributing almost weekly
to the Academy, a relationship which continued for some ten years,
and in 1875 he began the series of leaders in the Daily News which
were to make him the center of a cult in the early eighties. These
brief pieces, "like fairy tales written by an erudite Puck," appeared three or four times a week on the editorial page after the
political, sociological, and economic leaders. Lang also con-
tributed to a host of other organs—the Saturday, with which he
seems to have had family connections, the Morning Post, the New
Review, the Fortnightly, the Cornhill, Cosmopolis, The Pilot—
almost all late nineteenth century publications below the level of
the "greater" reviews. But Lang's personal magazine was Longman's,
the drab green, dumpy, sixpenny throwback to the mid-Victorian
literary periodical. Although the magazine was ostensibly edited
by Charles J. Longman, both contributors and readers knew that the
real influence was Lang, who found it necessary to reiterate time
and again that he was not the editor. Lang's influence is found
not only in his series, "At the Sign of the Ship," but also in the
adventure-laden, non-didactic, romantic fiction which the magazine

62 Richard Le Gallienne, The Romantic Nineties (New York, 1925),
p. 91.
63 See C. Lewis Hind, "Andrew Lang," Authors and I (London, 1921),
pp. 171-176.
64 George Saintsbury, "Andrew Lang in the 'Seventies—and After,"
serialized. His "Ship" essays continued until the magazine succumbed twenty-three years later to the competition of the new illustrated monthlies. Lang, however, continued his causersies in the Illustrated London News as "At the Sign of St. Paul's" until his death.

In his short title bibliography of Lang's work, Roger Lancelyn Green has identified at least 150 separate volumes which Lang wrote, translated, or introduced between 1872 and 1900, either alone or in collaboration with others. Only a small percentage of these volumes, which include fairy tales, poetry, a novel, and studies of history, Homer, folklore, and golf, are literary criticism, although most of Lang's writing is permeated with bookish lore. Lang seems to have considered his critical journalism as merely a side product of his multifarious activities. Even though "At the Sign of the Ship" was a well-written commentary on the state of letters for over twenty years, Lang would never consent to its republication in book form. The indifferent attitude he adopted toward the success or failure of Lost Leaders (1889), compiled from the Daily News by C. Lewis Hind and W. Pett Ridge, is symptomatic of his attitude toward all his critical journalism. It is in these terms that he once characterized himself as "a punctual, domesticated barn-


67 See Hind.
yard fowl, laying its daily 'article' for the breakfast table of the citizens."68

As a critic Lang was both loved and hated. Essays in Little, said the Saturday in 1891, was "entertaining" and "bracing," good for odd half hours of reading by every class.69 Letters on Literature, the Athenaeum asserted in 1889, was the "dry champagne of journalism" written by the most "expert" and "graceful" of the mob who write with ease.70 Henry James, however, objected to his "Philistine twaddle," and R. C. Lehmann, editor of the Daily News, dismissed his critical articles as "infernally niggling productions."71 One indictment against him was the scope of his work. While Henley could call him "the Divine Amateur" in the true sense of a man's loving what he does, most anti-Langites protested that no man could be poet, novelist, classical scholar, folklorist, fairy tale compiler, literary critic, journalist, expert on old French, historian, bibliophile, sports writer, and biographer without cutting corners.

A second and more serious charge was his philistine taste. Even though he contributed a great deal to the reputation of popular novelists such as Rider Haggard, Anthony Hope, Stanley Weyman, S. R. Crockett, and Stevenson, he was impatient with important current novels.

69 LXXXI (Feb. 14, 1891), 207f.
70 No. 3211 (May 11, 1889), 596f.
71 Letters of Henry James, I, 238; Alfred Noyes, Two Worlds for Memory (New York, 1953), pp. 30f.
trends, particularly in fiction, and set himself firmly against the new forces of realism.

The attitude toward Lang as a social being was likewise mixed. People who looked forward to his slightly acid daily article did not necessarily like him as a person. Saintsbury, perhaps his closest friend from 1875-1885, excused his fellow critic's social aloofness in these terms:

Several people seem to have interpreted Lang's manner as that of one not thinking them worth shaking hands with, when as a matter of fact he was probably not thinking about them at all except as coincidences of existence. I suppose he could not be called invariably affable; but your invariably affable person requires a certain extra touch from Providence to prevent him from being frequently intolerable. Now in all those years, many of them thickly frequented years, of which I have spoken--I never found his company other than agreeable.72

Lang did have friends and did help the reputation of many aspiring young writers. Among these were Rider Haggard, Stevenson, and Gosse, who with Lang formed a group which contemporary gossip accused of being a mutual admiration society for log-rolling each other's books. Lang in the nineties was frequently seen in London artistic and social circles. Only after the turn of the century did he fail to make new friends and see frequently the old.

Compared with Lang, Gosse, and Saintsbury, John Churton Collins was a veritable bulldog of English criticism in the late nineteenth century. A man of reputedly vast scholarship, he was nevertheless terribly limited. Blind to the beauty of music, art, or the theater,

Collins considered poetry the pre-eminent vehicle for spiritual teaching and supported this belief in his writing with a bluntness which cost him more than one friend. Respected, but not well-liked, he tried to substitute hard work for the critical genius, and geniality, which he lacked.

Collins was educated at Oxford at the same time as Lang, who dubbed his fellow student Will Ladislaw. In 1872 he came to London to make his living as a man of letters. Unlike most journalistic critics, however, Collins was not satisfied to keep working for the daily or the more popular periodical press. Although his first London writing was for the Daily News, a connection which he kept intermittently, his whole effort in the seventies was to publish in the greater reviews. By the end of the decade he had had articles accepted by the Cornhill ("Aulus Gelius," 1878) and the Quarterly ("Dryden," 1878). He had also made a friend of the Quarterly's editor, Dr. William Smith, who acted as his literary adviser. According to his son's bibliography, Collins published sixteen principal articles between 1878 and 1908 in the Quarterly, five in the Cornhill, one in Temple Bar, eight in the Nineteenth Century, five in the Contemporary, two in the New Liberal Review, six in the National Review, and four in the Fortnightly.

This scattering of articles in the more intellectual reviews did not pay enough to support Collins and his growing family.

73 Much of the material in these paragraphs is drawn from L. C. Collins, Life and Memoirs of John Churton Collins (London, 1912).
Thus, in 1880, he joined the London University Lecture Society, which in the ensuing years became his major source of income. He was quite popular among the West End ladies who doubtless came more for the delight of hearing him declaim poetic "beauties" in his fine voice than for the critical content of his lectures. His son estimates Collins made ten thousand lectures in his lifetime, often at the rate of half a dozen a day to different audiences on highly different subjects. His income, however, was commensurate with his effort; late in the century he admitted to Frank Harris that he made £4,000 a year, all of it by sheer hard work. The importance of these lectures to his printed criticism is that they often formed the germ, or first working, of material he later published.

Another milestone in the eighties beside his attack on Gosse was two essays in the Pall Mall Gazette and one in the Quarterly ("English Literature in the Universities," 1886) in which he tried to loosen the stranglehold the "dilettantes and philologists" had on the study of literature at Oxford and Cambridge. Reducing the classics to syntax and grammar, he felt, was a betrayal of the real use of great poetry--its spiritual and ethical value. Because he was so outspoken a controversialist, he played no small role in the "modernization" of the academic study of literature. After the turn of the century, he was also instrumental in establishing a school of journalism at Birmingham.

At the invitation of the American Society for the Extension of University Teaching, Collins made a lecture tour of the United States in 1893. Like Gosse nine years earlier, Collins too rejected an offer from Johns Hopkins. A year later, when Frank Harris took over the editorship of the "new" Saturday, Collins was one of the first men asked to serve. Even after Harris left in 1898 Collins continued writing for the weekly review, his outspoken criticism bringing at least one libel suit from a disgruntled author. His books of collected criticism include *Essays and Studies* (1895), *Ephemera Critica* (1904), *Studies in Shakespeare* (1904), *Studies in Poetry and Criticism* (1905), and *Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Rousseau in England* (1908). In 1904, four years before his death, he finally received the university appointment he had wished for all these years, the professorship of English Literature at Birmingham.

What Collins was really like is difficult to determine. One certainly cannot accept the paragon of literary virtues who emerges from L. C. Collins' biography of his father. On the other hand, the position of many of his contemporaries, that his critical judgments were completely tainted by personal animus and jealousy, is equally unacceptable. The answer probably lies somewhere in between. The son's omission in his "portrait" of any reference whatsoever to Gosse is suspicious to say the least. But as a servant of poetry, Collins sincerely believed, or at least rationalized that he did

75 Saintsbury, for example, quoting the Times, commented: "Unfortunately, he was apt to let his own disappointments colour his estimate of those who were more fortunate than himself." See "Some Memoirs of Edmund Gosse," *London Mercury*, XVIII (1928), 265.
so believe, that one could write outspoken criticism of a man's works
and still remain that man's friend. Yet both Gosse and Swinburne
broke with him because of his vicious pen.

Collins was a dogged workman. Lacking the facility of Gosse
or Lang, he tried to be thorough, for example, searching forty-two
church registers in Norwich to find Greene's death date, and succeed­
ing. Frank Harris, whose memoir of his employee is most sympa­
thetic, saw his life as essentially tragic. Wishing to do something
that would live but recognizing himself as a "laborious mediocrity"
he substituted hard effort, an exactness amounting to pedantry, and
blunt attack upon his contemporaries for the genius which he lacked.
Even so, Harris praised him for his enthusiasm, "his chivalries, the
insight of him, and the honesty, for after all he was a great worker,
an honest English workman."76

76 Latest Contemporary Portraits, p. 320.
Chapter 2 CRITICISM FOR THE "MANY-HEADED"

The journalistic critic of the late nineteenth century was caught between two opposed forces: his own seriousness about literature and the middle class tastes of the audience for which he wrote. These forces are quite clear in the statements which Edmund Gosse and Andrew Lang made about their profession. They also underlie the critical thought of the less popular George Saintsbury and John Churton Collins. Spiritual grandsons of Sainte Beuve, sons of Walter Pater, and more or less cousins of Matthew Arnold, they attempted to shape a set of working principles for criticism in a democratic world. They produced no profound theories—perhaps because they lacked the ability or perhaps because they felt their readers would not be interested. Nor, with the exception of Collins, did they stress the ethical implications of literature. Rather, they were eminently practical. Loving books themselves, they searched for the best way to inspire their readers with the joys of literature.

1. The cat and the honeybee

Edmund Gosse was certainly a "practical" critic in these terms. With an unerring sense that the general reader preferred personalities to punditry, he withstood the shifting winds of half a century of critical doctrines, popular to the last. The basis for this pop-
ularity was his portrait technique and easy style; not, certainly, his theorizing. He avoided the profound, and wrote essays which are now read seriously only by unsuspecting undergraduates. One is tempted to consider him a diluted Sainte Beuve, a journalist looking for the "main chance." One thing, however, redeems him from being thought a crass opportunist: the man loved literature with a fervor amounting to religious passion.

Gosse was quite reluctant to talk much about his profession. His letters, for example, though addressed to numerous fellow-writers, say almost nothing about the critic's function. Beyond a basic commitment to the "high priest" theory of criticism, it seems that he was just not much interested in any really coherent aesthetic. Nevertheless, he was not unaware of the critic's problem in a democratic society. Robert Louis Stevenson wrote to him in 1886 complaining about "the bestiality of the beast whom we feed. What he likes is the newspaper; and to me the press is the mouth of a sewer. . ."1 Gosse replied:

You will perhaps see how oddly your serious letter has affected me; I am made rather sullen, frightened a little, by your earnestness; I have only two ambitions, to do my work well, and to be present when John Gilpin rides by. I feel that these are not enough, but how to rouse myself? I pitifully agree with you about the unimportance of the man of letters--only let us only whisper it among ourselves; for God's sake don't go blowing on the whole thing in public. If once they, The Many-Headed, find out that our mission is all humbug, where will our cheques come from? I think you are a little unjust to the trade. This

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1 The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson, ed. Sidney Colvin (New York, 1923), 11, 312.
Mission is an outward and intelligible symbol to the public of that inward and inexplicable thing, the essential greatness of Literature. The individual littérateur is nothing, but Literature is everything. I grow a deeper idolator of this deity every day—the great books, the phrases of the great men, give me a more thrilling pleasure the older I live, seem more supernatural than ever, satisfy my nature more completely. And to touch the skirts of this glory, live in the repletion of it, be conductors of the warmth of it, this is quite as much as religion!2

Gosse’s "Many-Headed," however, were not necessarily Stevenson’s newspaper reading beasts. In fact, Gosse suspected that journalistic criticism was valueless and was a bit ashamed of the source of his checks. When he announced to Stevenson that Stead’s expose in the Pall Mall Gazette of white slavery of children had given him an excuse to break with the daily press, his tone was one of relief—"as long as I can struggle along this side of beggary without them [the newspapers], I shall not be back."3 As did many critics, Gosse doubted that the newspaper and periodical really served the reader of books or the cause of literature. Press notices of new books, he felt, were "useless, seldom increasing the sale by even two hundred copies." The only type of review worth mentioning was that rare impersonal one that merely describes the book just published.4 Even so, Gosse reprinted many of his own

3 Pp. 186ff.
reviews, which are anything but impersonal, in his various volumes of collected essays. Ironically, too, it was to a newspaper audience that he returned at the end of his life with his weekly column in the Sunday Times.

Gosse's attitude concerning the effect of a widening and more democratic reading public upon letters was somewhat mixed, although he ultimately thought of the critic's role in modern society in much the same terms as Edward Dowden did. In his essay "The Influence of Democracy on Literature" he pointed out his belief that democracy created an "environmental sanity" which is good for art and which encourages "directness of utterance, simplicity, vividness, and lucidity." He further admitted that it was very difficult to make the specific charge that democracy had lowered the standards of even the popular novelist. Nevertheless, while democracy might not keep the first-rate author from writing as he ought, it might very well affect the tastes of his reader. In his causeurie "What is a Great Poet," Gosse expressed fear that a revolution against reputations which no longer pleased the mass might destroy tradition and debase current standards of taste.

Writers, he knew, wrote for both fame and money. In a democratic society, where the sale of an author's book determined his economic status and, incidentally, a great part of his fame,

5 Questions, pp. 33-67.

6 Ibid., pp. 91-111. For a later statement of the same general ideas see the preface to Some Diversions of a Man of Letters (New York, 1919).
there was a danger that the merely current and popular, that which
the mob admired for non-literary qualities, would replace the tra-
ditional. The critic's major aim is to combat this leveling tend-
ency. Addressing himself to the general reader he must constantly
reiterate the time honored and time tested values of all literature
and in that way attempt to stop the debasement of taste.

In his contribution to the *New Review* symposium "The Science
of Criticism" in 1891 Gosse spelled out what this critic should
be like. Much more than a mere reviewer, the true critic is a
lover of letters who is "intelligent," "sympathetic," and
"personal," and who writes "comparative" and "composite" criticism
which is almost as valuable as the original work of art. He should
have a mind which acts rapidly, is sensitive to delicate impres-
sions, and is able to see art from all points of view. His
sympathy gives him insight, imagination, and a sense of relative
values, allowing him to get inside the author's mind and to re-
construct the "why" as well as the "what" of the work. His own
reaction to art is the especial hallmark of his writing. Criticism
considered this way is not just a composite of other people's
opinion but an utterance from a highly individual mind. The devel-
opment of such a mind is no easy task; the critic is thus a rare be-
ing: "Without a lifelong knowledge of books, without absolute ju-
dicial rectitude, without the mental habit of urbanity, without a
determined cultivation of suppleness and independence of mind, no
one ought to have the presumption to present himself to us as a critic."7

Gosse's most important critical attitude grew out of his inveterate tuft-hunting. Hero worship was a lifelong facet of his personality, tied closely to his love for literature itself,8 and a great many of his essays were based upon his own relations with writers. He never tired of reminding his readers that he was a friend of Browning or of believing that those same readers would be interested in "My Day" with Whittier or Tennyson. He read his audience aright. His most popular book, Portraits and Sketches (1912), has Gosse's acquaintance with writers as its single unifying theme. Treating subjects as varied as Gide and Richard "Hengist" Horne, the collection contains "short studies of authors whom I have known more or less intimately, and have observed with curiosity and admiration."

From his delight in bagging personal acquaintance with the great and near great in the literary world, Gosse developed a belief in the effect of "personal character" upon literature. But he was no devotee of Taine; late in life (1924) he wrote to F. C. Roe denying any influence at all from the French critic. Sainte Beuve, he continued, had been the major model: "No one else has

7 P. 111. The whole of this brief essay is the most coherent statement of Gosse's critical "theory."

8 Charteris, Gosse, p. 169.
been my master." In the preface to Portraits and Sketches he wrote:

To analyse the honey is one thing, and to dissect the bee another; but I find a special pleasure in watching him, myself unobserved, in the act of building up and filling the cells. In what I have recorded, I have tried to concentrate attention, not on vague anecdotes and empty tricks of conduct, but on such traits of character as throw light on the man's intellect and imagination, and are calculated to help us in the enjoyment of his work. And while I hope I have never courted sensation by recounting anything scandalous, I have not hesitated to tell what I believe to be the truth, nor glossed over peculiarities of temperament when they help us to comprehend the published writings.

Gosse, then, meant to use biography as an illumination of literature, not as an explanation for it. And a knowledge that the reader likes the personal was seemingly never far from his mind.

2. A is not B

While Gosse avoided constructing a coherent body of critical ideas, George Saintsbury wrote long and often about what he thought the critic should be and do. The difference in their treatment of Pater is typical of their difference as critics. Gosse's is an anecdotal account of the life, a mixture of biographical detail and a few commonplaces about style. Saintsbury, on the other hand, was not interested in Pater's biography; it was the criticism.

9 Pp. 473ff.
which attracted him and which he used as the basis for his own critical and philosophical faith.\textsuperscript{12}

The most striking statement of Saintsbury's basic critical method is contained in an essay on Diderot's Salons (1884):

While some critics (more in his day than in ours) proceed on a cut-and-dried method of formulas, applying the foot-rule and listening to the stop-watch; while others (more in our day than in his) exhaust themselves in decoratively describing the immediate pronouncements of god without even endeavouring to connect those pronouncements and render a reason for them, Diderot follows a third course. He asks, 'What is the impression of this work on me?' first. But he is by no means content with that impression. He goes on to ask, 'Why does it produce that impression?' 'What connection has that impression with such and such another?' Sometimes (not very often, because the very habit of such questioning insensibly refines the taste itself) he has to come back upon his impression and ask whether it was a genuine and not a mistaken one.

This, I say, is the method of all good criticism. ..\textsuperscript{13}

Much in Saintsbury's writing seems to place him in the aesthetic school. As early as his 1875 essay on Baudelaire he had asserted that the critic's job was to report the impression made by the work of art upon the critic's mind.\textsuperscript{14} Dorothy Richardson, who has made the most thorough study of Saintsbury, saw him as at least a partial follower of art for art's sake. He believed form and style were the critic's major concern; he divorced art from ethics; he believed that the individual reaction was the true

\textsuperscript{12} Prefaces and Essays, ed. Oliver Elton (London, 1933), pp. 359ff.

\textsuperscript{13} A Last Vintage: Essays and Papers by George Saintsbury, eds. John W. Oliver et al. (London, 1950), p. 221.

\textsuperscript{14} The Collected Essays and Papers of George Saintsbury: 1875-1920 (London, 1923), IV, 8.
criticism and that life through art could become a series of pleasureable moments. Yet throughout his entire career Saintsbury's conservative temper kept him from the excesses of his more radically decadent brothers. For example, he was never tempted to revolt from traditional ethical values and almost from the beginning had doubts that the critic's impression alone was a sufficient basis for critical judgment. In the passage on Diderot he advocated the use of rules, even though arrived at empirically. Criticism by impression has done good work in its time, he stated in an essay on Jeffrey (1887), but "it decidedly needs chastening by an admixture of the dogmatic criticism, which at least tries to keep its impressions together and in order, and to connect them into some coherent doctrine and creed." The fault of modern impressionism, he wrote in 1895, is that it empties out "all but the individual impression."

Saintsbury was a connoisseur, not only of books, but of wine, women, and high Tory politics as well. A catholic enjoyment underlies almost all of his critical attitudes. His central aim was to place himself and his reader into a state where they could enjoy both a Shakespeare or a Milton and a minor poet of the French eighteenth century even though this meant devouring great pieces of history,

16 Collected Essays, I, 99.
17 Ibid., II, 311.
social documents, and juvenilia, normally quite indigestible. In
truth, no critic considers with such obvious enthusiasm so many
kinds of literature, both small and great, and communicates so
contagiously what he finds. Such a view, that value of some sort is
to be found in even a minor writer, that the most pedestrian of
poets may have his "poetic moments," led him to pity "the delicates
who can only relish one or two things in literature."\textsuperscript{18}

Saintsbury never tired of reiterating throughout both his
journalistic and professorial career the "neglected First Law of
Criticism—B is not bad because it is not A, however good A may
be."\textsuperscript{19} Such a "law" means that the critic must consider each work
of art as a separate entity and attempt both to account for its
impression on the critic and to find its beauties. To accomplish
these Saintsbury advocated analysis, use of historical background,
and comparison. If he does analyze, that is consider the parts of
a piece of writing to discover how they fit together, the critic
must avoid the method of Croker upon "Endymion"; refrain, in other
words, from any preconception about what the pieces should or
should not contain.\textsuperscript{20} Historical background, too, may be useful,
provided the critic does not fall into the Arnold-Taine racial
explanation for literature where a little trick of logic can work

\textsuperscript{18} "Praed," \textit{ibid.}, II, 51.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{A Scrapbook} (London, 1922), p. 183.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 149-150.
Finally, comparison may also help if the critic remembers that no piece of literature should be taken as an ideal against which to test another piece: "the comparison which takes This and That, puts them together, notes what This has and That lacks, observes how This excels That in one way, and That excels This in the other, appears to me...the one method by which you can get at really luminous results."^22

The central basis for such comparison, Saintsbury felt, lay in style, the crystallization of an emotion, a mood, or an idea in unique and unforgettable language. All writers had such moments, and it was the critic's task to isolate them. Saintsbury was convinced that this pre-eminent attention to style kept the critic from going astray, particularly when he considered contemporary or unusual work. Subject matter—such things as ethical, political, social, or moral significance—is highly inadequate as a standard of judgment because the critic is bound to be influenced about these matters by "mood, circumstance, temperament, habit."^23

Saintsbury at times seems almost to imply that a work of art can be great on the basis of style alone, but he is usually sensible enough to recognize that one can no more have style without matter than one can have art without life. Looking back at the


23 Collected Essays, IV, 10f.
controversy from the vantage point of fifty years, he remembered that "What we fought against... was the muddling of the two, the inability to distinguish them, the stipulation that the canvas must have been bought at the proper shop, the paper manufactured at the particular mill, before people would allow themselves to enjoy the picture or the poem." \(^{24}\)

3. "We are all but Goniobombukes"

Gosse believed that the way into literature was through personality, and Saintsbury that the critic should emphasize style. Andrew Lang was a mixture of impressionist and dogmatic critic. He certainly published more "journalism" than his friends, much of it on non-literary subjects. His criticism proper was written, one could almost say, dashed off, for immediately practical purposes: to fill space he had contracted to fill or to puff the novels of his friends. He was by far the most influential critic of his day when it came to current reputations; today as a critical influence he is dead. One suspects that "Merry Andrew" would nod a languid acquiescence at this fate: behind his willingness to help other writers lay a profound doubt about the value of the critical act.

As a journalist Lang was under no delusions about the abilities

\(^{24}\) Scrapbook, p. 116.
of his readers or about the quality of the newspaper press. He believed that a taste for books was inborn and that no one should condemn the great mass of people for not reading much. Nevertheless, he felt journalism to be a kind of prostitution, an attitude he adhered to from the time of his own leaders in the Daily News. He summed up his feelings about the press and its readers in Essays in Little (1891):

For the wise world, which reads newspapers all day and half the night, does not care much for books, still less for good books; least of all for old books. You can make no money out of reading Sagas: they have nothing to say about stocks and shares, nor about Prime Ministers and politics. Nor will they amuse a man, if nothing amuses him but accounts of races and murders, or gossip about Mrs. Noakes's new novel, Mrs. Stoakes's new dresses, or Lady Jones's diamonds.

Lang also denied that most literature had much serious or profound use. With the exception of Shakespeare, the Bible, and the Homeric poems—"the best training for life"—he claimed that literature could not teach anything life does not. The value in "In Memoriam," he wrote in the Forum in 1887, lies merely in the slight comfort it gives a bereaved reader, certainly not in its

25 Andrew Lang and "X" a working man, "The Reading Public," Cornhill n.s. XI (1901), 783-795.
29 "Homer and the Study of Greek," Essays in Little, p. 84.
philosophical overtones. Such a depreciation of the "teaching" or "moral" value of literature was in strong contrast to the critical emphasis of his Victorian predecessors. Indeed, he was attacked by his own contemporaries, especially disgruntled novelists, for critical blindness. Lang, of course, knew very well that art for art's sake had never been completely accepted by the artist and that didacticism did not necessarily keep a piece of literature from being a work of art. Nevertheless, keeping his own standard, "more claymores, less psychology," and the tastes of his Longman's readers pretty firmly in mind, he asserted many times that "power to please" rather than "criticism of life" was the permanent value of books. To those who decried this stand, he would undoubtedly counter with an assertion that enjoyment in literature is all and that what one man enjoys need not be the favorite of another. "We must not," he wrote in his essay on Bunyan, "excommunicate people because they have not our taste in books."

