CRITICISM OF POETRY IN AMERICA
DURING THE NINETIES

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INTRODUCTION
INTRODUCTION

Coming as it did between two periods of achievement in American poetry and criticism, between the early American Renaissance of the 1830's and 40's and the later Renaissance of 1912, the period of the genteel tradition, that is, the period from after the Civil War through the first decade of the twentieth century, has seemed particularly arid and futile. The genteel writers, like Edmund Clarence Stedman, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, and Richard Watson Gilder, who were usually both poets and critics, continued in the Coleridgean romantic tradition of their renowned predecessors, but because this tradition was derivative and because the ideas which were of moment to an uncentralized agrarian society were no longer of value to a society becoming industrialized, scientific, and urban, the idealism which vitalized the greatness of one era retarded the growth of another. The ideal world of the genteel tradition had lost the religious force of Emerson's and was merely some vague, shadowy land of dreams. Genteel poets were inspired only to a spineless dream poetry, carefully limited in content to moral and optimistic platitudes and in style to traditional verse forms. Genteel critics, because they too demanded of poetry that it present a vision of the ideal, accepted the existing restrictions in poetic form and
content, and too easily and uncritically praised their own and their friends' poetry. Here, it seems, was the decay of the New England flowering.

And yet the turmoil characterizing the social and economic life of post Civil War America warns us of a similar disturbance in the apparently barren literary field. The genteel writers never reigned uncontested; always there were rebellious writers challenging their domain, pitting against the decaying romanticism more realistic tenets. The battle between the romantics and realists in prose fiction has long been noted: Howells, Garland, Crane, Norris are key figures in American literature. That a similar struggle was being waged among poets and especially among critics of poetry has been insufficiently recognized. Arrayed against Stedman and his associates, against the "defenders of ideality," were a group of young critics like Harry Thurston Peck and James Gibbons Huneker who, though they sometimes merely toyed with the new movements of decadence and symbolism from abroad, were primarily attempting to introduce into the appreciation of poetry the same requirements of truth to human experience and accuracy in diction and speech rhythms that the realistic novelists were championing in prose. Furthermore, within the confines of the genteel tradition itself were men like William Morton Payne and Charles Leonard Moore whose discriminating
criticism enlarged the boundaries of sanctioned poetry to include unconventional subject matter and unstylized verse forms.

In prose and in poetry the challenge to the genteel tradition reached a climax during the nineties, a decade whose importance to American literary history is being increasingly stressed. Critics, among them Louise Bogan, emphasize that the generation of the nineties "so misunderstood and so generally maligned during and after its lifetime--actually discovered and put into operation the methods by which their successors, with more exact knowledge at their command, made a final and successful breakthrough from minor to major art." The breakthrough of the realistic novelists in this "critical period of American literature" has recently been studied by Grant Knight (The Critical Period in American Literature, New York, 1951). Many other scholars, among them Leonard Lutwack in an unpublished dissertation at The Ohio State University (1950), have investigated the battle between the romantics and realists in prose fiction. It is the purpose of this dissertation to study the attack launched against the genteel tradition during the nineties by critics of poetry. By examining poetic reputations as well as criticism of the art of poetry, this study tries to determine the extent

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to which genteel poetic principles were overthrown, or at least undermined.

Because it soon became apparent that, while often contested, genteel criticism of poetry was at no time deprived of its authority, it seemed essential, first, to re-examine the genteel aesthetic. Accordingly, Chapter I presents the traditionalistic criteria used in the criticism of poetry and the literary standing of various poets and poetic eras through an analysis of the work of Edmund Clarence Stedman, accepted spokesman of the tradition. Chapter II studies these principles and attitudes in operation by examining poetry criticism in important magazines of the tradition—the Atlantic Monthly, Harper's Monthly Magazine, the Century Magazine, and Scribner's Magazine. True, the conservatism of these magazines has been amply demonstrated, but as no one has previously analyzed their criticism of poetry explicitly, it seemed necessary, even at the risk of repeating some familiarities in literary history, to document the thesis that poetry criticism in these genteel magazines was as circumspect as the criticism of fiction.

The second half of this dissertation presents some changing, perhaps even revolutionary, attitudes toward poetry as an art and toward the reputations of old and new poetic figures and movements. Because, unfortunately, the work of no single critic was adequate in range or
development to represent this "new" criticism, once again the analysis resolved itself into a study of magazine criticism. In the little magazines like the Chap-Book or M'lle New York, and to a lesser extent like the Lark, revolt against the tradition was most outspoken—if often as fruitless as revolt per se can be; yet, certainly, in their championship of continental literature, and of French symbolism in particular, these "dinkies" made a major contribution to criticism. In contrast, critical journals like the Bookman, the Dial, and Poet-Lore were often as conventional as the Big Four conservative magazines. Nevertheless, precisely because they proceeded more slowly and their judgments were more carefully weighed, they offer the more serious indication of an awakening appreciation of new methods and figures in poetry. In the Bookman's acceptance of Crane, the Critic's partiality for Whitman, and the Dial's kindness to Robinson are the true beginnings of a new criticism.

Chapter IV studies the reputation of particular poets as an additional yardstick of the quality of criticism during the nineties. The appreciative but unperceptive reception of Edwin Arlington Robinson, whose first book of poems appeared in 1896, and the adulatory yet obtuse acceptance of Emily Dickinson, whose work was published posthumously during the nineties, offer rewarding examples
of both the progressiveness and the conservatism of the
times. Other studies in poetic reputations during the
nineties might perhaps be made. Yet preliminary examina-
tions of the reputations of Emerson and Crane and Frost
suggest that the conclusions will be similar to those
arrived at in this dissertation: the nineties stepped far
forward in welcoming untraditional poetry, but it never
relinquished its allegiance to genteel patterns of thought.

The last chapter on "Poetic Drama and the Tradition"
comes, in a way, full circle, for some of the themes
examined in the early chapter on Stedman—on the sterility
of the age and the glorious future lying ahead—are re-
examined here. Few critics have noticed how frequently
Stedman uses the experiments in poetic drama during the
nineties to support his thesis that poetry will once again
come into its own and speak to a changing audience. Other
genteel poets and critics too, like Hovey and Moody and
Charles Leonard Moore, express a similar faith that the new
direction for poetry lies in poetic drama. As the conclud-
ing chapter details, genteel critics saw in poetic drama a
compromise between two approaches to art, a synthesis
between idealism and realism. Poetic drama, they felt,
could marry the novelist's ability to deal with realistic
subject matter to poetry's traditional responsibility to
suggest the ideal behind the real, the universality of
truth and experience behind the individual fact or event.
The chief contribution of this dissertation lies in its recognition of the centrality of poetic drama to the genteel aesthetic of the nineties. If there was no organized revolt against the tradition, there was at least an awareness within the tradition itself that to be meaningful to a new age poetry must change its dress. To a large extent, then, the conclusions of this study are not positive. While many striking instances of mature criticism during the nineties are examined, no concerted movement against the tradition and no critic of stature outside of the tradition is disclosed. On the other hand, perhaps in the very nature of things, no other result can be expected. Realistic fiction can more easily ignore universals, can campaign for an objective portrayal of reality which disregards ethical significance. Poetry, however, by the very nature of its art, cannot discard the traditional concern with morality or philosophy. Individual poems, to be sure, may accept limitations—may simply describe a scene, narrate a story, or portray a character. In this respect, both Stedman's and Charles Leonard Moore's distinction between lyric poetry which can deal with more limited personal subject matter, and epic or dramatic poetry which requires a "serious" theme seems another profitable attempt to expand the boundaries of the subject matter of genteel poetry. Essentially, however, one of the
Main definitions of poetry from Plato onwards has been that it is an art which, in Emerson's words, shows us "the soul of the thing," shows us the Ideal world behind Reality. It is an art which ministers to man's spiritual needs. If, therefore, no major critic contested the transcendental core of Stedman's doctrine, it was because the Platonic tradition of the romantics, of Coleridge, Emerson, and ultimately of Stedman, was, to a large extent, valid.

To be sure, the application of the Platonic tradition might need adjusting. The success of the novelists and the journalists made the genteel critics aware that something was lacking in their tradition. And so they turned to the poetic drama. They were trying to get the best of both worlds. To reach the busy audience of a materialistic age they tried to add to the traditional function of poetry the attractions of other mediums. The continued failure of twentieth century lyric verse to find an audience suggests that the genteel writers were moving in the right direction. The popularity, on one level, of Stephen Vincent Benet's long narrative poems and, on another, of T. S. Eliot's experiments in poetic drama, seem to vindicate their prophesies. If the importance of the nineties does not lie in the victory it won, it lies at least in the early battle it waged. The victory may have been left for the twentieth century, but the argument of this dissertation is that the foundation for that victory was built before the twentieth century began.
CHAPTER I

EDMUND CLARENCE STEDMAN--CONSERVATIVE CRITIC
EDMUND CLARENCE STEDMAN—CONSERVATIVE CRITIC

"Stedman," George DeMille concludes, "is one of these fortunate persons who made a reputation, not because they are great, but because they are representative." Even his contemporaries, who valued him more highly than does DeMille, accepted him as spokesman, as the chief defender of idealism. Steadman's eminence was the result partly of his industry: despite his careers as journalist, lawyer, and war correspondent, and as broker on the New York Stock Exchange, he regularly dedicated a daily stint to Literature. For him literary activities included not only the writing and criticism of poetry but also "societies, associations, and clubs." He was Vice-President of the American Copyright League under Lowell and became President himself in 1891; he collected funds for the establishment of a Keats-Shelley memorial in Rome; he organized the short-lived American Academy of Arts and Letters; he was an elector in the Hall of Fame; and he was a member of the important Century Club. Frequently Stedman worked as editor and compiler: with Ellen M. Hutchinson he edited the eleven-volume A Library.


of American Literature from the Earliest Settlement to the Present Time (1889-1890); with George E. Woodberry he edited The Works of Edgar Allan Poe (1894-1895) in ten volumes; and with Thomas Bailey Aldrich he edited the works of Lanier. He edited texts, too, of Robert Browning and Austin Dobson, and prepared guide books to Europe and the Paris Exposition. Stedman also conducted an extensive correspondence, both with established authors like Arnold, Whittier, and Lowell, and young hopefuls like Ridgely Torrence, Madison Cawein, and Martha Gilbert Dickinson. His youthful and voluminous letters to his mother, lost to him by her marriage to William Burnet Kinney who was appointed Minister to the Court of Victor Emmanuel in 1850, show that he was early addicted to letter writing, but in later years he liked to bemoan the size of a correspondence which ultimately required the help of a secretary, and to regret the many outside commitments which kept him from his work. Yet Stedman was clearly proud of his varied activities and of his estimable reputation, and in spite of frequent ill health (his granddaughter, who edited Stedman's letters with George M. Gould, sadly comments that the cause of all his suffering might simply have been eyestrain) he drove himself energetically.

Stedman's importance to his contemporaries and to us stems from his dual role as poetry critic and poet. Although other genteel critics wrote criticism, which can
be found scattered in an occasional essay or more frequently in their personal letters, Stedman was the only one who prepared a systematic body of poetry criticism. The various essays he contributed to *Scribner's Monthly* and afterwards to its successor, *The Century*, he collected into two volumes on British and American poetry: *Victorian Poets* (1875) and *Poets of America* (1885). Later he added two anthologies as companion pieces, *A Victorian Anthology 1837-1895* (1895) and *An American Anthology 1787-1900* (1900).

Yet more important even than his criticism is his study of aesthetic theory. As early as 1866 in an essay in *The Galaxy* entitled "Elements of the Art of Poetry" he foreshadowed the history and theory of poetry which would appear in his most important book of criticism *The Nature and Elements of Poetry* (1892). Stedman was the one critic of the genteel tradition to formulate the genteel aesthetic in an organized fashion, and his views on poetic theory and reputations are closely adhered to by his contemporaries.

It is ironic that Stedman regretted the time spent on criticism almost as much as he regretted his more pedestrian labors. Even to his friends he had defended the value of creative writing. "I have read your book on Woman with interest," he writes to Higginson in June, 1882, "but I do wish you would break into literature, pure et simple once
more, as of old."³ "I am jealous even of the Atlantic," he tells Aldrich in 1883, "if your labors there are going to prevent you from writing more of your imaginative prose and verse..."⁴ And in 1884 Matthew Arnold receives the same counsel. "Like all other authors, I do hope you will complete the circle and get around, again, to your first love,—the field of poetry and belles-lettres. You surely have earned the right to rest awhile from your forays into Philistia and to lead us again beside the pleasant streams of Arcady."⁵ Thus, in considering his own career, Stedman writes to Maurice Thompson in 1892:

Of course I do not affect to regret my prose-essays— their style, their purport, their reception... But all my reputation, down to '73, was that of a poet—though, like you, I rarely wrote a poem that did not first write me, and compel me to give it out. I am quite sincere in saying that I have had all the critical attention which I deserved or wished. [But]... I still hope—the hope is my Phantom Ship—to get back to my desired metier. I am full of grief that would be remorse if the coil and chance of life would have permitted me to do any otherwise than I have done.⁶

At this time, Stedman's reputation as a poet was still firmly established. The January, 1898 issue of the Atlantic

³Life and Letters, II, 38.
⁴Ibid., p. 78.
⁵Ibid., p. 43.
⁶Ibid., pp. 548-549.
Monthly, for example, celebrates him and Aldrich as "Our Two Most Honored Poets." It is true, however, that during the nineties Stedman's standing as a critic was so secure that one writer claimed that Stedman even surpassed Lowell "in equipoise, in impartial judgment, in coolness of mind." 

Stedman's major work, The Nature and Elements of Poetry, is "the one complete defense of literary Idealism which the age produced." Published in 1892, the book consists of the Turnbull Lectures which Stedman had delivered the preceding year at Johns Hopkins University, after Lowell had refused the lectureship. In it, Stedman reaffirms the principles expressed in his two previous works, Victorian Poets and Poets of America. Repeatedly he had stressed that his studies of English and American authors were based on a consistent theory of poetry: "My books on the modern English and American poets were written chiefly to give vent to long-cherished ideas of the canons of poetry and art in general--the poets themselves were merely my texts for preaching on 'What I knew about' Poetry." Now, in formulating his poetic theory, he is

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7 "Our Two Most Honored Poets," Atlantic Monthly, LXXXI (January, 1898), 136-139.


10 Life and Letters, II, 147.
convinced of the unity of his work. "... if this statement of first principles could not be made up from my books of 'applied criticism,'" the introduction to The Nature and Elements states, "I would doubt the integrity of the one and the other; for I have found, in preparing the marginal notes and topical index of the present volume, that nearly every phase and constituent of art has been touched upon, however briefly, which was illustrated in the analytic course of my former essays."\(^ {11}\) An early essay on "Elements of the Art of Poetry," published in The Galaxy in 1866, also foreshadows the present work.

The Galaxy essay refers to Coleridge's comment that "Poetry is the proper antithesis to Science" and adds that "This does not conflict with our statement, that there is a science of poetry, which must commence with its definition."\(^ {12}\) Like its precursor, The Nature and Elements has "not evaded that which it is so customary to deprecate,—a definition of the thing examined in this treatise."\(^ {13}\) "If there is anything novel in this treatise,—anything like construction,—it is the result of an impulse to confront the scientific nature and methods of the thing discussed."\(^ {14}\)

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\(^{11}\) Edmund Clarence Stedman, The Nature and Elements of Poetry (Boston, 1892), p. 28.

\(^{12}\) Edmund Clarence Stedman, "Elements of the Art of Poetry," Galaxy, I (July 1, 1866), 408.

\(^{13}\) The Nature and Elements, p. ix.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., p. xiii.
Both studies begin with a history of various definitions of poetry which become the springboard for Stedman's avowal of idealism. Stedman declares that poetry has a soul as well as a structure, that it is both an essence and an incarnation. The function of poetry is to interpret the divine, "to contemplate the order of celestial things and to reproduce it." With approval, he explains Platonic Inspiration, the major source of the idealist aesthetic. The poet's soul is "in harmonic relation with the soul of the universe." "... the poet is a seer, possessed of all secrets and guided by an inspiring spirit. . . ." And he traces this theory from Plato to "our seer of seers, Emerson, in whose belief the artist does not create so much as report." Although other elements of the art of poetry are reviewed, the essential point is that the poet is the vates, the maker, the interpreter—the seer.

The prophetic or spiritual nature of poetry, Stedman continues, is best illustrated by a study of the romantic antithesis between science and poetry. With Wordsworth and Coleridge he agrees that "poetry is not opposed to prose, of which verse is the true antithesis, but that in spirit and

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15 Ibid., pp. 22-23.
16 Ibid., pp. 21-22.
17 Ibid., p. 23.
action it is the reverse of science or matter of fact."

As defender of the ideal, Stedman was much aware that his was a scientific age unsympathetic to the devotion to idealization, that industrialization with its accompanying class conflicts, strikes, and depressions was turning man's attention to material needs. For him, the fundamental reason for the contemporary malaise resulted from the impact of scientific determinism on traditional religious and philosophical beliefs. In seeming, as first interpreted at any rate, to minimize the importance of man, in portraying nature as an endless struggle in which only the fittest survived, in suggesting that the design and order of the biological kingdom was the result of chance, the new theory of evolution disturbed man's comfortable reliance on a philanthropic and beneficent deity and ushered in an age of skepticism and doubt. The result, it seemed to the genteel writers, was that the traditional importance and value of poetry was undermined. As early as 1875, in *Victorian Poets*, Stedman devoted a lengthy discussion to the conflict between science and poetry; in 1892, in *Nature and Elements of Poetry*, he refers the reader to his previous treatment and restates the early arguments. Elsewhere, in *Poets of America* for example, the same ideas reappear. For the central theme of Stedman and other genteel critics was,

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like that of Coleridge and Shelley and Pope, a defense of poetry in a scientific age.

"What does the assertion that poetry is 'the antithesis to science' mean," Stedman asks, "and how far does its bearing extend?"

The poet has two functions, one directly opposed to that of the scientist, and avoided by him, while of the other the scientist is not always the master. The first is that of treating nature and life as they seem, rather than as they are; of depicting phenomena, which often are not actualities. I refer to physical actualities, of which the investigator gives the scientific facts, the poet the sembla­nces known to eye, ear, and touch. The poet's other function is the exercise of an insight which pierces to spiritual actualities, to the meaning of phenomena, and to the relations of all this scientific knowledge. 19

It is, of course, the second function—that the poet pierces to spiritual actualities—which is crucial. For the importance of poetry is that poetry deals with an ideal realm; it suggests and interprets the unknown. Poetry's strength lies "in its sovereign perception of the relations of things." 20 The poet, as Emerson says it, "turns the world to glass, and shows us all things in their right series and procession." "For beyond the phantasmal look of things and full scientific attainment there is a universal coherence—there are infinite meanings—which the poet has

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19 Ibid., p. 28.
20 Ibid., p. 37.
the gift to see, and by the revelation and prophecy of which he illumines whatever is cognizable."21

Stedman's discussion of the poet's first function of treating nature and life as they seem rather than as they are is somewhat more difficult to follow—and less important. Understandably, he drastically cut his treatment of this argument in Nature and Elements; in Victorian Poets, however, he was more complete.

"There are two ways of regarding natural objects:"

Stedman begins in Victorian Poets,

first, as they appear to the bodily eye and to the normal, untutored imagination; second, as we know they actually are—having sought out the truth of their phenomena, the laws which underlie their beauty or repulsiveness. The former, purely empirical, hitherto has been the simple and poetic function of art; the latter is that of reason, scientifically and radically informed.22

That the poet deals with things as they seem means, therefore, that he presents things as they appear to the bodily eye; and although the phrase things as they actually are is sometimes used to refer to the ideal world, Stedman is here speaking solely in terms of the material world. Thus scientists present things as they actually are because they are masters of scientific truth or factual knowledge. The

21 Ibid., p. 33.
22 Edmund Clarence Stedman, Victorian Poets (Boston and New York, 1875), p. 4.
poet, on the other hand, presents the physical world only as it appears or seems to him; that these semblances may not accord with scientific truth does not matter. Thus, Stedman says, the poet speaks in fanciful imagery, personifying the Dawn as Aurora or describing a storm as the result of the East Wind "pouring his armies into the bay." He relies on "ancient fables" or "follies of expression" to describe natural phenomena, rather than on a factual representation of reality.

Such a distinction between the poetic and rational interpretations of nature, Stedman continues, was obviously greater in "antique times." Far more than now, the myths and language of poets of old were "fancy-free," not subject to scientific validity. In the nineteenth century, however, scientific knowledge—or rather scientific iconoclasm, since scientists take nothing on faith—has so overpowered men's thoughts that the "poetic bearing of phenomena seems of little worth." Poets have "surrendered," either beguiled into the camp of the opponents or disenchanted with a world in which mythic or religious language and imagery are suspect.

Yet, Stedman counsels, the poet must take heart and remember that the physical world as it seems is, after all, the true reality. If the semblances are not things as they actually are in the physical world of science, they are as they actually are in the ideal world envisioned by the
poet—and thus the first and second functions of the poet become one. "... the imagination, paradoxical as it may seem, has been most heightened and sustained by the contemplation of natural objects rather as they seem to be than as we know they are. For to the pure and absorbed spirit it is the ideal only that seems real; as a lover adores the image and simulacrum of his mistress, pictured to his inner consciousness, more than the very self and substance of her being."23 "True Realism" is "that which is just as faithful to the ideal and to the soul of things as to obvious and external matters of artistic treatment."24

Although his approach tends to define poetry as pure spirit and science as the objective presentation of reality, Stedman insists that there is, after all, no conflict between poetry and science. Science indeed is the ally of poetry. "Empirical knowledge is rapidly becoming a part of the poet's equipment,"25 he explains, and the idealists will "soon adjust their imagery to the resulting conditions."26 Poetry will express itself in "new symbols, new imagery and beauty, suggested by the fuller truth."27 Thus the poet's

23Ibid., p. 18.
24Ibid., p. 478.
25Nature and Elements, p. 32.
26Ibid., p. 37.
27Victorian Poets, p. 21.
portrayal of the world as it seems will ultimately harmonize not only with spiritual actuality but with scientific or objective actuality as well. Furthermore, science can even stimulate poets to "pierce to spiritual actualities," to fathom the meaning of things. Poetry finds science "offering it fresh discovery as the terrace from which to essay new flights." Stedman concludes as Wordsworth did, that "It is a fundamental fact that the conquest of mystery leads to greater mystery; the more we know the greater the material for the imagination."\(^{28}\)

However, despite Stedman's many protestations that science and poetry are allied, both Victorian Poets and The Nature and Elements of Poetry conclude with poetry securely seated upon the throne. Science must yield to poetry, Stedman argues, first because poets, through their power of intuition, foreshadow scientific discoveries. In certain passages of their poetry, for example, Lucretius and Goethe and Beddoes anticipated various scientific truths. It is even said that Edison was indebted for some of his ideas to writers of fiction. As a result, Stedman continues, the scientist, if he would be a good scientist, must also be a poet: "... the investigator, if he would leap to greater discoveries, must have the poetic insight and imagination,—be, in a sense, a poet himself, and

exchange the mask and gloves of the alchemist for the soothsayer's wand and mantle." And Stedman refers admiringly to Professor Hardy of Dartmouth College who was both a distinguished mathematician and a writer of "very poetic novels." Yet all this is still to value science. The most brilliant jewel in poetry's crown is rather that the "poet must always have a separate and independent province, for the spirit of Nature is best revealed by an expression of her phenomena and not by an analysis of her processes. Visible beauty exalts our emotions far more than a dissection of the wondrous and intricate system beneath it." In spite of all their attempts to accept science, the genteel critics subordinate scientific analysis to the artistic vision. Poetry is still their queen and they continue to defend her sovereignty.

Stedman begins his definition of poetry with the qualification that " . . . the essential spirit of poetry is indefinable. . . . The poetic spirit is absolute and primal, acknowledged but not reducible, and therefore we postulate it as an axiom of nature and sensation." The "vocal expression" of poetry, however, can be defined. In


30 *Victorian Poets*, p. 21.

1866, in the essay in the *Galaxy*, Stedman defined poetry as "RHYTHMIC, IMAGINATIVE LANGUAGE INTERPRETING NATURE." Now in 1892, in *Nature and Elements*, he explains that "Poetry is rhythmical, imaginative language, expressing the invention, taste, thoughts, passion, and insight of the human soul." Since he had earlier defined NATURE "in its individual and profoundest sense, to include every aspect of the universe, physical and spiritual, with their correlative attributes of beauty, goodness, and truth," it is apparent that in a quarter of a century his definition has changed little. Rather, he is now listing the elements of his definition more precisely. They are sixfold: "The imaginative invention and expression are Creative"; the poet is "a revealer through Insight"; Poetry is "an expression of the beautiful through creative Taste"; "Poetry is an expression of intellectual Thought"; "The poet must be impassioned"; and "Poetry is an art of Speech." Only the last item is not developed in succeeding chapters, although Stedman calls it the "key-stone of our definition." Since the other elements are common to all the arts, "What is it, then, that differentiates them?

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Nothing so much as their respective vehicles of expression. . . . poetry, in the concrete and as under consideration, is _language._"\textsuperscript{34} Its characteristic language, Stedman continues, is always _rhythmical_; _rhythm_ is the essential attribute of poetry as expression. Although he admits that practice helps one to excel in "rhythmical mechanism," his ideal conception of poetry leads to the conclusion that poets are born with the rhythmic gift, that "In real, that is, spontaneous minstrelsy, the fittest assonance, consonance, time, even rhyme, . . . come of themselves with the imaginative thought. The Soul may conceive unconsciously, . . . but when the wire is put up, the true and only words—just so far as the conception is true and clear and the minstrel's gift coequal—are flashed along it."\textsuperscript{35}

The discussions of Imagination and Insight are, of course, elaborations of Stedman's idealism and are strongly indebted to Wordsworth, Coleridge and Emerson. Imagination is essentially Creative; it is the "creative origin of what is fine, not in art and song alone, but in all forms of action,—in campaigns, civil triumphs, material conquest."\textsuperscript{36}

The imagination of the poet, however, as distinguished from that of the man of affairs, makes him "a congener of the

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 50.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 54.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 228.
universal Soul," makes him a part of creative divinity.

Without imagination there can be no great poetry. The artistic imagination is

a faculty of conceiving things according to their actualities or possibilities,—that is, as they are or may be; of conceiving them clearly; of seeing with the eyes closed and hearing with the ears sealed, and vividly feeling, things which exist only through the will of the artist's genius. Not only of conceiving these, but of holding one's conceptions so well in mind as to express them,—to copy them,—in actual language or form. 37

The poet's creation, therefore, is a kind of revelation. The poet "utters, reveals, and interprets" what he sees with an inward vision, a second sight, a prophetic gift. "... the inward light of the Quaker, the a priori guess of the scientist, the prophetic vision of the poet, the mystic, the seer," 38 is Insight. Insight is the direct inspiration from deity; indeed, a "mandate of utterance" is laid upon it, and the poet is compelled to express his vision. It is the possession of Insight, of the prophetic or inspired gift, that makes the Genius. The poet must possess "the special gifts which, however cultivable, come only at birth—the 'inward vision and the faculty divine,' and a certain strong compulsion to their exercise. . . . these gifts, under such compulsion, constitute what we mean

37 Ibid., pp. 231-232.
38 Ibid., p. 285.
by the poet's genius." Although, as we shall see, Stedman was strongly influenced by Taine, from the first he felt "a flaw in the armor of Taine, otherwise our most catholic exponent of the principles of art, that he did not allow for the irrepressibleness of genius, for the historic evidence that now and then 'God lets loose a man in the world.'"

A concomitant of imagination and the faculty divine is Passion; it is the impassioned spirit that awakens the imagination, that moves the poet to expression. "The truth is that passion uses the imagination to supply conceptions for its language. On the other hand, the poet, imagining situations and experiences, becomes excited through dwelling on them. But whether passion or imagination be first aroused, they speed together like the wind-sired horses of Achilles." Even in previous works Stedman had admitted indebtedness to the Miltonic canon that poetry is "simple, sensuous, and passionate." Because "passion" is almost a synonym for love in popular usage, Stedman suggests that Milton might have used the word "impassioned." For passion rises above the sensual and even the sensuous, or it has no "staying power." Poetic passion is intensity of emotion;

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39 ibid., p. 277.
40 ibid., p. 276.
41 ibid., pp. 261-262.
furthermore, the impassioned poet is inspired not primarily by fits of passion but by the "universal moods embraced in the word 'feeling.'"\(^{42}\) The human feeling in Whittier's "Snow-Bound" and the sorrow in Emerson's "Threnody"--the "most impassioned of American lyrics"--illustrate that from "the middle register of emotion" poetry rises supreme. Love which includes the ideal as well as the physical, friendship, ambition, nature, religion, patriotism--these inspire the passion that thrills.

Yet besides portraying the passion of his own soul, the poet can create impassioned types objectively. In the varied personages of the epic and particularly of the drama, the poet finds a variety of passions and passion's extremes. Because all passion is good, the great poet is "he who makes us realize the emotions of those who experience august extremes of fortune. For what can be of more value than intense and memorable sensations?"\(^{43}\) Man's satisfaction with tragedy and comedy is "not morbid, but elevating." The exhibition of the power of passion "enhances and instructs" our own. "The grand drama, then, is the most efficient form of poetry in an unideal period to conserve a taste for something imaginative and impassioned"\(^{44}\)--all the more

\(^{42}\)Ibid., p. 264.  
\(^{43}\)Ibid., p. 272.  
\(^{44}\)Ibid., p. 274.
because the suppressed passion, reserve power, or imagined feeling best embodied in the drama offer the most moving effects. In the element of passion, then, lies Stedman's theoretical justification for the faith in poetic drama which, we shall see, he expresses constantly.

The heart of Stedman's theory, however, is to be found in his chapters on Beauty and Truth. Stedman believed that his contribution to aesthetics was that he combined an appreciation of the form and the spirit of poetry. Recognizing his dependence on the transcendental tradition, he argued, nevertheless, that he progressed beyond it by including beauty as an essential element of poetry. Although he notes that Berkleian metaphysicians deny the actuality of beauty because it is not a substance, he believes that beauty exists nevertheless in a "vibratory expression of substances." The quality of beauty exists in substances as the quality regulating these vibrations—even if there be no intelligence at hand to receive an impression of it. Thus, Stedman insists, at the outset the poet is a phenomenalist.

True, "Some of our modern transcendentalists, vaunting their Platonic allegiance to ideal beauty, affected indifference to its material emblems." In this, Stedman explains, he is speaking only of "certain of the followers";
in contrast, Emerson recognized the visible reality of beauty while looking inward for the ideal. Generally speaking, however, "There was something ridiculous, if heroic, in the supercilious attitude of our transcendent-alists, not only putting themselves against the laity, but opposing the whole body of their fellow seers and artists, whose solace for all labors ever has been the favor of their beloved mistress Beauty,—the inspirer of creative taste."^46 "... if concrete beauty is not the greatest thing in poetry, it is the one thing indispensable...."^47

Stedman's indebtedness to Poe is obvious. If his ideality stems from Emerson, his understanding of concrete beauty is dependent on Poe. Of Poe's definition that "Poetry is the rhythmical creation of beauty," Stedman writes: "One need not accept this as a sufficient statement, but one may assert that no statement is sufficient which does not pointedly include it."^48 Poe's formula "will always be tenderly regarded by refined souls, for Beauty, pure and simple, is the alma mater of the artist."^49 And many specific passages in the chapter on Beauty echo Poe. Although Stedman believes Poe "wrong in restricting poetry

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^46 Ibid., p. 47.
^48 Ibid., p. 152.
^49 Ibid., p. 27.
to the voices of sorrow and regret," he agrees that these are "among the most effectual of lyrical values." Like Poe, he termed evanescence an unfailing source of the beauty of a poem: "The appeal which a delicate and fragile thing of beauty makes to us depends as much upon its peril as upon its rarity." Things are "most fair because most fleeting." Again, although Stedman does accept a long poem even though it be but a succession of short poems, he agrees with Poe that the beauty of a short and lyric poem is supernal.

To be sure, the influence of the transcendentalists continues to be apparent throughout the chapter, particularly in Stedman's view that beauty, besides being concrete—and analyzable as such—is also ideal. The law of beauty "all comes back to the truths of nature, to the perfection of the universe, to that sense of the fitness of things which is common to us all. . . ." The essence of beauty "lies in conformity to the law and fitness of things, . . . all natural things are as beautiful as they can be,—that is, beauty is their natural quality. . . ." True, Stedman next admits, various racial and national ideals of beauty are affected by the conditions of life in different

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50 Ibid., p. 183.
51 Ibid., p. 181.
52 Ibid., p. 156.
53 Ibid.
regions. Furthermore, even within a particular ideal, fashion or the "zest" for novelty modifies or transforms the elements of beauty. Nevertheless, "You will observe that after most revolts the schools go back, in time, to certain ideals,—to those which become academic because the highest. They recover zest for these. . . ." And he discusses particular national ideals, showing that even the diverse ideals of different peoples are founded not simply on differing material needs but on spiritual fitness. Each nation and each period discovers "the beauty conformed both to general laws and to specific needs." Every people recognizes "an extra-mundane conception of beauty, founded in the spirit of man, and this again conforms itself to the spirit of each race." Thus, despite variations in the particulars of beauty, all nature possesses an ideal beauty which conforms to general laws, which is "the efflux of the universal spirit."

As the champion of concrete beauty, Stedman very pointedly joined Poe in the fight against the "didactic heresy." Indeed, his chapter on "Truth" begins first with didacticism, "a certain kind of preachment, antipathetic to the spirit of poesy," which "instinct tells us" is a heresy in any form of art.

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54 Ibid., p. 160.
55 Ibid., p. 163.
Now, why does a bit of didacticism take the life out of song, and didactic verse proclaim its maker a proser and not a poet? Because pedagogic formulas of truth do not convey its essence. They preach, as I have said elsewhere, the gospel of half-truths, uttered by those who have not the insight to perceive the soul of truth, the expression of which is always beauty. This soul is found in the relations of things to the universal, and its correct expression is beautiful and inspiring.  

If, however, "the soul of truth is found in the relations of things to the universal," then considerations of goodness, fitness, and conformity cannot be ignored. A prosaic moral may be "half a lie" because it expresses "arbitrary and temporal" and not "essential and infinite" relations, and thus didactic verse is incomplete and false. On the other hand, "extreme beauty and power in a poem always carry a moral: they are inseparable from a certain ethical standard. . . ." Thus George E. DeMille's statement that the main thesis of The Nature and Elements of Poetry, "the thesis that was implicit in his earlier critical works, is that poetry is the creation of pure beauty, independent of all considerations of moral effect. . . ." is inaccurate—in spite of the fact that Stedman himself would second it. For the Nature and Elements—and genteel criticism—by no means scorns morality and ethics.

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56 Ibid., p. 188.

57 Ibid., p. 216.

58 DeMille, op. cit., p. 764.
As his comments on Poe's definition of poetry reveal, "beauty for its own sake, Tennysonian finish of workmanship," was not Stedman's desideratum. Although to some extent he accepts Poe's definition that "Poetry is the rhythmical creation of beauty," Poe's error, Stedman wrote in the *Galaxy*, was that "he limited beauty almost to the department of the Sensuous, and somewhat restricted the poet to mechanical processes and effects." "If you accept beauty in a comprehensive sense, including all emotions, truths, and ethics," Stedman writes similarly in the *Nature and Elements*, "accept this definition as precise and unflinching. But Poe confines its meaning to the domain of aesthetics..." To be "comprehensive," that is, beauty must include not solely the domain of aesthetics but the ethical as well. Beauty, as well as truth, Stedman explains, must conform to general laws, to the fitness of things, to an "extra-mundane" conception. "If all natural things make for beauty,—if the statement is well founded that they are as beautiful as they can be under their conditions,—then truth and beauty, in the last reduction, are equivalent terms, and beauty is the unveiled shining countenance of truth."

60 *Elements of the Art of Poetry,* p. 406.
There is, then, a "higher didacticism" in all poetry. "If there is a base didacticism false to beauty and essentially commonplace, there is a nobly philosophic strain which I may call the poetry of wisdom." Homer and Dante, among others, witness that all great poetry is essentially ethical—although, to be sure, an obtrusive moral is still objectionable. Stedman's distinction is, of course, valid; didacticism is the result not so much of the content of a poem as of its technique. However, the difficulty is, on the one hand, that the genteel critics paid such frequent lip-service to Beauty that they themselves forgot the prominence of ethics in their aesthetic, and even the astute DeMille slights it; and, on the other, that in actual practice the demands of the "higher didacticism" were so strictly imposed that criticism of poetry became, as we have seen, a moral judgment. As Bernard Smith aptly explains, Gentility's basic principle is that "literature is created for enjoyment, not instruction— but enjoyment of a kind that is consonant with the traditional morality." We are not surprised, then, that in discussing the precise nature of truth, Stedman returns to the theme of realism versus idealism. There is a "truth to nature" and a

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63 Ibid., p. 211.

64 Bernard Smith, Forces in American Criticism (New York, 1939), p. 245.
"truth to life," he begins, and while nature has been, until
now, the prime interest of the poet, future poets, he hopes,
will turn "Not to 'fresh woods and pastures new,' but to
human life with its throes and passions and activity. . . ."65
Furthermore, poets should describe the environment about
them, the "life, feeling, ideal" of their own people. "But,
while they should favor their own time," comes the expected
qualification, "they must avoid expression of its transient
passions and characteristics."66 For, as we recall, true
realism is not just a statement of facts but a suggestion
and interpretation.

Realism, in the sense of naturalism, is the firm
ground of all the arts, but the poet, then, is
not a realist merely as concerns the things
that are seen. He draws these as they are, but
as they are or may be at their best.67
Poets are "realists in knowledge" and "idealists in inter-
pretation."

The poet's recognition of truth, like his recognition
of beauty, is thus intuitive, for in both he is inspired by
divinity, he shares the divine imagination and power. There
is a kind of "natural piety" in his work. Something more
than sincerity and knowledge are needed, then, for the

65 Nature and Elements, p. 211.
66 Ibid., p. 201.
67 Ibid., p. 197.
expression of truth; these qualities alone frequently lead
to didactic verse. Rather, "noble contemplation and the
anointed vision" are the attributes of the poet. Thus, the
true inquiry about poetic truth "concerns the quality of the
writer, his power of expression, the limits of his
character. For no small and limited nature can enter into
great passions and experiences."\textsuperscript{68} The value of the poem,
Stedman had written earlier, lies "in the credentials of
the poet."\textsuperscript{69} It becomes theoretically valid, then, to
examine Bryant's life or Poe's or Tennyson's, not merely as
background material, but as the touchstone of the value of
the poetry. Their lives, as well as their writings, are
their "credentials." Thus the "higher didacticism" becomes
the purely didactic; criticism that is supposedly
aesthetically grounded is seen to have roots in morality.
And, as we shall see, at no time in the nineties were these
roots pulled up.

Stedman offers a unified body of criticism not only
because his subjects are restricted to the narrow canon of
genteel criticism--nineteenth century British and American
poets--but also because his themes are few. \textit{Victorian
Poets, Poets of America}, and even the introductions to

\textsuperscript{68}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 199.

