THE INVENTION OF "MICHAEL FIELD:" A DANDY-ANDROGYNE, MODERNISM AND THE AESTHETIC WORLD OF KATHERINE BRADLEY AND EDITH COOPER

by

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Abstract

THE INVENTION OF "MICHAEL FIELD:" A DANDY-ANDROGYNE AND THE AESTHETIC WORLD OF KATHERINE BRADLEY AND EDITH COOPER

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My study concerns "Michael Field" as a modernist project. This pseudonym belongs to late nineteenth century English aunt and niece literary collaborators Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper. By contextualizing "Michael Field" culturally, critically, and biographically, what emerges, I offer, is how female collaboration in the guise of a male identity creates a new genre through a merging of a lived reality with the production of that reality in writing. Focusing on the aesthetic movement, including theories of the dandy, this study analyzes the appropriation of a "gay male" discourse by two "lesbian" poets as a complementary discourse to contemporary theories of androgyny and queerness in the articulation of radical women's voices and queer desire. Utilizing Wildean notions of art and Butlerian notions of gender, I explore the ways in which Bradley and Cooper construct "Michael Field" as a dandy-aesthete- persona. My study begins with an analysis of "Michael Field's" artistic aim through a consideration of Bradley's *The New Minnesinger,* unpublished letters, and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own.* This section also concerns biographical material, which suggests political issues as opening up a space for "Michael Field's" aesthetic investigations. An historical overview, with a focus on gender politics, suggests a theory of collaboration that explores the complexities of the formation of a male poetic identity for two women poets within the context of emerging identities of the New Woman and homosexual aesthete. Poems

from *Wild Honey*, *Underneath the Bough*, *Sight and Song,* and *Dedicated* as well as unpublished poems are read as life enacted in art. *Long Ago* is analyzed with particular attention to Hellenism, which is read as a discourse of female erotic desire. This work is situated in the context of "Sapphic Modernism." The study concludes with a look at the plays and religious poetry which are further analyzed as sites of female transgressions, a subject also produced through Bloomsburyian literary experimentation in the plays. By tracing the evolution, function, and multiple meanings of this identity, I hope to show that the public and personal desires of two women poets, filtered through "Michael Field," forged an innovative sphere of literature representative of modernist literary enterprises of the next generation of women.

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Chapter One: Coming Out as "Michael Field"

> In stories, as in life, it is the male figure whom society has hitherto allowed to be the protagonist, who must, for a time, be the model.
> --Carolyn G. Heilbrun

I. Topic and Thesis

"Michael Field" is the pseudonym under which Katherine Bradley (1846-1914) and Edith Cooper (1862-1913), aunt and niece and literary collaborators, wrote volumes of prose, plays, and poetry in the late nineteenth century in England. A cultural event as well as a mask, "Michael Field" represents what Karl Miller in *Doubles: Studies in Literary History* refers to as a "cultural phenomenon of multiple identity," a literary concern of the late 19th century, "duality's heyday," a time when " a hunger for pseudonyms, masks, new identities, new conceptions of human nature, declared itself " (viii). "Duality's heyday" coincides with the aesthetic movement, of which there are various strands, in British arts and culture. To best explain the phenomenon of "Michael Field," the traditional male movement heralded by Walter Pater and taken up, revised, and promoted by his follower Oscar Wilde is most useful. Thus, "Michael Field," as conceived by Bradley and Cooper, can be seen as a product of the emergence of a "gay" male movement, as the politics of aestheticism has come very recently to be understood as gendered and implicated in the cultural history of "gay" male discourse,[1] and its corollary, the aesthetic dandyism of the English at the end of the century.

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[1] See three key texts that discuss the cultural history of "gay" male discourses, including Greek Studies: Eve Sedgwick's *Between Men* (1985), Wayne Koestenbaum's *Double Talk: the erotics of male literary collaboration* (1989), and Richard Dellamora's *Masculine Desire* (1990).

Within the cultural context of aestheticism, including a theory of the dandy, that coincides with a personal situation at a particular historical moment, Bradley and Cooper construct "Michael Field" as a dandy persona to provide the interpretive frame through which they invent their life and works. Wilde, according to Ellen Moers in *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm*, claimed the dandy is an aesthete, which, to him, means artist (13-14). Similarly, Bradley and Cooper claim the dandy as an aesthete or artist, but they both evoke and challenge the gender identification of this figure. By becoming "Michael Field," they can, as women, join a male subculture of mostly homosexual men, and enter into a dialogue with them. Their social milieu included Walter Pater, the "New Dandies," including Oscar Wilde, Aubrey Beardsley, Max Beerbohm, and the Rhymer's Club Poets, as well as artist William Rothenstein, John Gray, and Andre Raffalovich, and radical thinkers such as pioneering sexologist Havelock Ellis. Their act of infiltration into this group allowed Bradley and Cooper to use the specifically, though not exclusively, male homoerotic frame of reference of aestheticism, and further to use dynamics available from this male aesthetic culture to help shape their collaboration and subsequent writings as well as their own life experience, especially their own intimacy. As "Michael Field," they could produce literary works, which aestheticized a lived reality, a love relationship between an aunt and niece, that otherwise would have been considered transgressive. The aesthetic tendency to bleed life into art and vice versa, without gender and sexuality limitations, enables Bradley and Cooper, two women with a possible lesbian connection, to constitute themselves as a new entity, "Michael Field," their version of the dandy-aesthete. Through "him," I argue, they could be everything they wanted to be: a married couple, lovers, poets, and aesthetes.

While aestheticism and the dandy ideal are the two discourses that, I argue, impact upon the formation of "Michael Field" as a male poetic identity for two women poets writing and living together within a specific context in a given culture at a certain time, there are overlapping discourses, androgyny and queerness, that are also important to understanding the phenomenon of "Michael Field." "Michael Field," as a kind of aesthetic dandy, is an experiment in gender and sexuality that is, on the one hand, modern in spirit, anticipating a new literary sensibility that is neither "male" nor "female" but both androgynous and queer. To examine "him" through a contemporary queer (that overlaps with a feminist) lens is to read "him" as a "gay male" personality with a "lesbian," or more appropriately for Bradley and Cooper, "sapphic" consciousness. Bradley's and Cooper's union and work, sanctioned by the male name, thus come to represent incoherencies in the "stable" relationships among anatomical distinctions among the sexes, gender, and sexual desire.

At a site of intersecting discourses that coincide with a biographical situation and personal needs at a particular point in time, "Michael Field" becomes a public "gay male" construction of a private "sapphic female" interpersonal identity. Essentially, through the performance of "Michael Field, " Bradley and Cooper form a new category that is sui generis, what I shall call the dandy-androgyne, a performative strategy that redefines, for them, selfhood, authorship, and creativity as well as authorizes inspiration and cultural authority. The creation of this dandylike poetic persona, the dandy-androgyne, enables Bradley and Cooper to create a female sexual aesthetic, and also to turn their lives into literary artwork. By constituting themselves as the dandy-androgyne, Bradley and Cooper deliberately moved away from cultural constructions of Victorian womanhood,

and created a world apart in both public and private where they could, as Walter Pater urges in his infamous "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance*, "burn always with this hard, gem-like flame." At the same time, they use a "gay male" discourse, aestheticism, to give expression to their sexuality in their poetry. Further, Bradley's and Cooper's creation of this dandy-androgyne through which they interpret their life and work anticipates the formation of the modern female dandy such as Radclyffe Hall, Virginia Woolf's "Vita" in *Orlando*, and Djuna Barnes as well as places them in a modern context, particularly "Sapphic modernism," alongside authors such as H.D., Renee Vivien, and Virginia Woolf, among others.

II. The Expression of Bradley's and Cooper's Artistic Ambition

In an attempt to define the idea of "Michael Field's" so-called artistic ambition without, hopefully, sounding essentialist, I argue that Bradley's and Cooper's artistic aim is twofold: to turn their lives into literary artwork and to treat a wide range of themes, traditionally the province of male authors, in their work without the "psychological" shackles usually placed on female authors. This artistic aim folds into a historical moment in which gender is in flux and an avant garde artistic "male" movement is also emerging, both are linked to the two women poets' feelings for each other as well as a biographical situation. The evolution of this aim begins with Bradley's initial stabs at poetry, the sentiments of which anticipate Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, and contain Bradley's early declaration of love for her niece. It leads to their collaboration and their invention of the male poetic identity, "Michael Field."

Bradley and Cooper were unusual women—university educated, members of the "aesthetic" crowd, and immersed in each other—they sailed against the tide of traditional

nineteenth-century views of gender. They rejected the well-worn idea of woman or the female poet as long suffering and tied to the hearth, or as associated with nature rather than art. This is so despite the fact that they lived and worked within the context of a movement that was, indeed, founded against nature and its association with the life cycle, particularly with regard to both decadent dandies and decadent literature in which women were often depicted as objects of disdain.[2] But Bradley and Cooper, as women who lived without male partners by choice, who sought to be a part of a "gay male" arts movement, and who both identified with fractious female figures (in other works of literature) and created strong, independently-minded female characters (in their own plays), attempted to circumvent the "law" of nature, avoiding the traditional feminine association with human reproduction, as well as moved to treat larger "universal" themes in their work. To achieve this kind of artistic freedom with intertwined aesthetic and sexually transgressive overtones, Bradley and Cooper sought a way to legitimize, authorize, and solidify their collaboration, hence their urgency in creating a specifically male poetic identity.

Their journey began with the coming of age of Bradley, who started to write love poems to her niece when Cooper was 13 years old, a creative gesture that was to become a lifetime practice. She published her first book of poems, *The New Minnesinger*, in 1875, under the vaguely masculine pseudonym, "Arran Leigh." The first poem, "To E.C.," dedicated to Edith, sets the stage for a merging of life and art between the two women. At this time, Emma Cooper had become an invalid, and Bradley had adopted her daughter unofficially. As "Michael Field's" biographer Mary Sturgeon in *Michael Field* observes, Bradley "fostered her [Edith] as a mother," and "lavished on her, an eager and rather imperious affection" (17), which the poem reflects:

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[2] See Bram Dijkstra's *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Female Evil in Fin-De-Siecle Culture.*

My deep need of thy love, its mast' ring power,
I scarce can fathom, thou wilt never know;
My lighter passions into rhythm may glow;
This is forever voiceless. Could the flower
Open its petall'd thought, and praise the dower
Of sunlight, or the fresh gift of the dew.
The bounteous air that daily round it blew,
Blessing unwearidly in sun and shower,
Methinks would miss its praises: so I drink
My life of thee; and put to poet's use
Whatever crosses of strange or fair.
Thou hast fore-fashioned all I do and think;
And to my seeming it were words' abuse
To boast a wealth of which I am heir. (*New Minnesinger:* vii)

Bradley, barely masked by the male persona "Arran Leigh" expresses in this poem love and desire for her niece. Poetry, for her, is the safe place where such an overwhelming passion between women can be manifested. The first person speaker of this lyric declares that the amount of love "he" wants in return from "his" beloved is so great "he" cannot let her know about it, suggesting that it is something that is forbidden. "He" sees himself as mastered by her, unbeknown to her, indicating "he" wishes to be engulfed by her love as much as "he" wants to engulf her with "his." The flower is a metaphor for the beloved, who is both fragile and beautiful. This passage implies that the flower would die from receiving too much sun, water, or air, suggesting that overdoing something causes what is supposed to be beneficial to be lost, thereby, turning good to bad. The warning is that too much love—implicitly the category of a transgressive love--can be destructive.

The speaker's solution is to merge with the lover, and then put into art what "he" sees as the outcome of that merging: something both odd and pure, a mingling of opposite feelings for the one "he" desires. These opposites can be reconciled only in art as "his" feelings are sanctified there. Finally, the beloved becomes a kind of muse, bringing out in the speaker the poetry "he" believes "he" inherits from her. Indeed, as

Sturgeon notes, the poem captures the flowering of "Michael's authentic love-story," which "centers upon Henry; and the poem expresses a master passion . . . Indeed she was greater as a lover than as a poet; for her life was her finest poem and Henry was its inspiration" (*Field* 78).[3]

Looking at an unpublished poem "Michael" wrote for "Henry" further illustrates the point. In 1885, Bradley took a trip to Italy while Cooper stayed home with her family in Cornwall. The two women exchanged letters frequently while they were apart. One night, Bradley woke up at five in the morning, "curled up" in bed, and wrote this poem in a letter to Cooper:

> My Deare Asleep
> I did not take me to the sea,
> When the winged morning
> wakened me
> With beamy plumes; I used them right
> to bear me in an Eastern flight
> Of arriving [undecipherable word]to the bed
> Where my beloved still slumbered.
> Such peace on lip and cheek she wore
> As when the soul was monitor,
> Lying half poet and half child
> The twin divineness reconciled.
> And I, who scarce could breath to see
> Her spirit in its secrecy[4]

In passages like these Bradley's intense feelings for her niece emerge almost without restraint. The poet who will become part of the team called "Michael Field the Poet" has found her raison d'etre.

In the title poem, "The New Minnesinger," Bradley moves away from the personal, yet aligns herself with her own sex, implying her bond with Cooper as well as a

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[3] "Michael" was one of Bradley's nicknames, "Henry," Cooper's. In the third chapter, I shall discuss the women's nicknames as well as possible multiple meanings of the name, "Michael Field."

[4] The letters are held in the Bodleian Library under the title "Letters from Katherine Bradley to Edith Cooper," (1876-ca.1898), MS. Eng. letter. c. 418.

political impulse. The tone is daringly feminist—to the degree that it could be read as a precursor to Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own,* a text many critics claim to be the first exercise in feminist literary theory. The epigram, "Think of Womanhood; and thou to be a woman" (*New Minnesinger* B), immediately suggests Bradley's awareness of the considerable part sexual politics plays in artistic production and its reception. But we get the feeling that Bradley, as "Arran Leigh, and later on, as one half of "Michael Field," will find a way to unleash her unwieldy feminine impulses. Sturgeon observes:

> Think of Womanhood; and thou to be a woman;
> That has a significance which is elaborated in the name
> piece, whose theme is of love and of the woman-poet's
> special aptitude to sing about it; and where it is insisted
> that the singer shall be faithful to her own feminine nature
> and experience. (*Field* 69)

Ironically, the way Bradley and Cooper are able to be "faithful to her own feminine nature and experience," "a conscious motive" (*Field* 70) in creating their poetry, is to invent a male poetic identity. As we can see, it is the poem's overarching theme--the woman poet and her difficulties in forming a poetic identity (the pursuit of a "male" dream) in a culture that intentionally and systematically limits her (as well as anticipates the New Woman novelist)—that has a larger significance for the way Bradley and Cooper negotiate what will become their uncommon place in the world.

"The New Minnesinger" considers the circumstances of both the female poet and woman as subject. As Woolf does in *A Room of One's Own*, Bradley objects to a woman's lack of agency in writing her own life. Woolf, in her analysis of the historical relations between women and literature, laments the nonexistence of a woman's literary tradition. Acknowledging that, historically, it is men who have written women into being in almost all annals of culture and history, she playfully asks an audience of daughters of

educated men: " Have you any notion how many books are written about women in the course of one year? Have you any notion how many are written by men? Are you aware that you are, perhaps, the most discussed animal in the universe?" (*Room* 34). It is easy to imagine Bradley as one of these daughters, intensely listening to the lecture— with its lesbian subtext--on Mary Beton's visit to Oxbridge. As Jane Marcus proposes in *Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy, A Room of One's Own* "sings sisterhood in homoerotic tones, slyly seducing the woman reader and taunting patriarchal law just this side of obscenity" (163).

Similar to Woolf's interest in the troubled relations between women and writing in British culture, Bradley in "The New Minnesinger" declares that women's voices for too long have been silenced--a silence, as Tillie Olsen in *Silences* suggests, that is "unnatural, the unnatural thwarting of what struggles to come into being, but cannot" (6):

O Woman, all too long by thee
  Love's praises have been heard;
But thou to swell the minstrelsy
  Hast brought no wealth'ning word.
Thou who its sweetest sweet canst tell
  Heart-trained to the tongue,
Hast listen'd to its music well
  But never lead the song!
(*New Minnesinger* B)

In the beginning of the second stanza, Bradley appears to challenge the entire canon of English male poets, accusing them of misrepresenting women's experience. She concludes that the truth of women's lives is unknown because they have been distorted by male perceptions, insisting that a woman's life is accurately represented only when she, not he, is the author of it:

Yes, Woman, she whose life doth lie
  In virgin haunts of poesie,-

How men have woven into creeds
  The unrecorded life she leads!
What she hath been to them, oh, well
  The whole sweet legend they can tell;
But what she to herself may be
  They see not, but dream they see.
(*New Minnesinger* B2)

In the third stanza, the poem indicates that a woman is compromised by man's need for her full attention fueled by his sense of entitlement, anticipating Woolf's argument that men have a fierce emotional and political stake in perpetuating the idea that woman are socially inferior since: "Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the delicious power of reflecting the figure of the man twice its natural size" (*Room* 45). Ultimately, the female poet is compromised by the constraints of a man's needs and wishes:

But will she never give us part
  Of the deep workings of her heart,
When suddenly she finds before
  Its unheeded, open door
A stranger, clad in pilgrim weeds,
  Whose homeless state and simple needs
Ask courtesy and kindly care,
  Which he wins of her unaware,
Meek suppliant! And then reveals
  The loft rank her roof conceals,
And urges secrecy and lays
  Constraints on all her guileless ways?
(*New Minnesinger* 4)

The lines that follow reveal a woman's anger—similar to Mary Beton's anger at being barred from entering the university library--at being forced to quell her artistic talents and freedom of expression for the sake of home and marriage. Toward the end of this passage the woman's anger turns to thoughts of guilt and betrayal, suggesting that Bradley recognizes it is often difficult for a woman to feel entitled to live her own life without

feeling she has betrayed the culture which has placed expectations on her that severely limit her freedom:

> Her free, frank life she puts aside,
> Careful her kingly charge to hide,
> And guessing dimly thro' her fear
> How the new durance groweth dear;
> Tho' angry thoughts hot protest make,
> Sore questioning why she should take
> In her unquiet heart to rest
> This captive, regnant, royal guest
> Who must be homaged, must be hid,
> Till, conscience-goaded, conscience-chid,
> Almost she wishes him away,
> Almost she could trust her betray,
> Then closer shuts the house, lest e'en
> A peep of treasonous thought be seen.
> (*New Minnesinger* 6)

Imagining that she is free from the tyranny of male domination and control, the speaker declares that the world wants to hear poetry from a woman's lips, suggesting that the poetry she creates, reminiscent of the grand poetic ambition of the Romantics, will be greater than all that has come before:

> Long songs of girlhood, loftier lays,
> Rich-noted, fuller-toned to praise
> The life new-magin'd, flowing wide
> With a fresh water's mingling tide,
> We as of her; and then we call
> For a new song most sweet of all-
> A Song of Songs! (*New Minnesinger* 8)

The end of the poem takes a curious turn as the speaker reminds the woman poet that motherhood is a great joy, indicating that no matter how inspired a woman may be, she should think twice about leaving what is believed to be her proper sphere:

> O Woman, can she e'er complain
> Of straiten'd lot in song's domain,
> Having as dower of highest good
> The whole wide realm of motherhood?

(*New Minnesinger* 10)

"This version of femininity," as Chris White proposes in "Poets and Lovers Evermore," "offers an ambiguous challenge to the terms of patriarchal culture . . . It embraces the productiveness of womanhood and an all-woman community, but concedes the reality of an attraction to man, destructive as that is" (200). It also seems that Bradley's recapture of the female poet to domesticity follows, in part, a tradition in Victorian poetry written by women. For example, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's seemingly liberated female poet Aurora Leigh is essentially a compromised heroine whose self-abasement upholds Victorian conventions about women and writing: "Books succeed/ And lives fail/ Do I feel it so, at last?" In Christina Rossetti's cautionary tale, "Goblin Market," Lizzie and Laura retreat to the safety of home and hearth and become wives and mothers after a daring youthful adventure into the forbidden land of desire. On a somewhat different path than her predecessors, Bradley's last minute call to the "highest good" of "the whole wide realm of motherhood" seems half-hearted compared to the conservatism of Barrett Browning and self-renunciation of Rossetti, suggesting that Bradley belongs to a new generation of women poets.

Clearly Bradley's poet in "The New Minnesinger" does not denigrate herself like Aurora Leigh does, but the speaker does express guilt about her own passions. The poem thus tries to reconcile love and art for the woman poet by suggesting that if a woman is to have a creative life, it must be in harmony with her domestic life:

> Sage-sued, world-beckon'd, she must be
> Full woman: lifted to a free
> And fellow life with man. No more
> Must she creep dumbly as of yore
> Adown the ages (*New Minnesinger* 12)

and,

How high soe'ver her thought may reach
Still it must flow through women's speech
In woman's fashion; only so
Can twinn'd lives unhind'ring grow.
(*New Minnesinger* 13)

The poem's attempt to liberate its Judith Shakespeare, though, ultimately fails. The heroine, despite her confidence, bravado, and sense of adventure, is unable to break the chains of gender subordination. Bradley and Cooper, with "Michael Field" as their guide, however, come to debunk dominant systems of gender perhaps with more success, or at least, with loftier goals.

III. Biography

The aunt and niece who became "Michael Field" grew up in a traditional Victorian middle-class English family. In 1846, Katherine Harris Bradley, the elder of the two poets, was born. Her father,Charles Bradley, a tobacco manufacturer, died when she was two years old. In 1834, he had married Emma Harris of Birmingham. The other child of their marriage, a daughter, Emma, was eleven years old when Katherine was born. Both children received lessons in painting, French, and Italian. Katherine later on embarked on the classics and German language and literature. Emma Harris Bradley married in 1860 James Robert Cooper, a merchant, after which Katherine and her mother moved with them to Kenilworth. In 1862, the younger poet Edith Cooper was born. Two years later the birth of a second daughter, Amy, left Edith's mother an invalid for life, leaving Katherine to become the natural companion of little Edith. Fortunately, the profits from the family business provided both Katherine and Edith with a small private income on which they were able to live for the rest of their lives.