What then did criticism mean to Lang? Certainly not the chantings of a high priest like Gosse, unless he be in the service of Ayesha. In the same symposium in the New Review (1891) where Gosse had described the critic as sympathetic, intelligent, and personal, and where Henry James had defined criticism as a force

32 Essays in Little, p. 182.
leading society, Lang called it "the form of skilled labour which is occupied in writing about other men's books, old or new." On what other basis, Lang wondered, can one call the work of Arnold, Sainte Beuve, and an unsuccessful lady novelist criticism? The implications of Lang's definition are clear: criticism is merely one way of earning a living; its importance to society and to the world of letters is practically nil. Further on in this essay, Lang expressed his weariness with the whole business:

I can scarcely conceive of a topic less momentous than Criticism. We are all but Goniobombukes. [For the benefit of Grub Street let us translate this hard word. It means 'persons who buzz in a corner.' (Lang's note)]; though some buzz a little louder or longer than others, and in a more spacious corner. Who reads Boileau now, and is Quintilian much in men's minds?

One suspects, however, that Lang did not quite believe all he said; "Merry Andrew" may have been adopting another one of his famous poses. In the first place, Lang clearly distinguished between reviewing books and criticizing them. Even though a great portion of his own work was reviewing, he reserved his choicest jibes for this kind of writing. Thus, unlike Saintsbury, who praised reviewing while admitting its faults, Lang usually poked fun at it. His amusement at the silliness of the average journalistic piece about books is best caught in How to Fail in Literature, a lecture he delivered at the South Kensington Museum in 1889. Purporting to be advice to a young aspirant to the title of man of letters, the talk is a humorous survey of the contemporary

33 "The Science of Criticism," p. 400
literary scene. The following passage illustrates not only Lang's attitude toward reviewing but also the fact that its contemporary weaknesses were no different from the time of "The Dunciad" and "The Battle of the Books":

Perhaps reviewing is not exactly a form of literature. But it has this merit that people who review badly, not only fail themselves, but help others to fail, by giving a bad idea of their works. You will, of course, never read the books you review, and you will be exhaustively ignorant of the subjects which they treat. But you can always find fault with the title of the story which comes into your hands. . . . You can also copy out as much of the preface as will fill your eighth of a column, and add, that the performance is not equal to the promise. You must never feel nor shew the faintest interest in the work reviewed, that would be fatal. Never praise heartily, that is the sign of an intelligence not mediocre. Be vague, colourless, and languid, this deters readers from approaching the book. If you have glanced at it, blame it for not being what it never professed to be; . . . I have known a reviewer of half a dozen novels denounce half a dozen kinds of novels in the course of his two columns; . . . This can easily be done, by dint of practice, after dipping into three or four pages of your author. Many reviewers have special aversions, authors they detest. Whatever they are criticising, novels, poems, plays, they begin by an attack on their pet aversion, who has nothing to do with the matter at hand. . . . But the great virtue of a reviewer, who would be unreadable and make others unread, is a languid ignorant lack of interest in all things, a habit of regarding his work as a tedious task, to be scamped as rapidly and stupidly as possible.34

Lang defined true criticism in the same terms as Anatole France, "that which narrates the adventures of an ingenious and educated mind in contact with masterpieces." The critic need not be correct or sound in his judgment; he merely helps the reader to see overlooked flowers in the paradise of literature. Criticism, as such, has little effect upon the creation of art; rather it is related

34 (London, 1890), pp. 82-86.
to art in the same way art is related to nature: "It clears our eyes, it heightens and intensifies and makes more select our pleasures."^35 Lang here is in thorough agreement with Oscar Wilde.

But like Saintsbury, he did not go the whole way with impressionism. In an essay on Morris, he commented that even though one's "adventures among books" may produce trivial anecdotalge, such writing at least has the advantage of being historical. "We know how books have affected, and do affect ourselves, our bundle of prejudices and tastes, of old impressions and revived sensations."

But this is not enough. Even though the incursion of the critic's personality makes the task an almost futile one, there are times when an effort must be made to judge books impersonally.^36 A second limitation upon impressionism is Lang's use of biography and literary history. Like Gosse, he did not go as far as Taine: biography and environment merely affect genius rather than account for it. Lang also agreed with Arnold that a stimulating national and social environment was essential to good literary production. Thus in his own criticism Lang frequently made use of both biography and history to explain the literature and to enliven his own writing.

"Originality, individuality, the possession of wide knowledge and of an interesting temperament": these are the marks of Lang's good critic. And, one might add, using Lang as his example, the


critic must also love good books. He should be particularly able to rise above a feeling for the artist when he criticizes the art. "Am I bound to think Jones a bad citizen, a bad man, a bad householder, because his poetry leaves me cold?" Finally, judging from Lang's own practice, the critic should be conservative, urbane, and liberally endowed with Scotch wit.

4. "the same yesterday, to-day and for ever"

Gosse, Saintsbury, and Lang certainly constitute no school. Although each to a certain degree felt criticism to be a matter of individual reaction to a particular work, they expressed their reactions in different ways. However, when one turns from them to a consideration of John Churton Collins, it is like dining on solid English beef and potatoes after an apéritif. Collins is a prime exemplar of the fact that late nineteenth century periodical criticism could be solid as well as frivolous, devoted to matter as well as to manner.

With his faith in literature rooted in the Greek concept of paideia Collins had no patience with the criticasters of his own

37 Lang is never tired of asserting his own love. See The Library (London, 1892), pp. 1f; Adventures Among Books, the title essay.

38 Essays in Little, p. 116.
day, by whom he meant all critics except Arnold, Stephen, Pattison, Courthope, and Frederic Harrison. Criticism to Collins was law, and it was his self-appointed task to rescue its government from "weak and dishonest hands."40

The major statement of Collins' critical theory is contained in two works on Greek literature: Greek Influence on English Poetry (1910) and "Longinus and Greek Criticism" (1905).41 Not principally a journalist, he said almost nothing about the kinds of criticism one finds in the reviews.42 Rather, he classified criticism traditionally—syntactical, aesthetic, and philosophical. The first is concerned with the architectonics of the work of art, the second with an analysis and application of the laws of the beautiful, and the third with the matter—metaphysics, ethics, politics.43 All three are conducted by law.

39 Arnold, according to Collins, is the "finest" and "soundest" critic in England. He tempers this praise by adding "within his range." "The Literary Indebtedness of England to France," Fortnightly, n.s. LXXXIV (1908), 199f.


41 In Studies in Poetry and Criticism (London, 1905).

42 According to the bibliography appended to L. G. Collins' Life and Memoirs of John Churton Collins (London, 1912), Collins contributed his major essays only to the greater reviews. A typical Collins comparison is in his equation of the Old Comedy of Athens with the writings in the contemporary popular press. "Longinus and Greek Criticism," p. 245.

Collins believed that the Greeks had said the last word about criticism both as science and as art. Thus Longinus is an "infallible guide" for style and, with the exception of the unities of time and place, other Greek critics asserted all the important critical canons and principles of composition.\textsuperscript{44}

For let us remember this, that, as essence is the same, myriad as are its manifestations in phenomena, so it is with the laws of the Beautiful and the Excellent. They are fixed, permanent and unchanging, the same yesterday, to-day and for ever. Language is but the medium or symbol of expression; one language differs from another in power and adequacy, and that is all. What constitutes excellence in style and diction, and what constitutes by implication the opposite, is the same in all languages.\textsuperscript{45}

In order to avoid the necessity of dismissing that which he knew to be valuable in modern art, Collins adopted the attitude of Schlegel and Browning. Greek art, its goal the finite, is perfect but limited; modern art, its goal the infinite, is necessarily imperfect because it tries to express concepts beyond the range of human beings. But, even when considering modern art, Collins reiterated, "the ultimate law of art is beauty, harmony, and we do well to keep that ideal before us, and that ideal we have always before us in the theories and achievements of the artists of Greece."\textsuperscript{46} The man, then, who wishes to lay the basis for a firm critical education must master the Poetics, the second book of the

\textsuperscript{44} The Study of English Literature: A Plea for Its Recognition and Organization at the Universities (London, 1891), p. 82.

\textsuperscript{45} Greek Influence, pp. 82f.

\textsuperscript{46} P. 86.
Rhetoric, the tenth book of the Institutes, the De Oratore, the De Sublime, and Lessing's Laocoön.47

Thus equipped, Collins entered his protest against what he sneeringly called the "New School of Criticism": impressionism. Swinburne, once a friend of Collins, was the chief villain. He had turned criticism into a "lyrical cry" and was mainly responsible for the "wretched cant" of art for art's sake. He had no intellectual qualities except a retentive memory. His judgment was the sport of the emotions and imagination. He could not see that soundness or unsoundness of ethic and metaphysic was important. And his view had made modern criticism a "mere siren of the senses":

"Turn where we will...there, too often, is his note...his turbid intemperance of judgment, his purely sensuous conception of the nature and scope of art; there, too often, his characteristic modes of expression, his hyperbole, his wild and whirling verbiage, his plethora of extravagant and frequently nauseous metaphor."48

Swinburne was not the only target of such attacks. Collins surveyed the whole critical field of his day and found it desperately wanting. John Addington Symonds was unsound in fact and unsound in generalization; Richard Le Gallienne was honest but

47 The Study of English Literature, p. 42.
48 "The Predecessors of Shakspeare," Essays and Studies, p. 104. This is a typical Collins gambit, leaping from what purports to be a scholarly study of pre-Shakespearean drama to an attack upon a pet villain.
ignorant. Stevenson and his disciples, with their "craze" to find new ways of saying things, would get short shrift from Longinus. Critics who rolled logs and puffed were destroying the distinction between ordinary literature and the works of the masters. Finally, in an implied slap at Gosse, Collins poked fun at critics who wrote about "My Day with--" or "My Letters from--" and who struck up an acquaintance with a second rate novelist and then waited until he died to compose a fulsome memoir.

Collins did not do battle with the more popular critics of his day merely for the joy of the conflict. He was deeply concerned about the effect of such critics upon literary standards. "What they [critics like Symonds] do has the force of example," he wrote; "a book which is not too defective to be called excellent, and not too excellent to become popular, exercises an influence on literary activ-

49 "The New Criticism," Ephemera Critica, pp. 151-157. Collins somewhat tempers this attack by saying that if Le Gallienne would only get knowledge he might "obtain an honourable reputation."

50 "Longinus and Greek Criticism," p. 255.

51 See "Log Rolling and Education," Ephemera Critica, pp. 133-144, and "The Predecessors of Shakspeare," p. 155, where Collins comments that the critic "must distinguish between merit which is relative and merit which is intrinsic."

52 "The Gentle Art of Self-Advertisement," Ephemera Critica, p. 163. Collins finds the nadir of this sort of tying oneself to the great reached in the Rev. Aris Willmott's Gems from English Literature where Willmott sandwiches his own work between the work of the masters. But because of the date of Ephemera Critica (1901), we may infer that Gosse must have been in his mind. This is just about what Gosse did with both Stevenson and Swinburne.
ity the importance of which it is scarcely possible to estimate."^53

Acting as a mediator between the mass public and the artist and as a scourge to the impressionist, Collins' ideal critic puts his faith in traditional standards. He must take the place of the intellectual aristocracy for whom writers once worked; he must combat the supersession of popular literature, read by those who seek from books the excitement they once had from social dissipation.^54 Collins found an apt analogy in science whose growth, he believed, was explained by its controls and guides. Literature, having neither, was failing. The result will be "most disastrous to us as a nation, to our reputation in the World of Letters, to tone, to taste, to morals."^55

The critic, then, is certainly no individual soul loose among the masterpieces. Nor is he a literary gossip or sensation-monger. Although learning alone cannot fit him for his profession, he is a man of deep education, especially in the Greek critical documents. He is scholarly, with an abhorrence of inaccuracy and false statement. He is judicial and not afraid to decry bad work when he finds it. Unlike his contemporaries who turn away from below-standard works, Collins' critic feels obliged to attack them. But above all, he is a teacher with a faith in the power of literature as a guide for life.

^54 "The Present Functions of Criticism," pp. 16f.
^55 Preface, Ephemera Critica, pp. 6f.
Clearly, in the matter of critical theory, none of these men have a great deal to say to the modern student. One finds in them no spark of originality of the sort which makes a Johnson, an Arnold, or a Pater a critic for all time. Their saving quality is their enthusiasm for literature, that which underlies Gosse's portraits, Saintsbury's essays on minor writers, Lang's impressionism and Collins' stubborn traditionalism. The value of these critics, apart from illustrating the literary situation in their own era, lies then not in their critical theory but in their practice, in their attempts to communicate specifically the pleasures of poetry, the novel, the drama, and foreign literatures. Their practice in these areas forms the burden of the chapters which follow.
Chapter 3 "IT IS POETRY THAT DOES NOT DIE"

If the historian of poetry is hard pressed to make his way through the cross winds of late nineteenth-century poetic controversy, what must have been the problem of the contemporary critic? As in all transitional periods, poetry, the most queenly of the arts, found itself buffeted by a host of contrary laws and non-laws. The last fifteen years of the century alone contained such diverse poetic elements as the Victorian moralizing of "Crossing the Bar," Browning's crabbedly obscure "Parleyings," Kipling's apostrophes to a soon-to-be-dead imperialism, Henley's unrelentingly realistic "In Hospital," and Francis Thompson's deeply felt Catholicism. The wind which blew the loudest, of course, was filled with the sick, sweet odor of decay, a forewarning of the death of the decadence at the true fin de siècle. Wilde, Dowson, Symons, Johnson and the rest of that group, which in Le Gallienne's words had nothing in common but a publisher, expressed their real, or assumed, soul sickness in a Britain devoted to science and economics by creating a world of their own personalities. Seizing upon Pater's "gemlike flame," Baudelaire's assertion that a poem "has no purpose but itself," and Swinburne's attacks upon the "pale Galilean," hymns to pagan gods, and celebration of unknown sins, they thought to free themselves from the suffocation of social and moral restriction. Their
poetry had a brittle, beautiful façade but no solid center. "Libera Me" cried Ernest Dowson:

Goddess the laughter loving, Aphrodite, restore
Life to the limbs of me, liberty, hold me no more
Having the first fruits and flower of me, cast me the core.

But they never found the "core," and the movement died in suicide, sodomy, and a soul harvest for the Catholic Church.

The true road to modernism could not have been apparent to many. Yeats took back to an Ireland ready for the Celtic revival what he had learned at the Cheshire Cheese. Bridges was off somewhere in the country perfecting his art. Hardy was still a novelist, having not yet suffered the ignominy of the attack on Jude. Father Hopkins was a hidden influence, whose new poetic diction and forms would remain scarcely noticed for many years. Nowhere in England was an obvious True Path. The critic who wished to journey beyond the school to the whole was faced by many conflicting routes. He may be excused if he tended to ignore the poetry of his contemporaries when he wrote his criticism.

Aside from the bewildering array of poets and poetry, the critic faced much more practical difficulties. He could, like Arthur Symons or W. E. Henley, go the whole way with a particular movement. But if he did, he was apt to find only a few places where he could publish. Most of the magazines which printed criticism were addressed to a general audience of the middle class, an audience prone to support a somewhat conservative view of the arts. The fate of the Yellow Book and the Savoy is sufficient evidence of that. But beyond the conservatism of his readers,
the critic was also acutely aware that in spite of his individual love for poetry, his audience seldom read it. Most of them, if they read at all, read novels. As a result, the popularizing critic had to write about poetry with full knowledge that his readers were not much interested; that, despite this, he kept writing attests to his faith in the art.

1. "an effort of bluff"

Edmund Gosse understood, in theory at least, what it meant to be a high priest critic in the service of poets and poetry. He appreciated the critic's need to fight against the leveling of democracy. He was highly sensitive to form and style. He felt the critic was duty bound to support verse in a hostile world. Yet in practice he never quite attained his self-assigned critical role. His essays on poetry for the most part talk about poets and their style; the meaning behind the poetic words, the profundity of the poet's thought he was incapable of communicating.

Gosse's flirtation with the French Decadence is as good an illustration as any of the shallowness of his insight. He was incapable of seeing beneath the façade, the linguistic prettiness, of this experimental poetry. Although he was one of the critics responsible for introducing modern French verse into England, he missed the whole serious point of the movement: the autonomy

1 The most complete study of this aspect of Gosse's criticism is Ruth Z. Temple, The Critic's Alchemy (New York, 1953), pp. 185-228.
of art. He paid lip service to the intelligence and modern spirit of the decadence. But even in the eighties, he echoed British conservatism, calling the movement dangerous because "Alexandrian and sickly. The hues on the dying dolphin are exquisite, no doubt, but it will soon be a dead dolphin, and a very disgusting object of study."2

Thus it is we find him in Questions at Issue praising Mallarmé for his seminal influence, for recognizing that "art is not a stable nor a definite thing, and that success for the future must lie along paths not exactly traversed in the immediate past."3 But a decade later we find him deciding that Mallarmé was basically a failure and that his influence would be temporary.4 Gosse seems too to have missed Baudelaire's efforts to see beauty in ugliness. The poet's subject matter, the critic wrote, is not "a very perdurable element. . .absurd. . .vulgar; all of it. . .seems now to have evaporated." The only really powerful thing in Baudelaire, Gosse felt, was his "noble gift of subduing to the service of poetry the voluptuous visions awakened by perfume and music and light."5

In the end Gosse assumed a sort of British paternalism toward these decadents. His whole final attitude is illustrated by


5 P. 319.
his account of a trip to Paris where he sought out choice specimens of French poets, finally bagging the choicest, Verlaine, in a cellar:

The last of the three days devoted to this fascinating sport had arrived. I had seen Symbolists and Decadents to my heart's content. I had learned that Victor Hugo was not a poet at all, and that M. Viély-Griffin was a splendid bard. I had heard that neither Victor Hugo nor M. Viély-Griffin had a spark of talent, but that M. Charles Morice was the real Simon Pure. I had heard a great many conflicting opinions stated without hesitation and with a delightful violence; I had heard a great many verses recited which I did not understand because I was a foreigner and could not have understood if I had been a Frenchman. I had quaffed a number of highly indigestible drinks, and had enjoyed myself very much.6

Gosse's own thinking about poetry explains why this French group fascinated him. A poem, he believed, was essentially a manipulation of words; its greatness lay in its diction, versification, and form. Whether this stand was the result of a revulsion from his deeply evangelical boyhood, the anti-Victorian ideas in the air, a gift of the French decadents, or his own incapability of dealing with poetry on other than a stylistic level is a moot question. What is important is that his criticism of poetry is based almost wholly upon this point of view. The content of a poem may be important, he thought, but certainly it is not crucial.

On this basis he explained the difference between those few who could read poetry and those many who could not. Even though he spent his life popularizing verse, he knew perfectly well that 6 P. 184.
it was appreciated, indeed even looked at, by only a small minority. "Poetry," he wrote in an essay on Tennyson, "is not a democratic art"; it is kept important only by "an effort of bluff on the part of a small influential class." This class, the "aristocrats," those who have it in them to appreciate style, bothers very little about the subject matter. That is left for the ordinary man, who reads only for enjoyment and solace within his own narrow experience. Unaware of the higher qualities of poetry, this man, Gosse implied, is also incapable of being led to such awareness by poetic criticism.

It follows that to Gosse subject matter is merely that element in the poem which the average reader, incapable of artistic judgment, can appreciate. He felt that this fact helped explain the contemporary popularity of such a poem as Philip Bailey's "Festus," a work which with its various accretions no self-respecting critic could call an "artistic" success. Bailey had believed in pure inspiration and had scorned technique. He could be no master to his fellow poets because only the average reader accepted him:

"Festus" appeals to the non-literary temperament, which is something very different indeed from saying that it appeals to the anti-literary. Those who love it appreciate its imagery, its large music, its spacious landscape, but they value it mainly for its teaching. No purely aesthetic estimate of the poem will satisfy those who reply, "Yes, what you say is technically true, no doubt; but it has helped and comforted me, and it helps me still." In many a distant home, in America even oftener than in Great

7 "Tennyson--and After," Questions, p. 182.
8 "What is a Great Poet?" ibid., p. 106.
Britain, a visit to some invalid's room would reveal the presence of two volumes on the bed, the one a Bible, the other "Festus." This is an element in the popularity of Philip James Bailey which criticism is powerless to analyse. 9

This passage illustrates the difficulty of a critic who differentiates too radically between the form of a poem and its content. Does not Gosse's own admission that the appeal of "Festus," its ideas, is beyond the power of criticism imply that a critic of style is equally powerless to deal completely with a poet like Milton or Dante? It is true enough, of course, that one may extend the definition of style to include something more than the way a thing is said, to include the poet's whole organization of his universe and his use of words as symbols of such organization. It is also true that subject matter considered at the philosophical level is something more than the sugar coated sentimentalities and clichés of Bailey's poem. But even so, Gosse was much like his average reader when it came to comprehending ideas. Certainly one finds no profound criticism of the thought of great poets in his work.

If the poem is style, then the history of poetry is the history of style. Gosse felt poetic matter to be a somewhat invariable thing; poetic form, however, he was sure was an organism capable of almost perpetual evolution. In Questions at Issue he defined the poet as "a maker, a man or woman who expresses some mood of vital

passion in a new manner and with adequate art." The key phrase here is "new manner." Poetry advances, Gosse believed, because the true poet desiderates new poetic forms. But novelty, of course, is not enough. The poet must never stray too far from stylistic tradition. Young poets, Gosse knew, rebel against bondage; if they are true poets they are at the same time attracted by the invariable qualities of purity and nobility. "To the young man of violent idiosyncrasies and genuine talent two things always happen—he impresses his charm upon our unwilling senses, and he is himself drawn back, unconsciously and imperceptibly into the main current of the stream of style."

Gosse best illustrated at full length his theory of "the stream of style" in his ill-fated book From Shakespeare to Pope, where he reads an entire century of poetry as the history of the increasing use of the distich. Romantic poetry, Donne's for example, was characterized by overflow; classical poetry by the couplet. The successive chapters of the book recount in considerable detail the poets who used the distich and try to show their influence upon one another. Gosse made Waller the hero of his volume, not because of his own poetic powers but because of his seminal position.

Whether or not pure inspiration, poetic genius in the Platonic

10 P. 72.

sense, had much to do with the evolution of poetry, Gosse did not make clear. Certainly, according to his own professed critical aim, to elucidate art through the personal characteristics of the artist, he felt that genius did play some role. When faced with a poet like Swinburne, he even seems to have aligned himself with the "art as aberration" school:

The physical conditions which accompany and affect what we call genius are obscure, and have hitherto attracted little but empirical notice. It is impossible not to see that the absolutely normal man or woman, as we describe normality, is very rarely indeed an inventor, or a seer, or even a person of remarkable mental energy. The bulk of what are called entirely "healthy" people add nothing to the sum of human achievement, and it is not the average navvy who makes a Darwin, nor the typical daughter of the plough who develops into an Elizabeth Barrett Browning. There are probably few professional men who offer a more insidious attack upon all that in the past has made life variegated and interesting than the school of robust and old-fashioned physicians who theorise on eccentricity, on variations of the type, as necessarily evil and obviously to be stamped out, if possible, by the State.12

Yet it takes more than inner qualities to make a good poet. We have already seen this attitude in his criticism of the "inspired" Philip James Bailey. On his American trip Gosse was much struck with the personalities of both Whitman and Whittier. He lauded their sincerity, their gentlemanliness, their devotion to an ideal. But he could not bring himself to admit that they were first rate poets, for both lacked style.13

Similarly, Gosse could not decide on the role of social environment in poetic evolution. In his essay, "The Influence of France Upon English Poetry" he contrasted the French cultural sympathy for the form with its opposite in "densely unpoetic England." Strangely, however, it is the poets of England who, in spite of their environment, have surpassed the world as fine and subtle artists in language. In his essay "Is Verse in Danger?" Gosse did acknowledge the pressure of the democratic world on poetic production. Because the note of modern poetry is "extreme refinement of its exterior mechanism," that which the average reader cannot comprehend, the poetry of the future will emphasize matter of a sort which he can. Again, because of the complexity of modern knowledge, the poet, finding it impossible to deal with the whole of human experience, will be forced to treat lyrically ephemeral states of emotion. Democratic readers will also, Gosse believed, make a future for the short, highly finished narrative poem, the dramatic poem, and religious and philosophical verse. The aristocratic diction of the past will respond to the democratic demand for plain statement: "The next development in poetry is likely to be very bare and direct, unembroidered, perhaps even arid in character. It will be experimental rather than descriptive, human rather than animal."

Gosse as a critic, then, was well aware of the dangers fac-

14 French Profiles, p. 334.
ing poetry. The average man, reading for solace and enjoyment and blind to the higher nuances of style, is apt to dogmatize his purely emotional response to a poem into a judgment. He is easily led astray by devotion to the poet rather than to his works, for example the public grief at the death of the Laureate. While not denying that his own generation could rejoice in the number and quality of contemporary poets, he believed that unless critics pointed out their value, they would go unheeded. In sum, Gosse felt the critic must recognize the evolution of poetry, be sympathetic with experimentation, and yet hold fast to the tradition of style. In this way he might do his bit in the "effort of bluff" which keeps poetry alive.

But as a practicing critic, Gosse was not quite capable of realizing his own goals. Rather than being "lofty" and "generous" with the poetry of his own day, he almost ignored it and in his essays devoted most of his energies to somewhat gossipy journalistic biographies. On the other hand, as a person he was a staunch champion of many of the newer poetic names of his own generation. And again, regardless of the shallowness of his criticism, his essays are so full of infectious enthusiasm that the reader more than once finds himself wanting to turn to the poetry itself.