\textsuperscript{69}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 145.
A Victorian Anthology, An American Anthology, and A Library of American Literature all discuss literary nationalism, the problems of a transitional age, the contrast between decoration and construction in the technique of poetry, and the future of poetry. Furthermore, these themes are echoed both by critics within the tradition as well as by the few who challenged it. Stedman's contemporaries not only accepted his formulation of the genteel aesthetic; they also shared his estimates of particular poets and his views on the American literary scene. Ironically, a study of poetry criticism during the nineties serves rather to elevate than to dethrone the "literary arbiter" of the eighties and nineties.

Stedman's interest in Taine, for example, typifies the thinking of other genteel critics. Considering the importance of "genius" to the idealist aesthetic, the extent to which Stedman and his contemporaries subscribed to Taine's theory that literature reflects "the race, the moment, and the milieu" is surprising. Apparently, the very science whose encroachments the idealists feared encouraged their acceptance of Taine. Thus Stedman argues that although there are poets of a "higher rank" whose gift is "sovereign," "independent," the critic "must recognize and broadly observe the local, temporal, and generic conditions under which poetry is composed, or fail to
render adequate judgment upon the genius of the composer."70 *Victorian Poets*, in particular, reveals Stedman's debt to Taine, for the organization of the book is built around particular "schools" of poetry—the art school of Landor and Keats, the didactic yet imaginative strain of Wordsworth, the combination of the two in the "idyllic method" of Tennyson which "upon the whole, has distinguished the recent time," and, lastly, the "new and dramatic lyric school" of Browning and Swinburne.71 *Victorian Poets*, Stedman wrote Moncure D. Conway in 1875, "is the first attempt thus far to survey the whole course of recent British poetry, from the rise of Tennyson, down to the latest aspirants, upon a consistent method—with analysis of the period. . . ."72 Of *Poets of America*, Stedman felt that the leaders of American poetry "have much in common" in their "methods and motives" and were not so much "imitative of schools."

Nevertheless, in this work too, Stedman uses the historical approach and attributes the barrenness of American literature during the nation's early years as well as its eventual flowering in New England to social and economic conditions.

Considering that the 1887 edition of *Victorian Poets* was not a drastic revision of the original 1875 work, it is

70 *Victorian Poets*, p. 4.
71 Ibid.
72 *Life and Letters*, II, 3.
not surprising that *Poets of America*, published in 1885, presents many of the themes and viewpoints of its predecessor on English poetry. Stedman himself stresses the similarity of the two books. The preface to the 1887 edition of *Victorian Poets* remarks that "The American treatise . . . enabled me to finish all I desired to say concerning poetry. These books are hopefully addressed to those who will read the two, and each of them not in fragments but as a whole." A few years later, when mailing Woodberry the revised edition of *Victorian Poets* and a copy of *Poets of America*, Stedman comments: "I have not changed my views of poetry and art and the poetic life; and indeed I started with them in youth, and so you will not find much inconsistency, I trust." Stedman's trust was well founded. There is a close unity of purpose and ideas in the two books.

The central thesis of *Poets of America* is that American poetry blossomed in the nineteenth century because at this time "Poetry bore closer relations to the life and enthusiasm of a people than it often has borne in other lands and times." Poets offered a truthful reflection of nature and presented the national sentiments of "domesticity, 

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piety, freedom, loyalty to the institutions of the land."

Progress in the development of American poetry, Stedman argues, is dependent on the use of American material. Not only, then, does the national life influence the poet, but the poet should portray his country and his times:

Through his sensitive organization the poet is exquisitely affected by the spirit of his time; and to render his work of future moment, seeks to reflect that spirit. . . . Mr. Emerson, in his search for the underlying principle of things, finds it a defect even in Homer and Milton, that their works are clogged with restrictions of times, personages, and places. Yet these are the world's great names; it has no greater. . . . Their personages and places are but the media through which the Protean forms of nature are set forth.76

As we shall see shortly, the problem of what constitutes an American theme is far from simple; nevertheless Stedman never tires of demanding that the poet's themes be American. If the significance of a nation's literature is "Undoubtedly, and first of all, the essential quality of its material as poetry," it is also "its quality as an expression and interpretation of the time itself. In many an era the second factor may afford a surer means of estimate than the first. . . ."77

Stedman's debt to Taine helps us understand another of his favorite themes: that the late nineteenth century

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76*Victorian Poets*, p. 27.

was a "twilight era," an "age of transition" for both American and British poetry. To a large extent Stedman attributes this to the "times"; the times are inopportune for the production of great poetry. As we have seen, *Victorian Poets* posited at some length a conflict between science and poetry. Although, to be sure, Stedman insisted that the conflict was reconcilable, that poetry can use scientific knowledge to advance its own ends, he continued to recognize that at first science seems a threat to the poet. Attracted by science's success, the poet deserts to the other camp, or, disillusioned by scientific skepticism, he becomes incapable of doing his work. Eventually he must learn, Stedman explains, that "science kindles the imagination with the new conceptions and new beauties which it has wrested from the unknown."78 Nevertheless, Stedman admits, the poet's creative impulse has temporarily been checked. "In scientific iconoclasm, then" he concludes, "we have the most important of the symptoms which mark the recent era as a transition period.

*Poets of America* also discusses other forces antagonistic to the "pursuit of the ideal." There is "the world's material activity displayed in labor, invention,

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78 *Victorian Poets*, p. 17.

construction," which keeps men too busy to feel a spiritual want. There is also "the world's realistic eagerness, that makes of the newspaper, the novel, and the bulletins of science the food and outlets of the imagination..."

Although the popularity of the novel has brought a "measurable compensation" in the "decided gain to the prestige of our national authorship," the novel is not, Stedman argues, "a more vital and enduring creation than the poet's song." The subordination of poetry to fiction, therefore, is but another reason for Stedman and his fellow critics to conclude that if there is "not a decadence," there is "at least a poetic interregnum."

The mark of a transitional age is also to be seen, Stedman continues, in the ineffectual poetry being produced. In any intermediary lyrical period, he adds, poetry is often unimaginative. As Chapter V also explains, dissatisfaction with contemporary verse was a frequent theme in genteel criticism. Poetry was termed correct but uninspired, skilful but uncreative. The argument, that is, was that poets emphasized form rather than content; they were "mere artificers." Both Victorian Poets and Poets of America contend that poetry "wreaked its thought upon details of sound and color, placed decoration above construction, the

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80 Poets of America, p. 27.
81 Ibid., pp. 463-464.
form of verse above its motive. . . ."82 Poetry confined itself "to skilful utilization of the laws of form and melody."83

No doubt it was this type of criticism which inspired Aldrich to defend technique, or form, in his poem on "Art."

"Let art be all in all," one time I said,
And straightway stirred the hypercritic gall.  
I said not, "Let technique be all in all,"
But art—a wider meaning. Worthless, dead—
The shell without its pearl, the corpse of things—
Mere words are, till the spirit lend them wings.  
The poet who wakes no soul within his lute
Falls short of art: 'twere better he were mute.

The workmanship wherewith the gold is wrought
Adds yet a richness to the richest gold;
Who lacks the art to shape his thought, I hold,
Were little poorer if he lacked the thought.
The statue's slumber were unbroken still
In the dull marble, had the hand no skill.
Disparage not the magic touch that gives
The formless thought the grace whereby it lives!84

Yet essentially there is no contradictions between Stedman's and Aldrich's views. In theory, both subordinate technique or form to content. Art "a wider meaning" has than that "technique be all in all." The root of the problem lies perhaps in the genteel writer's arbitrary separation of form and content. Had Stedman recognized the "organic unity of art" he would never have admitted that "a faulty poem or

82 Ibid., p. 459.
83 Victorian Poets, p. 13.
84 Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Poems (Boston and New York, 1907), II, 130-131.
picture may be great because a great thought or character is in it.\textsuperscript{85} Nor would Aldrich have condemned Emily Dickinson so readily for "defying the laws of gravitation and grammar." In practice, Stedman and Aldrich and their colleagues defined technique in terms of conventional correctness and precision. If they regretted that contemporary poetry was over-precise, they also refused to accept poetry that was not precise. Ironically the very writers who condemned the technical facility of their time failed lamentably in appreciating the technical innovations of Robinson or Dickinson or Whitman. The genteel aesthetic rightfully did not countenance excessive finish and ornamentation; dexterity was no substitute for emotional intensity. But, unfortunately, it also did not appreciate that form which was more than mere virtuosity contributed essentially to the thought.

The genteel poet's emphasis upon technique, Stedman believed, stemmed from his lack of available themes. Repeatedly in \textit{Victorian Poets} and \textit{Poets of America} comes the plaint that Landor or Arnold or Lowell suffered from inadequate themes. Like Hawthorne and James before him, like Hovey and Moody after him, Stedman regretted "the lack of background, of social contrasts, and of legendary and specific incident" in American history and life. In a

\textsuperscript{85}Poets of America, p. 459.
country like Scotland, he explains, "the popular tongue, costumes, manners, all distinctively and picturesquely her own," stimulate and influence national art; but in America, "From the Revolution to the Civil War, the incidents of our life and passion are so recent and so plainly recorded as to gather no luminous halo from the too slight distance at which we observe them." "Where are our forest and river legends, our Lorelei, our Venusberg, our elves and kobolds?" he asks. From one who had argued that the poet must portray his own land and his own time, the question is surprising. Yet in spite of Stedman's many calls for American themes, he is obviously much disturbed by the "scarcity of home-themes, no less than by the lack of sharp dramatic contrast in our equable American life." Like Charles Leonard Moore, Stedman finds that "In no other country are there so many happy little households. . . ." Republicanism "is a leveller, and in its early stages raises a multitude to the level of the commonplace; so that there have been few tall heads of grain above the even field." The tragic loneliness of Melville and the bitter death of Poe reveal the superficiality of this view. Recent studies of the Indian too, which treat him as an essential part of American history, suggest a direction

86 Ibid., pp. 20-21.
87 Ibid., pp. 16-19.
Stedman and others might have taken in their search for a usable past. Yet the frequency with which nineteenth century authors bemoan the lack of available themes must remind us how real they felt the problem to be. It is interesting that both Stedman and Charles Leonard Moore distinguish between the "emotional and lyric" poet and the "ambitious poet." The lyric poet "is at no loss for a method or a theme. . . . Personal joys and griefs, special occurrences in history or related to the individual life,--these have inspired, and do inspire, the briefer poems, the lyrics which still make up the choicest portion of our verse." But, Stedman continues, "while the lyrical songster need not cast about for a subject . . . the ambitious poet is best equipped for a larger effort by some adequate theme awaiting his hand." The ambitious poet, we soon discover, is the epic or dramatic poet who, if only because of the greater length of his work, is particularly troubled "with the absence of theme for a national masterpiece." And it is the dramatic poet who will guide the future of American poetry. The time has come, Stedman writes, "for poetry, in any form, that shall be essentially dramatic. . . . It is a symptom of maturity. . . . I think

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88 Ibid., pp. 18-19.
our future efforts will result in dramatic verse, and even
in actual dramas for both the closet and the stage."89

Few critics have realized the frequency with which
Stedman calls for a dramatic poetry and/or a poetic drama.
"The highest form of poetry is the drama," Stedman writes
in his chapter on Bayard Taylor, "for it includes all other
forms, and should combine them in their greatest excellence.
At its best it is the supreme flower of the literature of
any nation, and demands a poet's rarest and most compre­
hensive genius."90 Or again, in the chapter on Browning,
"... the form of the play still seems to a poet the most
comprehensive mould in which to cast a masterpiece. It is
a combination of scenic and plastic art; it includes
monologue, dialogue, and song,—action and meditation,—
man and woman, the lover, the soldier, and the thinker,—all
vivified by the imagination and each essential to the
completeness of the whole."91 As Chapter V also treats at
length, Stedman and his contemporaries saw in poetic drama
the one way by which poetry could meet the challenge of the
other arts. Like fiction and the prose drama, poetic drama
could present man and woman, lover and soldier; unlike
these other media, it also "vivified" its material by means

89 Ibid., p. 466.
90 Ibid., pp. 428-429.
91 Victorian Poets, p. 295.
of the poetic imagination. Poetic drama goes "beyond the epic presentment of external life and action: not only rendering deeds, but setting bare the workings of the soul." Stedman's concept of the poetic drama, thus, remains clearly within the idealist tradition.

To be sure, Stedman has many passages which momentarily seem to ascribe more realistic aims to this drama. "Nothing will strengthen more rapidly the native bias of our literature than its increase of dramatic tone," he concludes Poets of America. "Speech, action, and passion will be derived from life as here seen, from factors near at hand and stuff of which the writer is moulded." A craving for more dramatic, spontaneous utterance is prevalent with the new generation. There is an instinct that to interpret the hearts and souls of men and women is the poet's highest function; a disposition to throw aside precedents,—to study life, dialect, and feeling,—as our painters study landscape, out of doors and at first hand." But it soon becomes apparent that Stedman defines "life at first hand" very rigidly. Earlier he has urged the poet to portray American life—all the while professing a scarcity of suitable subject matter. So, in discussing Bayard Taylor's

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92 An American Anthology, p. xxxiii.
93 Poets of America, p. 474.
94 Victorian Poets, p. 31.
The Prophet, a poetic drama on Joseph Smith and Mormonism, Stedman objects to the theme as too modern!

Such a plot might be treated idealistically, by giving the widest range to imagination, fearing no extravagance, creating one's own facts and atmosphere, and the result might be a great dramatic poem if not an acting drama; or it might be treated realistically,—the course which Taylor naturally pursued. To insure success by the latter mode, the time and events of a drama must be poetic in themselves. In this story of our own time, there is, perforce, a lack of the illusive and entrancing atmosphere of the far-away past. That which is too modern and familiar seems commonplace.95

Compare the comments on Tennyson's dramatic poetry.

"Tennyson forces his characters to adapt themselves to preconceived statuesque ideals of his own," Stedman says. "His chief success is with those in humble life; in Enoch Arden, and elsewhere, he has very sweetly depicted the emotions of simple natures, rarely at a sublime height or depth of passion. He also draws . . . a group of sturdy, refined, comfortable fellows upon their daily rambles, British and modern in their wholesome talk.

But the true dramatist instinctively portrays either exceptional characters, or ordinary beings in impassioned or extraordinary moods.96

Stedman demands of poetic drama, then, that it deal with themes from a historic or legendary past, portray heroic

95Poets of America, p. 429.

96Victorian Poets, pp. 189-190.
characters, and be written in heightened poetic language. As Chapter V maintains, such a formula obviously does not preclude great drama; it is as unwise to prefer only contemporary themes and situations as it is to require historic or legendary ones alone. The point here is simply that Stedman's requisites are not as revolutionary as they sometimes seem to be. His tributes to a native American literature seem but lip-service, as does his request that poetry deal with contemporary "times, personages, places." Nevertheless, in directing towards the drama the thoughts and activities of contemporaries like Hovey and Moody, both of whom revered him, Stedman anticipated a significant trend of twentieth century poetry.

The Nature and Elements of Poetry not only summarizes genteel aesthetics, but presents a history of poetry and poetic theory as well. Two early chapters in particular, Chapter III on "Creation and Self-Expression," and Chapter IV on "Melancholia," are expressly devoted to a history of poetry. These present a unified body of British and American poetry which Stedman and his genteel followers consistently admired.

Stedman analyzes all poetry "by the amount of personality" expressed; that is, poetry is either "impersonal" or it is "self-expressive"; poetry "is
differentiated by the Me or the Not Me,—by the poet's self-consciousness, or by the representation of life and thought apart from his own individuality.\textsuperscript{97} The poetry of the primitive and pagan eras, he finds, is impersonal—witness their epics and sagas and ballads, while the typical poetry of modern times is the poetry of self-expression.

"Contrast the two, and what do we find? First, a willing self-effacement as against the distinction of individuality; secondly, the simple zest of art-creation, as against the luxury of human feeling . . ."\textsuperscript{98} The implication throughout much of the discussion is that objectivity results in greater poetry, particularly since the greatness of classical drama, "the noblest of poetic structures," is essentially "impersonal."\textsuperscript{99} Between the pagan and Christian eras, Stedman admits, "there has been a loss." Yet, "To think of this as a loss without some greater compensation is to believe that modern existence defies the law of evolution and is inferior as a whole to the old. . . ." As such a conclusion is clearly impossible, Stedman finds his compensation in the divinely human love of the modern spirit, that is, of Christianity:

If we have lost the antique zest, the animal happiness, the naivete of blessed children

\textsuperscript{97}\textit{Nature and Elements}, p. 77.
\textsuperscript{98}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 139-140.
who know not the insufficiency of life, or that they shall love and lose and die, we gain a new potency of art in a sublime seriousness, the heroism that confronts destiny, the faculty of sympathetic consolation, and that "most musical, most melancholy" sadness which conveys a rarer beauty than the gladdest joy,—the sadness of great souls, the art-equivalent of the melancholy of the Preacher, of Lincoln, of Christ himself, who wept often but was rarely seen to smile.¹⁰⁰

Dürer's statue of "Melencolia" is the symbol of this modern Christian spirit: "she broods, she suffers, she wonders." And the Christian motive—the need to proffer sympathy even as it craves it—results in modern self-expression. "The modern mind understands that its compensation for the loss of absolute vision is the increase of types, the extension of range and variousness."¹⁰¹

Objectivity, then, Stedman concludes, is not the chief test of poetic expression. Although "a few world-poems exhibit the absolute epic and dramatic impersonality, it by no means follows—in spite of common assertion—that the worth of other poetry is determined by an objective standard. The degree of self-expression is of less moment than that of the poet's genius."¹⁰² Once again, therefore, Stedman returns us to the poet as the source of a poem's worth. We seek the "personality" of the singer, he states;

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¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 143.
¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 139.
¹⁰²Ibid., p. 139.
style must be subjective. True, subjective work can be inferior if it is morbid, if it stems from egotism and conceit; yet, "Commonplace objective work . . . is of no worth compared with the frank revelation of an inspiring soul." And at this point comes the first occurrence of the statement that "the value of the poem lies in the credentials of the poet." "Where the nature of the singer is noble, his inner life superior to that of other men, the more he gives us of it the more deeply we are moved." 103

That Stedman's two major works are devoted to nineteenth century British and American poetry is an indication of the importance of contemporary literature to him; but we see now the theoretical basis for his almost complete rejection of earlier literature: since that literature is primarily objective, it offers limited rewards to an audience subjectively involved in personality. To be sure, Stedman pays tribute to Homer, Virgil and Ovid, to Dante, Tasso, and Ariosto, but his point of view is historical rather than critical. Only of the drama is he sincerely appreciative; of pre-nineteenth century literature, he is most successful with the Greek and Elizabethan dramatists. Of English literature that is pre-Elizabethan, he admires only Chaucer, and from the Elizabethans to his own time he jumps an even greater gap:

103 Ibid., pp. 144-145.
Milton, Stedman frequently says, is the only light between Shakespeare and the nineteenth century. "...you will find that the generations after Shakespeare are not overimaginative until you approach the nineteenth century. From Jonson to the Georgian school there is no general efflux of visionary power. The lofty Milton and a few minor lights—Dryden, Collins, Chatterton,—shine at intervals between." The conclusion is obvious: it is the nineteenth century that has produced the poetry of genius—and this because it "has developed the typical poetry of self-expression."

Although continental authors like Heine and Goethe and Hugo are included in this glorification of nineteenth century literature, English and American authors rank higher—and the English Victorians outrank them all, for Stedman only partially admires the romantics. Although Shelley is defended as "altruism incarnate" and Coleridge as "another being when at work," although we are reminded that Byron "had no Byron for a predecessor, as an objectlesson in behalf of naturalness and common sense," the Georgians are reprimanded for their flamboyant personal behavior—and Wordsworth for his didacticism. Only Landor and Keats are unflinchingly accepted, but

104 Ibid., pp. 249-250.
105 Ibid., p. 118.
106 Ibid., p. 123.
Stedman had written earlier, was a premature Victorian poet. For it is the Victorians, and Tennyson and Browning and Swinburne in particular, who receive Stedman's whole-hearted applause.

Of course, Stedman reveres Tennyson most. As early as 1857, in a letter to his mother, he described Tennyson "as great as the greatest in all."\(^{107}\) In *Victorian Poets*, he calls him an "independent genius," although, to be sure, "the only just estimate of Tennyson's position is that which declares him to be, by eminence, the representative poet of the recent era."\(^{108}\) He was frequently accused of echoing Tennyson too strongly in his own poetry; yet in one sense his admiration for Browning and Swinburne was even greater than his love for Tennyson, for he saw in them the promise of a new dramatic school of poetry. Stedman's cry throughout *Victorian Poets* that poetry should be dramatic can only emphasize Browning's merits. Browning's effort, Stedman explains, "was at figure-painting, in distinction from that of landscape or still-life. It has not flourished during the recent period, but we are indebted to him for what we have of it."\(^{109}\) Still Stedman cannot accept Browning unequivocally, for Browning is *too* subjective; he

\(^{107}\) Life and Letters, I, 142.


\(^{109}\) Ibid., p. 320.
imbues all his characters with his own personality. "... the flame is that of Browning, and not of the separate creatures which he strives to inform."\textsuperscript{110}

Thus \textit{Victorian Poets} saves its greatest accolades for Swinburne, "in some respects the most notable of the poets who now, in the prime of their creative faculties, strive to maintain the historic beauty and eminence of England's song."\textsuperscript{111} While appreciating Swinburne's melodic gift, Stedman nevertheless values him most as a dramatic poet. "The man had come to do what Browning had failed to do in a less propitious time, and make a successful diversion from the idyllic lead of Tennyson."\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Atalanta}, \textit{Chastelard}, \textit{Bothwell} are all lavishly praised, as, for that matter, is Swinburne's \textit{Poems and Ballads}. In particular, Stedman celebrates the ode "Ave atque Vale," composed in memory of Charles Baudelaire. Although in an earlier review Stedman had modified his enthusiasm in deference to Lowell, who disapproved of Swinburne, now Stedman does not hesitate to compare the poem favorably with "Lycidas" or "Adonais," and to marvel at its metrical affluence.\textsuperscript{113} At

\textsuperscript{110}Ibid., p. 294.

\textsuperscript{111}Ibid., p. 6.

\textsuperscript{112}Ibid., p. 386.

\textsuperscript{113}F. De Wolfe Miller, "Lowell the Author of 'Bayard Taylor's' Review of \textit{Laus Veneris}," \textit{American Literature}, XXVII (March, 1955), 108-109.
a time when most American critics were sermonizing on Swinburne's lack of decency, Stedman's praise was a corrective, and Swinburne himself was pleased with his American champion.\textsuperscript{114}

It is true that in later years Stedman tends to interchange his estimates of Browning and Swinburne. The 1887 Supplement to \textit{Victorian Poets}, for example, terms Swinburne's poetry "too rich and productive. The torrent of his rhythm, beautiful and imaginative as it is, satiates the public. . . ."\textsuperscript{115} On the other hand, both the "style and matter" of Browning's work "have at last given occasion" for his fame. "A contrast between the objective, or classical, dramatic, mode and that of Browning is not derogatory to the resources of either."\textsuperscript{116} Yet Swinburne is not forgotten. In 1892, in \textit{The Nature and Elements of Poetry}, he admires his "fiery lyrical gift and individuality" even in his "most impersonal work,"\textsuperscript{117} and lauds both poets for proving that "there is a subjective drama which, as we have learned in our day, is not without greatness derived from the unique genius of its constructor."\textsuperscript{118}

\textsuperscript{114}Clyde Kenneth Hyder, \textit{Swinburne's Literary Career and Fame} (Durham, N. C., 1933), pp. 167-168.

\textsuperscript{115}\textit{Victorian Poets}, p. 439.

\textsuperscript{116}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 431.

\textsuperscript{117}\textit{Nature and Elements}, p. 132.

\textsuperscript{118}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 108.
when Stedman prepared his *Victorian Anthology* as a complement to the criticism in *Victorian Poets*, he was still convinced that the work of Tennyson, Browning, and Swinburne,--among others--proved that "the time under review was destined to rank with the foremost times of England's intellectual activity,--to be classed, it well might be, among the few culminating eras of European thought and art, as one to which even the title of 'Age' should be applied."\(^{119}\)

Yet, if it is subjectivity that we want, if the personality of the singer determines the value of the poem and ultimately of the age, then we must turn to American poets. For, as much as he esteems England's poets, Stedman reveres American poets more. In his preface to *Poets of America*, he tells us that he regards "the treatise on British poetry as of less significance, in its field of observation, than the work now following it. . . ."\(^{120}\) The reason, of course, is the intense nationalism that leads him to say that " . . . the literature--even the poetic literature--of no country, during the last half-century, is of greater interest to the philosophical student, with respect to its bearing on the future than that of the United


\(^{120}\) *Poets of America*, p. viii.
States." American literature is both "the expression and the stimulant" of national feeling and thus is "of import in the past and to the future of American and therefore of the world. . . ." 

As we have shown, Stedman's nationalism was grounded in his belief in the superiority of American life and character. America's ideal "is derived from sentiments which, even more than in Great Britain, preserve a Saxon quality,—those of domesticity, piety, freedom, loyalty to the institutions of the land. . . ." 

Domesticity, patriotism, and religion were, and probably still are, American characteristics often determining an author's success or failure. A reverent feeling, emancipated from dogma and imbued with grace, underlies the wholesome morality of our national poets. No country has possessed a group, equal in talent, that has presented more willingly whatsoever things are pure, lovely, and of good report. . . . We have no proof that the unmorality of a people like the French, with exquisite resources at command, can evolve an art or literature greater than in the end may result from the virile chastity of the Saxon mind.

Here is the epitome of the late nineteenth century partiality for British and American culture, which Howard Mumford Jones details in Ideas in America. Of course, England is included in this paean to the Saxon mind; yet Stedman adds that

121 Ibid., p. ix.
122 An American Anthology, p. xxii.
123 Poets of America, p. 48.
Victorian poets inadequately portray their home-sentiments and are less national than their American fellow-poets. Furthermore, besides not being "greatly involved with the action and history of their time," they are not "conspicuous as individuals." American poets, Stedman repeatedly says, are more distinctively personages: "The personality of the noted American minstrels has been more suggestive than that of their English contemporaries." Yet to Stedman a distinctive personality is neither singular nor eccentric; Whittier's "beautiful character" for example, makes him "distinctively a personage." Thus, once again we return to the "wholesome morality" of American poets as the justification for their eminence. American poets are notably virtuous. The "credentials" of American poets are superior to those of their British contemporaries, and American poets eclipse the entire history of English, indeed of Western, poetry.

No wonder, then, that Poets of America busies itself with the morality of the poet's life and writings, and particularly with his life. Each successive chapter pointedly praises the poet's righteous life. The chapter on Whittier is an illustration of Stedman's emphasis. As a boy Stedman boarded with a Quaker family who encouraged him to admire Whittier. His early *Lyrics and Idylls with Other

Poems, with its opening poem "Ad Vatem," was dedicated to Whittier who, in turn, hailed Stedman as "the worthy successor of Bryant." When Whittier wrote of Stedman's "Corda Concordia" that it was the best occasional poem of the last quarter of a century, Stedman marked the letter, "A letter from John G. Whittier, which I wish my children never to part with," and he replied: "To feel that I have written something which has moved you to offer me this beautiful and voluntary reward, is to make me count as nothing many of the failures and misfortunes, and to feel that even my life has been well worth living." Stedman was Whittier's literary executor; he wrote a biography of Whittier for the Encyclopedia Britannica, and he was the last speaker at Whittier's funeral in 1892. In Poets of America he defends him as the "Galahad of modern poets, not emasculate, but vigorous and pure; he has borne Christian's shield of faith and sword of the Spirit." As the "voice of freedom," and even more as "the Prophet Bard" imbued with "deep religious feeling," Whittier receives Stedman's love. Although Stedman at one point admits that "we measure poetry at its worth, not at the worth of its maker," he concludes that "in Whittier's

127 Ibid., p. 301.
128 Poets of America, p. 124.
record, if ever, there is an appeal to the higher law that takes note of exceptions. 129

The exceptions are many enough to be the rule. Emerson, we are told, was "so rare a personage that one who seeks to examine his writings apart from the facts and conduct of his life needs must wander off in contemplation of the man himself." 130 Holmes' writings "surely owe their main success to an approximate exhibition of the author himself. Where the man is even more lively than his work, the public takes kindly to the one and to the other." 131 Longfellow especially is treated kindly. "I am sure that I write of him with a personal affection felt for no other poet," Stedman confessed to Howells. "He charmed my boyhood so that 'tis hard for me to judge what of his verse is weak—what lasting." 132 Of "Evangeline" Stedman writes: "This one poem, thus far the flower of American idyls, known in all lands, I will not approach in a critical spirit." 133

The chapter on Lowell is a particularly striking illustration of how much the personality of the poet influenced Stedman's estimation of the poetry. Stedman was always grateful for Lowell's early encouragement of his

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129 Ibid., p. 105.
130 Ibid., p. 137.
131 Ibid., p. 102.
132 Life and Letters, II, 79.
133 Poets of America, p. 201.
work. In 1866 he thanked Lowell for a "cordial notice" in the North American, and in the same year, in reply to some of Lowell's criticism of his prose and poetry, Stedman wrote:

Let me here give you, my dear Mr. Lowell, a thousand hearty thanks for the genial and unexpected interest which you take in my work and intentions. In this age when everybody is so much at work, and so accomplished, I certainly have no right to hope, even from the comity of authors, that one in your position and under your constant obligations, can pause from worthier pursuits, to regard and encourage mine. I do not say this with the slightest affectation, but feel it thoroughly. Your advice and friendship are naturally more to one of my habits than could be those of any other American, and I do not hesitate to believe that I am truly grateful for the one and honored by the other. 134

In later years Stedman tended to see himself as another Lowell; like Lowell, he was both critic and poet, and his friends affected to find similarities in the writings of the two men. Bayard Taylor wrote in 1868, "When I read 'In the Twilight' (in Europe) without the author's name, I said: 'This must be Lowell, yet it is perfect music--and if not Lowell, Stedman has made a seven-league stride all at once.'" 135 Again, in 1878, Taylor wrote of Stedman's studies on Elizabeth Browning, Hood, and Arnold, "Your three prose papers are admirable. I like your tone and manner better than Lowell's: it is less discursive, betrays

134 Life and Letters, I, 376.
135 Ibid., p. 428.
no personal prejudices, and has that ripe sympathetic quality which belongs to true criticism."\textsuperscript{136} Stedman, we know, succeeded Lowell in the Presidency of the American Copyright League and was chosen to deliver the Turnbull Lectures at Johns Hopkins after Lowell rejected the offer. Although Stedman was at times resentful of Lowell's secure reputation, he esteemed him highly.

Stedman very carefully notes Lowell's diffuseness and technical blemishes; Lowell, he says, "is one who might gain by revision and compression." Yet, although both Lowell's prose and poetry are "open to criticism," "each is sustained by a spirit which makes the reader forgive and forget."\textsuperscript{137} Lowell's work "is so imbued with his individuality, that none can overlook the relations of the one to the other, or fail, in comprehending his poetry, to enter into the make and spirit of the poet himself."\textsuperscript{138} Once again, then, virtue triumphs, for in Lowell we have "a man better than his best writings."

Stedman's emphasis on the virtuous lives of America's leading poets subjects him to the charge of soft-pedalling, of catering to established reputations. Certainly there is something wrong with a set of principles which enable a

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{136} Ibid., p. 500.
\item \textsuperscript{137} Ibid., p. 329.
\item \textsuperscript{138} Ibid., p. 307.
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critic to count a group of minor American poets superior to their greater English contemporaries, and, by implication, to great English poetry of the earlier centuries. Whenever the merits of the poetry were questionable, Stedman could always praise the poet. This defect is most apparent in those chapters on poets whose reputations today are somewhat discredited; the discussions of Bryant, Whittier, Longfellow, Holmes, perhaps even the one on Lowell, all overrate their subjects; and, of course, even in Stedman's day the inclusion of a chapter on Bayard Taylor was suspect. Yet in spite of Stedman's caution, Poets of America remains a judicious book. As Willard Thorp remarks, "If we peel off his elaborate praise of the older poets as kind neighbors and good citizens, we come time and again, on the hard core of a valid judgment." Stedman's sugar-coating is reprehensible, but his occasional bitter pills deserve our respect. Even those chapters which we find most objectionable contain penetrating criticism. The chapter on Longfellow, for example, is frequently very perceptive, particularly in its praise of Longfellow's sonnets.

However, Poets of America is more impressive in the chapters which we least expect Stedman to treat successfully: those on Emerson, Poe, and Whitman. "It is now

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\(^{139}\)Thorp, op. cit., II, 816.
pretty clear, notwithstanding the popularity of Longfellow in his day," Stedman wrote in 1900 in his preface to *An American Anthology*, "that Emerson, Poe, and Whitman were those of our poets from whom the world has most to learn. . . . Our three most individual minstrels are now the most alive, resembling one another only in having each possessed the genius that originates."\(^{140}\) True, fewer pages in the *Anthology* are allotted to each of these writers than to Longfellow or Whittier, but Stedman explains that "space is not a sure indication of merit." The exigencies of the over-all design of the anthology must not obscure the brilliance of these men. His estimates today, he says, differ very little from those he made fifteen years earlier in *Poets of America*, a volume which venerated this trinity of poets.

Although the nineties "ushered in new and increasing fame" for Emerson as poet, at the time of his death in 1882, his poetic reputation was insecure.\(^{141}\) Critics were disturbed by the irregularities in Emerson's meter and rhyme. Frequently they found the poetry awkward or obscure, and doubted whether Emerson was a poet at all. Stedman's essay was one of the earliest to approach Emerson's poetry

\(^{140}\) *An American Anthology*, p. xxiv.

sympathetically. "It becomes a question," he comments on this issue of Emerson's correctness, "whether his discords are those of an undeveloped artist, or the sudden craft of one who knows all art and can afford to be on easy terms with it." There is, of course, "evidence on both sides," he answers; at times "feeling and expression were in circuit": at others, "the wires were down." Basically, however, Stedman admires Emerson's lyric gift. In a few "lyrical masterpieces" like "Threnody" or "Woodnotes" or "May-Day" Emerson showed that he had perhaps "the finest touch of all." And even in the lesser poems:

The melody is there, and though the range be narrow, is various within itself. The charm is that of new-world and native wood-notes wild. Not seldom a lyrical phrase is the more taking for its halt. . . .

In comments like this, Stedman effectively prepared for the wider vision that Howells later shed on Emily Dickinson's unconventional technique.

The chapters on Poe and Whitman are also among the earliest attempts to treat these controversial poetic figures impartially and sympathetically; they are historically as well as critically important. During the quarter of a century after Poe's death in 1850, criticism generally reflected the personal animus expressed by

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142 Poets of America, p. 135.
143 Ibid., p. 159.
Griswold in his posthumous edition of Poe's work. Not that critics were niggardly in their praise of particular works, "But the striking characteristic of nearly all of this discussion was the inability of the authors to consider artistic matters without passing judgment also upon the personal failings which, largely through the initial instruction of Griswold, Poe was believed to have possessed."\(^{144}\) John Ingram's ninety-page biographical preface to the edition of Poe's collected works published in England in 1874 and 1875 was the first major refutation of Griswold's conclusion; from then on there was a steady if slow "search for the truth about Poe." Stedman's essay, first published in 1880 in *Scribner's Monthly*, illustrates an "unbiased and unshocked point of view in a new generation."\(^{145}\) In 1905 Stedman himself wrote of his article on Poe that "it was the first essay in a standard magazine in which Poe's art and genius and temperament were treated at length, with a wish to be highly critical yet sympathetic. . . ."\(^{146}\)


\(^{145}\)Alice L. Cooke, "The Popular Conception of Edgar Allan Poe from 1850 to 1890," *University of Texas Studies in English*, no. 22 (1942), 165.

\(^{146}\)Life and Letters, II, 234.
As we might expect, Stedman discusses Poe's life: he defends Poe from the charge of immorality. Asserting "that scholars, writers, and artists, in spite of a tradition to the contrary, are less given, as a class, to forbidden pleasures than business men and idle men of the world," Stedman adds that Poe was no exception to the rule. He was tender and lovable in his home and patient and regular in his work. He was not a libertine: "There is not an unchaste suggestion in the whole course of his writings. . . ." Nor was he "a scoffer nor an habitual drunkard." That Poe drank at all Stedman attributes to an "hereditary taint." Poe was "not immoral but immoral." Although eventually Stedman has to admit that "Making every allowance, Poe was terribly blamable," he merely blames Poe for having "no real strength of will."¹⁴⁷ Stedman himself emphasizes that "In stating expressly that Poe was not 'immoral' the worst charge I brought against him was that he lacked strength of will."¹⁴⁸ And at other times he upholds the argument of this chapter. "... I have laid stress on the fact that Poe, with all his faults, was not 'a libertine,' and I see not the slightest cause to change my opinion. In fact, he was the least 'sensual' of men and authors; his dramatic 'grand passions' were all of the

¹⁴⁷Ibid., p. 271.
¹⁴⁸Life and Letters, II, 214.
heart and head and imagination rather than of the body." 149
And some years later, approving a study of Balzac's life, Stedman refers with satisfaction to his claim "in my paper on Poe, that every true artist is from his very devotion to the ideal, essentially and practically freer from common vice than ordinary men of business or action. . . ." 150

To be sure, Poe criticism would reach maturity only after the works were studied in isolation from his life. Yet Stedman's defense of the life was historically necessary; furthermore, his criticism of Poe's works was discerning. His essay must not "be underrated. It was, in point of time, the next serious effort after that of Lowell's of an American critic, whose judgment posterity respects to consider the genius of Poe. And the appraisal, in spite of certain conclusions which most Poe scholars would hold to be at best half-truths, belongs in that small group of permanent criticism concerned with Edgar Allan Poe." 151

The details of Stedman's criticism do not require elaboration. Essentially Stedman presents the same opinions

149 Ibid., p. 222.
150 Ibid., p. 378.
in the various introductions to Poe's poems, tales, and criticism that he wrote for the ten-volume Stedman-Woodberry edition of Poe's works published by Stone and Kimball in 1894 and '95. In both, Stedman analyzes Poe's aesthetics of poetry with the same appreciation for Poe's love of beauty and disapproval of didacticism that he expresses in *Nature and Elements*, although again he qualifies that by not recognizing that "the soul of beauty is truth," Poe narrows his definition of beauty unduly. Poe's criticism, he adds, was discriminating, if at times inconsistent: "He had the judicial mind, but rarely was in the judicial state of mind." Stedman also admires "the romantic and the wonderful" in the tales and is one of the few critics to recognize that the absence of moral judgments in Poe's fiction stems from his critical theory and not from his supposedly immoral life. As for the poetry, Stedman agrees with customary opinion that Poe's range was limited but that "as a melodist he achieved wonders in a single strain." The Stedman-Woodberry edition of Poe's works was "the most distinguished especially in editorship and elaborateness that had yet been offered to the public."\(^{152}\) The text of the poetry, in particular, which incorporated Poe's "own original marginal corrections" and appended variant readings of all the poems, "was printed in

\(^{152}\)Hutcherson, "One Hundred Years of Poe," pp. 282-283.
a fashion that merited unqualified praise." The apotheosis of Poe was not to be accomplished until the centenary of Poe's birth in 1909, but in Poets of America and the edition of the works, Stedman undoubtedly laid some groundwork for this homage.