Bradley and Cooper's class status, while ultimately providing them with the economic freedom to pursue their artistic and intellectual interests, was not enough to

protect them, particularly Bradley, from the constraints of strict Victorian gender codes. When Bradley was 20 years old in 1866, her mother became ill with cancer, and Bradley became her mother's caretaker, thus becoming bound to the confines of sick-room and steeple. Her sadness over her mother's illness as well as her seclusion from the world inspired her to start a diary: "it will comfort me to write down what happens, & what my darling says & does these days." [5]

It is in these diaries that we gain insight into Bradley's thoughts and feelings. We find that she expresses sentiments hardly expected from a genteel young woman. Angela Leighton's assessment of the diaries in *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* offers a view of Bradley's "contrary nature:"

> In this sad document, she records her mother's slow decline, and assesses, against that gloomy background, her own spiritual and temperamental failings: 'the graces I most lack are meekness, patience, & humility,' she laments. These pages also express a passionate but generally thwarted desire for experience: ' I feel the desolation of my life here--of my pent-up youth. I thirst for love for communion, for contact with kindred human souls . . . I feel I was made for something nobler than to be an old spinster aunt.' Loving, tactless, and headstrong, Katherine was also . . . highly sensual. She writes in one place that 'Sin is as much a part of us, & as inescapable from us as our blood . . . Wild gusts of passion sweep over me, & leave me desolated in body and spirit. At such times, I feel evil as a stray man within me.' (205)

Not a docile female seeking fulfillment through marriage and children, Bradley—thinking of "sin," experiencing "wild gusts of passion," and feeling as "evil as a stray man"--seems to want to burn with a "masculine" hard gem-like flame before she knew what it was. A woman before her time, it was not until her mother died in 1868, with her father already safely dead, that Bradley was able to break away from the domestic sphere and get some of the education and life experience she had longed for.

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[5] Cited in Angela Leighton's *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart*, 205. From the *Diary of Katharine Bradley 1867-8*. Bodleian Library MS. Eng. Misc. e.33b, fol.3.

She studied ancient and modern languages and literature at Newnham College, Cambridge, recently open to women, with private tutors, and at the College de France in Paris. While there, she fell in love with a young Frenchman, who unexpectedly died. Saddened by his sudden death, Bradley returned home in 1875 to face the same domestic isolation she had fought so hard to escape, though while at home she was able to share enthusiastically with young Edith her love of learning, adventure, and song. As Sturgeon observes:

> She lavished on her an eager and rather imperious affection. She led her, as the child grew old enough, along the paths she herself had adventurously gone . . . poetic genius was dormant in her too, only waiting to be stimulated by Katharine's exuberance and led by her audacity. (*Field* 17)

Despite her fondness for her niece, Bradley felt the need to break the chains of domestic confinement, so in January 1875 she joined Ruskin's Guild of Saint George. Subscribing to this quirky vaguely left organization afforded her the opportunity to correspond with the old sage himself, fulfilling her need for intellectual and artistic stimulation.

Six months later, she published, as mentioned in the last section, her first volume of verse, *The New Minnesinger and Other Poems* (1875), which she had sent to Ruskin for feedback. He gave her little: "—as I hope you will soon know—how much too seriously my life is to be spent reading poetry (unless prophetic). But I did accidentally open the *Minnesinger* and liked a bit or two of it—and I don't think I threw it into the waste-paper basket" (*Works* 147). Fortunately, Bradley, who craved his attention and praise, was undaunted by Ruskin's slight on her poetry and, later on, her intellect when their friendship soured.

Perhaps Ruskin might have found objectionable an overt feminist energy and youthful zest in the collection. It takes as some of its themes the rejuvenating power of nature, the thrill of first love, and religious skepticism. The poem "Apple-Bloom," for instance, celebrates the magnificent power of the sun, and by implication, a mysterious spiritual force behind the sun that fuels the power that makes an apple bloom:

> 'Bloom on the apple,
> How cam'st there?
> Because the sunshine
> Did not despair
> But play'd and beamed on
> My sullen green,
> Threw golden kisses
> As long seen
> (*New Minnesinger* 55)

A similar kind of divine force inspires both the poet's song, and the passion of a lover for his lady, Petrarchan in spirit:

> 'Song of the poet,
> How cam'st there?'
> Because his spirit
> Did not despair.
> The thought was golden,
> But O the doom
> In words to picture
> That inmost bloom!
> The thought was sunshine,
> But could it reach
> The thick-ribbed core of
> Resisting speech?
> The happy lover
> When first he knows
> To his lady's cheek he
> Can bring the rose,
> Will bid the colour
> Responsive rise
> To own the power of
> His passion's sighs.
> (*New Minnesinger* 56-7)

Bradley's light tone turns serious when she treats the theme of religious skepticism to which she brings an evolutionary perspective. In the poem, "Trompetenruf," for instance, she imagines a Last Judgment Day that is both absurd and unlikely, an event that could not possibly fulfill the promises of the scriptures. She doubts the existence of a mighty monotheistic God. He is not all-knowing, nor, by implication, all-good; rather He is weak and ineffectual:

> All awake, and fair summoned, at one trumpet-
> call,
> All startled, all defended, the great and the small.
> What all? From the babe who catches a gleam
> Of the finis-doom'd sunlight's funeral beam
> To the long-lost obliterate dead? We are men;
> But God—will He know all his creatures again?
> (*New Minnesinger* 163)

> In part, the great yearning God hath for His own,—
> His own by the birthclaim. Who giveth the breath
> Must give the life blessing. Who giveth the death
> Must give its befitting completion, not lay
> His half-finished beauteous creature away.
> (*New Minnesinger* 167)

As Bradley in the poem engages in the theological debate of the day, she exhibits a rebellious nature that will mark her later work. "The sheer scope of evolutionary history, here," as Leighton notes, "threatens to make nonsense of Christianity's small, rather local homecoming of the saved soul" (*Victorian* 206).

Bradley loses her belief (eventually to reclaim it), something Ruskin does not take to kindly: "You're letter telling me you have lost your God and found a Skye Terrier is a great grief and amazement to me. I thought so much better of you" (*Works* 155). He is so put off by her atheism that he kicks her out of the Guild: " but that you should be such a fool as coolly to write to me that you had ceased to believe in God—and had found some

comfort in a dog—*this is deadly*. And of course I have at once to put you out of the St. George's Guild" (*Works* 158). This is ironic since two years earlier he had advised she read the New Testament as history. On a lighter note, Bradley's enthusiasm for a terrier anticipates her and her niece's obsessive love for their beloved dog, "Whym Chow," years later.

Before their break at the end of 1877, Ruskin and Bradley had a quarrel over his public denunciation of the suffragist and reformer Francis Power Cobbe. "In *Fors Clavigera*, the journal of the Guild, Ruskin had sentimentally contrasted 'the ductile and silent gold of ancient womanhood' with the 'bronze and tinkering . . . saucepan' (1903-12:VVVIII, 62) of modern womanhood, epitomized by Cobbe" (Leighton *Victorian* 207). Bradley apparently took him to task since he wrote to her: "I will . . . tell you more of Miss Cobbe. It is not the wrongness in her views, but her insolence in proclaiming them—contrary to St. Paul's order: 'I suffer not a woman to teach'—which is deadly in her character and so harmful in its effects"(*Works* 148-9). He further insists: " I only called her a clattering saucepan—a saucepan is a very good thing in its place; but not when it clatters' (*Works* 149). His prickly view of the outspoken social critic, which foreshadows the negative literary reception of "Michael Field" when "found out," may have hit a rawer nerve with Bradley than previously imagined since, in *The New Minnesinger*, what is most striking is its centering on female vision on both personal and political levels.

In 1878, Bradley, 32 years old, and Cooper,16, moved together to Stoke Bishop and enrolled at Bristol College where they studied classics and philosophy. As women of the well-to-do social classes, Bradley and Cooper were fortunate to be a part of "a small

but significant number" of women, who, as David Rubinstein in *Before the Suffragettes: Women's Emancipation in the 1890s* asserts, were able "to enjoy the intellectual stimulus and relative freedom of university life," which was a result of improved secondary education for women which had begun in the 1870s (12). The budding aesthetes exhibited a political consciousness, reflecting a period when political and aesthetic interests overlapped. This was the beginning of a brief period of Bradley's and Cooper's outward social activism that centered on feminist causes. The two women, as Sturgeon notes, were "already sworn in fellowship" and showed signs of aesthetic affinities, yet they "plunged into the questions of the moment," speaking in public "eloquently of the suffrage for women " (*Field* 20-21). Bradley was secretary of the Anti-Vivisection Society in Clifton until 1887. This organization represented a group of dissenting women of the 1880s labeled by recent critics, according to Anne Ardis in *New Women New Novels: feminism and Early Modernism*, as "single-issue social reformers, antivivisectionists, who perceived cruelty to animals as a crime against women, against the body as a 'female' space" (15). As "devotees of reason" (Sturgeon *Field* 21), the two women poets debated these burning social issues as members of their university's Debating Society.

In 1888, the two women poets left Bristol and the world of social causes for Reigate to dedicate themselves to art and each other. Shortly before, they published two works that would lead up to this move. With the publication of their first collaborative effort in 1881, the volume *Bellerophon*, under the pseudonym "Arran and Isla Leigh," Bradley and Cooper solidified the relationship, both creatively and personally, that would endure for the rest of their lives. "Michael Field," the name under which they would build

their literary reputation, came into existence, publicly, in 1884, with the publication of *Callirhoe*, a tragedy based on an ancient Greek story of a woman who avenges her husband's murder, to excellent reviews. Although reviews of "Michael Field's" work would eventually turn cold, "he" (they) continued to write and publish under the name for the rest of their lives.

In 1890, "Michael Field" published *The Tragic Mary*, a play about Mary Stuart that draws a sympathetic picture of her. This play caught the attention of the artist Charles Ricketts, who was introduced to Bradley and Cooper by the artist William Rothenstein through their friend, Mary Costelloe, the wife of Bernard Berenson. Ricketts was part of a male couple with the artist Charles Shannon. The two men were editors of *The Dial*, and "Michael Field" became contributors to that magazine. When the couples first met, "Michael Field" was more well-known than Ricketts and Shannon, and the men had entreated the women to help them promote *The Dial*. Shannon wrote to "Miss Bradley" to ask if she would put in a word with George Meredith for a poem to be published in the journal to assure him "that it is not another *Yellow Book.*" [6]

Perhaps Ricketts in his biography, titled *Michael Field*, captures the two women poets' unique personalities:

> Of the two, Michael (Miss Bradley) took the lead. She was then immensely vivacious, full of vitality and curiosity, with a great taste for life and character . . . She gave a trace of old world country manner and temper. (1-2)
>
> Henry was . . . very quiet in voice and manner, an immensely alive and vivid spectator and questioner, occasionally speaking with force and vivacity, but instinctively retiring and absorbed by an intensely reflective inner life.(2)

On meeting the two women poets Rothenstein in *Men and Memories (vol.2)* observes:

> Field, wan, a little drooping, with her large clear eyes, clear forehead

[6] *From the Ricketts and Shannon papers 1895.* The British Library Add. MS. 58087.

> and sensitive lips looked the poet she was; Michael, stout, with high colour, masterful, protecting, was the active, managing spirit of the Paragon. (115)

As the Paragon (at Richmond), "Michael Field's" earlier home at Reigate exhibited the exacting and precise requirements of "his" (their) era, the details of which were most likely managed by Bradley. Ricketts describes "his" (their) house at Reigate as having

> Morris curtains and wallpapers . . . The place spoke of a love of books, art, travel and flowers. I noticed on the table one of those early paper-covered editions in which Nietzsche first appeared; otherwise, the general atmosphere was crystallized by Walter Pater. (1)

The two couples shared a desire to live an aesthetic life inspired by a close creative relationship with their respective same-sex partners. Ricketts designed the covers of "Michael Field's" books, and published four of "his" (their) plays at his own Vale Press. "The Poets" and "the Painters," as the two couples called each other, remained friends for about twenty years until Cooper's death in 1913. Eventually "Michael Field" left Reigate to join Ricketts and Shannon in Richmond where the two couples dined together about three times a week.

At Richmond, Bradley's and Cooper's most prized possession was their beloved dog "Whym Chow" to whom they dedicated a volume of passionate and fiery poetry, titled *Whym Chow: Flame of Love* (1914). The dog seemed to inspire an even closer tie between the two women poets as he became the object of their over zealous attention, devotion, and love. It was the death of the dog as well as Cooper's failing health—she had always had frail health—that led to her conversion to Catholicism. The two women poets took the dog's death hard, as he seemed to function as a symbol of their wild pagan past as well as a child substitute. Cooper claims that Chow's death was "the worst loss of

my life—yes, worse than that of beloved mother or the tragic father" (1906 journal:14).[7] Bradley and Cooper mourned relentlessly and loudly to the consternation of their friends. In 1906, Ricketts wrote to "Michael Field" or "the Fields" from his new home in Holland Park:

> I am quite unable to face an interview with this excessive and dolorous lamentation still in your ways of speech, and also these countless references and reminiscences of an event, unpleasant and distressing in itself, but which in common decency should have been relegated to a volume of your diary which could afterwards be suppressed.[8]

It seems as if this excessive mourning distanced the two women poets from Ricketts and Shannon more than their religious conversion.

It was Cooper who first converted to Catholicism without the knowledge of her aunt. Bradley converted shortly after Cooper, and the two women poets moved away from the influence of Ricketts toward the influence of Father John Gray, the former fin-de-siecle poet and apparent model for Wilde's Dorian Gray, as well as other father confessors, namely Fathers McNabb and Gosscannon. It was at this time that Cooper made astonishing mentions of her sexuality: "Since I have entered the Holy Catholic Church, I have never fallen into fleshly sin," and "When I came to this Church a year ago [I gave] a gift that was a vow of chastity."[9]

In February 1911, Cooper was diagnosed with cancer. To be able to keep on writing, she refused morphine so her mind would remain clear. Oddly enough, Bradley contracted the same disease six months later, but kept knowledge of it from her companion so that she could continue to nurture Cooper's work and take care of her.

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[7] Cited in Marion Thain's *Michael Field and Poetic Identity*, 15. Cooper's father died tragically when he got lost on a climbing expedition in Switzerland he took with his other daughter, Amy, and seems to have fainted in a wooded area never to recover. Bradley and Cooper had feared he was murdered.
[8] Cited in Thain, 15.
[9] Cited in Leighton's *Writing Against the Heart*, 222. The British Library ADD. MS. 46797,fol. 52b, and fol. 77a.

Cooper died on December 13th, 1913, and Ricketts broke off his friendship with Bradley after her death. Bradley spent the last year of her life collecting Cooper's early poems and published them in a volume called *Dedicated.* Her end was to come on September 26th, 1914, the beginning of a new era with the Great War. Though the two women poets spent their entire lives wrapped up in each other and their work, in death they were parted. Cooper was buried at Isleworth, near Richmond, and Bradley at the Hawksmoor Priory in the village of Armitage. Ironically, Ricketts was the main beneficiary of Bradley's will.

IV. How the Identity Becomes Male

The concern of this section is to explore the complexities of the formation of a male poetic identity for two women poets at a particular point in time that coincides with personal needs and a biographical situation. Before getting into specifics, though, it is useful to approach the topic more generally by speculating on the following questions: What is an author? Where does authorial voice receive its authorization? These questions are posited in the context of, as Jack Stillinger asserts in *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius*, "the relevance of the author in the interpretation, presentation, and evaluation of a literary work" (v), as those works, in the case of "Michael Field," produce the life of the so-called author. This gives rise to yet another question. What is it about the concept of collaboration that requires a single authorial identity?

Within the context of opposing theoretical arguments on the notion of authorship as an act of solitary creative genius or a product of cultural constructions—the "dead" author[10]--Stillinger argues that authorship is rarely singular but rather multiple, an act

[10] See Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author" in *Image, Music, Text* and Michel Foucault's "What is an Author" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice.*

performed by various hands: "We routinely refer to a single authorial mind, or personality, or consciousness to validate meaning or authority; where others besides the nominal author have a share in the creation of a text" (vi). [11] As Stillinger sees it, editors, friends, spouses, engagement with a younger writing self, other texts, and mentors can play a crucial part in the production of various texts, making all authorship "multiple authorship."

Larger cultural forces, to expand on Stillinger's argument, I would contend, "impinge on an author's authority and freedom" (182). With regard to "Michael Field," these influences transform the meaning and value of poetic identity to assert artistic authority and empowerment within the context of the aesthetic movement. This is complicated and problematized by the fact that "he" (they) is both a collaboration and two women. Indeed gender and gender relations played a significant role in Bradley's and Cooper's invention of a male poetic identity.

Yet the idea of collaboration in literary history--even without the complication of gender--is a thorny one. In the words of Walter Besant, a contemporary of "Michael Field," in "On Literary Collaboration" (1892), collaboration was thought to have "expected limitations . . . because people will always think that in a work of collaboration they are listening to two voices" (203). "Collaborative works," as Wayne Koestenbaum in *Double Talk* argues, "are intrinsically different than books written by one author alone; even if both names do not appear, or one writer eventually produces more material, the decision to collaborate determines the works' contours, and the way it can be read" (2).

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[11] For a variety of takes on "plural" authorship, see *Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership*, Edited by Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron; *Singular Texts/Plural Authors: Perspectives on Collaborative Writing* by Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford; and *The Construction of Authorship* edited by Martha Woodmansee and Peter Jaszi.

"Indeed, as a process," claims Bette London in her study on female collaborators and feminist discourse, *Writing Double: Women's Literary Partnerships*, "collaboration was more open to scrutiny than solitary authorship" (7).

Bradley's and Cooper's first collaborative effort, the volume *Bellerophon*, (1881), written under the pseudonym "Arran and Isla Leigh," was mostly ignored by the press. Most likely this was because critics were suspicious of collaborations, as they threatened the imaginary sanctity of authorship. With the publication of this work, it seems as if the two women were trying to find a way to define their unusual personal relationship while at the same time present literary productions of that relationship to the world in an acceptable way. "Their literary productions," as Lillian Faderman in *Surpassing the Love of Men* notes, " were bound as closely as their lives for as long as they lived" (210). Whatever the case with regard to "Arran and Isla Leigh," the two women quickly dropped this moniker as well as this early volume, suggesting that they were searching for a more suitable identity that would be able to endorse both their public and private selves.

Carolyn Heilbrun's investigation of the issue of identity and womanhood for twentieth century women in her book *Reinventing Womanhood* is useful in understanding Bradley's and Cooper's move to constitute themselves as "Michael Field." Heilbrun argues that for women to achieve "a full formation of self"(16), they must reinvent themselves by adopting male role models as a means to autonomy, freedom, and self-expression. She urges women to

> take as their own the creative possibilities, the human aspirations . . . once the property of men only . . . women must learn to appropriate for their own use the examples of human autonomy and self-fulfillment displayed to us by the male world. (95)

Given the context of Bradley's and Cooper's life and work, it seems as if they formed a male poetic identity as a way to control their own destiny, the performance of "maleness," as Heilbrun urges, "to *do* rather than to *be*" (141)—on their own highly unusual terms. Moreover, while the reason for the formation of this identity is cultural it is also imbricated in their feelings for each other.

The two women poets created a male poetic identity, not a female one, in part at least, because the male artist was permitted to draw from the full range of human experience without boundaries or hindrances, something they wished to do. This is not to say that by inventing "Michael Field" they are completely free from aspects of gender subordination; they are not. In fact, to protect their work against the constraints of the male literary establishment, and to be taken seriously as artists, was essential for them—it was also a life-long source of anxiety. Yet, as "Michael Field," they were free to the extent that, through "him," they were able to conceive of themselves as producing works of art they viewed as inspired by the image-making powers of their two minds working together, motivated by their relationship, without the burden of being pinned down to the specific issues, controversy or harsh criticism that often dogged women writers. Marie Corelli in *The Sorrows of Satan* illustrates the point. When aspiring novelist Geoffrey Tempest is asked if he has read a popular female novelist, Mavis Clare, he says:

> I never paid any attention to the names of women who choose to associate themselves with the arts, as I had the usual masculine notion that all they did, whether in painting, music, or writing, must of necessity be trash and unworthy of comment. (112)

Such was the case of the New Woman novelist, which I shall discuss later in this section. "For two women writing together as a single author, " asserts Holly Laird in "The

Coauthored Pseudonym: Two Women Named Michael Field," "the pseudonym could be both a weapon and shelter to achieve authorship and authority in print" (193). "Their new pseudonym," Virginia Blain notes in "Michael Field, the Two-Headed Nightingale: Lesbian Text as Palimpsest," "certainly gave their work the requisite protection from reviewers' prejudices for the year or two—1884-85—during which its cover remained inviolate" (246).

Indeed the scope of "Michael Field's" life and work shows that doing the opposite of what they did, taking on a female identity, would have instantly denied them equal representation and protection, full visibility, and recognition because of their gender (which, ironically, happens to a considerable degree once they are "found out"). During this time, gender, as Nicola Diane Thompson proposes in *Reviewing Sex: Gender and the Reception of Victorian Novels*, was a "particular interpretive horizon" that was "not only an analytical category used by Victorian reviewers to conceptualize, interpret, and evaluate novels, but in some cases the primary category" (1). It is under the protection of "Michael Field," then, that the two women poets were able to move forward.

Yet Bradley's and Cooper's progressive attitude towards their own sex gave them a kind of place in the historical moment of the suffrage movement, largely a middle class effort that began in the 1870s. This movement also supported changes in higher education for women from which the two women poets benefited. The period was a time of great social upheaval in definition of the roles of the sexes (as well as issues surrounding race and class) which were the result of the campaign for repeal of the

Contagious Disease Acts of the 1870s and 1880s.[12] This campaign coincided with other aspects of the feminist movement, such as the fight for access to higher education and medicine, property rights, and an increased demand for the Vote.[13] Most important, these crusades raised issues about women's sense of sexual objectification and victimization. As Susan Kingsley Kent points out in *Sex and Suffrage in Britain*, the woman's suffrage movement "sought no less than a total transformation of the lives of women," and "set out to redefine and recreate, by political means, the sexual culture of Britain" (3). David Rubinstein, whose study of the women's movement focuses on the 1890s, identifies "a new spirit" of a free-thinking and educated woman whose quest for emancipation was "more far-reaching than the immediate impact of the parliamentary vote could be" (*Before* xi). It is no surprise, then, that Bradley and Cooper, independent, high-spirited, and educated, supported reforms that would afford them some opportunity to develop their talents as well as move about more freely in the world.