Except in his histories, Gosse paid little attention to the poets before the nineteenth century, great or small. One finds him

16 "Tennyson--and After," ibid., p. 193.
attempting no studies of writers like Milton, Chaucer, or Dryden. A handful of essays in Gossip in a Library (1891) illustrates his approach the few times he did deal with the poetry of the past. The book contains a brief historical account of that "dreary doggerel," "A Mirror for Magistrates"; paraphrases of Wither's "The Shepheards Hunting" and John Hopkins' "Amasia"; chitchats about the late seventeenth century poetess Lady Winchelsea, Gerard's "Herbal," and Christopher Smart. His comment that Smart was the poet of a single lyric "that glows with all the flush and bloom of Eden" is typical of such criticism as these essays contain.

Gosse's articles on the greater nineteenth century poets are further evidence of his inability to come to solid and original terms with verse. Even though he restricted himself to comments about the style of poetry, he seldom went very deeply into the verbal texture of the poem, contenting himself with somewhat generalized comments arrived at impressionistically. Keats he reduced to a man of "superlative charm and skill" who copies the highest of other's styles, striving for "a crystallisation into one fused and perfect style of all the best elements of the poetry of the ages."17 Shelley, he considered, appealed to one-and-twenty, not to an older, more serious man.18 Gosse's contribution to Wordsworth criticism was a slight essay on "Peter Bell" which, after considerable digression, concluded that close students will always

find in the poem nature sincerely expressed in simple language.\textsuperscript{19}

In these studies and in others like them Gosse was certainly saying nothing strikingly original.

Gosse's most readable essays on poetry concern men whom he knew personally. His "Swinburne" is a good example of the way he frequently let the biographical details of his subject far outweigh in interest the criticism.\textsuperscript{20} A further illustration is his account of "The Sonnets from the Portuguese." The narrative charm with which he tells of the poem's putative discovery and printing tempts the reader, if only for a moment, to renew his acquaintance with Mrs. Browning.\textsuperscript{21} Only rarely did Gosse attempt more than such biographical portraits. His essay on Christina Rossetti is a serious, and successful, attempt to place her work in the transitional period when the "evil" of "Festus" was working on "Maud," the Spasmodic School, and the "slovenly hexameters" of Clough.\textsuperscript{22} But for the most part, Gosse is more interesting and valuable as a biographer of poets than as a critic of poetry. Sensitive though as he was to poetic style and to oddities of character, he lacked the philosophy and tragic sense which help the critic of poetry get beneath the surface of his subject.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{19} "Peter Bell and His Tormentors," Gossip, p. 265.
\textsuperscript{20} For a typical critical comment see Portraits and Sketches, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{21} "The Sonnets from the Portuguese," Critical Kit-Kats, pp. 1ff.
\textsuperscript{22} Pp. 136ff.
\textsuperscript{23} Robert Lynd, The Art of Letters (London, 1921), pp. 178ff. makes essentially this point.
2. The "tie-beam" of style

From one point of view, Gosse and George Saintsbury thought as one about poetry. In opposition to idea-centered mid-Victorian aesthetics, both believed the crucial element in a poem to be style. Gosse, however, was the more cautious in articulating his position. In conversation he might have agreed with Saintsbury's forthright attacks upon moralistic, subject-based criticism; in his magazine essays, he bated his claws. Saintsbury, intellectually convinced of the rightness of his own ideas, often made the attack direct upon other critical positions:

Men will try to persuade themselves, or at least others, that they read poetry because it is a criticism of life, because it expresses the doubts and fears and thoughts and hopes of the time, because it is a substitute for religion, because it is a relief from serious work, because and because and because. As a matter of fact they (that is to say those of them who like it genuinely) read it because they like it, because it communicates an experience of half-sensual, half-intellectual pleasure to them. Why it does this no mortal can say, any more than he can say why the other causes of his pleasures produce their effect. How it does, it is perhaps not quite so hard to explain; though here also we come as usual to the bounding-wall of mystery before very long. . . . It often makes people positively angry to be told that the greatest part, if not the whole of the pleasure-giving appeal of poetry lies in its sound rather than in its sense, or, to speak with extreme exactness, lies in the manner in which the sound conveys the sense.24

Poetry, then, is poetry and not a textbook of religion, or morality, or history. The poem, although ultimately unexplainable, can be

discussed only in terms of its meter, rhyme, diction, and form. The critic who ignores this will soon find himself in a blind alley, attempting to explain the poem by reference to what it is not or to rank poets fallaciously by their "universal" subject matter.

Having dismissed matter as unimportant, Saintsbury did, in theory at any rate, adopt the aesthete's point of view that art is above morals. Even so, he was not above an occasional moral slap at his poets. After all, he was a conservative writing for a relatively conservative audience. He objected, albeit weakly, to Tom Moore's attempts to "raise a snigger" by "gross indecency" and seemed to find agreeable the "rapid strides" which propriety had made in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, one can hardly accuse Saintsbury of any sort of prudishness. The reader can skip the gross parts of Swinburne, he wrote: "The virtue of the virtuous parts remains." Herrera's "foul epigrams" are not bad because of their immorality, he said, but because they lack "literary merit." In these and other similar judgments, Saintsbury maintained that if a poet has style, it little matters what he writes about.

This adherence to style as the crucial element in the poem fits neatly Saintsbury's critical temper. The critic is not required to consider the whole of a man's work: a "poetic moment," that is good style, may be imbedded in mediocrity.

25 Ibid., I, 140r.
26 Ibid., II, 226.
Saintsbury thus rejected the traditional division of poets into major and minor. In defense of Austin Dobson, he wrote:

I have seen, since his death, Dobson dismissed—not at all contemptuously, but as a matter of course—as a 'minor' poet. Now this facile phrase, which has had at times quite a palpitating history, is, like many others, one fears, frequently if not generally, used with a very vague meaning. A man may be called, and actually be, a minor poet in comparison with undoubted majors of his own or some other time. Or he may be held to be such in consequence of the setting up of some very high standard of poetry itself, which is to apply equally to all times. Or, lastly, he may seem to be minor because he does not deal with the most important and grandiose kinds of poetry—narrative, dramatic, or lyrical. The first calculus is, it will be seen at once, shifting and untrustworthy, although occasionally applicable. According to it, a man may be a minor poet at one part of his career, and a major, though on the score of no fresh work, at another. Everybody is a minor poet, perhaps, if your standard is Shakespeare, Milton, and Shelley in the three divisions. So with the second. The impossibility of getting any agreed estimate of what the essence of poetry is makes it impractical, to say nothing more. For those, indeed, who accept the doctrine of the poetic 'moment', the whole thing is idle. There are poets and there are those who are not poets; but there is no majority or minority except in point of mere bulk or number.28

As a result of this stand, Saintsbury could find poetic virtue in surprising places. He pitied the man who could not read Praed. He lamented in an essay on Panard that although "the maladie du siècle" had not interfered with "the consumption of fermented liquors" it had interfered with their "poetical celebration."29

He was impatient with the "silly prejudice" against Macaulay's poetry and with the critics who objected to "those delightful

29 "A Frame of Miniatures," Collected Essays, IV, 155f.
verses of Scotch Drink [by Burns], which did so shock the delicate nerves of Mr. Matthew Arnold. . ."30 He even liked less manly poetry, Dorat's for instance, which appeals only to those who have a taste for "Dresden China, minuets, powder, and so forth. . ."31 As these passages show, the critic of style can find poetry almost anywhere.

Saintsbury's method when dealing with a poem was essentially impressionistic. He worked up his essays with care, reading widely to put himself into a state of mind where he could discuss the poem as a contemporary would see it. A paragraph in a study of Swinburne suggests the approach:

You read for the first, the twentieth, or the hundredth time "The Garden of Proserpine," or "Ilicet," or "A Wasted Vigil." There is the first stage of pleasure, a purely uncritical enjoyment. Then there is the second stage, in which you sit down and take your critical paper and pencil, and put down: metre so much; alliteration so much; ingenious disposition of vowel sounds so much; criticism of life so much; pathetic fancy so much; to having read it when SHE was present, or absent, or cross, or kind, or something, so much; literary reminiscence so much. And then there is the third, when you have totted these items up and found that they do not come to anything like the real total, and there is an infinite balance of attraction and satisfaction which you cannot explain, which is fact, but an unsolved, unanalysed, ultimate fact. The poetry which has come to mean this to a lover of poetry never gets stale, never loses charm, never seems the same, or rather, always being the same in one way, is always fresh in another.32

Saintsbury, aside from his work on French literature, wrote essays mainly about nineteenth century poets. The requirements of the periodicals which printed his work certainly played some

30 "English War-Songs--Campbell," ibid., I, 349; 340.
31 "A Frame of Miniatures," ibid., IV, 133.
32 Ibid., II, 230.
part in this choice of subjects because in his books Saintsbury took all literature as his province. However, unlike Gosse, who seldom came to real critical grips with his near contemporaries, Saintsbury was not afraid to have his say about Tennyson, Arnold, Browning, and Swinburne, while at the same time paying due attention to a whole host of lesser figures. The following handful of critical statements is typical. He felt Tennyson's "secret" lay in his "slow and dreamy music," his "concerted blank verse," his accurate observation of nature, and "his wonderful skill in adjusting vowel values." He believed Swinburne had more "velocity" than any other British poet, although he lacked "command of the means." He felt Browning to be like a seventeenth-century poet, with the same ugly defects of indolence and bad taste, a mixture of "ore and dross." He particularly chided Arnold—for "rhymes almost descending to the cockney level of Mrs. Browning at her unintelligible worst, now curious little pedantries of expression, now things that show the poet's craftsmanship altogether fails him, now affectations and imitations of every sort and kind."

Saintsbury's studies of the minor poets of the nineteenth century are particularly fine, a collection of them forming as

33 Ibid., II, 202-205.
34 Ibid., II, 222-224.
35 Ibid., II, 252.
36 Ibid., II, 272.
good a survey of the poetry of this period as has ever been written. Dealing with writers as varied as Praed, Hood, and Southey, his enthusiasm never flagging, he got to the heart of each poet's unique gift, while at the same time seldom over-praising him. Landor he found to be frequently "silly," a stylist with nothing to say; but "if we tried to do without Landor, we should lose something with which no one else could supply us." 37 Moore's virtue, he thought, rested in his ability to marry music to both verse and poetry, although "Lalla Rookh" is merely a poem of the second rank. 38 Crabbe, he wrote, has created a gallery of "sharp-edged characters" which compare with those of the greatest novelists, but "there is no wing in Crabbe, there is no transport, because...there is no music." 39 In his other studies of this sort, those on Praed, Hunt, Hogg, Morris, Southey, and Hood, Saintsbury took the same judicious road, blaming where blame was due, praising when it was required. But always on the basis of style. If the reader of criticism wishes to discover what the poets of the nineteenth century thought, what moral, social, or ethical ideas their verse contains, he will have to turn to another critic than Saintsbury.

37 Ibid., II, 131.
38 Ibid., I, 149f; 146.
39 Ibid., I, 18; 21.
What is to be said of a critic who places Matthew Arnold at the head of nineteenth century poets, while admitting that "criticism" would place Browning or Tennyson there and that his judgment is merely a "personal impression"? Again, how is a critic who sincerely believes that poetic taste is inborn to set up any criteria for judgment at all? Andrew Lang, commenting on his dislike for Virgil, once wrote, "Why should we force ourselves into an affection for them [writers whom tradition calls great]? No spectacle annoys me more than the sight of people who ask if it is 'right' to take pleasure in this or that work of art. Their loves and hatreds will never be genuine, ..." Lang is a prime instance of the intuitive critic whose instincts more often than not lead him to the right judgments, but whose readers find it difficult to find a basis for these judgments. Certain critical principles can be detected in Lang's essays on poetry, but it is impossible to know just how seriously he held them.

On the question of matter and form, Lang opposed both Gosse and Saintsbury. He often commented upon an author's style in his essays, but it was clearly subject matter which interested him more. His comparison of Longfellow and Poe is typical of his position. "Longfellow," he wrote, "is exactly the antithesis of Poe, who, with all

41 Ibid., pp. 58f.
his science of verse and ghostly skill, has no humanity, or puts none of it into his lines. One is the poet of Life, and every-day life; the other is the poet of Death, and of bizarre shapes of death, from which Heaven deliver us! He agreed with Gosse that "humanity" (in Gosse's terms, subject matter) was the real stuff of poetry to the majority of men just as he agreed that democracy had but a "feigned respect" for poetry at all. But even so, Lang's apparent poetic tastes were those of the average reader.

Like this reader, Lang usually required his poetry to be "manly" or "light" or "gay," typical English values which the critic found in Chaucer but which he now felt to be battered and scarred by the nineteenth century world. The French poet de Banville, he wrote, could teach modern writers "a lesson of gaiety. They are only too fond of rue and rosemary, and now and then prefer the cypress to the bay." He extolled the "Lays" of Sir Walter on the same basis:

"He came with poems of which the music seemed to gallop, like thundering hoofs and ringing bridles of a rushing border troop. . . . They call his Gothic art false, his armour pasteboard; but he put living men under his castled roofs, living men into his breastplates and taslets. Science advances, old knowledge becomes ignorance; it is poetry that does not die, and that will not die. . . ."

42 Ibid., p. 45.
44 Essays in Little (London, 1891), p. 76.
But even as he heaped praise on the kinds of poetry the average reader enjoys, Lang had, as we have seen, no illusions about the intelligence of the British public. Even while he lauded his reader's tastes he attacked their mental abilities. His essays on poetry are full of waspish remarks like this explanation for Chaucer's no longer being read: "your Englishman is not quick-brained, he cannot guess what 'cyster' should signify."\(^6\) Too, he had little use for blatantly popular poets like Martin Tupper, whom he characterized as a "chastened Walt Whitman" whose statements are "obvious, but respectable":

> Zoilus attacked Homer; the Arabs attacked Tupper. The works of the Arabs and of Zoilus have perished; Tupper and Homer endure. The critics are as the shifting sands that the wind blows at the wind's will; Homer lasts like the great Pyramid, and on Tupper's face is the secular and enigmatic smile of the imperishable Sphinx.

> On perusing your works for the first time, Sir, I can easily see that, as Mr. Matthew Arnold said of Mr. Tennyson, you "were the most popular of our poets, -- and richly deserved to be so." Why the wasps and Arabs, and scorpion Detraction, with her mile of rope, pursued you, stung you, and increased your circulation, I cannot imagine. You wrote, Sir, for Anglo-Saxons, the offspring of Brythonic mothers, and you wrote, in an unaffected and cheerful manner, exactly what suited your audience. I do not reckon you at all inferior to poets who have been discovered by the newspapers.\(^7\)

Recognizing the average reader's inability to detect irony, one might conclude that Lang deliberately wrote this way, knowing very well

that some of his readers might think he spoke straightforwardly.

Lang, on occasion, talked about the social and biographical influences on poetry. Poe, for example, was "a genius tethered to the hack-work of the press, a gentleman among canaille, a poet among poetasters" who, had he lived thirty years later, would have been applauded.48 But Lang never dwelt in much detail on the biographies of his subjects. He praised Colvin's restraint in the life of Keats49 and objected strenuously to the "commentators, biographers, anecdotists" who swarm around Shelley "like carrion-flies round a sensitive plant."50 The biography of a poet, Lang felt, is no business of the reader of poetry.

Certain eternal subjects make a poem last, while matter suited to one generation, even though clothed in beautiful language, soon loses its power. "For this reason," Lang wrote to Chaucer, "me-thinks, you old poets are dear, because you tell of life and men's hearts, ever the same, . . . Time alters our speech and manners and habit, but never alters our hearts, or the birds' song."51 In contrast, Lang objected to Fitzgerald because he thought Khayyam's philosophy unsuited to modern England52 and believed it impossible

48 Letters to Dead Authors, p. 136.
50 Letters to Dead Authors, p. 164.
51 New & Old Letters, p. 183.
52 Letters to Dead Authors, p. 200.
ever again to recover for Byron "the generous admiration expressed by Shelley, Scott, and Goethe."53

Lang's writing about poetry was essentially a recounting of his own likes. Thus he had much in common with Gosse and Saintsbury although he seldom troubled to draw coherent critical principles from his experience. He ranged farther afield in both time and distance than his two friends, but his criticism was a good deal more trivial. Among nineteenth century poets, he reserved his highest praise for Shelley, Tennyson, and his favorite Arnold; his lowest for Browning. Byron is a "swift" rather than a "lovely spirit"54 and Swinburne is the poet of a single great work, "Atalanta."55 Morris, who uses "colour words" well and who has never come up to his first book, is best read on sleepy summer afternoons.56 Bridges has "a certain austere and indifferent beauty of diction and a memory of the old English poets, Milton and the early lyrists."57 In all of his essays Lang's procedure was to quote passages from his poets and then to cite his impressions of them. He seldom, however, bothered with the why. Thus while the reader may be stimulated by Lang's enthusiasm, he is somewhat at a loss to account for the critic's emotion. What,

54 Ibid., p. ix.
57 P. 21.
for instance, did Lang mean by elevating Kingsley to the small band of "true" poets? "He had the real spark of fire, the true note; though the spark might seldom break into flame, and the note was not always clear." What the "true note," the "spark of fire" are, Lang never made quite plain.

1. "the keys of this world of ideas"

Saintsbury and Gosse read poetry for style, Lang for a somewhat limited matter. None made very much of the view that poetry itself is the higher truth. To take their work as typical of late nineteenth-century journalistic criticism would be to say that pleasure alone was the desired poetic value. But other critics than these were also publishing, among them John Churton Collins, whose theory of poetry embraced Plato and Aristotle, Dante, and Matthew Arnold. Poetry is "the application of ideas to life"; upon this definition Collins constructed his theory. Even in the midst of the decadence, of the rejection of mid-Victorian aesthetics, this older view of poetry as a vehicle of teaching still had its champions, here a highly spirited one.

Collins' best theoretical statement is his essay "The True Functions of Poetry" which he wrote for book publication in 1905. He grounded his discussion in the "parables" of Wordsworth's imprisoned soul and Plato's cave. Poetry, he asserted in the words

58 Essays in Little, p. 156.
of the "Ion," is written by the heaven-inspired bard in whose hands are "the keys of this world of ideas." ⁵⁹

These, surely, are the poets, these the critics who will teach us best the true functions of poetry, teach us to understand that the chief office of poetry is not merely to give amusement, not merely to be the expression of the feelings, good or bad, of mankind, or to increase our knowledge of human nature and of human life, but that, if it includes this mission, it includes also a mission far higher, the revelation, namely, of ideal truth, the revelation of that world of which this world is but the shadow or drossy copy, the revelation of the eternal, the unchanging and the typical which underlies the unsubstantial and ever-dissolving phenomena of earth's empire of matter and time. ⁶⁰

To carry out this ideal, the poet, if he wishes to be a good one, must necessarily be a good man. For the true poet is a great teacher who, just as life and nature do, teaches "by virtue of the profundity, purity, and comprehensiveness of his insight." ⁶¹

Yet Collins made quite clear that the poet cannot deliberately set out to teach. If he fails to appeal to the "sensuous and emotional nature of man," he has failed as an artist. "The moment he preaches, or poses as a moralist, he ceases to be a poet." As a God-inspired being, he may take great pains with the "aesthetic" of his poem; the "spiritual" or "moral" part of it, however, will be mainly unconscious. ⁶²

Collins believed that poetry's low estate in the modern world

⁶⁰ P. 265.
⁶¹ P. 277.
⁶² Pp. 276f.
arose from a lack of definition. In his own restatement he drew upon Dante's letter to the Can Grande. Poetry of the highest order blends and fuses the poetic levels which Dante distinguished in the Comedy: the literal, the allegorical, the moral, and the mystical. In second rate poetry these "exist in singularity" or are mixed imperfectly. Collins was quite sure that the basic danger to poetry in his own age was the failure of readers to recognize these levels. The difference between a major and a minor poet was not to be found, as Saintsbury said, in the quantity of the poet's production; it lay rather in the quality of his insight, in his ability to comprehend the universe at different levels. And there was little help for an age that could not see this:

No one can doubt that our confused and inadequate definitions of poetry, at once springing from, and leading to confused and inadequate notions of its nature and its aims have arisen from our not distinguishing between its higher and lower manifestations, between its functions as the greatest of the world's poets conceived them and its functions as poets of a secondary order have conceived them. As long as we accustom ourselves to place loosely in the same category and to label with the common name of "poetry" the Prometheus Bound and The Rape of the Lock, the Odes of Pindar and the Odes of Prior, the Attis of Catullus and the Ode on the Intimations of Immortality, our conception of what constitutes, or should constitute, "poetry," from an educational point of view, is not likely to be sound and furthering. I am here pleading that poetry, as a medium of civil culture and discipline should, both in elementary and advanced education, have far more importance attached to it than is attached to it at present, that in this respect it should be to us what it was to the ancient Greeks. It can never hold that place until we distinguish between

63 Pp. 281f.
its interest, value and charm aesthetically and in relation to art, and its value and power spiritually and morally in relation to theology and ethics. 64

The major figure in the debasement of criticism, according to Collins, was Swinburne; the major figure in the debasement of poetry was Keats. Keats with his magic of expression, "his unerring artistic tact and bewitching power of piercing into the innermost soul of sensuous beauty" was the "Lorelei" who had led to the disastrous separation of aesthetic from metaphysic and ethic. 65 Although Keats himself was of the "divine brotherhood" his followers were not. They had reduced poetry to "light and frivolous" uses, to sensuality and obscenity, to an attempt to express man's grosser appetites and instincts, and, worst of all, to pessimism. All of this, Collins protested vehemently, was to "bind the living with the dead" and "blasphemy" in its most repulsive form. The only hope for poetry was a return to tradition. 66

The role of the critic of poetry, Collins believed, is to act as an interpreter of the genre to individual men, much in the way the poet himself is an interpreter of God to mankind. 67 The critic must be imbued with the Greek spirit and have faith that poetry will again regain its rightful place with the discovery

64 Pp. 289f.
65 P. 285.
66 P. 283.
67 P. 264.
of new forms and new themes. The critic must realize that the scientific spirit is a "deadly solvent" corroding the imagination and soul of man. Under this spirit, poetry will degenerate even further into mere amusement for those whose serious interests lie elsewhere. But there is hope that this destructive materialism will eventually be overthrown. Collins thought he saw in the themes with which Whitman fumbled and in the religion and ethics which Emerson preached a reaction against the scientific spirit.

Poets of the future, he felt, would follow their lead:

A reaction against the restless, hollow degraded life at present characteristic of the great centres of business and fashion is inevitable, and with that reaction poetry may awake, --the poetry of a fuller day,--and the famous prophecy find its realisation, not politically only, but in another and nobler sense as well:

Westward the course of Empire takes its way.68

As a critic of poetry, Collins is as disappointing in his way as Gosse, Saintsbury, and Lang are in theirs. Theoretically, one can find little to quarrel with if one agrees that morality in a higher sense is crucial in a poem. However, Collins' constant over-emphasis of the didactic led him to underestimate the pleasure principle and his impatience with factual inaccuracy in more impressionistic critics frequently overshadows the positive things he had to say. When he attacked other critics, Collins' professed aim was to support a standard of scholarship in poetry as a guide for students who would read academic books. In a sense, he had

the equipment for this work, being one of the most learned men of letters of his day. But the ease with which he pounced upon both major and minor misstatements of fact and his often querulous tone do not, it must be confessed, add very much to one's understanding of poetry.

Collins' original studies of poets themselves are essentially contributions to literary history or attempts at source hunting. Most suggest an encyclopedia article. His extensive study of Dryden, for example, makes wide use of history, social background, and biography. He found Dryden as a poet lacking in imagination, in the "sense of the beautiful, of the pathetic, of the sublime." Although the poet had a fine ear for rhyme and a "plastic mastery" of language, he lacked genuine enthusiasm. A good bit of Collins' essay on Byron is devoted to source hunting to prove Byron as indebted to his reading for his poetry as were Milton and Gray. Somewhat surprisingly in the light of his own standards of mid-Victorian morality, Collins was genuinely enthusiastic about Don Juan. Byron, he concluded, is the most versatile English poet next to Shakespeare, although he had no spiritual insight, no repose, no harmony, was defective architectonically, had a bad ear like Browning, and was cursed with an ingrained coarseness. Two essays on minor poets, Gerald Massey and William Watson (in Studies in Poetry and Criticism), display Collins' usual technique

70 Studies in Poetry and Criticism, pp. 117ff.
when dealing with poetry. In the "Watson" he excused the poet's faults by saying that Watson, like Arnold, was born in an unfriendly age. Then he quoted "beauties," labeled successively "a treasury of jeweled aphorisms," "immortal," "exquisite triplet," "a gem without a flaw," none of which phrases seems to mean very much, and none of which is apt to lead the reader to a concept of the poet as God inspired.

One of Collins' favorite devices when writing about poetry was source hunting. His book, Illustrations of Tennyson, which originally appeared in article form in the Cornhill, deserves a word to itself because it exemplifies the depths to which this kind of "criticism" can go. It is a work in which pedantic scholarship is revealed in all its minuteness and rightly brought about the poet's characterization of Collins as "a louse on the locks of literature." Although at the beginning of the book, Collins proclaimed, "What constitutes Lord Tennyson's glory as a poet, it is no part of the present volume to discuss..." he succeeded in reducing the Laureate, whether he meant to or not, to a mere poetic gleaner of fields where others had reaped more widely.