Even more successful than the essay on Poe was Stedman's study of Whitman which marked "the beginning of this public critical acceptance by others than the members of the Whitman circle." Although today John Crowe Ransom's estimate that "Whitman and Emily Dickinson were surely the greatest forces of American poetry in the nineteenth century" excites no surprise, Whitman's eminence in American literature is essentially "a posthumous phenomenon." When he died in 1892 critics were as divided in their judgments on his fame and ability as they had been in 1855 when Leaves of Grass was first published; and although, to be sure, some remarkable appreciations of his poetry are to be found during the nineties, Whitman was not universally accepted until after the publication of Bliss Perry's biography in 1906.154

Yet as early as 1880 Stedman willingly faced a possible thunderstorm and persuaded the reluctant Josiah


154 Ibid., p. 87.
Holland to print an article in *Scribner's Monthly* which, in spite of its reservations, "was the strongest indorsement of Whitman that had appeared in an American magazine." Anticipating condemnations from both enthusiasts and detractors, he struggled unhappily with the article. "I am skirmishing *in re* Whitman and dreading my task," "I am wrestling with Whitman," his letters confess. And when it was all over he exclaimed with relief, "I probably never shall write another of the same length; certainly never shall have to study the exact force and meaning of each word so closely again. Heaven be praised; it is done!" He felt that never in his life had he performed a "more original investigation," and as late as 1904 he was still satisfied that he had written a "judicial review." Stedman had reason to be proud:

The critic whose major admirations are Theocritus and Landor and Tennyson, and yet who can thoroughly give himself up to Whitman is not the commonest of phenomena. The essay, indeed, is one of that rarest of things in criticism—the tribute of a lover of a recognized and conventional sort of excellence to an excellence of a new and disturbing kind.

Ironically, Stedman spends little time in his article justifying Whitman's life, in spite of the fact that this

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157 De Mille, *op. cit.*, p. 763.
was his normal method and that critics generally discussed the poet's life and personality. Perhaps he skirted this problem because, as his letters reveal, he considered Whitman pretentious; but, in that case, his appreciation of Whitman's merits is all the more remarkable. "Shall castigate him for affectation and humbug in his life, manners, style; but fully recognized his lyrical and descriptive genius," Stedman wrote. "In short, I look upon his character and career as melodramatic, diplomatic, insincere; his philosophy as trite and superficial; his conceit and arrogance as unbounded; his power of diction, and his knowledge of out-door nature, as something almost unexcelled." \(^{158}\) To some extent, certainly, Stedman reveals this attitude in his objections to Whitman's "frequent want of true simplicity," to his "boldness, and the 'pride that apes humility.'" \(^{159}\) Yet he distinguishes between the fine extravagance of genius, the joy in its own conceptions, and self-conscious vanity or affectation,—between, also, occasional weaknesses of the great, of men like Browning, and like the greatest of recent masters, Hugo, and the afflatus of small men, who only thus far succeed in copying them.\(^{159}\)

And he concludes that "it would be unjust to reckon Whitman among the latter class." Essentially, however, Stedman argues that Whitman's song "is more noteworthy than his

\(^{158}\)Life and Letters, II, 107-108.

\(^{159}\)Poets of America, p. 389.
that is,—and this is indeed a turnabout—"it is not the man but the poet that he evaluates." 161

In the Whitman chapter, he discusses the basic issues of the poet's attitudes toward sex and his style—the "two-fold obstacle" which few critics were able to surmount. As a rule, critics objected to Whitman's realistic treatment of physiological details Stedman, too, objected to Whitman's frankness—and in this he betrays his genteel bias. True, he prided himself that he was criticizing Whitman "upon his own ground." We must presuppose his honesty of purpose, he explains, and recognize that Whitman was advocating 'a sane sensuality'; that he was proclaiming 'that there is in nature nothing mean or base.' Yet, Stedman replies, "if there is nothing in her which is mean or base, there is much that is ugly or disagreeable"; that is, there is, indeed, a coarseness in the physical processes of nature which is repulsive, or at least—Stedman hastens to add—"if not so in itself . . . , it seems so to the conscious spirit of our intelligence." But, he continues, while nature often is "strong and rank," it is not "externally so." "Nature, I say, covers her slime, her muck, her ruins,

160 Ibid., p. 353.

with garments that to us are beautiful." Whitman errs in not perceiving that "what we call decency is grounded in her law."\textsuperscript{162}

It is not squeamishness that leaves something to the imagination, that hints at guerdons still unknown. The law of suggestion, of half-concealment, determines the choicest effects, and is the surest road to truth.\textsuperscript{163}

Thus Whitman fails to realize that true realism must be consistent with idealism, that "our spirits seek the spirit of all things." And Stedman concludes that Whitman should re-edit his works and reject "certain passages and words."

In discussing Whitman's style, however, Stedman does better. While most critics were disturbed by Whitman's metrical freedom, Stedman labors to show that Whitman was by no means discarding formal technique. In fact, his reliance on familiar rhythmical patterns is presented as further proof that "Technique, of some kind, is an essential, though it is equally true that it cannot atone for poverty of thought and imagination."\textsuperscript{164} Stedman correctly points out that while Whitman discards rhyme, he continues to rely on time, accent, and rhythm, and he traces Whitman's style back to the King James version of the Bible. Noting, too, Whitman's debt to Blake, Stedman insists that Whitman's

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\textsuperscript{162} Poets of America, p. 368.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., p. 369.
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., p. 372.
method is "not an invention" but "a striking and persistent renaissance." But although he understands Whitman's aims, he is not overly sympathetic with them. He accepts them as "suited" to Whitman, but believes that if other poets adopted Whitman's "irregular unrhymed form," the method would soon become artificial. Furthermore, he adds that Whitman himself returns in his later work to more traditional metrical patterns. Like many other critics, Stedman comments that "the pieces whose quality never fails with any class of hearers,—of which 'My Captain' is an example,—are those in which our poet has approached most nearly, and in a lyrical, melodious manner, to the ordinary forms." Whitman "is far more original in his style proper than in his metrical inventions,"165 Stedman concludes, and he praises the poet's diction and his sudden and novel imagery.

Although this study of Whitman certainly displays Stedman's limitations, it also represents his critical faculties at their best. Even when Stedman disapproved of some of Whitman's practices, "he displayed no bad temper," and it is this "subdued tactful, and appreciative tone"166 in particular, which helped to win a sympathetic hearing for Whitman's poetry. The chapter on Whitman can, in a

166 *Bozard, op. cit.*, p. 209.
way, stand for Poets of America. In many respects it is unsatisfactory. It is clearly a product of its time. But it is Stedman's best work and reveals a true critical ability.

Stedman's views on the art of poetry and on particular poets have been detailed at length because they represent opinions which most critics held during the nineties. It seems unfortunate that modern critics malign him so, for in many ways he was a mature and competent critic. Although he is the most prominent exponent of the genteel tradition, his best work deals with figures of the new school. The great mass of his judgments "are in the main contemporary judgments, and it is a great deal easier to be wise and pregnant and penetrating about the literature of the past than about that which is rising around one." 167

The achievement of Victorian Poets lies in its recognition of the weakness of the idyllic method in Tennyson, the idol of most genteel writers, and in its sympathetic portraits of Browning and Swinburne. Poets of America, too, challenges traditional reputations by elevating Emerson, Poe, and Whitman to the ranks of major poets. Its appraisal of other American greats shows, we have seen,  

167 Charles Leonard Moore, "Two Recent American Classics," Dial, XLIX (September 1, 1910), 107.
equal perception. In *The Nature of Elements of Poetry*, Stedman presents a unified, consistent, and logical theory of poetry and reveals, in his countless critical and historical asides, a thorough knowledge of the history of poetry and of poetic theory. These works are not the productions of a man slavishly bound to a tradition, but of one gifted with both critical acumen and originality.

Even viewed as a critic whose importance is solely historical, Stedman should not be scorned. In an age whose literary efforts were directed to prose, Stedman was the one critic to center his work, both as poet and critic, around poetry; as Howard Mumford Jones comments, "Stedman, chief historian of verse in the nineteenth century has not yet had an adequate successor..." To be sure, he was unduly tolerant of minor poets, bestowing praise indiscriminately. Yet his cordiality to the new poets at least weakened the American idolatry of the elder poets. His nationalism too, at times extreme, helped deliver America from its dependence on British literature. And his request for American themes, tempered, to be sure, by the idealistic caution against subject matter that is too immediate, nevertheless influenced young writers to look homeward for themes.

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It cannot be denied, however, that Stedman's inherent critical ability was subordinated to a critical tradition which was too static to excite a turbulent era. Stedman's idealism was too dependent on its sources; an aesthetic that was meaningful to Poe and Emerson was no longer significant to the postwar years. Imagination, Inspiration, and the Faculty Divine were concepts requiring reinterpretation for a scientific and realistic age. The didactic motive of Stedman's work rendered criticism biographical rather than analytic, and the emphasis on the virtuous life of a poet resulted in a canon which discarded most past literature and unduly favored the Victorian because its morality was right. When he did attempt to be critical, Stedman's rejection of less conventional subject matter as false to the demands of Beauty or Ideal Truth, and of experimental forms as unrhythmical, confined poetry to traditional paths and contributed to the success of the novel, which did face the new realities. Only in his call for a dramatic poetry which would deal with life rather than nature did Stedman point in a new direction. Yet his style minimized the value of even his significant criticism, for he was unnecessarily verbose and he depended on sentimental stock phrases, partly perhaps because of his own insufficiency, and also because of "the critical tradition that one must criticize poetry
in poetic prose."¹⁶⁹ The result is a conservative body of criticism, in style and content, from a man who was capable of better work. Stedman is frequently said to have been "made" by the mediocrity of his times. Perhaps he was its victim instead.

¹⁶⁹De Mille, op. cit., p. 757.
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CHAPTER II

MAGAZINES OF THE NINETIES--THE REAR GUARD
MAGAZINES OF THE NINETIES—THE REAR GUARD

Both contemporary observers during the nineties and critics and essayists gifted with the hindsight of later years testify to the dominance of periodical literature in the writing of the day. In 1893, observing the "Directions and Volume of our Literary Activities" a critic in the Forum noted that at that time there were no less than 1051 periodicals "devoted wholly or mainly to literature." ¹

In 1900, Henry Loomis Nelson, Editor of Harper's Weekly, in a similar review of "American Periodicals" in the Dial, concluded that "There is no doubt that the periodical literature of the country has greatly increased in importance, and what we call weight, in the last twenty years, and that the tendency is towards still greater importance."² A later critic, Algernon Tassin, informs us that "In this period, two hundred and fifty thousand regular monthly buyers of periodicals became two millions, and the reader of one magazine became the devoted devourer of half a dozen and more."³

¹Ainsworth R. Spofford, "Directions and Volume of our Literary Activities," Forum, XVI (1893-94), 598.


The justification of numbers, however, is not the magazines' main claim to distinction. Past and present critics alike also testify to the beneficent influence that the magazines exerted on the direction of American literature. In the July, 1893, Atlantic, an unsigned article probably written by Horace Scudder commented that "magazine poetry has become something like a byword, and in looking over any new batch of American books of verse one comes upon little that has not first seen the light in magazines." Tassin also praises the encouragement that both literature and authors received from the patronage of magazines. Reminding us that "most American authors in the nineteenth century won their reputations in the magazines," Tassin explains that before the enactment of the international copyright law publishers did not publish American books unless their contents had previously appeared in magazines. The most ardent praise of the power of the magazine came, of course, from the editors themselves. Henry Mills Alden, Editor of Harper's Magazine from 1869 to 1909, argued in Magazine Writing and the New Literature, published in 1908, that "Since 1860, no distinction as to quality or as to any substantial values can be made between the best books and the best periodicals."  

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last sixty years," he elaborates, "has been issued serially before book publication. Some of the best volumes of verse in our day are collections of magazine poems.\(^6\) Alden too is impressed by what he calls the "scope" of American magazines. Not only the yearly content of a magazine, he marvels, but even the content of a single issue will contain varied entertainment:

New disclosures of physical phenomena; luminous interpretations of history; revisions of old and mistaken views based upon freshly discovered material; the most recent revelations of archaeological exploration; the result of current sociological experimentation; studies of tendencies characteristic of the civilization of today and of imperfectly understood conditions of civilization in earlier times; studies also which are the result of travel and observation among peoples never before heard from and of the reaction of a creative imagination upon material which seemed familiar, but which for the first time yields to a new interpretation its inmost secrets, affording a fresh field of wonder; narrations of singular adventure—all this from writers the most authoritative. ... \(^7\)

Yet, in spite of this frank display of an editor's pride, Magazine Writing and the New Literature is largely a defense of the American magazine. The elaborate justification of editorial policy that this very panegyric to magazines sets up reveals the extent of adverse criticism lavished on periodical literature of the late nineteenth century. The charge against the magazines has been that

\(^6\)Ibid., p. 54.

\(^7\)Ibid., p. 71.
they fostered and perpetuated the weak conservatism of the genteel tradition. If literature in the nineties was servilely traditional, and if, during the nineties, the magazine dominated the literary scene, then it follows, the argument runs, that the magazine is primarily responsible for literature's weaknesses.

The conservatism of American magazines has been ably investigated by many students. Both Everett Gillis' "American Prosody in the Eighteen Nineties, with Special Reference to Magazine Verse" and Carlin T. Kindilien's dissertation, "A Study of American Verse, 1890-1899," for example, demonstrate the determining influence of Victorian morality on the thought and content of periodical literature. The most comprehensive treatment of this topic is Leonard Lutwack's dissertation, "The Dynamics of Conservative Criticism: Literary Criticism in American Magazines, 1880-1900." Like every other critic, but with greater completeness and research, Lutwack contends that the reader, author, and publisher are mutually responsible for the poor quality of magazine writing. Just as in our own time—Lutwack and the others explain—the dictates of the mass audience for movies and radio and television largely result in cheap entertainment, so, during the nineties, almost for the first time, the shoddy requirements of a mass audience were catered to.
This audience, even Alden points out, was primarily feminine, middle-class, practical-minded. It was dominated by Beer's "Shadowy Titaness, a terror to editors, the hope of missionary societies and the prey of lecturers . . . [who] existed rather as a symptom of America's increasing cheapness than as an attitude of womankind." In 1887, in a moving discussion of "Why We Have No Great Novelists," Hjalmar Boyesen uses a similar figure of "the Iron Madonna" to characterize "the young American girl . . . who strangles in her fond embrace the American novelist; [she is] the Moloch upon whose altar he sacrifices, willingly or unwillingly, his chances of greatness." Whereas the European novel is a "vehicle for advanced thought," Boyesen explains, American fiction betrays "a distinct half-unconscious lowering of standard, a distinct descent to a lower plane of thought or thoughtlessness." Although Boyesen was speaking primarily of the novel, he presents a similar indictment of magazine writing. Magazine literature is equally conservative, equally stultified, equally conventional. "The editor, being anxious to keep all his old

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9 Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen, "Why We Have No Great Novelists," *Forum*, II (February, 1887), 619. Reprinted in *Literary and Social Silhouettes* (New York, 1894), as "The American Novelist and His Public."

10 Ibid.
subscribers and secure new ones, requires of his contributor that he shall offend no one."¹¹ "... our women-instructed minds," charged another contemporary critic, Charles Leonard Moore, "shrink from strong passions and tragic situations."¹²

That editors and writers did indeed have their hands tied is seen by their own admissions. Everywhere the figure of the young girl was used as the test of the propriety of a work of art. Maurice Thompson, for example, calls Hardy's Tess "unclean," Flaubert "an evil influence," Daisy Miller "tinseled vulgarity," and insists that "the fact that a novel is unfit for open reading at the family fireside is positive proof that it is not wholesome reading for any person at any place."¹³ The classic statement appears in Howells' Criticism and Fiction:

Between the editor of a reputable English or American magazine and the families which receive it there is a tacit agreement that he will print nothing which a father may not read to his daughter, or safely leave her to read herself.¹⁴

¹¹Ibid., p. 620.


¹³Maurice Thompson, The Ethics of Literary Art (Hartford, 1893), p. 57.

¹⁴William Dean Howells, Criticism and Fiction (New York, 1891), pp. 159-160.
Lowell and Aldrich, Stedman and Gilder, all subscribed to this restriction. It was Gilder who spoke for all in his article on "Certain Tendencies in Current Literature" published in the New Princeton Review but delivered as an address both at Wesleyan University and, a month later, at Wells College. In the article, which, as Gilder himself wrote, was meant as "a plea for the ideal,"\(^{15}\) he directly replies to Boyesen's attack. Admitting the truth of Boyesen's charge, Gilder finds, however, quick consolation: "... are there no compensations?" he asks. "Is there, or is there not, a greater delicacy and decency of speech in America than on the European continent? ... Is not this purity worth paying for with a little prudery?"\(^{16}\) That he paid with more than a little prudery the many slurs on his name reveal. True, Gilder was kind, as Whitman acknowledges.\(^{17}\) True, his judgment was often wise, as James L. Ford attests.\(^{18}\) But even Ford [William Allen White's "pre-Menckenite literary protestant"]\(^{19}\) is forced to conclude


\(^{17}\)Letters of Richard Watson Gilder, p. 66.


that while "Mr. Gilder was not slow to recognize merit in manuscript," he preferred "matter which would not offend anyone--a policy that is better for the counting room than for the making of good literature."\textsuperscript{20}

That editors submitted to what Stedman liked to call the "virginibus maxim" was due partly to the pressure of circulation but more to the identity of the editor's mind with that of the average. Alden's \textit{Magazine Writing and the New Literature} is again useful as a revelation of genteel thought and morality. In its attempt to define and praise the \textit{New Literature} or, as Alden sometimes calls it, the New Realism, the book manifests the same kind of ambiguity that appeared in Stedman's criticism. As in Stedman's case, what Alden expounds as liberal arguments are to us damagingly conservative. Like Stedman Alden praises the realist for dealing with "human action and passion"; but unlike Stedman he rigidly confines the boundary of human action and passion. This paean to realism, for example, praises "the new imaginative literature" because it "cleared itself from that first \textit{acharnement} of its new realism in its seizure upon flesh and blood reality. . . ."\textsuperscript{21} The point is--note

\textsuperscript{20} Ford, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 117.
\textsuperscript{21} Alden, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 200.
the following definitions too—that what Alden praises as realism is idealism with a new name:

One of the most misleading distinctions of it [realism] is that which opposes it to idealism. It is in reality only that beauty and all that is ideally excellent are embodied forth or brought home and made familiar.22

The chief value of realism is that, while it seems to bring us down to earth, it at the same time, exalts the earth, so that the common and homely things have a new disclosure of old but neglected values.23

An editor who thus defines realism would hardly feel the grasp of the Iron Madonna. He might at times chafe under the restraint: witness Alden's letter of July, 1890, which answers Henry James' complaint about the omission of the anti-Christ episode in James' translation of Daudet's Port Tarascon: The Last Adventures of the Illustrious Tartarin:

... the Magazine is pledged against offence to any of its patrons; and the fact that such offence is based upon the reader's inconsiderateness or ignorance does not atone to him for what seems a violence.

I do not wonder at your surprise. I have been myself so often surprised by the misunderstanding on the part of even intelligent readers of the most exquisite pieces of art that whenever there is a chance of this I avoid it.24

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But *Magazine Writing and the New Literature* reveals that Alden was willing in his submission. Written seventeen years later, the studied and reasoned statement of a mature man, Alden's own reply to the charge that the Iron Woman strangles literature is probably more representative of his position than the frank but no doubt conciliatory reply to James.

At least, in an experience of more than forty years in association with a publishing house, we have never known of any meddling on their [women's] part with the business, except in rare cases after the fact.

We never knew a publisher to reject a novel that was on its literary and dramatic merits worth publishing, except when it was indecent or was likely to have an actually immoral influence—the kind of thing which would have been as unpleasant reading to himself as to any reader, even a matron.  

It is the qualification, of course, that is important, as is the last sentence in a passage occurring a few pages later. "We do not say that everything which could be published with propriety in a book could fitly be published in a magazine. The purchaser chooses the book; the magazine goes to an audience by a pledge. But the limitation does not arise from an embarrassing moral constraint. . . ." 26 The constraint, that is, is no constraint. The genteel editor shares the moral bias of his feminine readers. He not only

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26Ibid., p. 68.
avoids giving offence; he is glad to avoid it. And so it is that Beer addresses Alden: "And I hear of you always making little changes of homely words such as 'breasts' and 'belly' and 'spittle' and 'sweat' until your name gets to be rather a joke, and a source of nervous irritation. . . ."27

The result, of course, was an emasculated literature. The bourgeois standards of respectability and good taste were evoked as the touchstones of literary acceptability. A superficial culture, an aristocratic veneer, a confusion of morals and manners marked the minds of the magazine audience and thus of editors catering to it. A too earthy realism of setting, a too licentious treatment of sex, a vocabulary too coarse, all were proscribed. Similarly, an optimistic view of life and society, a yea-saying belief that this is the best of all possible worlds and America the best of all possible countries was required of all magazine writing. As Burlingame, chronicler of the house of Scribner's and son of the editor of *Scribner's Magazine* reminisces, "Truth, realism, clarity, economy, all the things we praise in our brave world, got into print almost word by word. . . . The public screamed and called out the police; ministers (forgetting the ugly words in Scripture) rocked their pulpits; moralists shouted about sex depravity,

snobs about vulgarity, managers about the labor octopus, patriots about Treason."^28

It seems unnecessary to cite all the examples of censorship imposed by the Century and the other magazines. Some are familiar, like Beer's account of Gilder rejecting a story (later printed in McClure's) because it contained a reference to a boy's nipple. ^29 Beer also tells of John Ford Bemis' book on a preacher turned agnostic which was rejected by both Gilder and Alden who might have considered it "had not, in the final scene, the mob killed the wife along with the husband."^30 The incidents can be multiplied; William James had to modify "a paper on Janet" for Scribner's, and Scribner's Burlingame also asked Robert Grant to tone down the "Reflections of a Married Man." The prudery and fastidiousness of genteel periodicals are everywhere too apparent. Gilder and the Century, Alden and Harper's, Burlingame and Scribner's, "a reader in the eighties and nineties" sarcastically remembers, "were three in one and one in three, a blessed trinity that beamed over the America of the day, kindly lights of literature and learning, beacons that shown benignly unto the perfect day."^31

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^29 Beer, op. cit., p. 216.
^30 Ibid., pp. 49-50.
Although they were already warring with competitors, during the nineties The Atlantic Monthly, Harper's Magazine, The Century, and Scribner's Magazine retained the authority they had established during the preceding decade. Of the four monthlies, the Atlantic was perhaps the most influential. Published in Boston, christened by Oliver Wendell Holmes, its first editor James Russell Lowell, the Atlantic—to quote William Ellery Sedgwick who bought the magazine in 1909—was "poor and distinguished." "Their aristocratic price of thirty-five cents a copy defined their constituencies. . . ."32 The Atlantic addressed a bookish audience which looked to the magazine to perpetuate the literary tradition of its New England heritage. From the time of its founding in 1857 by Phillips, Sampson and Company until Sedgwick bought it from Houghton Mifflin and Company, the Atlantic was the organ of a publishing firm, and its editor frequently functioned as both magazine editor and publisher's representative. Although it should be emphasized that the Atlantic was not unfairly partial, perhaps it was this association which gave the magazine one of its main aims—to inform the reader of all important publications—and which resulted in one of the Atlantic's most important monthly features, its "Comment on New Books," a series of short book

reviews grouped under topic headings. During the nineties, the Atlantic also featured a "Contributors' Club" consisting of a number of short unsigned essays, which, like the present-day "Topics of the Times" in the New York paper, covered almost any topic. But although some articles on politics or art occasionally appeared--the Atlantic's subtitle was A Magazine of Literature, Science, Art, and Politics--the main interest of the magazine, and, for that matter, of the "Contributors' Club" too, was literary. Furthermore, although the Atlantic featured short stories prominently and serialized novels constantly--for example, James' Tragic Muse and F. Marion Crawford's Don Orsino--its central concern was with literary criticism.

From 1890-1898 the Atlantic's editor was Horace Elisha Scudder, author of children's books, and editor of the Riverside Magazine for Young People during the four years of its existence (1867-1870). Less eminent than his predecessor, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Scudder nevertheless influenced magazine policy appreciably; in fact, as assistant editor under Aldrich, he had already been in full command during Aldrich's many summers in Europe. As Lutwack informs us, "The extent of Scudder's work as a critic is seldom recognized, principally because so little of his criticism

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33"Boston Letter," Bookman, XVII (July 12, 1890), 21.
was published in book form. Except for many perfunctory introductions to Houghton Mifflin books and one collection of essays, *Men and Letters* (1887), his critical writings remain buried in the pages of the *Atlantic*. Unfortunately, because Scudder also favored unsigned reviews, we cannot with certainty ascribe a particular article to him. Yet he has probably written all of the unsigned reviews and criticisms; certainly he has written most of them and approved the rest. The only two articles which Scudder himself signed are pleas for teaching good literature, especially the classics, in public schools: "The Educational Law of Reading and Writing," published in the February, 1894, *Atlantic*, and "The Academic Treatment of English," published in November, 1894.

The academic interest Scudder displayed in these articles clearly influenced his choice of manuscripts; scarcely an issue appeared without an article on the classics or a conventional analysis of a standard work. George Lyman Kittredge, for example, wrote on "Chaucer's Pardoner" (December, 1893), John Jay Chapman on "The Fourth Canto of the Inferno" (November, 1890), William Cranston Lawton on "The Persians of Aeschylus" (August, 1892), and R. Y. Tyrrell

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on "Lucretius" (July, 1894). The point is not that these studies are insignificant, but that they are being printed, one has the feeling, not for their intrinsic merit but for the reflected glow from the eminence of their subjects.

Another characteristic of the "literary criticism" Scudder printed in the Atlantic was its dependence on letters and personal reminiscences. Here again the authors treated were established lights, this time in that other fertile field for genteel criticism: nineteenth century English and American literature. Letters from Coleridge to Southey, William Hazlitt's unpublished letters, the Emerson-Thoreau correspondence--this is typical Atlantic material. At best a biographical introduction was attached to the collection, as in Thomas Wentworth Higginson's publication of Emily Dickinson's letters to him; yet all too frequently the letters alone were printed. Often the gap between critic and subject was further widened when the Atlantic printed not the letters but a review of a collection of letters. Clearly a dependence on William Sharp's personal remembrances of Christina Rossetti or Walter Pater was just another means by which Scudder's Atlantic abdicated the job of literary criticism.

At times, however, the Atlantic turned from its adulation of traditional authors to review contemporary fiction, only to take its stand, in the momentous battle
then being waged, against realism. We might note paren-
thetically that Scudder favored the New England local
colorists. Profiting, perhaps, from sheer provincialism,
Mary E. Wilkins and Sarah Orne Jewett fared very well in
"New England in the Short Story," a kind of group review
typical of the Atlantic's method. Howells, however, was
rarely treated with complete sympathy: Scudder's unsigned
review of Criticism and Fiction entitled "Mr. Howells's
Literary Creed"35 well explains the Atlantic's stand:

Fashions change, and it is entirely possible
that the form of fiction which once was
acceptable should now seem tiresome; but if
our ancestors could read some of the micro-
scopic fiction of the present day, we suspect
they would cry out for something more in mass,
less in detail. . . . The fundamental truth
may be there, but the creed is dreadfully
contemporaneous and hopelessly individual.36

The following year, in an unsigned review in the "Contribu-
tors' Club" on "The Melancholy of Modern Fiction," Scudder
moans: "For my own part, I think that a preface by Mr.
Howells, recommending a book for its realism, will hereafter
be enough to guard me against it. . . . what we need is
tonic treatment, and views of life that tend to hopefulness,

35Lutwack attributes this review to Scudder, op. cit.,
p. 62. As he comments, "Tell-tale signs of a jejune
attitude towards literature make it almost always possible
to ascribe an unsigned review to Horace Scudder," ibid., p.
58.

36"Mr. Howells's Literary Creed," Atlantic Monthly,
LXVIII (October, 1891), 569.
not gloom."37 Even an article on Hamlin Garland with an approach and temper avowedly sympathetic complains of his "unnecessarily frank, sometimes even brutal realism."38 In contrast, the Atlantic abounds with praise for Stevenson, "the consistent preacher of courage and cheer," the "romantic in an age of realism." The controversy is fully detailed by Lutwack; for us it is enough to reiterate that it was precisely this entrenched and almost embittered conservatism that stirred the fighters for a new fiction and a new poetry.

The Atlantic's handling of poetry further displays the conservatism of its critical attitudes and method. Rarely will a study of a poet appear that is not, like that of Annie Fields on "Celia Thaxter," mere biography or reminiscence. It takes an esteemed poet in her own right, Louise Imogen Guiney, to turn out some acceptable studies, one on "James Clarence Mangan" and the other on "Henry Vaughan the Silurist," and yet even these two are heavily biographic. The closest the Atlantic got to serious criticism of poetry was in the quick "Comments on New Books" or in the frequent, unsigned articles usually titled, like "Some Recent American Fiction" or "Recent French Literature," "Some Recent American Verse." The judgments expressed in

38 "New Figures in Literature and Art," Atlantic Monthly, LXXVI (December, 1895), 842.
these articles invariably echo Stedman's views. The July, 1893, "Some Recent American Verse" finds American poetry competent but undistinguished, yet looks hopefully toward the future; an article entitled, Stedman-like, "Major and Minor Bards" expresses the same opinion. The unsigned June, 1892, article simply called "Whitman" could almost be Stedman's, so precisely does it repeat his argument that it is the law of nature even more than the law of poetry which should have restrained Whitman in his excesses of language and thought. Again, how reminiscent of Stedman's nationalism is an unsigned review of Samuel T. Pickard's Life and Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier which amusingly concludes its comparison of Whittier and Burns: "... one may well consider the immense advantage which the farmer boy in New England had over the farmer boy in Scotland as regards the consciousness of human equality and individual independence."39 The point is that the genteel approach toward poetry is to be found in Scudder's Atlantic: poetry criticism becomes a praise of traditional poets for their traditional values, primarily for their optimistic—that is, American—view of life and art.

The Atlantic, like Stedman, was also unsympathetic to experimentation in form. In December, 1891, reviewing Lizette Woodworth Reese's A Handful of Lavender, the

Atlantic praises the poet's description of nature but says of her form:

... in other parts of the collection there is more ambition, and, as was to be expected, in these later poems there is something of literary affectation. The proof is to be found in her metres, which are not simple, and in the imitateness of the diction and the mood.

Similarly, of Louise Guiney's A Roadside Harp: "One thing from the classics, however, she has still to learn,--lucidity. She always has an idea,--which cannot be said of all our singers,--even if she fails sometimes to make it clear to others." And yet it is these two whom Louise Bogan praises as "true, compelling, and sincere women's talents." Ironically, it is Miss Reese's "weightless diction and ... syntax so natural," and Miss Guiney's "seemingly effortless" lyrics that Miss Bogan especially commends. It was in the Atlantic too that Aldrich's famous objections to Emily Dickinson's rhyme scheme in "I taste a liquor never brewed" first appeared. Faced with poets of promise, the Atlantic had no encouragement to offer.

During William Hines Page's editorship, the Atlantic presented much the same face to its readers. Officially,

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40 "Recent Poetry," Atlantic Monthly, LXVIII (December, 1891), 845.


Page edited the magazine from 1897 to 1899, but his biographer records that as early as 1895 when Page became assistant editor under Scudder he assumed almost full command. The continuity in the make-up of the magazine reveals the continuity of editorial control. There was still an unquestioning servility rather than an appreciative humility toward classicism—see "Classical Studies in America" (December, 1896) or "Shall We Read Greek Tragedy?" (April, 1898); still a dependence on letters and reminiscence—Higginson's *Cheerful Yesterdays* was then the feature serial. There were still articles of summary like "Six Books of Verse," and still a core of favored British and American authors.

Some changes, it is true, were made. Page sponsored a revaluation of American literature which resulted in an excellent study of Emerson by John Jay Chapman and a surprisingly fine article on Poe by Hamilton Wright Mabie. In July, 1897 "Comment on New Books" was dropped—yet the *Atlantic* suffered from the loss. Page's personal participation in many current affairs seems to have been responsible for the greater preponderance of sociological and political articles, but it is debatable whether a conservative literary magazine gains much by such a change. Again, the

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Atlantic might have seemed different when, because of Page's militant approval of the Spanish American War, the magazine shocked its readers with a colorful cover picturing a waving American flag. Nevertheless, the Atlantic was the same. The extended argument in "Miss Wilkins: An Idealist in Masquerade" (February, 1899) that "the best realists are idealists at heart" was all too familiar.

A study of the three remaining major magazines need not be too detailed because their material was far less literary than that of the Atlantic. Indeed, the student turning from the Atlantic to study Harper's is surprised by the difference in content and mood. The contrast is effectively presented by the editor himself who, in his review of "Fifty Years of Harper's Magazines" printed in the May, 1900 issue of Harper's, compares Harper's with London's

\[44\] Page's political influence was perhaps more consequential than his career in literature—and reflects the same Anglomania. Howard Mumford Jones charges that Page, as Ambassador to Great Britain under Woodrow Wilson, "softened or ignored the many violations of American rights by the British, failed to present American protest in the manner of a representative of an injured country, bombarded the President and the Secretary of State with letters that are sheer propaganda, and finally helped to sweep this country into the orbit of British politics." H. M. Jones, "American Scholarship and American Literature," American Literature, VIII (May, 1936), 121.
Blackwood Magazine—read the "Atlantic" for "Blackwood's," he suggests, and the comparison will still be apt. Alden, who edited Harper's from 1869 to 1919, states that whereas Blackwood's had a "choice appeal to a limited class of highly cultivated readers," Harper's was "addressed to all readers of average intelligence, having for its purpose their entertainment and illumination. . . ." The magazine, Alden went on to say, "continued to publish serially the best novels that were produced from year to year, but it could not have published Emerson's essays or Lowell's critical papers."^45

Harper's, that is, aimed to be a popular magazine, aimed at a mass audience, and in doing so, of course, had to satisfy a mean level of taste. It could not be academic, but then it could not be cheap. It must please all and offend no one. Harper's fiction was, it is true, both popular and distinguished—according to Beer, it was the best magazine fiction published.^46 George du Maurier was then fashionable, and during the nineties Harper's serialized Peter Ibbetson, Trilby and The Martian. Hardy's Hearts Insurgent—formerly The Simpletons, later Jude the Obscure—and Henry James' translation of Daudet's Port Tarascon

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^46 Beer, op. cit., p. 291.
also appeared during this decade. But knowing the Alden of *Magazine Writing and the New Literature* we are not easily impressed; we remember that, ever mindful of the family fireside, Alden censored passages in James, and that Hardy was asked to rewrite one of his chapters. In 1900, occupying the reborn "Editor's Study," Alden reaffirmed Harper's policy:

... it is the unwritten law of this Magazine, in every part, to avoid the discussion of what are known as "burning questions," and of themes that divide sects in religion, parties in politics, and classes in society.\(^{47}\)

Its fiction censored, its non-fiction, then, was screened too. Not, we have said, primarily a literary magazine, *Harper's* was, like the best-selling magazines today, journalistic. Presenting a miscellany of social and political and literary features, its articles were reportorial, descriptive. Political issues were explained, not argued; political figures described, not criticized. Travel articles and discussions of science were Harper's special interests. Featured was "A Monthly Record of Current Events"—little more than a list organized chronologically. The magazine printed much on art, but "Some Modern French Painters," for example, was largely biographical. The point of view is familiar.

\(^{47}\)"Editor's Study," *Harper's Magazine*, CII (December, 1900), 160.
The desire to be uncontroversial worked hand in hand with another striking practice of the magazine: its extensive use of drawings and photographs. The journalistic concern for the pictorial, that is, frequently determined the magazine's content. Harper's discussions of art, for example, were also on the kind of descriptive topic that warranted illustrations: "Winged Victory of Samothrace" or "Glimpses of Western Architecture." Travel articles, of course, offered the best excuse for printing pictures, while a good domestic love story justified sentimental portraits of a pretty girl and her handsome lover. All the historians of Harper's--Shackleton, Tassin, and J. Henry Harper himself--stress the importance of the magazine's illustrations. Although at its start in 1850 Harper's was not pictorial, the engraving department soon became crucial to the magazine's success. In fact, when Scribner's Magazine appeared in 1870, the rivalry between the two was more artistic than literary. "The competition between the magazines," J. Henry Harper recalls, "became so keen that at times we paid as high as five hundred dollars for engraving one page of our Magazine. In 1888, when both the Century and Scribner's were in the field, the demand for first-class engravers was very great and the market value of their work became a serious consideration for the publishers."48 By

the nineties, of course, process reproduction in half-tone was developed and the problem about engravers became less acute, but the key point is that the use of illustrations, and now of colored ones too, increased.

In a magazine which "could not have published Emerson's essays or Lowell's critical papers," the treatment of literature was also journalistic. Like the other articles, literary studies were non-evaluative. Once again biography and reminiscence substituted for criticism. Annie Fields on "Whittier, Notes of His Life and of His Friendships," "Lord Byron's Early School Days"--the titles indicate the point of view. The reminiscences that Howells later collected into "Literary Friends and Acquaintances" were first serialized in Harper's; ripe for illustrations, they served the magazine admirably. Howells on the New England writers, Curtis on Holmes, Norton on Lowell--notice that the hierarchy is familiar. Uncritical acceptance of the standard writers stood for criticism in Harper's. In the entire decade only one article is distinguished: Arthur Symons on "The Decadent Movement in Literature" in the November, 1893 issue. It is, let us admit it, a highlight in Harper's career. "Symons fut en Angleterre le meilleur défenseur du symbolisme, et aucune étude n'a été plus importante à cette époque que The Symbolist movement.
in literature." Yet even in this essay the purpose is more explanatory than critical (the article, by the way, is heavily illustrated), so that the strength of the study seeps through almost unconsciously from the author's personal sympathy for the aims of the movement, and from Symons' fine style. One other study had promise, Louise Guiney on "English Lyrics Under the First Charles" (May, 1890), but Harper's destroyed all possibility of success. Preferring a cursory treatment of many poets to a profound discussion of one or two, it happily displayed eleven photographs of the eleven poets Miss Guiney superficially discusses.

To a student of literary criticism Harper's would be of little interest were it not for the magazine's literary columns, each written by one person. As Lutwack comments, perhaps too sympathetically, "the significance of Harper's as a critical organ derives largely from these columns, which more than made up for the lack of literary articles." The most long-lived of Harper's three columns, the "Editor's Drawer," later simply the "Drawer," is the least important. The "Drawer," "so called because a drawer in Fletcher Harper's office desk was the receptacle of the quaint oddities gathered from varied sources . . . had no scheme

50 Lutwack, op. cit., p. 96.
apart from its humorous intention."51 Cartoons, a short humorous column, a number of jokes, these made up the "Drawer," and like the cartoons in the New Yorker they were probably opened to first—and soonest forgotten. For the forty years between 1852 and 1892 George W. Curtis graced the "Easy Chair," establishing his own reputation and enhancing that of Harper's with the nonchalance of his style.