Yet despite gains the women's suffrage campaign made, obstacles facing the movement were great, especially since the dominant sentiment—which was in the process of being shored up by "scientific" evidence--valued women solely for their maternal duty. It was thought that science, as Cynthia Eagle Russett notes in *Sexual Science: the Victorian Construction of Womanhood*, "shed light on vexing social issues raised by such changes in women's roles and status that were taking place during the middle and later nineteenth century" (2). "The domestic ideology proclaimed in this

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[12] For an in-depth study of the connection between the Contagious Diseases Acts repeal campaigns and the suffrage movement, see Judith Walkowitz's *Prostitution and Victorian Society, Women, Class, and the State.*

[13] The following are some results of feminist agitation: The Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882 allowed women to keep property they brought to marriage; women were allowed to take examinations at Girton at Cambridge in 1871 and Newnham at Oxford in 1879, among others; in 1867, John Stuart Mill introduced a woman suffrage amendment to the Reform Bill of 1867, which failed. See Susan Kingsley Kent's *Sex and Suffrage in Britain: 1860-1914*, 54-55.

period associated women not only with the household but also with biological characteristics that objectified them as 'the Sex'" (Kent *Sex* 4). To strengthen the sharp gender divisions of separate sphere ideology, the newly founded scientific community rallied to show that gender roles were prescribed by "nature." It was a time, historically, in which, as Russett points out, "social and scientific developments converged to create the possibility and urgency of a science of male and female nature and of the differences between them" (*Sexual* 2). By the 1890s, "the authority of Charles Darwin, powerfully bolstered by Herbert Spencer, gave a spurious authenticity to the assertion that the subordination of women was scientifically ordained" (Rubinstein *Before* 3). The appreciation of Darwin by others interested in "proving" a hierarchal natural order of human beings gave rise to the new field of social science, which included anthropology, sociology, and psychology. In general people thought something had to be done to control the unruly ego and the psychology of woman with its "weaknesses and inefficiencies." Some went as far as blaming progressive women for the spread of "Socialism and Nihilism." [14] With such fears about women's threat if not controlled, both natural and social science went to great lengths to try to validate, through elaborate experimentation, what they believed were innate differences between men and women. Russett outlines the interdependent relationship between natural science and the social sciences:

> From physics they took the principles of the conservation of energy and the correlation of forces: from biology, sexual selection, the biogenetic law . . . and the physiological division of labor. These theories were utilized and adapted to explain how and why men and women differed from each other and, often enough, what these differences signified for social policy, and conclusions drawn from them display such as a remarkable degree of uniformity that it is fair to say that a genuine scientific consensus emerged by the turn of the century (*Sexual* 10).

[14] See "The Apple and Ego of Woman." *Westminster Review*, 374, 377.

Despite the strong resistance to the emancipation of women, the Darwinian belief in the existence of inborn gender differences was challenged and by late century considerably shaken, especially in more the avant garde and elite circles to which Bradley and Cooper belonged. Before then, seemingly in a face off with Darwin, John Stuart Mill in his famous essay *On the Subjection of Women* (1869) persuasively argues that the nature of women is "an unnatural thing," and faults men for being "too emotional" on the subject of women and equality, instead of logical and rational. In the realm of "science," biometrician Karl Pearson "insisted that available evidence failed to prove the theory of greater variability among males, thus attempting to debunk what he termed 'a pseudo-scientific superstition' commonly used to support belief in the inferiority of women'" (Rubinstein *Before* 1). In spite of this dissent, the now "scientifically" sanctioned age-old opinion that women were above all destined to become wives and mothers, at the expense of self-fulfillment, remained a force to be reckoned with:

> Whether the issue was education, politics, employment or other aspects of the struggle for equality, the assertion that the inferiority of women stemmed from ineradicable physiological causes was widely accepted and used to justify their continued legal and social handicaps (*Before* 3).

As public figures and as members of their university's Debating Society, Bradley and Cooper were likely to have been aware of the "scientific" evidence, led by the light of evolution, concerning the "woman question" and the social implications of the conclusions that relegated women to inferior status. Certainly the evolutionary perspective of Bradley's first volume of verse, particularly the early poem"Trompetenruf," as well as her arguments with Ruskin over atheism, indicate that she was aware of evolutionary debates. As such, it is plausible to think that the questions "science" raised about gender differences—who is man? who is woman?—were, in a

way, the same questions Bradley and Cooper, as "Michael Field," were trying to answer in their effort to carve out a place for themselves in a world that was grappling with definitions of gender and sexuality and by extension, gender and writing.

Indeed "Michael Field," as Bradley and Cooper conceived "him," occupies a space in the mix of new identities that emerged at the end of the century, with the New Woman on one side and the male homosexual decadent on the other. However, as Elaine Showalter observes in *Sexual Anarchy*, "While they were often linked in the press and in popular culture as 'twin apostles of social apocalypse,' New Women and decadent men did not experience themselves a natural allies. . ." (170). So, at this point in my discussion, though the male decadent is important in relation to "Michael Field," I shall focus on the New Woman to offer insight into why Bradley and Cooper most likely felt it necessary to create a specifically male poetic identity.

Generally speaking, the New Woman was widely recognized as a liberated woman in the literature and in the social life of the period. The New Woman novelists were both women and men who wrote novels with a feminist bent that engaged with political causes. Many critics agree that Olive Schriener's pioneering novel, *The Story of an African Farm,* published in 1883, is an early representation of both the New Woman, with the controversial character of Lyndall, and the New Woman novelist, which Schreiner herself came to represent.

The New Woman is an unstable category that came out of the social unrest that reflected a changing society. "By early 1894, the demands of women seeking emancipation had reached such a pitch that it was fairly common to write in terms of a 'new' womanhood" (Rubinstein *Before* 15). Anne Ardis observes in *New Women, New*

Novels: *Feminism and Early Modernism* that a late nineteenth century feminist could be called a variety of names: "She was called 'Novissima:' the New Woman, the Odd Woman, the Wild Woman, and the Superfluous Woman in English novels and periodicals of the 1880s and 1890s" (1). Sally Ledger, who claims "Michael Field" as "New Women poets," in *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism*, is more specific: "The New Woman of the fin-de-siecle had a multiple identity. She was, variously, a feminist activist, a social reformer, a popular novelist, a suffragette playwright, a woman poet " (1).

It was in 1894 that the label New Woman became a catchword for almost any renegade woman. Earlier in the year, Sarah Grand published an article entitled "The New Aspect of the Woman Question" in the March issue of the *North American Review*, and referred to a woman who sought emancipation as "the new woman." [15] Ouida (Louise de la Ramee), responding to Grand's essay, published in May an article entitled "The New Woman," taking Grand's phrase and turning it into a name for a new breed of womanhood in a negative way. As the Labor Question, historically, was linked to the Woman Question, Ouida in her article allied "the New Woman" with "the Working Man," calling them both "unmitigated bores," who "meet us at every page of literature written in the English tongue, and each is convinced that on its own special W hangs the future of the world."[16] Ouida's essay drew much attention to what was now called the New Woman, setting off a barrage of attacks upon her by the popular press. In fact, she was, according to Rubenstein, "mostly largely a creation of the press" (*Before* 18). Ardis notes, "what had once been termed the 'Woman Question' became a more strictly literary affair" (*New Women* 12). Taking a slightly different approach, Ledger's study sees that

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[15] Cited in Ardis, 10.
[16] Ibid, 10-11.

the press attacks actually forwarded dominant discourses of the New Woman at the fin-de-siecle, which include the cause of the New Woman: "For by 'naming' and thenceforth largely ridiculing and attacking the New Woman," she argues, "the editors and hacks of the periodical press unwittingly prised open a discursive space for her, a space which was quickly filled by feminist productions sympathetic . . . toward the claims of the New Woman" (*New Woman* 9).

New Woman novels dealt with sexual issues and the state of marriage, both hot topics in public discussion. In an article entitled "The Fiction of Sexuality" (1895) by James Ashcroft Nobel published in the *Contemporary Review,* for example, Sarah Grand's popular novel *The Heavenly Twins* and two works by George Egerton, which are not named, are seen as part of "an epidemic of . . . perverted emotion ", in which characters' "sexual passion provides the main-spring of their action." In response to this article, *The Westminster Review* published "Sex in Fiction"(1895) by D. F. Hannigan, which is mostly supportive of the New Woman in male-authored texts, namely Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did.* Hardy's novel is praised as a "masterpiece" that is "almost entirely devoted to the question of sexual relations. " [17] Likewise, Grant's novel is seen as a welcome critique of "a system which enforces conjugal fidelity by means of the penalty of divorce and disgrace in the event of violation of the contract. " [18] With the one exception of George Egerton whose work "Keynotes and Discords" this author mentions no female New Woman. What this suggests is that even when women themselves, this time as authors, are responsible for starting a new trend in literature that is not only popular but female centered, they are

[17] "Sex in Fiction," 618.
[18] Ibid, 623.

denied recognition by the establishment, the kind of recognition, as we shall see, Bradley and Cooper craved.

In 1896, Bradley herself, indirectly, expressed a distaste for politics in literature with regard to a prominent New Woman. Bradley seems to have been harboring a bit of envy of the New Woman novelist, which she expresses later in life in remarks about Schreiner:

> Olive Schreiner home from the Cape, after years of brute, wild life in Africa. The ambassador pays his respects to her, Watts asks to paint her (he is refused), she goes the round of the great. Lovers from Africa come after her—to sink on their knees as soon as they land. . . . Meditating on all this I am filled with jealousy; this woman has been worshipped—she has known solitude—she has walked naked in the open air, she has handled politics, she has set one up and put down another (Field *Works* 193-94).

While this bitter reflection might suggest Bradley and Cooper somehow missed something along the way by turning their life into literary artwork via "Michael Field," Bradley's tone also indicates a wish for something more obvious--to be recompensed and rewarded for their audacity to live life as women who produced literary works on their own terms as well as a new cultural model for women living and writing together, though she would not have thought of it in this way. Neither Bradley nor Cooper would not have wanted to change anything about "Michael Field." The two women poets, however, did seem to have felt they did not get enough life experience or adventure because of their gender, which might help explain some of Bradley's envy of Schreiner. To illustrate the point, after the only public performance in Manchester of one of their plays, *A Question of Memory*, Cooper wrote of the experience: " . . . I am a woman, and to bring out a play is experience of life—just what women feel so crushingly that they need. You men get it like breathing" (Field *Works* 184).

This feeling of frustration, though, did not prevent Bradley and Cooper, nor the New Woman for that matter, from asserting new claims to a life outside the domestic sphere. Throughout their lives they challenged cultural constructions of femininity and female sexuality. But the two women poets do this—especially with regard to female sexuality-- in a different way. While the New Women mostly rejected the conventional idea of a woman's lack of sexual passion, they often could not accept the idea of an active female sexuality. In Sarah Grand's popular three-decker novel *The Heavenly Twins*, for example, the heroine Evadne Frayling refuses to consummate her marriage when she discovers her husband (who later dies of syphilis) has had a shady sexual history, thus denying her own sexuality. Ledger calls Grand's bestseller "quite a puritanical novel" (114). Ardis discusses "the New Woman's retreat to celibacy," in George Gissing's *The Odd Woman,* in which the protagonist "odd-woman" Rhoda Nunn "retreats . . . from the 'voluptuousness' Barfoot intends her to body forth. She resumes her nun-like chastity. " (110). Showalter sums up this attitude toward sex: "The dominant sexual discourse among New Women, as among other late-nineteenth-century feminists, reproduced and intensified stereotypes of female sexlessness and purity" (45). Bradley and Cooper, in radical contrast, seek to write against this cultural grain. And once they become "Michael Field," they are able to create female sexuality on their own terms, boldly rewriting Sappho in a work entitled *Long Ago*, for instance, that is brimming with sexuality, both lesbian and heterosexual, and that unabashedly celebrates the passion and lust of Dionysus in relation to women.

It is by relinquishing politics, specifically the overt sexual politics of the New Woman, then, that Bradley and Cooper, as "Michael Field," were able to write about

more daring subjects than they would have if they had remained tied to political causes, particularly in their public lives. Further, in addition to "Michael Field's" desire to express female sexuality more openly, though the two women poets share general sentiments with regard to a woman's place in the world with the New Woman, they differ in both genre and artistic perspective. Bradley and Cooper are poets, not novelists. They, in the Romantic tradition of Shelley, Carlyle, and Mill, though not a Romantic, among others before them, held the poet in an exalted position, and imbued "him" with special powers. Bradley, in an unpublished letter to Cooper, writes, " the poet shall know all things—the strange agonies of mortality—the rebellion and submission of the flesh—the discomfort of the earthly tenement that the heavenly may be desired." [19] This is a construction of an aesthetic ideal, not a political one. The works of "Michael Field," as far as they can be categorized at all, fall into the aesthetic category.

Yet it is important to consider that women authors of all genres have historically been allotted limited territory within which to write. One result is the nineteenth century tradition of literary women, George Elliot, Ellis Bell, Vernon Lee, for example, assuming male pseudonyms as a publishing strategy to negotiate the prevailing literary culture. "Michael Field" is a part of that tradition. Gender issues, in other words, crucially inflect Bradley and Cooper's choice of a male identity. But ironically this male identity provided a way for them to write from a consciously female, including feminist and lesbian perspective.

An exploration into their work—particularly the poem "The Poet"—on categories of poetic vision and the ways of poetic experience offers some insight into the issue of poetic identity and the universal view, held by Bradley and Cooper, that constructs this

[19] "Letters from Katherine Bradley to Edith Cooper."

identity as male. In 1887, Bradley and Cooper, as "Michael Field," wrote "The Poet" which was not published until 1907 in the collection *Wild Honey*. The poem contains specific ideas on the creation of a poetic identity:

> Within his eyes are hung lamps of a sanctuary;
> A wind, from whence none knows, can set in sway
> And spill their light by fits; but yet their ray
> Returns, deep-boled, to its obscurity.
>
> The world as from a dullard turns annoyed
> to stir the days with show of deeds or voices:
> But if one spies him justly one rejoices,
> With silence that the careful lips void.
>
> He is a plan, a work of some strange passion
> Life has conceived apart from Time's harsh drill,
> A thing it hides and cherishes to fashion
>
> At odd bright moments to its secret will:
> Holy and foolish, ever set apart,
> He waits the leisure of his god's free heart.
> (*Wild Honey* 58)

The lines "He is a plan, a work of some strange passion/ Life has conceived apart from Time's harsh drill" suggest that the poet is a conception born of desire. This conception, " a work of some strange passion," expresses an intense sensuality, perhaps of a sexual nature. Obviously this poet is not a full-blooded male like Robert Browning or Daniel Gabriel Rossetti; "he" is more of an abstraction, something that has been thought about and worked out in detail beforehand, and who will take the shape of a male poetic identity (hence the firm use of the pronoun "he"). Consciously designed, "he," referred to as a "thing," is a kind of object to be molded or shaped at "his" creator's will. Planned in a special way, "he," by implication, will serve certain functions for "his" creators, who are not identified. Similar to that of the dandy, the identity of this poet comes into being after "he" is thought up; before then, "he" does not exist. The "life" that has conceived

this "plan" might be thought of as a life energy, that is to say, the life energy that generates the production of the imagination. That "he" is not subject to the tyranny of time suggests that the poet, or the poet's imaginative gift, in a Romantic fashion, transcends earthly time and place. Clearly this plan is carried out by a "secret will," suggesting that there is some sort of mysterious force behind the creation of "Michael Field," an aspect of which, it seems, is an aesthetic sensibility that underlies the creation of this identity, a view of the aesthetic that is "male" if not "gay male" centered. The "odd bright moments" are structures of moments of inspiration, which reflect the "hung lamps of a sanctuary" within the poet's eyes in the first stanza. These moments are the result of a particular model of creativity—the construction of visionary powers that are holy and sacred yet possessing a strange quality, as the word "odd" implies. Shunned by the world at large, the beauty of the poet's vision is apprehended by an exceptional one, who "if one spies him justly one rejoices." This kind of receptivity echoes the special temperament required of Walter Pater's aesthetic critic. In the poem, the exceptional one, an experimentation of sensibility for two women, "Michael Field," apprehends the beauty of something strange within a divine vision.

V. "Michael Field" as a Modernist Phenomenon

From symbolism to vorticism to the outlook of the poets and writers of the Harlem Renaissance and beyond, modernism is at best defined as a complex, lengthy, and varied era with a wide variety of strains. Perhaps to consider intellectual and social concerns within a particular context—that began in the nineteen nineties and moved well

into the twentieth century[20]--would be useful in attempting to define modernism, a sensibility, generally, that calls for a break with tradition, as well as experimentation, innovation, and revitalization of art and the self. This aesthetic conventionally has been attributed to the prominent men of modernism—T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, James Joyce, for example—in an attempt to construct the movement as a monolithic "virile" one. But it is now common knowledge that the framers of modernism include literary women such as Virginia Woolf, Djuna Barnes, Gertrude Stein, for example, as central figures who developed a sense of their identities and works with a decisively radical feminine bent, politically and personally.

The fictional and critical approaches to the process, production, and maintenance of gender and sexual categories are a concern of modern women writers, as well as "Michael Field." "The invention of strategies that sever the narrative from formerly conventional structures of fiction and consciousness about women," Rachel DuPlessis asserts in *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers*, "is what I call 'writing beyond the ending'"(x). "Modernism as we were taught it, " notes Bonnie Kime Scott in *The Gender of Modernism*, " was unconsciously gendered masculine. The inscriptions of mothers and women, and more broadly of sexuality and gender, were not adequately decoded . . . this is an example of the politics of gender" (2). Jane Marcus in her groundbreaking book on Virginia Woolf, *Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy*, sought to contribute "to the wider definition of modernism currently being explored by feminist critics" (xv) by rereading Woolf's works

[20] Bonnie Kime Scott in *Refiguring Modernism, vol. 2* credits "dysfunctional families," "Edwardian men of letters," "adventurous and brash suffragettes," and "'the men of 1914'" with influencing female authors of that era,1.

in the context of historical, biographical, and theoretical frames that venture way outside of "virile" modernist thought.

Woolf, as other twentieth century women authors, negotiates modern questions of aesthetics, art, and politics, with her male counterparts, and thereby connects with modernists of both genders. "Michael Field," though writing earlier than Woolf, does something similar. T.S. Eliot in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" reveals his purpose behind his poetry, which is impersonality, a desire to escape from private emotion, a quality that "Michael Field's" work does not share. But he also speaks of an "historical sense," which makes a writer "traditional," and which

> compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that whole of literature of Europe of Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. (*The Sacred Wood* 49)

The two women poets, with their commitment to the classics, German, the art of Europe, and extensive knowledge of English poetry and prose and the philosophical and literary works of the great dead white men of Europe, could be said to be "traditional." But it is when they rewrite Sappho in *Long Ago*, under the guise of "Michael Field," that the "past" is "altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past" (Eliot "Tradition" 51), a move that not only embodies Eliot's aesthetic (for women), but that gives rise to a lesbian centered strain of modernism, "Sapphic modernism." "Michael Field," while deliberately choosing not to transcend the private self, as Eliot would require, exhibits a sense of fixity together with flux in "his" ("their") work, a modern impulse, as well as produces a new aesthetic, "making it new" exclusively for women.

While the outcomes of the project of "Michael Field" might not completely fit the modernist paradigm, especially that of experimentation with form and language, the

formulation of "him," it can be argued, is a modern gesture. "He" is a hybrid identity, an experiment (that, in turn, informs Bradley's and Cooper's poetic process). This strategy, the invention of "Michael Field," thus enables the two women poets to move away from orthodox patterns of thinking about gender, selfhood, and authorship, and reformulate these structures for their own needs—at once to sanctify their relationship and to claim cultural authority. By marking their life and work with a higher degree of self-signature that plays with gender (and sexuality) via "Michael Field," Bradley and Cooper anticipate the coming of this new era that constructs its search for style in a highly individualist sense, a move that constitutes a break with tradition.

Breaks with tradition, particularly with regard to cultural constructions of gender, and by extension, gender and writing, came to the fore in the late nineteenth century. Conventional assumptions with regard to the literary tradition of the muse and her concomitant empowered, inspired, and divine "male" poet, were challenged by changing views on gender. Kime Scott observes that there was a "crisis in gender identification that underlies much of modernist literature " (*Gender* 2). Lisa Rado in her book, *The Modern Androgyne Imagination*, argues that the moment of gender confusion at the end of the century represented a crisis in gender hierarchies to which twentieth century authors responded by fashioning a new mode of the imagination, what she calls a "modern androgynous imagination." Rado's theorizing of the imagination within a cultural and historical context is useful in understanding the event of "Michael Field." "He" is more than the way Bradley and Cooper wear gender to signify belonging; rather, through "him," the two women poets exhibit an "androgynous imagination" publicly and privately that plays with both gender and sexuality and that is modern in spirit.

Overall, I position "Michael Field" as a modern liminal "personality," what I call the dandy-androgyne, a category that is sui generis. I map onto the pseudonym added discourses of hybridity, simultaneity, multiple subjectivities, and plurality, the mask signifying what Bradley and Cooper become. It is through "him" that Bradley and Cooper face the barriers, both inward and outward, as two women writing together attempting to write literature at a particular point in time. The invention of this male poetic identity for the two women poets thus allow "his" creators both the psychological positioning and a cultural identity to be able to flow in and out of gender and sexual determinates and categories free to create their own spaces in which to become poets, playwrights, lesbians, a married couple, dandies, aesthetes, and eventually, devout Catholics.

Chapter Two: The Dandy-Aesthete-Androgyne Poet

Although Bradley and Cooper remained on the sidelines in the politically charged arena of the battle of the sexes dominated by New Women and male aesthetes, the two women poets, speaking in the voice of a single man, seemed to be answering one of the burning questions of the era: what is masculinity, and by extension, femininity, specifically with regard to the woman artist. These questions of gender, sexuality, and art for Bradley and Cooper are connected to the aesthetic movement and to the figure of the dandy.