In the light of his high poetic standards, Collins was undoubtedly right in his conclusion that Tennyson was not a great original poet. But as a critic and teacher who professed it his duty to uphold the standards of poetry in a time of materialism and democracy, his method of arriving at his conclusion is

hardly valuable. Page after page of comparative quotations are of no interest to the general reader and of slight interest even to the university man whom Collins wished to indoctrinate. And the same is true of all of Collins' writing about poetry. Thus, although he alone among the critics with which this study deals constructed a profound and coherent aesthetic for poetry, he also was least effective in communicating his theory in practice. Actually, a Gosse gossip, a Saintsbury vintage essay, or a Lang letter to a dead author is better calculated to uphold the tradition of poetry in a hostile world than all the "slating" or pedantries of a Collins.
The problem the late-nineteenth century critic faced with the novel was somewhat different from that which he faced in poetry. The latter form, he knew as he wrote, was little read; fiction, however, had a great and growing audience. In addition, the 1880's and 1890's saw a widening of the gap between novels for the general public and novels for the intelligentsia. Except for Hardy, George Eliot had been perhaps the last of the great Victorian novelists who appealed to both the intellectual reader and to the Mudie subscriber. With the example of continental novelists—Tolstoi, Dostoievsky, Flaubert, and Zola—before them some writers, like Gissing, George Moore, and James, were beginning to insist that the novelist as well as the poet was an artist and not an entertainer, that he had a perfect right to investigate all facets of human life. But many general readers (and critics as well) were afraid that naturalism and "psychologizing" would destroy the novel as a "safe" vehicle for family reading. Thus, in terms of sales, Rider Haggard and Anthony Hope, not Meredith, Hardy, James, or Gissing, were read as Dickens and Collins had been read.

The journalistic critic found himself in a somewhat uneasy position. He had to review novels, many of them trash, in the pursuit of his daily occupation. But most of these reviews were anonymous and necessarily superficial. If he wished to write a
more serious, signed article about the genre, he had to recognize
that the general public preferred She to Jude. He could, like
John Churton Collins, decide not to write about fiction at all.¹
Or he could follow the lead of Edmund Gosse and George Saints-
bury and turn to the more mature and more artistic continental
novelists for his subjects. Again, he could limit his dis-
cussions to English books before his own age, as Saintsbury in
his more formal essays often did. Or he could adopt the attitude
of Andrew Lang and find in novels of all times and countries
the very things which the reading public demanded: romance,
morality, good fights, and happy endings.

¹ "imaginative-realism"

Edmund Gosse was peculiarly unsuited to be a critic of
fiction. "Never in all my early childhood," he wrote in Father
and Son, "did any one address to me the affecting preamble 'Once
upon a time.' "² His parents had denied him almost all access
to the tales which nourished other British boys, and, even after
he emancipated himself, he never seemed able to attain the
emotional response to fiction which characterized his love for
poetry. Thus, while Lang and Saintsbury had a fine time exclaim-

¹ Collins' only reprinted study of fiction is in a review of
Critica (London, 1901).

² (New York, 1907), p. 25.
ing about their impressions of the great English novels, Gosse rarely mentioned them.

As a journalist he did do some contemporary novel reviewing, of Hardy's *The Woodlanders*, for instance; but for the most part his magazine subjects were not English ones. Thus it is in connection with his studies of French authors (collected in *French Profiles*, 1904) that Gosse must be considered as a late nineteenth-century critic of the novel. Some of these pieces, the sketches of France and Loti, are merely reprintings of earlier book reviews; others, on Fabré and Daudet, are full length criticisms employing biography, portrait, anecdote, and critical commentary. Even though he seems to have read most of the contemporary French novels, his affinity was for those novelists with British leanings, or for those who were basically stylists. Interestingly enough, in the light of his preoccupation with style in poetry, almost all of his pronounce-
ments on the novel concerned subject matter.

Gosse was not affected a great deal by the growing belief that the novel was serious literature. As a corollary to his aristocratic views about poetry, he seemed to feel that because the novel had a wider appeal it necessarily had to be an inferior literary genre. An essay in *Questions at Issue* aptly titled "The Tyranny of the Novel" set forth his views of fiction and its readers. The literary monopoly of the novel, he wrote, had, since 1837, grown more and more "irresistible." Its readers were women,
especially young women in their first year of marriage, presumably
during their nine months or so of waiting. But even so, as the
following passage shows, he felt fiction had a very real place,
albeit a low one, in the literary life of the times. One wonders,
however, what the reaction of Flaubert or Gosse's friend Henry
James would have been to such adjectives as "gentle," "mild," "ir-
responsible," or "restful."

It appears to me natural and rational that this particu-
lar form of writing should attract more readers than
any other. It is so broad and flexible, includes so
vast a variety of appeals to the emotions, makes so
few demands upon an over-strained attention, that it
obviously lays itself out to please the greatest
number. For the appreciation of a fine poem, of a
learned critical treatise, of a contribution to
exact knowledge, peculiar aptitudes are required:
the novel is within everybody's range. Experience,
moreover, proves that the gentle stimulus of reading
about the cares, passions, and adventures of
imaginary personages, and their relations to one
another—a mild and irresponsible mirroring of real
life on a surface undisturbed by responsibility, or
memory, or personal feeling of any kind—is the
most restful, the most refreshing, of all excitements
which literature produces. 3

Gosse was an acute enough critic to recognize the changes in
the novel of his own age and forward looking enough to see them in
the main as a good thing. He thought that the romantic novel was
less and less desired and less and less satisfactory because of
what he called the "excess" of knowledge in the modern world. In
other words, an age of science and realism called for novels
which were more true to life than a mere romance. He charac-

terized The Shaving of Shagpat, for example, as the last book in which any Englishman had allowed his fancy to go roaming without any thought of morality or intellectuality. Gosse isolated two mutations in the novel beyond such romance. In his discussions of Zola as the objective realist and Tolstoi as the objective realist plus the man of imagination, he erected a neat Hegelian synthesis pointing toward the novel as it would be.

The first mutation was the replacement of romance by realism, or naturalism, or the experimental novel, all three terms used interchangeably by Gosse and other critics. As he had done when he explained the Symbolist movement to his British readers, Gosse made a further attempt to elucidate the theories of the French naturalists, especially those of Zola. The result was "The Limits of Realism in Fiction," one of the most satisfactory analytical essays he ever wrote. He took up the subject not because he was blindly dedicated to the movement but because he was "tired to death" of those critics who refused to see what naturalism really was and who denied that Zola was a first rate novelist. For in spite of Zola's "moral lameness," Gosse maintained that the French writer was as "divine" as any Hawthorne or Thackeray and was the one writer responsible for gathering together the scattered threads of naturalism.


5 Questions, pp. 138-154.
The central aim of the naturalist movement, Gosse declared, was to negate both fancy and the ideal. Its object

...is to be contemporary; it is to be founded on and limited by actual experience; it is to reject all empirical modes of awakening sympathy and interest; its aim is to place before its readers living beings, acting the comedy of life as naturally as possible. It is to trust to principles of action and to reject formulas of character; to cultivate the personal expression; to be analytical rather than lyrical; to paint men as they are, not as you think they should be.

These, Gosse continued, obviously forgetting for a moment Heathcliffe, Pickwick, and Monte Cristo, are the aims not alone of the naturalists but of all great novelists. Where then had the movement gone astray? Why are its products dismissed as "filth and crime"? The answer Gosse found in a reversed romanticism which painted men not as they are but worse than they are. The naturalistic novelists had been so intent upon mirroring physical life as it is that they forgot that imagination too is a side of man. In their attempts to remain disinterested, they produced such a "brutal want of tone as to render the portrait a caricature." The crowning result had been to drive out the "fantastic and intellectual" elements from fiction, leaving but "clinical bulletins of a soul dying of atrophy."

The naturalistic movement had produced good work and had been the vehicle for some of the greatest minds of the day, but, because it was limited, it had to give way in the future to novels which made "a concession to the human instinct for mystery and beauty."
The Russian novelists, especially Tolstoi, made such a con-
cession, Gosse believed, and thus produced the kind of fiction
which evolved from naturalism and went beyond it. In a highly
sympathetic essay on Voguâ, Gosse sketched for his English readers
the reaction against Zola's mechanical extremity on the part of a
critic steeped in the Russian novel. Voguâ was almost a hero to
Gosse, who considered his book Le Roman Russe "perhaps the most
epoch-making single volume of criticism issued in France during our
time." The Russians, Voguâ had discovered, were just as serious
and thorough as Zola; they, however, made room for the "mystery"
and "beauty" of the human condition. "In Dostoeffsky and Tol-
stoy," Gosse wrote, "he Voguâ found great masters of fiction who
appreciated the value of scientific truth, but who were not content
to move a step in the pursuit of it without being attended by pity
and hope." In his own essay on Tolstoi, Gosse reiterated the
value of the imaginative content of the Russian's work. Unlike
Howells and Zola, who were committed by their theories to present
exhaustive details, Tolstoi "cannot be tied down to describe more
than he chooses to create." He is an impressionist whose observa-
tion is vivid but whose imagination is more vivid still. His

6 "Eugène Melchoir de Voguâ," Portraits and Sketches (London, 1912),
p. 260.
7 P. 258.
major role in the history of the novel, Gosse concluded, was to take the form a step beyond naturalism:

- The realists in Russia, as well as elsewhere, have given us many good gifts—they have awakened our observation, have exposed our hallucinations, have shattered our absurd illusions. It is mere injustice to deny that they have been seekers after truth and life, and that sometimes they have touched both the one and the other. But one great gift has commonly eluded their grasp. In their struggle for reality and vividness, they have too often been brutal, or trivial, or sordid. Tolstoi is none of these. As vital as any one of them all, he is what they are not—distinguished. His radical optimism, his belief in the beauty and nobility of the human race, preserve him from the Scylla and Charybdis of naturalism, from squalor and insipidity. They secure for his best work that quality of personal distinction which does more than anything else to give durability to imaginative literature.9

One might suspect from his friendship with Henry James and his own interest in poetic form that Gosse might have seen the possibilities in the American's methods. But such is not the case. In his letters to James, Gosse rather pointedly ignored the novels, just as he seems not to have written very much about them elsewhere. One can infer, however, from an essay on Bourget, who was "indubitably trying what he can produce with the pencils and two inch square of ivory that are the property of Mr. Henry James," that Gosse had slight sympathy for psychologizing. Bourget's sort of novel, Gosse asserted, is not in the "great central hall" occupied by Balzac, Zola, Tolstoi, Fielding, and Dickens. Gosse's comment on Bourget's La Duchesse Bleue is typical of those made by many of James's less perceptive modern

9 Pp. 130f.
readers: "we confess that it requires some respect for M. Bourget and some enthusiasm for the processes of the psychological novel to carry us through so long a book attached to so slender a thread of plot."¹⁰

No, what Gosse wanted in the novel was a sort of "imaginative-realism," a fusion of the naturalist's care for detail and the romanticist's power of idealizing and selecting that detail. Aside from Tolstoi, what he preferred in fiction can be found in the work of three of his friends: Gide, Kipling, and especially Hardy. Gide, Gosse wrote, had taken the middle path between "improvisation" and "the old logical lucidity of classic French."¹¹ Kipling had filled up a void in English fiction "between excess of psychological analysis and excess of superhuman romance."¹² But it was Hardy who especially seemed to please him. Gosse's championship of the creator of Wessex was lifelong and famous; any disparagement of the novelist brought about an immediate unsheathing of critical claws. Sir Newman Flower cites a typical anecdote:

He snubbed Lord Kitchener once on this subject.
"Who is this person—Hardy?" Kitchener asked Gosse.
"Oh, just like yourself, Lord Kitchener, a member of the Order of Merit," Gosse replied. Kitchener said nothing.¹³

¹² "Mr. Kipling's Short Stories," Questions, p. 256. Gosse found the same thing true of Daudet. "Alphonse Daudet," French Profiles, p. 120.
What Gosse found in Hardy was a realistic picture of rural England and its effect upon its inhabitants. But even more important, it was a realism made ideal because it was filtered through a highly imaginative mind.

Gosse's comments about style in the novel are typical of the native Englishman saturated with French fiction: style is much but not everything. A fine stylist is the novelist under control; an erratic stylist the novelist of unfettered individuality. Control may save a novel just as a strong personality may substitute for conscious artistry. Daudet, Gosse wrote, had a marvelous talent for seeing the decorative and external side of life which saved him from the excesses of the autobiographical method. He had a way of communicating reality filtered through "the bright coloured atmosphere of his talent." But his art lay "in his arrangement and adaptation of things that he has experienced, not in his invention." Kipling, on the other hand, was an erratic stylist: "I acknowledge the broken and jagged style," Gosse wrote, "the noisy newspaper bustle of the little peremptory sentences, the cheap ironies of the satires on society. . . . But when all this is said, what does it amount to? What but an acknowledgement of the crudity of a strong and

15 P. 122.
rapidly developing young nature?" In his essay on La Duchesse Bleue Gosse most clearly stated the difference between the novel as style and the novel as the unfettered expression of the individual. The first is the French way; the second the English: In the hypothesis of the French novelist, a love, a hatred, a joy, a sorrow, is to the really successful artist nothing more than so much manured earth out of which he can force the flower of his talent, that blossom of delicacy and passion, to perfect which he will not hesitate for a moment to kill in himself every true delicacy and every living emotion. It is not a pleasant theory, and the ugliness of it may help us who form the vast majority of men and women to bear with fortitude the mortifying fact that we were not born to be geniuses. But we think that M. Bourget makes a mistake in attributing this peculiarly inhuman hardness of heart exclusively to the artist of the highest class. We are afraid that our experience has led us to observe the vanity—which is really at the root of this moral deformity—in those who have nothing of genius in their nature except its fretfulness and its ferocity.17

One danger of a purely stylistic view of literature Gosse somewhat sidestepped in his discussion of poetry: the danger of the reader's being led morally astray by the very beauty of the style. On his own evidence, he himself fell into the trap when reading Loti's Profanation:

There is one piece in Figures et Choses which certainly ought never to have been written. I hope to screw up my courage, presently, to reprove it by name; it is horrible, unseemly. But I have read every word of it, slowly, with gusto, as we read our Loti, balancing the sentences, drawing the phrases over the palate. It is a vice, this Lotism; and I am not sure that there ought not to be a society to put it down. Yet if I

16 "Mr. Kipling's Short Stories," Questions, p. 258.
17 French Profiles, p. 249.
were persuaded to sign a pledge never to read another page of Loti, I know that I should immediately break it. 18

In fact, the whole problem of morality in the novel was one which Gosse had to face. According to Frank Swinnerton, the critic agreed to use his writing to help publicize Heinemann's series of continental novels, 19 and he certainly must have been aware that these books, particularly the French ones, had not been written with English moral standards in mind. But while there may have been remnants of the Plymouth Brotherhood in his thought, Gosse was certainly no prude. His honest attempt to see what Zola was doing is evidence of that. He worked from the premise that the tastes and reticence of one nation were not necessarily the tastes and reticence of another. The situation, though, was a difficult one for him, as the following passage from his essay on Bazin shows:

This question of the "spiritual digestion" is one which must always trouble those who are asked to recommend one or another species of reading to an order of undefined readers. Who shall decide what books are and what books are not proper to be read? There are some people who can pasture unpoisoned upon the memoirs of Casanova, and others who are disturbed by The Idyls (sic) of the King. They tell me that in Minneapolis Othello is considered objectionable; our great-aunts thought Jane Eyre no book for girls. In the vast complicated garden of literature it is always difficult to say where the toxicologist comes in, and what distinguishes him from the purveyor of a salutary moral tonic. In recent French romance, everybody must acknowledge, it is practically impossible to lay down a hard and fast rule. 20

20 "M. René Bazin," French Profiles, pp. 266f.
But even so, perhaps in response to the preference of his readers, Gosse reserved his highest praise for those French novelists who were acceptable on the basis of English moral standards. Both Bazin and Daudet had produced novels that could be left lying around the house. "I do not say...that this is everything," Gosse wrote; "but I protest--even in the face of the indignant Bar of Bruges--that this is much." Gosse, as he did in so many critical areas, took a middle path, recognizing that a British critic of French fiction had to skate as lightly as possible over the "thin ice" of morality.

2. "assimilation" and "creation"

George Saintsbury wrote to Norman Douglas in 1921: "I am seventy-five. I have read more novels than a man of seven hundred and fifty ought to have done. For some twenty years I used to review hundreds or thereabouts of English and scores of French as they came out." Making allowances for the exaggeration of old age, one can detect in this letter from the venerable critic some of the difficulties in dealing with Saintsbury on the novel. Aside from the hundreds of book reviews, there were scores of introductions to both English and French editions, long articles

21 P. 273
in the Britannica, histories of the novel, and many leaders and magazine articles. In the following pages I have attempted merely to sketch Saintsbury's criteria for judging the novels he read and to show how he applied these criteria to a limited number of novels, particularly those of the mid-Victorians.

Saintsbury's comment in "The Present State of the English Novel" (Fortnightly, 1888) that the genre was dying in England and would be replaced by romance is somewhat cryptic until one realizes that the critic is using the term "novel" in a peculiarly limited sense. The novel, according to Saintsbury's definition, is a fiction limited to the portrayal of character and social manners; the romance, on the other hand, is a fiction dealing with the enduring actions and passions of men. The subject of the novel being society and the men in that society, Saintsbury, his Tory eye cocked suspiciously at democratic leveling, concluded that materials for the novel were almost exhausted. As democracy increased, social variety decreased, limiting in turn the kinds of material which the novelist might use. The novelistic elements in contemporary fiction are then but a reworking of the "shallow ground" of democratic society "which yields a thinner and weedier return at every cropping." "The average man and woman in England of the middle of the late nineteenth century, has been drawn and quartered, analysed and 'introspected,' till there is
nothing new to be done with him."23 The elements of romance, on the other hand, are a constant body of material upon which the fictionist can draw. Because these elements are universal to all men in all times and societies, it is they who make the fiction "eternal."

By this definition, Saintsbury was thus committed to believing that the writer who best reproduces the society with which he deals writes the best book. In an essay on Susan Ferrier, he classified novelists into two schools on this basis. Writers like LeSage, Fielding, Thackeray, and Jane Austen reproduce a section of real life; others like Dickens and Balzac do work which "if not false, is always more or less abnormal." The first group, Saintsbury thought, had some of the universal and truthful qualities of Shakespeare while the second kept museums where various "monstrosities" were on view.24

Thus Saintsbury did not decry the non-romantic elements in fiction as Andrew Lang was accustomed to do. Like Gosse, he objected to "superficial critics" who believed that realism necessarily meant a choice of unpleasant subjects, even while he recognized that many lesser writers deliberately chose such subjects to qualify for the title of realist. Saintsbury, for example, praised Flaubert's refusal to compromise his art in response


24 "Miss Ferrier," ibid., I, 326.
to bourgeois demands for romance in the novel. Here was a writer who dared to show that people sometimes fail. One enjoys reading about the triumphant return of a Sinbad after each adventure, the critic wrote, "but the majority of Sinbads have experiences of a somewhat different sort, and I do not see why the majority also should not have their bard." But for all of his chronicling of the majority of Sinbads, Flaubert still had little appeal to the average "mariner." Emma Bovary would hardly enjoy his realistic account of her own kind of experience. Nor does a "cold blooded" slice of the folly and weakness of life such as L'Education Sentimentale go down with the reader who wants "romance" and a dénouement of some sort. The average reader, too, wants immediate pleasure from his novel and does not get it from such books as Salammbô, where repeated readings are needed to get to the art beneath the repulsive details. Saintsbury in his Flaubert essay found himself in the position of recommending the novelist even while he knew that most readers would not agree with his taste. It was a position he was often in.

In various speculations on the psychological processes involved in creating fiction, Saintsbury isolated two cardinal movements of the mind, both necessary to make a novel an artistic whole. The first, assimilation, he defined as the acuteness of the author's vision as it considered the social environment the book was to reproduce. The second, creation, meant the way the author's

mind worked to bring the material to artistic and independent life. Creation is the more important; this half of the writing job makes the reader willingly suspend his disbelief. It also saves the book, which may teach unobtrusively, from being a moral or social tract or from being a mere autobiography. It is creation that gets the novelist outside his book.

Like Gosse, Saintsbury was particularly fond of French fiction and rather cool toward the native novel of his own day. Certainly his 1888 survey of the state of the English novel damns with faint praise. British fiction, he wrote, had lost some graces of style even though the writing in the average book was better. English fiction's major weakness, structure and arrangement, had improved "somewhat," but even so there were no very bad current books nor no very good ones.

It is perhaps unfair to marshal against Saintsbury those journalistic essays on mid-Victorian novelists collected in Corrected Impressions. Yet he did reprint them, and twice, with very little correction of his original judgments. His distaste for most of these novelists can perhaps be explained by their didacticism and morality. The novelist, one remembers, must reproduce a real society and be completely out of his book. Here it is that

27 "The Historical Novel," Collected Essays, III, 20
Trollope, Dickens, George Eliot, and Charlotte Brontë fail.

Trollope was a mere magazinist to Saintsbury, having little else but fertility of invention. His books show no genius, are completely commonplace and often vulgar, qualities which great art cannot have. "You might not be extraordinarily enamoured of it [the latest Trollope novel], "Saintsbury wrote; "you might not care to read it again; you could certainly feel no enthusiastic reverence for or gratitude to its author. But it was eminently satisfactory; it was exactly what it held itself out to be; it was just what men and women had sent to Mudies to get." Saintsbury later (1923) changed this judgment after having read Trollope's later books, indicating that for once he had not read all of a man's works before passing judgment.

Saintsbury felt that Dickens had written one good novel—Pickwick. Here alone was the pure Dickens, the creator of comedy. The rest of his volumes contain dire faults: he cannot create heroes or villains; his social satire is unfair, vulgar, stupid, and one-sided (Saintsbury the Tory talking); his style in many places is melodramatic rant; he knows nothing of the upper levels of society; and he has an "utter absence of the sense of limit." The only place where he is supreme is "in his own region of partly observed, partly exaggerated humour of the fantastic kind." 29


30 "Dickens," ibid., II, 260f.
This essay Saintsbury thought in 1924 was "too jaunty."

But he never qualified his estimate of George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë. Saintsbury seems to have had a constitutional dislike for women authors; witness, for example, his slaps at Mrs. Browning. As far as female novelists are concerned, he reduced his two movements of the novelist's mind, assimilation and creation, to sexual terms. The female has the mere faculty of "receiving, assimilating, and reproducing"; she cannot, as the male can, complete the novel process by "creation and judgment." The truth of the matter is that the two women novelists, George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë, whom he attacks are in some of their work more creative than assimilative. Nevertheless, George Eliot gets the worst of it. With overtones of the Anglican divine, Saintsbury wrote concerning her "assimilative" power: "And then it came out in the novels, at first pretty simple, and really powerful; then less simple, but ingeniously reproductive of certain phases of thought and sentiment which were current; last of all hardly reflective of hardly anything (save in scattered and separate scenes where she always excelled) except strange crotchets of will-worship, which she has taken up to replace the faith which she had cast out, but that was evidently more or less necessary to her." In all her books, Saintsbury thought he detected "a taint of the morbid and the unnatural." To him Felix Holt and Middlemarch were "on the whole dead," a judgment which in itself is a small sermon on the dangers of criticizing one's near contemporaries. He even took liberties
with literary chronology to denigrate George Eliot, explaining the
popularity of *Adam Bede* as due to its time of arrival between the
setting sun of Dickens and the rising star of Thackeray.\(^3\) Similarly he attacked Charlotte Brontë as another female who transcribed too much her own personal feelings. *Jane Eyre* is a classic, but one which cannot stand a critical rereading. He was reduced to explaining her success by her freshness of approach (the very transcript of feelings he objected to) and to the fact that there were fewer critics in her day.\(^3\)

It would be unfair, of course, to claim that this sketch of
Saintsbury's thinking on the novel is at all complete. It is merely a survey of Saintsbury the critic of English fiction as he appeared to magazine readers of the eighties and nineties. All of his essays on the novel, no matter what critical principles underlie the judgments, are full of contagious enthusiasm. Saintsbury, however, can best be seen as a critic of fiction in the many prefaces he wrote over the years; but a preface is read after a book is bought, not before.

3. **the novel as "anodyne"**

Andrew Lang as a critic of the novel was the eternal boy reader in the first flush of romantic adventuring in books. He was not

31 *"Three Mid-Century Novelists," ibid., II, 281ff.*

32 Pp. 277f.
unaware of the modern literary movements of psychology and realism; he simply did not like them. Uneasy in a world of industrialization and change, he looked on the novel as many generations of readers before and since have looked on it, as a means of escape from the drabness of life. That he preferred to escape by the limited road of romance aligned him with the average reader. His middle class standards for the novel made him a highly popular contemporary critic, but they severely limited the value of his judgments for posterity.

Lang's nostalgia appears frequently in his criticism. "Little joy would you have had," he wrote in a letter to the dead Sir Walter Scott, "in most that has befallen since the Reform Bill. . ."33 The towns are black with smoke; the waters which once leaped with fish are poisoned and dirty; cockney villas disfigure the countryside; soldiers are cowardly; and even whiskey has been banished in places. Modern novels are full of "doubts and delicacies, of dallying and refinements, of half-hearted lookers on, desiring and fearing some new order of the world."34 One "anodyne" for the problems of this uncomfortable universe, Lang believed, was novels, especially those which reasserted the old Homeric values of joy in battle, pleasure in beautiful women, wine, and honorable death.

33 "To Sir Walter Scott, Bart.," Letters to Dead Authors (new York, 1902), p. 141.
Such a novel is Kingsley's Westward Ho! one of those "large, rich well-fed romances, at which you can cut and come again," one which teaches us to live as a Viking at peace.  