Then, for eight years after Curtis' death, the "Easy Chair" was put in storage—"so completely was it identified with Mr. Curtis that after his death it seemed unnatural to continue"52—but in December, 1900, Howells "sank into Curtis's 'Easy Chair,' where he reclined until his death in 1920." But the "Easy Chair" too is of minor importance to us for, under Howells as under Curtis, it was "a sort of journalism."53

Literary criticism in Harper's was primarily to be found in the "Editor's Study," occupied by Howells from 1886 till March, 1892, and then by Charles Dudley Warner who had previously edited the "Drawer." in 1898 the "Editor's Study" was closed, but when Howells shifted to the

52Ibid.
53Leonard Lutwack, "William Dean Howells and the 'Editor's Study,'" American Literature, XXIV (May, 1952), 207.
"Chair" in 1900, the "true" occupant, editor Alden, opened the "Study" again. As conducted by Howells, the "Study" was a review of current literature, and, as we might expect, the column is more of interest to the student of fiction than of poetry for it is here that Howells championed the cause of realism—his *Criticism and Fiction*, in fact, is simply a collection of essays from the "Study." *Harper's*, however, was not as revolutionary as it might seem in providing an organ for the apostle of realism. Howells was clearly there by sufferance, by virtue of his eminence as a novelist and as a friend of the New England greats, both past and present. Professing respect for Howells' sincerity, critics nevertheless attacked his theories, primarily in the *Atlantic* but in *Harper's* too. When Warner took over the "Study" in 1892, he brought to it a more conventional mind. He ignored foreign literatures, and, "like many men who have passed middle age, he felt a marked indifference toward new writers."  

"... why should we waste precious time in chasing meteoric appearances, when we can be warmed and invigorated in the sunshine of the great literatures?"  

He was to ask years later in the *Century*. In the first "Study"  

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article he begins more cautiously: "The late master of this department," he writes, "has made the succession very difficult, not because of the theories that loom and dazzle or becloud, but because of his informing spirit. They used to say of municipal affairs that they preferred a bad charter with a good mayor to a good charter with a bad mayor."\(^{56}\) Warner's respect for the mayor did not long silence the attack on the charter. "Are there any old-fashioned readers left aboveground to enjoy a historical romance?"\(^{57}\) he challenges two months later. Worse yet, he soon drops the fight completely, making the "Study" as innocuous as the "Chair," praising the Chicago fair, for example, "enlarging the scope" of the "Study"—according to Alden—"so as to include other than literary themes."\(^{58}\)

Years later, when Alden took over the "Study," he too entered the fight, if warily. "For many years," he wrote, "Mr. Howells has strenuously insisted upon this kind of reality in fiction, both in his own work and in that of others. Writers often attempt to produce work having this quality and fail, mistaking the realistic for the real."\(^{59}\)

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\(^{56}\)"Editor's Study," *Harper's Magazine*, LXXXIV (April, 1892), 802.

\(^{57}\)"Editor's Study," *Harper's*, LXXXV (June, 1892), 153.

\(^{58}\)"Editor's Study," *Harper's*, CI (December, 1900), 160.

\(^{59}\)Ibid.
Howells' realism, that is, is not Harper's realism. Despite Howells—and, for that matter, we could question how radical Howells himself was—Harper's remained an organ of conservative opinion.

Concerning poetry, at any rate, there is no argument. Howells the critic of poetry has not the stature of Howells the foe of romantic fiction, and criticism of poetry in Harper's peters off into nothingness. There is no program, and, for that matter, not much criticism—Howells would have been wiser not to tackle the job at all. Although at rare intervals there is a reference to a book of poetry in a "Study" dedicated to other matters, only two complete columns are devoted to poetry, and these are, in the tradition of the time, summary accounts covering more than a dozen books. The comments on each are unsystematic and incomplete—reviewing a book Howells might praise a particular poem and let it go at that—so that it is difficult to generalize about his position. One thing is clear: he is rarely critical. Howells' discerning comments on Emily Dickinson in the January, 1891, "Study" are often cited as evidence of his literary acumen, but unfortunately such perspicuity is atypical. In another case Howells wisely censures Madison Cawein for too much "delight in beautiful wording" (yet the main import of the review is favorable anyway); but normally the poems he cites are undistinguished and his phrasing is characteristically vague.
The most minor poet easily merits his praise. Most of the time he seems simply to be accepting the judgment of his contemporaries, as in his generous praise of Aldrich or Gilder or William Watson, or even in his approval of poets like Edith Thomas or Gertrude Hall. Occasionally, however, his receptivity seems rather an extension of his championing of realistic fiction: poets are admired not for their intrinsic worth but for their promise or for their theoretical aims. Perhaps—Howells seems to be wondering—the realistic movement in fiction can be extended to poetry. Favorably reviewing a host of new poets from the West, Howells comments: "With this active Western competition, literature, like agriculture, may become an effete industry at the East, and we may yet hear of abandoned studies of New England, as we now hear of the abandoned farms."60 In the same column, and on the same poets, he concludes: "Never before has there been closer affinity between the poets and the universal life; never have its local expressions been more lovingly and faithfully studied. Perhaps in poetry, as in fiction, we are to have a democratic republic of letters, instead of the old oligarchy."61 But this is Howells grinding his axe; this is not a functioning

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60 "Editor's Study," Harper's Magazine, LXXXIV (January, 1892), 317.

61 Ibid., p. 320.
critic. Of genuine criticism of poetry, neither Howells nor Harper's had much to contribute.

Where Harper's was weak, the Century was strong; where Harper's was strong, the Century was stronger. The Century, as a result, achieved one of the biggest circulations of any periodical in the nineteenth century. Established in 1870 as Scribner's Monthly, its avowed aim was to compete with Harper's; by the time it changed its name in 1881 to divorce itself completely from Scribner's publishing house, the Century had won the competition. The success of Harper's, we remember, was due largely to the prominence of its engravings; for the Century, illustration was even more decisive. When Dr. Holland, founder and editor of the old Scribner's Monthly bowed out of the new magazine, he conceded: "I suppose if any one were asked what more than anything else had contributed to the success of the magazine, he would answer: its superb engravings and the era it introduced of improved illustrative art." The complete title of the new magazine—The Century Illustrated Monthly—indicates how essential illustrations continued to be for Scribner's successor. Indeed, as in Harper's, the Century seemed to build articles around illustrations rather than illustrations around articles. A footnote to Brownell's

study of "Two French Sculptors. Rodin Dalou," justifying the disregard of some of Rodin's latest work, notes that although the article itself had been written some years ago, printing was delayed till suitable illustrations were prepared. Clearly, like Harper's, the Century was printing extensive articles on painting only to feature illustrations. Its special attraction was a series on "Italian Old Masters" illustrated by Timothy Cole which the Century lauded as "the reproduction of the masterpieces of painting by the hand of the master-graver of our time." Its pride in this led to a Dutch and Flemish Series and then to an American Artists Series, as well as to numerous illustrated studies of various architectural examples. In 1890, reviewing "'The Century's' Twentieth Anniversary," Mr. Gilder wrote: "If some other writer were reviewing the twenty years of this magazine we would wish him to examine the record of these pages as to printing and wood-engraving. . . ."64

To compete with Harper's, however, the new magazine needed not only finer illustrations but different aims. Harper's success was as a reprint magazine. By reprinting

63"Topics of the Time," Century, L (October, 1895), 952.

the best of British literature at a time when there was no international copyright law, Harper's not only saved money, as Tassin charges, but also, as J. Henry Harper claims, enlarged its scope and strengthened its popularity. For, in spite of the American author's resentment of Harper's closed doors, the reader did benefit from Harper's policy. Scribner's plan, however, was to encourage and print American writers. It thus, of course, aided the struggling American author and, at the same time, gratified its audience's patriotism and literary taste. American material was, after all, more interesting to American readers. Perhaps it was this receptivity which prompted the conclusion to the retrospective estimate quoted above: "If there is any one dominant sentiment which an unprejudiced reviewer would recognize as pervading these forty half-yearly volumes, it is, we think, a sane and earnest Americanism. . . ."65

This theme of the magazine's Americanism is constantly reiterated, often, however, from a new point of view: at times Americanism is defined as anti-sectionalism. A year later, announcing a prospectus for the coming year, the editor writes: " . . . The Century is a national magazine--not an international, not a sectional magazine. . . . And yet being national it assumes on the one hand that

65 Ibid.
America has a great deal to do with abroad, and on the other that *America is a nation*" (the italics are the editor's). Whereas both the *Atlantic* and *Harper's* were magazines of the North, so to speak, the *Century* was consciously hospitable to Southern and Western writers and material. The War Series of the eighties, so influential to the success of the magazine, presented the memoirs of Southern as well as Northern generals. *Scribner's* service "in helping the wounds of war to heal," Tassin comments, "cannot be overestimated." At the same time, the magazine could not be accused of being unduly partisan. The *Century* published Grant's *Memoirs* and the Hay-Nicolay *Life of Lincoln* which Gilder was ultimately forced to defend "to an editor of a Western newspaper":

> We try not to be patriots for revenue only [he writes]. If we were sordid in our aims we would not, on the one hand, antagonize the soldier audience by an appeal to their better nature with regard to the pension craze, and, on the other hand, endanger our entire Southern circulation by publishing the "Life of Lincoln," which goes into politics more deeply and dangerously than any serial ever published in a magazine for general circulation, so far as I am aware. 68

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66 "Topics of the Time," *Century*, XLII (October, 1891), 950.


Being American, attempting to represent varied and at times discordant opinions, meant, then, that the magazine must be willing to take a stand and to expound ideas. And it is true that whereas Harper's, we remember, refused to express any opinion, the Century's monthly column "Topics of the Time" was devoted primarily to social and political issues. The Century, we might note, never called itself a strictly literary magazine. The first number of the magazine had promised "the elaborate discussion of living, practical questions." During the nineties, the Century again claimed to be "the illustrated magazine that deals most with recent and mooted periods of domestic history, and with the burning questions of the day. . . ." And the Century did espouse reforms. Jacob A. Riis, with whom Gilder worked on the Tenement House Commission, wrote of New York's seamier side in, for example, the ironic "Light in Dark Places. A Study of the Better New York," and "Days in Little Italy." Washington Gladden wrote on "The Problem of Poverty" and Henry Cabot Lodge on "Why Patronage in Offices is Un-American." The Century thus "expressed itself editorially with more force than any other American magazine, but it was not thereby a journal of independent

69 Ibid., p. 102.

70 "Topics of the Time," Century, XLII (October, 1891), 950.
A look at the causes championed illustrates why. To fight slums or poverty or patronage is hardly daring. To campaign for a copyright law or civil service reform takes little courage. The Century's policy, that is, was based on what Lutwack calls "a broad optimistic religion of humanity" which only in rare occasions would offend a reader. The Century set itself up as a lone fighter, but it was favored to win at the start.

The stance of a champion of Right and Justice and of the Average Man marks the Century's attitude throughout, but its morality was always narrow and its judgments timid. Since its editor, from the time of the magazine's christening in 1881 till 1909, was Richard Watson Gilder, and its unofficial editor and chief contributor Edmund Clarence Stedman, it should not surprise us that even the Century, gallant though its fight was against the prudent Harper's, should align itself with the forces of conservatism. Its concern with current events was an admirable attempt in a cautious age to stand its ground in the changing American scene, but the attempt was weak-kneed. And in its fiction the Century lagged behind Harper's. Defender of the ideal, Gilder printed romantic tales, mostly by women, whose titles are not even worth recording. F. Marion Crawford's historical novels were the Century's

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71Lutwack, op. cit., p. 169.
main attraction. The rare times Gilder was faced with more promising material, he censored passages in Twain, and rejected Crane's *Maggie* and even Richard Harding Davis' *Gallegher*. It is, it is true, too easy to be unjust to Gilder. He braved contumely to print Twain at all, and Whitman's tribute to Gilder's support has already been referred to. But if he was "a forerunner of honest candor" as well as "a gentleman of the old school," he was at best "a transitional figure in the history of our taste."72 Although in his letters to Howells he professed to be in sympathy with realism, "it was quite another matter to go on record as a supporter of Howells,"73 and the *Century* enshrined romanticism in its critical columns as in its fiction. Furthermore when Gilder was disposed to moderate his prissiness, we have L. Frank Tooker's word for it that he and another assistant were "the two grim puritans of the office."74 Beer is quite right. "The fiction? Not so good."75


73 Lutwack, "William Dean Howells and the 'Editor's Study,'" p. 200.


If, as Beer also claims, "the Century's strength was its critical side,"\textsuperscript{76} then that strength can lie only in the quantity of its criticism, not in its quality. The Century's reformist tone extended to literature, to, in fact, all the arts. Sacrificingly, dedicatedly, the Century was bringing Culture to a mass audience. "Civilization," Gilder wrote, "is travelling westward on the million wings, shall we say of the 'Century'..."\textsuperscript{77} Hence the wide ground that the magazine covered. Besides its studies of art, during the nineties the Century published articles on Mozart, Gounod, Berlioz, Schuman, Grieg, and Dvorak, but these were little more than biographical studies. Similarly of literature. Sticking largely to what we have called the canon of genteel criticism—nineteenth century British and American literature—the Century nevertheless, unlike the other magazines, reached out toward other periods. But hear the titles: "The Author of Gulliver," "The Author of Robinson Crusoe." It would be unfair to say that there was no criticism in these nor even that they were badly written; the point, once again, is merely that these articles were little more than discursive studies intending to familiarize a lay reader with the salient facts. The Century was simply proselyting.

\textsuperscript{76}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{77}\textit{Letters of Richard Watson Gilder}, p. 394.
Still, the Century did print the largest quantity of critical material, especially of poetry—as, for that matter, it published the most verse. All of Stedman's major works, for example—Victorian Poets during the seventies, Poets of America during the eighties, and, during the nineties, The Nature and Elements of Poetry—were first serialized in the Century. Of the last series, Tooker justly comments that "In no other American magazine would have been found so unusual a feature. . . ." Surely some credit must be accorded the Century that in its zealous desire to enlighten the public, it dared to print what to so many must have seemed "desert regions in the magazine." But having studied the imitativeness of The Nature and Elements, indeed of Stedman, the Century's representative critic, we can award no more credit than this. It stepped ahead of the other major magazines; but it did not step far forward.

As we might expect, the same must be said of the rest of the Century's criticism. The generosity of the magazine toward criticism we must praise anew: Henry Van Dyke on Tennyson, Frank Dempster Sherman on Aldrich, Woodberry on Lowell and Shelley, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps on Whittier—the articles abound. All this even exclusive of the usual letters and reminiscences and biographical studies—"Poe in Philadelphia," "The Hawthornes in Lenox." Yet the canon

78Tooker, op. cit., p. 37.
of reputable authors remains rigidly defined and the judgments expressed once again parallel those we studied in Stedman. Tennyson is revered because, in the conflict between doubt and faith, "faith has the victory"; or again, "he represents the century better than any man." Shelley is admired for "his aid to the cause of social justice and liberty," Whittier for his "dedication to God." To be sure, some work was well done. In a study of John Burroughs, Hamilton Wright Mabie makes some discriminating distinctions between Burroughs and Thoreau. Aware of the frequently noted similarity between himself and his subject, even Aldrich is spurred to a perceptive analysis of Robert Herrick. Yet here too the genteel bias is to be seen, among other examples, in Aldrich attributing the "coarseness of the man" to the "coarseness of the time." Some pickings were to be had on the bone, but they were slim. The Century may have been better dressed than Harper's or even the Atlantic. But it was still no rare bird.

Both Harper's Magazine and the Century published articles about their own histories; Scribner's Magazine, being more closely tied to its parent's strings than was either Harper's or the Century, printed instead an article on "Charles Scribner's Sons. The History of a Publishing
Besides detailing the different alliances of the various Scribners and their associates, the article explains what Roger Burlingame and others so often need to re-explain, that the old *Scribner's Monthly*, begun in 1870, was a Scribner step-child only; Josiah Holland and his friend Roswell Smith, having offered Charles Scribner four-tenths of the stock for his name, established a separate joint-stock company, Scribner and Co. (compare Charles Scribner and Co.—later Charles Scribner's Sons) to publish the new magazine. It was because Holland and Smith wanted only the prestige of the Scribner name whereas the firm wanted to control a magazine, that the *Monthly* was ultimately sold in 1881 (to become the *Century*), and a new publication, *Scribner's Magazine*, was born in January, 1887.

*Scribner's Magazine* claimed to be "a new publication in every sense, in no way a revival of any part of the past. . . ." but its claim was clearly false. "It might have horrified the founders of *Scribner's Magazine,*" writes Roger Burlingame son of the *Magazine*'s editor, "to say that the *Monthly* served it as a model, but, looking back over the sweep of American literature, it seems to have been a sound archetype in form and variety of substance of American

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79 *Scribner's Magazine*, XVI (December, 1894), 793-804.
80 Ibid., p. 801.
magazines in general. . ."81 When the Century, née Scribner's Monthly, was so much like Harper's, it would be surprising if Scribner's Magazine differed much from its namesake. The Century, as we saw, was notable for the quality and quantity of its illustrations; like the Century, Scribner's excelled in its pictorial material. The great illustrators of the day, Howard Pyle, A. B. Frost, Howard Chandler Christy, and Charles Dana Gibson were on Scribner's staff. The renowned Joseph Chapin was "part of the very soul of the House of Scribner." For this Scribner publication as for the earlier one, it could be said that "It was the illustrations as much as the text of Scribner's which made the Magazine's reputation."82

Perhaps even more of the later Scribner's was it true that illustrations were important, for Scribner's "great enterprise" was in art. More extensively than did the Century, Scribner's published the familiar heavily illustrated descriptions of Newport or Constantinople or the Paris Exposition; like the Century it had its series on American Wood-Engravers and its articles on "George Frederick Watts, R. A." True, there was perhaps, as Lutwack suggests, a subtle shift in emphasis. Scribner's labored to

82 Ibid., p. 233.
be cosmopolitan, strove for "bourgeois sophistication," and at times its articles took on a learned tone. Brownell's series on French art, for example, was mature criticism. A column on "The Field of Art" which was unillustrated and critical was, for a time, featured monthly. Nevertheless the picture-gallery approach characteristic of the Century was evident in Scribner's too. Once again quantity was all. "The proportion of art features sometimes ran as high as four out of ten articles in a single issue."\(^3\) "It was Burlingame's intent 'to print good reading first and then give it all the illustrative help possible' and not to 'make a picture book merely,' but as the Magazine grew and the House gained access to such a wealth of picture material, . . . there were times when a special number contained groups of pictures alone. . . ."\(^4\)

It is not surprising, therefore, that, like the Century, Scribner's was weak in literary criticism; not even the quantity of its criticism was vast. Scribner's printed less literary criticism than did either the Century or Harper's or the Atlantic. Of criticism of literary movements (to be distinguished from critico-biographical material) Scribner's published only two articles during the nineties--both by Aline Gorren. To some extent, this gap

\(^3\)Lutwack, op. cit., p. 229.
\(^4\)Burlingame, op. cit., p. 234.
was the result of the policy of its editor, Edward Livermore Burlingame, who remains disturbingly elusive to the student because he published no books (he edited two works: *Art, Life, and Theories of Richard Wagner* (1875), a translation; and *Current Discussion* (1878), a "collection of chief English essays on questions of the time"), printed no signed articles, and wrote letters, that, according to Lutwack, are singularly uninforming. Burlingame, who edited the *Magazine* from 1887 till 1914, slighted the merely literary. He objected to literary columns as "cut-and-dried" (*Scribner's* monthly column "Point of View" was non-literary), and thus forfeited the field in which the *Atlantic* and *Harper's* succeeded so handsomely; and although a letter written just before the publication of the first *Scribner's* states his plan to print "short critical articles from time to time on classes and groups of books or on special phases of literary activity," the plan, we have seen, was not adhered to.

Burlingame substituted for criticism the ersatz that satisfied Scudder and Alden and Gilder: critico-biographical material, including letters. Indeed, Burlingame's great coup, promoted even before the publication of *Scribner's* first issue was the unpublished letters of Thackeray, presented in a series; this was followed during the decade

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by Carlyle's unpublished letters, "Lowell's Letters to Poe," a series of Stevenson's letters, etc. Stevenson, we soon discover, was Scribner's star attraction, being the admired subject of "Home Life at Vailima," "Vailima Table-Talk," and "Stevenson at Play." Yet other authors were discussed—they were accorded the same biographical approach:

"Reminiscences of Dr. Holmes as Professor of Anatomy," "Mr. Lowell as a Teacher," "Conversations and Opinions of Victor Hugo." Nor do articles which seem to promise more deliver: Andrew Lang on "Moliere" (June, 1891,) merely discusses "the main events which are certain in a life of obscurity"; Andrew Lang on "Homer" (October, 1892,) traces "the development of the Homeric Question"--a biographical question on Homer's "date, on his method of composition, on the life he knew." And Andrew Lang on "An Unpublished Work of Scott" (December, 1893,) simply introduces the "Private Letters of King James's Reign," a fragment, a "literary curiosity," that Scott wrote in the style of the reign of James I, first as a joke, but later as parts of different novels. Scribner's published the entire fragment--Lang's article was but a generalized history. Once again criticism was no more than hack work, a pedestrian job.

The subjects of Scribner's criticism were equally pedestrian. Unlike its competitors, Scribner's was not unduly chauvinistic; it refused to indulge in the fawning attention customarily paid to nineteenth century American
authors. "In the years between 1887 and 1900 only four Americans were treated in *Scribner's*—Lowell, Holmes, Thoreau, and Bunner..." But the magazine's neglect of the New England hierarchy stemmed from no independent critical approach. The content of *Scribner's* did not differ markedly from that of the other magazines. Moliere, Homer, and Scott; Balzac, Goethe, Sainte-Beuve—these authors, safe and established, were familiar to *Scribner's* readers. They were familiar too to Stedman and associates who, fearful of experimentation, could remain unalarmed by criticism in the *Century's* most important rival. The canon of approved authors continued unquestioned. The narrow core of continental writers and Victorian and contemporary English authors sanctioned by conventional taste was enthroned in *Scribner's* as in the other magazines.

Perhaps the magazine's emphasis on British and foreign material resulted from *Scribner's* dependence on foreign critics. When criticism was so small a proportion of the magazine's contents, no one critic was published with any frequency, but those who wrote most often for *Scribner's* were British. Lang was *Scribner's* most regular contributor; Austin Dobson and Augustine Birrell were other *Scribner* contributors. Of American critics, only William Crary Brownell and Aline Gorren were printed more than once. With 

such an indifferent and random method of selecting critics, no wonder Scribner's criticism was undistinguished. Lang, who could never live down preferring Rider Haggard to Hardy, and who once said that "Writing about contemporary books is the merest journalism," contributed, we have seen, only discursive studies of classical authors. Brownell, who wrote for the magazine during the forty years that he served as a literary adviser and book-editor for the Scribner firm and thus comes closest to being Scribner's staff critic, nevertheless rarely determined policy. During the nineties his influence was certainly minor. Except for two or three chapters from Victorian Prose Masters published late in the decade, Brownell's contributions to the magazine were French Traits and French Art, and these are specialized works. Furthermore, it could hardly be argued that a humanist like Brownell, however significant his part in the humanist movement, could do much to enliven a conservative magazine. As usual, Beer puts it aptly: "Style, Mr. Brownell, will not always be subject to dicta of the admirable Matthew Arnold. . . ." Only Aline Gorren in her excellent study of "The French Symbolists" in the March, 1893, issue and, to a lesser extent, in her portrait of

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"A French Literary Circle" in January, 1898, wrote impressive criticism for Scribner's—and she had to wait before she was published. "On trouvait dans cet article d'Aline Gorren, avec une brève revue des œuvres de Verlaine, de Laforgue, de Rimbaud, une étude sommaire de poètes inconnus en Amérique, Gustave Kahn, François Poictevin; et les premières remarques intelligentes sur l'œuvre de Mallarmé." Miss Gorren's literary sophistication and independent judgment were scarcely characteristic of the rest of Scribner's criticism.

Scribner's fiction was an undistinguished as its criticism. The eminent authors like James and Howells and Meredith and Hardy whose names are listed in the magazine's index might seem, at first, to disprove such a conclusion, but a perusal of the works themselves shows that this is not the case. The authors may be estimable; their creations were not. Hardy's The Fiddler of the Reels, Meredith's The Amazing Marriage and Howells' The Story of a Play were little better than the mawkish nonsense published at their side. Despite its service to the realistic cause in publishing Harold Frederic's In the Valley and The Copperhead, Scribner's, like the other magazines of the nineties, preferred romantic fiction. During the nineties Stevenson and Osbourne's The Wrecker, Thomas Nelson Page's Red Rock,

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89Taupin, op. cit., pp. 29-30.
A Chronicle of Reconstruction, and Richard Harding Davis' Soldiers of Fortune were doled out in installments to eager readers. Endless other romantic tales by these authors were published, as well as sentimental works by Barrie, Kipling, Joel Chandler Harris, and George Washington Cable. Scribner's, it is clear, hardly offered a market for earnest, non-imitative work. It did, it is true, grudgingly publish "The Open Boat" in June, 1897, but of the rest of Crane's work Burlingame wrote, "I don't think he is going to outrun the limits of a sensation."90 Similarly, Edith Wharton published a number of short stories in Scribner's during the nineties, but she found few of these worthy to be reprinted in 1899 in her first collected volume. Instead she echoes the by-now familiar complaint: "Again and again in my editorial life I have encountered . . . editorial timidity."91

Editorial timidity is, of course, even more apparent in the magazine's approach to poetry. Scribner's followed the pattern, known even to contemporary magazine readers, of printing poems only as fillers at the end of articles. Acceptable poems might remain unpublished indefinitely, being printed only when appropriate space presented itself.

90Burlingame, op. cit., p. 133.
Naturally, long poems requiring a page or more for themselves rarely appeared; when they did they were bedecked with illustrations. The poetry itself was familiarly genteel; Frank Dempster Sherman, Clinton Scollard, and Aldrich were the most frequent contributors. A Stevenson poem could be found in almost any issue, while the innocuous humorous poetry of H. C. Bunner was published with almost the same frequency.

Occasionally more deserving poetry by Guiney or Reese or Wharton was printed, but invariably the poems—like Wharton's "Botticelli's Madonna in the Louvre" or "To Trojan Helen"—were dignified by their classical or literary subject matter. *Scribner's* also published two poems by Emily Dickinson: "Renunciation" in August, 1890, and "The Parting" ("My life closed twice. . . .") in June, 1896, but here again the daring is deceptive. To begin with, the text of these poems underwent the meliorating changes familiar to students of the Todd-Higginson texts. Furthermore, Burlingame, "whose curious indifference to Emily Dickinson was probably responsible for the *Scribners* not becoming her publisher," accepted even these bowdlerized versions under stress. The magazine's own "Point of View" complained of "the perversity which is implied in a poet who, though capable of taking one's breath away, nevertheless

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prefers to do so in arbitrary rather than in artistic fashion."93 Constantly we are reminded that Scribner's definition of "artistic fashion" was indeed narrow.

Only in its non-fiction did Scribner's distinguish itself—as did the other magazines. As Howells charged in "The Man of Letters As a Man of Business," the magazines are "two-thirds popular science, politics, economics, and the timely topics which I will call contemporanics. . . ."94 Scribner's, the last of the four major magazines to start its career, and unburdened with the Atlantic's literary tradition, carried perhaps the largest share of "contemporanics." With even more zeal than the other magazines, Scribner's reported the Spanish-American War. The war's major heroes—R. H. Davis and Teddy Roosevelt—wrote for the Magazine. Scribner's series on "The Great Businesses" seems still to be remembered. But surely no further evidence of the barrenness of literary criticism need be cited. This chapter has consistently tried to document the failure of the major magazines of the nineties to nurture the seeds of a new literature or to nourish the more serious writer. Instead, the frequency, indeed the regularity, with which


the magazines starved literature by printing masses of non-literary material has been attacked. "I can praise this in your magazines:" writes Beer, "your journalistic sides are excellent."\footnote{Beer, op. cit., p. 233.}
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INTRODUCTION

(PART II)
INTRODUCTION

The conservatism exemplified, to some extent in Stedman, and in the major magazines of the nineties, does not totally represent the decade. "A generation that saw, even with indifference, the work of Richardson and Sullivan in architecture, of Homer and Eakins and Ryder in painting and of St. Gaudens in sculpture, of Clarence King and Raphael Pumpelly, Willard Gibbs and Jeffries Wyman in science, of William Graham Sumner and Lester Ward in sociology, Francis Parkman and Henry Adams in history, and Henry George in economics, of Oliver Wendell Holmes in law, of Charles Peirce and William James in philosophy, was not wholly sterile."¹ In all these areas, a more or less conscious revolt against traditional patterns of thought was being fought. In literature, a similar battle was occurring, chiefly in the field of fiction; yet in poetry too, the impact of the new science and the repercussions from the Civil War shattered the security of the genteel writers. Undoubtedly, the established American poets and their disciples retained command. But "Americans are too accustomed to await patiently the renaissance in 1912 and

to forget that to the Nineties belong the first editions of Emily Dickinson's poetry, two collections by E. A. Robinson and Stephen Crane, the sonnets of George Santayana, and some poems of Edwin Markham, Edgar Lee Masters, Hamlin Garland, William Dean Howells, Harriet Monroe, Lizette Reese, Louise Guiney, William Vaughn Moody, and Richard Hovey.

... The importance of the battle was not lost on young men and women like Carl Sandburg, Robert Frost, Vachel Lindsay, Anna Trumbull Stickney, George Sterling, Amy Lowell, and William Carlos Williams, who were already of an age to appreciate the new poetry.  

The situation during the nineties, however, was indeed paradoxical; any dividing line between conservatives and rebels is at best arbitrary. If any one figure adequately represents the new forces it is Richard Hovey who, in his experiments with the technique of poetry and his receptivity to French symbolism introduced "a new seriousness in the practice of poetry in America." Yet, while Hovey was sympathetic toward some of the aims of the realists, he accepted genteel idealism. Furthermore, both Hovey and Bliss Carman, for example, objected to Whitman's unconventional form, while the genteel Stedman was one of the earliest critics to welcome "the good gray poet."

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Again, Howells disapproved of Whitman; yet he wrote the most significant review of Emily Dickinson's poetry published during the nineties. Perhaps these very paradoxes, however, demonstrate that the nineties was an age of turmoil in which traditional aesthetic principles could no longer be imposed dictatorially.

The most outspoken cry against the genteel tradition was uttered by the bohemians, a group which— at times— included Hovey. Hovey, Carman, and Louise Guiney, the publishers Herbert Stone, Herbert Small, and Herbert Copeland and F. H. Day, and architects Ralph Adams Cram and Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue united in an attempt to create an aesthetic movement in America. Together with the more iconoclastic James Gibbons Huneker, Vance Thompson, and Gelett Burgess, the bohemians represented a salutary rebellion against "the platitudes and insipidities" of a materialistic culture. With only the "little magazines" as their outlets of expression, they turned to the decadents in England and the symbolists in France for inspiration in their campaign for greater freedom of theme and form. Yet the contrast between American and European fin-de-siècle tendencies emphasizes dramatically the limits of American attempts at revolt. "American literature at the end of the nineteenth century was not quite ready to assimilate or to borrow intelligently from the decadent movement in England and from the subjectivist and often esoteric movements in
France. Borrowings tended to have an artificial look and to be self-conscious."^{3} Although ultimately, it is true, French literature in particular "helped make possible the poetry of T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, Ezra Pound, Allen Tate, and Hart Crane," during the nineties the power of the bohemians and the scope of the little magazines was undoubtedly restricted.

It is within the tradition itself that the more significant rumblings of the future are to be found. In the changing attitudes toward poetry and poetic figures expressed even in conventional literary journals like the *Bookman* and the *Dial*, and particularly in the reception of Emily Dickinson and Edwin Arlington Robinson, lie the fore­shadowings of a criticism which soon would welcome still greater extremes of style and content. The genteel writers themselves clearly recognized that the idealistic tradition had reached a standstill; their faith in dramatic poetry and poetic drama represents their willingness to compromise with the realistic tendencies of the age. If it was left to others to advance less cautiously in this movement for a poetry that would deal with the realities of life in a compelling and vigorous form, it was to the credit of the genteel writers that they took the first step.

CHAPTER III

MAGAZINES OF THE NINETIES--THE ADVANCE GUARD

The Chap-Book and Stone and Kimball

The Lark and Gelett Burgess

Mlle New York and James Gibbons Huneker

The Bookman and Harry Thurston Peck

The Dial and William Morton Payne

Poet-Lore and Helen Clarke and Charlotte Porter
MAGAZINES OF THE NINETIES--THE ADVANCE GUARD

Although estimates of the number of little magazines published during the nineties vary considerably, probably because the criteria of classification differ, the list of over 150 in P. W. Faxon's Bibliographies of Ephemeral Bibelots is representative, and certainly ample to exhibit the popularity of these "advance guard" magazines. Like the countless little magazines which sprang up during the twenties and later, the "dinkey magazines" of the nineties multiplied with amoebian frequency, numbering highest during the peak years of 1896 and 1897. Just as Harriet Monroe's Poetry Magazine presaged the literary renaissance of 1912, so this flurry of little magazines is the surest evidence that the nineties was indeed a period of ferment.

Writing primarily of the twentieth century, Frederick Hoffman states, in his superb study of The Little Magazine, that "little magazines usually come into being for the purpose of attacking conventional modes of expression and of bringing into the open new and unorthodox literary theories and practices."¹ The little magazines of the nineties had precisely this aim--it is, in fact, their function as protest magazines which gives them their

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Editors and authors both, finding the standard magazines closed to all but traditional themes and styles, sought new means of publication. They believed that there was an audience not being tapped by the large circulation magazines, that there were a few, a 'remnant,' who would support experimentation. As a nineties editor explains, "The movement asserted itself as a revolt against the commonplace; it aimed to overthrow the staid respectibility of the larger magazines and to open to younger writers opportunities to be heard, before they had obtained recognition from the autocratic editors."^2

The "germ carrier" of the many dinkey magazines, and "one of the few literary magazines of the nineties which can be called the predecessors of the little magazines of the twentieth century,"^3 was the Chicago Chap-Book. During its short four years, the Chap-Book influenced the thought of the nineties as certainly as did the Atlantic or Harper's. Although its circulation fell far short of the 175,000 reached by Harper's, the Chap-Book nevertheless equalled the Atlantic's circulation of 14,000 by 1895, and exceeded the Atlantic's steady figure with a high of 16,500 in the spring of 1896. Published semimonthly at five cents an

^3Hoffman, op. cit., p. 235.
issue, the magazine succeeded partly because of its cheapness. More significant was the wisdom of its editor, "a fellow of infinite charm," Herbert S. Stone, partner in the publishing firm of Stone and Kimball.

Herbert Stone and Ingalls Kimball began the Chap-Book in May 15, 1894, while they were still students at Harvard, but soon after the first issue they moved the magazine and the firm to Chicago, a city whose budding cultural maturity they helped quicken. Note, for example, a contemporary article published in the Atlantic on "The Upward Movement in Chicago" which praises their contribution. In 1896 Kimball bought out the firm and moved to New York, but Stone, remaining in Chicago, kept the Chap-Book and published it under the newly formed Herbert S. Stone and Company. Stone, writes Sidney Kramer, the historian of the two firms, "never expected to found a regional publishing house, specializing in local authors and works of information on a specific region, such as Frederick J. Schulte had attempted between 1891 and 1893 in Chicago, or William Doxey maintained in San Francisco. His work, like himself, was essentially cosmopolitan."4

The bibliography of books Stone published easily substantiates this claim. Although the Boston firm of

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Copeland and Day had first choice in importing the editions of Elkin Matthews and John Lane, Stone and Kimball were no laggards in publishing English and continental literature. On their list were John Davidson, Yeats, Kenneth Grahame, Maeterlinck, Ibsen, and Verlaine. In 1897 they became George Bernard Shaw's first American publishers, and in 1899 they printed the first authorized edition of *Esther Waters*. Stone and Kimball also gave their imprint to works by Santayana, Harold Frederic, and Carman and Hovey, in addition to books by Hamlin Garland which "were the rock on which the firm was securely founded." It is clear why, despite the firm's short life, Stone and Kimball fill an exalted niche in the history of publishing. Their renown is legendary. "The substance to this legend is that Stone and Kimball were actually publishing in 1894 and 1895 many books of immediate appeal and more lasting value, in more consistently attractive editions than any American trade publisher had thought it worth while to attempt."\(^5\)

In May, 1894, Stone wrote to his family, "To speak plainly the *Chap-Book* is no more nor less than a semi-monthly advertisement and regular prospectus for Stone and Kimball."\(^6\) The first volume of the *Chap-Book* certainly seems but a house organ, a trumpet for the firm. The

\(^{5}\)Ibid., p. 71.

\(^{6}\)Ibid., p. 25.
magazine announced Stone and Kimball books and printed Stone and Kimball authors. A kind of mutual admiration society grew—similar to the clique of the Southern Fugitives during the twenties. C.G.D. Roberts wrote on his cousin, Bliss Carman, and Carman wrote on Roberts. Or Carman discussed Gertrude Hall or William Sharp, other Stone and Kimball authors. Soon, however, the *Chap-Book* untied its parental strings, or rather bound its parents to itself. Publishing the work of non-Stone and Kimball authors, the *Chap-Book* established its own list and its own audience. The book firm even published Gertrude Hall's translation of Verlaine's poetry after some of the material had been printed in the magazine. "One wonders," Kramer writes, after commenting on the propensity of authors to gravitate to New York publishers, "if it would have been possible for Stone and Kimball and Herbert S. Stone and Company to exist at all in Chicago if they had depended on books. The periodicals were more profitable."\(^7\)

The *Chap-Book*’s growth can partly be attributed to the shift in assistant editors. During the first two months, Bliss Carman assisted Stone, but from September, 1894, until the *Chap-Book*’s death in July, 1898, Harrison Garfield Rhodes acted as assistant editor—as well as chief reader for Stone and Kimball and Herbert S. Stone and Company.

\(^7\)ibid., p. 123.
Unlike Carman who, his biographer records, "never showed much interest in continental literature," Rhodes was familiar with Symbolist literature and, having spent a year in France, with many of the Symbolists themselves. The Chap-Book's chief glory lies in the attention it gave to French literature, and for this Rhodes must be partly responsible. Some explanation must lie too in what modern critics would call the Zeitgeist, for "the years 1895 and 1896 seem to have marked the peak of fin de siècle tendencies and interest in decadence in America."

\[\text{L'année 1895 est celle où l'Amérique s'est le plus intéressée aux écrivains français. Il faut attendre jusqu'à 1914 pour voir un tel intérêt s'élever au sujet d'une littérature étrangère. C'est l'année où l'on discute si violemment les idées de Nordau, c'est l'année où paraît le Bookman de Peck, et c'est à partir de cette année-là qu'on va voir paraître une foule de petites revues révolutionnaires imitées des revues symbolistes françaises et consacrées pour la plupart à la propagande française.}\]

In July, 1894, the Chap-Book published a Verlaine issue which included a poem by Verlaine, an article on Verlaine by Anatole France—both translated, and a portrait of Verlaine. Two months later Epigrammes by Verlaine


10 Taupin, op. cit., p. 32.
appeared. The magazine printed some Mallarmé quatrains in December, 1894; Hovey's translation of Mallarmé's _Hérodias_ in January, 1895; and an illustration of Mallarmé by F. Vallotton in September, 1895. Again, in February, 1896, after Verlaine's death, Mrs. Reginald De Koven submitted "Verlaine: A Feminine Appreciation," and in May, 1896, Mallarmé wrote a letter to Rhodes on Rimbaud which the _Chap-Book_ printed, along with a portrait of Rimbaud. Even for these exciting years, this surely was an impressive record. It was, after all, the little magazines that created the _Zeitgeist:_ "French literature received scant study in the pages of representative American magazines."

The _Chap-Book's_ affection for France can be seen particularly in the field of art. The magazine criticized French _expositions_, reproduced French drawings, and employed French artists. One of its most prized artists was the Frenchman Felix Vallotton who drew the portraits of Mallarmé and Rimbaud. During the poster craze when colored lithographs were used for advertising, Lautrec did poster work for the _Chap-Book_. Poster designs for almost any type of merchandise became so artistic and popular that Stone and Kimball imported and sold French posters made for others.