I. Introduction

In examining the issue of the dandy and "Michael Field," I am entering into a debate sparked by Marion Thain in her study *Michael Field and Poetic Identity.* She argues that Bradley and Cooper's dual authorship and femininity are crucial to the formation of the poetic identity "Michael Field" in that, with the pseudonym, they imitate the strategy of the decadent dandy in order to denaturalize gender, specifically femininity, to create themselves as artists. She views this act of denaturalizing gender as necessary to the two women poets since she claims that Victorian women poets, which is how she categorizes Bradley and Cooper, have to overcome two obstacles inherited from Romantic poetic theory and reinforced by Victorian ideology. These are the dilemma of the woman poet trying to find a place in a tradition that identifies the poet as male, and the belief that women are subject to the tyranny of nature. It was thought that women's lives were determined by biological functions, especially childbirth, which destined them

to become wives and mothers, not poets. Women thus were associated with the body, emotion, and passivity; men the mind, reason, and creativity.

While I agree that the artifice of the dandy is important to the way Bradley and Cooper create themselves as artists, I disagree that this act of invention derives solely from what Thain posits as the problems of woman and poet, and woman and nature. This is not to deny that in the nineteenth century there was a strand of thought that viewed concepts of "woman" and "poet" as split--there was. And, certainly, historically, the poet was a male "gendered" identity. But feminist critics have argued persuasively for the existence of a female literary tradition beginning with Sappho. This is precisely where "Michael Field" began with their first collection of poetry, *Long Ago*, which audaciously rewrites Sappho's lyrics.

Despite their placement in this tradition, Bradley and Cooper were much too unusual as women—university educated, members of the "aesthetic" crowd, and immersed in each other--to see themselves as long suffering female poets tied to the hearth, associated with nature rather than art because of their gender. As Leighton suggests, "Michael Field, in many ways, belongs altogether outside the tradition of Victorian women's verse" (*Victorian* 204). This is so despite the fact that they lived and worked within the context of both decadent dandies and decadent literature in which women were often depicted as objects of disdain, and which, in part, was against nature and its association with the life cycle. Bradley and Cooper chose to live free of male partners, though they sought to be a part of a "gay" male art movement. The "essential freedom of their lives," writes Leighton, is "a freedom particularly from the conventions and conclusions of heterosexual love" (204). They also identified with fractious female

figures (in other works of literature) and created strong, independently-minded female characters (in their own plays), and were thus able to circumvent the "law" of nature, and avoid the traditional feminine association with human reproduction. Beyond gender, with the invention of "Michael Field," Bradley and Cooper, like the dandy, rebelled against a bourgeois culture, and an economy of exchangeability and accumulation of mass production. "Michael Field" thus allowed the two women poets to step outside the system. Through "Michael Field," they moved to reproduce the same way homosexual men do, with the creation of an elaborate "unnatural" self and with art. In the fashion of the dandy, "Michael Field" becomes a singularity, unique and irreproducible.

Bradley and Cooper lived during a time when rules about gender and sexuality were being questioned by both men and women. They were part of a generation that anticipated, if not were a part of, modernism. Overall, at this time, it was common for poets and writers of both sexes to adopt masks of the opposite gender, which was, in part, what Bradley and Cooper, as women and collaborators with the invention of a male poetic identity, were doing. Then again, a careful examination of their situation reveals something more complicated--the philosophy of aestheticism, as its proponents, the dandies of the aesthetic movement, liked to think of it, impacted the formation of "Michael Field." "He, " I shall argue, is Bradley's and Cooper's response, as both women and artists, to the cultural forces of gender questioning and aesthetic change.

Before exploring the relationship among the dandy, aestheticism, and "Michael Field," it is important to acknowledge what distinguishes "Michael Field" from traditional dandies, that is, males from George Brummell to Charles Baudelaire to Oscar Wilde. The conception of "Michael Field" is a more complicated figure because of the

mixed gender. "He" provides the space which the two women can inhabit in order to invent their lives and works.

The act of evading conformity is what Jessica Feldman in *Gender on the Divide* designates as the "chief rule of the brotherhood of dandies" (2). Giving this tradition of the dandy-writer a new take, Bradley and Cooper join together, in their imagination, as "Michael Field," and create "his" (their) own life as a dandy in "his" (their) works. While they do not create themselves as obvious dandy-heroes in prose—such as Wilde does in *Dorian Gray*, Baudelaire in *The Painter of Modern Life*, or Huysmann in *Against Nature*--Bradley and Cooper, as "Michael Field," do create a dandified version of their relationship in their work by producing, if not reproducing, their own very deep intimacy, including their sexuality, in their poetry. Through this highly feminized double in the form of a single masculine mask, the ultimate pose, Bradley and Cooper assume interchanging, and at times, commingling public and private roles as a poet, as lovers, and as aesthetes. More so, through "Michael Field," they can inhabit an aestheticized, alternative lifestyle, evading conformity to cultural constructions of Victorian womanhood, which promoted women's association with nature to the fullest degree.

"Michael Field" also anticipates the modern female dandy-writer, such as Djuna Barnes, Virigina Woolf, or Radclyffe Hall. Barnes was a public figure who became known for a dramatic black cape without which she was rarely seen in public. Virginia Woolf, though lacking a flamboyant public persona, was a kind of dandy-writer who created a dandy-hero, Vita Sackville-West, her lover, in *Orlando*. Radclyffe Hall, though usually not considered a modern writer, was a wealthy elaborate and elegant cross-dresser, and subsequently created herself as Stephen Gordon, a tragic dandy-hero figure,

in *The Well of Loneliness*. The relation of these authors to "Michael Field" and the dandy is too large to include in this study, but important to placing "Michael Field" in a twentieth century (as well as queer) context.

My contention in this chapter is that the figure of "Michael Field" is a product of two discourses available at the time, both of which overlap one another: one, that of aestheticism, and two, that of the "gay" male dandy. "Michael Field" thus combines the art work and the personal life, as did the aesthetic dandy of the period.

II. Aestheticism

To best understand the phenomenon of "Michael Field," it is the conventional version of aestheticism, considered a predominately male culture, that is most helpful. This movement has both French and English origins, the French having a strong influence on the English. Challenging prevailing Victorian attitudes toward just about everything from art to class to gender--in England later in the century particularly--this movement began in 1835 with the publication of Theophile Gautier's novel *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, a collection of gender-bending tales that have overt homosexual overtones. It is the preface to the book, which bears little relation to the stories, however, that makes claims that inaugurated the school of thought famous for the slogan, "art for art's sake." The preface expresses sentiments that became crucial elements in aestheticism; in Ian Small's words, "aesthetics and ethics are entirely separate categories of thought, [namely] that art should suffer no incursions from the moral sphere . . . that beauty in nature or in art have no end other than itself" (*Aesthetes* xii). Two decades later Algernon Charles Swinburne, a follower of both Gautier and Baudelaire, in the essay *William Blake* (1868) maintained that morality of art was

insignificant while its formal merits were paramount; "Art for art's sake first of all, and afterwards we may suppose all the rest shall be added to her " (Small *Aesthetes* 6). In *Notes on Poems and Reviews* (1866) Swinburne demanded that art be free of imposed moral concerns.

It was Walter Pater, however, with the publication in 1873 of "his most stimulating and certainly his most notorious work," *Studies In the History of the Renaissance*, who became the high priest of the aesthetic movement (xiv). " Pater's importance for the subsequent development of Aestheticism," Small notes, " is difficult to overestimate for he was the first serious and forthright English critic to maintain that aesthetics, far from being implicated in cultural and moral issues, could, and should, exist freed from those contexts" (xiv). Pater's view—"music, poetry, artistic and accomplished forms of human life" for their own sake--had both social and literary resonance. Oxford was scandalized by the book and Pater thus was motivated to explain and elaborate on his position in subsequent works. Despite being a closeted homosexual, a retiring don, and shy man, Pater nevertheless influenced men—and some women, Vernon Lee and "Michael Field," for instance--who were destined to achieve celebrity and renown: Gerard Manley Hopkins, Lionel Johnson, Arthur Symons, George Moore, W.B. Yeats, and Oscar Wilde, his most famous student. As Wilde's biographer Richard Ellmann asserts, "Wilde had been Pater's disciple" (*Oscar Wilde* xiv).

In Pater's view, the aesthetic sensibility in both art and life involves a heightened receptivity and sensitivity to beauty, privileging art over ethics, and suggesting life be experienced in the manner of art. Gearing his suggestions toward the aesthetic critic, he appropriates Mathew Arnold, tenets of Romanticism, ideas on perception and cognition

by late nineteenth century British psychologists, and the Hellenic ideal of harmonious perfection. Pater writes in the "Preface:"

> 'To see the object as in itself it really is,' has been justly said to be the aim of all true criticism whatever; and in aesthetic criticism, the first step toward seeing one's object as it really it, is to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realize it distinctly. (xiv)
>
> What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book to *me*? What effect does it really produce on me? Does it give me pleasure? How is my nature modified by its presence, and under its influence? (xiv)
>
> What is important, then, is not that the critic should possess a correct abstract definition of beauty for the intellect, but a certain kind of temperament, the power of being moved by the presence of beautiful objects. (xxx)

The work of Pater's critic is marked by a higher degree of subjectivity, an overt self-consciousness, in that she is to look deeply inside the self rather than to the object in order to "see the object as it really is." What this suggests, in Adam Phillips' words, is that "in his very earliest writing Pater had been preoccupied with the 'elusive inscrutable mistakable self'. . . the description of a more passively receptive sensibility, an inwardness of response that was itself a new form of perception" (Introduction to *The Renaissance* x).[1] The making of a self thus was determined by one's perceptions.

In the "Conclusion," Pater expands the theme of personal identity and truthful perception in a world in flux. Enriching life through intense perception grounds individual identity in an ever-changing universe, the passion for art having the greatest potential for warding off a sense of transience because in art the perceptions of a highly developed mind are already in place. Advocating living for the moment, he writes in the "Conclusion:"

> Every moment some form grows perfect in hand or face; some tone on the hills or sea is choicer than the rest; some mood of passion or insight or intellectual

[1] See Pater's essay, "Diaphaneite," in *The Renaissance*, edited by Adam Phillips, 154.

> excitement is irresistibly real and attractive to us,--for that moment only. Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end. (152)
>
> To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. (152)
>
> Great passions may give us this quickened sense of life, ecstasy and sorrow of love, the various forms of enthusiastic activity. . .Only be sure it is passion—that does yield you this fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness. Of such wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire for beauty, the love of art for its own sake, has most. For art comes to you . . . to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake. (152)

Pater's aesthetic impulse, that success in life is to experience as many pleasurable moments as possible, was widely misunderstood as profane and hedonistic. It is important to remember that Pater emphasizes the "higher" passions--experience of nature, the intellect, the emotions, and most important, art, not the "lower" passions—excessive indulgence of the senses. His aim is to encourage the cultivation of a particular kind of temperament, a temperament that apprehends the experience of art as improving on, and moving beyond, the experience of life.

This conception of a highly individualized sensibility, for Pater, is equally important to the artist, the temperament of the artist and the critic being one in the same. What is beautiful in art is its essence or truth derived from the transcription of the artist's sense of the world. In his essay on literary art "Style" in *Essays on Literature and Art* he writes:

> The writer's aim, consciously or unconsciously, comes to be the transcribing, not of the world, not of mere fact, but of his sense of it, he becomes an artist, his work a fine art; and good art . . . in proportion to the truth of his presentment of that sense, as in those humbler or plainer functions of literature also, truth—truth to bare fact, there—is the essence of such artistic quality as they may have. Truth! There can be no merit, no craft at all, without that, and further, all beauty in the long run only fineness of truth. (396)

This notion of truth, meaning truth in art, is inspired by the poet's move to transcribe her own impressions, making the resulting work of art markedly individual. Artistic integrity thus is the result of the artist's ability to interpret her own private sense of the world. Pater called for a language that would capture the inner life of the artist, naming those impressions "soul facts," which are, in Adam Phillips' words, "an ambiguous area between evidence and invention" (*Renaissance* xii). "For Pater, the aim of any kind of artistic representation was to make these soul-facts sharable, and by doing so to reveal the soul of the artist" (xii). To initiate a sense of self in art is essential for Pater.

Wilde, who replaced Pater's transformation of truth to an individual sense of fact with lies, masks, and artifice, was profoundly influenced by Pater's work. Both Pater and Wilde in their critical works insist on the artist's personality being present in a work of art for it to be considered a work of art. Personality thought of in this way gives rise to the aesthetic notion that art is life transformed in a particular way. Images in art or literature owe their beauty, as Wilde's writes in "The Artist as Critic," "*to the fact that the author is what he is*" (*Wilde* 270). In Pater's construction of the aesthetic, life provides the raw material for the artist, which might be seen as the clay of the artist being molded into a shape that is derived from the artist's imaginative sense, and imbued with her personality. Pater views personality as a "distinct quality" which conveys to us "a peculiar quality of pleasure which we cannot get elsewhere" (*Renaissance* 40). For both Pater and Wilde, art vibrating with the artist's personality is what makes the work unique and beautiful.

The relationship between life and art hold special significance in Wilde's aesthetic in that he sees art as grabbing hold of life and giving it meaning in art ". . . Life

imitates Art . . . the self-conscious aim of Life is to find expression, and that Art offers it certain beautiful forms through which it may realize that energy" (*Wilde* 320). For Wilde, "the two supreme and highest arts" are "Life and Literature, life and the perfect expression of life" (350). Making life a work of art or creating life in art suggests that Wilde sees life, as Warner and Hough propose, as "an infinitely flexible thing to be modeled according to one's own desire, one's own sense of fitness " (*Strangeness* vol. 2 123). Wilde thus subscribes to, and articulates boldly, what Pater has been suggesting all along. He views the move to invent life in art or make life a work of art as deriving from the power of the imagination at work on actual reality, indicating that one's perception or sense of something is what creates reality or truth.

Wilde translated Pater's proposition that the experience of art showed life at its most intense, inestimable moments, into the cult of artificiality, which gave rise to decadence. As a dandified "effeminate" public figure--he was also influenced by Whistler's public display of his own large, flamboyant personality--Wilde gave the aesthetic and eventually decadent movement a higher profile. "At some point in the early 1890s, as the cultivation of the beautiful experience for its own sake was replaced as an artistic credo by the cultivation of any experience for its own sake," writes Small, "Aestheticism modulated into that movement we now call Decadence" (xii). Yet "decadence," as Showalter notes, "is a notoriously difficult term to define" (*Sexual* 169), so it is easy to blur the identities of aesthete and decadent. Wilde contributed to the confusion by calling *The Renaissance* decadent. He had been seen, as reported by Yeats, as " conspicuously flourishing a copy of *The Renaissance*:"

> 'It is my golden book; I never travel anywhere without it, but it is
> the very flower of decadence; the last trumpet should have sounded

> the moment it was written.' 'But,' said the dull man, 'would you not have given us time to read it?' 'O no,' was the retort, 'there would have been plenty of time afterwards—in either world.'[2]

The propositions of Wilde's early work, which adheres closely to those of Pater, would be considered aesthetic. Decadent, on the other hand, was associated with perverse sentiments of morbidity, solipsism, and the ruthless experience of sensations.

Bradley and Cooper were aesthetes who held onto aesthetic ideas associated with the decadence—in Showalter's words, "the inner life of art, artifice, sensation, and imagination" (170). But they also abhorred sentiments that strayed too far away from the leading sentiment of aestheticism: the primacy of art. When literary critic R.K.R. Thornton discussed public reaction to the decadence, he pointed to a diary entry of Cooper's, dated April 5th, 1891: "the prayer-From decadence, Good Lord Deliver us!" (*Diary* 1890s 21). Bradley and Cooper also refused to be published in *The Yellow Book.* Leighton explains:

> They requested the return of one of their poems which had been accepted by *The Yellow Book*, in protest to its style. For all their daring in real life, they could be solemnly censorious about art, their commitment to Pater's 'clean' aestheticism resulting in high-minded disapproval of the more perverse forms of decadence. (*Victorian* 217)

They also disdained the idea of artificiality taken too far. "Unlike some of the French decadents, the poets preferred real flowers to artificial ones, " writes Henri Locard ("Works and Days" 2). They loved flowers to the point of ecstasy. "Again I have joined my passion with my love's over generations of roses," writes Cooper, "till the curving delicateness of their edges and their light-filled color and their sweetness are a part of myself."[3]

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[2] Cited in Ian Small's *The Aesthetes*, xvi. The autobiography by W.B. Yeats is *The Trembling of the Veil.*
[3] British Library. Add. Ms.46784, 1895.

As to art, their appreciation for art and the artist transcended labels. They acknowledged that Huysmans' work, for instance, dealt with issues of excessive sensuality, but they viewed him as a "veritable artist."[4] This is because, Bradley writes, he "throws open the whole interior world of his true sensualists. We see how the world is to them."[5] So it is the execution of a work, its literary merits as well as its subjectivity, rather than its subject matter or morality, that is important to them. To carry out their vision of life and art through "Michael Field," Bradley and Cooper appropriate the leading ideas of aestheticism—'to live life in the manner of art'--before it shaded into decadence. They were closer to the ambiguities of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in its support of aesthetic principles.

Pater, whom they met in 1889, affected the lives of the two women poets profoundly. Pater, Leighton writes, "seems to have been the single most important influence on their writing" (*Victorian* 215). Having long admired him, they valued him highly as a friend. According to Emma Donoghue in *We Are Michael Field*, "they used to drop in to his Kensington rooms on Mondays at five, and learned to call him 'Tottie'" (55). The artist Charles Ricketts in his monograph on "Michael Field" when visiting their home comments:

> The place spoke of a love of books, art, travel, and flowers . . . the general atmosphere was that crystallized by Walter Pater. (*Michael* 1)
>
> Walter Pater till his death counted as a highly prized acquaintance; his books not his actual personality left their mark upon their habits in life and on their valuation of beauty in art and nature. (3)

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[4] British Library Add. Ms.46781, 1893. Cooper was in bed with influenza and just finished reading *En Rade.*
[5] Ibid.

Discussing Pater with friends was one of their favorite past times; commenting on Logan Pearsall Smith, Cooper writes with characteristic wit:

> Logan sat, his Yankee limbs as unnecessarily prominent as a lank Egyptian deity and his eyes with that look, as if clean prairie air has fostered them, that gives novelty to the faces of his community of men—sat talking Pater and Impressions. [6]

They also talked about Pater with Wilde, who was an admirer of their work, especially the plays; " they fell into agreement with him, " writes Leighton, "on the Pateresque principle that 'the whole problem of life turns on pleasure" (216). Once while ill in Dresden, Cooper was read the Bible by a nurse, which drove her into a pleasure seeking frenzy:

> Sister had read from the Bible before she left and my whole nature grew elfishly wicked as she read. I determine that I will have as much pleasure as I can. I dance at balls, I go to Operas, I am Mars, and looking across at Sim's little bed, I realize that she is a goddess, hidden in her hair-Venus (*Works* 56).

The ideal of pleasure in the form of sensual paganism, sexual rebellion, and anti-Christianity for Bradley and Cooper was a guiding principle of their aestheticism, which at this point they seem to confuse with decadence. "Although 'pleasure' is one of the catchwords of aestheticism," writes Leighton, "for these women poets it has an energy and freedom, a sense of commitment to real life, which is more emancipating than decadent, more active than introspective" (214).

Their testament to the aesthetic movement, and perhaps to Pater, is their joint journal, *Works and Days*, from which I and other critics have been quoting. In both its published and unpublished versions, it covers forty years or more of their lives together. The artist William Rothenstein, whose studio in Chelsea they visited frequently, wrote

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[6] Add.Ms. 46783. British Library, 1895.

the introduction in which he described the two women as "aesthetic ladies, Ruskinian in their enthusiasm for Italian painting, little attracted to the realistic aims of the nineties" (*Works* xi). It paints a picture of how Bradley and Cooper, or more accurately, "Michael" and "Field" or "Henry," as they called themselves, lived and worked as women among men. "They chronicle," Locard notes, "the many forms of their worship of beauty" ("Works and Days" 2). Locard offers a snapshot of their "plunge deep into the eighteen nineties" (1) by beginning with a quote by Arthur Symons:

> The making of one's life into art is after all the first duty and privilege of man. It is to escape from material reality into whatever form of ecstasy is our own form of spiritual existence. (1)

Locard continues,

> This ideal in life, as Symons defined it, was certainly the poets' ideal too. After they had turned to the Roman Church, like so many worshippers of Beauty both in Britain and France at the time, Fr. Vincent McNabb, a Dominican and Edith's confessor suggested she should write of the Aesthetic Movement. She answered that her reflections on the years when "England was only just waking from a long hebetude toward Beauty were already set down in the white *Work and Days*. (1)
>
> Their conversion to Catholicism did not interfere with their worship of beauty.

Gordon Bottomley, after inquiring about local church services for them, wrote to "Michael:"

> The wild rose must be in bud everywhere; and so your journey must be in bud, too . . . we long for the delight of having you and Mr. Henri with us in our very own home where too we seek to follow the counsel of beauty.[7]

Cooper's obituary, pasted in their diary by her sorrowful aunt, is also a testimony to their devotion to beauty: "They lived together at Richmond in a house that is a sanctuary of Art, on the banks of the Thames. It is a beautiful spot, redolent with poetic inspiration."[8]

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[7] Add. Ms. 45851. British Library, 1909.

As we can see, Bradley and Cooper as "Michael Field" were life long devotees of Pater's aestheticism. In recent criticism, this brand of aestheticism has come to be regarded as gendered male as well as implicated in the cultural history of gay male discourse. Eve Sedgwick mapped this terrain in 1985 with her study on homosexuality and Victorian culture in *Between Men*. Through an examination of mostly mid-Victorian texts, she argues that homosexuality is a part of all masculine experience, and that desire between men is an integral part of the structure of gender relations. She coins the phrase "homosocial" in her discussion of "male homosocial desire." This desire is manifested in a triangle between two men and a woman where it appears as if two men are competing for the love of the woman, but it may be a cover for what is an attraction between men. Richard Dellamora in *Masculine Desire* (1990) continues the discussion of male-male desire within the context of sexual politics of Victorian aestheticism. The work of Pater is at the center of his study. Dellamora credits Pater with the formation of a "sexual-aesthetic awareness" in which he "begins to theorize a place for perverse sexual self-awareness in cultural formation and critique" (*Masculine* 18). Homosexuality becomes associated with being an artist, and Pater, with the publication of essays "Winckelmann" and "Notes on Leonardo DaVinci," makes the link "explicit in public" (18). Wayne Koestenbaum in his study on male literary collaboration, *Double Talk* (1989) suggests that "Pater and the aesthetes yearned for a homosexual Renaissance" (167).