Although he himself wrote almost poetically about the evils of modern life, Lang denied that the writer should use such problems as the basis for a story. If the novelist had a social problem to discuss, then he should compose a tract. Aside from the appeal to personal taste, Lang nowhere justifies this position. He seems not to have realized that a novel frequently has greater social influence than any other literary form and that its use as a document advocating social change might well be justified on this basis.

Because he believed that a critic should write only about books which pleased him, Lang made no full-length studies of the realists. But buried in the asides of his other essays is plenty of evidence of his impatience with them. At root, realism did not offer the anodyne which Lang required of literature. The aged George Sand, he wrote, would have found no help in Tolstoi, Zola, Dostoievsky, or any "scientific" observer "whom we are actually requested to hail as the masters of a new art, the art of the future." Nor did Lang like the baseness and dullness of realistic subjects. Here were no glorious combats and hairbreadth escapes, only "microscopic porings over human baseness, . . .

35 "Charles Kingsley," ibid., p. 153
36 "Alexandre Dumas," ibid., p. 4.
minute and disgustful records of what in humanity is least hu-
man. . ."37 Again, Lang did not like psychologizing of character.
These "psychologues" "niggled" and "stippled" too much at their
canvas; real characterization calls for broad sweeps and full
brushes.38 But the most important danger from realism was its
tendency to shut off younger readers from the great novelists
of the past. People no longer read Scott or Dumas or Dickens
because they were "too gutterly gutter." Early in his career he
wrote: "Are we not too much cultivated? Can this fastidiousness
be anything but a casual passing phase of taste? Are all people
over thirty who cling to their Dickens and their Scott old fogies?
Are we wrong in preferring them to 'Bootle's Baby,' and 'The
Quick and the Dead,' and the novels of M. Paul Bourget?"39 Lang,
of course, was an "old fogie" in this sense and the fact that
the better novelists at the end of the nineteenth century and the
beginning of the twentieth did embrace both realism and psychology
added to the aging critic's disillusionment.

What really bothered Lang about realism, besides its failure
to offer escape, was not the method but the subject matter; not
the style but the lack of imagination. A passage from

37 "To Alexandre Dumas," Letters to Dead Authors, p. 111.
38 "To Henry Fielding," New & Old Letters to Dead Authors
his essay on Kipling sums up his whole position neatly:

New strength has come from fresher air into their brains and blood; hence the novelty and buoyancy of the stories which they tell. Hence, too, they are rather to be counted among romanticists than realists, however real is the essential truth of their books. They have found so much to see and record, that they are not tempted to use the microscope, and pore forever on the minute in character. A great deal of realism, especially in France, attracts because it is novel, because M. Zola and others have also found new worlds to conquer. But certain provinces in those worlds were not unknown to, but were voluntarily neglected by, earlier explorers. They were the "Bad lands" of life and character: surely it is wiser to seek new realms than to build mud huts and dunghills on the "Bad lands."

Fictional "Bad lands" should be avoided for more than their mere unpleasantness. A good novel must be morally safe, too, even for young girls. Lang made no secret of his satisfaction at Dumas' failure to burn incense to the "great Goddess Lubricity," whom so many Frenchmen worship. Yet the eighteenth century English novelists, two of whom Lang liked, posed a problem. He could not bring himself to damn Smollett on moral grounds, concluding that such a character as Roderick Random is too "ideal," even though a rogue, to do much moral damage to the reader. As for Fielding's morality, one had "to take the best of it and leave the remainder alone." Lang found compensation for Fielding's moral lapses in the novelist's romantic adoration of women, high faith

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40 "Mr. Kipling's Stories," Essays in Little, pp. 200ff.
41 "To Alexandre Dumas," Letters to Dead Authors, p. 113.
in marriage, and subject matter—a real rather than an ideal world. Lang, however, like Henley, detested Richardson on moral grounds. Here was the classic example of the author who deliberately constructs a combination of "virtuous sentiment" and "vicious action." "Yours is not a nice morality," he wrote to Richardson, "and your vogue depended on a curiosity rather prurient, as well as on that old romantic situation of the imprisoned and oppressed virgin." However much one may agree with this judgment of Richardson, one cannot help but pity Lang's shortsighted narrowness when he tried a blanket condemnation of modern novels on the same moral grounds. Many authors, he said ironically, employ squalid scenes and depraved characters for the "profoundest moral ends," the reader himself being expected to add the tags. "Tess is a descendant of Mrs. Pamela's, though less unfortunate because less rusée—they are two wonderful 'pure women!' Moral design, with naughty description, these things secured your vogue, or helped to secure it."\[4\] One has only to remember the more tempered view of both Gosse and Saintsbury toward moral problems in the novel to appreciate Lang's excessive narrowness. In the light of the unfairness of attacks like this, it is no wonder Hardy gave up fiction in disgust.

Lang once defined fiction as "a beautiful disease of the

\[4\] "To Mr. Samuel Richardson," New & Old Letters, pp. 214ff.
brain." He believed the way the germinal ideas became a story depended upon the genius of the particular writer, a process as unexplainable as the "Philosopher's Stone." Authors, however, can be classified according to the materials upon which their genius works. Lesser novelists, like Dickens, get their stories from life and thus appeal to the non-bookish reader. Better novelists, like Thackeray, study books and appeal to those who know books. The best novelist is one who combines the materials, Robert Louis Stevenson, for example: "Mr. Stevenson's writings breathe equally of work in the study and of inspiration from adventure in the open air, and thus he wins every vote, and pleases every class of reader."

Finally, Lang did believe that a novel should have both good characterization and style. The first of these, he thought, was the most important single element, certainly not to be equated with the mere mechanical construction of plot. As for the novelist's style, it should be clear, colloquial, and concise. "When I read the mummerings, the stilted staggering sentences, the hesitating phrases, the far-sought and dear-bought and worthless word-juggles; the sham scientific verbiage, the native pedantries of many modern so-called 'stylists,'" he wrote, "I rejoice that Dumas

46 "Dickens," Essays in Little, p. 131.
47 "Mr. Stevenson's Works," Ibid., p. 35.
was not one of these." On the grounds of their style he praised Bunyan, Dumas, Hawthorne, and especially Thackeray: "Surely that style, so fresh, so rich, so full of surprises— that style which stamps as classical your fragments of slang, and perpetually astonishes and delights— would alone give immortality to an author, even had he little to say."

Lang's criticism of the novel, like his criticism of poetry, was mainly a recitation of his own tastes. He could do a good job on writers like Anthony Hope, Stevenson, or Rider Haggard; he succeeded in fact in rendering these writers a most important service— he helped sell their books. But because of his limited appreciation of the novel, he did a disservice to the really important fiction writers of his day. Even though Gosse and Saintsbury with all their French standards may not have sold many books, they did more to bring about an appreciation of the novel as a serious art than Lang with his love for romance could. Nevertheless, any reader of fiction tires after awhile of psychology and realism and longs also for the freer world of imagination and ideal people. It is refreshing to find as well read and as urbane a critic as Lang advocating such an escape.

48 "Alexandre Dumas," ibid., pp. 19f.

49 "To W. M. Thackeray," Letters to Dead Authors, p. 8.
Chapter 5 ON THE THEATER'S PERIPHERY

On the highly popular but non-literary British stage of the late Victorian era there was much for a critic to be concerned about if he were seriously interested in the future of English drama. Most plays to which democratic London flocked were pot-pourris of melodrama, romance, and upperclass smart talk tailored to the histrionic abilities of an actor-manager. These once admired plays like Money, The Lyons Mail, Trilby, and Still Waters Run Deep are now just titles, the actors who brought them to life being dead.

The true renaissance of the English theater had to wait until the reign of Edward VII, although during the last half of the nineteenth century there were hints of its coming. Acting had advanced under the example of such artists as Henry Irving and Ellen Terry; stagecraft moved toward realism with the leadership of Beerbohm Tree. As early as 1867 T. W. Robertson's Caste, daring enough for its times, had shown briefly a similar realism in subject matter. The plays of Henry Arthur Jones (The Liars, 1897) and (Mrs. Dane's Defense, 1900) and Arthur Wing Pinero (The Second Mrs. Tanqueray, 1893) proved that drama which investigated real life could be a success, especially if the lead role of the wronged woman were taken by a popular feminine star. Finally, although the late Victorian theater was far to the rear of its continental counterpart, the progressive movement led by
Ibsen was beginning to make itself felt; the Dutch-born J. T. Grein established the Independent Theatre in 1891, a somewhat abortive forerunner of the J. E. Vedrenne--Granville-Barker experiment at the Court Theatre thirteen years later. In both houses the attempt was made, in spite of considerable criticism, to produce experimental drama.

The "theatre of ideas" then was fairly familiar to, although not popular with, the British play-going public by the end of the nineteenth century. But, other than Shaw, there was no British dramatist of Ibsen's talent willing or able to depict English life from an adult point of view through the medium of artistic language and construction. Even Shaw had to print his "pleasant" and "unpleasant" plays in 1898 to find an audience for them. Some blamed the censorship power of the Lord Chamberlain for the weakness of British drama; others felt the more lucrative novel lured better authors away from the stage. No matter what the reason, it appeared that a serious literary critic had little motive for even considering drama, particularly in its contemporary manifestations.

Yet the great period of dramatic criticism began late in the nineteenth century. Between 1890 and 1910 Shaw and Max Beerbohm wrote for the Saturday Review, William Archer for the Morning Leader, A. B. Walkley for The Times, J. T. Grein for the Sunday Times, and Desmond McCarthy for The Speaker. Basically, what this criticism accomplished was the domestication and growth of conti-
mental dramatic realism. Complete success had to wait until the Edwardian Theatre, but important advances had already been made before the end of the nineteenth century, especially in the British acceptance of Ibsenism. Only one of our four critics—Edmund Gosse—had much to do with the introduction of this "new" drama.¹

₁. "'Ej blot til Lyst'—not merely for enjoyment"

Edmund Gosse seems to have got from the theater the emotional excitement he did not get from the novel. His library was full of editions of plays; a life-long theater-goer, he was, according to his biographer, both a critic and Charles Lamb's "genuine spectator" rippling 'with honest titillations of mirth and generous chucklings of applause."² He wrote to Pinero in 1893 after having seen The Second Mrs. Tanqueray: "I was agitated with interest and emotion all through, and indeed am not even yet rid of the intellectual excitement it produced."³ But even so, Gosse's main critical interest lay not in the play as staged but in its literary value. "It was due, no doubt, to my bringing up that the plays

¹ For an account of the differences between the late Victorian and Edwardian theater see A. E. Wilson, Edwardian Theatre (London, 1951), esp. Ch. 3.


³ Pp. 225f.
[Shakespeare's] never appealed to me as bound by the exigencies of a stage or played by actors," he wrote in *Father and Son*. 1 "The images they raised in my mind were of real people moving in the open air, and uttering in the natural play of life sentiments that were clothed in the most lovely and yet, as it seemed to me, the most obvious and the most inevitable language." As was typical of Gosse, a dramatist's use of words moved him most. When watching Congreve's *Way of the World*, he turned to his companion with tears in his eyes: "The excruciating beauty of the language." 5

Regardless of his enjoyment of staged drama, Gosse was not at all satisfied with the condition of a theater whose central aim was entertainment for a democratic audience. In the literature of Scandinavia--the Danish national theater and the plays of Henrik Ibsen--he found evidence of what drama could be but was not in Great Britain. Writing in 1875, he showed particular interest in the relationship between the theater at Copenhagen and the national life. The drama in Denmark, he declared, is both a school for patriotism and an instrument for popular culture. Because the nation is small, the dramatists live close to the people and are both loved and heeded. How different from the situation

4 *Charteris, Gosse*, p. 128.
5 Charteris, Gosse, p. 128.
in England where the theatre is almost completely debased:

It cannot be wholly without value to us to be made aware of the success of other nations in fields where we have been notoriously unsuccessful ourselves. Without falling into any of the jeremiads that have only been too plentiful of late years, we may soberly confess that our own theatres have long ceased to be a school for poetic education, or influential in any way as leaders of popular thought or taste. They have not attempted to claim any moral or political power; they have existed for amusement only, and now, in the eyes of most cultivated persons, they have ceased even to amuse. Over the drop-scene at the Royal Theatre at Copenhagen there stands in large gold letters this inscription: "Ej blot til Lyst"—not merely for enjoyment: and in these simple words may be read the secret of its unique charm and the source of its power. It has striven, not prudishly or didactically, but in a broad and healthy spirit, to lead the popular thought in high and ennobling directions. It has not stooped to ask the lowest of its auditors how near the edges of impropriety, how deep into the garbage of vulgarity and slang, how high in the light air of triviality it dared to go; it has not interpreted comedy by farce, not turned tragedy into melodrama, nor dirtied its fingers with burlesque, but has adapted itself as far as possible meekly and modestly, to the requirements of the chastity of art, and has managed for a century and a half to support a school of original actors and a series of national plays without borrowing traditions or dramas from its neighbors. 6

Finding in Denmark the sort of theater he wished transported to England, he found in Norway the sort of plays he wished acted there. Gosse, the first English critic to write about Ibsen, introduced the Norwegian to the English public; Archer translated and produced his plays; Shaw defended him against the attacks of the philistines. 7 These three were the major opponents of the


Ibsen-phobia which began in the late seventies and ended in 1897 when Queen Victoria attended a production of Ghosts. Gosse's role, of course, was not as important as that of Archer and Shaw. He himself, in the preface to his biography of Ibsen, explains his being the first to write about the dramatist as an accident of time. Nevertheless, to be first is something, particularly when being first, meant coming to terms with a writer whose work was an attack upon the complacent values of one's whole training and society. However, from the moment that Gosse asked a Trondhjem bookseller if Norway had any poets and got a volume of Ibsen in reply, the Englishman was squarely in the Norwegian's camp.

Gosse published at least four articles on Ibsen in British periodicals during 1872-1873. One, an 1873 study of Ibsen's three great "satires," Love's Comedy, Brand, and Peer Gynt, he reprinted in Northern Studies. Aside from the novelty of the subject, the essay is no great piece of criticism. He knew that most of his audience could not read the plays, and thus his procedure was to paraphrase the plots and label the various translated quotations and scenes with impressionistic tags. But even this early, Gosse saw in Ibsen the diagnostician of society. His portrait of the dramatist "watching, noting, digging deeper and deeper into the vast dark places of modern life, developing more and more a vast and sinister genius" and his recognition that "sooner or later" these plays "will win for their author the homage of Europe" show a good
deal of discernment, especially as it took almost three decades to fulfill the prophecy.®

Gosse’s propagandizing in the seventies actually had little effect upon Ibsen’s reputation in England. Archer himself, when he began his own campaign in the eighties, claimed that not half a dozen men in England even knew the dramatist’s name. Gosse, however, returned to the crusade in 1889, the year in which the Charington’s production of A Doll’s House brought about the first really hard fought battles over Ibsen. In an essay in the Fortnightly (later reprinted in Northern Studies), Gosse discussed the new realism of the stage. He could not agree that Ibsen’s current writing was necessarily an advance, regretting particularly the abandonment of poetry—“as if Orpheus should travel hellward without his ivory lyre.” His attitude toward Ibsen’s social dramas was also somewhat ambivalent. Underlying his comments are both attraction and repulsion, almost as if the critic were forced against his will into a recognition of genius. His treatment of Ghosts illustrates his feeling. This was a subject no respectable man should discuss publicly, let alone air on the stage. Yet Gosse, who four years earlier had damned Stead for "The Maiden Tribute," felt here that genius had transcended subject matter:

It is hardly possible, in addressing the prudish English reader, to suggest the real meaning of the whole thing.

8 "Henrik Ibsen," Northern Studies, pp. 38; 63.
Ghosts! ghosts! the avenging deities born of the unclean blood that spurtled (Gosse's coinage) from the victim of Cronos! How any human creature can see the play acted through without shrieking with mental anguish, I cannot tell. Perhaps the distraction of the scene makes it a little less terrible to witness than to read. As literature, at all events, if anything exists outside of Aeschylus and Shakspeare more direct in its appeal to the conscience, more solemn, more poignant, than the last act of Ghosts, I at least do not know where to look for it.9

Gosse read these social plays as Ibsen's analysis of the "mortal moral disease" which was destroying Europe. The affliction in The Pillars of Society was "hypocritical respectability"; in A Doll's House, "masculine egotism"; in An Enemy of the People, "faith in the majority." They were certainly not, Gosse wrote with obvious sarcasm, "the kind of imaginative literature that Mr. Lang would appear to hanker after."10 Rather than "anodynes," they were important steps in the evolution of modern literature:

Those to whom the modern spirit in literature is distasteful, who see nothing but the stitches of the canvas in the vast pictures of Tolstoi, would reject Ibsen, or would hark back to his old sweet, flute-like lyrics. But others, who believe that literature is alive, and must progress over untrodden ground with unfamiliar steps, will recognise a singular greatness in this series of social dramas, and will not grudge a place for Henrik Ibsen among the foremost European writers of the nineteenth century.11

For his honest recognition of Ibsen, Gosse does deserve praise, especially when other critics like Clement Scott were, as late as

9 P. 94.

10 P. 98

11 P. 104.
the nineties, still viciously attacking the playwright. But aside from these Scandinavian studies and his cursory critical treatment of Ben Jonson, Chapman, and Beaumont and Fletcher in *The Jacobean Poets*, Gosse wrote very little else about the form. Forced by the language barrier to consider subject matter rather than style and enthusiastic over what for awhile was his own personally discovered critical bailiwick, he did in his studies of Scandinavian drama come to a close sympathy with the modern realistic spirit. Whether or not these essays were mere accidents of time does not detract from the rightness of his critical instincts in this field. The only thing one can quarrel with is that he did not do enough writing of this sort.

2. "Prithee, keep up thy quillets"

Along with the excitement over the new realism, late Victorian journals exhibited a quieter concern about older dramas as literature and as documents for scholarly investigation. The criticism of John Churton Collins was of this type. As uninterested in the contemporary play as he was in the novel, Collins wrote about the Greeks and the Elizabethans, looking for ethics, poetic quality, relationships, and influences. His aim, he said, was to find the "truth" in the drama, by which he usually meant ferreting out such points as the Italian influence on the plays of the English renaissance, Shakespeare's Catholicism, knowledge of the classics and law.
Here, as always, he had no patience with more informal critics who failed to ground their discussions in solid research.

There would be little sense in proposing that Collins had any influence on the recognition of the modern drama of his day. Yet in his long review of John Addington Symonds' *Shakspere's Predecessors in the English Drama* he suggests that his criteria for worth in dramatic literature are little different from those which Gosse implied when he objected to Ibsen's use of prose in his social plays. A good drama, Collins believed, was a combination of poetry and realism. The fault with Christopher Marlowe, exquisite poet or not, lay in his peopling his world from "air and fire" rather than from "flesh and blood":

In the first place, he had no humour; in the second place, he had little sympathy with humanity, and with men of the common type, none—a defect which seems to us as detrimental to a dramatist as colour-blindness would be to a painter. In the faculty, again, of minute and accurate observation—a faculty which is with most dramatists an instinct—he appears to have been almost wholly lacking. 12

Collins did feel that most domestic tragedy, perhaps the nearest renaissance counterpart to late-Victorian realism, suffered from too much naked fact and too many coarse subjects. But in *Arden of Faversham* he found a drama of real life with a power of characterization not unworthy the genius of a mature Shakespeare. Had Collins descended into the arena of criticism of the modern theater, such would probably have been his model—

a play based on contemporary society and people, but elevated above mere realism by the poetic ability of its author.

Collins' essays about the drama, however, are really attempts at popularizing scholarship. The best place to see him at work in this area is his book *Studies in Shakespeare* (1904), a collection of rewritten periodical articles, whose titles suggest their range: "The Bacon-Shakespeare Mania," "The Text and Prosody of Shakespeare," "Shakespeare and Montaigne," "Shakespeare and Holinshed," "Was Shakespeare a Lawyer?" "Shakespeare as a Prose Writer," "Sophocles and Shakespeare as Theological and Ethical Teachers," "Shakespearian Paradoxes," "Shakespeare as a Classical Scholar." The end of the nineteenth century was that period when Furnivall and Halliwell-Phillipps were using verse-tests to establish the "wholeness" of the Shakespearean canon; when Swinburne was writing, in Croce's term, "exclamatory" criticism full of hyperbole but yet with occasional brilliant interpretations and insights into the processes of artistic creation; when Edward Dowden made an attempt, albeit sentimental, to look at Shakespeare as a whole; when R. G. Moulton in opposition to the sentimental view tried to establish dramatic criticism as a regular inductive science; and when A. C. Bradley considered Hamlet, Lear, Othello, and Macbeth from the point of view of dramatic technique. Collins, although his name is not even mentioned in such a work as F. E. Halliday's *Shakespeare and His Critics*.
tried to add his bit to the growing Shakespearean literature.

Shakespeare was not an original creative genius: such is the dominant theme of many of the essays in *Studies in Shakespeare*. Collins saw in him the same trait, although in a much higher degree, that he saw in both Tennyson and Byron. The dramatist had a marvelous receptivity, and his genius lay in "realising a character, a scene, a story, already defined in embryo or sketched in outline."¹⁴ The tendency of the various comparative studies in this volume is to elevate Shakespeare into a massive reader and interpreter of other people's work. An ancillary theme is Collins' familiar argument for saving the classics at the university. In his study of Shakespeare as a classical scholar, Collins lavishly employed parallels proving, he felt, that Shakespeare knew Latin well and probably Greek. In fact the implication is never far distant that Shakespeare's reflections on life and death, his metaphysics and ethics, his political creed, his heroes, his use of comedy to relieve tragedy, his antithetical use of character, and his irony all come from his acquaintance with Greek drama. "It demonstrates," Collins concluded, "that the works which are the pride and glory of the modern world are not only indissolubly linked with the ancient masterpieces, but find in those masterpieces their true companions and their best commentaries."¹⁵


¹⁵ P. 95.
Collins, however, did more than merely comparative studies: he also busied himself with Shakespeare's style. His review of A. P. Van Dam and C. Stoffel's *William Shakespeare: Prosody and Text* is mainly negative. Here he attacked the "many scores of scribblers" who practice textual emendation with no knowledge of Elizabethan idiom. He also showed his suspicion of the work of the Shakespearean Society by doubting that Shakespeare's deviations from the norm of blank verse could be tabulated. The poet must be read by ear.\(^{16}\) Collins' study of Shakespeare's prose style, on the other hand, is a quite respectable piece of work. It is true that the schoolmaster shows through in such statements as Shakespeare is more "correct" in his prose passages than in his poetry. There is also some overstatement in the claim that if Shakespeare had written novels the world would not have had to wait 150 years for Fielding and 200 years for Scott. Nevertheless, this long chronological account of the development of the dramatist's prose style shows a good deal of perception, as this summary of Shakespeare's "Englishness" reveals:

What, then, did Shakespeare do for English prose?
He was the creator of colloquial prose, of the prose most appropriate for drama. He showed for the first time how that prose could be dignified without being pedantic; how it could be full and massive without subordinating the Saxon to the Latin element; how it could be stately without being involved; how it could be musical, without borrowing its rhythm and its cadence from the rhetoricians of Rome. He made it plastic. He taught it to assume, and to assume with propriety.

\(^{16}\) "The Text and Prosody of Shakespeare," *ibid.*, pp. 312f.
every tone. He showed its capacity for dialectics, for exposition, for narrative, for soliloquy. He purified it from archaisms. Indeed, his diction often differs little from that of the best writers in the eighteenth century.\(^\text{17}\)

Collins is always at his best when dealing with the didactic in literature. Thus the most successful essay in the book is "Shakespeare and Sophocles as Theological and Ethical Teachers." Not pushing his parallels too hard for a change, writing clearly about what is in essence a profound topic, he points up and compares quite well the train of ideas underlying each dramatist.

The following passage suggests both the argument and the style:

In conclusion, what constitutes the distinction between these poets as teachers is this: that while arriving practically at the same conclusions both with regard to life and with regard to man, Shakespeare contemplates man rather in relation to himself, to duty and to society than in relation to the Unseen. It is always in relation to the Unseen and the Divine, and only secondarily in relation to himself and his surroundings that he is contemplated by Sophocles. Thus the one subordinates theology to ethics, and the other subordinates ethics to theology. In the theodicy of both the fabric of nature and life rests on a divine foundation. In Shakespeare this foundation is not always discernible. In Sophocles it is never at any moment concealed. It is as a dramatic poet and a dramatic poet only that Shakespeare deals with life; he is a moralist and theosophist indirectly and by virtue of the subtlety, profundity, and comprehensiveness of his dramatic insight. But Sophocles is pre-eminently a religious poet.\(^\text{18}\)

The reason Collins' essays on the Elizabethan theater have

\(^{17}\) "Shakespeare as a Prose Writer," \textit{ibid.}, pp. 184f.

\(^{18}\) \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 176f.
been forgotten lies undoubtedly in their purpose. Certainly the critic was as careful a scholar as most late Victorians; certainly many of his essays are as provocative as those of his contemporaries. But here, as everywhere, Collins used scholarship as a club. These essays, then, most of which are book reviews, are a combination of original scholarship and outspoken objections to weaker, less accurate critics. For example, Collins' study of Shakespeare's precursors is a well-mannered, fast moving, and generally successful historical sketch. But the first sixteen pages are devoted to a diatribe against contemporary criticism. Nothing is deader than yesterday's arguments over small points of scholarship, and too often Collins' querulous tone drowns out the quite valuable contributions to knowledge which he tried to make.