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In later years when the Chap-Book tempered its devotion to French literature, its admiration for French art endured.

Other artists for the Chap-Book, particularly Frank Hazenplug and Will Bradley, reflected Aubrey Beardsley's influence. Beardsley himself contributed some drawings, most notably his famous illustration for Poe's "Masque of the Red Death" in August, 1894, which Stone and Kimball also reproduced in their ten-volume edition of Poe, edited by Stedman and Woodberry. The Chap-Book's show of art no doubt mirrored the popularity of illustrations in all the magazines of the nineties, but Stone defended his practice on principle: "Since The Chap-Book aims in a measure to represent certain features of this time as, in past centuries, the original Chap-Books suggested the spirit of their period, it is manifestly a part of my function to record artistic as well as literary movements."12

The Chap-Book's indebtedness to Beardsley and its partiality for symbolist and decadent literature induced contemporary and later critics to liken the magazine to the Yellow Book. This comparison Kramer takes great pains to dispute. The Chap-Book, first published May 15, 1894, appeared, it is true, after the Yellow Book, which began April 12, 1894, but, as Kramer argues, the correspondence

12"Notes," Chap-Book, III (November 1, 1895), 509.
in time is too close for the Chap-Book to be called an imitator. More important, "The manner of speech of The Chap-Book, as well as the essential psychological difference between optimism and the 'subtilizing refinement' of the leading English writers of the first years of the decade, differentiated it from The Yellow Book with which it was popularly associated then and later."

No American periodical, in fact, aped the Yellow Book or even reviewed it favorably. The American fin de siècle mood was more hedonistic than morbid, more gay than morose. The Carman-Hovey "escape to vagabondia" was the furthest step in the direction of aestheticism taken by American thought. Consistently Americans repudiated European pessimism--even in a comparison of the satire of Swift and Anatole France, Brander Matthews objected to the Frenchman as "pessimistic."

Thus, as other critics besides Kramer conclude, "It is not to be understood that these ephemeral periodicals advocated art for art's sake or decadence exactly in the European manner. . . . Their link with decadence was in general trifling and artificial."  

"That entire considerable school of art which, according to the temperament of the critic, has been dubbed decadent, symbolistic, impressionistic,

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14 Limpus, op. cit., pp. 121-122.
romantic or merely Young, had but slight American equivalent."^{15}

For that matter, Americans were actively hostile toward aestheticism. The conservatives, of course, disapproved: in 1882, during Wilde's first visit to New York, Aldrich fearfully refused all social engagements. But the Chap-Book too, particularly in its later years, was caustic. The slightly new format of October, 1895, in which the magazine used cover designs and placed the table of contents inside, apparently heralded a more drastic change in policy. Its earlier friendliness forgotten, the magazine bitterly attacked Symons and Beardsley, the editors of the new Savoy, "a much more distinctive publication" than the Yellow Book:^16

They are men of great cleverness and no little real ability, but men who are decadent in the unpleasant sense of the word. Mr. Symons has become notorious for his immoral pose; he has sought a reputation for wickedness and, in some quarters he has, doubtless been successful. As for Mr. Aubrey Beardsley, he is a man of such splendid gifts that one had hoped to overlook qualities less attractive. His work, however, has often been so obtrusively indecent that this is impossible, at best. "The Savoy" is absurd, impossible, and Mr. Leonard Smithers, the publisher, will soon find it out. . . .^{17}

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^{17}"Notes," Chap-Book, IV (December, 1895), 99.
In January, 1896, "One Word More" was added by Hamilton Wright Mabie, who accused decadent literature of confusing "mannerism with originality, and unconventionality with power." Hereafter contributors were more carefully screened. Increasingly English rather than French, they were, in either case, unoffending—Stevenson, William Sharp, Henry Harland, John Davidson.

In March, 1896, the Chap-Book doubled its price to ten cents an issue, two dollars a year, and increased the number of pages; in January, 1897, it enlarged its page size to the twelve by eight and a half inches of the conventional English literary review. The larger size vividly symbolized the loss of the freshness and originality of the earlier issues—the Chap-Book itself spoke of its "younger perhaps more radical days." Fiction was contributed by local colorists like Maria Louise Pool and Octave Thanet whose work, however, had already been endorsed by conservative magazines. Poetry, usually excitingly original, was now too frequently the rehearsed performance of Stedman and Aldrich, Madison Cawein and Frank Dempster Sherman. The Chap-Book was particularly imitative in its criticism. Its authors and titles echo the vapidities of the conservative magazines. In addition to his article on decadence, Mabie intoned wearisomely on "Recent American Essays" and (!) "Mr. Aldrich in Poetry and Prose." Other stale professionals were Brander Matthews and Maurice
Thompson. And could there be a more familiar routine than Wallace de Groot Rice's article on "The Verse of 1897," which merely listed, uncritically, collected editions, new publications, anthologies, etc.? "The thorough critical essay, especially the close analysis of a writer's new work or the study of tendencies and schools in foreign literatures, that had made the first volumes of The Chap-Book so distinctively valuable, was continued only intermittently." 18

The deficiencies of the later volumes, however, cannot obscure the brilliance of the early Chap-Books nor, for that matter, totally dim the brightness in even the later ones. In the very issue in which the Chap-Book enlarged its size and adopted the mood as well as the form of the English literary review, it also began serialization of James' What Maisie Knew. Late in its career too, in July, 1897, the Chap-Book published John Jay Chapman's fine study of Whitman. And in February, 1897, there is Louise Guiney's beautiful salute to Housman, the "young stranger" to whom others can but "touch their rusty lances to the rim of his shining shield." "Miss Louise Guiney's delightful appreciation of Mr. A. E. Housman's book of poems, A Shropshire Lad, in a recent number of a Chicago journal,"

18 Kramer, op. cit., p. 48.
praised the Bookman, "has caused a number of readers to make inquiries about the book and its author."\textsuperscript{19}

In July, 1898, the Chap-Book ceased publication and was absorbed by the Dial. A number of reasons have been given for its death: it depended on newsstand sales rather than on annual subscriptions so that ultimately both its circulation and its advertising decreased; it unwisely diminished the number of its illustrations and prints. Perhaps the best explanation is that its success was its undoing. By inspiring the birth of other little magazines it diffused its strength; both its staff and its audience dispersed elsewhere. Too soon dead, the Chap-Book lives nevertheless. The Chap-Book remains a highlight in the history of little magazines and of American magazines in general. Here was a magazine, during the supposedly stagnant nineties, printing Yeats, James, Hardy, Crane, Garland, Verlaine, Mallarme, Maeterlinck. No wonder an enraptured reader once exclaimed, "My heart leaped up like Wordsworth's when he saw the rainbow."

Like the rest of its criticism, the Chap-Book's comments on its rivals and descendants are pointed. When it terms the Lark "intimate" in its charm and adds that "its friends will be appreciative but there will not be

\textsuperscript{19}"Chronicle and Comment," Bookman, V (March, 1897), 11.
many of them," the Chap-Book accurately delimits the Lark's virtues and defects. The Lark is a delight and yet it wears. Its humor charms but soon palls. As the Chap-Book also noted, "The Lark is so good that it ought to die, in order to make its life perfect."\(^{20}\)

In the tradition of little magazines, the Lark did die young. The two volumes preserving its life cover but two years, from its birth in May, 1895, to the last regular issue in April, 1897, and its Epilark in May. Like the later Secession which guaranteed only two years of publication, the Lark promised in its first issue that when singing a song or telling a story "is no longer to our liking" then "this little house of pleasure will close its doors." At the end, it waggishly quoted Dickens:

"That's rayther a sudden pull-up, ain't it, Sammy?" inquired Mr. Weller.
"Not a bit on it," said Sam; "she'll vish there wos more, and that's the great art o' letter writin'." \textit{Pickwick Papers}

We do not, it is true, vish there wos more; but at least the little house of pleasure was not open overlong.

What there is is a monthly from the Far West of San Francisco whose editors were obviously attempting something different. In particular, they flaunted a rather arty format. The original issues, displaying ragged right-hand margins, were printed on Chinese bamboo paper which, \footnote{\textit{"Notes," Chap-Book, V} (May 15, 1896), 236.}
however, soon began to tear and "which today disintegrates if you look at it." Deliberately slim, the monthly eschewed a table of contents and other "filling" which "pad out the bulk" of many magazines. Its sixteen unnumbered pages were unsigned, and if it was not clear whether those whose names were listed on the verso of the title page were editors or authors that was because they were both. The Lark did not solicit contributions; it was primarily the achievement of Gelett Burgess who, as he put it, had "to turn so many handsprings in each number."

Assisted, it is true, by Bruce Porter, who was co-editor until April, 1897, and contributor afterwards, Burgess was nevertheless a one-man show. "The names used in the first volume of The Lark—Edmond Charlroy, Richard Redforth, Lewis Holt, and James F. Merioneth, 2nd—are all pen names for himself." For the second volume he still wrote more than half of each issue, but he was now willing to accept help. Earlier he had rejected Carolyn Wells' contributions with, 'no advertisements, no satire, no criticism; no timeliness and no women contributors,' but in volume two her name appears frequently. The woman listed in volume

22Ibid., p. 146. See also "Chronicle and Comment," Bookman, IV (September, 1896), 9.
one, Florence Lundborg, is an artist who occasionally did the cover design. Burgess's assistants were often artists and not writers—although he himself could draw too.

The Prologue to the first issue, repeated in the Epilogue to volume one, declares that the Lark "has no more serious intention than to be gay." It is followed by a verse on "the wide clean earth, and the shouting sea" which typifies the spirit of Carman-Hovey hedonism animating the magazine. The content of the Lark was charming but inconsequential. The four-line illustrated verse, like the cartoon and verse of the famous "Purple Cow" exhibited in the first issue, was the Lark's forte; one appeared in each issue and soon a number were collected into The Purple Cow, A Book of Vagaries, which also included a popular poem from the third issue on "The Chewing Gum Man." Later a gay rhyme on "The Runaway Train" attempted to capitalize on the earlier poem's success. The Lark was found of whimsical stories like the one on the burglar's wife who incites her husband to crime only to be robbed herself. If Rosamond Gilder was to complain famously "One does not look to a Purple Cow for milk, nor to a Yellow Book for anything but yellowness," another reader ecstatically cooed, "Its pages lilt like Pippa's song, giving out only joie de vivre through the medium of a limitless and illimitable imagination."23

23 Ibid.
To couple the Lark with the Yellow Book is a graver error than to pair the Chap-Book with the British magazine. The Lark was the opposite of decadent; it was "the best expression of the unforced gaiety which was a principal ingredient of most American ephemerals, and which is in such a sharp contrast with the seriousness of the majority of esoteric periodicals abroad." The Lark itself, like the Chap-Book, was opposed to Decadence "with its morbid personalities and accursed analysis of emotion." Accepting the conclusions implicit in its fanciful and humorous approach to literature, the Lark espoused romanticism:

The absolute lack of Realism in the LARK'S pages, needs no explanation other than the personal taste of the writers, moved to Romanticism by age, by climate and by all the traditions of western life. They have held amusement the chief function of fiction, and that fidelity to fact is founded on another ideal.

The only famous figure to appear in the magazine was the romantic Stevenson. According to the Bookman, Burgess, 'a saturated solution of Stevenson,' was a "favourite and friend" of the Stevenson family, and "it is partly due to Mrs. Stevenson's advice and inspiration that he has turned to literary work." In something like a Stevenson issue the


26 "Chronicle and Comment," Bookman, IV (September, 1896), 9.
Lark featured a portrait of Stevenson, some of his early writings, and a tribute and a poem to him from Bruce Porter. Later an early Stevenson letter was printed. As a rule, however, the Lark disregarded literary celebrities and ignored schools and causes. It was a humorous not a literary magazine.

Burgess repeatedly stressed the Lark's intention to be gay. "The Lark's best service," he claimed, was "to give a day's delight and to remain a grateful memory." "Its appointed office was to refresh and gladden." The Lark "has protested the joy of life, the gladness of youth and love, and the belief that these shall endure." Increasingly, however, Burgess felt compelled to justify this aim. Sometimes he merely asserted defensively, "it is surely well to express the gladness of May, for beauty and joy are the attributes of eternal youth, and the sunshine of December is not a mere memory of the Spring, but a happiness in itself. It is a part, too, of Life." At other times, he composed an elaborate argument. Although the Lark was only casually interested in criticism, in the Epilogue to volume one and the Epilark to volume two, as well as in an essay in the second volume (Number 18), Burgess was able to discourse on "The Sense of Humour."

27Ibid.
All of life, Burgess argued, could and should be viewed through the sense of humour. Humour, he says, is not merely a sideline, a place apart; it is the "corollary of what is vital," the "subtle polarity induced by graver thought." It is "a habit of mind, a point of view, and must not be confounded with the disagreeable attributes of the wag." 

O, my Readers, I give you the Philosophy of Mirth,—the Religion of Laughter! Yet 'tis an esoteric faith, mind you, unattainable by the multitude; not of the 'te-he, Papa's dead!' school, nor of the giggling punsters are its devotees. No comic weekly shall be its organ. It must be hummed not by the coarse guffaw, but in the quiet, inward smile,—and, for its ritual, I submit the invisible humour of the Commonplace,—O paradox!

In other words, the sense of humour gives one perspective toward life. It is "the appreciation of the relative importance of things, that prevents one's taking oneself too seriously. . . ." It functions perhaps, like the Irony of the New Critics, accenting the complexity of life, revealing the comedy behind tragedy, yet subduing "the thoughtlessness of pure abandon." The sense of humour

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30 Burgess, "The Sense of Humour."
31 Burgess, "Epilogue to Book First."
mitigates the sting of life without, however, denying life's pain.

The attempt to depict humour as a philosophical attitude, to oppose its inward smile against the coarse guffaw, induces Burgess to contrast humour with satire. With humour, the "situation" is absurd; with satire the "victim" is. Malice is frequently the partner of satire or ridicule or parody; humour avoids personalities and scandals. It was the Lark's pride that it never dealt in personalities. "No satire" as well as "no women contributors" Burgess had written to Carolyn Wells. And there was no satire. Nor, however, was there humour in the philosophical sense defined by Burgess. The Lark was amusing but too superficial to depict the ambiguities or tragedies in life. Burgess's musings on humour have but slight connection with the aims and accomplishments of the magazine; they describe an ideal, not the reality. The Lark was clever but not profound.

By the end of the first year the thoughtless gaiety of its style had lost it the succès de scandale and the Lark was forced to raise its price from five to ten cents. "The size will not, and the Quality cannot be improved," the editor explained, "but Wings will be added in the form of an extra Cover Sheet to contain Advertisements and Announcements by which financial Aid the Lark may fly
another year." One year later, in March, 1897, the Lark concluded that it would fly no more. The Chap-Book commented that "Even the sincerest friends of the paper are glad; for a constant atmosphere of nonsense rhymes was growing almost as debilitating to the reader as it must have been to the writer." When the Chap-Book, in its own bid for life, had enlarged its size earlier in the year, the Lark rhymed:

You have done up your Tresses,
And lengthened your Dresses,
And grown up, as a Magazine should
But your Charm none the less is,
My Heart still confesses,
For I'd do the same too, if I could.

But it could not do the same. As Burgess knew, "the echo of its shout of mirth committed it to gayety."

Its last regular issue in April, 1897, was an artistic rounding-off. All staff members--Burgess, Porter, Peixotto, Lundborg, Garnett, the Japanese Yone Noguchi, Wells, and Tompkins--were represented. The Lark's catechism, posed in the preceding issue, was answered here, the replies serving as a summary and reminder of the magazine's merits. Burgess bid good-bye to Vivette, his literary vis-à-vis, and with the cartoon and verse on "Ah, yes, I wrote the

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32 Lark, I (April, 1896), n. p.
33 "Notes," Chap-Book, VI (March 15, 1897), 349.
34 Lark, II (February, 1897), n. p.
'Purple Cow'—" the Lark came full circle. "There will, however," the Lark announced, "be published an Epilogue to The Lark, or Memoir, containing certain phases of the intimate history of The Lark with Reflections thereon." The following month, in the newly-christened Epilark, Burgess and Porter reflected on the Lark's aims and on the sense of humour, and simply said their good-byes. "Her scoffers will say the Lark made a great to-do about dying," Burgess feared. But the Epilark crowns the Lark like a halo. It is a glorious farewell.

"Besides The Dial [1840-44]," writes Hoffman, only four of our nineteenth century periodicals "deserve serious recognition as predecessors of modern little magazines: Henry Clapp's Saturday Press (1858-66), and the Chicago Chap-Book, Lark, Mlle New York, all of the nineties."35 At times superficial, trifling, the Lark wins its renown because it was original. It was, to quote the Epilark, "among these brownies, but not of them." Ignoring contemporary fads as well as past tradition, it was bold and exciting. The Lark demonstrates "the idea that is native to the earth and air of California--the idea of sloughing old coats of tradition and restraint, and starting unencumbered in the race. ..."36 The magazine's importance may perhaps seem


only negative. Still, like the Chicago Chap-Book, the San Francisco Lark evidences that New England gentility did not rule American literature unchallenged.

"I am hoping--perhaps hopelessly--that a recently established periodical entitled 'M'ille New York' may live," greeted the Chap-Book in September, 1895, exactly one month after M'ille New York was born. The life of the new magazine, however, was even shorter than either the Chap-Book's or the Lark's. A fortnightly, the magazine's appearances became irregular a few months after it began. Of the eleven issues in volume one, Number 9 was the only December issue, Number 10 was published the end of January, and Number 11 not until April. After a hiatus, M'ille New York began a second life in November, 1898, but only four issues were published, this time by Marc Blumenberg who carried it at a loss, and in 1899 the magazine died its last death. Today M'ille New York is a collector's prize, partly because of the scarcity of the last four issues, partly because of its unusual make-up, and partly because of its intrinsic value.

The illustrations in M'ille New York were, as Huneker reminisced, "simply gorgeous." The artists Thomas Powers

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37"Notes," Chap-Book, III (September 15, 1895), 352.
and T. Fleming justly received equal billing on the title page with editor Vance Thompson and assistant editor James Gibbons Huneker; according to the Chap-Book, the staff also included Henri Boutet and Robida and other French artists "to whom 'M'lle New York' has not seen fit to give credit."
The magazine was printed in colours and in its wide margins displayed tiny pictures, sometimes just decoratively instead of as textual illustrations. There were also larger drawings and full page cartoons, frequently of bosomy women in low-cut dresses, for M'lle New York, in its reading matter too, was a sexy magazine. Its descriptions were suggestive and its morality was unconventional. "Frankly," Huneker rightly marveled, "I wonder how we escaped Anthony Comstock."

M'lle New York's delight in the risqué was but one instance of its quarrel with the bourgeois. The magazine took as its motto the line from a Charles Wesley hymn, "O Lord, the dark Americans convert!" As Taupin comments, "C'était par la France que l'éditeur, Vance Thompson, voulait convertir ses compatriots. . . ."38 Both Thompson and Huneker had spent part of the eighties in Europe (Huneker early in the decade and Thompson later), and, like the émigrés of the twenties, they keenly felt America's provincialism. As reporters and critics for various

38Taupin, op. cit., p. 38.
newspapers during the early nineties, both had already
missionized among their compatriots; to propagate the light
of France more effectively they united to form a new and
daring magazine, Mlle New York. More bitter than Huneker,
perhaps because he was less able, Thompson thoroughly
denounced American literature, criticism, society.

He railed primarily against his contemporaries. The
insipidity of genteel literature of course deserved his
rebuke, but Richard Harding Davis, the Gilders, and Howells
come under such frequent and violent attack that Thompson's
animus seems personal. Davis, Thompson says, "is essen­
tially bourgeois and ridiculous. His appeal is to the
suburban mind--the commuters' intelligence." Howells is
arraigned for his "moral snobbishness" but "while Mr.
Howells merits one's habitual indignation, Mr. Gilder is
undoubtedly the worse of the two. I have never known a man
so uniformly nul." Amidst the "vapid inanities of--God
save the mark!--American literature," America has produced,
Thompson concludes, two men of genius--Poe and Whitman, but,
he moans, "both she has disowned."

Thompson grumbles in like manner about American art.
American artists? There are two of them,
Whistler and Sargent. . . . They are exiles and
without honour in their own land, even as were
those two artists in verse, Poe and Whitman.
. . . Art in America to succeed must be the
art of Church and Chase, Longfellow and Gilder
--so smug, so shoppy, so inoffensive, so
absolutely commonplace, so intolerably useless that it serves the picture-framers and the book-binders.

American "art" may be summed up in babies and boiled beef, photographs and fur coats, valets and pupils, picture-framer cheques and the obscene comforts of domesticity. 39

Once again the accusations are not groundless, but their truth is obscured by their acrimony. Thompson seems the professional scoffer, an excellent example of the old saw that the incompetent often take refuge in mockery.

His indignation at American society spent itself too in the perversities of anti-semitism and misogyny. Anti-semitism is a frequent theme in M'lle New York. A great many of Fleming's powerful drawings caricature the Jew, and articles like "White Music and—Jewish" which inveighs against conductors Damrosch and Seidl and composer Rubinstein not for their musical deficiencies but because they are Jewish are common. The relative merits of misogyny and philogyne were also disputed frequently. Thompson's tirades against what Huneker liked to call "the unfair sex" stimulated replies not only from outraged women but from Huneker too who even in later years was amazed by Thompson's spleen. Admittedly there are examples enough with which to argue that women have never produced great art but Thompson builds his case of the total inferiority of women upon many

crudities. When, in a Leader on political anarchism, Thompson later cries, "This is no democracy. This is no republic. 'Tis a mere vulgar, financial tyranny," we feel that here is but one more instance where captiousness prevails over social criticism.

If the motive for Thompson's preferring French to American art and culture is suspect, he nevertheless performed a genuine service in introducing European writers and painters to America. He was enthusiastic over Scandinavian as well as French literature. "Edvard Munch, a powerful Norwegian artist, and Strindberg, the Swede, probably had their names printed for the first time in America in the pages of M'llle New York."^{40} Thompson admired Knut Hamsun and translated some of his work. He commended Boyesen for bringing "Scandinavia and the magnificent Norse literature home to a people which was battering on Howells." And he promoted writers from other European countries too: Eugenio de Castro and Joao de Deus, Portuguese poets; D'Annunzio "the lord of Italian letters"; Stanislaw Przbyszewski, Polish author who wrote in German. The extreme of his fervor, however, was devoted of course to France.

M'llle New York, said Huneker, "was more Parisian than Paris." It printed several criticism of the symbolists,

^{40}James Gibbons Huneker, Steeplejack (New York, 1922), II, 191.
translated many of their writings, and even published a number of poems in French. Taupin proudly catalogues:


Thompson also contributed his own studies of the French, as well as some poetry, chiefly in the French tradition. As always his writings were less successful than his enthusiasms. His poems in French and in English are superficial. His article on the "Technique of the Symbolists" is but competent, that on "Impressions of Verlaine" very slight. "Wagnerian Poets and Painters" depicting Mallarmé as a Wagnerian because he "composes" whereas the Parnassians "improvise" is precious, and "Two Nigger Poets of Paris" on Charles Cros and de Heredia is shallow. In 1900 some of these articles were collected into French Portraits, which, understandably, was not well received. It was Harry Thurston Peck who first used "Purple Portraiture" to describe Thompson's work: "He gives us epigram in the place

41Taupin, op. cit., p. 39.
of reflection, and adjectives in the place of ideas."^42
If, as Hanighen counsels, we compare Thompson with Arthur Symons "who wrote about much the same subjects," we perceive "the former's superficiality and his readiness to accept the most conventional view."^43 "Vance Thompson admirait les poètes français, mais on peut le soupçonner d'avoir mieux aimé leurs poses que leur art véritable, aussi sa propagande est-elle dangereuse."^44

Fortunately the contribution of Huneker is more impressive. If there is a single figure most responsible for the revolt against the genteel tradition, one who most completely and most dedicatedly fought American provincialism, it was James Gibbons Huneker. "If it was not James Huneker, it was certainly no other."^45

For it was Huneker, more than any other, who cleared the grove of the far worse masters next preceding—the Mables and William Winters, the Flincks and Brander Matthews, the Tartuffes and Pecksniffs, the literary Sunday-school superintendents and vice-crusaders, the concocters of White Lists of books, the shrill fuglemen of bad painting, maudlin music,

^42Harry Thurston Peck, "Purple Portraiture," Bookman, X (February, 1900), 567.
^43Frank C. Hanighen, "Vance Thompson and Mlle New York," Bookman, LXXV (September, 1932), 479-480.
^44Taupin, op. cit., p. 38.
valentine poetry, tin-pot drama and bogus criticism.46

Huneker's double achievement was that he embraced all the arts in his criticism and that, even more than Thompson, he brought Europe to America. Once again Mencken expresses it best, Mencken who "made" Huneker as Huneker had "made" others, Mencken "to whom," Huneker says, "I owe more than a lakh of metaphorical rupees for his interest in my work.

..."47

He [Huneker] was, I believe, the first American (not forgetting William Morton Payne and Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen, the pioneers) to write about Ibsen with any understanding of the artist behind the prophet's mask; he was the first to see the rising star of Nietzsche (this was back in 1888); he was beating a drum for Shaw the critic before ever Shaw the dramatist and mob philosopher was born (circa 1886-1890); he was writing about Hauptmann and Maeterlinck before they had got well set on their legs in their own countries; his estimate of Sudermann, bearing date of 1905, may stand with scarcely the change of a word today; he did a lot of valiant pioneering for Strindberg, Hervieu, Stirner and Gorki, and later on helped in the pioneering for Conrad; he was in the van of the MacDowell enthusiasts; he fought for the ideas of such painters as Davies, Lawson, Luks, Sloan and Prendergest (Americans all, by the way: an answer to the hollow charge of exotic obsession) at a time when Manet, Monet and Degas were laughed at; he was among the first to give a hand to Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, Stephen Crane and H. B. Fuller. In sum, he gave


some semblance of reality in the United States, after other men had tried and failed, to that great but ill-starred revolt against Victorian pedantry, formalism and sentimentality which began in the early 90's. 48

Not all of these accomplishments of course were performed during the nineties. But although Huneker's numerous books were all published after 1899 much of their contents had appeared earlier. From 1889 to 1902 he conducted a weekly column of miscellaneous criticism called "The Raconteur" for the Musical Courier. He was musical and dramatic critic for the New York Recorder from 1891-95, and for the New York Advertiser from 1895-97. In 1897 he began his long career with the Sun. Concurrently he was assistant editor for M'lle New York during its two careers. "The most astonishing thing about the work of James Huneker--and that which makes him unique in America--is that three-fourths of his greatest creative work was published in the newspapers." 49 If there exists no major volume of this decade that embalms Huneker's work, his influence on the thought of the nineties was nevertheless decisive.

For M'lle New York, Huneker wrote more fiction than criticism. In these stories, many of which were later collected into Melomaniacs, he tried to combine music and


49 Benjamin De Casseres, James Gibbons Huneker (New York, 1925), p. 35.
literature, most obviously in the plot—as in "A Weaver of Souls" which portrayed the influence of a pianist's music on his loves, or in "Santuzza's Child" which continued and paralleled the story of Cavalleria Rusticana. Huneker said of Melomaniacs, "It is not only about music, but it is music itself."\(^{50}\) Believing that he had succeeded in using music thematically as a rhythmical motivating force in a story, he was disappointed when Mencken wrote that he had no talent for fiction. But Huneker persisted. "The trouble is," he explained, "that these stories demand both a trained musical reader and a lover of fiction—not a combination to be found growing on grapevines."\(^{51}\) Whatever their value as fiction, the importance of these stories to M'lle New York is that, like Huneker's criticism, they propagated the arts. The assumption behind them that the cultured reader loved music served to inspire this love—just as Emily Post's inelastic code often determines manners. Critical comments on music and other arts were often injected into the stories, spreading the Word. For Huneker, in the midst of narration, to credit the reader with knowing "the Second Impromptu of Chopin, the rarely heard one in the key of F sharp, major mode," was surely artful propaganda.

\(^{50}\) Huneker, Steeplejack, II, 215.
\(^{51}\) Ibid., pp. 215-216.
In other ways, too, Huneker's fiction, if at times imitative or experimental, was exciting. A good deal of the fiction in *Mlle New York* was realistic. In its first issue a taut story by Edward Townsend on white slavery in New York's Chinatown was reminiscent of Crane's *Maggie*. The situation in "When Badger Meets Con" where a prostitute and parolee administer knockout drops to each other seems of the world of John O'Hara, while Rupert Hughes' "When Pan Moves to Harlem" is no less realistic. Huneker's sensuous fiction, however, was rather in the exotic style of decadence, but it was, of course, no less heretical to the conservatives. They cried blasphemy at "Where the Black Mass Was Heard," a story set in the church where the boy Huneker had once played the organ but influenced instead by Huysman's description of the Black Mass in *La-Bas*. At least Rémy de Gourmont could rejoice that Huneker's "invention was as vivid as Huysmans."52 Other "prose-poems," as Huneker called them, reflected Mallarmé and Baudelaire and if, as he later felt, his style was "tortured" or "precious" or he suffered "from the green-sickness of too ambitious writers," these sketches were nevertheless salutary in their "mild cynicism" and "sense of the mockery of the 'sacred institutions'."53 Similarly, with his criticism. If his


description of Maggie Cline in "A Brunhilda of the Bowery" is "pompous prose" or if Yvette Guilbert was "so plastered with epithets" that "her own mother wouldn't have recognized her," here was still "a new note" in criticism. The extravagance was refreshing, the emphasis on music in a literary magazine electrifying.

According to Mencken, Huneker was an amiable critic. "Huneker never addressed himself to clearing them [the critical mountebanks] out: he was content to offer better stuff, and let it go at that." Nevertheless, the effect of his criticism was militant. Alarmed that "the word 'decadence' was used as a club to smash an author's reputation," Huneker defended the French decadents from the blows of "the Nordau humbuggery." Denying the argument of Degeneration, he upheld the virtues of Nietzsche, Huysmans and Barrès, and of course of Baudelaire, for him "the greatest French poet of the nineteenth century—Victor Hugo excepted, and only Hugo. . . ." A critic whose "most enduring passion" besides the music of Chopin was the prose of Flaubert, and who "adored Poe" of necessity clashed with the "moral buzzards" of American criticism. "Huneker was

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54 Huneker, Steeplejack, II, 196.
56 Huneker, Steeplejack, I, 269.
ever so polite to them, but when he had had his say they were done."57

"No man who worked so hard to be the Johnny Appleseed of the arts," says Alfred Kazin, "could help being superficial."58 "There was no substance in him, no depth, no wisdom."59 "A steeplejack of the arts," Huneker called himself. He labored everywhere but excelled in no one field. Widely read in the classics, he was, however, truly comfortable only with contemporary arts. Loving French literature exceptionally, he clung to Goncourt, Anatole France and Stendhal, Huysmans and Gourmont, but ignored the dynamic symbolists, perhaps because, despite his preference for Baudelaire, he was inexpert with poetry. Despite the effort of a recent article to "correct the injustice" of the view that Huneker was oblivious to the literary scene at home and to the talents of American authors,60 Huneker was indeed largely indifferent to American literature. Clearly his approach to literature was unsystematic, and his mind

unphilosophical. In sum, his method was impressionistic. "It sounds magnanimous," Huneker wrote in Steeplejack [extolled by a disciple as "the greatest book of personal and artistic matter that has ever been done in America"61], "but neither praise nor blame should be the goal of the critic. To spill his own soul, that should be his aim. Notwithstanding the talk about objective criticism, no such abstraction is thinkable. A critic relates his prejudices, nothing more." The bane of the impressionist critic is that he often reveals himself more than he depicts the work of art; this trap at times ensnared Huneker. Yet if he was not the great critic idolized by DeMille, he was a professional anti-Philistine who "performed a Service." Like the accomplishments of other importers and translators, the results of Huneker's efforts "may be counted in educated audiences rather than achieved masterpieces."62

Mlle New York's epitaph is similar to Huneker's: its influence is considerable. It again becomes apparent that the value of little magazines is more suggestive than intrinsic. Their importance lies in the encouragement they offer young writers, the stimulus they impart to new ideas. They perform "une préparation utile." As Burgess reflected

61Benjamin De Casseres, op. cit., p. 20.
at the Lark's death, "... the sedition is broached, and the next rebellion may have more blood to spill."\(^{63}\)

To the literary historian, William Allen White's reminder that "the change from the 1870's and 80's to the 1930's was not accompanied by a cataclysm"\(^{64}\) seems axiomatic; literary cycles, unlike some types of literature, present no transfigurations where suddenly the cringing villain stands resplendent as the gallant knight. Yet a study of critical journals of the nineties particularly reminds one of Longfellow's line that "There is no Death! What seems so is transition." It is purely arbitrary, for example, that critical journals are listed here in Part II rather than I, for in so many ways the copy they present to their readers resembles that in the conservative magazines. In most cases, their theory of literature and their estimates of individual poets parallel those in the Atlantic or Harper's; yet occasionally a striking idea, a surprising judgment appears—and these we grasp at. After all, it is not the earthquake but only its rumblings which are heard in the nineties.

Although the little magazines offer more exciting copy, the best evidence of both traditional and advanced

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literary thought of the nineties is to be found in the critical journal or literary review. While the Big Four and other illustrated magazines were filled more and more with "contemporanics," and the little magazines frittered away many energies in egocentric movements, these journals, because of their narrow aims and specialized audience, remained faithful to literary interests—to news and reviews of books and literary gossip. Whereas the general magazine was often under attack for "following where it should lead," the critical journals were justly esteemed. Boyesen, in an otherwise pessimistic article on "American Literary Criticism and Its Value," concludes with praise for "special journals" like the Nation, the Critic, the Literary World and the Dial which "are gradually attaining the importance, the individuality, and the traditions, befitting permanent institutions."\(^6^5\)

Of the four magazines honored by Boyesen, the Dial alone has gained in reputation through the years. Significantly, it was published in Chicago—no doubt it was primarily this kinship which resulted in the Dial's inheriting the Chap-Book's remains in 1898, although its forthrightness and honesty too made it the logical heir of America's most famous little magazine. The New York Nation.

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\(^6^5\) Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen, "American Literary Criticism and Its Value," *Forum*, XV (June, 1893), 466.
of course, continues its remarkable career, but, as an off-shoot of the New York *Evening Post*, even by the nineties it was concerned largely with current events. True, with Higginson as literary critic, the *Nation* boasted a competent critic and a consistent point of view; its literary reviews, however, were significant during the eighties rather than later. The *Critic*, begun in 1881 by Richard Watson Gilder's brother and sister, Joseph and Jeanette Gilder, does not perhaps quite deserve Grant Knight's ready dismissal as "a genteel periodical committed to a belief in the soundness of the union of morality and art, a gallant champion of good taste and breeding and a decrizer of the vulgar and drab in literature."66 A weekly until 1898 when it became a monthly, the *Critic* featured a regular column of poetry review which, if by no means memorable, is still, in many cases, reliable. Like her more famous brother, Jeanette often saw through the blindfold of genteel criticism. Yet, in addition to writing for various newspapers, she had worked for Gilder on the old *Scribner's Monthly*, and in 1895 Joseph became literary advisor for Gilder's *Century Magazine*; although the *Critic* scrupulously avoided any association with Richard Watson, even to the point of refusing to review his books, a distinction between it and the *Century* is not always apparent.

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Another New York magazine, the Book Buyer, begun in 1869 as a monthly catalogue of Scribner, Welford, and Company, during the nineties "blossomed out into a literary magazine comparable to the later Bookman or today's Saturday Review of Literature. It reviewed impartially the books of all publishers, carried their advertising, had a paid subscription list, and was illustrated with magnificence." Yet if the Book Buyer was not always a Scribner house organ, it was always a trade magazine: the bulk of each issue was made up of columns like "New Books and New Editions," "Books of the Month," and "The Newest Books" which were often mere bibliographical lists or at most short paragraphs of comment or summary rather than of criticism. When the magazine attempted to be critical, its point of view was, like the Critic's, conservative; its most frequent signed contributor, Richard Burton, plugged the principle that "good art and ethical companions are not ill-mated." In many ways a counterpart to these two New York magazines, Boston's Literary World was perhaps somewhat more liberal; in any case it slighted poetry and thus interests us little.

The one magazine deserving—like the Chicago Dial—extended study is the New York Bookman, not begun until 1895. Although its prestige increased during the first

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67Burlingame, op. cit., p. 203.
quarter of the new century, at its inception it shone immediately, sparked by Harry Thurston Peck, senior editor from 1895 to 1906. During the nineties too, there were of course many magazines devoted to special interests which often featured literary columns, but the views, if at times stimulating, were unoriginal. Although the Forum, which was primarily a political magazine, was a major source for this work because it printed some superb articles on literature, these special magazines will not be separately studied here; however, a very specialized magazine with a small circulation, the Poet-Lore of Philadelphia, naturally merits our close examination. In contrast, the Magazine of Poetry is ignored: "Strictly speaking, it was a current and cumulative anthology rather than a magazine of the type of the later Poetry: A Magazine of Verse and Poetry Review."68

The Bookman was not free from a conservative tinge -- early in the twentieth century it became even more conservative, but during the nineties it was a stimulating critical journal. Although its content was, in many ways, the specialized domain of the other literary monthlies, "The Bookman's Table" offering reviews of current publications and "The Book Mart" listing new books, the Bookman addressed a wider audience. On the magazine's second

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anniversary, the editors reflected, "There seemed, indeed, to be a place for a periodical that should appeal not merely to professional workers in the field of letters, but to the greater body of cultivated men and women who enjoy whatever is good in literature. ..." The Chap-Book, which normally feuded with the Bookman, conceded that the magazine was "working on the right line" but "in the wrong way."

The Chap-Book called the Bookman smug and commonplace, bourgeois and platitudinous. Certainly for a literary monthly the Bookman came dangerously close to being journalistic. In its aim to be "a magazine of independent judgment, not smacking of the literary shop" it included much of the usual miscellany—letters from Paris and London, lead articles on newsworthy figures, with portrait, the familiar series on "Living American Critics" and "Living Continental Critics," and even some fiction and an occasional poem. The Bookman, the Critic said, "touches on more subjects than its name would imply." Yet it is rather ironic that the Chap-Book damned the Bookman and "Mr. Pecksniff" so heatedly and so frequently when the Bookman, like the Chap-Book, was instrumental in bringing continental literature before the American public. The

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69 "Chronicle and Comment," Bookman, IV (February, 1897), 449.
first article in America on Mallarmé appeared in the Bookman—according to Taupin in 1896, but no evidence of it appears before 1898. Between 1870 and 1915, the Bookman printed more articles on the French realists than did any other magazine. The symbolists, particularly Verlaine, were popular subjects for Bookman articles. Peck was "as influential as any other single man in introducing European authors in America. His attentions were chiefly directed toward France and Germany, and among the numerous hitherto unrecognized names he publicized were those of Mallarmé, Huysmans, Prevost, Hauptmann, and Sudermann." The magazine was also a ready outlet for Hovey's studies of Maeterlinck, printing a number of his translations of the poetry as well as his 1899 article on "Maeterlinck as a Prophet of Joy."