III. The Dandy

To both capture the essence of dandyism which evolved into the dandy-aesthete-artist toward the end of the century and to help place "Michael Field" in context, it is useful to discuss actual dandies in history, beginning with George Brummell. Most critics

[8] Add. Ms. 45856, British Library, 1914 Diary.

agree that he is the original dandy. Moers, for instance, notes he is "the one thorough exemplar of the type" (*Dandy* 13). "If a center must be named," proposes Feldman, "the Regency period in England presents itself, with Beau Brummell the reigning beau on whom all other dandies necessarily model themselves" (*Gender* 1). "Born to commoners," Rhonda Garelick in *Rising Star* explains, "Brummell effectively launched dandyism in both England and France, and in the worlds of both literature and society" (6). Indeed Brummell represents the signifying traits of dandyism: self-created, feminine, witty, and dedicated to his own perfection. Entirely self-invented through his clothes and coming from it seemed nowhere, he was "an archetype of the human being in revolt against society"(Moers *Dandy* 17), which is typical of the dandy. "The dandy is, by occupation," writes Camus in *The Rebel: An Essay On Man In Revolt*, "always in opposition. He can exist only by defiance" (51). Bradley and Cooper in their relationship, collaboration, work and aesthetic lifestyle, which included an obsessive devotion to clothes, reflect this dandy aesthetic. Their defiance of gender norms is even similar to Brummell's brazen insult of the Prince Regent, which led to the great dandy's downfall, though that did not happen to them.

The French celebrated Brummell and put this English dandy and dandyism on the map in an essay, "On Dandyism and George Brummell," written by nineteenth century dandy-writer Barbey d'Aurevilly.[9] In fact, because of this essay, "dandyism could return to the surface of English thought," Moers notes, "clarified by the conceptualizing of the French " (14). Barbey constructed Brummell as "dandyism itself." This essay, Garelick notes, is "considered the primary source for all dandyist literature that followed" (19).

[9] I will be using a recent translation of Barbey's essay by George Walden in his *Who's a Dandy? Jules Barbey D'Aurevilly Dandyism and Beau Brummell.*

"For Barbey," Garelick continues " Brummell is dandyism, the perfect confluence of person and concept" (20). To illustrate the importance of Barbey's work on the dandy, Moers writes:

> Barbey's book is the pivotal work upon which the history of the dandy tradition turns. Little that came after it (the intellectual dandyism of Baudelaire, the "negative dandyism" of Huysmans, the aesthetic dandyism of English 'eighties and nineties') cannot somehow be traced to Barbey's *Du Dandyism and George Brummel.* (25)

Commenting on the breadth and depth of the work, Feldman characterizes it as "a butterfly's wing" that "scintillates among many generic possibilities: history, biography, autobiography, memoir, eulogy, jeremiad, gossip column, satire, tragic tale" (55). But more important than the multiple generic nature of the piece, though this further attests to its significance, is "the serious attention it paid to Brummell," which, as Richard Pine in *The Dandy as Herald* notes, "marks the beginning of a theory of dandyism which permeates French literature and by which it reintroduces itself to English aesthetic theory thirty years later" (18). Certainly when the aesthetes of the late nineteenth century sought to invent themselves as artists free of moral responsibility, they reached back to France, specifically the essays on the dandy by Barbey, and his disciple, Baudelaire, whom Camus calls "the most profound theoretician of dandyism " (53).

An important claim Barbey makes for Brummell is that he is an artist, which anticipates Wilde's dandy-aesthete, an artist dependent on a persona. Brummell, Barbey writes, " was a great artist in his way . . . His art was life itself" (Walden *Who* 112). That Brummell's life and art are one, the core of aesthetic thought, is what makes him "the archetype of all artists " (263). Baudelaire, in his dandy treatise *The Painter of Modern Life*, sees the dandy-artist-flanuer in the figure of an imaginary M.G., understood to be

the artist and illustrator Constantin Guys. On M.G. he writes, "I was reluctant to describe him as an artist pure and simple . . . I might perhaps call him a dandy" (9). Max Beerbohm in his important essay "Dandies and Dandies" suggests that "Mr. Brummell was, indeed, in the utmost sense of the word, an artist" (*Incomparable* 2).

As with the dandies who followed him, Brummell's canvas was his body, his medium cloth, his aim elegance, and his work, done on himself at his toilet which took hours, driven by an aesthetic urge to move away from nature. Baudelaire carried this idea further in his essay "In Praise of Cosmetics," in which he equated the artificial with the beautiful: "I ask you to review and scrutinize whatever is natural –all the actions and desires of the purely natural man: you will find nothing but frightfulness," he writes. "Everything beautiful and noble is the result of reason and calculation" (32). Indeed the dandy improves on nature, his body, and creates himself with his clothes. "The ideal of the dandy is cut in cloth," Moers notes, "his independence, assurance, originality, self-control, and refinement should be visible in the cut of his clothes" (21). As Feldman observes, "the dandy is . . . artificial in dress and deportment, always elegant, often theatrical. He creates 'la mode,' style itself" (3). As such, Brummell, to Beerbohm, was "the father of modern costume" (5).

Creating himself with his clothes, Brummell's elaborate construction of his own performance is a one-man show of considerable virtuosity. As a dandy, he is, as Feldman notes, "the figure who practices, and even impersonates, the fascinating acts of self-creation and presentation" (3). This performance, or act of self-invention, renders Brummell as an artist of the self. Dandyism, according to Baudelaire, is "a cult of the self" (27). "Like the dandyism of Balzac and Barbey," Garelick suggests, "Baudelaire

rejects work and condemns the production of anything save one's own carefully tended self" (28). His artifice makes him beautiful. Brummell, influencing dandies who followed him—Disraeli, Count D'Orsay, Baudelaire, Whistler, Wilde, for example--thus cultivated by means of his costume an artificial public personality, his pose.

James Abbott Whistler, along with Wilde, was one of the more public figures of the aesthetic movement. Whistler makes great claims for the artist and establishes his own artificial public persona in his famous literary work, the "Ten O'clock" lecture of 1885. A flamboyant personality, he proclaimed the artist free of moral and social concerns by "a series of quite deliberately hyperbolic and epigrammatic statements, the effect of which was to present a histrionically artificial and provocative pose" (Small *Aesthetes* xxiii). Artifice, then, for the aesthetic movement, as for the dandy, is the key ingredient in creating the beautiful. Borrowing from both Whistler and Baudelaire, Wilde developed a cult of artificiality, which saw the artificial as beautiful, and advanced the idea of the dandy, a feminized man who is entirely self-created, as an aesthete or artist, which is how he constructed himself. With his green carnation, drooping lilies, knee breeches, and wide turned-down collar, Wilde made his way into society, preparing "his way with his clothes" (Moers *Dandy* 295). He came to embody, as Garelick suggests, "the self-conscious artificiality of decadence, and the elaborately posed persona of the decadent dandy " (5).

Historically, the dandy's pose—in other words, his mask, a mark of an achieved self--is linked with issues of gender. "Dandies, by demonstrating that human identity is a matter of self-construction and presentation," Feldman proposes, "have always self-consciously played with the construction of gender" (13). Garelick suggests the dandy

indulges in "highly theatrical gender play" (1). "Indeed, much of the serious attention paid to the dandy figure in Second Empire France," Moers notes " derived from its seemingly triumphant fusion of masculine and feminine principles" (309). Feldman, who devotes her study to the issue of dandies, modernism, and gender, argues:

> Dandyism exists in the field of force between two opposing, irreconcilable notions about gender. First, the (male) dandy defines himself by attacking women. Second, so crucial are female characteristics to the dandy's self-creation that he defines himself by embracing women, appropriating their characteristics. (6)

She further argues that dandies place themselves somewhere within this divide to create something new. Yet their dandyism is highly dependent on appropriating female characteristics, a phenomenon that is important to the way Bradley and Cooper construct "Michael Field."

For example, the French identity Barbey acknowledges as a dandy is one who is feminine and androgynous. His movement against nature as well as his artificial pose results in the dandy having "something of the woman about him" (Walden *Who* 137). Going so far as to suggest that the dandy's complete intersexed identity, Barbey writes the dandies are:

> Double and multiple natures of undecided intellectual sexuality, their grace is heightened by their power, and their power by grace. They are the Hermaphrodites of History, not of Fable, of whom Alcibiades was the supreme example in the most beautiful nations. (*Who* 148)

Alcibades, the Athenian general of the fifth century B.C., is a dandy figure because he is a dual sexed being, a carefully tended self. Feldman calls him "the patriarch of all dandies, except that he deliberately feminized himself" (4); he is "comprehensible only in terms of women" (57).

Garelick, in her analysis of Baudelaire's treatise on the dandy examines his critique of the "figure of the eunuch who appears in Guys's illustrations of Turkey" (30):

> The heavy, massive carriages . . . from which emerge sometime some oddly feminine glances . . . the frenetic dances of the performers 'of the third sex' (never has Balzac's comical term been more applicable . . . since . . . beneath the flaming make-up of cheek, eyes, eyebrows . . . and in the long tresses that float down the back, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to perceive their virility.[10]

Garelick suggests that "like the dandy, the eunuch is a creature of theater, disguise, and rerouted sexuality . . . If the eunuch resembles the dandy in the orientalist world of these war drawings, he resembles the women just as much" (30). So it follows that at the end of the century, if the artist or aesthete is a dandy, and vice versa, and the dandy resembles a woman, then performing "femininity" is crucial to the way he produces art.

With the invention of "Michael Field" as a kind of dandy persona, Bradley and Cooper play with gender and sexuality in ways similar to their male counterparts, but with a feminine twist. They present themselves to the world by performing "masculinity" together, under the guise of "Michael Field." In the spirit of the dandy, through this mask, they imitate the gender of the opposite sex, but to a completely different end. The two women poets adopt the "masculine" to give new expression to what was traditionally associated with the "feminine." As Thain suggests, Bradley and Cooper, with the male pseudonym, "enact their femininity in a freer and potentially more meaningful way" (27). They create an identity, works, and aesthetic life style that exhibit the androgyny of the dandy-writer who evolved into the dandy-aesthete-artist by the end of the century.

The deliberate act of designing the self with a dandy costume was a practice of Bradley's and Cooper's. They ascribed to themselves a kind of dandical identity not only

[10] Cited in Garelick's *Rising Star*, 30.

by creating a male poetic identity—and calling themselves male names, "Michael" for Bradley and "Field" or "Henry" for Cooper-- through which they envisioned what they wished to be, but they adopted a kind of dandical style in dress. Adorning themselves with special made hats and dresses, the two women poets dressed to be seen. Cooper, for instance, commented in her diary that during a visit to Robert Browning his son Pen Browning was "enjoying, too . . . our gold and green dresses" (Field *Works* 12). In 1902, when dining at the home of their good friends, the artists Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon, Cooper recalled: "Michael wears black striped silk . . . I arrived with green and bowed with green velvet—a scarf of black crepe with under frills of green. I bear the Manchu necklace on my old Manchu gold blouse."[11] The editor of their diaries, Sturge Moore, reveals that more often than not they "insist on evening dress" (Field *Works* xix). During a visit to George Meredith, though he never indicated that his dinner party was a black tie affair, Cooper recalled: " Well, we go to the inn where Keats wrote *Endymion*, putting on evening clothes, and ascend to Flint Cottage" (Field *Works* 89). Extravagant dress to the two women poets who lived as "Michael Field" was necessary to their performance of a highly stylized, pondered, constructed dandical self.

On their manner of dress, the artist William Rothenstein reveals:

> dress, like everything else, must for long be discussed and pondered, and finally ordered from the modiste with elaborate directions. But most important were the hats. Once a year a visit was paid to . . . a Dover Street milliner, and imperial hats were chosen, purple with superb feathers, that drooped over Field's small ear, and waved proudly above Michael's head. (xii).

Like the dandies of the avenue, coffee houses, and theater, "Michael" and "Field," after prolonged rituals of contemplating, preparing and dressing, displayed themselves in public as a visual piece of art. As Rothenstein suggests, the two women poets were

[11] British Library Add. MS. 46791,1902.

especially known for their hats. In fact, the artist Charles Ricketts, while stage designing a production of Wilde's *Salome*, comments in a letter written to the women: "the head-dress of Herod . . . is to be played as a recognizable imitation of you upon the stage" (*Letters Ricketts Field* 18).

Their devotion to dress was so even if their choices threatened certain male acquaintances. Donoghue, recalling dinner parties Bradley and Cooper gave at their home Paragon in Richmond, illustrates the point:

> Formal wear was compulsory at Paragon, which some young guests found rather intimidating. Logan Pearsall Smith described such a dinner many years later, making fun of these 'incredible old maids,' who seemed to gradually metamorphose over the course of the evening into chanting priestesses, Maenads, or witches on broomsticks. (*We* 108).

Pearsall Smith's satire of "Michael Field" reflects the disdain, fear and jealousy frequently directed at women who dared to step outside the box of prescribed gender roles, and is reminiscent of the criticism they received from the male literary establishment. But in both public and in private, the women of "Michael Field," though often bruised, remained unmoved by pressures to conform, as did the effeminate male aesthetes or dandies who were their friends.

Posing for a community of mostly male artists, Bradley and Cooper viewed their dress as a sign of the artist. For example, clothes were as important as art when they attended the one night only performance of their play—Oscar Wilde had reserved an entire box--*A Question of Memory*, at the high-art Independent Theater in London in 1891, a major event in their lives. Cooper wrote:

> My love wore her black and coral dress and a lovely green velveteen opera cloak with silver clasp and black fur edgings. Two white flowers were bunched under the collar. I wore a dress of shimmering beryl-green-white lace, black satin sash and breast bow, deep red leaves and a Venetian red opera cloak,

with black fur edge.[12]

They are extravagantly dressed women while metaphorically wearing men's clothes when writing and hence fulfilled the expectations of the dandy.

Throughout their diaries, the two women made constant mention of elaborately designed hats, dresses, and accessories. On a typical day in 1895 Cooper reported they went to town to buy a new "suspended lamp" as well as "a fair [indecipherable word] of a toque for Michael and a flax blue sailor-hat with black velvet quills for me."[13] Before going to the offices of the *Athenaeum* and meeting Bradley for lunch, Cooper stopped at Paddington Green to "arrange for our empire evening dresses."[14] Even their intimacy was sometimes expressed by a ritual of adorning the body with artifice. In 1898, on the night before Bradley's birthday, Cooper "waited till half past midnight, then laid an exquisite old Berlin ironwork necklace on Katherine's sleeping breast" (Donoghue *We* 99). They progressed from wearing Berlin ironwork to "exquisite pendants;" as Donoghue points out, "Ricketts gave them more than half of all the jeweled art objects he designed" (108).

Strong emotions, such as sadness and jealousy, were also expressed through costume. In 1906, when their beloved chow dog, "Whym Chow," died, they held a funeral service where their friend Father John Gray read a religious poem. During the service, Donoghue notes, "Katherine wore a black hat with horse plumes" (122). Clothes also were integral to their personal lives. Close friends of the art critic Bernhard Berenson and his wife Mary Costelloe, Edith appears to have had fallen in love with Berenson, and

[12] British Library Add. MS. 46779,1891.
[13] British Library Add. MS. 46784, Oct.-Dec. 1895.
[14] British Library Add. MS. 46781, 1893.

he with her, which caused tension in the relationship between the two women poets, and a great deal of jealousy on the part of Bradley. When Bradley was in London, after an argument with Cooper about Berenson, Bradley sent Cooper a lavish garment. Cooper wrote: "A red silk blouse bodice sewn with garnet and aquamarine beads comes for me from town in the grim midst of morning."[15] On an April trip to Italy in 1893, the two couples had a trying time getting along with each other. Donoghue observes:

> Mary Costelloe described Katherine with her 'frowsy flowing hair,' wearing a huge fur wrap around her neck on the hottest days, claiming that it kept her cool. The locals were mystified by the visitors until Mary spread the word that they were poets—like Dante—which explained everything (*We* 79).

The putting on of the fur is a dandy act. But because of the personal situation, it becomes an act of possessiveness, which allowed Bradley to simultaneously stake her claim as a lover and assert herself as an artist.

Overall, Bradley and Cooper, as dandified women, created a kind of style of dress that expressed their feelings and thoughts. "Michael Field" worked in a similar way. Through "him" they could conceive of themselves in a number of ways: as poets, as a collaboration in the voice of a lone male poet, and as lovers who were a part of an avant garde elite populated by (mostly) homosexual men. Elegant, rebellious, and talented, the two women poets debunked cultural constructions of Victorian femininity, masculinity, and the middle-class, which the dandy deliberately revolted against, to create themselves as artists.

III. "Michael Field" as a Dandy-Aesthete-Poet

Dandies and dandy novels permeated the nineteenth century. "The crucial and irresolvable complexity at the root of dandyism is that dandies are both real historical

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[15] Ibid, 46784.

people and literary heroes," writes Garelick, " . . . Brummell's example inspired the literary dandyism found in the work of Lord Byron and the so-called fashionable novels" (6). One such novel was *Pelham* (1828) by Edward Bulwer. This novel was celebrated in England as "the 'hornbook' of dandyism." Moers notes that it taught "the rules of the game to many an aspiring dandy " (68). "Sometimes these young men," Garelick points out, "became in their turn dandyist novelists, continuing the cycle of merging life and literature" (6). Indeed Barbey in 1843 creates the literary figure of Brummell in his dandy treatise—Garelick suggests that "the goal of Barbey's treatise on Brummell is to turn Brummell's life into literary artwork" (9). Baudelaire creates Constatin Guys in the same vein; on Baudelaire and his treatise, Garelick notes, "It will allow him to create, as he says, 'an imaginary artist,' blurring the factual lines of his text" (27). Wilde, in what might be considered a variety of dandy treatises, invents himself as Lord Goring in *An Ideal Husband*, Lord Darlington in *Lady Windermere's Fan*, Lord Illingworth in *A Woman of No Importance*, and perhaps, the fictional dandy most widely associated with him, Lord Henry Wotton in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. "In his literary work," Moers proposes, "Wilde dealt constantly with dandyism . . . as a critic and 'aesthete' he turned inward upon himself in search of a dandy-artist figure" (300).

Bradley and Cooper also turned inward upon themselves in search of an artistic figure to help them carry out their vision, in both public and private, as lovers, poets, and aesthetes. They thus invent "Michael Field" as a "gay" male persona, and eventually, come to embody "him." This enabled them to create their lives in literary artwork, as demonstrated in their poetry. An unpublished, untitled poem Bradley[16] wrote to Cooper

[16] If this poem were published, it would have been under the name "Michael Field."

on Christmas of 1896, which sketches the history of the couple, helps to illustrate the point:

From Fowl to Fowlet
From Owl to Owlet
From Loving to Lover
From Bard to his Brother
From Arran Leigh
To the Voice to be
From the hand of "Own"
To the dearest known,
From the Bird All-Wise
To the Light of His Eyes
After life shall End[17]

While the poem, generally, sets up both the relationship and age difference between the older and the younger poet, it does so by using masculine and feminine signifiers of the same species-- "fowl" signifying an older, masculine figure, "fowlet" a younger feminine figure--to indicate a kind of marriage. This bond eventually forms the "Voice to be" of the dandy poet, "Michael Field." Indeed their concept of the poet, even as a public persona—though the identity when established was created as an emblem of masculinity to serve as a protective covering for two outspoken women--was not always strictly male-identified. This is apparent early on in Bradley's choice of persona. When Bradley, as "Arran Leigh," which I have designated as a vaguely masculine name in the last chapter, was sending her work to various publications, and corresponding under the pseudonym, she spoke of "Arran" as being female. In an unpublished letter she received from the editor of *The Truthseekers*,[18] he wrote:

Dear Friend,

[17] This poem is held in the Bodleian Library under the title "Letters from Katherine Bradley to Edith Cooper," (1876-CA. 1898). MS. Eng.letter.c.418.
[18] *The Truthseekers*, edited by the Reverend John Pages Hopps, was a "free and unsectarian review of books," related to the development of "religious life and liberty in the Christian Church."

> You tell me 'Arran' Leigh was quite a little girl when I was in Birmingham.
> I want to see her now . . . The poems are like rain after a long draught.[19]

What this suggests is that Bradley's first incarnation of the mask "Arran" (L 5)—together they had called themselves the heterosexual sounding "Arran and Isla Leigh" when they published their first play, *Bellerophon*—is a mix of male and female. The interplay of gender, then, which is characteristic of the dandy, is deeply rooted in the making of "Michael Field." Further, the last six lines of "From fowl to fowlet" suggest that through a combination of artistic and divine powers, they hope to achieve eternal life together. In a sense, this conception of immortality is intimately connected to the invention of "Michael Field" in that through "him" and the poem itself, everlasting life is created, as is the unconventional life Bradley and Cooper created for themselves on earth. In the poem, by implication, life lived in the manner of art will continue in heaven.

Another early poem, "An Invitation," addressed by Bradley to Cooper, and later published in the 1893 collection *Underneath the Bough* under "Michael Field," gives us a glimpse of their intense commitment to both each other and to art. The following are key stanzas that depict details of their living situation and budding working relationship:

> Come and sing, my room is south;
> Come, with thy sun-governed mouth,
> Thou wilt never suffer drouth,
> Long as dwelling
> In my chamber of the south.
>
> There's a lavender settee,
> Cushioned for my sweet and me;
> Ah, what secrets there will be
> For love-telling,
> When her head leans on my knee!

[19] This letter is held in the British Library in the collection of Michael Field manuscripts, Add. 45851, volume 1.