* * * *

Neither George Saintsbury nor Andrew Lang bothered himself much about the drama. Saintsbury believed that there was little connection between literature and drama and that the play, especially the modern one, could be better approached from a place in the stalls than from an easy chair in the library. Similarly, Lang denied the literary value of contemporary drama. In an essay on Molière he maintained that the English were "privateers" and that one had to turn to the French to study

comedy at its best. As for "realism" on the stage, he had no more use for it than he had for realistic novels. His dramatic criticism consists of a series on Shakespeare for the Illustrated London News which he never bothered to reprint. Actually then, none of our four critics had very much real influence in dramatic criticism. Collins suffered from a bit of dryness and from his unfortunate habit of using his essays as bludgeons. Gosse, even though he was the first English critic to appreciate Ibsen, failed to carry through his early championship of the "new" theater, at least in his writing. One obvious reason for this general lack of critical interest in the theater is that until the nineties there was really not much to write about in the contemporary drama. And when the renaissance began, our critics (except Gosse) were perhaps too set in their ways to recognize it. So they left the job to other men, the Shaws and the Archers, and went to the play to amuse themselves.

The successive Victorian battles over Balzac, Baudelaire, French Naturalism, Ibsen, and the Russian novel were essentially moral conflicts, although ultimately the issues were rooted in aesthetic theories strange and slightly repellent to British taste. French naturalism with its attempt at scientific objectivity in its investigation of even the lowest social levels was particularly at issue. Even George Saintsbury could complain wearily that most modern French novels were studies in "plain and fancy adultery." With many Englishmen still clinging to the belief that fiction was a family affair, many a modern French novel was read covertly and kept on the highest shelves in the library. French poetry, too, for those who could and would read it, was suspect. There could have been no objection to the Parnassian poets, except on the score of dullness. Rather than exploiting "forbidden subjects," the English and French writers (Gosse and Lang among them) who in the seventies followed Théodore de Banville supported intricately fixed forms of medieval and renaissance French poetry—the rondeau, ballade, villanelle, chant royal, and triolet—in

1 See Amy Cruse, After the Victorians (London, 1938), Chs. 4, 7, 9 and C. R. Decker, The Victorian Conscience (New York, 1952), from which many of the details in the following paragraphs have been drawn. The quotation is from Essays on French Novelists, 2nd ed. (New York, 1891), p. 28.
their pursuit of the beautiful. However, later in the century the very names of the Symbolistes—Mallarmé, Verlaine, Rimbaud—conjured visions of hashish, absinthe, madness, and abnormal love. Even as domesticated by the English poets of the decadence, this way of writing—the pursuit of any subject for its own sake and for its own inherent beauty—was too alien to a taste reared on the "moral" literature of mid-Victorianism. A great task then confronted critics who were convinced that modern French movements—aestheticism and naturalism—had in them something of value for the English. By the end of the century more and more Britons were willing to concede that the morals of one country were not necessarily those of another and that such matters in the end have little to do with purely literary worth. Criticism had done its work well.

British insularity was being challenged by more than French literature and its English supporters. As translations in the eighties and nineties made the books of Turgeniev, Tolstoi, and Dostoevsky available, many critics—Gosse, for example, and Matthew Arnold in 1887—thought they saw in the products of Russia's Golden Age examples of the novel of the future. Almost everyone agreed on the profundity and scope of these books with their difficult names and dolorous situations. But many found them too depressing: there were no happy endings,

no lights in the gloom. A second voice of modernity, just as
dismal, echoed from the fiords across the North Sea. While
most of the literature of Scandinavia remained relatively
unknown, Ibsen, at least, was in the process of remaking the
drama of Europe, including that of England. And, of course,
there were always books from America, books which were accepted,
except for an occasional charge of crudity, on the same basis
as English literature itself. Hawthorne, Howells, and James;
Emerson, Whittier, and Longfellow were more "British" in their
standards than those Frenchmen across the channel. Only against
Whitman and his celebration of the body was a great deal of
clamor raised.

The last three decades of the nineteenth century thus saw a
revolution in the attitude of many British readers toward
foreign literature. This was especially true of the widening
acceptance of French writing, in spite of its suspect methods
and morals. Arnold himself, in "The Literary Influence of
Academies," had used French "purity" in language as an argument
in his attempt to make English literature more classical. Other
critics like Swinburne, Arthur Symons, Walter Besant, Havelock
Ellis, and Edward Dowden wrote widely and often throughout the
three decades about French subjects. What relative importance
any critic has in the introduction of a foreign literature to his

3 Cruse, pp. 101ff.
4 Pp. 156f.
fellow countrymen is difficult to ascertain, particularly when publications as different as the Illustrated London News, Cornhill, and the Quarterly published foreign studies, not only by recognized experts but by a host of lesser figures. Suffice it to say that Andrew Lang and John Churton Collins remained somewhat on the periphery; Gosse was decorated by the French government for his efforts; and Saintsbury was generally recognized as the expert in England on French literature.

1. Romance and history

Not all French literature, of course, is "naturalistic" or "aesthetic," even though the tenor of much late nineteenth century British criticism would have one believe so. Some critics, Lang and Collins among them, felt that French books and authors from an earlier time too should be better known in England. Although neither consistently championed foreign literature, Lang with his familiar essays and Collins with historical studies did add their bit to English writing concerned with foreign books.

Lang, as we have seen, was an uneasy sojourner in his nineteenth century world. Disliking the new movements in the novel and poetry, in his nostalgia for the past he erected monuments to a gayer, simpler literature of less complicated times. This feeling operated in his infrequent selection of
French subjects: Rochefoucauld, Ronsard, Banville, Rabelais, DeNerval, Dumas, Chapelain, and Molière. The predominance of pre-nineteenth century figures in this list is to be expected. Lang, among his contemporary fellow critics, was probably the most conversant with medieval and renaissance French. Nor is the selection of nineteenth century figures out of character. His love for the romantic Dumas is amply evident. The Parnassian poet Banville, with his "intellectual cigarettes," had been his model in the seventies when Lang himself employed old French verse forms in English poetry like that collected in Ballads in Blue China. And even DeNerval, whom Arthur Symons saw as a precursor of the Symbolist movement, Lang praised because young ladies could read him safely and because his story "Sylvie" was full of spring and youth.

Lang's essays on foreign writers are usually rather brief and sketchy. What he does with Rabelais is instructive. Here is no discussion of style, point of view, or social background. Lang merely wrote a pastiche poking fun at modern free education, female suffrage, and social reform in general:

Now when they heard these answers of Pantagruel they all

7 The Symbolist Movement in Literature (New York, 1919), pp. 69ff.
8 Letters on Literature (London, 1892), pp. 149f.
fell, some a weeping, some a praying, some a swearing, some in arbitrating, some a lecturing, some a caucussing, some a preaching, some a faith-healing, some a miracle-working, some a hypnotizing, some a writing to the daily press; and while they were thus busy, like folk distraught, "reforming the island," Pantagruel burst out a laughing; whereas they were greatly dismayed; for laughter killeth the whole race of coqcigrues, and they may not endure it.9

This is all very amusing and does catch the spirit of Rabelais. It is obviously written in the hope that the reader will turn to the sixteenth-century Frenchman to find more of the same. In other essays Lang does employ an occasional parallel between foreign and English writing, paraphrases and translates passages from the French, and makes frequent impressionistic comments about his authors. But he is never very consistent. Nor did he write much about French literature. Opposed as he was to naturalism and the decadence, his essays have a somewhat old-fashioned air about them, particularly when contrasted with the work of more forward looking critics. Thus it would seem that he did more for the reputation of French writing with his Parnassian-poetry than he did in his direct critical studies.

John Churton Collins' contribution to late nineteenth century Anglo-French literary relations was mainly in the field of literary history, an area in which his scholarly abilities could be used to best advantage. Three long periodical studies show him at work in this field: "Voltaire in England" (Cornhill, October 9. "To Maitre Francois Rabelais: of the Coming of the Coqcigrues," Letters to Dead Authors(New York, 1902), p. 68.
and December, 1882), "Rousseau in England" and "Montesquieu in England" (Quarterly, October, 1898 and April, 1903). In one sense, of course, these essays are not literary criticism but studies in biography. Collins collected much factual material, anecdotal and otherwise, about the journeys the three Frenchmen made to England. Although mainly narratives, the essays do point up the relationship between each of the three writers and Britain. Rousseau, for example, although the journey was the turning point of his life, learned nothing in England. Montesquieu learned to think there. Voltaire's visit, on the other hand, was highly important in removing the intellectual barriers between England and France. In these three essays, Collins vividly recreates the personalities and experiences of his subjects. But because they deal only slightly with literature itself their contribution as literary criticism is rather limited.

2. "a condition of mutual intelligence"

On "le plus heureux jour de ma vie" Edmund Gosse rose in 1904 to address the Paris Société des Conferences on the French element in English poetry. In his academic French he pointed out the signpost he had followed during his critical

10 Published in book form as Voltaire, Montesquieu and Rousseau (London, 1908).
journeys into continental literature for a quarter of a century:

But I cannot help nourishing a confident belief that in the future, as well as in the past, the magnificent literatures of France and of England will interact upon one another, that each will at the right psychological moments flash colour and radiance which will find reflection on the polished surface of the other. To facilitate this, in ever so small and so humble a degree, must be the desire of every lover of England and of France. And in order to adopt from each what shall be serviceable to the other, what is most needful must be a condition of mutual intelligence. That entente cordiale which we value so deeply, and which—some of us have so long laboured to promote,—it must not be confined to the merchants and to the politicians. The poets also must insist upon their share of it.11

Borrowings between the literatures, he continued, were of "substance" and "colour": the first a complete borrowing, an attempt to reproduce in one language the style and manner of another; the second a mere borrowing of elements of style. We have already seen that Gosse felt English literature had much to gain from continental models. The Norwegian theater pointed to what the British theater might be; the Russian novel was the novel of the future; French poets could teach carefulness in style. The critic's job was to draw two nations closer together, to show by comparison the influences on and relationships between one literature and another and to point out lessons which domestic literature could learn from an alien one.

Throughout his travels in foreign books, Gosse declared many times the necessity of treating the product of another

culture for what it was, not for what an Englishman might wish it
to be. Because the British frequently damned a continental book
without a reading—sometimes on whim, sometimes on moral or
political grounds—the critic had to rise above such considerations
and take his audience with him whenever possible. Gosse made this
point with unaccustomed vehemence in his essay on Bourget's
L'Étape: "...let us, for goodness' sake, avoid the folly of
hauling our neighbors up to a tribunal of Anglo-Saxon political
virtue." "Here in England, we are called upon—if only English
people would comprehend the fact—to contemplate and not to
criticise the intellectual and moral idiosyncrasies of our
neighbors. If we could but learn the lesson that a curious
attention, an inquisitive observation into foreign modes of
thought becomes us very well, but that we are not asked for our
opinion, it would vastly facilitate our relations."12

To imply that Gosse steadily maintained a catholic critical
aloofness from British moral and intellectual standards would be
an exaggeration. He had an audience, and a fairly wide one,
which was full of prejudice, particularly against French
literature. A sentence in his essay on Loti is the key to his
conception of comparative criticism. The critic, he wrote, is
not "obliged to take into consideration the political or social
accidents which may affect the reputation of an author at

home."\textsuperscript{13} The interpreter, while bound loosely to the judgment of his subject's own country, best builds his cultural bridge by reinterpreting the foreign literature in domestic terms.

It follows that comparison is at the root of almost all of Gosse's foreign criticism. His essays frequently draw parallels between a continental writer and a more familiar English one or show the likeness or contrast between an alien state of mind and a domestic one. As in his essay on Ferdinand Fabré, his discussions are frequently governed by a consideration of those books which an Englishman would find most rewarding.\textsuperscript{14} Thus the tenor of his criticism is to stress the "Englishness" of this literature and to reinterpret the work of individual authors in British terms. This is not to suggest, however, that the major portion of his essays deals extensively with such parallels; other material—biography, anecdote, translation, an impressionistic criticism or two—was his main concern. Nevertheless, specific comparisons usually appear, serving as guideposts to a reader unfamiliar with a foreign author.

Although Gosse seldom overemphasizes direct comparisons between a foreign author and a British one, those he does use are frequently misleading. He was probably right to compare the "interminable psychological reflections" of Bourget to those of


\textsuperscript{14} "Ferdinand Fabré," \textit{ibid.}, p. 161.
Henry James; but, on the other hand, the reader would like a little more evidence that if Daudet is read "not wisely but too well" he has "aspects" in which he seems like Mrs. Gaskell, Anthony Trollope, Stevenson, and Kipling. Again, Gosse's comment that Bazin not only had British moral standards but also described provincial towns with the same caution as Mrs. Gaskell or Anthony Trollope may be true of a novel like _La Terre Qui Meurt_ but seems hardly to fit a novel like _Les Oberlé_. A serious fault in Gosse's specific comparisons is his relating a major author to a minor one. His essay on the Flemish poet Verhaeren uses the critical gambit of finding similarities between him and Crabbe: both have "the same saline flavour, the same odour of iodine, the same tenacious attachment to the strength and violence and formidable simplicity of nature." But Verhaeren is in the front rank of poets while Crabbe certainly is not. In contrast, Gosse states that Albert Samain reminds him of Poe, Bridges, Yeats, and Arthur O'Shaughnessy, thus elevating a third rate French poet into the company of some first rate English ones. I do not feel, however, that such oversimplifications

16 "Alphonse Daudet," _ibid_. , p. 120.
17 "M. René Bazin," _ibid_. , p. 281.
18 "Four Poets," _ibid_. , p. 315.
19 P. 324.
are entirely due to Gosse's obtuseness. Here again we find him
meeting the reader on the reader's own ground. For the result
of such a technique is clear; one does obtain from these essays
an elementary acquaintance with a writer whom he has never read;
and the whole process, thanks to Gosse's style and method of
working, is usually quite painless. How much one learns about the
unique quality of a foreign author from such a method is another
matter. Gosse usually remained content with his author's "Brit­
ishness" or lack of it.

Gosse's first critical book, Studies in the Literature of
Northern Europe (1879), shows his early awareness of the
problems he had to face all his life as a popularizer of foreign
literature. "It is useless," he sighed in his essay on the
Danish poet Paludin-Müller, "to recommend the reader to the books
themselves, and how is a weary critic to persuade him of the value
of their contents?" Dealing as he was with a little known area
of literature and with languages he knew his readers would never
learn, Gosse developed a critical strategy to overcome these
handicaps. The devices he used included a wider employment of
social and historical background than was ever again customary
with him, rather full translations and paraphrases of the
literature he was discussing, fairly slight impressionistic

20 Reprinted as Northern Studies (London, 1890). This is the
book I have used in the present study.

21 "Four Danish Poets," ibid., p. 228
critical comments, and pen portraits of the artists he had met.

Aside from the two essays on Ibsen and the one on the Danish national theater, which we have already looked at, and a descriptive piece on the Lofoden Islands (his first published essay, 1871) the bulk of the studies treated the poets and poetry of Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. These essays are practically a microcosm of all of Gosse's work with foreign literature. He combined history, biography, plot paraphrase, and translation in his survey of the Swedish poet Runeberg (1878). He tried to show the effect of myth, race, and politics on Norwegian poetry, devoting his most sympathetic attention to Björnson, whose spirit, "as masculine as a Viking's, and as pure and as tender as a maiden's," is particularly attractive to a foreigner. The book is crammed with impressionistic criticism, such as this passage on Wergeland: "We rise from reading the poem as from studying some exquisite piece of majolica, or a page of elaborate arabesques; we feel it can never be as true to our own faith as it was to the writer's, but we regard it as a lovely piece of art, shapely and well-proportioned." And, above all, in his essay "Four Danish Poets" (1877), Gosse employed the portrait technique which became his hallmark.

There is no particular philosophical depth to these studies—Gosse never wrote that way. He knew from the beginning that few

22 "Norwegian Poetry since 1814," ibid., p. 31.
23 P. 15.
of his readers could go to the original poetry. It is even
doubtful if he himself could have appreciated the subtleties
of style in the Scandinavian languages. But for their pur-
pose, an introduction to a relatively unknown literature, they
are certainly adequate and still remain a stimulating and lucid
account of seldom read literatures. In them, Gosse was well on
his way to becoming a successful popularizer.

Gosse's major literary love, however, lay not across the
North Sea but across the Channel. A confirmed Francophile, he
seemed to prefer the literature of France even to that of his own
nation. According to his biographer, he had a wide acquaintance
with French authors, stayed abreast of modern French literature,
and daily read both the Debats and Figaro. His preferences we
have already seen in his criticism of the novel and of poetry.
He was particularly attracted by the formal and stylistic
qualities of French writing. An English Parnassian along with
Lang, he not only wrote in classical French forms himself but
also contributed "A Plea for Certain Exotic Forms of Verse" to
Cornhill (1877). In his various studies of the Symbolistes it
was the manner rather than the matter that appealed to him.
Likewise in the novel, he preferred those French writers with
somewhat British standards, like Daudet, or those who were
stylist like France and Loti.

24 Gosse read Ibsen with dictionary aid. See Evan Charteris, The
25 P. 462.
Gosse was among the first of the British critics of French literature to try to reach a wide audience. Ruth Z. Temple has commented that of all the English critics of French literature Gosse alone did not assume his readers knew the French language.\textsuperscript{26} He concerned himself mainly with nineteenth-century subjects and attempted to approach his Frenchmen without initial prejudice. Even so, because his main critical aim was to show the Englishness of French writing and because of his classical tastes in poetry, he failed to go very deeply into French experimental literature. Compare, for example, Arthur Symons' studies of such writers as Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Verlaine (studies which take into account the basic mysticism of the writer who uses symbols) with Gosse's chitchats about personality and style. Mrs. Temple is quite right in her conclusion that in the long run such less popular critics as Symons did more for the reputation of French poetry in England than Gosse did.\textsuperscript{27} But here as always one has to admit that Gosse was serious in his desire to draw the two cultures together. That he worked out his essays with British rather than French standards in mind undoubtedly weakens his criticism; yet he must have played at least a small role in bringing about an understanding between the two nations. One


\textsuperscript{27} P. 228.
assumes the French government did not decorate him for nothing.

3. the Cleopatra of literary love-making

George Saintsbury, according to Huntington Cairns, was without a peer "as a systematic expositor of French literature to the English public." During his early career as a teacher he read French books avidly, inaugurated his critical work with the first detailed study in English of Baudelaire (Fortnightly Review, 1875) and followed with his series on French novelists (Saturday Review, 1878). At various times throughout his journalistic life he served as French specialist for the Fortnightly, the Academy, and the Saturday Review. To the eleventh edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica he contributed selections including what has been called the best short history of French literature ever published in England. The words about France flew from his pen for fifty years, a flood of translations, articles, introductions, prefaces, anthologies, primers, and full scale histories—enough raw material in itself to justify a book length study. His last systematic book, full of idiosyncrasies of style,

28 George Saintsbury, French Literature and Its Masters, ed. Huntington Cairns (New York, 1946), p. vi. Several details from the following paragraphs have been borrowed from this preface.

29 Ibid., p. v. Saintsbury's contributions to the eleventh edition are collected in this volume.
was the two-volume *History of the French Novel* (1917-1919).

Like Gosse, Saintsbury was in competition with other late nineteenth-century essayists who tried to keep alive the interest in French literature which Matthew Arnold had raised. His essays were clearly on a par with the work of these men. However, because of his background, it is not surprising to find his criticism much more wide ranging, thorough, and learned than that of Gosse. Its very scope, perhaps, kept him from being as widely popular.

One explanation for the difference in the degree of popularity of Gosse and Saintsbury rests in their various attitudes toward French writing. Gosse, as we have seen, consistently reverted to direct comparison to elucidate his French subjects: he stressed the borrowings which had occurred between the two literatures. Saintsbury, on the other hand, saw a great gulf there. That his lecture to the Bradford Philosophical Society, "The Contrast of English and French Literature" (*Macmillan's*, 1892) contained the word *contrast* in the title is suggestive. The critic's task, he announced, is to discover these contrasts, not necessarily to reconcile them. Like the separate halves of a jaggedly torn painting, each literature is different, but each is needed to complete the whole:

The two together form the veritable Cleopatra of literary love-making, whom no age can wither nor custom stale. I do not forget the charms of others, or the merit of others; I would not give up my reading of Greek or of Latin for any consideration; I would not be ignorant of German, or unable to make a shift to read Dante; I wish
I knew more than I do of other languages still. But I cannot help thinking that for those whose circumstances do not permit them a wider range, it is absolutely impossible to find two literatures which, both for edification and delight, complete each other in so strange and perfect a way as these two.30

These contrasts can be found in language, spirit, and literary types, not in "non-historical" critical canons like moral or racial generalization. In language the contrast is clear: French is characterized by order and law, English by license and tolerance of change. One can find values in both; the critic must merely recognize that what applies to one need not apply to the other. The English, for example, would have no use for an Academy on the French model because there are "no fixed rules to apply."31

Saintsbury found five oppositions of spirit between France and England. French sobriety contrasts with the gayer moods of the "mad Englishman." The French are people of wit, the English of humor. French literature is characterized by mechanical inventiveness while English literature shows evidence of a discursive imagination. French writing tends to be clear and precise, English vague and obscure. Finally, a French writer has a critical spirit, a trait which his English counterpart decid-

31 P. 236.
edly lacks. It follows that the English excel in those departments of prose literature, the novel for example, which "border on poetry, while the French excel us in oratory, in a certain kind of history, and... in the exposition of clearly understood facts and theories." French poetry is governed by formal law while English poetry is much more tolerant of variation. The English taught the French to write the novel. In drama, both nations are just about equal.

At one time or another Saintsbury considered critically nearly all the major and minor French writers. Thus the essays which he collected from his twenty years of journalism are apt to be misleading if taken as an illustration of the range of his work. He wrote in Blackwood's (1895) that French literature written since 1830 had never had such variety and excellence. But from the essays which he reprinted, one would not be apt to draw the same conclusion. For the most part, except for novelists, they concern fairly minor figures. His poets are Quinet, a master with no masterpieces; Farny, a second rate love poet of the late eighteenth century; Panard, a writer of drinking songs; Dorat, a butterfly, pretty in fine weather and suitable surround-

32 P. 238.
33 Pp. 240f.
ings; Vadé, in whom there is "plenty of fun, no horrors, and no morbid pseudo-psychology";\(^{36}\) Firon, a strictly occasional writer; and Désaugiers, whose songs range from the music hall level to "fair impromptus for a convivial meeting."\(^{37}\) The only important essay on a poet which he reprinted from this early period was his study of Baudelaire. Included in his 1891 volume, \textit{Essays on French Novelists}, are eight pieces from the \textit{Fortnightly} of the seventies: studies of Sandeau, Flaubert, Gautier, Dumas, Fouillet, Cherbuliez, de Bernard, and Henri Murger. To these he added studies of "sensibility novels" (1882), Anthony Hamilton (1890), and "The Present State of the French Novel" (1888). From non-fictional prose writers Saintsbury selected Chamfort and Rivarol, Rousseau and Voltaire, Montaigne, Saint Evrémonde, and Renan.

The relative obscurity of many of the figures whom Saintsbury chose for critical treatment can undoubtedly be explained by the exigencies of the medium in which he first published. In his preface to \textit{Essays on French Novelists}, he felt it necessary to explain that, left to his own devices, he would have selected other authors than he did for his \textit{Fortnightly} series. The editor, John Morley, decreed otherwise, not only about the subjects but about the treatment.

From these essays, certain consistent attitudes about French

\(^{36}\) "A Frame of Miniatures," \textit{ibid.}, IV, 145.

\(^{37}\) P. 141.
literature emerge. There is, of course, the usual enthusiasm, the ability to find literary worth in unexpected places. Too there is the search for the "poetic moment." These essays are thus of a piece with his other work. Perhaps the epigraph to his study of Baudelaire—"Ce Baudelaire est une pierre de touche; il déplait invariablement à tous les imbéciles"—may be taken as his own touchstone for French poetry. He who devotes himself to style above all else is the best poet. Three more specific critical stands can be found in his articles on the French novel: the low state of French fiction can be traced to the fall of the monarchy in 1830; from the time of Zola, the "dirt compeller," it has suffered increasingly from "dirtiness" and "dulness"; and the bleak half century of the analytical novel must lead to a resurgence of romance.

As an expositor of French literature Saintsbury took a middle path between Gosse's anecdotal, biographical approach and Symons' more seriously critical one. In his studies of novelists, he usually opened with general remarks, sometimes biographical and sometimes not, followed by translations or paraphrases of long extracts from his writer's work, and concluded by further critical remarks in which he tried to point out the "formula" (in Pater's sense) of his writer. His essays on other genres included usually a review of the criticism of his author, a biographical sketch, a paragraph or two of annotated bibliography, a catalogue of the major books, a consideration of the historical position of the
writer, and concluding remarks, again aimed at finding the "formula."

In general, unlike Gosse, Saintsbury assumed that his readers had a fairly wide knowledge of French language and literature. In fact he felt obliged to apologize for the space he devoted to translation and extract in his Fortnightly essays. And with just cause; many of these studies have more translation in them than they do criticism. Morley, who required the device, obviously knew more about the abilities of his readers than Saintsbury did. Again unlike Gosse, Saintsbury was not too consistent in his use of comparisons to elucidate a French writer in British terms. Finally, like all essayists he frequently strayed from his main subject. His digressions, however, usually concerned topics clearly allied to the matter at hand. Thus he began his essay on Murger with an extended definition of "bohemian" and in his study of Lesage wandered into several paragraphs on the Théâtre de la Foire.