"It would seem simple jealousy that made Peck the subject of much criticism for 'vulgarity' in The Chap-Book," Kramer explains; "did one not see in The Bookman's notes and literary criticism, along with praise for Stone and Kimball's typography and admiration of their publicity methods, many unmerited innuendoes on the immorality of their productions. Even Stone and Kimball's posters and book

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71 Fay, op. cit., p. 291.
72 Limpus, op. cit., p. 152.
Undoubtedly Peck was not a radical critic. Previously, he had worked for the Bookman's publishers, Dodd, Mead and Company, as an editor on their International Encyclopedia and then on the New International Encyclopedia. Later he edited the Harper's Classical Dictionary and produced many reference books, in addition to the hack work he did prior to his suicide. His Bookman reviews were usually on specialized textbooks in linguistics and philology. A scholar, already installed as Professor of Latin and Semitic Languages at Columbia University, Peck said of the little magazines, "To read some of their articles, one would suppose that the world was being turned upside down..." It is all the more surprising, therefore, that a man of Peck's taste and background should at other times be sympathetic to the more modern literature. The articles on French literature were, it is true, cautious; the symbolists were scored as usual for their supposedly immoral lives and their overemphasis on form. Essentially, however, they received a sympathetic and perceptive hearing. Despite the contradictions in its editor's personality, in its own way Peck's Bookman flourished. A man who wrote on perfumery in women and

73 Kramer, op. cit., pp. 48-49.

74 Harry Thurston Peck, "Then and Now," Bookman, XXX (February, 1910), 601.
women's taste in men for the popular magazines, whose love letters to a former secretary were publicly revealed when she sued him for breach of promise, Peck condemned "the taint in what Swinburne wrote." Yet in 1900 the Bookman printed an excellent technical study of Swinburne's poetry. Although in 1910 Peck dismissed Crane as readily as he dismissed the little magazines, in 1895 he had dared to call Black Riders "the most notable contribution to literature which the present year has given birth." During the remainder of the decade, the magazine frequently drew attention to Crane the man and writer. In the criticism of fiction, its recognition of George Moore's genius was historically important. The Bookman also praised the "true fire" in Robinson's verse and was as receptive to Hovey's poetry as to his criticism. Not only did the magazine publish many of Hovey's poems, but it was also ready "to support him in the literary lists." The December, 1898 article by Curtis Hidden Page which discerningly described Hovey's poetic aims and favorably reviewed his work marked a "turning point" in Hovey criticism. It set the stage for the respectful hearing accorded Hovey's work which the poet's early death in 1900 merely intensified. As Beer said of Peck, so of the Bookman: "It is not a brilliant criticism, but it is alert."

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Named after America's eminent transcendentalist magazine and parent to the New York *Dial* of the twenties which published, among others, Yeats, Valery, and Lawrence, the Chicago *Dial* was a widely acclaimed magazine. The *Dial*, begun in May, 1880, was originally an organ of the Jansen, McClurg Publishing Company, its editor and part-owner, Francis Fisher Browne, also functioning as a reader for the firm. In July, 1892, however, like Gilder of the *Century* née *Scribner's Monthly* before him, Browne incorporated The Dial Company, becoming full owner of the *Dial* "to make its literary independence hereafter as obvious as it ever has been real." William Morton Payne and Edward Gilpin Johnson, both frequent contributors, became associate editors, and Mr. F. G. Browne became business manager.

To us, the new *Dial's* proud platform seems at first a falling-off. Formerly "a monthly *Journal of Current Literature*" emphasizing the critical review, it was now "a semi-monthly *Journal of Literary Criticism, Discussion and Information,*" the change in title revealing "the inclusion of new, and not strictly critical, departments." A special feature of each issue, the *Dial* announced, "will be the leading review, descriptive and extractive rather than critical, of the most important book of the fortnight . . . the latest news about books, their writers and

76"*The Dial—Change of Ownership,*" *Dial*, XIII (July 1, 1892), 85.
publishers..." Four years later, reviewing "The Dial's Score of Volumes," the editors still felt that "the leading editorial articles" were the most noteworthy addition of the new Dial. And yet, in their emphasis on "the lives and works of writers recently deceased," these editorials undermined the earlier Dial's literary dedication.

Nevertheless the Dial turns out to be one of the more distinguished of the nineties' critical journals. Perhaps it is simply its midwestern birthplace which makes this conclusion seem inevitable. Although the Dial argued that it was not a regional magazine and indeed, despite its civic pride, its content was no more regional than the Chap-Book's, the fact that this is the one magazine sired not by the literary East but by the bustling metropolis proud of its new university, its new library, and its site as the World's Fair accentuates the magazine's achievements. What seemed conservatism in the East appears as maturity in the Mid-West. Yet assuredly this is unjust, for the Dial easily holds its own with the Critic, the Book Buyer, and even the Bookman. It is the one magazine which followed a set of principles, repeatedly expressed. Proud that even its brief reviews were written by specialists, the editor wrote that "The Dial stands preeminently for objective and scientific criticism; it believes in the existence of critical canons, and endeavors to discover and adhere
Browne was an enthusiastic admirer of Matthew Arnold and tried to bring historical criticism to the Dial. Approved literature, he felt, provided an "infallible touchstone" for evaluating a new work of art. "The Dial's reviews constantly related the present to the past, measuring modern trends in literature, science, education against established standards, comparing the current with the historical." Too often, unfortunately, the result was a journal inhospitable to the modern, especially to the significant contemporary fight for realism in fiction. Yet the Dial's reassessment of the individual writers was often brilliant. Articles on Kipling, Holmes, and Lanier all temper the over-enthusiastic reception these writers were accorded elsewhere. The Dial was especially successful in redressing Poe's reputation, printing, among other studies, one fine analysis of "The American Rejection of Poe" by Charles Leonard Moore. Perhaps because Moore never collected his criticism in book form (he did publish some books of poetry), he has never been the subject of any study; yet during the nineties and until the first world war he was writing voluminously for the Dial. In him can be seen the Dial's strength and weakness.

77 "The New Dial," Dial, XIII (September 1, 1892), 128.

He was, of course, essentially a genteel critic; in 1913 he was still lamenting that modern poetry lacked Beauty. Yet, after all, it is not so much that genteel criticism was intrinsically weak but that its ideas were derivative and its critics often inept in applying borrowed ideas to contemporary works. Moore, however, in a fluent, allusive style, spoke with such vigor that he seems original; his frequent attacks on the sterility of the age and repeated defense of poetry as the greatest of the arts are powerful exhortations. Furthermore he fearlessly made his own judgments, not only terming Tennyson's reputation over-great and commending Emerson the poet more than the thinker, but consistently defending Poe as "the greatest intellect America has produced--assuredly the best artist."

True, he belittled the symbolists and erred grievously in believing Whitman a minor poet. He also excluded the commonplace as the subject matter of poetry, for is there not "a real difference between cabbages and roses?" Yet ironically this defender of the ideal attacked America's optimism and prudery. During the nineties Moore repeatedly lashed out in the *Dial* at America's failure to recognize the "dark foundations of man's estate." American writers, he said, treat only "fairly-contented or happy humanity" who wear "clean linen" and are "well-washed." Moore's strictures against the contemporary as the subject matter of tragedy, therefore, stem not from distaste for reality
but from principle. A remote setting, he believed, encourages the artist to eschew the routine and the transient and to underline man's essential nature. Although Moore felt that realists like Balzac, Turgeneiff, Zola and Tolstoy were too enmeshed in the ordinary and the commonplace, he praised them nevertheless for portraying "creatures of gloom and horror." "If anything saves them from posterity, he admitted, "it will be their pessimism."79 On comedy, Moore argued similarly. Unlike tragedy, he wrote in the Dial, comedy and satire can, perhaps must, deal with the local, but like tragedy, comedy must not deal with the middling. "The extremes of life are the regions of supreme art."80 The domain of comedy, he said, encompasses the brutal, the coarse, the vulgar; the "very notion" of comedy is license. As a result, Moore concluded, comedy must not be made decent and decorous. Yet Americans he regretted, acting as if they "had just graduated from a young ladies' boarding-school, or were possible contributors to some Ladies' Journal,"81 censor the comic jester. As the years of sterility continued into the early twentieth century, Moore's attacks in the Dial became even more vehement. The

79Charles Leonard Moore, "Cabbages and Roses," Dial, XLV (November 1, 1908), 282.

80Ibid., p. 281.

view that banished "pumpkin pies" and "blue-jean blouses" from art at least plumbed the lower depths.

The best source of information on the history of the Dial is the Newberry Library, which owns not only the papers of editor Browne but the letters and manuscripts of associate editor William Morton Payne, among them scrapbooks containing all Payne's printed contributions to the Dial. From these "scrapbooks it is evident that Payne wrote nearly all the unsigned leading editorials on literary, educational, political, and cultural topics that were a feature of the enlarged Dial after 1892. Previous students, as the author of an article on Browne in this Newberry Library Bulletin (No. 2, September, 1945, pp. 23-26), had attributed these editorials to Browne. But it is now clear that credit for the vigorous and effective editorial interpretation of the Dial's conservative and idealistic standards is due to Payne. Payne also contributed a regular signed column on "Recent Fiction" or on "Recent Poetry"—and, at the same time, wrote for other magazines and newspapers. Teacher, journalist, critic, his mark on the nineties was probably deep. Yet, except for the indispensable article in the Newberry Library Bulletin, critics have ignored him—as they have ignored Moore.

As is to be expected, Payne shared the opinions and biases of his editor. He too was "objective and idealistic. He believed in standards of criticism and in applying the same standards to all literature regardless of its origin." Like Browne, he was cordial to neither the new realism in fiction nor symbolism nor the experimental school of Carl Sandburg in poetry. But his was a wise conservatism, and when he turned instead to Moody as a brilliant contemporary who did not ignore tradition it was at least to a poet who, along with Robinson, was one of "our two most considerable poets writing between the death of Whitman in 1892 and the arrival of the 'new poetry' about 1912." "Payne was an acute critic of poetry. He could nearly always recognize the true poetic power when he came upon it, and his judgments on the poets of his day, are, in the main, astonishingly like the considered verdict of posterity." He wrote frequently on what he liked to call his six dix maijores among the Victorians--Tennyson and Browning, Arnold and Rossetti, Swinburne and Morris, in the case of Swinburne (the one great poet left to the English

83 Ibid., p. 200.


85 Mosher, op. cit., p. 201.
race, if not to the world, at the close of the nineteenth century, publishing selections from his poetry and an edition of his blank verse drama *Mary Stuart*. Payne's anthology of *American Literary Criticism* is still a serviceable text for American literature students. He was receptive to Robinson and Dickinson, just to new poets like George Cabot Lodge, and, with reservations, kind to Yeats. He was particularly appreciative of Thoreau both as a poet and essayist. Furthermore, his admiration of Brunetière led him to value Whitman not only as a poet but as a "characteristic exponent" of evolutionary criticism which traces the "influences and the action of contemporary circumstances" on literature. Whitman, Payne wrote in a survey of late nineteenth century criticism, at least reflects the influence of Darwin's studies in evolution so that, by contrast, even Lowell seems dated. Yet, except when his veneration for Swinburne led him to excessive admiration for Swinburne's room-mate, Theodore Watts-Dunton, Payne is never intemperate and the balance between Whitman and other American critics is justly weighed. Payne also believed that the evolutionist critic must study comparative literature; he himself was proficient in many languages.

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including Norwegian, and translated some Scandinavian authors—Ibsen, Bjornson, and Hauptmann.

For forty-three years a teacher in Chicago high schools and a frequent writer on educational theory, Payne regarded himself as educator as well as critic. No doubt he was largely responsible for the scholarly tone of the Dial which could easily be contrasted with the more popular approach of the Bookman. The Dial's policy, said the Chap-Book, was "to criticize every new poet by the standard of Shelley, and damn every fresh novelist because he is not a Thackeray." "I wish sometimes it would step down from the pedagogue's chair," its editor wrote at another time, "... and mix genially with its fellow-mortals." Nevertheless, in the same review, the Chap-Book conceded that "no literary journal in America" was "within a mile of The Dial." Similarly, another magazine, which complained that the Dial's "reviews are all calm and no moving tempest," also added that the magazine was "probably the ablest as it is the most just literary review in the United States." That verdict still stands. Admired by scholars, the Dial still spoke to lay readers; acceptable to conservative

88"Notes," Chap-Book, VI (December 1, 1896), 94.
90"Literary Criticism in Chicago," Critic (reprinted from America) XVIII (May 16, 1891), 268.
critics, the *Dial* also pleased a Boyesen. In the same league with Eastern journals, it was all the more the pride and inspiration of the Mid-West. "... it was the pioneer work of Payne and of Browne on the *Dial* which prepared the ground for that flowering of the creative spirit which at least twice in its history has made Chicago the literary capital of the United States."\(^9\)

The polarity between two conflicting views of life and art apparent in a Peck or Moore or Payne and in the policy of the other critical journals is equally operative in a specialized magazine called *Poet-Lore*. For us, the magazine is of particular interest because it is the only critical journal of the nineties expressly devoted to poetry alone, except perhaps for *The Magazine of Poetry* which, however, was absorbed in the autumn of 1896 by *Poet-Lore* during the latter's change from a monthly to a quarterly. *Poet-Lore* was begun in Philadelphia in January, 1889, by two amateur critics, Helen Alexander Clarke and Charlotte Porter, who moved the magazine to Boston early in the nineties when Dana Estes of Estes and Lauriat Publishing Company guaranteed them office space free for three years in return for three regular pages of advertising. The two women sold *Poet-Lore* in 1903 but continued to edit it for some time after.

Its sub-title "A Monthly Magazine Devoted to Shakespeare, Browning, and the Comparative Study of Literature," Poet-Lore was interested in "the life in the culture--or poet-lore of all periods," with Shakespeare standing for "all human life as reflected in the past," and Browning "for present life and literature." As such, the policy of the magazine was clearly conservative, the editors believing that contemporary poets needed more grounding in both life and art before they "may assume to tread where Shakespeare and Browning have led!" As Porter recalled in the now no-longer hyphenated Poet Lore:

We meant not to provide a wide-geared vehicle for current verse. Not of course to exclude it but rather mainly to develop a broadly inclusive historic knowledge of all the facts of the field to be garnered in; and of the criticism to. . . . The whole illuminating lore of the Art!93

The magazine thus featured "Appreciations," as the editors called them, "essays on general themes and special literary interpretations." The favorite subjects, of course, especially early in the magazine's career, were Shakespeare and Browning, the latter, by the nineties, almost as safely entrenched as a classic as Shakespeare.

92"What 'Poet-Lore' Means," Poet-Lore, III (December, 1891), 646.

93Charlotte E. Porter, "A Story of Poet Lore With Relation to the Late Helen A. Clarke, One of its Founders," Poet Lore, XXXVII (September, 1926), 438-439.
At the height of his popularity during the eighties, when many editions of his work were published and countless Browning Societies were established—and flourished, by the nineties Browning found his supporters among "the most conservative elements of English and American society." He still occasioned much dispute on complexity in poetic language, being attacked, as Francis Howard Williams wrote in 1890 in *Poet-Lore*, for embodying "not only deep philosophic truths, but even light, artistic impressions, in language which is strained and far-fetched and needlessly complicated by inverted grammatical constructions and ellipses." As a rule, however, critics ignored any extravagances in form and praised Browning as a dramatist or even as a writer of fiction rather than as a poet, and as an optimist in a doubt-ridden age—although the more intellectual critics were already calling Browning's thought superficial and unsystematic. At times critical of Browning's excesses, *Poet-Lore* was of course essentially adulatory. Its quantity of material on Browning, comments a student of Browning criticism in America, "is the source

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95 Francis Howard Williams, "Browning's Form," *Poet-Lore*, II (June, 1890), 304.
of some excellent information and of much that is worthless nonsense."

In addition to "appreciations," the magazine did publish poetry and fiction, and most frequently plays, serially or even complete in one issue. The American poetry was undistinguished—Stedman, Edith Thomas, and Nathan Haskell Dole being representative poets; yet occasional poems by Whitman and Hovey appeared, and Hovey's most important work, the poetic drama Taliesin, was first published in Poet-Lore. The magazine was most successful, however, in promoting other literatures—the third item in the triad of the magazine's title was, after all, "comparative literature." Many of the appreciations did study literature comparatively: "The 'Bhagavad Gita' and Emerson's 'Brahma',' and, by the same author, "Goethe's 'World Spirit' and the Vishnu of the 'Bhagavad Gita'"; also "The 'Alkestis' of Euripides and of Browning," "Shakespeare and the Russian Drama," etc. But during the mid-nineties Poet-Lore began to publish the works of European writers known only as names to Americans. These were usually in translation of course, but sometimes they were in the original. The magazine

had a first cut at some of Ibsen's poetry and expressed early favor of his plays. . . .

[Bjornson's En Hanske] was given with his

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96 McCormick, op. cit., p. 220.
authorization in the original Danish-Norwegian version instead of the German translation used on the Continent. Among the Northeners [sic] followed Selma Lagerlof, Strindberg, Drachmann the Dane and Kielland, among the new Russians, Garshin, Gorki, Andreyev, Chekov; the Austrian Schnitzler, and Wilbrandt; the great Spaniard Echegaray; Italy's D'Annunzio in plays and poems when only his less noble novels had been set down to him here, and young Bracco; the eminent Germans in drama, Sudermann, Hauptmann, Wildenbruch; from the French, the first of Maeterlinck, Curel, Delisle Adams, Hervieu, Lavedan, and so on.\footnote{Porter, op. cit., p. 442.}

Perhaps because of its partiality for Hovey, Maeterlinck, in translations by Hovey and by the editors, was the magazine's favorite among these Europeans. That the editors were eventually forced to abandon this ambitious program because, with the absence of international copyright, American and English magazines pirated the translations, is all the more indicative of a public eager for this material. "When no periodical admitted translation or drama, and all delegated bits and shreds of poetry to chance margins after ungrudging lavishment of space to prosy prose miscellany, specializing on mere literature was somewhat novel."\footnote{Ibid.}

*Poet-Lore* also presented reviews, Helen Clarke usually treating American poets and Charlotte Porter the British, but in this department the magazine contributed little. Like most of the other periodicals, it offered
group or capsule reviews, and was amazingly open-armed to all whom it discussed. Naturally it embraced Aldrich and Stedman and Watson, but it also received Dickinson and Hovey and Robinson and Poe, and in particular welcomed Whitman. Its emotion, however, was restrained. It is rather in a department called "School of Literature" that Poet-Lore achieves its greatest importance. Formerly called "The Study," "School of Literature" offered "studies of American and British masterpieces, reading courses arranged on the comparative plan, short studies in poetics, queries, and club records." In the reliable bibliographies of the technique, history, and aesthetics of poetry or of individual authors, and its questions and answers from readers in the vein of the New York Times' "Queries and Answers," the magazine fostered an interest in poetry and the drama. More important, it encouraged the type of technical analysis popularized by the New Critics today: it proposed specific textual questions on a given poem or play and, in a number of "Hints," prepared the groundwork for a serviceable body of analysis. As is to be expected, the "School" most frequently tackled a Shakespearian play: after preliminary information on the name, date, and source of the play, discussions of the metre and language and of the action and characterization were presented. Poems by American authors, however, were also popular subjects. Studying Whittier's
"Snow-Bound," the editors used as a springboard Whittier's own comments within the poem that it is a "Winter Idyl" or like a "Flemish picture of old days." At some length Clarke and Porter establish an understanding of these two terms and apply them to the treatment of scene and character. They then propose some questions on the language and metre of individual lines and passages, and conclude on the poem's statement of faith in immortality. Other poems, like Emerson's "Each and All," are subjected to similar analysis. The contrast between this method and the biographical approach of the other periodicals is overwhelming—even if Poet-Lore tends toward condescension. No other magazine proceeds with such regard for the formal technique of art.

In addition to the "School of Literature" many articles in the magazine approach literature from the technical point of view. True, there are the conventional generalizations on "The Nature of Poetic Expression," "Literature and the Scientific Spirit," or "A Propaganda for Poetry" which argue that poetry idealizes life by making man aware of the universal truth and beauty inherent in individual events and people. But the magazine redeems itself with the many technical articles like "The Blank Verse of 'Sohrab and Rustum'" or "Clews to Emerson's Mystic Verse" which examine the structure or interpret the meaning
of specific lines of poetry. And there are broader but equally perceptive studies like Helena Knorr's "Richard Hovey's Promise and Work" which, along with the Page article in the Bookman, is still a basic reference for the Hovey scholar. Poet-Lore, said the Critic, is "the best exponent of pure literature in this country." For us, it is one other reminder that during the nineties there were indeed critical minds competent to understand the formal structure as well as the historical significance of a work of art.
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CHAPTER IV

A STUDY OF REPUTATIONS
A STUDY IN REPUTATIONS

Edwin Arlington Robinson

For years genteel criticism had castigated Poe and Whitman, primarily because of the supposed immorality of their lives. But, we wonder, was there during the nineties any awareness of the merits criticism now attributes to them? Emily Dickinson was first published during the nineties. Was the reception she received at all commensurate with the esteem in which she is now held? What was the response to the striking poetry of Stephen Crane which also appeared during the nineties? And what about contemporary poets who began their careers then? How, for example, were the early works of Robinson and Frost received? Clearly the critical reception accorded particular key poets can serve as yardsticks of the quality of criticism during the nineties—of its perceptiveness, its traditionalism, its willingness to go out on a limb. A study of Edwin Arlington Robinson's reception is especially fruitful: "The authenticity of Robinson's gift, his single-minded devotion to it and complete dependence upon it for a livelihood made him a test of the ability of American poetry to survive the two decades before 1912, when the odds against it were tremendous. The only other poets of significant achievement
then writing, Santayana and Frost, had other strings to
their bow. For Robinson it was poetry or nothing."¹

"It must have been about the year 1889," reminisced
Edwin Arlington Robinson about "The First Seven Years,"
"when I realized finally, and not without a justifiable
uncertainty as to how the thing was to be done, that I was
doomed, or elected, or sentenced for life, to the writing
of poetry. There was nothing else that interested me, and
I was rational enough to keep the grisly secret to myself."²
At the time, Robinson was twenty, through with the idyllic
high school years when he and Harry Smith and later Ed Moore
and Arthur Gledhill shared confidences and ideas and chewed
"Check" tobacco ["And we were more than friends, it seemed
to me:-- . . . But we were boys, and there it ends."];
through too with a post-graduate year at high school study­
ing Horace and Milton. By 1891, more because an ear
infection required treatment in Boston anyway, Robinson
succeeded in persuading his father--and the school
authorities--to permit him to enter Harvard as a special
student where he remained for two years. But during the

¹Emery Neff, Edwin Arlington Robinson (New York,
1948), p. 249.

²Edwin Arlington Robinson, "The First Seven Years," in Breaking into Print, Ed. by Elmer Adler (New York:
Simon and Schuster, 1937), p. 166. Reprinted from The
Colophon, Part IV, December, 1930.
intervening years, and again between 1893 and 1897 when he was once more at home in Gardiner, Maine, Robinson, lonely, diffident, but withal certain of his choice, spent his days writing, with time out for household chores or occasional odd jobs during the summer.

Letters to Smith and Gledhill, both away at college, sustained him. A friend and neighbor, Dr. A. T. Schumann, a physician who preferred writing poetry to doctoring his patients, encouraged him. "As I shall never know the extent of my indebtedness to his interest and belief in my work, or to my unconscious absorption of his technical enthusiasm," Robinson wrote of Schumann and these early years, "I am glad for this obvious opportunity to acknowledge a debt that I cannot even estimate." These years, however, were not happy ones. Although the "family fortune, such as it was," was at the time adequate to support him, Robinson was conscience-stricken at not being "up and doing"; the promising medical career of his brother Dean ruined when he fell victim to morphine, his father's death, the dwindling of the family income, all these strengthened his guilt at forgetting the "large prodigality of gold" for "that larger generosity of thought." His letters to his friends sing one tune. "This feeling of dependence is hell," he

3 Ibid.

wrote Smith in 1893. "You, who are making a living, cannot imagine how cutting it is for a man of twenty-four to depend upon his mother for every cent he has and every mouthful he swallows," he wrote a year later. The plaint continues. "Here I am in my twenty-fifth year with absolutely no prospects, no money, and not much hope." "You don't know what it is to be twenty-six years old, and still a little child as far as a prospect of worldly independence goes." But despite his discouragement he felt too an "incurable belief" in what he was doing. "Business be damned," he said. "If Merchant A and Barrister B are put here as 'ensamples to mortals,' I am afraid that I shall always stand in the shadow as one of Omar's broken pots."  

Dear friends, reproach me not for what I do,  
Nor counsel me, nor pity me; nor say  
That I am wearing half my life away  
For bubble-work that only fools pursue.  
And if my bubbles be too small for you,  
Blow bigger then your own: . . .

"Remember, if you will," concludes this early sonnet from The Children of the Night:

The shame I win for singing is all mine,  
The gold I miss for dreaming is all yours.

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5 Ibid., p. 126.
6 Ibid., p. 150.
7 Ibid., p. 246.
8 Ibid., p. 107.
Robinson's persistence in sticking to writing and his faith in himself are the more remarkable because of his failure to interest all but a few personal friends in his work. For three years, Robinson recalls, he submitted poems "to every reputable monthly and weekly periodical in the country." Occasionally one was accepted: On November 24, 1894, the Critic printed the oft-quoted "Oh, for a poet. . . ." sonnet, but offered no remuneration. In Gardiner, in 1894 and '95, William Henry Thorne who published the Globe, "a quarterly of limited circulation and unlimited impudence," printed, without pay, a number of Robinson's poems. Robinson received his first 'blood money' in February, 1895, seven dollars from Lippincott's Magazine, for the sonnet on Poe which was not printed, however, until ten years later. But usually his poetry was returned. "My collection of rejection slips," he said, "must have been one of the largest and most comprehensive in literary history, with innumerable duplicates." In desperation, he selected about forty of these poems for a small book, "reasoning prematurely and wildly that publishers might find something in them that editors had overlooked." But this

11 Neff, op. cit., p. 56.
13 Ibid., p. 168.
manuscript too was rejected, and finally Robinson had The Torrent and the Night Before, as he named the book, after its first and last poems, printed at his own expense ($52 for 312 copies) by the Riverside Press of Cambridge.

In retrospect Robinson attributed his difficulty in getting published to the "traditional sensibilities of editors in general." Yet it does not seem as if his early struggles were anything more than the usual efforts of any unknown to secure a footing. Robinson was an aloof poet bent on self-expression only; he "had no sense that he was pioneering or inaugurating a movement."\(^{14}\) His debt to the American and British past, to Emerson, Poe, Longfellow, and Bryant, to Wordsworth, Keats, Tennyson, and, to a lesser extent than is generally assumed, to Browning, is well exhibited in Edwin Fussell's excellent study of Robinson's literary background. "There is every indication," Fussell comments, that Robinson "wished to be judged by what he regarded as the universal standards of the past."\(^{15}\) Other critics, too, underscore Robinson's traditionalism.

Critical custom sets Edwin Arlington Robinson among the rebels who transfused the anemic literature of the genteel tradition. The same impulses are attributed to him as made Masters

\(^{14}\)Hagedorn, op. cit., p. 99.

and Frost turn to homely subjects and daily speech; as sent the Imagists in quest of new patterns; as produced the new realism in fiction. He is variously regarded as a pioneer realist, a partaker in the new disillusion, as a social satirist. Yet the letters of his young manhood blow no self-conscious trumpets of rebellion. He admired Thomas Bailey Aldrich sufficiently to send him a copy of *The Torrent* and to quote him frequently. Longfellow was more congenial than the avant-garde spirit of *The Yellow Book*, and he more gladly read Dickens and Thackeray than Zola. The bolder French insurgents—Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Baudelaire—he never mentioned; the work of Maupassant, Mendès, and Gautier he castigated as "matchless trash," a willful confusion of love and lust. He preferred Coppée's "healthy naturalism" and the Dickensian pleasures of Daudet. Romancers like F. Marion Crawford, Richard Blackmore, and William Black he read faithfully while *Madame Bovary* stood unopened on his shelf. Among poets his early favorite was Matthew Arnold; Cowper, Wordsworth, and Tennyson were not for him outmoded, and the last of them he could read "over and over again without tiring of him." His one reference to William Butler Yeats was scornful. The young man who had plunged enthusiastically into Lewis Gates's courses in eighteenth and nineteenth century prose had too keen a sense of his own ignorance to throw bricks at the temple of tradition.16

To be sure, if Robinson did not consciously challenge conventional poetry, his work was helping to overthrow it nevertheless. His emphasis on man rather than on nature "marked the end of one of the strongest conventions of romantic poetry."17 "There is very little tinkling water, 


17 Pussell, op. cit., p. 175.
and there is not a red-bellied robin in the collection,"\textsuperscript{18} Robinson wrote Gledhill about his first book. The dependence on wit and irony was also novel. But his major innovation was his diction. He preferred a monosyllabic line. Moody's lushness irritated him, despite his admiration for his friend's work, and he strove for the everyday words of common speech. He rejected "archaisms and circumlocutions, the Tennysonian polysyllabic roll, all the imitative prettiness of the 'little sonnet-men'. . . ."\textsuperscript{19} His language was "less metaphorical, less flashing," his word-order prose-like, his manner conversational. His poetry, however, was always cast in traditional forms so that, superficially at any rate, it hardly appeared revolutionary. If Robinson's first book "marked 'the beginning of a new era in American poetry,' as Allen Tate has said, it must nevertheless not be forgotten that Robinson did after all stem from the nineteenth century. His verses in the French forms, his sonnets, his quatrains were only manifestations of contemporary trends. Even his Tilbury Town portraits had counterparts in the satirical etchings of Ambrose Bierce, though Robinson's seriousness of treatment was not customary."\textsuperscript{20}


\textsuperscript{19}Hagedorn, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 99.

\textsuperscript{20}Richard Crowder, "The Emergence of E. A. Robinson," \textit{South Atlantic Quarterly}, XLV (1946), 97.
Conventional poet that he seemed, Robinson's first book was received favorably, in spite of his previous difficulties with editors and publishers. Robinson mailed *The Torrent and the Night Before* "out to the world," to periodicals for possible review, to well-known authors and critics, to friends and acquaintances. He feared the results, but the response was heartening. "I can only say that the book has been very favourably received by such as have taken the trouble to write to me," he wrote Smith in December, 1896. "The future looks as dark as ever, but I have a little better courage to look into it."21 And he enclosed extracts from the letters of John Vance Cheney, Barrett Wendell, Charles Eliot Norton, and Nathan Haskell Dole, among others. The following month he had still more statements to copy. Professor George P. Baker of Harvard, Horace Scudder, Edgar Fawcett, Edmund Gosse, Clinton Scollard, Edward Eggleston, all had written to encourage him. "It is gratifying," Robinson wrote, "... to realize that I have attracted the attention of certain people, and I am beginning to feel that I may possibly do something sometime that will bring me a publisher."22


22 Ibid., p. 270.
The reviews were almost as approving as the letters. The newspapers were "more uniformly favorable"23 than the periodicals, but the periodical reviews too, if not always penetrating, were friendly. Robinson was not always appreciative of the "wholesale reviewing," the "patronizing ease" of William Morton Payne; yet it was Payne in the Dial who was consistently sympathetic to his work, and even Robinson admitted that Payne's review of Torrent was kind. Robinson's poems "are far above the average in thought and expression," Payne said, particularly in their "note of austere restraint," and he quoted "Oh, for a poet... ." and commended the sonnet to Verlaine.24 The Bookman charged that Robinson's "humour is of a grim sort, and the world is not beautiful to him, but a prison-house."25 ["The world is not a 'prison house,'" Robinson replied the following month in a letter to the editor, "but a kind of spiritual kindergarten, where millions of bewildered readers are trying to spell God with the wrong blocks."26] Nevertheless, despite its misgivings, the Bookman applauded the "true fire in his verse" and "the swing and the singing of wind and wave" and "the passion of human emotion in his lines." In

23Neff, op. cit., p. 77.

24William Morton Payne, "Recent Poetry," Dial, XXII (February 1, 1897), 92.


26"Chronicle and Comment," Bookman, V (March, 1897), 7.
the Poet-Lore, Helen Clarke conceded: "This verse has more power to hold the attention than anything we have seen lately." And in the Sewanee Review, William P. Trent devoted a separate article to Robinson's "poetic venture." Praising Robinson's knowledge and love of the technique of poetry, Trent singled out the sonnets to literary figures --to Arnold, Crabbe, Hardy, Verlaine, and Whitman--for special praise, and, like almost everyone else, quoted "Oh, for a poet..." in full. As a critic, Trent said, he was not posing as a "poet-finder" because "The true poet sooner or later finds his public and his public finds him..."

His purpose was simply "to encourage Mr. Robinson with the thought that he has had at least one interested reader." Years later Robinson continued to feel that The Torrent and the Night Before "was received generally with a respect and enthusiasm that was gratifying, and was all that I needed to keep me going through the years of obscurity and material uncertainty that were so definitely before me."

Robinson's satisfaction, it is true, was short-lived. There is no denying that during the nineties he experienced years of discouragement and privation. But there was enough

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27Helen Archibald Clarke, "Notes on American Verse," Poet-Lore, IX, no. 3 (1897), 448.


sympathetic response to his work to hearten him. That is all we can say, but it is enough.

By April, 1897, he was again despondent at his failure to find a commercial publisher for his blue-covered little pamphlet of poems. "My courage is all right," he wrote Smith after an unsuccessful assault on the publishing houses of Boston and Cambridge, "but to spend four or five years in getting a small book together and then to have it just fall short, 'is a damned tough bullet to chew!'—even though I am well aware that almost every author had chewed it. If I could convince myself that the stuff is the real thing, I should be satisfied, but I am slowly beginning to see that much of it is commonplace and that some of it is rot." Nevertheless he labored over a revised edition of his poems, and in December, 1897, Richard Badger and Company of Boston published the book, now called *The Children of the Night*. Some new pieces had been added, the dramatic monologues "The Night Before" and "For Calderon" and the skit "For Max Nordau" were discarded, and other poems were reworked and rearranged. Perhaps because the Badger imprint was not too reputable— it was Badger who approached Robinson, offering to print the book "on commission"— the reviews of *Children* were unusually scanty.

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but again they were favorable. Although the Bookman, the Critic, and the Independent ignored the work, Payne in the Dial "hailed" it, and the Nation was fulsome in its praise. The New York Musical Courier was enthusiastic. And the Boston Transcript, in a review by John Hays Gardiner, Robinson's friend, was generous. True, even the friendly notices often missed essentials. Crowder comments that there was but "vague recognition" of Robinson's independence of poetic conventionalism, and that his contribution of the psychological portrait was generally missed. Furthermore, "What critics did not analyze beyond calling it restraint was the poet's persistent simplicity of diction and prose-like cadence—natural conversational qualities."\(^{31}\)

Undoubtedly this blindness to Robinson's key contribution to modern poetry betrays the limitations of criticism during the nineties. Nevertheless, the point once again is that Robinson was sufficiently encouraged by the sympathetic reviews to take heart about his work. "What notices have come in are very good," he wrote Smith about the Children in February, 1898. "I am very well satisfied with the way things are going—didn't expect any howling success."\(^{32}\)

The situation remains unchanged for the few remaining years of the decade. Robinson worked alone, detached, 

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\(^{31}\) Crowder, "The Emergence of E. A. Robinson," p. 90.

\(^{32}\) Robinson, Untriangulated Stars, op. cit., p. 295.
unheeded by the lovers of optimistic morality and luxuriant emotionalism. But the encouragement of a few friends and reviewers continued to sustain him. His major effort was a long narrative poem originally called "The Pauper" but published as "Captain Craig" in a volume which also included some short poems previously planned as a separate book. Captain Craig too made the rounds of the publishing houses. For a while it seemed as if Small, Maynard, and Company, prodded by Josephine Peabody, would publish it, but when, under financial stress, the firm changed hands, the manuscript was returned. Finally, in 1902, only when Robinson's friends Hays Gardiner and, in secret, Mrs. Laura E. Richards supplied the funds, did Houghton Mifflin publish Captain Craig on commission.

The odyssey of Captain Craig's search for a publisher left Robinson resigned to public neglect and critical disapproval, yet he must have hoped for much for this "book with the germ of life in it." And from some reviewers he did get criticism discerning enough to remind us that during the first decade of this century, a darker time even than the nineties, some light shone. John Albert Macy, who was to write the influential Spirit of American Literature in 1913, was then the special correspondent from Boston for the Chicago Evening Post. His appreciative review, printed in the Post on October 25, 1902, noted Robinson's return to
plain speech and concluded: ' . . . if he should do enough better in the direction he has taken to justify the comparison he would stand to our age as Wordsworth did to his.'

In December, the *Nation*, in a review reprinted the following day in the *New York Evening Post*, wished "health, fortune, and encouragement and still farther development" to one who could write a book like Captain Craig. "There is not a trivial or meaningless thing in it . . . ." said the magazine which had also welcomed *The Children of the Night*. Another of the poet's old admirers, the *Dial*'s William Morton Payne, found in Captain Craig the man a mixture of Socrates, Aristophanes, and Carlyle, and in Robinson himself elements of Whitman and Browning, and greeted once again "an utterance that seemed to score rhetorical trickery."

Except for Payne in the *Dial*, however, the reviewers in the established critical journals were disdainful of a work now considered one of Robinson's major successes. In the *Critic*, Clinton Scollard was disturbed by too much

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33Quoted in Robert Liddell Lowe, "Two Letters of Edwin Arlington Robinson: A Note on his Early Critical Reception," *New England Quarterly*, XXVII (June, 1954), 259. (This article introduces William Allan Neilson, then a young instructor at Harvard, as an early supporter of Robinson's work.)

34"Recent Poetry," *Nation*, LXXV (December 11, 1902), 465.

"blank-verse that is little more than inverted prose chopped up into lines. . . ."36 Similarly, Frank Dempster Sherman of the Book Buyer could not forgive "the rough, crude, and altogether prosaic character of the blank-verse."37 As for the Independent, its reviewer was subtle in his acrimony. Captain Craig, he said, was an "extraordinary piece."

"... here is indeed a poetry suited to all the uses of modern life—a sort of prose-poetry or poetical prose," which, he found, "symptomatic of certain tendencies of modern verse," of "what may be called the secularization of poetry." The language and subject matter of Captain Craig, he continued, were opposed "to all we normally think of as poetic." Although he saw the "vigor, humor, caricature, even satire and pathos" of the "present volume," he could only fear its formlessness: "Can the lesson be lost?" he asked. "Shall not the many merits of the book—for it has many, as we have just tried to suggest—rather emphasize than conceal the dangers to which poetry is exposed at present?"38 The reviewer's opinion was apparently shared by magazine editors, for they continued to reject Robinson's poetry. "Between 1896 and 1905 Robinson's verse appeared

36Clinton Scollard, "Recent Books of Poetry," Critic, XLII (March, 1903), 232.

37Frank Dempster Sherman, "Recent Poetry," Book Buyer, XXV (December, 1902), 429.