French, that corner of primrose!
Flaubert, Verlaine, with all those
Precious, little things in prose,
  Bliss-compelling,
Howsoe'er the story goes:

All the Latins *thou* dost prize!
Cynthia's lover by thee lies;
Note Catullus, type and size
  Least repelling
To thy weary eyes.

And for Greek! Too sluggishly
Thou dost toil: but Sappho, see!
And the dear Anthology
  For thy spelling.
Come, it shall be well with thee.
(*Underneath the Bough* 80-81)

Seductive, sensual, and happy, this is a love poem that reveals their perception of themselves as intellectuals, aesthetes, and poets who are inspired by each other's gifts, spirit, and talent. The forth and fifth stanzas refer to Cooper's preference for Latin over Greek, a choice which inspired Robert Browning to urge her "do learn Greek." An intimate peek into their early private and visionary world of beauty, ideas, and emotion, the poem also demonstrates the French influence of Flaubert and Verlaine on their lives and work, and echoes the French influence of Barbey, Balzac, and Baudelaire, with whom they were also familiar, on English dandies.

"The Prologue" (circa 1891), as Sturgeon rightly claims, "is a piece which describes the sealing of a bond between the two poets" (*Michael* 78). Chris White proposes that the poem sets the stage for "the connectedness of the art and the relationship," and the title "implies [the poem] precedes all others and defines the content and framework of the poetry" ("Flesh" 48). Leighton notes that the poem " records the two poets' pact of love and work with a free and informal openness which, while it

disarms censor [sic], also discourages a purely innocent reading" (209). I would like to suggest that it is the ways in which Bradley and Cooper perceive this bond, as produced in the poem, that gives rise to their creation of "Michael Field" as a dandy figure in that "he" is their response as two women poets to the aesthetic movement. An artistic cover that will enable them to reach their aesthetic goals, "he" is the frame that will hold their pact together and enable the structure of their writing together:

> It was deep April, and the morn
> Shakespeare was born;
> The world was on us, pressing sore;
> My love and I took hands and swore,
> Against the world, to be
> Poets and Lovers evermore,
> To laugh and dream on Lethe's shore,
> To sing to Charon in his boat,
> Heartening the timid souls a float;
> Of judgment never to take heed,
> But to those fast-locked souls to speed,
> Who never from Apollo fled
> Who spent no hour among the dead;
> Continually
> With them to dwell,
> Indifferent to heaven or hell. (*Underneath the Bough* 79)

In this poem, the "poets" and "lovers" make a pact against the world they view as hostile to them, particularly, it can be read, since they are women. Seeing themselves as both "poets" and "lovers" who laugh at death and who consider themselves beyond "divine" judgment suggests that art—in this instance, poetry--and love are so empowering that the commingling of them will enable the two women poets to transcend earthly tensions and concerns, provided they find a way, as women living and writing together, to achieve their artistic aim. Through the creation of both the identity and the literary works these female partners will merge life and art. "Michael Field" thus can be read as a kind of aesthetic aura of the two women.

In the poem, gestures of rebellion, mirroring the dandy's role mark the "poets'" and "lovers'" moments of inspiration for art and life. They wish to "laugh and dream on Lethe's shore," and "to sing to Charon in his boat," suggesting that, as poets, they see themselves not as mortals with divine powers, but as challenging death. The line, "Who never from Apollo fled," implies that they never reject inspiration. They imagine themselves, as Wilde urged, to be "out on the hillside with Apollo" (*Wilde* 300). The deliberately non-Christian last line, "indifferent to heaven and hell," suggests that their poetry will acknowledge that the beautiful is the moral—a cornerstone of aestheticism.

This notion is linked to the act of self-construction of the dandy, whose aspiration is the status of nonreproducability, the image for which there is no substitute. In this act, resulting in the creation of a work of art, the dandy "himself," they adhere to no morality. As Moers writes, the dandy upholds "no ready-made morality" (14). Through "Michael Field," then, the two women poets separate art from morality, which suggests both the primacy of art in their lives and the transgressive nature of their relationship, which they weave into literary artwork. Their aestheticism revolves around a "forbidden sexuality" they render real in their poetry (similar to the way male aesthetes, including Pater, produce homoeroticism in various art forms). As there is no substitute for the dandy, there is no substitute for them for the poetic dandiacal figure, "Michael Field," these two women poets have invented. This idea, by extension, is also true with regard to their own artificial, theatrical, and elegant selves. The sartorial strategies in their real lives, overtly feminine yet extremely extravagant, give them the power of the dandy's glamour and uniqueness.

Through "Michael Field" and "his" works, using the discourse of aestheticism, their relationship, including their sexuality, is "actualized, rendered 'real' in print" by their own pen, in the fashion of the dandy-writer in history who merged life and art. As the dandy-writer-aesthete, Bradley and Cooper, through "Michael Field," "choose to make" of themselves and their "daily life a fiction" (Feldman *Gender* 3). Moreover, the combination of their works, their relationship, and their aesthetic lifestyle, through "Michael Field," inserts their presence in a sphere that is usually associated with mostly homosexual men. "Michael Field" as a "gay" dandy poet provides the interpretive frame through which Bradley and Cooper lived and worked.

Chapter Three: The Flight into Androgyny and Queerness

"Michael Field" as a "gay" dandy persona as described thus far is a product of two overlapping discourses, aestheticism and the dandy ideal, both of which respond to and shape each other. Aestheticism responds to the dandy and helps to produce the dandy-aesthete-artist. Bradley and Cooper, through "Michael Field," evoke and challenge the gender identification of this figure. This gives rise to their formulation of a particular poetic vision in which the two women poets are empowered and authorized by the culture within which they are creating. "Michael Field," then, is produced by a confluence of intersecting discourses that include androgyny and queerness, making "him" (them) both modern in spirit, anticipating a new literary sensibility that is neither "male" nor "female" but both, and indeterminate, representing incoherencies in stable relationships between biological sex, gender, and sexual desire.

Bradley and Cooper, with the invention of "Michael Field," create a category that is sui generis, what I call the dandy-androgyne. My analysis represents a first attempt at a study of "Michael Field" as a whole project. It synthesizes the two women poets' desire for each other, a desire trumped by their artistic aim as it figures in aesthetic discourses, including the dandy, in England during the late nineteenth century, and in the androgynous spirit of twentieth century women writers, particularly Virginia Woolf, and queer discourses of contemporary literary theory.

I. Androgyny

Before a discussion of "Michael Field" and androgyny can begin, it is necessary to set the epistemological groundwork for an approach to understanding androgyny, with its modernist implications, as a strategy that redefines selfhood and authorship for the

woman writer. Reading "Michael Field" as an androgynous poet who anticipates modernism is uncharted territory. By androgynous I mean that in their life and works Bradley and Cooper, through "Michael Field," construct an aesthetic androgynous vision, a literary and personal sensibility at the forefront of modern thought that involves an emotional range that includes male and female elements. Within this context, notions of femininity and masculinity are to be understood as nonessential, as historical and variable, constructed by and circulated within certain cultural formations and signifying practices.

To read "Michael Field" as an androgynous modern poet Carolyn G. Heilbrun's landmark text *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* (1973) is a good place to start. She has put into feminist discourse a theory of androgyny as fundamental to perceiving Western cultural tradition, and by extension, as the ideal for the woman artist. "This ancient Greek word—from andro (male) and gyn (female)--," Heilbrun writes, "defines a condition under which the characteristics of the sexes, and the human impulses expressed by men and women, are not rigidly assigned" (x). Many feminist critics have criticized Heilbrun's work for privileging androgyny over feminism, and heterosexuality over homosexuality or bisexuality, leading them to dismiss the concept of androgyny as embedded in the patriarchal scheme thereby providing no place for women.[1] The androgyny debate in feminism, though, while worth mentioning, is now passé, making room to look at the issue from a historical perspective.

[1] See *A Literature of Their Own* by Elaine Showalter; " The Androgyny Papers," edited by Cynthia Secor and Wendy Martin in *Women's Studies*; and *Androgyny and Denial of Difference* by Kari Weil. Additionally, it is ironic that Heilbrun suggests homosexuality not be confused with androgyny since many of Bloomsbury's artists were homosexuals.

In the late nineteenth century, the crisis of masculinity, and by extension, femininity, challenged established hierarchies of gender. This gave rise to changing cultural representations of gender roles between men and women that were increasingly difficult to determine. Discussing this historical moment of gender confusion, Lisa Rado's book *The Modern Androgyne Imagination* makes the point that theorists Havelock Ellis, Richard Kraft-Ebbing, and Sigmund Freud supposed a third, intermediate, or androgynous sex, which affected the twentieth century artist's sense of legitimacy and influence, and which resulted in a culturally specific notion of an androgynous imagination. She argues that the notion of a "third-sexed" or "androgyne" imagination is a modern concept, using the word "androgyne" to "indicate the almost hermaphroditic nature of the concept of androgyny in modernist usage" (12), meaning that modernists saw the androgynous mind as something physical, a "biological condition" that is in the "blood" (13). Rado defines this modern concept of androgyny across the gender divide:

> A number of male authors envision the imagination as a partly "female" entity that has the ability to engender living worlds; they actually represent their creative minds as if they are characterized by a balance of sexually charged energies, fueling their artistic impulses with oppositional tensions . . . the moderns go further to represent the imagination as part of the subjective mind that is biologically both male and female . . . In a similar fashion, female modernists construct a model of creativity in which their imaginations are partly "male;" these writers represent inspiration not as the incorporation of "masculine" qualities but rather as generated by the precarious coexistence of a female consciousness and a masculine other-self that goes beyond mere pseudonym. (13)

Within this context, Heilbrun's work is useful in understanding Michael Field as a modern poet, anticipating the artistic and personal vision of the Bloomsbury group. The ideal for the woman poet, as Heilbrun notes, is to move "away from sexual polarization

and the prison of gender toward a world in which individual roles and modes of personal behavior can be freely chosen" (ix).

Uncovering the female aspect of culture, the usually hidden positive part women have played within the social scheme, is integral to Heilbrun's idea of "the recognition of androgyny." With regard to literature, for Heilbrun, androgyny is "the re-entry of the 'feminine' principle as a civilizing force" into the literary canon (21)—but the "re-entry" of the female principle into consciousness is to be understood as the coexistence of it with the male principle. A description of Dionysus in *The Bacchae* —a figure important to Bradley and Cooper--represents the "fundamental indefinable nature of androgyny" (xi), suggesting a collapse of binary oppositions of masculinity and femininity. Heilbrun borrows a description of the mythical figure from critic Thomas Rosenmeyer's discussion of the play:

> "Dionysus, who is Euripides' embodiment of universal vitality, is described variously by chorus, herdsman, commoners, and princes. The descriptions do not tally, for the god cannot be defined . . . If a definition is at all possible it is a definition by negation or cancellation. For one thing, Dionysus appears to be neither woman nor man; or better, he presents himself as woman-in-man, or man-in-woman, the unlimited personality . . . In the person of the god strength mingles with softness, majestic terror with coquettish glances. To follow him or to comprehend him we must ourselves give up our precariously controlled, socially desirable sexual limitations."(xi)

Dionysus is worshipped by wild bands of women called Maenads or Bacchants, who represent his feminine side. Pater in his essay "The Bacchanals of Euripides" calls him "a woman-like god,--it was on women and feminine souls that his power mainly fell" (*Greek Studies* 53). Liberated from all human fears and conventions, these women dance on the mountaintops with wild abandon, their ecstatic frenzy both sensuous and dangerous. Mostly because of these female figures, the play *The Bacchae* comes close to

embodying the androgynous ideal in literature that Heilbrun puts forward. "Androgyny suggests a spirit of reconciliation between the sexes, " she writes, " it suggests, further, a full range of experience open to individuals who may, as women, be aggressive, as men, tender, it suggests a spectrum upon which human beings choose their places without regard to propriety or custom" (xi). The bloodthirsty (female) chorus is certainly aggressive, a male gendered emotion, as are the unruly Maenads, and throughout the play there is vivid imagery of gender and gender reversals particularly with regard to Pentheus and Dionysus.

But it is the Bloomsbury group, in Heilbrun's view, that embodies the androgynous spirit, in their works and persons, to the utmost degree. She makes a case for Bloomsbury as "the first actual example" of "the androgynous spirit" (115). The group produced "more works of importance than did any similar group of friends, and. . . it was androgynous, " she writes. "For the first time a group existed in which masculinity and femininity were marvelously mixed in its members" (118). Virginia Woolf, whom Heilbrun calls a "genius," was one of Bloomsbury's more prominent members, and, as Kari Weil in *Androgyny and the Denial of Difference* reminds us, "a catalyst for much of the feminist critical attention to androgyny" (146). Rado suggests that "modernist literary men and women," including Woolf, "share the desire to embody the newly perceived strength of both sexes and to transcend sexual and artistic limitation altogether" (13).

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf is keenly aware, as Anna Tripp in *Gender* asserts, "of the role of history, culture and language in the production of cultural

understandings of what it means to be a woman or man" (5). Within this context, Woolf explores the imaginative (and political) means of the notion of androgyny.[2] She writes:

> For certainly when I saw the couple get into the taxi-cab the mind felt as if, after being divided, it had come together in a natural fusion. The obvious reason would be that it is natural for the sexes to co-operate. One has a profound, if irrational, instinct in favor of the theory that the union of man and woman makes for the greatest satisfaction, the most complete happiness. But the sight of the two people getting into the taxi and the satisfaction it gave me made me also ask whether the two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body, and whether they also require to be united in order to get complete satisfaction and happiness? . . . If one is a man, still the woman part of the brain must have an effect; and a woman also must have intercourse with the man in her. Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said the great mind is androgynous. (128-9)

For Woolf, the female author should model herself on the androgyne. This figure possesses a "man-womanly" or "woman-manly" mind, and this "type of androgynous" mind--which also must be incandescent and unimpeded by personal annoyance--best authorizes and empowers literary creation (128-9). This model of creativity would express both masculinity and femininity; she argues that "it is fatal for anyone who writes to think of their sex" (132). "Woolf advocates androgyny," Weil notes, "as a psychological and poetic ideal, a transcendence of sex, the self, and language" (*Androgyny* 147). Further promoting androgynous thinking as the ideal for the creative mind, Woolf writes:

> Some collaboration has to take place in the mind between the woman and the man before the art of creation can be accomplished. Some marriage of opposites has to be consummated. The whole of the mind must lie wide open if we are to get the sense that the writer is communicating his experience with perfect fullness. (*Room* 136)

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[2] Rainer Maria Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet* mentions the necessity of an androgynous mind for the poet. Also, see Adrienne Rich's "Vesuvious at Home:The Power of Emily Dickinson" in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* for a discussion of Emily Dickinson and androgyny. Woolf's discussion, however, is the most in-depth on the subject, particularly as it relates to the female author.

Yet Woolf recognized, as perhaps Heilbrun did not, the differences between male and female writing, detecting the variations in male and female experience and values that would necessarily affect literary elements of the novel, and by extension, other prose and poetry. In the essay "Woman Novelists," Woolf writes:

> No two people will accept without wishing to add to and qualify these attempts at a definition, and yet no one will admit that he can possibly mistake a novel written by a man for a novel written by a woman. There is the obvious and enormous difference of experience in the first place. (71)

Joan Scott explores the meaning of experience as it relates to identity in poststructuralist terms, seeing experience as "influences external to individuals: social conditions, institutions, forms of beliefs or perceptions that the subject reacts to" (63). Experience, then, is determined by social factors outside the self; experience is both an interpretation and something that is interpreted, a way in which the subject is constituted. We can read Woolf's meaning of experience as a social construct as it intersects with cultural renditions of gender, the cultural moment of androgynous sex theories, and the social meaning of values. In *A Room of One's Own*, she writes:

> And since a novel has this correspondence to real life, its values are to some extent those of real life. But it is obvious that the values of women differ very often from the values which have been made by the other sex; naturally, this is so. Yet it is the masculine values that prevail. (95)

The male gendered values that "prevail" occupy no ideal space for Woolf. In the essay "Women and Fiction," Woolf claims "that both in life and in art the values of a woman are not the values of a man. Thus, when a woman comes to write a novel, she will find that she is perpetually wishing to alter established values" (49). The alteration of a woman's model of creativity, which questions dominant value systems, gives rise to

Woolf's questioning how conceptions of the self and subject, and their identities, are produced in texts.

Through an examination of experience and values and the woman writer, Woolf problematizes the notion of identity—of the author, the text, and the self. Rejecting the essentialism that underlies patriarchal ideology, she writes against dominant categories of thought with regard to gender and writing by challenging the ways in which the categories of male and female are produced in modern fiction. So the ideal of androgyny for the writer, for Woolf—the letting go of one's gender when writing--is a deconstructed androgyny because male and female elements become nonessential--effects of social conditioning.

Orlando—the novel Woolf was working on at the same time as *A Room of One's Own* and the novel in which Woolf, assuming the role of the dandy-writer, creates a dandy-hero, Vita Sackville-West, her androgynous lover, in prose—perhaps best exemplifies the deconstructive nature of gender and writing in Woolf's fiction. Rado suggests that "Woolf invents and identifies with her ageless androgyne, Orlando" (13). Jane Marcus in *Virignia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy* argues that *Orlando* deconstructs the history of English patriarchal literature in which "there is no truth about women" (180). Toril Moi in her influential book *Sexual Textual Politics* (1985) examines androgyny in the context of a feminism which collapses binary oppositions of gender; Moi contends that in *A Room of One's Own* and Woolf's fiction, she practices more than a "non-essentialist form of writing"—she reveals "a deeply skeptical attitude to the male-humanist concept of an essential human identity" (9). Kari Weil notes that "*Orlando* is the make-believe biography of a person freed from the constraints of time and gender"

(*Andrgoyny* 156). Karen Kaivola in "Revisiting Woolf's Representations of Androgyny: Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Nation" views the character Orlando's gender (and desire) as "fluid and dynamic," responding to and eluding "gender imperatives and sexual codes that shape Western culture from the Renaissance to the early years of the twentieth century" (235-6).

Gender, as Eve Sedgwick proposes in *Epistomology of the Closet*, is an elaboration of "chromosomal sex," "the relatively raw materials on which is then based the social construction of *gender*. Gender, then is far more elaborated, a more fully and rigidly dichotomized social production and reproduction of male and female identities. . " (27). Judith Butler in "Imitation and Gender Subordination" postulates that there is nothing essential about gender; rather, she claims it is "*performative* in the sense that it constitutes the very subject it appears to express" (*Lesbian* 314). "Neither femininity nor masculinity are fixed, coherent, or static constructions," writes Tripp. "Gender is never, so to speak, unadulterated: it is always already inflected and intersected by differences of generation, class, 'race,' ethnicity, sexuality, and so on" (8). Woolf in the novel grapples with the idea of the human subject as being defined in terms of a fixed gender, an idea propagated by patriarchal Western discourse. She undermines normatives of masculinity and femininity, and produces a deconstructed androgyny by questioning Orlando's and minor characters' identities. In the text there is a sense of a journey that attempts to find truth, a steady exploration that seeks to discover who Orlando really is: a crucial part of this journey is the idea of his or her gender. The male Orlando wakes up after a deep sleep to "the truth:"

> He stretched himself. He rose. He stood upright in complete nakedness before us, and while the trumpets pealed Truth! Truth! Truth! We have no choice left

> to confess—he was a woman. (*Orlando* 132)

The truth, for Woolf, about gender is a joke. She deconstructs traditional notions of gender and reconstitutes identity according to her own model of invention. After Orlando's sex change, the narrator comments:

> Orlando had become a woman—there is no denying it. But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been. The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity. (133)

Woolf's usage of the pronoun "their" signifies the character Orlando as embodying both genders. "Their" future is altered because of the different ways in which men and women are socialized, yet Orlando's "core" is unaltered; she retains her memories, attitudes, and experiences. "Their" identity comprises personality, temperament, perspective, position, capability, physique, emotion, and attraction. Moreover, from the outset, Woolf's narrative imagines gender as an endless possibility for change, transformation, and instability. The first sentence of the novel, "He—for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it—"(*Orlando* 13), suggests, as does the entire novel, that one can change one's gender as easily as one's clothes. This is reminiscent of the dandy who invents himself solely with his clothes.

A. "Michael Field" as Androgyne

Bradley and Cooper attempted to create doubt about their sex by producing a male pseudonym "Michael Field" as a dandy poet. Through him, they consciously play with gender in both their life and work. He represents a strategy that is a part of the process of poetic production that enables the two women poets to claim poetic authority and inspiration. As collaborators and women poets, they chose to speak through a single male voice for a gender-specific reason--to reclaim the masculine as a way to achieve cultural prominence, to use masculinity, including the "feminized" masculinity of their

male homosexual circle, for their own artistic and personal needs, and to reconstitute masculinity to find new ways to express a radical femininity. In other words, they wanted to afford themselves the opportunity of a freer range of human expression and experience akin to the mixed gendered figures of Dionysus and Orlando as well as the androgynous mind of Bloomsbury, their quest for androgyny having to do with appropriating specific gendered characteristics, and ultimately, producing transgressive sexualities.

At the outset for Bradley and Cooper this meant celebrating the masculine when their work was being judged in the professional and public arenas because there it was the masculine that was valued, respected, and relatively free from social strictures. In a conversation about their plays George Meredith asked Bradley which of them *"does the Males?"* They both agree that this question is "the highest compliment in any question asked of Michael" (Field *Works* 82), suggesting they have succeeded on some level in overcoming a significant cultural obstacle. Being considered capable of writing the specific gendered characteristics of the masculine within their artistic circle was cachet for a female author at the time (as it is now). When Bradley writes that "Edith was asked by a friend to read a sonnet in the *Spectator* I wrote a fortnight ago on Fawcet; by Michael Field-a Bristol man." She rejoices, "That is victory here" (6).

Their victory has to do with artistic freedom that allows for the expression of an aesthetic androgynous vision, keeping in mind that the male aesthetes were their loci of authority. As poets and lovers who wished to be a part of a gay male artistic movement, Bradley and Cooper would not have wanted to be pinned down to (political) issues of any kind, particularly those that had to do with gender issues, which was often the case with female authors, such as the New Woman novelists, who occupied a polar opposite space

to the aesthetes. This is not to say that Bradley and Cooper did not treat the themes of gender (and sexuality); they did, but did so in aesthetic terms. Both their gender and collaboration were issues that had to be resolved in some way to pave the road for the subject, Michael Field, the creation of which was a part of the solution, to speak and signify their version of aestheticism. Their relationship with Robert Browning early in their career helps to illustrate the point.