No matter what subjects or method Gosse, Saintsbury, Lang, or Collins employed, each was motivated by a very real sense of the value of foreign letters to the British. Their effectiveness was determined not so much by their approach as by their consistency. Lang's pastiches and appreciations do give the reader a feeling for the work involved; but his essays on alien writing were rather scattered. Collins' historical information was a worth-while addition to the scholarship of his day, but he hardly
did enough work in this field to be considered an expert. Gosse's pen portraits were graceful introductions to foreign authors, but they were too much on the surface to be very influential in the long run. Only Saintsbury, who combined literary history, biographical detail, social movements, philosophical ideas, and impressionistic criticism in his work has had much lasting value as an interpreter of foreign writing.
Even though Arnold, Pater, Swinburne, and Stephen wrote for periodical publication their criticism was aimed at a somewhat restricted group of readers. Arnold's appeal, for example, was essentially intellectual; Pater's carefully inlaid style was a bar to any general appreciation; Swinburne's flights of impressionism soared beyond all but the bookish; Stephen's judicial attitude and manner harkened back to Jeffrey and the limited thousands who read the Edinburgh. These men, however, belong essentially to the middle of the nineteenth century. By 1900 a stylistic change had taken place in many of the periodicals addressed to the well-read middle class. It was a change which Frederick Greenwood, editor of the Pall Mall Gazette, characterized as a supersession of the artificial, formal, and hackneyed by "a style more idiomatic and familiar, unpedantic, flexible, good English of common life, never without humour, which men of education use in their talk and in their letters."¹ A glance at the magazine criticism of the late nineteenth century shows at once its relative brevity, its easy rhetoric and diction, its wide use of anecdote and personal impression, and its generally conservative theoretical base—a criticism, as Gosse said, written indeed for the Many-Headed.

All four of our critics felt their essential task was to communicate facts, ideas, and impressions about literature to a growing reading public who were not necessarily lovers of belles-lettres. This attitude seems to underlie the style of all four in their periodical essays. It is hard to say, of course, just how much of their way of writing was governed by a conscious response to the demands of their audience. One is never sure in these matters whether a Gosse or Lang deliberately makes himself "popular" or whether he has merely been fortunate enough to appear with the right style at the right time to gain general approval. Of the four, only Saintsbury, talked much about addressing his audience. Nevertheless, one has only to compare the more serious books of these men with their periodical essays to detect some difference in manner. Certainly in the latter there is usually a greater clarity of discourse.

Neither Gosse, Lang, Saintsbury, nor Collins were trying to approximate any sort of journalistic norm. Indeed, the day when all magazine articles sounded like all other magazine articles was still in the future. Each, with the possible exception of Collins, who made the pugnacious attitude of the Quarterly somewhat his own, was an individualist whose style and tone were an echo of his own personality. Nevertheless, a consideration of the writing of each should give some sense of the variety of discourse which late nineteenth-century editors of better periodicals found acceptable for their pages. Too, such a con-
sideration should give some notion of the methods these men developed to communicate their love of letters. It may also help to explain why Gosse and Lang were highly popular critics, Saintsbury only passably so, and Collins not at all.

Let us consider then four paragraphs, typical of late nineteenth century journalistic criticism, and even more typical of the men who wrote them. Here is Gosse on de Vigny:

It is not to be pretended that the poetry of Alfred de Vigny is to everyone's taste. He was too indifferent to the public, too austere and arrogant in his address, to attract the masses, and to them he will remain perpetually unknown. But he is a writer, in his best prose as well as in the greater part of his scanty verse, who has only to become familiar to a reader susceptible to beauty, to grow more and more beloved. The other poets of his age were fluent and tumultuous; Alfred de Vigny was taciturn, stoical, one who had lost faith in glory, in life, perhaps even in himself. While the flute and the trumpet sounded, his hunter's horn, blown far away in the melancholy woodland, could scarcely raise an echo in the heart of a warrior or banqueter. But those who visit Vigny in the forest will be in no hurry to return. He shall entertain them there with such high thoughts and such proud music that they will follow him wherever his dream may take him. They may admit that he is sometimes hard, often obscure, always in a certain facile sense unsympathetic, but they will find their taste for more redundant melodies than his a good deal marred for the future. And some among them, if they are sincere, will admit that, so far as they are concerned, he is the most majestic poet whom France produced in the rich course of the nineteenth century.²

Lang on Hawthorne:

Hawthorne's way was never too ruddily and robustly human. Perhaps, even in "The Scarlet Letter," we feel too distinctly that certain characters are moral con-

ceptions, not warmed and wakened out of the allegorical into the real. The persons in an allegory may be real enough, as Bunyan has proved by examples. But that culpable clergymen, Mr. Arthur Dimmesdale, with his large, white brow, his melancholy eyes, his hand on his heart, and his general resemblance to the High Church Curate in Thackeray’s "Our Street," is he real? To me he seems very unworthy to be Hester’s lover, for she is a beautiful woman of flesh and blood. Mr. Dimmesdale was not only immoral; he was unsportsmanlike. He had no more pluck than a church-mouse. His miserable passion was degraded by its brevity; how could he see this woman’s disgrace for seven long years, and never pluck up heart either to share her shame or peccare fortiter? He is a lay figure, very clever, but somewhat conventionally made and painted. The vengeful husband of Hester, Roger Chillingworth, is a Mr. Casaubon stung into jealous anger. But his attitude, watching ever by Dimmesdale, tormenting him, and yet in his confidence, and ever unsuspected, reminds one of a conception dear to Dickens. He uses it in "David Copperfield," where Mr. Micawber (of all people!) plays this trick on Uriah Heep; he uses it in "Hunted Down"; he was about using it in "Edwin Drood"; he used it (old Martin and Pecksniff) in "Martin Chuzzlewit." The person of Roger Chillingworth and his conduct are a little too melodramatic for Hawthorne’s genius.3

Saintsbury on Praed:

I have seen disdainful remarks on those critics who, however warily, admire a considerable number of authors, as though they were coarse and omniverous persons, unfit to rank with the delicates who can only relish one or two things in literature. But this is a foolish mistake. "One to one" is not "cursedly confined" in the relation of book and reader; and a man need not be a Don Juan of letters to have a list of almost mille e tre loves in that department. He must indeed love the best or those among the best only, in the almost innumerable kinds, which is not a very severe restriction. And Praed is of this so fortunately numerous company. I do not agree with

those who lament his early death on the ground of its depriving literature or politics of his future greatness. In politics he would most probably not have become anything greater than an industrious and respectable official; and in letters his best work was pretty certainly done. For it was a work that could only be done in youth. In his scholarly but not frigidly correct form, in his irregular sallies and flashes of a genius really individual as far as it went but never perhaps likely to go much farther, in the freshness of his imitations, in the imperfection of his originalities, Praed was the most perfect representative we have had or ever are likely to have of what has been called, with a perhaps reprehensible parody on great words, "the eternal undergraduate within us who rejoices before life." He is thus at the very antipodes of Wertherism and Byronism, a light but gallant champion of cheerfulness and the joy of living. Although there is about him absolutely nothing artificial—the curse of lighter poetry as a rule—and though he attains to deep pathos now and then, and once or twice (notably in The Red Fisherman) to a kind of grim earnestness, neither of these things are his real forte. Playing with literature and with life, not frivolously or without heart, but with no very deep cares and no very passionate feeling, is Praed's attitude whenever he is at his best. And he does not play at playing as many writers do: it is all perfectly genuine. Even Prior has not excelled such lines as these in one of his early and by no means his best poems (an adaptation too), for mingled jest and earnest:

\begin{verbatim}
But Isabel, by accident,
Was wandering by that minute;
She opened that dark monument
And found her slave within it;
The clergy said the Mass in vain,
The College could not save me:
But life, she swears, returned again
With the first kiss she gave me.  
\end{verbatim}

Collins on Chesterfield:

But the world has little leisure, and still less inclination, to concern itself about writings which are

of interest only for the light which they throw on the
character of the writer, or to explore the by-paths of
history and biography. To ninety-nine in every hun-
dred of his countrymen Chesterfield is known only in
association with the Letters to his son Philip. On
the evidence of these Letters, or to speak more
correctly, on evidence derived from portions of these
Letters, confirmed and supplemented by current
traditions, the popular conception of him has been
formed. We have little doubt that in the imagination
of thousands he is still pictured as the epigram of
Johnson pictured him more than a century ago. We
have little doubt that to many, and to very many, his
name is little more than a synonym for a profligate
fribble, shallow, flippant, heartless, without
morality, without seriousness, a scoffer at religion,
an enemy to truth and virtue, passing half his life
in practising, and in the other half teaching a son to
practise, all that moves loathing and contempt in
honest men. Even among those who do not judge as the
crowd judges there exists a stronger prejudice
against Chesterfield than exists with equal reason
against any other Englishman. He has himself remarked
that there is no appeal against character. His own
character has been established through the impression
made by the testimony of hostile contemporaries, and
through the impression made by such portions of the
only writings by which he is now remembered as un-
happily reflect it on its worst side, and appear there-
fore to corroborate that testimony. And his character,
or what has for a century and a quarter been assumed
to be his character, has been fatal to his fame. He
will now be judged more fairly. We do not think that
the present Letters throw any really new light on the
man himself, but, unlike the more famous Letters, they
reflect only, and very charmingly, what was best and
most attractive in him. They show how much amiability,
kindliness, humanity, seriousness, existed in one whose
name has become a proverb for the very opposite
qualities. They exhibit, simply and without alloy,
what he took a cynical pleasure in concealing from the
world in general, and what is in his other writings
obscured and vitiated by baser matter. That their
publication will have the effect of creating a reaction
in his favour, a reaction the result of which will be
a juster estimate of the value of his writings, is
highly probable. And we heartily hope that this will
be the case. We have long regarded it as a great
misfortune that what was reprehensible in Chesterfield's
conduct and teaching should so completely have obscured what was excellent and admirable in both, as practically to deprive his name and works of all popular credit and authority.\footnote{5}

Different as these passages are, they have in common an oral quality, a tone of one gentleman speaking to another. Gosse and Collins, of course, are the more rhetorical, both having spent many hours on the lecture platform. Lang and Saintsbury more nearly achieve Greenwood's "good English of common life." But all four show evidence of the oral style with its propensity to qualification, its inversions, its many parallels and series, its rather loose sentence structure, and its generally simple vocabulary. Gosse in his timid "It is not to be pretended that. . ." and in his third, fourth, and ninth sentences qualifies almost half of the direct statements he makes in this paragraph. Six of his nine sentences contain series or parallels while two show a looseness in grammatical elements typical of the platform speaker. Lang writes more directly; only three of his sentences contain qualifications. He, however, affects the series and parallel as much as Gosse, uses the rhetorical question, and (witness the eighth, eleventh and thirteenth sentences) writes much more loosely and parenthetically. Collins, without question, is the orator of the group. Almost every one of his longer sentences (nine out of sixteen) contains at least one qualifying clause or phrase. His structure, too, is eminently

\footnote{5 "Lord Chesterfield's Letters," \textit{Essays and Studies} (London, 1895), pp. 194ff.}
correct. Even his page-filling fourth sentence with its series within a series is carefully pivoted on the connective "and."

Saintsbury, finally, is the orator with a difference. Few of his many parentheses are qualifications; if anything, he makes more direct statements than indirect ones. Although he uses parallels as much as the others, his construction over all is more loose than not—note the pronoun "which" in the fourth sentence and the ingeniously careless combination of clauses and phrases in the ninth.

Even though these four are similar in their use of an oral style, they were certainly no hack critics grinding out reviews in a set pattern, the sort of thing one finds in today's Sunday book supplements. Each in turn was a unique personality, and even though they framed their expositions within a broad limit, their differences in tone are more apparent, and more interesting, than their similarities in style. Gosse, for example, has the imagination of the writer of narrative, Lang the loose associational fancy of the familiar essayist, Saintsbury the mood of the intellectual conversationalist, and Collins, though he may be pushed upon occasion to emotion, the clear coldness of the hard-working scholar.

Gosse, of course, strove for balance, cadence, and lucidity—qualities typical of his first literary love, French. Mechanically, his writing is not too abrupt to be called telegraphic; neither is it too complicated to be difficult. His
paragraphs seldom exceed ten sentences and frequently contain only five or six. He averages thirty to forty words a sentence, occasionally emphasizing an idea with a very brief unit. On the rare occasions he does use a long sentence, seventy words or so, he is careful to balance the elements so that length does not destroy his clarity:

They [the things Ferdinand Fabré cares about] are found among the winding paths that lead up through the oleander-marshes, through the vineyards, through the chestnuts, to the moorlands and the windy peaks; they are walking beside the patient flocks of goats, when Sacripant is marching at their head; they are the poachers and the reapers, the begging friars and the sportsman, all the quiet, rude population of those shrouded hamlets of the Hérault.

Because of this balanced style, Gosse uses more compound-complex sentences than most writers. But even these long structures seldom contain more than one or two subordinate clauses.

Gosse's somewhat over-conscious use of poetic devices was also a part of his attempt at balance and clarity. In the de Vigny passage above, almost every thought unit uses alliteration to tie grammatical elements together. Particularly striking is the second sentence with its "austere," "arrogant," "attract," and "masses." Even more interesting is the effect of initial "p's" and "b's." Not overstressed, so as to give a popgun effect, their repetition from the first sentence to the last binds the whole passage with sound.

Gosse's metaphors too were not merely poetic decoration.

6 "Ferdinand Fabré," French Profiles, pp. 180f.
A great deal of his success as a writer can be explained by his ability to move from the unknown to the known, from the abstract to the concrete:

The best poetry may roll down violent places, but it remains as limpid as a trout-stream; what is unfortunate about Mrs. Browning's is that it is constantly stained and clouded.  

Zola seems to me to be the Vulcan among our later gods, afflicted with moral lameness from his birth, and coming to us sooty and brutal from the forge, yet as indisputably divine as any Mercury-Hawthorne or Apollo-Thackeray of the best of them.  

But these people [the decadents] are getting bald, and have grey beards, and still suck their thumbs. There must be something more in the whole thing than met the eye of the philosopher. When the entire poetic youth of a country such as France is observed raking the dust-heaps, it is probable that pearls are to be discovered.  

What these images show, and one could find hundreds more like them, is Gosse's ability to vivify even abstract points—to bring them down to the experience of his reader. Even when referring to mythology, he made sure he would be understood—in the Zola image, for example, adding the adjectives from the forge and equating Mercury and Apollo with novelists his readers knew about. 

Many writers, however, employ balanced sentences, allit-

eration, and metaphor. What really distinguishes Gosse is his tone. Rebecca West once called him a frustrated novelist, and anyone today who has sat over his pages must agree with the judgment. Even in his summation of de Vigny, he dramatizes his reading experience by the long image of the forest. Gosse's major gift as a writer, however, was portrait painting; and to his portraits, as well as to his criticism, he brought the novelist's ability to select, to actualize, and, on occasion, to distort. He saw both his writers and their works as capable of dramatic treatment. Thus his essays are full of memorable touches made vivid by their playfulness, their colorful adjectives and verbs, and their motion:

I have a vision of him [Mallarmé] now, the little, brown, gentle person, trotting about in Bloomsbury with an elephant folio under his arm, trying to find Mr. Swinburne by the unassisted light of instinct.  

. . . the [Pater] flashed forth at the Private View of the Royal Academy in a new top hat and a silk tie of brilliant apple-green. This little transformation marked a crisis; he was henceforth no longer a provincial philosopher, but a critic linked to London and the modern arts.  

. . . Alphonse Daudet waiting to be wracked with anguish from moment to moment, a shawl wrapped round his poor knees, lifting the ivory lines of his face with rapture to the beauty of a flower, or pouring from his delicate


lips a flood of wit and tenderness and enthusiasm.\(^\text{13}\)

Like the novelist, Gosse was less interested in objective truth than in imaginative truth. His carelessness has given scholarly critics, from Collins to the present day, ample opportunity for tongue clucking and worse. Nevertheless, are there not occasions when exaggeration and colorful writing more neatly buttress and make memorable objective truth than a more bald account can? Do we not gain greater insight into Walter Pater from the following account of the aftermath of a disagreement with Pattison?—"We [Gosse and Pater] went back, sad and silent, to Bradmore Road, and, just as we reached home, Pater said, with solemn firmness, 'What Pattison likes best in the world, no doubt, is romping with great girls in the gooseberry-bushes!'"\(^\text{14}\) It is questionable if Pater made such a remark; the alliterated "g's" are just too pat. But true or not, such touches as these made Gosse one of the liveliest critics of his day.

Almost as lively as Gosse's and certainly simpler to read was the writing of Andrew Lang. His paragraph units, although they vary greatly, are on the average somewhat longer, upon occasion fifteen or twenty sentences. His clarity, however, depends upon the brevity and simplicity of his units of thought. While Gosse's length was thirty to forty words, Lang's sentences

\(^{13}\) "Alphonse Daudet," *French Profiles*, p. 110.

average twenty to thirty, and a long sentence, one of more than forty words, is a distinct rarity. His structure, too, is easier. He uses a great many more simple units, some compound and complex sentences, and only occasionally a compound-complex one. Like Gosse's, his sentences seldom contain more than one subordinating clause.

Lang's prose is much less poetic than Gosse's, its rhythm more nearly approximating the ruggedness of ordinary speech. He does, of course, use alliteration, having a particular penchant for pairing words ("ruddily" and "robustly," "warmed and wakened," "culpable clergyman" in the Hawthorne passage above). But more of his sentences than not get along without the device. He also had a keen ability to bring down into specific language whatever he wanted to say. His success at making his material vivid was greater than Gosse's because he could make even highly general ideas concrete:

Little Nells and Dombays, children unhappy, overthrown early in the mêlée of the world, and dying among weeping readers, no longer affect us as they affected another generation.¹⁵

Smollett's heroes, one conceives, were intended to be fine, though not faultless young fellows; men, not plaster images; brave, generous, free-living, but, as Roderick finds once, when examining his conscience, pure from serious stains on that important faculty. To us these heroes often appear no better than ruffians.¹⁶

¹⁵ "Dickens," Essays in Little (London, 1891), p. 120.
But, shortened or not, they [the Sagas] are brave books for men, for the world is a place of battle still, and life is war.17

One often feels that the kind of redundancy which these passages illustrate was a conscious device on Lang's part. Perhaps he felt that if his readers could not understand one in a series of restrictive adjectives, they could grasp the meaning of the next. Lang, finally, was somewhat wary of similes of the sort which often carry the weight of the argument in a Gosse essay. Rather, his pieces are full of allusions, which of course befits a critic whose main tone is that of a familiar essayist drawing his images from books rather than from the world around him.

Lang's hallmark then is his essayist cast of mind—his recounting of his own experiences, his impressionism, his digressiveness, and his wit. Perhaps the best place to watch Lang reproduce his exploits as a reader is the introductory essay to Adventures Among Books (1905). Here are accounts of reading Shakespeare by firelight, getting the "call" to the novel by Dickens and Thackeray, being made to cry by Uncle Tom's Cabin, and so on. Most of his essays contain this sort of reminiscence. He remembers his first reading of Tupper:

The name brings back to my memory myself, a grubby little boy, in this library of an old country villa, lent long ago by the wicked Colonel Charteris to the virtuous Forbes of Culloden. Here many days of the nonage of the bookworm were spent, and when not riding barebacked ponies, or making experiments with brass cannon, I

would be reading every kind of book. Among them was your own, beautifully bound, and obviously a gift to some romantic fair one. On asking my elders as to the character of your work, I was told, "It is a very wise book," which, for some reason, put a stop to my researches.  

He recalls how books frightened him as a boy:

Personally I may say that few people have been plagued by the terror that walketh in darkness more than myself. At the early age of ten I had the tales of the ingenious Mr. Edgar Poe and of Charlotte Brontë "put into my hands" by a cousin who had served as a Bashi Bazouk, and knew not the meaning of fear. But I did, and perhaps even Nelson would have found out "what fear was," or the boy in the Norse tale would have "learned to shiver," if he had been left alone to peruse 'Jane Eyre,' and the 'Black Cat,' and the 'Fall of the House of Usher,' as I was.

Any person who has ever read has experienced such adventures. Most of us have been grubby little lads exploring a library or frightening ourselves with a tale of terror. Lang's confidential tone in passages like these has the singular advantage of drawing the reader closer to the writer, of making him feel a friend of the critic himself.

Also typical of Lang was his ability to reproduce the spirit and feeling of the original work of art. Although he seldom went so far as Pater, his essays are full of such impressionism, particularly in "his letter-writing to the illustrious dead."

These pieces, which had been suggested by Frederick Greenwood

18 "To Martin Farquhar Tupper, Esq.," New & Old Letters to Dead Authors (London, 1907), p. 227.

when editor of the St. James Gazette, were criticism in letters addressed to an author in a pastiche of that author's style.²⁰

At first glance such material seems not to be aimed at a general reader because to appreciate pastiche fully one should be somewhat familiar with the original work. But Lang obviated this difficulty. Although his letters to dead authors are not his clearest essays, the pastiche itself does not offer many reading problems. For example, the flavor of the Compleat Angler may be suggested in the following passages from the letter to Walton, but certainly Lang took care to remove any element of seventeenth century diction which would be unfamiliar to a nineteenth century reader:

And as to the River Lea, wherein you took many a good trout, I read in the news sheets that "its bed is many inches thick in horrible filth, and the air for more than half a mile on each side of it is polluted with a horrible sickening stench," so that we stand in dread of a new Plague, called the Cholera. And so it is all about London for many miles, and if a man, at heavy charges, betake himself to the fields, lo you, folk are grown so greedy that none will suffer a stranger to fish in his water.

William Blackwood III once wrote to Mrs. Oliphant, "When Lang

²⁰ "To the Gentle Reader," Letters to Dead Authors (New York, 1902), p. vi.

²¹ "To Master Isaak Walton," ibid., pp. 82; 88.
gets a lot of facts into his head he does not seem to be able to get them out again in anything like logical order. He reminds me sometimes of a well-known saying of the Duke of Wellington's, about some English generals, that if they got ten thousand men into Hyde Park, they would never get them out again without clubbing them. Lang's mind, like a dry fly flicked over a Scottish stream, flitted gaily over the expanse of literature, but seldom dipped beneath the surface. In the Hawthorne passage above, for example, he makes no fewer than four allusions to other writers—Thackeray, Bunyan, George Eliot, and Dickens. The problem is that these allusions, rather than being devices for clarification, actually work the other way by distracting from the central argument. It is almost like saying "Look what a clever fellow I am to know this much about so many books." Charming as the device may be in a familiar essay, it is hardly an ideal way to communicate clearly.

Underlying all of Lang's tone is his ironic wit. Uneasy in his changing late nineteenth-century world, unable to stand a sacred cow, he did battle in passages which range from the audaciously nasty to the puckish:

Then, turning from the philosophers to the seekers after a sign, what change, Lucian, would you find in them and their ways? None; they are quite unaltered. Still our Peregrinus, and our Peregrina too, come to us from the East, or, if from the West, they take India on their

way--India, that secular home of drivelling creeds, and of religion in its sacerdotage. Still they prattle of Brahmins and Buddhism; though, unlike Peregrinus, they do not publicly burn themselves on pyres, at Epsom Downs, after the Derby. We are not so fortunate in the demise of our Theosophists; and our police, less wise than the Hellenodicae, would probably not permit The Immolation of the Quack. Like your Alexander, they deal in marvels and miracles, oracles and warnings. All such bogy stories as those of your "Philopseudes," and the ghost of the lady who took to table-rapping because one of her best slippers had not been burned with her body, are gravely investigated by the Psychical Society.23

There never was such another as Charles Dickens, nor shall we see his like sooner than the like of Shakespeare. And he owed all to native genius and hard work; he owed almost nothing to literature, and that little we regret.24

Ah, pleasant age to live in, when good intentions in poetry were more richly endowed than ever is Research, even in Research in Prehistoric English, among us niggard moderns! How I wish I knew a Cardinal, or, even as you [Chapelain] did, a Prime Minister, who would praise and pension me; but Envy be still.25

As I regard them (for I have tarried in their tents), and as I behold their trivialities,— the exercises of men who neglect Molière's works to write about Molière's great-grandmother's second-best bed,— I sometimes wish that Molière were here to write on his devotees a new comedy, "Les Molièristes."26

In his comments on Anatole France, Gosse once defined irony as that sort of writing which the Englishman, literal-minded individual as he is, cannot abide. Thus ironic humor in a popular journalist

23 "To Lucian of Samosata," Letters to Dead Authors, p. 58.
24 "Dickens," Essays in Little, pp. 130f.
25 "To M. Chapelain," Letters to Dead Authors, pp. 92f.
26 "To Monsieur de Molière, Valet de Chambre du Roi," ibid., p. 175.
seems somewhat paradoxical. But Lang again certainly knew what he was about. The tone in the above passages is such that it would take a rather dull reader not to comprehend their real meaning.

Quite clearly then, Gosse and Lang brought to the service of popular criticism the style and tone of the novelist and familiar essayist. Churton Collins' work, on the other hand, reminds us that even in this day of growing informality in writing there was still a place for the formal. A good bit of Collins' style no doubt can be traced to his major publisher, the Quarterly, a periodical which in many ways was the most formal and traditional organ for criticism in the late nineteenth century. But he also contributed to the daily press, the Cornhill, the Saturday Review, and elsewhere articles just as unemotional, just as staid as those which the Quarterly accepted. Collins strove, as Macaulay did, for a style which would carry the weight of scholarship to an essentially non-scholarly audience.