38"A New Poetry," Independent, LV (February 19, 1903), 446-447.
in no commercial periodical." Only the Harvard Monthly printed two poems. "By discouraging Robinson from further experiment," concludes Emery Neff, "they [editors and reviewers] delayed the advent of the twentieth-century style for over ten years. Otherwise, there might have been no gap between 'Captain Craig' and Spoon River Anthology and Prufrock."39

The commercial failure of Captain Craig left Robinson desperate, personally and economically, and in the fall of 1903 he took a job underground as a time-checker for a construction company building the first New York subway. Too exhausted at night to write, he began to drink too much and avoided his friends; yet he held the job until his section of the subway was completed, about nine months later. Further rescue came early in 1905 when, at the instigation of President Roosevelt, whose son Kermit had presented him with Children of the Night, Gilder accepted a poem, "his first paid acceptance since the sonnet on Poe ten years back."40 Scribner's Magazine also printed some poems, and the Scribner firm took over Children from Badger and reissued it. But Robinson's going was still rough, smoothed only by the summers he was able to spend at the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, Vermont. "Between that

39Neff, op. cit., p. 129.
40Ibid., p. 136.
year, 1905, and 1913, his only acceptance outside the realm of Roosevelt's personal influence with Scribner's and The Century Magazine, was The Atlantic Monthly, which printed Calverly's in May 1907. 41

The new critical climate brought about by the poetic renaissance of 1912 ultimately led to the increased attention accorded Robinson's work. Robinson's masterpiece, The Man Against the Sky, published by Macmillan in 1916, while not unduly applauded, was nevertheless the subject of appreciative criticism, and from that time on he could count on a respectful hearing for the many works yet to come. In the long run, it was the "magnitude" of Robinson's work which finally brought him attention as a major writer, and to that extent, the early critics cannot be blamed for not recognizing his importance. " . . . if he had not published his long poems—he might have remained a minor poet, unheralded, inglorious." On the other hand, it is true that among his best work are many poems from the earliest books, that critics and poets turn "from the long narratives to the shorter pieces in these early books for study and emulation." 42 " . . . I fancy that I am safe in saying," Robinson wrote in 1917, "that my style, such as it is, was pretty well formed by the time my first book was published,

41 Ibid., p. 144.
in 1896. "^3 We can only deplore the critical vacuity which permitted a poet of Robinson's stature to starve, and poetry of the quality of Robinson's to languish. Although the period of Robinson's greatest despair was the 1900's and not the 1890's, it is true that critics of the nineties might have been more perceptive and perhaps even more enthusiastic in their acclaim of Robinson's work. "Ours the blame for the long discouragement." But at the same time, "ours the praise that there were individuals among us who permitted him to live by poetry."^44 A reviewer like Payne, friends like Gardiner and Mrs. Richards, fellow-poets like Moody and Torrence and Stickney, the philanthropy of Mrs. MacDowell, even the appreciation of a president, sustained him. "In a nation supposedly given over to commercialism was found a saving remnant."^45

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[^44]: Neff, op. cit., p. 262.
[^45]: Ibid., p. 263.
Although seven poems were printed in magazines and newspapers during Emily Dickinson's lifetime, the bulk of the poet's work was first published posthumously during the 1890's. Dickinson is often cited as an example of the private poet who shuns publication because his poetry is written for "self-expression" alone; yet a study of her relationships with editors and publishers indicates that she feared not the publication of her poems but the textual alterations that publication invariably entailed. Unfortunately, as we shall see, during the nineties the editors of Dickinson's poems persisted in deeming editorial revisions essential, and thus the history of the posthumous publication of Dickinson's poems is, in a way, a continuation of the poet's earlier difficulties with friends and editors.

In 1862, when Emily Dickinson first wrote to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, she was in a "frenzy" of creation; according to Thomas Johnson, fully half of all her extant poems were transcribed during the three years from 1861 to 1863. Although it can never be determined whether all these poems were written during these few years or whether they "represent fair copies made from drafts which had been accumulating for the previous eight or ten years," 46

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certainly at this time she was aware of herself as a poet. The poet's immediate justification for writing to Higginson was his Atlantic Monthly "Letter to a Young Contributor" which seemed almost to solicit replies from readers, but her real motive in asking whether her verses were "alive" was to inquire whether her poems could be published. Although in later years she was firmly averse to publishing her work, it seems "beyond doubt" that at the time she wrote Higginson she longed for public recognition. As Johnson comments, the statement "If fame belonged to me, I could not escape her" hardly stems from a person "who courts obscurity"—nor does the careful transcription of her poems, or the preoccupation of the poems written between 1862 and 1865 with the subject of fame.\(^7\) Dickinson was, however, determined to safeguard the integrity of her art, and when Higginson's friendly reply suggested conventional modifications in the poems she sent him, she abandoned hope that her poems could be published unaltered during her lifetime. Throughout their correspondence of twenty years or so, and during his two visits to her in Amherst—in 1870 and 1873—Higginson admired her intensity and individuality but considered her poems a purely "personal form of expression." "In view of the lack of direct evidence it is hardly fair

to place on his shoulders the sole responsibility for the fact that during her lifetime only a handful of her verses appeared in print. . . . Yet Colonel Higginson's influence was without doubt the most important factor outside of herself. . . . If Higginson had perceived in them the work of an original who should be made known, it seems probable that her resistance to publicity would finally have been overcome."^48

Higginson must bear the brunt, it seems, for the entire critical climate. Both Samuel Bowles and Josiah Gilbert Holland, friends of Emily Dickinson and professionally involved in literature, shared his belief that hers was a striking individual talent too personal for publication, and their views undoubtedly reflected critical opinion in the seventies and eighties. Perhaps it was best, after all, "that she was not subjected to the opposition or the neglect of a public that was not ready to receive her."^49 Certainly the textual inaccuracies of the few poems that were published during her lifetime pained her. In May, 1861, the Springfield Daily Republican printed "I taste a liquor never brewed" anonymously, but only after the editor revised the first stanza so that the second and fourth

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49 Ibid., p. 18.
lines rhymed. In February, 1866, the paper again printed a Dickinson poem anonymously, "The Snake" ("A narrow fellow in the grass"), which Sue had submitted to editor Bowles. When the Republican substituted a dash for a question mark in the third line, and altered the stanzaic divisions, Emily wrote Higginson that the poem was 'robbed of me—defeated too of the third line by punctuation.' Even more disillusioning was her experience with "Success," published in 1878 in an anthology of anonymous verse, A Masque of Poets, the concluding volume of Roberts Brothers' No Name Series. The poem was solicited by Helen Hunt Jackson, of all Emily Dickinson's literary friends "the most persistent in urging her to publish her poems and the most ingenious in her attempts to overcome the poet's diffidence." Mrs. Jackson's ingenuity apparently included submitting the poem to the publisher even before she received her friend's consent, although ultimately she did acquire the necessary permission. Yet when the poem was printed with five alterations in the text, this additional

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51 Ibid., II, 713.
53 Johnson, Emily Dickinson, op. cit., p. 171.
example of "editorial highhandedness" strengthened Dickinson in her resolution not to publish.

To be sure, Helen Jackson was important to Emily Dickinson. She gave Emily "as no other person ever did, a conviction that her poems were of first importance. Nothing ever touched her more deeply than the recognition thus bestowed upon her art--and by another poet, one whom the best critics of the day acclaimed as a leading, if not the leading, writer of verse in America." Furthermore, as intercessor for "Success" for Roberts Brothers, publishers of her own successful books, Mrs. Jackson opened the door not only for the firm's posthumous publication of Dickinson's poetry, but for the correspondence between Emily and Thomas Niles of Roberts Brothers. Nevertheless, in 1884 when she again tried to get her friend to publish a volume of poems, neither she nor Niles could prevail upon Emily to publish, to some extent no doubt, because of the unhappy experience with "Success." If Emily Dickinson readily accepted Higginson's advice that she not publish, it was also because of her own realization that there was no audience for the unaltered text of her poems.

Emily Dickinson died in 1886, one year after Mrs. Jackson. Unfortunately, by the nineties, when Dickinson's poems were published posthumously, the climate of opinion

54 Ibid., p. 179.
had not changed essentially. It would seem, at first, that new critical gods had decreed an enlightenment, for, as we shall see, the three series of the Poems and the two-volume edition of the Letters were all enormously successful, each running into a number of printings. However, both Millicent Todd Bingham's Ancestors' Brocades, the account of the original editing of the poems, and Thomas Johnson's variorum text of Emily Dickinson's poetry reveal that during the nineties the poems underwent what Mrs. Bingham calls "creative editing."

The recent variorum text by Thomas Johnson proves what, in the past, critics could but suspect, that editorial decision and not manuscript confusion was responsible for the revisions in the early text of the poems. Previously, family feuds had been responsible for the confusion about the Dickinson manuscripts. After Emily's death, her sister Lavinia oversaw the job of getting the poems published. For help Vinnie turned at first to their brother Austin's wife Sue, once an intimate of Emily and a recipient of many of her poems, but when Sue did nothing with the poems Lavinia enlisted the Dickinson's Amherst neighbor, Mrs. Mabel Loomis Todd, as editor. Mrs. Todd copied and numbered and, in some cases, dated, the frequently illegible manuscripts, and, with Colonel Higginson's help for the first two series only, published the three series of Poems and the edition of the Letters, and would have prepared further
volumes had not disagreements resulting in a lawsuit occurred between her and Vinnie. Ultimately Sue inherited the original manuscripts, and in 1914 and later during the Dickinson revival of the twenties, Sue's daughter, Mrs. Martha Dickinson Bianchi, edited texts based partly on the published manuscripts, and partly—correctly and otherwise—on the original manuscripts in her possession. In the meantime Mrs. Todd continued to publish intermittently—another edition of the Letters in 1931, and some reminiscent articles. Then her daughter Millicent entered the lists, not only with Ancestors' Brocades, but with Bolts of Melody, a text of the poems based on her mother's copies of the original manuscripts. Although Mrs. Bingham indulged in excesses in her portrait of the Dickinson family, critics have generally accepted her account of the feud, and have preferred her text of the poems. Bolts of Melody, says Johnson, "marked a new era in textual fidelity." Fortunately, however, with the Harvard University Library's purchase of all but a small portion of the manuscripts, Thomas H. Johnson's variorum text of the poems was made possible. At the same time, Johnson published an "interpretive biography" of the poet which, if not definitive because its size and scope are limited, is nevertheless indispensable.

Johnson's task, described in Studies in Bibliography and in his introduction to the text of the poems, was as
exciting as Mrs. Todd's original job of editing. Problems of dating do not concern us here, but it is interesting that by studying the handwriting and the paper, and from internal clues in letters which contained some of the poems, Johnson was able to date all manuscripts "within a twelvemonth," and many of course far more precisely--no mean accomplishment when we remember that the poet dated no poems, and no letter after 1850, and that Lavinia burned all letters to Emily. Establishing an accurate text was often as difficult as dating the poems. As Mrs. Bingham has also explained, many of the poems were unfinished, copied either in one or many drafts with alternative words or lines: "Reference to the original manuscripts often leaves an editor in doubt as to the poet's intention, not only regarding preferred alternative readings, but also with respect to details of prosody, length of lines, division into stanzas, and indentation of rhyming lines --matters of style with reference to which Emily Dickinson was under no constraint of consistency."55 Undoubtedly the original editors were plagued by these textual difficulties and of necessity relied on their own judgment in choosing among alternates. On the other hand, the unfinished manuscripts were far less numerous than is often supposed.

Most of the early manuscripts were copied as finished drafts and bound together, six or eight sheets at a time, into what Lavinia later called "volumes." It is only the loose-sheet copies and later the poems written in pencil on odds and ends of paper that are truly unfinished.

"... 80 per cent of the poems exist in finished versions, copied fair, with no alternate lines or variant readings suggested. Of the remaining 20 per cent--some 400 poems--she offers variant readings, for the most part with no indication which reading she might ultimately have selected in a final version. . . . It would be misleading to give the impression that many such [alternates and variant readings] exist. Even of the 300 or 400 poems that show them, by far the largest part offer alternates for but one or two words in any poem."56

The textual discrepancies between the original versions and the copies printed during the nineties, therefore, can only infrequently be explained by confusions in the manuscripts. In most cases the changes were deliberate attempts by Mrs. Todd and Colonel Higginson to make Dickinson's poems conform with conventional expectations. The editors "attempted wherever possible to smooth rhymes, regularize the meter, delete localisms, and

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substitute sensible metaphors\textsuperscript{57}; they pandered to the audience's desire for correctness and decorum. Specific examples are detailed in Ancestors' Brocades. The poet's preference for the subjunctive over the indicative mood often seemed grammatical error to the editors and they "improved" the wording. Idiosyncrasies like the use of "lain" for "laid" which probably reflected Dickinson's predilection for current spoken usage were also troublesome.

"Textual changes ranged all the way from altering a word to make a rhyme, or to conform to the rules of grammar, to leaving out entire stanzas."\textsuperscript{58} Typographical matters further disturbed the editors, and they felt compelled to omit many of Dickinson's capitals, underscorings, and quotation marks, and to correct mistakes or eccentricities in spelling. Clearly, the best the nineties had to offer was a watered-down Dickinson.

Because Higginson was largely responsible for the changes he and Mrs. Todd made, he is frequently derided by later critics. To be sure, he cannot be acquitted of all charges of insensitivity, but it is also unfair to judge him solely with the hindsight of the present. "Only a Sainte-Beuve can stand above or outside traditional proprieties, or recognize a new art form and help the artist win

\textsuperscript{57}Johnson, ed., \textit{Poems}, op. cit., I, xlv.

a public." Conventional editorial procedure, as well as the opinions of other critics, persuaded Higginson that the poems should be edited. At first he asked Houghton Mifflin Company, for which he was a reader, to publish a selected 200 of the poems, but they refused. Because he was reluctant to approach a competing Boston publisher, it was Mrs. Todd who took the poems to Thomas Niles of Boston's Roberts Brothers, still "among the choicest publishing houses in the United States." Despite the fact that Niles had previously been enthusiastic about Dickinson's poetry and had solicited poems from her during her lifetime, he now hedged about publishing, and termed the poems "generally devoid of true poetical qualities." Perhaps, as Johnson suggests, Niles was merely exercising a business-like caution in order to get the best terms for the firm; but Higginson and Mrs. Todd were discouraged further when Arlo Bates, an esteemed poet and a reader for Roberts Brothers, was also skeptical about the poems' literary and commercial merits. Bates recommended that about half the poems be published in a small edition--after they were edited. Eventually, with Lavinia paying for the plates, 500

61 Johnson, Emily Dickinson, op. cit., p. 176.
copies of the **Poems**, containing 115 poems and "edited by two of her friends, Mabel Loomis Todd and T. W. Higginson," were published by Roberts Brothers on November 12, 1890 at $1.50 a copy. "After such pain," the editors understandably feared the results and made every effort to prepare the public through articles, lectures, and the publication of individual poems in magazines.

To the surprise of the editors and publishers, and still to the surprise of many today, the book was "the major publishing sensation of the nineties." The 480 copies placed on sale were soon gone, and the book was out of print for a few days until the second printing of 380 copies appeared in December. In January, 1891, 500 copies of a cheaper edition at $1.25 each were put out. "In 1891, 4,350 copies were printed, and most of them marketed. By 1898, the sixteenth printing had been attained." Equally amazing was the critical response. Reviews were printed even before the actual publication; immediately afterwards a "flood of notices" appeared. "There were more than five hundred printed reviews within the first few weeks. . . . Letters filled with extravagant delight and sympathetic understanding came . . . from all over the country and from

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Although the English reviewers were largely unsympathetic, with few exceptions American critics "agreed that the poems were works of genius." In September, 1890, just before publication, Higginson prepared an introductory article on Dickinson for the Christian Union, "a literary-religious journal of respectability and wide circulation. The essay is some twelve hundred words in length, and however tentative in judgment and apologetic in tone, it is in fact the first critical identification of Emily Dickinson as a poet." Higginson's shorter introduction to the Poems was either taken from or was the basis of the Christian Union article, both of which set the tone of much of the Dickinson criticism of the nineties. Here occur the comparisons with Emerson and Blake; here appears the quotation from Ruskin that no 'beauty of execution can outweigh one grain or fragment of thought'; here Higginson's own oft-quoted statement that "when a thought takes one's breath away, a lesson on grammar seems an impertinence." [In the Christian

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65 Bingham, Ancestors' Brocades, op. cit., p. 109
67 Introduction to Emily Dickinson, Poems (Boston, 1890), p. vi.
Higginson's argument, of course, is that although Dickinson's form is often "wayward and unconventional," the brilliance and insight of her thought excuse any technical lapses.

Both the favorable and unfavorable notices of the Poems echoed Higginson's opinion of Dickinson's technique. To be sure, the few adverse reviewers refused to pardon what they considered Dickinson's lack of form. "Formlessness is the antithesis of art," wrote the reviewer for Scribner's Magazine:

Having one's breath taken away is a very agreeable sensation, but it is not the finest sensation of which we are susceptible; and instead of being grateful for it one is very apt, if he be a connoisseur in this kind of sensations, to suffer annoyance at the perversity which is implied in a poet who, though capable of taking one's breath away, nevertheless prefers to do so in arbitrary rather than in artistic fashion.69

The Overland Monthly's critic was equally annoyed:

One lays down the book with a feeling of perplexity that is akin to exasperation, that being so good they should not be better. They have true poetic quality in them without doubt, but as a whole are too crude and fragmentary to admit of unqualified endorsement.70

68 Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "An Open Portfolio," Christian Union, XLII (September 25, 1890), 393.


And there were one or two other critics who believed that "Nothing in recent literature is more painful than the pent and paralyzed inspiration of this truly gifted mind, incapable of mastery of its art or of itself."  

The majority of the responses to the "Auction" of the Poems, however, were favorable. Yet it cannot be said that the reviewers who praised were, as a rule, any more perceptive than the reviewers who damned. Although the former were at least willing to put up with the "imperfections" in form for the sake of the thought, both camps continued to regret the technical irregularities and the occasional obscurity in the poems. In the Dial, William Morton Payne was appreciative and compared Dickinson with Blake. Quoting Higginson throughout, Payne agreed that the poems' "formal defects do not shock us"—but, he was compelled to admit, their form was "rugged."72 The Atlantic delighted in the "fragmentary richness" of the poems but found the perfect poem just "beyond grasp."73 The Critic said that the poems were "surprisingly individual and genuinely inspired"—though they were "rough and rugged."74 And as usual, the

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71 "Emily Dickinson's Poems," Literary World, XXI (December 6, 1890), 466.


74 "The Poems of Emily Dickinson," Critic, XVII (December 13, 1890), 306.
Book Buyer's verdict was similar to the Critic's: the poems "show a quite remarkable sensitiveness to music, and there are several that startle by their depth of poetic insight," wrote Nathan Haskell Dole, "though they are reckless of rhyme." The Independent's review was particularly pleasing to both Mrs. Todd and Colonel Higginson. Written not, as they thought at first, by Maurice Thompson, but by a Dr. Twining, the review was indeed highly laudatory. Dickinson was called an "original genius" whose poems would win over all but "the most hopeless conventional" readers. Half a dozen poems or so were quoted in full and commended. Yet this is the review which erroneously noted the supposed "misprints" in the book. For "satin" (in "To satin nations he is nought"), said Dr. Twining, read "Latin"; for "sate" (in the bee "That will not sate its sting"), read "state" -- neither reading characteristic of Dickinson. The first edition of Dickinson's Poems may have been commercially successful, but the response was hardly creditable to the literary sensibilities of the reviewers. Even a diluted Dickinson, it seems, was not acceptable drink to critics of the nineties.

But some reviewers wrote discriminatingly of Dickinson's poetry. The Reverend John W. Chadwick, for example,

75Nathan Haskell Dole, "Literary Topics in Boston," Book Buyer, VII (December, 1890), 540.

76"Poems by Emily Dickinson," Independent, XLII (December 11, 1890), 1759.
whose admiration dated back to 1864 when "Some keep the Sabbath going to church" was published in the Round Table, wrote movingly in the Christian Register of "precious things discovered late." "... we are much mistaken," Reverend Chadwick continued, "if she does not prove that the adjunct of rhyme is not so necessary to the pleasure of verse as many have believed."77 The most impressive notice of the Poems was the famous review by William Dean Howells in the January, 1891 Harper's Magazine. How much Howells truly believed that he wrote, and how much was written out of friendship for Mrs. Todd who sent him the book before its publication, is hard to say. As Higginson wrote Mrs. Todd, Howells was "a dangerous friend, often praising so whimsically (e.g. that turgid & imitative Cawein) that his praise rouses opposition as much as sympathy..." 78 And in a scathing review in the London Daily News, Andrew Lang was thus roused. Howells' very enthusiasm, Lang remarked, should have frightened potential readers. Nevertheless, "The review by Howells... penetrated at once to her originality."79 Howells was one of the few critics who realized

77 John W. Chadwick, "Poems by Emily Dickenson [sic]," Christian Register, LIX (December 18, 1890), 828.
78 Bingham, Ancestors' Brocades, op. cit., pp. 64-65.
that Dickinson's form was "no less finished than her thought." Each poem, he wrote, was "a compassed whole, a sharply finished point, and there is evidence, circumstantial and direct, that the author spared no pains in the perfect expression of her ideals."

Occasionally the outside of the poem, so to speak, is left so rough, so rude, that the art seems to have faltered. But there is apparent to reflection the fact that the artist meant just this harsh exterior to remain, and that no grace of smoothness could have imparted her intention as it does.80

Occasionally a reviewer, like "Droch" in Life magazine, appreciated Dickinson's ability to catch "a strange melody in most irregular measures."81 But, as a rule, such perception was rare during the nineties. That it is to be found at all, however, is the basis of our faith in the awakening of critical sensibilities too long dormant.

Even more promising was the change experienced by the editors themselves. Higginson was now as committed as Mrs. Todd to the "extraordinary thing" they had done in "revealing this rare genius." "I feel as if we had climbed to a cloud, pulled it away, and revealed a new star behind it,"82 he wrote his co-editor. The public must have

82Todd, "Emily Dickinson's Literary Debut," p. 470.
another volume, the two of them decided, and within a year, in November, 1891, a Second Series of the Poems was published. Although this time Mrs. Todd, and not he, prepared the short introduction, Higginson assumed primary responsibility for the volume, and his name precedes hers on the title page.

More important, both editors became more fully aware, if they had been aware at all, of the function of Dickinson's compression and irregularity, and they intensified their efforts to win over the public to a similar understanding. "Let us alter as little as possible, now that the public ear is opened," Higginson wrote Mrs. Todd, and there is indeed "less wholesale emendation in the second volume than the first."83 "... all interference not absolutely inevitable has been avoided," Mrs. Todd stated in her Introduction. "The very roughness of her own rendering is part of herself, and not lightly to be touched; for it seems in many cases that she intentionally avoided the smoother and more usual rhymes."84 Higginson offered a similar defense in his article in the Atlantic Monthly: "... at first I tried a little--a very little--to lead her in the direction of rules and traditions;" he admitted, but, he added, the effort was "only perfunctory," and

84 Introduction to Poems (Boston, 1891), pp. 6-7.
Dickinson soon interested him "more in her—so to speak—unregenerate condition."

... I soon abandoned all attempt to guide in the slightest degree this extraordinary nature, and simply accepted her confidences, giving as much as I could of what might interest her in return.\(^5\)

In this respect, Johnson comments that Higginson's willingness to play the game by her rules, to give the help she needed by simply replying as a friend to her letters, is to Higginson's everlasting credit.\(^6\) To his credit, too, is his effort to win the public to a similar appreciation of Dickinson's unusual, if not revolutionary, method.

The sale of the second volume "was nearly as rapid as that of the first series"; by the end of the month a second printing was needed. The critical reaction was much as before: there were a few new admirers, some converts, and also some backsliders.\(^7\) In the periodicals, the backsliders predominated. The *Nation*, of course, remained friendly, for its anonymous review was written by Higginson, but both the *Book-Buyer*, in a review by Arlo Bates, and the *Critic*, keyed their tune to the supposed discords of the poetry. "A thought may be striking," wrote the *Critic's*


\(^6\)Johnson, *Emily Dickinson*, op. cit., p. 121.

\(^7\)Kilgour, op. cit., p. 244.
reviewer, "but the stroke should not be fatal. After reading two volumes of Miss Dickinson's poems one gets exhausted, and a healthy mind begins to fear paralysis." The Overland Monthly regretted that the praise lavished on the first volume led to the publication of a second, while the Literary World was strengthened in its conviction that Dickinson's "rhyme, meter, and vocabulary" jarred upon the artistic sense. And it was now that the most famous objection to Dickinson appeared, that by Thomas Bailey Aldrich. First printed anonymously in the "Contributor's Club" of the January, 1892 Atlantic Monthly, the review was republished in Aldrich's Ponkapog Papers (1903). "... an eccentric, dreamy, half-educated recluse in an out-of-the-way New England village (or anywhere else)," Aldrich wrote, "cannot with impunity set at defiance the laws of gravitation and grammar." His conclusion: "Oblivion lingers in the immediate neighborhood."

But there is always the "remnant which saves." Some critics profited from the second volume by probing deeper

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88 "Recent Poetry and Verse," Critic, XIX (December 19, 1891), 346.
89 "Recent Verse," Overland Monthly, XIX (February, 1892), 218-219.
90 "Poems by Emily Dickinson," Literary World, XXII (December 19, 1891), 486.
91 Thomas Bailey Aldrich, "In Re Emily Dickinson," Atlantic Monthly, LXIX (January, 1892), 144.
into Dickinson's art. Most satisfying was a "Letter to the Editor" of the Critic objecting to the review which had condemned not only the "fatal thought" but also the "formlessness" of the poems which "keeps them almost outside the pale of poetry." Such critics seem to believe, wrote Francis H. Stoddard,

that real poetry must have perfection of technique, must have metrical and grammatical finish: the poems of Emily Dickinson do not have such finish; hence these verses are almost out of the pale of poetry. The major premise here set down has not been attacked of late. The minor one is not so easily disposed of. For Miss Dickinson's poems may be formless, or they may be worded to so fine and subtile a device that they seem formless. . . . 92

And Stoddard analyzes in detail Dickinson's reliance on harmony and alliteration and end rhyme in "I died for beauty." "I submit," he concludes, "that such art as this may be subtle and medieval, but it is not formlessness." 93 Here, along with Howells, was another reviewer, rare indeed, who instead of apologizing for Dickinson's form, understood it, and admired it.

As early as December, 1891, Mrs. Todd, with Vinnie's approval, had decided to publish Dickinson's Letters, but the task of collecting and editing them was arduous. The


93 Ibid., p. 25.
death of Roberts Brothers' Thomas Niles in May, 1894, complicated matters further, but finally in November, 1894, the two-volume boxed edition of the *Letters of Emily Dickinson* was published at $2.00 a copy. "This edition of one thousand copies sold, but not with the speed of the two series of poems. . . ." 94 The income was only enough to cover the cost of the plates; yet the book seemed to many "the book of the year," and the reviews were many. Occasionally a critic, like the one for the *Book Buyer*, insisted that the letters be read "for themselves alone"—that is, as literary documents; but as a rule interest was in the personality of the writer and the details of the writer's life. The *Letters* "lack the sustained power, the soundness of thought, the sanity of view, and the firmness of fiber which make literature," said the *Outlook*; they "form a contribution to our knowledge of human nature, rather than to our literature." 95 In either case, "it may be said that the publication of the letters marks a period in the Dickinson sensation. The period of greatest popularity was over, and, in reality, the best poems had been published." 96

94 Kilgour, op. cit., p. 248.
95 "Books and Authors," *Outlook*, LI (March 23, 1895), 481.
96 Kilgour, op. cit., p. 245.
One more volume of poetry was to come, the Third Series in September, 1896. Like the Letters, this book was edited by Mrs. Todd alone, but she observed "the same editorial principles employed earlier" and altered freely. The few reviews were kind. The Nation and the Dial remained steadfast admirers, while the Overland Monthly preferred this Series to the two previous ones. In the Brown Magazine, Harry Lyman Koopman analyzed Dickinson's "disregard or defiance of the accepted rules of prosody,—leading her to prefer irregular verse-forms, and generally to substitute for verse a crisp, rhythmic prose marked by occasional rhymes and more frequent assonance and alliteration. . . .," and concluded that "Her revolt against verse-traditions connects her with some of the greatest names of our century. . . ." Nevertheless, "The book's reception was not stirring. Very few of the critical periodicals reviewed it; most of the notices were in newspapers and were not especially significant. " . . . The Letters, published in 1894, had never had enough purchasers to provide any royalties for the copyright holders, and this volume was not more successful." 

99 Kilgour, op. cit., p. 274.
Mrs. Bingham claims that had not the lawsuit between Lavinia and Mrs. Todd intervened, her mother would have continued to publish other editions of Dickinson's poetry, and Kilgour agrees that the lack of commercial success would probably not have deterred Roberts Brothers from printing further volumes. Considering the dull ears upon which the Third Series fell, the reception of future volumes would probably have been discouraging. From the point of view of the present, the reception of the Three Series of Poems during the nineties seems of doubtful encouragement too. The modifications in the original texts and the readiness of most reviewers to find fault with Dickinson's technique suggest that, despite the clamor for the poems, they were read unthinkingly. Nevertheless, in no area of poetry criticism in the nineties have more than a few nuggets been found, and perhaps we should not seek a whole mine in the reception of Emily Dickinson. Gold is here too—in the dedication of Mrs. Todd, in the growing perception in Higginson, and even in the enthusiastic, if uncritical, interest of the public. And there may, indeed, be a whole mine after all, for the understanding reviews by Chadwick and Howells and Francis Stoddard and Koopman are a remarkable phenomenon in the history of American taste.
EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON


Robinson, Edwin Arlington. Captain Craig. Reviews:

"A New Poetry." Independent, LV (February 19, 1903), 446-447.
"Recent Poetry." Nation, LXXV (December 11, 1902), 465.
Sherman, Frank Dempster. "Recent Poetry." Book Buyer, XXV (December, 1902), 429.

Children of the Night. Reviews:

Payne, William Morton, "Recent American Poetry." Dial, XXIV (January 16, 1898), 49.
"Recent American Poetry." Nation, LXVI (June 2, 1898), 426.

Torrent and the Night Before. Reviews:

"A Literary Journal." Bookman, IV (February, 1897), 509-510. [Robinson's reply: "Chronicle and Comment." Bookman, V (March, 1897), 7.]
Clarke, Helen Archibald. "Notes on American Verse." Poet-Lore, IX, no. 3 (1897), 448-449.
Payne, William Morton. "Recent Poetry." Dial, XXII (February 1, 1897), 92-93.


**EMILY DICKINSON**

Arnold, Helen H. "'From the Garden We Have Not Seen': New Letters of Emily Dickinson." New England Quarterly, XVI (September, 1943), 363-375.


Reviews:

Block, Louis J. "A New England Nun." Dial, XVIII (March 1, 1895), 146-147.

"Books and Authors." Outlook, LI (March 23, 1895), 481.


"Emily Dickinson's Letters." Nation, LIX (December 13, 1894), 446-447.
"Letters of Emily Dickinson." Critic, XXVI (February 16, 1895), 119.

"Letters of Emily Dickinson." Literary World, XXV (December 14, 1894), 445-446.


Reviews:

"A Poet and Some Others." Saturday Review, LXXII (September 5, 1891), 279.


Chadwick, John W. "Poems by Emily Dickenson [sic]." Christian Register. LXIX (December 18, 1890), 828.


Dole, Nathan Haskell. "Literary Topics in Boston." Book Buyer, VII (December, 1890), 540.


"Emily Dickinson's Poems." Literary World, XXI (December 6, 1890), 466.


"Poems by Emily Dickinson." Independent, XLII (December 11, 1890), 1759.

"The Poems of Emily Dickinson." Critic, XVII (December 13, 1890), 305-306.


"Recent Poetry." Nation, LI (November 27, 1890), 51.


Reviews:

Aldrich, Thomas Bailey. "In Re Emily Dickinson." Atlantic Monthly, LXIX (January, 1892), 143-144.


"Poems by Emily Dickinson." Literary World, XXII (December 19, 1891), 486.
"Recent Books of Verse." Christian Union, XLV (June 18, 1892), 1212.
"Recent Poetry." Nation, LIII (October 15, 1891), 297.
"Recent Poetry and Verse." Critic, XIX (December 19, 1891), 346.
"Recent Verse." Overland Monthly, XIX (February, 1892), 218-219.
"Volumes of Poems." Book Buyer, VIII (January, 1892), 650-651.


Reviews:

Payne, William Morton. "Recent Poetry." Dial, XXII (February 1, 1897), 90.
"Recent Poetry." Nation, LXIII (October 8, 1896), 275.
"Recent Verse." Overland Monthly, XXX (August, 1897), 190.


Stoddard, Francis H. "Technique in Emily Dickinson's Poems." *Critic*, XX (January 9, 1892), 24-25.


______. "In Emily Dickinson's Garden." *Atlantic Monthly, CLXXVII* (February, 1946), 64-70.

CHAPTER V

POETIC DRAMA AND THE TRADITION
Tempering the extravagant panegyrics granted the most minor American poets was the awareness that America was undergoing a period of transition in literature. Like Stedman whose great expectations lay rather in the future than the present, American critics were alarmed at the sterility of American poetry in particular. Resignedly they watched death take the enthroned leaders and leave no figures of comparable stature to take their place; helplessly they saw fiction zoom in popularity over poetry. Nowhere is their dissatisfaction more vivid than in America's objections to Alfred Austin as Tennyson's successor in the Laureateship. The carpings that Austin was at best a competent melodist, that to have no Laureate would be preferable to having Austin in the seat, seem all the more vicious in the context of a criticism inordinately cordial to all who appeared in print. But with Tennyson as criterion, the literary scene seemed barren indeed. As in England, so in America, said the critics: the age of gold had passed. In 1891, in a retrospective survey occasioned by the tenth anniversary of the Critic, George Pellew wrote that "... a period is set in of infinite experimentation,
with a high level of general excellence but with little achievement of even relative perfection."¹

The indicators of American poetry continued to see science as the villain of the drama. The dichotomy posited by Stedman was accepted everywhere: Science, because it employs the Reason to classify Fact, is the enemy of Poetry, which relies upon the Imagination to apprehend the Soul or the Spirit within reality. Unfortunately, said the genteel critics, during the nineteenth century the apparent accomplishments of science have seduced man to subordinate the life of the Spirit to the life of Reason. On the one hand, developments in evolutionary theory and geological studies have seemed to dethrone former certainties so that "The cultivated mind is becoming incapable of giving final assent to anything definite."² In poetry, science "turns eager lyric utterances into introspective reflection, philosophic, skeptical even."³ On the other hand, the materialistic culture ushered in by science is an unquestioning one. Stolidly contented with material comfort, men have become conventional in manners and art. "Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers," and thought and taste are uniform.

¹George Pellew, "Ten Years in American Literature," Critic, XVIII (January 17, 1891), 29.


³Benjamin W. Wells, "Nineteenth Century Literature --A Survey," Book Buyer, XX (October, 1900), 204.
The results, concluded the critics, is that literature itself has become a business—and many are the articles which accuse authors of writing to order instead of producing "the well-considered and ripe fruits of their literary skill." A fine series of articles in the Forum by Frederic Harrison assailing British life and culture aroused much interest here because they were believed most applicable to America too. Attacking the decadence in poetry, fiction, and modern art, Harrison concluded, "This indeed is the real root of the mischief—that Art in all its forms is become a mere article of commerce."

The discontent with contemporary poetry became so acute that critics asked not only "Is Verse in Danger?" but "Have We Still Need of Poetry?" Some dared to reply that "By its indirect and suggestive method and by its artificial restraints of rhythm and rhyme [poetry] is no longer able to compete where analysis, examination, research, and exact expression are needed." Only "For the purpose of supplying

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4 Ainsworth R. Spofford, "Directions and Volume of our Literary Activities," Forum, XVI (January, 1894), 598.


6 Calvin Thomas, "Have We Still Need of Poetry?" Forum, XXV (June, 1898), 503-512. Edmund Gosse, "Is Verse in Danger?" Forum, X (January, 1891), 517-526.
words to music" and "in the nursery where the words do not need to have a meaning at all," this writer concludes, will poetry survive. But as a rule, of course, critics attempted a defense of poetry and expressed some hope for its future. Their arguments were both theoretic and pragmatic. Either they tackled the science vs. poetry controversy and argued that the transcendental view of art resolves the contradiction, for art "is the unity of reality [the ideal truths of poetry] and appearance [the world of science]." Or they examined literary production and praised either the quantity or quality of the poetic effort. The common cry was that if there is less great poetry than in the past, there is more truly good or excellent work; "... the proportion of books of quality and substance to books of ephemeral interest steadily increases." Howells, for example, cited William Watson in England and James Whitcomb Riley in America as evidence that this was after all a "poetical age." But defenders usually protest too much, and fortunately Howells seems aware of the inadequacies of his favorites:


8Oscar Triggs, "Literature and the Scientific Spirit," Poet-Lore, VI (March, 1894), 120.

9Hamilton Wright Mabie, "A Year's Literary Production," Forum, XII (February, 1892), 798.
I am tormented with an unhandsome misgiving that I have been making too much of it on every side. The names of the great poets who are gone recur to me dismayingly, almost accusingly. What are all the new Presences when confronted with such tremendous Absences as Browning and Emerson, Longfellow and Tennyson, Rossetti and Lowell, Arnold and Whittier, Holmes and Morris, and the great companionless vague which was once Walt Whitman? I am almost afraid to make answer; I can only shrinkingly suggest that To-day may soon be brow-beating To-morrow as Yesterday is now brow-beating To-day. 10

In many ways, of course, the unfavorable comparison of the present with the past was reactionary, the complaint that modern poets were not Tennysons or Longfellows but another example of the imitativiness of the genteel tradition. On the other hand, the contemporary malaise could also become a healthy setting for a new poetry. It turned attention too to the future, and although many continued to ask of the future only another Tennyson, some recognized that hope must lie in a new direction. In that respect, it would seem, Howells' willingness to accept the new Presences of Kipling and Riley, even when they scarcely deserve his tributes, was a good deal more salutary than his testimony to the tremendous Absences. Howells was, as has been suggested in the section on Harper's Magazine, hardly a perceptive critic of poetry; his admiration of Lloyd Mifflin indicates how swayed he was by contemporary

opinion, his preference for Madison Cawein how susceptible he was to local colorism in poetry too. But at least he opened the gates to another kind of poetry, as his enthusiasm for Whitman also testifies.

The distinctions between Whitman and Tennyson often seem the touchstone of a critic's attitude toward the new poetry. It would not be fair to say that all who disliked Whitman were reactionaries; even a Hovey or a John Jay Chapman had his reservations about The Bard. But it probably was true that all who hearkened back to Tennyson were as embittered as the following critic:

If the poetry of the future is to be the poetry of Whitman, as some suggest, then it is clear that the idealistic will give way to the materialistic; culture and refinement, to the grosser expressions of verse; and literature become simply a medium for the semienlightened views of the lower orders of society. If, on the other hand, the Tennysonian conception of literature is to prevail, then it is equally clear that the ideal will have full scope, and literature be kept upon its higher levels.  