In 1883 Edith Cooper began a correspondence with Robert Browning. The two women poets were exhilarated by their first experiences of writing together and publishing their work. Browning had replied with enthusiasm to *Callirrhoe*—their first publication in 1884 under the pseudonym "Michael Field," a verse drama about a young virgin's initiation to the cult of Dionysus--and *Fair Rosamund* when Cooper, an unknown letter writer, had sent him a volume of plays, published under the name Michael Field. "It is long since I have been so thoroughly impressed by indubitable poetic *genius*;" he wrote to her, "a word I consider while I write, only to repeat it, 'genius'" (Field *Works* 2). Cooper, delighted with Browning's response, replied, "Such words as yours give me more abundant life" (3). But she immediately became wary of the danger of his leaking their dual authorship to the press, which appears to be a cover for her deeper concern about revealing their gender, a sure way to lose the title of genius. In the same letter, responding to his curiosity, she wrote:

> As to myself and my part in the book—to make all clear to you, I must ask for strict secrecy. My aunt and I work together after the fashion of Beaumont and Fletcher. She is my senior, by but fifteen years. She has lived with me, taught me, encouraged me and joined me to her poetic life. She was the enthusiastic student of the Bacchae. Some of the scenes of our play are like mosaic-work—the mingled, various product of our two brains. The faun scene is mine . . . I think if our contributions were disentangled and one subtracted from the other, the amount would be almost even. This happy union of two in work and aspiration

> is sheltered and expressed by "Michael Field." Please regard him as the author. (*Works* 3)

After Browning received Cooper's candid letter, he urged "Michael Field" to "go and prosper," and assured them that their "secret," their female dual authorship, would be safe with him. "I think the most beautiful woman I ever saw was two years older than myself," he wrote, "and for all my very Aunt—my grandfather having married a second time in middle life" (5). As it turned out, however, Cooper's initial fears about Browning were not unfounded.

It seems that Browning, with good intentions, sought to promote their work, and in the spring of 1885, announced at a dinner party, with Arthur Symons present, that he had found a new poet. Symons subsequently gave *Callirhoe* a good review in *The Forum.*[3] Somehow between Browning and Symons, knowledge of their gender and dual authorship became known, and Bradley writes Browning a strong letter that expresses dismay at the revelation of their identities. To both defend and to clarify their joint androgynous quest, she invokes Spinoza:

> Spinoza with his fine grasp of unity says: 'If two individuals of exactly the same nature are joined together, they make up a single individual, doubly stronger than each along,' i.e., Edith and I make a *veritable Michael.* And we humbly fear you are destroying this philosophic truth: it is said the *Athenaeum* was taught by you to use the feminine pronoun. (6)

Indeed revelation of their gender was clearly a much more serious offense than their collaboration, as she begs Browning

> to set the critics on the wrong track. We each know that you mean good to us: and we are persuaded you thought that by "our secret" we meant the dual authorship. The revelation of that would be utter ruin to us; but the report of lady authorship will dwarf and enfeeble our work at every turn. Like the poet Gray we shall never "speak out." And we have many things to say that the world will not tolerate from a woman's lips. We must be free as dramatists

[3] See David J. Moriarty's "'Michael Field' and Their Male Critics," 123-24.

> to work out in the open air of nature—exposed to her vicissitudes, witnessing her terrors: we cannot be stifled in drawing-room conventialities . . . Besides, you are robbing us of real criticism, such as man gives man. (6-7)

In her effort to lay claim to masculine authority and inspiration and to debunk Victorian gender hierarchies, Bradley forgets about tact, and the well-respected sage became worried about their plans. While his reply to her is lost, it is obvious in her answer that he feared some impropriety had taken place. Bradley tries to smooth his feathers:

> I did not speak of combating 'social conventions.' It is not in our power or desire to treat irreverently customs or beliefs that have been, or are, sacred to men. We hold ourselves bound in life and literature to reveal—as far as may be—the beauty of the high feminine standard of *the ought to be.* What I wrote was, "we cannot be stifled in drawing-room conventialities." By that I meant we could not be scared away, as ladies, from the tragic elements of life. (8)

What is striking about this letter are her words, "the beauty of the high feminine standard of *the ought to be.*" Though it is not exactly clear what she means by this, what is suggested is that she believes there is a feminine sensibility inside the aesthetic that has not been allowed to be recognized, a co-existence of a feminine consciousness within Pater's "scholarly conscience," which he, greatly offending Bradley, viewed as solely "male."

Bradley's and Cooper's move to produce an androgynous aesthetic ideal and an identity with fluid and shifting genders and sexuality transcends myths of gender and sexuality of the male-poet female-muse model and limiting dominant views on women and writing. They anticipate the modern androgynous imagination. Bradley and Cooper, by constituting themselves as "Michael Field," gesture toward the twentieth century writer's elevated state of consciousness in which they are able to at once reclaim and re-imagine the feminine, which is sometimes a transgressive feminine that mirrors the

homosexual masculine, for their own purposes--to express their love and desire for each other as well as for life, and for art. As their biographer Sturgeon suggests, Bradley and Cooper will be faithful to their feminine side, a "conscious motive" for the creation of their literary works (*Michael* 70). Their motive was to create a model of invention to be able to produce in art and life their version of feminine beauty, placing a radical feminine sensibility, that has lesbian possibilities, firmly inside the aesthetic. Simultaneously, they lay claim to dealing with the eternal questions, "the tragic elements of life," traditionally male artistic territory. Indeed it is with the invention of "Michael Field" that Bradley and Cooper anticipate the modern deconstructed androgyne ideal, and stake their claim to artistic prerogative while at the same time transform their positions as women--circumventing social pressures to be angels in the house and muses--to active creators of both life and art. As Emma Donoghue puts it,

> the mask was for Katherine and Edith as much as for the world. In a sense they wanted to be men—or at least not mere women. . . . When they saw the French actress Sarah Bernhardt in a breeches role, for instance, they recorded approvingly that 'sex is forgotten as an accident—and the ideal lover remains.' (*We* 37)

To embrace a masculine world, for "Michael Field," is to let go of gender when writing. To be aware of one's sex, as an artist, for Woolf and the two women poets is a form of repression that interferes with the creative process.

Trying to live an unencumbered, free, and adventurous literary and personal life was not without difficulties because Bradley and Cooper were women, which was very likely the reason reviews of their work turned sour. Cooper was devastated when she learned of the negative reviews of their play, *A Question of Memory*. "I knew the play had failed with the critics . . . and went to bed as one does after a funeral," she writes.

" I woke feeling incomplete-I had lost my hope" (Field *Works* 183). Despite the pain and suffering caused by public criticism of their work, the two intense female personalities remained driven to create while wearing the mask of Michael Field. Cooper writes:

> When I said to Addleshaw that I would go through the whole experience again, now I knew how it would end,-he replied, 'A man would not.-But then you see, I am a woman, and to bring out a play is experience of life-just what women feel they so crushingly need. You men get it like breathing.' (Field *Works* 184)

To live free from the prison of gender—where gender has no real meaning--for Bradley and Cooper, is not to abandon their own femaleness, but to loosen it from culturally mandated inhibitions. Bradley and George Meredith were discussing Sarah Grand. He commented that Grand's writing "will improve, for she has said she has begun to care for nothing but literature--." Bradley's responded, "And you think *that* a good sign . . . a writer who was worth reading would care most of all for life" (107). Obviously Bradley wanted the free range of human experience and expression that Meredith, as a man, took for granted, which helps to explain the gender games the two women poets often played.

A crucial part of Michael Field's narrative was the idea of their gender and the ways in which they changed genders as easily as they switched various names. Donoghue writes:

> Over the years Edith called Katherine 'Michael,' 'Mick,' 'S' (from Simiorg, a fabulous wise Eastern bird), 'the all-wise bird or fowl,' and even (slightly tongue in cheek) 'Master.' Katherine called Edith 'Field', 'the Blue Bird,' 'the Persian' (cat), 'Puss,' 'Pussie,' or 'P,' and later 'my Boy,' 'Henry,' 'Hennery,' and 'Hennie-boy.' (*We* 37)

In addition to these cross-gendered and genderless bird or animal names, the two women poets, as Donoghue notes, sometimes called each other " 'he'" (37), suggesting that for them, gender and its concomitant patriarchal power had no real center, as woman is no more a transcultural essence than man. Equally important, "Michael Field's" move to

create life or life experience in art had to do with her pursuit of an aesthetic androgynous ideal. This ideal challenged social constructions of gender.

It is the mythical figure of Dionysus that perhaps best represents Bradley's and Cooper's aesthetic androgynous imagination. The Greek god of wine is associated with aestheticism because Hellenism (with its homosexual implications) was essential to aesthetic thought, and signifies androgyny because in *The Bacchae* he represents male and female affinities, bringing to life both the erotic and the ecstatic. On the Chorus of Bacchants, Martha Nussbaum notes: "The religion of Dionysus makes these women free to dance, to leap, to move with grace and power through the world of nature with the green joy of the body and its freedom" (*Bacchae* xii). "Transgression," she suggests about the play, is "everywhere"(xiv). "There is historical evidence for existence of such cults in antiquity, " writes Yopie Prins, "allowing for the temporary reversal of social roles for women as they enacted a ritual of feminine rebellion and gender inversion" ("Greek Manaeds" 49).

Dionysus was Bradley's and Cooper's favorite god of inspiration. They had an altar dedicated to him in their garden, and considered themselves students of *The Bacchae*. "In moments of exaltation they had been heard to express a Dionysian desire to dance like Maenads," writes Logan Pearsall Smith, "and tear, in their intoxication, young kids limb from limb"(*Reperusals* 89). Prins notes that "they were fascinated in particular by Dionysus, the archaic god who was also of interest to Pater . . . because in the figure of the Greek maenad they found an imaginary alternative to the Victorian spinster" ("Greek Manaeds" 46). In 1889, as Sturgeon recalls, Bradley wrote to Havelock Ellis, "There is an atrocious superstition about me that I am orthodox . . . whereas I am Christian, pagan,

pantheist, and other things the name of which I do not know" (47). In 1891, while Cooper was recuperating from her Dresden illness, Bradley wrote: "As you are a follower of Dionysus, I charge you get me Greek wine" (48). During her delirium, Cooper experienced fever-induced fantasies inspired by Tennyson's "Mariana:"

> I feel the outside beauty has an ominous calm about it. I am fervidly hot. . . I create phantasies that come so fast that they form an element around me in which I sink, sink . . . The moonlight through the blind becomes more powerful-delirium is glorious. . . Vast Bacchanals rush by . . . I am Greek, Roman, Barbarian, Catholic. (*Works* 53-54)

No matter what state of mind, the cult of Dionysus looms large in the poets' imagination. Prins views Cooper's delirium as an "erotic" episode in which a "catholicity of feminine sensation made both Bradley and Cooper lifelong maenads according to Pater's ideal, as they aspired "to touch thought through the senses." ("Greek Manaeds" 61). The rapid transformation of character, "Greek, Roman, Barbarian, Catholic," as Leighton points out, "reproduces the freedom from fixed creeds both women sought in real life," (*Victorian* 213); gender and sexuality, by extension, were two of those creeds from which they sought to be free. Though want of recognition dogged them throughout their career once their true gender was revealed, they held onto their pagan sensibility. Bradley wrote to Havelock Ellis: "Want of due recognition is beginning its embittering, disintegrating work, and we will have in the end a cynic such as only a disillusioned Bacchante can become" (Sturgeon *Field* 30).

The poem "On, o Bacchus, on We Go," from their collection *Underneath the Bough* records the two women poets' devotion to the Greek god of wine:

> On, o Bacchus, on we go:
> Evoe Bacchus, Bacchus io!
> For our heads the ivy-berry
> And green ivy-leaf we get,
> Serving thee we all make merry,

Nor by night nor day forget
Bacchus in our midst is set.
Drink, and I among you ,so:
On, o Bacchus, on we go:
I have drained my horn, delaying
Scarce a moment: put the tun
Nearer. How this hill is swaying,
Or my brain, has that begun
Spinning circles? All should run
Up and down as I do, so:
On, Bacchus, on we go!
Dead with sleep, I stand unsteady:
I am drunk? But am I ? Nay ?
All of you are drunk already,
That I see as clear as day.
Everyone should take my way:
Everyone should stagger, so:
On, o Bacchus, on we go!
Cups we empty without number,
Shouting Bacchus, Bacchus! Then
Down our bodies drop in slumber.
Drink each one, and drink again.
I shall lead the measure—when?
For my dance is over. Io!
On, o Bacchus, on we go:
Evoe Bacchus, Bacchus io! (*Underneath the Bough* 129)

This is a poem that celebrates the senses through the experience of dancing, self-absorption, and intoxification. Easy-going and pleasure-loving, the mood grows out of the wild abandon of the pagan god. The poem, "Sunshine is Calling," from the same collection celebrates the passion, drunkenness, and lust of Dionysus in relation to nature and women:

Sunshine is calling:
River-ice grows soft,
Trees toss the tender leaves aloft
That frost or sheath were thrilling:
O Bacchus, these are drunk with that
Kindling the wine that brims thy autumn vat!

And here are dances
Underneath the trees,
As shadow after shadow flees

With jest and sunny glances:
O Bacchus, these are drunk with that
Kindling the wine that brims thy autumn vat!

The hills, noon-lighted,
And the shady grove
Become the purple satyrs love
To quaff, by thirst incited:
O Bacchus, these are drunk with that
Kindling the wine that brims thy autumn vat!

All creatures waken;
Warm in dappled grass
Their gladsome wooing comes to pass;
Wild love is sought and taken:
O Bacchus, these are drunk with that
Kindling the wine brims thy autumn vat!

With shout and chorus
Birds are making joy,
Their voices have but one employ,
To sing *The woods are for us!*
O Bacchus, these are drunk with that
Kindling the wine that brims thy autumn vat!

The happy breezes
Sleep with humming breath,
Then grow so still, it might be death
Their wanton pleasure eases:
O Bacchus, these are drunk with that
Kindling the wine that brims thy autumn vat!

And flowers, sweet-hearted,
Put away their shame;
In openness to heaven's flame
The honey-buds have parted:
O Bacchus, these are drunk with that
Kindling the wine that brims the autumn vat!

Ye women, greet it!
Light hath called you come!
Love, sing, no more be cold and dumb;
Light calls you, meet it!
O women, be ye drunk with that
Kindling the wine that brims the autumn vat!

For light delivers!

Blood as wine runs red
When radiance is through it spread,
When with gay spring it quivers:
O Bacchus, be it drunk with that
Kindling the wine that brims thy autumn vat!

O Bacchus, Bacchus
Thou without the sun
Couldst never do what thou hast done,
Nor with thy fire attack us!
Nay, nay, we only can be drunk with that
Kindling the wine that brims thy autumn vat!

The sun, dancing nymphs, "purple satyrs," and the "wild love" of humans and birds are all inspired and energized by the god of wine and his overflowing vat. Women are urged to unleash their own desire by participating in "wild love" and "kindling the wine," suggesting the poem acknowledges strong female passions if not explicitly celebrates female sexuality. "Greek Maenads," Prins asserts, "seemed the very embodiment of feminine rebellion and female sexuality" ("Greek Manaeds" 49). "Michael Field" invokes the cult of Bacchus, then, a religion that empowers women, to firmly reinsert the feminine principle into aesthetic discourse; it is a principle that upholds no fixed definitions of gender or sexuality. Moreover, sapphism is suggested in the poem, which reflects both aestheticism's association with homosexuality—sapphism for women—and the modern impulse to connect androgyny with homosexuality.

II. Queerness

Perhaps Michael Warner has a point in proposing "the appeal of 'queer theory' has outstripped anyone's sense of what it exactly means" (*Queer Theory* 1).). "The queer is contained within, yet residing on the margins of, a heteronormative culture," writes Frederick Roden in his study on Catholicism and homosexuality in *Same-Sex Desire in Victorian Religious Culture* (1). As queer studies comes out of gay and lesbian studies, it

is safe to say that it takes as its main, though not only subject, homosexuality. Generally, "queers," as Roden suggests, are "cultural dissidents, deviant or non-standard in some way" (SSD 2). For a more elaborate definition of queer, Annamarie Jagose offers:

> Broadly speaking, queer describes those gestures or analytical models which dramatize incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender, and sexual desire . . . Demonstrating the impossibility of any 'natural' sexuality, it calls into question even such apparently unproblematic terms as 'man' and 'woman.' (*Queer Theory* 3)

Chromosomal sex, coined by Eve Sedgwick, as mentioned in the last section, is to be understood as a biological identity, based on the anatomical difference of the sexual organ of human beings. Gender, to further elaborate on the discussion in the last section, is something else. Judith Butler's larger project in *Gender Trouble* is to denaturalize gender:

> I argued that gender was performative and by that I meant that there is no gender that is 'expressed by actions, gestures, speech, but the performance of gender was precisely that which produced retroactively the illusion that there was an inner gender core. . . . Moreover, I argued that gender is produced as ritualized repetition of conventions, and that this ritual is socially compelled in part by the force of a compulsory heterosexuality. (31)

As the effect of gender impacts concepts of androgyny and homosexuality, Butler borrows the term "compulsory heterosexuality" from Adrienne Rich. She argues in "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" that heterosexuality is a social and cultural thereby "unnatural" institution imposed on women by society. Rich posits a "lesbian continuum" which is a series of a wide-ranging connections between women, including familial and friendship ties as well as sexually involved ones.

It was Foucault, of course, in his landmark text, *The History of Sexuality*, a major influence on feminist and queer critics, who argued that the Western conception of homosexuality was an invention of the nineteenth century. Lisa Rado notes that it was in

the late nineteenth century that "the binary relation between the sexes became destabilized, challenged by changing mores, medical science, and a fresh generation of women writers" (*Modern* 10). While this growing sense of sexual inderminancy gave rise to an androgynous imagination, it also inspired fear in some modern male writers because androgyny was associated with homosexuality.

In the late nineteenth century, though, homosexuals, and their perceived androgynous natures, were regarded by certain theorists as being "uniquely gifted and socially beneficial," with a propensity for the arts (16). Havelock Ellis, the pioneering sexologist and a friend of Bradley and Cooper, for instance, subscribed to this belief. On *Sexual Inversion*, his major study on homosexuality, Rado writes: "Ellis's tone is one of admiration when he relates that 56 percent of his subjects 'possess artistic aptitudes of varying degrees' (294), and spends over thirty pages detailing numerous intellectually and artistically accomplished inverts through history, among them Sappho, Christopher Marlowe, Michaelangelo, Walt Whitman, and Oscar Wilde" (16). Jeffrey Weeks in *Coming Out* writes of John Addington Symonds' admiration for Walt Whitman's idea of "'adhesiveness', love between men. This . . . was a 'manly attachment,' 'athletic love,' 'the high towering love of comrades,' 'a virtue,' 'a passion equal in permanence, superior in spirituality, to the sexual affection'" (53). Edward Carpenter also embraced Whitman, believing that there was "in man," as Weeks notes, " . . . the growth of a higher awareness, of love and comradeship" (72). The ideas of Ellis, Symonds, and Carpenter among others represented a change in consciousness about male friendships that emerged toward the end of the century.

These changes were brought about not only by sexological and socialist discourses, but also by, as Joseph Bristow in *Effeminate England* observes, "a powerful intervention" made by "several eminent classical scholars who increasingly turned to the works of Plato and Plutarch to consider how same-sex eroticism was historically a part of male sexuality" (4). Linda Dowling in her landmark study *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* explores the growth of Oxford Hellenism from which she argues developed "a homosexual counterdiscourse" that was able "to justify male love" in mid-to-late century Oxford (xiii). She writes:

> Greek studies operated as a 'homosexual code' during the great age of English university reform, working invisibly to establish the grounds on which, after its shorter term construction as a nineteenth-century sexual pathology (Kraft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis), "homosexuality" would subsequently emerge as the locus of sexual identity, for which, Victorian figures such as Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde are so often claimed as symbolic precursors. (*Hellenism* xiii)

Walter Pater and John Addington Symonds "would deduce from Plato's own writings an apology for male love as something not only noble but infinitely more ennobling than an exploded Christianity and those sexual taboos and legal proscriptions inspired by dogma" (Dowling *Hellenism* xiv), thus preparing the ground for aestheticism's (early) dissociation from Christianity. At the center of this radical Hellenism, and its attempt to create homosexuality as a positive identity for men, was "the ideal of 'spiritual procreancy,'" a term derived from Plato's *Symposium*, meaning a "pure intellectual commerce between male lovers which brings forth the arts, philosophy, and wisdom itself" (xv). Often these relationships were between a younger and older man.

In her essay on sexual politics and Victorian Hellenism, "Greek Maenads, Victorian Spinsters," Yopie Prins shifts the focus from "Hellenism and homosexuality in

Victorian Oxford to Hellenism and feminism in Victorian Cambridge, and from men's colleges to women's colleges, discerning the outlines of a feminine counterdiscourse within the masculine discourses of Victorian Hellenism" (46). The newly educated women of Cambridge appropriated, she argues, Pater's "aestheticized and eroticized vision of ancient Greece" and "imagined Greece on their own terms and within a female homosocial context" (46). Pater thus becomes the queer "uncle" "to a generation of wayward daughters"(47).