Colorless, but clear—these words best sum up Collins' style. He was not averse to using short sentences for rhetorical effect, even more than less formal critics. On the other hand, he also used a great many longer sentences than Gosse or Lang. These he combined into page-filling paragraphs which quite often contain fifteen or twenty units. He preferred the complex sentence, but whereas Gosse and Lang seldom qualified an idea more than once, Collins often piled up four or five subordinate clauses in a
single unit. Aside from using alliteration for coherence, Collins avoided almost entirely any adornment. He kept enlivening details to a minimum, said what he had to say once and no more. He seldom actualized a concept in a well-chosen word or wrote vividly. He selected the long word in preference to the short, the Latin instead of the Anglo-Saxon. His metaphors are quite trite, neither being drawn from a unique view of life nor functioning to make an abstract idea concrete. All of this results in long, sonorous, rolling units of words, well-suited to the lecture platform on which they were born. On paper, however, it must be confessed that they are somewhat stuffy and unexciting.

For the most part, reading Collins is like being saturated with the unemotional news columns of the Sunday New York Times. But when belaboring one of whom he did not approve, he was a master of vicious attack. One often feels his objections were picayune—a misstated date, a slight error in title, a mistake in fact—and that the bludgeon he wielded was somewhat oversized for the game. Sometimes his chiding is a slight click of the tongue or an attitude of mild pseudo-pity at bad work; frequently he poses as the master scholar chiding the junior scholar. Saintsbury, for example, illustrates the "worst characteristics of irresponsible journalism," cannot distinguish "vulgarity and coarseness from liveliness and vigour," and "takes
a boisterous pride in exhibiting his grossness."\textsuperscript{27} House style of the Quarterly or not, such attacks hardly further the "truth" which Collins insisted he was always looking for.

The writing of Gosse, Lang, and Collins is today slightly redolent of the late-Victorian era in which they wrote. George Saintsbury's style, however, is another matter. His critics both in his own day and in ours have never tired of pointing out the irony of a man who, while praising good style in others, himself wrote in long tortuous sentences. "Professor Saintsbury may be as loudly positive as he likes," wrote Arnold Bennett in 1908, "his style is always quietly whispering: 'Don't listen.'"\textsuperscript{28} Saintsbury, said Helen Waddell in 1950, wrote "like the scour of a river in spate, allusion tumbling on allusion, parenthesis rammed within parenthesis, reckless to reject the straws and faggots that his headlong thought swept up on its course."\textsuperscript{29} All of this may be said of Saintsbury's writing after his appointment to Edinburgh. But it is not completely true of his journalistic essays.

"...always to put the exposition of the subject before the display of personal cleverness" was Saintsbury's criterion for


\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Books and Persons: Being Comments on a Past Epoch} (New York, 1917), p.44.

the style of critical journalism. In his somewhat patronizing early essay "Modern Prose Style" (*Fortnightly*, 1876), he wrote that style as "the choice and arrangement of language with only a subordinate regard to the meaning to be conveyed" was beyond the comprehension of the general reader. Rather, this reader, he who subscribed to reviews and quarterlies, was interested mainly in ideas. Journalism in its attempt to satisfy this interest had brought to style "diffuseness; sacrifice of the graces of literary proportion to real or apparent clearness of statement; indulgence in cut-and-dried phrases; undue aiming at pictorial effect; gaudiness of unnatural ornament; preference of gross and glaring effects en bloc to careful composition." Saintsbury in his own writing tried, not always with success, to avoid these faults. Journalist or not, he refused to compromise for the sake of appealing to his readers.

Saintsbury's paragraph units are almost as long as Collins', his average being about fifteen sentences of thirty words each. His sentences, thus, are but slightly longer than Lang's. He also employs as many simple sentences when the movement of his thought requires the telegraph. But what makes Saintsbury difficult going for many, and what I suspect rouses the anti-Saintsbury ire, is his penchant for long sentences. In almost everyone of his paragraphs is such a unit (sometimes a hundred or more words),

30 *Collected Essays*, III, p. 64.
31 P. 75.
not carefully balanced as in a typical Gosse construction, not neatly qualified by parallel clauses such as Collins used, but an ongoing, driving series of ideas which can be cracked only by the same relative effort one uses to get into a walnut.

If compared to a writer like Gosse, Saintsbury seemingly had no ear for conventional prose rhythms in his own work. Indeed, he is more difficult to read than most journalistic critics; the very movement of his sentences hinders easy communication. But this is not the whole story. Edmund Wilson has recognized in Saintsbury's style an attempt to use the rhythms of informal talk rather than the rhetorical devices of literary convention.32 As a man talking to other men about his favorite subject, books, Saintsbury felt obligated to tell everything about a subject. To the critic interested in the minutest point no fact is too obscure, no allusion too esoteric to be pointed out in the "conversations." That such allusions and facts frequently just "come to one" does not mean that they should be denied expression. How, for example, does he use parentheses themselves (and there certainly are not too many of them in his journalistic prose)? Each has the purpose of further narrowing a subject, arriving more nearly at the truth of an idea. The same is true of his apparent overuse of subordinating constructions. Frequently his asides light up dark corners which might otherwise have remained obscure.

Saintsbury used a much less colorful vocabulary and much less vivid imagery than most other journalists. Somewhat abstract, his language is the vehicle for ideas, not pictures. He frequently employed colloquialisms but seldom chose vivid words. Similarly with his allusions and metaphors. Certainly his early essays cannot be attacked, as his later prose has been, on the grounds of incomprehensible references. While it is true that the allusions in Saintsbury's scholarly books are at times as private as those in "The Wasteland" before the notes, the same charge cannot be made about his journalism. Saintsbury, just as Gosse did, often used metaphors to clarify. That these are frequently non-literary adds to their communication value.

The major characteristic of Saintsbury's tone is its British bluntness. The man said what he had to say. There is no condescension in his writing, a feeling one often detects in Gosse, Lang, and Collins. Even when he talks about such matters as "lower class" reading habits or those who tuck obscene books under their arms, one never feels him to be on a self-erected pedestal. In fact, one suspects he read similar books with the same gusto with which he read anything else. Then he seldom engaged in satire or irony; when he had a joke to make, he made it directly.

In fine, Saintsbury's writing is but the measure of the man himself. On the evidence of his own statements, he was more
aware of the stylistic requirements of the periodical press than his friends Gosse and Lang were, refused to write down to his audience, and put obvious effort into what is generally considered an ephemeral critical form. Had he been less modest, he could have added himself to the late nineteenth-century critical trio he distinguished in 1930, "Traill for weight; 'Punch' Lang for variety and grace; Gosse for lightness"—a baritone between Traill's bass and the tenors of Gosse and Lang.

A final question is how much these "oral" styles we have been considering were influenced by the audience of the periodical press to which they were addressed. A definitive answer, which would of course rest upon a thorough consideration of the "book" style of each critic, is somewhat beyond the limits of the present study. Nevertheless, a glance at a bit of the more formal writing of Gosse, Lang, Saintsbury, and Collins suggests that each man did in varying degrees cultivate different styles for different audiences. To end where we began, let us examine four passages written directly for book publication. Here is a paragraph from Gosse's biography of Gray:

The death of his aunt seems to have brought to his recollection the Elegy in a Country Church-Yard, begun seven years before within sight of the ivy-clustered spire under whose shadow she was laid. He seems to have taken it in hand again, at Cambridge, in the winter of 1749, and tradition, which would fain see the poet always writing in the very precincts of a church-yard, has

fabled that he wrote some stanzas amongst the tombs of Granchester. He finished it, however, as he began it, at Stoke-Pogis, giving the last touches to it on the 12th of June, 1750. "Having put an end to a thing whose beginning you have seen long ago," he writes on that day to Horace Walpole, "I immediately send it to you. You will, I hope, look upon it in the light of a thing with an end to it: a merit that most of my writings have wanted, and are like to want." Walpole was only too highly delighted with this latest effusion of his friend, in which he was acute enough to discern the elements of a lasting success. It is curious to reflect upon the modest and careless mode in which that poem was first circulated which was destined to enjoy and to retain a higher reputation in literature than any other English poem, perhaps than any other poem in the world, written between Milton and Wordsworth. The fame of the Elegy has spread to all countries, and has exercised an influence on all the poetry of Europe, from Denmark to Italy, from France to Russia. With the exception of certain works of Byron and Shakspeare, no English poem has been so widely admired and imitated abroad; and, after more than a century of existence, we find it as fresh as ever, when its copies, even the most popular of all, Lamartine's Le Lac, are faded and tarnished. It possesses the charm of incomparable felicity, of a melody that is not too subtle to charm every ear, of a moral persuasion that appeals to every generation, of metrical skill that in each line proclaims the master. The Elegy may almost be looked upon as the typical piece of English verse, our poem of poems; not that it is the most brilliant or original or profound lyric in our language, but because it combines in more balanced perfection than any other all the qualities that go to the production of a fine poetical effect. The successive criticisms of a swarm of Dryasdusts, each depositing his drop of siccative, the boundless vogue and consequent profanation of stanza upon stanza, the changes of fashion, the familiarity that breeds indifference, all these things have not succeeded in destroying the vitality of this humane and stately poem. The solitary writer of authority who since the death of Johnson has ventured to depreciate Gray's poetry, Mr. Swinburne, who, in his ardour to do justice to Collins, has been deeply and extravagantly unjust to the greater man, even he, coming to curse, has been obliged to bless the "poem of such high perfection and such universal appeal to the tenderest and noblest depths of human feeling," admitting, again, with that frankness which makes Mr. Swinburne the most generous of disputants,
that "as an elegaic poet Gray holds for all ages to come his unassailable and sovereign station." 34

Lang's Homer and the Epic:

This is not all. The epics are not only poetry, but history, history not of real events, indeed, but of real manners, of a real world, to us otherwise unknown. The heroic and sacred poetry of other peoples, as of Vedic India and of Finland, goes back into the years before history was. But the Veddas have but little of human interest, the Finnish Kalewala has no composition, and is merely a stitching together of disjointed lays of adventure, or of popular songs. The Iliad and the Odyssey, keeping all the fresh vivacity and unwearied zest of 'popular' poetry, are also masterpieces of conscious art. Homer does not wander in a poetic chronical along the ages, or all through a hero's career; he seizes on a definite moment in the Siege of Troy, a set of circumstances centering in one heroic passion, or he tells a clearly circumscribed tale of Odysseus' return. Many peoples have heroic lays, or poetic chronicles of legendary events. Greece alone had a poet who could handle these with the method of a master. We readily see how Homer can rise above his time, while remaining true to his time. His age, though rich in minor decorative arts, had no accomplished statuary. The poet could not inspire himself from sculpture. On the other hand, it is his description of Zeus that inspired the colossal work of Phidias in a later day. The statues he knew were probably rude ancient idols, covered with sacred robes. But when he describes Athene arming, we see the polished body of the Goddess, the gleaming armour, the immortal raiment, "as in a picture." It is thus that Homer rises above the age whose ways, whose arms, whose ships, whose chariots, whose golden cups and necklets, and ornaments of amber he paints so firmly. He tells us plainly of a civilization far advanced, when women were honoured and listened to as the equals of men though they were ceremoniously purchased in wedlock. It was an age when religion, apart from mythic and scandalous anecdote, was comparatively clean. We hear of no foul rites of purification with pig's blood; the Mysteries,

34 Gray (London, 1887), pp. 96ff.
with their mingling of the lewd, the barbaric, and the sublime, are never the subject of an allusion.35

Saintsbury's *History of Criticism*:

Yet insufficient, and to some moods almost saugrenu, as such a definition may seem at first sight, it is, calmly and critically considered, only a re-forming of the old line of battle. Once more, and for the last time formally, Mr. Arnold is taking the field in favour of the doctrine of the Poetic Subject, as against what we may, perhaps, make a shift to call the "Doctrine of the Poetic Moment." It is somewhat surprising that, although this antinomy has been visible throughout the whole long chain of documents which I have been endeavouring to exhibit in order, no one, so far as I know, has ever fully brought it out, at least on one side. Mr. Arnold—like all who agree with him, and all with whom he and they agree, or would have agreed, from Aristotle downwards—demands a subject of distinct and considerable magnitude, a disposition of no small elaborateness, a maintained and intense attitude, which is variously adumbrated by a large number of terms, down to "grand style" and "high seriousness." The others, who have fought (we must confess most irregularly and confusedly as a rule) under the flag which Patrizzi, himself half or wholly unknowing, was the first to fly, go back, or forward, or aside to the Poetic Moment—to the sudden transcendence and transfiguration—by "treating poetically," that is to say, by passionate interpretation, inarticulate music—of any idea or image, any sensation or sentiment. They are perfectly ready to admit that he who has these moments most constantly and regularly under his command—he who can co-ordinate and arrange them most skillfully and most pleasingly—is the greatest poet, and that, on the other hand, one or two moments of poetry will hardly make a poet of any but infinitesimal and atomic greatness. But this is the difference of the poets, not of the poetry. Shakespeare is an infinitely great poet, and Langhorne an infinitesimally small one. Yet when Langhorne writes

"Where longs to fall that rifted spire
As weary of the insulting air,"

he has in the italicised line a "poetic moment" which is, for its poetic quality, as free of the poetic Jerusalem as "We are such stuff," or the dying words of Cleopatra. He has hit "what it was so easy to miss," the passionate expression, in articulate music, unhit before, never to be poetically hit again save by accident, yet never to perish from the world of poetry. It is only a grain of gold ("fish-scale" gold, even, as the mining experts call their nearly impalpable specks), but it is gold: something that you can never degrade to silver, or copper, or pinchbeck.36

Collins' Illustrations of Tennyson:

Tennyson, then, belongs to a class of poets whose work has a twofold value and interest—a value and interest, that is to say, dependent on its obvious, simple, and intrinsic beauties, which is its exoteric and popular side, and a value and interest dependent upon niceties of adaptation, allusion, and expression, which is its esoteric and critical side. To a certain point only is he the poet of the multitude; pre-eminently is he the poet of the cultured. Nor, I repeat, will his services to art be ever understood and justly appreciated till his writings come to be studied in detail, till they are, as those of his masters have been, submitted to the ordeal of the minutest critical investigation; till the delicate mechanism of his diction shall be analysed as scholars analyse the kindred subtleties of Sophocles and Virgil; till the sources of his poems have been laid bare and the original and the copy laid side by side; till we are in possession of comparative commentaries on his poems as exhaustive as those with which Orelli illustrated Horace, and Eichoff Virgil. His poems must be studied not as we study those of the fathers of song—as we study those of Homer, Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare—but as we study those who stand first in the second rank of poets. In dealing with him we have not to deal with a Homer, but with an Appollonius, not with an Alcaeus, but with a Horace—not, that is to say, with a poet of great original genius, but with an accomplished artist, with one whose mastery lies in assimilative skill, whose most successful works are not direct studies from simple nature, but studies

from nature interpreted by art. He belongs, in a word, to a school which stands in the same relation to the literature of England as the Alexandrian poets stood to the literature of Greece, and as the Augustan poets stood to the literature of Rome.

The least variation between magazine and book style appears in Collins. Although he does feel freer to use more long sentences in the Tennyson passage, the average length of his units remains pretty much as it was. His paragraphing, too, is the same, and certainly the distinctive elements of his formal oratory are still with us: the penchant for inversion, for extensive parallels, and for balance. Saintsbury, too, does not change his style extensively. His sentences and paragraphs remain the same length. He is still the expert of letters chatting about his knowledge. It is true, nevertheless, that Saintsbury does tend to be more parenthetic and to use more obscure allusions in his History than he did in his essays.

On the basis of these slight differences we might be forced to admit that there was no such thing as a "magazine" style were it not for the work of Lang and Gosse. On the surface Lang is still Lang—a "light" critic—even when dealing with Homeric authorship, a subject he was profoundly interested in. Even though he does use somewhat more lengthy sentences his average unit is still surprisingly short. The same may be said about his paragraphs. The essential difference, however, is not to

37 Illustrations of Tennyson (London, 1902), pp. 4f.
be found in these details but in the overall tone of the writing. In his shorter criticism, Lang was the essayist, letting his witty mind play with the material at hand. Here he is much more straightforward. His allusions in the Homer, rather than being merely decorative, at least have the virtue of relevance to the subject at hand. If anything, his willingness "to stick to the subject" makes his books somewhat easier to read than his essays.

Even more obviously, Gosse seems to have tailored his style to his medium. His sentences for book publication, for example, average fully ten more words apiece. Although his patterns, a mixture of compound and compound complex, remain as they were, he uses fewer simple sentences and now piles up a great many more clauses in a single unit. But again, as it was for Lang, the essential difference does not rest in these matters at all. In his magazine essays Gosse seems to have felt the need to qualify, the need to pile descriptive detail upon descriptive detail—in many places resulting in highly inexact statement. In his books, however, all is clear cut. He says what he has to say once and then drops the subject.

The desiderated style for journalistic criticism in the latter third of the nineteenth century seems then to have been an oral one. Each of our critics adopted this style, although in varying degrees. Collins was the classical orator; Gosse the university lecturer, Lang the witty essayist, and Saintsbury the more serious (and intellectual) talker.
Chapter 8 CONCLUSION

With the exception of John Churton Collins, the late nineteenth century critics we have been considering sprang from Diderot, Sainte Beuve, English romantics like Coleridge and his school, Pater, and Arnold. They had no use for the neo-classical criticism by rule and by kind and were not much interested in the "didactic" and "personal" heresies of 1830-1860. They refused to consider literature as a social, moral, political, or philosophical treatise and thus did not follow Johnson, Wilson, Croker, Macaulay, or even Leslie Stephen. They looked at literature as a thing existing of and for itself and refused to attack it for what it was not or for what they thought it should have been. Underlying all their criticism was intense delight in literature and the conviction that their major task was to enable others to experience an equal delight.

Edmund Gosse certainly had such a conviction and all of his criticism was written for the benefit of the "many-headed." His admitted model being Sainte Beuve, his essays are almost always in the causerie manner—relatively brief pieces containing biography, anecdotes, comments on books and quoted selections from books, and a tentative estimation of place and worth. Interested in literature for the sake of literature, he seldom mentioned philosophical or social implications in the work before him, although one cannot help feeling that his essays on
drama show his realization of the role literature might play in society. In the drama and in his ideal novel ("imaginative-realism") he seems occasionally to have received pleasure from subject matter. Usually, however, his enjoyment of all the genres came from style; and he saw the history of literature as a stream of style, constantly widening, sometimes wandering, but always returning and held in check by tradition. Gosse's sensitivity to literature, however, was peculiarly limited, probably because of his narrow childhood. There is no question that he felt intensely the beauty of language in poetry, but he was certainly as insensitive to romance as he was to the philosophical bases of the literature he discussed. Again, one can hardly call him an impressionist. Too often in the critical half of his essays he merely reports his opinions without following Pater's lead and accounting for them.

In his writing, Gosse hit almost exactly the tone required for the periodical of his own day. His style, slightly artificial in its propensity to balance, was colored enough by his novelist's imagination to become a vehicle as easy to read as fiction. His manners were always gentlemanly, even when he used irony. His subjects were never really great writers (except, perhaps, in his French studies); even in his books he dealt with Gray, Donne, and Swinburne, not with Shakespeare, Dryden, or Pope. When he did pass judgment or compare one writer with another, his statements were usually tentative.
Gosse's "virtue" is in an extra-literary area--biography. Supremely sensitive to oddities and unique qualities of personal character, here he was capable of not only reporting his impressions but frequently accounting for them. Sainte Beuve as model or not, Gosse often forgot that the Frenchman used biographical anecdotes only when they were relevant to literary production and seldom in and for themselves. But Gosse's most interesting essays are biographical ones, essays which often stint criticism for portraits of writers. In sum then Gosse is not a complete critic. His value lies in his very real devotion to literature and in his ability to communicate that devotion not through direct statements about books so much as through fascinating pictures of the men who wrote them.

Neither was Andrew Lang a complete critic; indeed, he did not set up to be. Historically in the line of impressionists, Lang comes close to Wilde in his concept of criticism as a report of one's adventures among books. Much more informal than most critics, he also felt no need to follow Pater's lead to account for these adventures. Oddly enough, Lang was one critic who had sincere doubts about the efficacy of the critical act except as it served to point out a few overlooked flowers in literature's garden. In one sense Lang objected strenuously to using literature as a moral or social tract; yet he enjoyed particularly books and poems of adventure which taught the old Homeric
values. Lang's pleasure came from subject matter more than it did from style, although the literary matter he desiderated did not embrace the painful subjects of the realists.

Lang's almost complete eclipse as a critic is due certainly to his impatience with modern literature and to his exclusive championship of what can only be called older literary values. Given a subject he did enjoy, one of romance or adventure, he could report his impressions so infectiously that one wishes to turn immediately to his Dumas or Scott. Much of his contemporary popularity lay in his learned approval of the tastes of the reader who looks to books for relaxation. His style too was easy, witty, and relaxed—the tone of the familiar essayist who is interested not so much in showing the reader how to read the book as he is in showing what the book suggests to the critic. His readers found him, and they still could today, an amusing and often instructive guide to light literature. One would hardly turn to him, however, for pronouncements on the literary trends of the eighties or nineties. The conservative of yesterday is far to the rear of today's tastes. It is even as Lang himself wished.

As George Saintsbury pointed out in his History of Criticism, he himself was indebted in his own critical work to Diderot, Sainte Beuve, and especially Walter Pater. Even more than Gosse, and completely contrary to Lang, Saintsbury refused to consider subject matter when it came to making critical judgments.
Manner interested him almost exclusively. He had no patience with rules or traditional judgments and felt a critic should be open-minded about all literature. The thing Saintsbury sought in his authors was the "poetic moment," a place in literature where an idea is clothed once and for all in a unique and unforgettable selection of words. Yet Saintsbury would never agree with Arnold that one passage of poetry could be used to test another or that one author could be used to find the strength or weakness of another. No, a man was a true poet only when he found such a moment and his greatness, or lack of it, could be judged only on the number of times he fixed an idea in enduring language. The critic's work was to find, point out, and explain such delights of style.

Within these limits, Saintsbury is undoubtedly the best critic of the four whom we have been examining. Much less emotional than Gosse or Lang, he seldom painted vivid pictures of reading experience. Rather his criticism is more cerebral. Like Edward Dowden he advocated a thorough knowledge of all of a man's work as a prelude to criticism, while one often feels in Gosse and Lang a lack of this sort of complete understanding. Saintsbury too, like Gosse, seldom talked about the really great literary figures, but when it comes to writers of the second rank there is none better. Yet he is hardly an ideal critic. Without the sparkle of Sainte Beuve or Gosse, he cannot be "enjoyed" at least as the average reader would use this term. His
style undoubtedly militated against his popularity in his own day and indeed still is a bar to many. But his greatest weakness lay in his attempt to find something good to say about even the most minor writers. Time and again one reads a Saintsbury essay, is stimulated to go to the shelves himself, and then is disappointed in what he finds.

Lurking on the periphery, where indeed he has lurked for many pages, is Churton Collins, whose formal criticism seems to find no room beside the informal work of the other critics with whom this study has dealt. Collins, in fact, is an almost complete antithesis of the ideal critic we talked about above. Why then include him? In the rash of critics who turned away from neo-classicism and mid-Victorian moral judgments, who sought for literary "pleasure," and who tried to analyze their impressions of books, it is easy to forget that late nineteenth-century periodicals also published writers like Collins. Heretical in Saintsbury's sense or not, these were critics who saw in literature something more than a series of pleasurable moments and who felt the ethical, social, historical, and mystical elements in it were valid areas for discussion. In fine they considered literature "criticism of life" and felt its growth rested as much in a coherent body of rules as it did in pure inspiration. Collins then is a somewhat old-fashioned critic in the same sense that a Johnson or a Macaulay is old-fashioned. Yet writing when he did at the full flowering of late nine-
teenth century impressionism, he represents a counter force at a time when much criticism had become a matter of personal relationship between the critic and the art. Collins believed sincerely that the "lyrical cry" of impressionism had gone too far and had emptied out too much of the didactic from its work. Not that he ignored the necessity of style as the dress of thought nor the importance of pleasure in literature. It was just that these were secondary when compared to those aspects of literature which taught.

One suspects, however, that Collins was incapable of giving himself up emotionally to a book or poem the way Gosse, Lang, and Saintsbury often could. Collins seems to have tried to substitute hard, scholarly work for his own inability to feel. His criticism then is somewhat cold. Not trying to appeal to a general reader but rather to those who teach the general reader, he acted as a gad-fly to careless critics and pedagogues. Believing that profound lessons about life were to be learned from literature, he tried to stress those areas and those great writers which the impressionist often ignored. This hard path explains his failure to last and indeed his inability to make much impression on his own day. Fashions in criticism change, and unless the critic of criticism be a Pope, a Swift, or a Byron he runs the risk of oblivion by attacking his contemporaries. Nevertheless, for those who will read him, Collins remains a vigorous reminder that there is more to literature than mere pleasure.
Of these strands was the periodical criticism of the late nineteenth century woven. When the subscriber opened his Saturday, his Longman's, his Quarterly, or his Cornhill he could expect to find such qualities as the writing of Lang, Gosse, Saintsbury, and Collins represents—essays not too profound, employing biographical detail and anecdotes, making tentative judgments (for the most part), and written in a style easy, urbane, humorous, and gently ironic. From such pieces, he could find out the really important things about the writer under discussion without a great deal of intellectual effort. He was not, of course, considering really great criticism—these essays were too time-centered and too shallow for that. But was he not a reader, and almost the last, considering what has become of criticism in our own day, privileged to be addressed by a high priest who thought it his duty to descend from the palace of art to the world of real men? If such critics as Gosse, Lang, Collins, and Saintsbury have enduring value is it not in their very willingness to "popularize"? Any lover of literature who believes the great thoughts in the great words have value for the average man, mass educated though he be, and are not the property alone of the priests in the ivory tower, can learn at least two things from critics like these—enthusiasm for his task and a willingness to try.
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