Fortunately, however, some denounced such a critical bias. In his articles for the Forum, for example, Harrison maintained that one result of a mechanical culture is a mechanical criticism. " . . . there is far too much moderate literature and far too fastidious a standard in literature. Every one is afraid to let himself go, to

offend the conventions, or to raise a sneer." 12 In poetry, in particular, "... we are all looking for echoes of the 'Idylls' or 'In Memoriam': it becomes our test and standard; the poet is afraid to let himself go. ... " 13 We worry too much about finding Tennyson's successor. "We shall have a poet worthy to succeed Tennyson when we no longer have Tennyson on the brain." 14 Writing in the Forum too, our friend from the Dial, Charles Leonard Moore, also affirmed that the climate for poetry would be more favorable if criticism were more virile. Criticism, he said, "has lost its gift of contradiction." Appreciations, not comparisons, are drawn. "Even Tennyson kicks the beam weighed against any of his robust predecessors." 15 As for the American idols, one cannot write "something natural, something real." "Our poets have been taken as read; they have been laid on the table; by a vote of the majority they are beyond discussion— they are American institutions." 16


14 Ibid., p. 649.


16 Ibid., p. 775.
Neither Harrison nor Moore, in these articles at any rate, progresses beyond this general dissatisfaction with contemporary art and criticism. Indeed, Harrison's conclusions in particular lead us back to the very generalities he is presumably criticizing. "There is no practical remedy:" he writes in the fourth and last of his series of articles, "and my object in what I said about poetry, literature, and art, is simply to insist that there is no practical remedy. . . . Simply hold fast by all that is pure, all that is beautiful, all that is broadly human." 17 Since his article on modern art extols Millet's The Angelus for its combination of "beauty and reality," there is every reason to believe that faced with specific works of art Harrison's reaction would be conventional. Moore's article also shies away from detailing the requisites of future art. "The future of poetry is as certain as the future of anything else," Moore concludes, presumably implying none of the negation a reader in the atomic age might attribute to that remark, "but the poetry of the future--to that we cannot give a date or description." In other articles, however, Moore does draft such a description. Its outlines are similar to those drawn by many other critics of the nineties.

Moore, it seems, never commented on the writings of Richard Hovey. Conceivably he was not one of his admirers, if he read Hovey's verse satire in The Tatler:

**The New Poet**

We all deplore
That Mr. Moore
Should be made thus
Ridiculous.

He is, no doubt,
A worthy man.
But why call out
The town to scan?

His book of verse
Might be much worse;
Why mark it comes
With fifes and drums?

Trumpets and tabors
Blare and rouse!
The Forum labors—
Lo, a mouse!

(O Weir, O Weir,
It's mighty queer
That you should make
So bad a break!)\(^8\)

Yet not only does Hovey's work in many ways fulfill some of Moore's demands but the two also expressed themselves

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\(^8\)Henry Leffert, "Richard Hovey: An American Poet. A Biographical Critique" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation New York University, 1929), 185-186. "I do not know which Moore called for The New Poet," comments Leffert. "— it could hardly have been Charles Leonard Moore, with three books of verse to his credit—but the gibe is a delight. . . ." Yet S. Weir Mitchell's "A New Poet," Forum, XIII (June, 1892), 430-438 must have been the stimulus for Hovey's satire—and Charles Leonard Moore "The New Poet." Actually Weir Mitchell rather than Moore bears the brunt of the attack.
similarly on a number of points. Besides his volumes of
ylyric poetry, his masque *Taliesin*, and his dramatic cycle
*Launcelot and Guinever*, Hovey also wrote criticism. In
addition to various essays on Maeterlinck and symbolism,
usually in the *Bookman* or *Poet-Lore*, and a few book reviews,
he wrote two important articles for *The Independent*: "On
the Threshold" in 1892 and "The Passing of Realism" in 1895.
"His critical articles, though few in number, are unusually
discriminating and go far to explain his poetry. . . . If
he had lived, it is probable that his success as a critic
might have come greatly to overshadow his poetic
achievement."  

As Katherine Turner documents, with references to
Hovey's plays as well as his articles, Hovey's central criti-
cal and artistic problem was achieving a synthesis of
realism and idealism. Strongly attracted to aestheticism,
interested in experimenting with the formal structure of art,
Hovey reveals the drift during the nineties away from the
excessive didacticism so characteristic of most nineteenth
century American literature. Yet, like most Americans, like
a Peck for example, he could not completely discard the
Puritan tradition and divorce art from life or ethics. The
compromise Hovey sought between two views of art gains in

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19 Katherine C. Turner, "Richard Hovey's Poetry in its
Relation to Certain Dominant Tendencies of the 1890's"
(unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan,
1939), 286.
significance because it typifies so much of the thought of
the nineties. The nineties, it must be repeated, did not
climb the summit; it simply established the first camping
grounds. Hovey's effort to implant European theories on
the soil of American idealism is the life of the camp.

By 1892 he had formulated the problem for himself.
For the *Independent's* round table panel on romanticism and
realism in American literature, Hovey predicted a "new era
in life and letters" which would unite realistic literalism
with romantic aspiration:

> The didacticism which afflicted our elder group
> of poets . . . will probably not return . . .
> At the same time, we have tired of dilettantism,
> and "esthetic" has become a word of reproach.
> We think now more of art for life's sake, and
> are beginning to realize that the best art is
> the most human.
> I think we must admit that realism, whether
> we like it or not, has been the most vital and
> most literary movement of recent years. The
> reaction has set in, however . . . May not
> realism be a sort of schoolmaster to prepare us
> for the fine art to come? And will not that
> art base itself on realism, like a giant with
> his feet firm on the earth, while with his head
> he strikes the stars?20

Like the other contributors, Hovey disapproved of the
realist's subordination of ethics to objectivity; unlike the
others, he appreciated the contribution of realism. His
next major critical article on "The Passing of Realism,"
therefore, restates his respect for the realist's portrayal

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20 Richard Hovey, "On the Threshold," *Independent*, XLIV (November 3, 1892), 1547.
of factual reality, although its essential theme is that realism must evolve into a more complete aesthetic. The new literature, he said, must adopt the realist's technical innovations while keeping the idealist's faith in the Idea or Spirit.

The judicious have clearly perceived all along that either of these two extremes is undesirable, and have cried out for a compromise, a via media, something that would avoid at once the rocks of Realism on the one side and the whirlpool of Idealism on the other. But what this course will really do, would be to give us all the vulgarity of one school and all the absurdity of the other, with the merits of neither. . . . True wisdom, as the great English Cardinal preached, does not lie in the via media but in the via catholica. It does not consist in sitting on the fence, but in getting down on both sides. . . . Both must be present, the thing and the idea, or we shall have a world of corpses or of ghosts, not of men. But both must be present, not as separate or contradictory entities, but as inextricably one. We must have the ideal; but we must find it were [sic] it actually is, in the real, not in the unreal. We must have the real, but we must portray it as it actually is, as the process of the ideal—not as a meaningless and empty husk.21

Hovey was fortunate in his belief that the via catholica was already being pursued by the symbolists, and a good part of the little criticism he wrote discussed French symbolism. Having been abroad, he knew much of the work at first hand, and was a particular friend of Mallarmé's. Although he never completed his projected book of Mallarmé's.

21Richard Hovey, "The Passing of Realism," Part II, Independent, XLVII (August 22, 1895), 1125.
translations, he did, it may be remembered, translate the
Hérodiade for the Chap-Book, and publish translations of
some of Mallarmé's poems. Mallarmé was also discussed in
"Our French Contemporaries," a series which Hovey and his
wife Henriette wrote for the Tatler. Another subject of
these studies was Maurice Maeterlinck; in his translations
and criticisms of Maeterlinck's work lies Hovey's greatest
value as an interpreter of symbolism. Maeterlinck himself
was so pleased with the Hovey translations of his plays and
poems published by Stone and Kimball in their Green Tree
Library that he named Hovey his sole authorized translator
in America. 22 Other translations and articles appeared, as
we have learned, in the Bookman and Poet-Lore. The
introduction Hovey wrote for the Green Tree Library edition
was later revised and expanded for the Nineteenth Century
magazine. As a popularizer and interpreter of French
symbolism Hovey "filled in the America of his period the
kind of position Arthur Symons filled in England." 23

The work of the symbolists, Hovey said, "lives for
itself and produces no impression of being a masquerade of
moralities; but behind every incident, almost behind every
phrase, one is aware of a lurking universality, the

22 Turner, op. cit., p. 152.
23 Ibid., p. 180.
adumbration of greater things."^{24} Because "psychological realism and simple realism of language were used by the Symbolists to interpret idealistic conceptions; specific truth was blended with universal in the symbol, which united thought existing upon two distinct levels,"^{25} Hovey saw in symbolism a key to the proper synthesis of realism and idealism. Symbolism was the giant with his feet on the earth and his head striking the stars. Symbolism was the via catholica portraying both the thing and the idea, the real and the ideal. "If the new symbolism of which we hear so much from France," Hovey concluded in "The Passing of Realism," "... should prove to be such a fusion of the two apparently antagonistic principles, who will say that it does not promise to be the new power we look for now that realism is passing away."^{26}

Symbolism held another attraction for Hovey: it was so frequently dramatic. Prophesying in "On the Threshold," Hovey had concluded that "the rehabilitation of the drama is now but a question of time. I believe, for my part, that it

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^{25}Turner, op. cit., p. 168.

^{26}Hovey, "The Passing of Realism," Part II, p. 1126.
will be so, and that in the coming revival of the arts, that which is almost by common consent the greatest form of art will hold a commanding position."

The work of the symbolists strengthened Hovey's faith in the future of the drama. Maeterlinck's work, of course, was essentially dramatic; Hovey also admired the plays of Yeats and Stephen Phillips, of William Sharp, John Davidson, and Moody. His own most serious work was dramatic: the masque Taliesin and the poetic cycle Launcelot and Guinevere. In addition to the blank verse tragedy Gandolfo, actually in proof in 1892 but unpublished, Hovey also collaborated on some unsuccessful plays (Falkenstein, 1894-95, The Cup of Victory, 1895-98) and wrote a problem play, Vows (no date), all of which Turner says, were hack work designed to open a wedge for him in the theatre. Although Taliesin and, in particular, Launcelot and Guinevere are admirable efforts in their own right, Hovey's influence on the course of poetic drama in America is perhaps more important than his own work.

The revival of the poetic drama reached its culmination, of course, during the early twentieth century in the work of the New York dramatic group: William Vaughn Moody, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Ridgely Torrence, Percy MacKaye,

\[27\]Hovey, "On the Threshold," p. 1547.

\[28\]Turner, op. cit., p. 173.
and Josephine Preston Peabody. "Here, where the white lights have begun / To seethe a way for something fair," Moody completed two works of his trilogy, The Masque of Judgment (1900) and The Fire-Bringer (1904), and left fragments of the third, The Death of Eve (published posthumously in Poems and Poetic Dramas, 1912). Robinson, who was to achieve success with a dramatic poetry, also tried his hand at drama. His plays Van Zorn and The Porcupine, first published in 1914 and 1915, were written in 1906 and 1907, and as late as 1911-12, he was at work upon a third play. Although both Torrence and MacKaye were to do their most significant work during the twenties, Torrence with Negro folk drama and MacKaye as propagandist for an American civic theatre, both wrote poetic dramas early: Torrence's Eldorado (1903) and Abelarde and Heloise (1907), and MacKaye's Beowulf in 1899. As for Josephine Peabody, her verse play The Piper reached a tenth edition after winning the Stratford Prize Competition in 1910; earlier she had written two poetic dramas: Fortune and Men's Eyes (1900) and Marlowe (1901) which, Moody said, was "full of those brave translunary things that the first poets had." Surely some of the honor of this renaissance must be credited to the nineties. "With the exception of Torrence, who attended Miami University and Princeton, the others were at Harvard in overlapping years, Moody from 1889 to
1893 and from 1893 to 1894 as a graduate assistant, Robinson from 1891 to 1893, MacKaye from 1893 to 1897, and Josephine Preston Peabody (at Radcliffe) from 1894 to 1896." All but Moody and Torrence published during the nineties; Torrence finished his book by 1895 and Moody, who published his first play in 1900, was already at work at this and at later works.

The "five comrades in lyric arms" do not exhaust the list of poets writing or publishing poetic dramas about the turn of the century. In 1904 George Cabot Lodge, at heart "less a poet than a dramatist," published *Cain: A Drama*, and in 1908 *Herakles*. Of these, says Lodge's biographer, Henry Adams: one "must search long, and probably in vain, through American literature, for another dramatic effort as vigorous and sustained as that of 'Cain,' and, if he finds what he seeks, it is somewhat more than likely that he will end by finding it in 'Herakles.'" Santayana's *Lucifer; or The Heavenly Truce* first appeared in 1899 and was republished in 1924; in 1901 he published *The Hermit in Carmel*. Less estimable poetic dramas were also being written by Barrett Wendell whose *Ralegh and Guiana* was performed in Cambridge

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in 1897 but not published until 1902\textsuperscript{31}; by Edgar Lee Masters who, in addition to his best known \textit{Maximilian} (1902), wrote five other plays in verse; and by Cale Young Rice, Olive Dargan, Madison Cawein, and Mary Austin.\textsuperscript{32} Perhaps the greatest single influence upon \textit{The Fire-Bringer} came from Trumbull Stickney whose \textit{Prometheus Pyrphoros} was included in the volume \textit{Dramatic Verses} (1902) which contained other dramatic pieces and fragments. Besides preceding Moody in handling the Prometheus myth, Stickney also inspired Moody's \textit{The Fire-Bringer} during the summer (1902) the two spent together in Paris; yet he himself believed the divergence in the handling of the characters and the action so great "that the connection between the two versions was of only 'philological interest,'"\textsuperscript{33} and he restrained Moody from acknowledging any influence in the forward to \textit{The Fire-Bringer} (1904). However, in his posthumous edition of Stickney's work in 1905, Moody ultimately recorded his indebtedness.

That Moody was indebted to other predecessors—among them Hovey—is again evidence that the nineties not only produced serious poetic dramas but quickened the

\textsuperscript{31}Dilworth, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 10.


\textsuperscript{33}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 179.
efflorescence of the following decade. A study of Moody's sources by Nash O. Barr actually begins in the seventies with the work of Bayard Taylor whose colleagues Aldrich and Boker were also writing verse plays—Aldrich published the blank verse play *Judith and Holofernes* as late as 1896. Taylor's *The Prophet* (1874), "structurally defective, naive in its psychology and incredibly conventional at times in theatrical procedure" but "a work worthy of careful study,"34 was probably a source for Moody's later *The Faith Healer*. Moody's trilogy rather shows the influence of Taylor's *Prince Deukalion* (1878), "by all odds the most audacious undertaking in verse of any American up to its date, and far more original, masculine and tuneful at all events than the 'Christus' of Longfellow...."35 The nineties also presented to Moody not only Hovey's dramas "of ideas projected as mythical personages" but Charles Leonard Moore's *Prometheus*, which treated the same myth, of course, as Moody's *The Fire-Bringer*, a myth also favored by Goethe, Shelley, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Moore's *Prometheus* is perhaps the weakest of the lot, but his very interest in the drama is striking: in his own creative work, including *The Ghost of Rosalys* (1902), the *Dial* critic was reaffirming the faith in the drama that he had

expressed editorially many times. No wonder that Moody, like Stedman and Hovey before him, was "heart and soul dedicated to the conviction that modern life can be presented on the stage in the poetic mediums, and adequately presented only in that way."36

To ascribe the revival of the poetic drama to a single cause is obviously impossible. To some extent the phenomenon must be but another instance of the recurrent faith in the medium manifested by poets throughout the centuries. Surely only a belief that "the dramatic art is the highest and most exacting in all literature" can account not merely for the poetic dramas of the Elizabethans, but for those of Addison and Thomson during the eighteenth century; of Coleridge, Southey, Wordsworth, Byron, and Shelley among the romantics; and of the Brownings, Bulwer-Lytton and Swinburne among the Victorians. Surely the conviction that "The crown of genius belongs only to the very rare poets who have written successful plays" alone can explain the contemporaneous work of Stephen Phillips in England, Yeats and Moore in Ireland, Maeterlinck in Belgium, Rostand in France, D'Annunzio in Italy, and Hauptmann in Germany. It is certainly much the same faith that makes T. S. Eliot exclaim

I say that prose drama is merely a slight by-product of verse drama. The human-soul,

in intense emotion, strives to express itself in verse. It is not for me, but for the neurologists to discover why this is so, and why and how feeling and rhythm are related. The tendency, at any rate, of prose drama is to emphasise the ephemeral and superficial; if we want to get at the permanent and universal we tend to express ourselves in verse.37

We can, however, also find a cause rooted in the historical cycle of criticism to explain the revival of this art form. The movement for a poetic drama during the nineties is usually ascribed to romanticism: in his history of the drama Quinn refers to the "heroic tradition" of the nineties, and Miss Dilworth argues that the interest in poetic drama "was in part a protest against the hereditary environment tragedy of Ibsen, and in part a continuance of the romantic tradition."38 As always, the distinctions between romanticism and realism vary from critic to critic. Doubtless we are all sympathetic to Charles Leonard Moore's grievance, "I have never been able to attach much importance to the fanciful labels of classic, romantic, realistic, symbolic, and the like, which writers give themselves and fight for. There is a real distinction between the different forms of literature, between tragedy and comedy, the novel and the play, narrative and lyric poetry. But all


38Dilworth, op. cit., p. 1.
literature is based on human nature, on the spectacle of
the world, on the thoughts and dreams of men. The reports
of these things differ according to the talents of the
authors, but not by any set formulas."39

In the age when "romantic" is so often a term of
reproach, it is all the more necessary to define the
"romanticism" of this poetic drama. Perhaps Moody, who
thought himself a romantic, can help us. He is "pros­
trated," he is "bowled over," by Greek drama because it is
"so unclassical," it is "romantic à outrance." Like so
many of the romantics, he tries to bring everyone into his
own camp. "I wonder how Ibsen ever got the name of a
realist," he writes after reading The Master-Builder. "A
very debauchee of Romance. And that is really the hold he
has over people."40 Or again:

It is very striking to see, at any rate,
[Moody wrote on July 2, 1903] how Howells
seems to be drifting back toward the poetic
envisagement of life with which he began
years ago. . . . How impressive it is to see
how almost all earnest minds, and exactly by
reason of their earnestness, have sooner or
later to abandon the realistic formula, or at
least to so modify it that it ceases to have
any meaning qua realism.41

39Charles Leonard Moore, "Interregnum in American
Literature," Dial, XLVIII (May 1, 1910), 308.
40Moody, Letters to Harriet, op. cit., p. 34.
41Ibid., p. 156.
"The poetic envisagement of life," "the earnestness of earnest minds"—these are the parts of the romantic puzzle. A similar clue is to be seen in Hovey's review of a drama textbook:

Ibsen himself certainly is not [trivial and evasive], whether Pinero and others of his imitators be so or not; but "temporary" just as certainly the whole movement is. Already the still newer reaction is making its appearance. Maeterlinck, Yeats, Stephen Phillips, may not yet have won the dramatic battle; they may or may not be the coming masters of the theatre, but they exist, and they show that the drift of the newer, younger tendency is away from the ugly and toward the beautiful; away from the sordid and realistic and toward the poetical; away from the discussion of "problems" and toward the expression of the human heart.42

Once again the "poetical" is contrasted with the "realistic" to the disparagement of realism. The proponents of the poetic drama, that is, were to some extent within the pale of the genteel tradition, for, like Stedman, they believed that the realist movement dealt with the contemporary rather than the universal, and with the ugly rather than the beautiful. They believed that the playwright must "bedeck the play in the fair garments of poetry, bejewel it, as it were, with the ideal . . . because at such times life itself becomes lyrical, heroic, dramatic in a noble sense."43

42Richard Hovey, "Review of Clement Scott's The Drama of Yesterday and Today," Bookman, X (February, 1900), 595.

43Richard Burton, Forces in Fiction and Other Essays (Indianapolis, 1902), pp. 66-67.
The movement for a poetic drama, then, was romantic in its acceptance of Ideality, in its belief in Spirit behind Fact, and thus in its belief that the spiritual transcends fact and that the interpretation of experience is more important than mere faithful transcription. It was romantic in its view that literature must "idealize the conventional, the commonplace and the homely in life," must "show the idea inhering in the gross and seemingly meaningless mass," must "detach the symbol from the fact, so that the fact takes on significance and loveliness."\(^{44}\)

It is precisely because the movement for a poetic drama is grounded in the genteel tradition that it becomes so important for the age. To begin with, surely idealism per se need not be suspect, despite the pitiable present reputation of the genteel writers—although, for that matter, "Time has dealt more harshly with the genteel critics than they merit. . . ."\(^{45}\) The Platonic tradition that inspired nineteenth century romanticism in both England and America may have run its course by the end of the century, but it was possible to revitalize the tradition. This is what Hovey and Moore and Moody were attempting to do. Although the battle between conservative and radical

\(^{44}\)Ibid., p. 112.

critics of fiction was waged rather noisily, the lines of conflict in the field of poetry were not clearly drawn. A rigid demand for a realistic poetry might result largely in the dialect verse of James Whitcomb Riley or Paul Laurence Dunbar; yet no sooner did one admit Spirit, Beauty, Soul, Truth, than the enemy triumphed. Essentially, it would seem, the central doctrine of Stedman's aesthetic that poetry was ideal, that it adumbrated universal Truth and Beauty behind particular Facts, went unchallenged. Perhaps a revolt against the concept of the ideal was inherent in the anti-conventionalism of the little magazines, but the "dinkies" were too involved in the immediate desire to shock to attempt a reasoned aesthetic. Rather, even enlightened criticism labored in tangential directions: it debated the precise definitions of Truth and Beauty so as to broaden the subject matter of art, it was more or less hospitable to metrical experimentation, and it deliberated the position of particular poets in the canon. The battle, that is, concerned how much of realism could be admitted into the romantic aesthetic, but a belief in the ideality of poetry was axiomatic.

The poetic drama attracted both traditional and advanced critics because it seemed a bridge between two critical approaches. It was Hovey's via catholica, the "giant with his feet firm on earth"--the synthesis between realism and idealism. Essentially symbolic, the poetic
drama could present both fact and idea. Psychologically true to character and situation, the play, by means of the symbol, could show the universal behind the particular. By means of its poetry, it could suggest what Eliot calls "a fringe of indefinable extent, of feeling which we can only detect, so to speak, out of the corner of the eye and can never completely focus. . . ." To critics of the nineties, the poetic drama was the medium of the future; to us, that hope does not seem far-fetched. Rooted in the traditionalist aesthetic of the nineties, the poetic drama born of ideality foreshadowed the poetic achievements of the twentieth century.

Because of its symbolic potentialities, Greek mythology was the favorite subject matter of the poetic dramatists. Like Arnold and Shelley and Swinburne before them, these dramatists discovered the opportunity the myths afforded to dramatize the abstract, to portray the ideal through the real. "It is, indeed, in the direction of the myth that we must turn for the first hope of great literature," wrote Charles Leonard Moore. "To allegorize the facts of nature or humanity, to fasten upon and exact certain elemental traits and types is the primal instinct."46

An interesting sidelight on the popularity of myth was the stimulus afforded by opera, Wagnerian opera in

particular. "There is more strong meat of suggestion for me as to what the stage ought to be, in one good opera," wrote Moody in 1905, "than in all the plays I have seen this winter put together....And I don't care much for the opera as such, either." Although he was not moved by Debussy's treatment of Maeterlinck's *Pelleas et Mélisande,* excitedly he "blew himself to a ticket" to the whole Wagnerian cycle. Ten years previous, Josephine Peabody thanked Horace Scudder for an evening out. "That Wagner programme set a whole vista of 'things' a-whirl in my mind," she wrote. "It was an oasis." And in 1900, a quarter of a century before his *Tristram,* Edwin Arlington Robinson was calling Tristan und Isolde "the only opera, as such, ever written....with the exception, perhaps, of *Die Meistersinger*...."

...it is hard for us to understand the revolutionary effect the handling of mythology in the Ring operas formerly possessed [comments Howard Mumford Jones]. This revolution becomes somewhat easier to comprehend when one remembers that the quasi-mythical poetic dramas of Ibsen—*Brand,* *Peer Gynt,* and *Emperor and Galilean*—

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were known in the nineties in advanced circles, and when one recalls the immense vogue of John Fiske, whose *Myths and Myth-Makers* (1872) had by no means been forgotten. Moreover, sociologists and anthropologists, still in the penumbra of the formulations of Herbert Spencer, were approaching comparative mythology as something more profound than literary lore; and, beginning in 1890, the magisterial work of Sir James Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, was being published. Young writers dissatisfied with orthodox belief and sensitive to new modes of cultural interpretation almost inevitably turned to myth as explanation and, almost as inevitably, cast their poems in masques, Greek dramas, or other forms permitting a large admixture of lyrical utterance to parallel, as it were, the Wagnerian music drama.50

The popularity of mythological subject matter, however, ran smack up against the movement for literary nationalism. Critics deplored the use of legendary themes, demanding instead a treatment of American scene and character. "You only show your own limitations when you profess to show yourselves unable to find American atmosphere and themese for American dramas..." Stedman wrote to MacKaye in 1907, repeating his view of a quarter of a century before. During the nineties, Thomas Davidson—who influenced Hovey's thought if not, it would seem, his work—enjoined: "... it argues a certain blindness to the poetic possibilities of American life, and a certain want of true patriotism, when an American author, instead of taking the subjects for his art from the life of his own


people or the scenery of his own country, goes to look for them among the people and scenery of other lands." The complaint of many critics then and now is that the poetic dramatists sold their birthright by ignoring native materials. Herein, in fact, in its turning to the past, the remote, the extraordinary, is one aspect of the "romanticism" of this movement. Undoubtedly, in their use of myth, many poetic dramas appealed to the same desire for the unfamiliar which made historical fiction and dramatizations of these novels so popular during the nineties. Probably the vogue of the sentimental and picturesque plays of Stephen Phillips reflects this appeal. But surely when myth is used to depict universal problems of man's existence it becomes more than an instrument of romance, at least of romance in any pejorative sense. The tendency of studies of literary nationalism to disapprove of the legendary themes of poetic drama seems a regrettable error.

Throughout the nineteenth century, of course, critics constantly cried that American literature should be national; that is, either in setting or theme it should reflect the life and character of the American people. As many scholars show, the strength and frequency of this demand is closely dependent upon the country's political and material success. In 1812, America's naval successes

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in its war with England culminated in a major call for an American literature; in 1837 Emerson's key address on "The American Scholar" reflected not only his own philosophical readings but the political nationalism of the Jacksonian triumph and the westward movement. By the late 1840's, however, "the opposition to a narrow Americanism in literature appears to have attained a strength comparable to that of the nationalists ten years earlier." Major authors like Longfellow, Poe, and Lowell aligned themselves against a strict literary nationalism, arguing that universality was preferable to nationality, that the genius of the artist was the result of "individual culture" and not of a great national spirit. The result, Benjamin Spencer concludes, was the "modified nationalism" of the 1850's. In a later article, Spencer carries his study of literary nationalism through the end of the century, showing the relationship of the new realism of the 1870's and 1880's to the production of a national literature: "The rise of realism altered significantly the long-established lines of the controversy: it aided in shifting the hope for a national literature away from the epics of the earlier part of the century toward fiction and toward drama. . . ."


54 Benjamin T. Spencer, "The New Realism and a National Literature," PMLA, LXVI (December, 1941), 1116.
In this controversy, the central figure, of course, was now Howells, his opponents the Stedmans and Gilders and Warners of the genteel tradition.

Neither side, it must be emphasized, ever doubted the basic principles of literary nationalism. They believed that literature must unquestionably reflect its political and cultural milieu, that it must both reveal and develop the national consciousness of a people. Taine's trinity of the race, the environment, and the epoch was all-pervasive; all agreed with him that it is "by representing what sort of a life a nation or an epoch leads, that a writer rallies to himself the sympathies of a nation or of an epoch."55

Rather the controversy concerned differing means of achieving literary nationalism: must a national literature be based on the use of American settings or details, or is it rather dependent on the depiction of an American spirit or theme or attitude? Such a controversy transcends the conflict between conservatives and liberals and even that between realists and romantics. He who advocates the depiction of American attitudes rather than of setting is not automatically a romantic; nor is he who requires an American setting for an American work automatically a liberal. It would seem, therefore, that the implication of

Spencer's article—that Howells is Right and his detractors conservative romantics—is highly debatable. Given the battle Howells was fighting during the seventies and eighties, his defense of native American subject matter was, of course, desirable, but his demands for literature can hardly be valid for all times and all art. Furthermore the problem is so frequently one of emphasis that it is often difficult to place a writer clearly within one camp. Since most writers usually see both sides of the coin, their classification as nationalists or universalists seems to depend on which side of the coin the critic chooses to turn upwards. In a previous article, for example, Spencer wrote of Lowell: "For all his assaults on nationalism, Lowell differed from many of its advocates chiefly in his conception of the nature of the immediate aim of American letters. To Lowell the advocates of nationality seemed to make of the American, the local, the fact, ends in themselves; to him they were proper but incidental." Lowell, that is, did admit the desirability of an American setting, even though he emphasized the "universal and permanently human" in literature as against the particular. Conversely, although Howells' nationalism consisted of an emphasis upon an objective treatment of American materials rather than upon

an American manner of treatment, he too accepted an ethical criterion, if a universal rather than a strictly national one. His famous dictum on "the smiling aspects of life," Spencer says, is an attempt to correlate "both his realism and his Americanism with a wholesome and humane outlook upon life."57 Furthermore, although Spencer says that Howells' position remained fairly constant until his death, his article depends on statements Howells made before 1892; the few quotations from a later date, however, suggest that in time Howells became more receptive to the concept of a national spirit or ideal.

Certainly the question of time complicates Spencer's thesis. Presumably the 1890's are covered in this study of late nineteenth century nationalism; however, the decade is crowded out by the greater emphasis on the seventies and eighties. By the nineties the fight for realism had lost some of its momentum. When the local colorists so dominated the literary markets in even the conservative magazines, perhaps because, as Grant Knight contends, they were in many ways romantics, surely it was now more permissible than it would have been ten or twenty years previous for a critic to campaign for a definition of nationalism broader than one based on the use of American setting. More important for

our purposes: Spencer's analysis purportedly includes poetry as well as fiction; yet with Howells as his central figure, the focal point is clearly the novel. Were Spencer to reexamine his statements with poetry as his point of focus, conceivably his partiality for the realists' definition of nationalism would weaken.

Too many times the modern critic's sympathy with the aims of the realists leads him into uncritical damnation of realism's detractors. Yet the medium which a writer is discussing ought to weigh heavily in his estimation of a critical theory. Unquestionably, in fiction, Howells and Grant Knight's foursome of Garland, Crane, Norris, and Bierce were in the vanguard in this "critical period of American literature" in the dethronement of genteel prudery and idealism. No doubt, too, the realists' victory in fiction ultimately led to the acceptance of a Robinson or a Masters in poetry. Yet while Masters is earth-bound in his realistic speech and settings, Robinson towers above; like Masters in rejecting conventional poetic vocabulary; Robinson, unlike Masters and his epitaphs, uses the more traditional patterns of the sonnet, the dramatic monologue, and the long narrative for his psychological studies of modern man and his moral reflection on man's fate. Furthermore, his cast contains not only contemporary characters like Eben Flood or Richard Cory but historical figures like Jonson or legendary ones like Arthur. Robinson, that is,
builds the modern upon the traditional. Such a combination of two worlds was, we have seen, Hovey's aim when he saw in symbolism a means of fusing realism and idealism. To remain content only with realism in poetry was to enthrone a Riley or a Kipling--two of Howells' favorite poets; at best it led to the telling yet limited art of Stephen Crane. To feel that poetry was outside the domain of the battle, a cultured art for the cultured few, was to admire Madison Cawein and Lloyd Mifflin--also favorites of Howells in his other moods. But to desire poetry to retain the high seriousness of its best examples and yet speak to a changing audience was to ask poetry to move in the direction of symbolism and myth.

In turning to mythology for the subjects of their plays, Hovey and Moody and the other poetic dramatists were trying not to escape from America but to bring American life and literature into a more universal tradition. "It is the primary fundamental humanity that we want," wrote Hovey in "On the Threshold," "rather than the trivial peculiarities of time and place, whose interest at best will soon become merely antiquarian . . . . We shall be quite American enough if we take the world for our heritage and use it with American hearts."58 When Hovey wrote Launcelot and Guinevere he believed that his concern for man's duty to

58 Hovey, "On the Threshold," p. 1547.
himself and to God and for the emancipation of women was "modern, contemporary, and American." Similarly, Moody said of the Death of Eve that he "didn't intend to expose it to cobwebs and museum shelves by putting Adam in creased trousers and Eve into glove-fitting etcetera." He was treating in Eve, as in the two preceding plays in his trilogy,

a vital problem of twentieth century civilization. . . . For example, the Promethean problem of The Fire-Bringer deals with the importance of the emotional fire in Man's existence. . . . Then, there is the all-important modern philosophical query--can Man control God or can Man get along without God? The Masque of Judgment, likewise, . . . is a poetic fore­shadowing of the modern impulses for richness of living, of the modern belief in the worth and joy of life, and of faith in individual good. Finally, the whole trilogy celebrates the spirit of rebellion against the restraints upon freedom; each major character, Prometheus, Raphael, Eve, is a study in revolt, the spirit of the twentieth century youth. If we grant the justice of the adverse criticisms noted above, would we not by the same logic be compelled to say that Faust, that King Arthur, that Hamlet have nothing for the modern reader?

Just as Edwin Arlington Robinson later turned to Arthurian romances and Maxwell Anderson to history and Christopher Fry to classical legend, so these playwrights felt it possible to use legend and myth to portray contemporary

60David D. Henry, William Vaughn Moody, A Study (Boston, 1934), pp. 113-114.
American life. But the fight to admit realistic subject matter into fiction and to some extent into poetry blinded many critics to the virtues of traditional themes.

All of which is merely to object to too facile a proscription of legendary themes but not, of course, to prohibit more contemporary subject matter from the drama. Moody himself was eager to experiment with modern subjects for poetic drama. "... I seem to myself to be on the point of solving the great problem of the application of blank verse to the realistic treatment of a modern theme in drama,"\(^{61}\) he wrote Harriet optimistically in 1904. The result, however, was *The Great Divide*, a prose play but one which Moody considered as poetic drama. *The Faith Healer* also used a contemporary setting and was started as poetry as early as 1895; but either because Moody despaired of achieving a successful blank verse or because he was exultant at the commercial success of *The Great Divide*, he turned it into prose in 1909. At his death in 1910 he was working on the uncompleted *Death of Eve*, the conclusion for his poetic trilogy.

The career of T. S. Eliot highlights the modern poet's preoccupation with the theme of poetic drama. Like Henry James' essays on his novels in the *Art of Fiction*, Eliot's published lecture on *Poetry and Drama* is an exciting

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discussion of his own work. Beginning with the historical theme of *Murder in the Cathedral*, Eliot turned next, in *The Family Reunion*, to "a theme of contemporary life, with characters of our own time, living in our own world," and continued in his later poetic dramas, *The Cocktail Party* and *The Confidential Clerk*, to use a contemporary setting. To some critics, of course, none of the modern plays is as successful as *Murder in the Cathedral*. "... there's a kind of play Eliot could write:" said Eric Bentley; "it could be made out of his favorite material (hollow men, waste lands, a sense of sin) but the vehicle for it would have to be, not anti-poetic, but super-poetic." But, more important, even those who prefer the later plays cannot ignore their origin in Greek myth. *The Family Reunion* is based on Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, although, Eliot says, no critics recognized the source of the story; *The Cocktail Party* originated from Euripides' *Alcestis*; and *The Confidential Clerk* is "based on the ancient Greek Ion by Euripides, a play about an abandoned child later sought for adoption both by his real mother and the man she has married." Like his predecessors, Eliot apparently felt

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that the parallels with Greek mythology heightened the universality of his modern plays. Even the contemporary realistic theatre, it seems, cannot ignore the symbolic potentialities of myth to suggest both the present and the past simultaneously.

If Moody's or Hovey's plays fail, the fault seems to lie not in their material but in their language. If Moody's trilogy is closet-drama today, it is because his poetry was more narrative than dramatic, too correctly metrical in its form, too elaborate in its vocabulary. "The language, with inversions, archaisms, and long poetic periods through which the thought advances without a break, would scarcely carry across the footlights. . . ." Katherine Turner's verdict on Hovey is similar. "Poetry was to become rejuvenated in the poetic revival of 1913 through a new freedom based upon a new simplicity. Richard Hovey, in his poetic dramas, went in the opposite direction, toward exceeding poetic complexity." In contrast, Eliot's success on the stage stems not from his themes, be they traditional or contemporary, but from his poetry. With each play he furthered his experiments with verse form. Yet from the very beginning, with Murder in the Cathedral, he was aware "that the essential was to avoid any echo of Shakespeare, for I was

65Dilworth, op. cit., p. 107.
66Turner, op. cit., p. 279.
persuaded that the primary failure of nineteenth-century poets when they wrote for the theatre (and most of the greatest English poets had tried their hand at drama) was not in their theatrical technique, but in their dramatic language; and that this was due largely to their limitation to a strict blank verse which, after extensive use for nondramatic poetry, had lost the flexibility which blank verse must have if it is to give the the effect of conversation." The fine achievement of Christopher Fry seems also due to a remarkable juxtaposition of colloquial speech with high poetry, just as, for that matter, the dramatic poetry of a Robinson or a Frost boasts a similar accomplishment.

But if the work of Moody and Hovey is not an unqualified success, it is nevertheless significant, as the nineties is significant, as a preparation for many of the achievements of the twentieth century. According to Jones, who calls Moody's trilogy "colossal," "unique," "gold and marble," "none of the present-day critics has seen how much of contemporary verse is implicit in Moody." Yet on its own account too, the nineties' preoccupation with poetic drama, with the problems of theme and language, is the

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67 Eliot, Poetry and Drama, op. cit., p. 27.

brightest culmination of the genteel tradition. Without ignoring contemporary problems, poetic dramatists retained the faith in spirituality that has always been the strength of the idealist tradition. No doubt these men experienced their share of the pessimism characteristic of the post-Darwinism era. "Christ, I believe; pity my unbelief," wrote Moody at the conclusion of "Until the Troubling of the Waters." Of Trumbull Stickney he said that "Throughout his life, in spite of its fortunate outward circumstances and real happiness, there weighed upon him a nameless oppression, a sense of the futility of the worldly outcome, a shadow of pain and bitterness upon all the fair face of things." Nevertheless, the ideal tradition which "must recognize the divine in and through the dark" obligated them, philosophically at any rate, to accept optimism. America, Hovey wrote, stands opposed to European "pessimism, dilettantism, and decay." "Pessimism, as a philosophy, is sporadic here, affecting chiefly the leisure classes and the undergraduates of certain Eastern universities. It does not perceptibly influence the real mass and movement of American life. Here only, so far as I know, in the world, does the philosophy which conceives the universe as rational and the destiny of man as adequate meet with wide acceptance--even, as

philosophies go, with popularity. If the poetic dramatists were romantics, then, theirs was a philosophical romanticism. More than a delight in "fantastic and pageant" setting, more than a concern for "sentimental and picturesque" subject matter, their romanticism was an affirmative philosophy of life which cannot be too readily dismissed. "For them, as for the lost generation, all the primary assumptions had collapsed. Heirs of a Christian tradition without Christian belief and of a cultural tradition without any central mytho-poetic core, they lived in a universe relentlessly eroded by the advancement of natural sciences." "Unlike the moderns," however, "... these writers affirmed a faith in humanity opposite to the negativism of later days." 

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70Hovey, "On the Threshold," p. 1547.
71Jones, The Bright Medusa, op. cit., p. 46.
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Miscellanea


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I, Martha Edelsberg Passe, was born in New York City on September 16, 1926. I received my secondary school education in the public schools of Brooklyn, New York, and my Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees from New York University in September, 1946, and September, 1947. In September, 1947, I began my studies for a Ph.D. at Ohio State University, and also began teaching in the English department as an Assistant. Except for the academic year 1956-1957 when I was completing my dissertation, for the past ten years I have been teaching as an assistant or a part or full-time instructor in the English department at Ohio State University where, at present, I am a full-time instructor.