Pater saw the Greek maenads as the model of inspiration for higher forms of intellect. Prins points out that, according to Pater

> the inspired enthusiasm of maenads in their "Thiasus" should serve as an inspiration to artists, not only in antiquity but (by implication) in Pater's own time as well: 'The imitative arts would draw from it altogether new motives of freedom and energy, of freshness in old forms.' (Prins "Greek Manaeds" 51)

The maenads represent the feminine principle inside the aesthetic; the essence of their "strange dance," to Pater, is "literally like winged things" that follow and motivate "their new, strange, romantic god" (*Greek Stuides* 53). Dellamora points out that also in *Greek Studies* Pater views the love of Demeter and Persephone as exceeding "the usual terms of mother-daughter love . . . Pater returns to Demeter the power stolen by jealous patriarchal deities. Doing so, he identifies the position of Bacchus with that of a renewed female authority and desire " (*Masculine* 172), opening up a space in the myth for lesbian possibilities. The "rapture" of the maenads, as Prins notes, "is the expression of an impressionability that is Pater's aesthetic ideal" (51). A sensual if not sexual female force, then, is the guiding principle of a newly formed aesthetic ideal for the late nineteenth century artist or dandy.

Dionysus thus is the precursor to the late century aesthete whose artistic inclinations is associated with his "femininity," one that is nontraditional, transgressive, and rebellious. This model of creativity is associated with male homosexuality as well, a conversion of a radical femininity into a Hellenized masculine ideal. "Maenadic enthusiasm is now transferred to the Hellenic enthusiast, who is explicitly addressed as male, " writes Prins (53). Pater's reading of Dionysus appeals to " a minority group that reads Greek with homoerotic or homosexual interests " (53). This form of homoeroticism, and the aesthetic ideal it inspired, has a female sexually dissident subtext.

Wilde as a homosexual and aesthete has been well documented; his persecution for homosexuality left a scar on the aesthetic movement. At his trial Wilde spoke of male love as the most exalted type of love between a younger and older man. "Wilde deploys a new and powerful vocabulary of personal identity," Dowling proposes, "a language of mind, sensibility, and emotion, of inward and intellectual relations" (2). Wilde, as Moers notes--despite the tragic story of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*--viewed homosexuality as an "ideal love, a part of the glorified New Hedonism" (*Dandy* 304), which, with its homosexual implications, was derived from Oxford Hellenism. "Wilde . . . fashioned his dignified models of male friendship from the protocols of Oxonian Hellenism," writes Joseph Bristow, "as it developed from the 1850s, to endorse his notion of 'Uranian' love" (4), his version of "spiritual procreancy."

Bradley and Cooper or "the two dear Greek women," as Robert Browning called them (Field *Works* 6), attempted to destabilize and denaturalize Victorian gender myths with the invention of "Michael Field." Doing so, they sought to enter into a dialogue with an elite male homosexual world. In the context of Greek studies and male homosexuality

in the late nineteenth century, the question is how can the Greek ideal of "spiritual procreancy" play out in the lives of two women poets? Prins points out that Bradley was one of the first generation of women, along with the classical scholar Jane Ellen Harrison, to learn Greek at university, Newnham College, and subsequently " developed an amateur's enthusiasm for Greek literature that she later shared with her niece, Edith Cooper " (44).

Bradley, the elder by sixteen years, as Sturgeon notes, "fostered Edith as a mother. She lavished on her an eager and rather imperious affection" (17). Bradley's "mothering" had to do with bringing out in Cooper her intellectual and poetic gifts. Prins offers a trajectory of their relationship:

> The sixteen-year age difference between Katherine and Edith, not quite a generation apart, allowed them to play different familial roles: if initially the aunt was like a mother and the niece like a daughter, gradually they became more like sisters, and then more like lovers, and eventually like husband and wife. (55)

Similarly, biographer Mary Sturgeon, perhaps in a more exalted tone, describes the nature of their relationship:

> But of her devotion to Henry, its passion, depth, its tenacity and tenderness, it is quite impossible to speak adequately. From Henry's infancy to her death—literally from her first day to her last—Michael shielded, tended, and nurtured her in body and in spirit. Probably there never was another such case of one mind being formed by another. (45)

Bradley seems to have fallen in love with Cooper by the time she was in her teens. An early poem titled "To E.C." [4] written by Bradley when she was 28 or 29 years old and Cooper was 13 or 14, under the vaguely masculine pseudonym "Arran Leigh," for Cooper, illustrates the point:

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[4] This poem is the first poem in Bradley's early collection, *The New Minnesinger* (1875).

My deep need of thy love, its mast'ring power,
I scarce can fathom, thou wilt never know;
My lighter passions into rhythm may glow;
This is forever voiceless. Could the flower
Open its petall'd thought, and praise the dower
Of sunlight, or the fresh gift of the dew,
The bounteous air that daily round it blew,
Blessing unweariedly in sun and shower,
Methinks would miss its praises: so I drink
My life of thee; and put to poet's use
Whatever crosses it of strange or fair.
Thou hast fore-fashioned all I do and think;
And to my seeming it were words' abuse
To boast a wealth of which I am heir.

The speaker of the poem assumes the subject position of male poet, declaring that the amount of love he desires from his beloved is so great he cannot reveal it to her. A Petrarchan-like lover, he sees himself as mastered by her love, unbeknown to her and unrequited, suggesting his fantasy of being engulfed by her love. The flower is a metaphor for his beloved, indicating she is young, beautiful, and fragile. The flower passage implies that the flower would die from receiving too much sunlight, water, or air, suggesting that overdoing something causes what is suppose to be beneficial to be lost, turning what is meant to be good into something destructive. This is reminiscent of Dionysus Zagreus, whose maenads, with undying worship for him, tear him to shreds. The speaker's solution to this overwhelming love is to merge with his beloved, and then, in aesthetic fashion, put into art what the poet sees as the outcome of this merge, suggesting that such a queer (culturally dissident) relationship can only be reconciled in art.

Though "the love-story of Henry's life was not so frankly revealed" (84), as Sturgeon points out, Cooper was aware of the unusual nature of her relationship with Bradley. She describes it in a letter to Robert Browning:

> My Aunt and I work together after the fashion of Beaumont and Fletcher. She is my senior, by but fifteen years. She has lived with me, taught me, encouraged me and joined me to her poetic life. She was the enthusiastic student of the *Bacchae*. (Field *Works* 3)

"Dedicated to poetry" and "sworn in fellowship" (Sturgeon *Field* 21), the two women poets exhibit an ennobling female love, patterned on the male model, whose purpose is to bring forth philosophy, wisdom, and most of all, art. They referred to each other as "my fellow," which is reminiscent of Whitman's "comrade." A poem titled "Fellowship" written by Bradley—"Michael's last word as a poet" (Sturgeon *Field* 70)—that she included in the volume *Dedicated* (1914), a collection of Cooper's poetry Bradley put together after she had died, is written with the discourse of a kind of noble and ennobling male love in which, by implication, she claims masculine authority and uses it for her own purposes:

I
In the old accents I will sing, my Glory, my Delight
In the old accents, tipped with flame, before we
knew the right,
True way of singing with reserve. O Love, with
pagan might,

II
White in our steeds, and white too in our armour
let us ride,
Immortal, white, triumphing, flashing downward
side by side
To where our friends, the Argonauts, are fighting
with the tide.

III
Let us draw calm to them, Beloved, the souls on
heavenly voyage bound,
Saluting as one presence. Great disaster were it
found,
If one with half-fed lambency should halt and flicker
round.

IV
O friends so fondly loving, so beloved, look up to us,
In constellation breaking on your errand, pros-
perous,
O Argonauts!. . .
. . . Now, faded from their sight,
We cling and joy. It was thy intercession gave me
right,
My Fellow, this fellowship. My Glory, my
Delight!
(*Dedicated* 123)

The poem gives the sense of a Christian afterlife within a Greek context. Bradley's wistful tone suggests a longing for the past she so intensely shared with Cooper when the Greek ideal was the guiding principle of their lives. The female gendered "white," for purity, and the male gendered "steed," for power, combines divine and earthly forces. The soul—joining other "souls on heavenly voyage"--and body together symbolize an attempt to unify the lover with her departed beloved. Though heartbroken, lonely, and now a Catholic, Bradley's final poem still has, as Sturgeon notes, "the audacity and abandon of the worshipper of the vine-god" (64).

Equally if not more important to understanding the Greek spirit of "Michael Field" is " her" earlier work. For example, the collection *Sight and Song* (1892), a volume of poetry written in response to masterwork European paintings, conveys a heightened aesthetic experience that, as Ana I. Parejo Vadillo argues, "aimed at showing the gendered experience of art, both in its production and its perception" ("Sight and Song" 16). This volume, as Leighton notes, employs "some of the stock poeticisms of the age" and draws on "the adventurous and permissively sensual experiences of their own lives together" (*Victorian* 215). This gendered, aesthetic, and sensual experience of both art and life constructs desire between women as a part of a lesbian continuum within

the structure of an elite male homosexual art movement. But before looking at specific poems from the collection, the question is, were Bradley and Cooper lesbians in any recognizable sense? Certainly their Sapphic collection, *Long Ago*, sets up a framework of lesbian aesthetics, as do selections from other volumes of their work, including *Sight and Song*. And they were familiar with the work of Swinburne and Baudelaire, who was the first poet to portray Sappho as a lesbian.

Indeed Bradley expresses feelings that signify the category of lesbian. In an unpublished letter to Cooper, written in 1885, she sensuously describes the Venus of Milo:

> Yet that Venus. O Persian I never saw her till the other day—
> The perfect woman—perfect in and of herself—with no thought
> of man, no entreaty for his love: yet with breasts so sweet one
> longs to drink from them . . . the eternal womanhood is what she
> expresses . . . The Venus of Milo disdains the love of man which
> I think well expressed. The attitude is evidently self-conscious. [5]

Bradley perceives the Venus of Milo as a mirror image of herself, self-consciously disdaining the love of man and overtly preferring the love of woman. The perfect woman "thinks no thought of man," suggesting her energies should be directed inward, nurturing and developing her own talents and abilities, rather than engaging in the traditional female activity of man-hunting. Perfection, then, for Bradley, is found in the image of "the eternal womanhood " of Venus. She sees in Venus a perfect physicality that reflects a spiritual quality, a higher form of love that can only be attained through same-sex bonds. Thus, by implication, it is sexual difference that allows women artists the freedom to be able to foster creativity, sensuality, and wisdom. Bradley longs to drink from Venus's "sweet" breasts to form with the goddess an erotically

[5] This letter is held in the Bodleian Library under the title "Letters from Katherine Bradley to Edith Cooper," (1876-ca.1898), MS. Eng. Letter. c.

charged aesthetic bond.

Although Cooper does not make as overt a statement as Bradley does, she is familiar with same-sex love. For example, on a journey to Dresden, which was one of their destinations on their European gallery tour for *Sight and Song*, Cooper became ill. While in the hospital, she encountered sexual advances from a nurse, who had fallen in love with her. Yet Cooper does not express disgust or shock. As Leighton points out, Cooper's account of the incident in her diary expresses "clear-sighted explanations of the situation, "which are singularly free of either intrigue or horror" (*Victorian* 214). Cooper writes:

> My experience with Nurse are painful—she is under the possession of a terribly fleshly love, [which] she does not conceive [of] as such, and as such I will not receive it . . . I must fight Nurse's unreasonableness. She comes while I am resting, throws herself about me and kisses me with the persistence of madness: I manage to make her understand she grieves and fatigues me—instantly with repentance she retires to the arm-chair. . . but the strain makes me dull by the time my Love returns. (*Works* 63-64)

Cooper's rejection of the nurse's sexual advances has to do with Cooper's lack of interest in her, and nothing to do with the fact that she is the same sex. In this passage Cooper's language flows naturally, as if there is nothing unusual going on except the usual bother that goes along with experiencing unwanted sexual attention. Cooper does not want to be emotionally drained by the situation; she is preoccupied with Bradley, whom she calls "my Love." Though ill, Cooper wants to feel the best she can when with Bradley, indicating the two women poets' ever present desire to be together.

Bradley's perception of the Venus of Milo and Cooper's account of her hospital experience suggest that the women have lesbian awareness. They see in Venus, who is to become a subject of their poetry, a figure associated with female

pleasure allied to creativity and sensuality, which reflects the aesthetic-sapphic nature of their work (as well as their relationship). "The erotics of "Michael Field's" verse," as Chris White proposes, derives from " an often fulsome appreciation of female beauty, a focus on the skin and flesh of the female body, and a complete absence of any consideration of male beauty or the male body" ("Flesh" 51).

The poem "The Sleeping Venus" from *Sight and Song*, a response to Giorgione's painting of the same title, has a voluptuous descriptiveness about it, and portrays the Venus in bold and bodily detail. It shows, as Leighton proposes, "the strong influence of that erotic, pictorial quality which Pater had already made fashionable" (214-5). The Venus is slumbering on open ground:

> And her body has the curves,
> The same extensive smoothness seen
> In yonder breadths of pasture, in the swerves
> Of the grassy mountain-green
> That for her propping pillow serves:
> There is a sympathy between
> Her and Earth of largest reach,
> For the sex that forms them each
> Is a bond, a holiness,
> That unconsciously must bless
> And unite them, as they lie
> Shameless beneath the sky (*Sight and Song* 99)

The sensuous description of Venus's body curving like a rolling hill of green pasture evokes the classic image of female anatomy as naturally seductive with curvy hips and shapely thighs. The intense feeling between the Venus and Earth, a maternal figure, conveys an image of same-sex bonding between a younger and older woman, "a holiness," that suggests a sense of spiritual procreancy. The use of the word "shameless" in the context of lying together implies self-consciousness, an awareness that the erotic nature of this bond might be considered transgressive. But the poem makes the

larger point that this union is created by a mysterious force, love thus is a matter of destiny, preordained by the gods. The aesthetic experience, while having a spiritual quality, is reserved for the body.

Another sensual image "Michael Field," now a female spectator hiding behind a male mask, is that of the Venus's breasts:

> Circular as lovely knolls,
> Up to which the landscape rolls
> With desirous sway, each breast
> Rises from the level chest,
> One in contour, on in round—
> Either exquisite, low mound
> Firm in shape and given
> To the august warmth of heaven.
> (*Sight and Song* 100)

The detailed, erotic, and fleshly image of the breasts produces an image of Venus as a living and breathing woman exuding sensuality and sexuality. Her sexuality, as Chris White suggests, is "self-referential;" Venus is portrayed in " an act of masturbation" ("Flesh" 53). This poem, as Leighton notes, "marks an extraordinary freeing of the female imagination" (215). This has to do with the two women poets' authorizing themselves to produce their radical vision "of delicious womanhood:"

> Her hand the thigh's tense surface leaves,
> Falling inward. Not even sleep
> Dare invalidate the deep,
> Universal pleasure sex
> Must unto itself annex—
> Even the stillest sleep; at peace,
> More profound with rest's increase,
> She enjoys the good
> Of delicious womanhood. (*Sight and Song* 102)

"The female spectator seems to see in Venus, because of the analogy of gender," as Vadillo claims, "the perfect desiring and desired subject " ("Flesh" 30). This implies a

sexual self-awareness in the form of an eroticized ideal of female same-sex love. The poem thus is an experimentation with gender, aesthetics, and sexuality that is modern in spirit. " Indeed 'delicious womanhood' is a welcome, sexualized description of an ideal too long associated with hearths and angels, " writes Leighton (215). It is the modern impulse to imagine her ("Michael Field's") imagination as "third-sexed," as well as the introduction of new sexual categories into the discourse, that radically enhances her poetic authority and strength to create something new.

III. The Marriage of Androgyny and Queerness

As an attempt to influence their own psychic scripting, as mentioned earlier, Bradley and Cooper called themselves by male nicknames. Most frequently they used "Michael," for Bradley, and "Field" or "Henry," for Cooper; the complete name became, as Holly Laird suggests, "as we think of it now—very gay: 'Michael and Henry Field'" ("Co-Authored Psydeonym" 201). The two names they chose to join for their pseudonym, "Michael" and "Field," I would further argue, form a kind of marriage name, which was common practice. "In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, " Laird notes, "coauthors represented their writing as romantic friendship, a love affair, and a companionate marriage, joining their names together in the romance of married authorship" (194).

The difference, though, for Bradley and Cooper, was that their motivation to coauthor was deeply personal. Laird agrees, "there were also more intimate reasons and meanings for the name "Michael Field" (as Donoghue also notes)" (199). The bringing together of "Michael" and "Field" is a holy union of art and love, as he represents their life long commitment to their work and each other and provides the imaginative space

through which they interpret the culture of the fin-de-siecle. They saw themselves, literally, as a married couple, "priding themselves," as Wayne Koestenbaum asserts, "on a union more complete than the redoubtable Brownings: 'those two poets, man and wife, wrote alone; each wrote, but did not bless or quicken one another at their work; *we are closer married*'" (*Double* 175).[6] Bradley and Cooper thus enact a female marriage through the construction of their authorial male name, which, as it is a combination of their private nicknames, is profoundly a part of themselves.

To their friends they were also known as the "Fields." Living in Richmond, the "Fields" and their artist friends Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon were known as couples. "When these two couples first met, in May 1894," writes John Gray's biographer Jerusha Hull McCormack, " Bradley confided in her journal, 'These 2 men live & work together & find rest & joy in each other's love just as we do'" (*Gray Dandy* 150). The two women poets conceived of themselves as the two male artists' doubles, assuming the role of "feminine affinities" as a response to the performance of the artistic homosexual masculine of, as McCormack citing Rothenstein suggests, " Ricketts and Shannon whose work they had fallen in love" (206). "Michael Field" bases "her" union on the Greek influenced model of male friendship. At the same time, she subscribes to the wild antics of the Greek maenads, a transgressive female sensibility that is a crucial part of her consciousness.

Gender destabilized, sexuality subverted, and the meaning of marriage culturally dissident, the two women poets, inhabiting the self-invented identity of the dandy-androgyne "Michael Field," live life in the manner of art in pursuit of an aesthetic ideal.

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[6] Such wrote Bradley in *Works and Days*, 16.

This ideal is inflected by an androgynous sensibility that anticipates the modern impulse of twentieth century women writers, particularly Virginia Woolf.

Chapter Four: The Sapphic Empire in *Long Ago*

Thus far, I have attempted to contextualize "Michael Field's" life and work within early modernist discourses of aestheticism and the dandy, the twentieth-century discourse of androgyny and cultural theory's discourse of queer theory. But analysis of "Michael Field" also can take place within late nineteenth-century conceptions of Greek studies that include contemporary feminist and queer interpretations of those studies. While Greek studies (which coincided with the emergence of medical and psychological discourses) provides the space for the emergence of a homosexual discourse for male aesthetes, at the same time the figure of Sappho emerged as a trope for lesbianism. This gave rise to an exploitation of Sappho by male poets and writers, such as Swinburne and Baudelaire, who, while honoring her as a supreme poet, appropriated her to saturate her with lesbian sexuality and use her as a prop in their work to shock the bourgeoisie; to them, because of her homosexuality, she represented the ultimate in decadence. "In the novels of Alphonse Daudet, Theophile Gautier, and Algernon Charles Swinburne," Chris White notes, "Sappho and Sapphic women were constructed as sadistic, predatory corruptors of innocent women" ("'Poets'" in *Sexual Sameness* 28).

But Sappho also represented the feminine side of aestheticism's association with homosexuality as well as the modern impulse to connect androgyny with homosexuality—for women, sapphism. It is these views of Sappho that are important to the study of "Michael Field."[1]

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[1] There is a difference, in my view, between sapphism and lesbianism, though the two terms seem easily interchangeable. The terms sapphism or sapphic, deriving from cultural constructions of the character and poetics of the figure of Sappho, refer to a model of creativity in which female homoerotic desire hinges on, and is embedded in, mutual artistic inspiration in female relationships that may or may not include sexual practice. Lesbianism is a sexual category that refers solely to feminine sexual attraction to the same sex and sexual (and emotional) activity between women. I use the terms lesbianism or lesbian

"Michael Field's" first collection of poems, titled *Long Ago,* published in London in 1889, is a volume of Sapphic lyrics. (Sapphic, capitalized, refers to the lyrical fragments attributed to the ancient poet Sappho.) Creating an ideal Greek world of passion, beauty, and sensuality that is female centered, the volume explores the heterosexual account of Sappho and Sappho as a lover of women as well as the meaning of the woman writer and sexuality. In this chapter, I will examine the ways in which Sappho of Lesbos is a part of Michael Field's aesthetic inheritance and the ways in which Sappho is a female precursor to Bradley's and Cooper's androgynous and sexually dissident imagination. In a way, my investigation of "Michael Field" and Sappho is an extension of that of Susan Gubar who in "Sapphistries" suggests that Sappho "empowered a number of female modernists to collaborate in exuberant linguistic experiments" (44). "Michael Field's" model of creativity is not necessarily focused solely on sensuality or sexuality, it also includes non-standard notions of gender (which, of course, overlap with sexuality) and gender and writing. This analysis expands ideas on gender, including androgyny, put forward in the last chapter. My contention is that the androgynous voices and transgressive sexualities "Michael Field" produced in *Long Ago* set the stage for her (their)[2] later work, and anticipates what has recently been called "Sapphic modernism" in contemporary feminist theory. It is important to keep in mind that thinking Greek was a way in which late nineteenth century artists discussed homosexuality, both male and female. This strand of modernism views the imaginations of female twentieth century writers—Woolf, Barnes, H.D., Stein, Renee Vivien, and

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when I want to emphasize the sexual in a person, work, or relationship even if a creative aspect is apparent in female friendships.

[2] Once again I am referring to Michael Field as a "her" because a strong, feminine Greek presence, the figure of Sappho, dominates the collection *Long Ago.*

"Michael Field," for example—as being revved up by the radical eroticism of Sappho in her many permutations. In this inquiry, I will focus on H.D., Renee Vivien, and Virginia Woolf as the authors "Michael Field" anticipates.

I. The Critical History of "Michael Field," Sappho, and *Long Ago*

In examining the issue of "Michael Field," Sappho, and *Long Ago*, I am entering into a dialogue with a small group of feminist critics who began writing about "Michael Field" in the 1990s—most notably Chris White, Angela Leighton, and Yopie Prins. Lillian Faderman, it can be argued, in her 1981 landmark text on lesbian history, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, prepared the ground for a critical discussion of "Michael Field." Within the context of her general argument that most women's relationships, specifically "romantic" friendships in the nineteenth century, including Michael Field's, were most likely non-sexual, she claims that *Long Ago* "gives little hint of any consciousness about the possibility of sexual expression between women; the emphasis in these poems, in fact, is on the heterosexual Phaon myth" (210). This sparked a cutting debate from Chris White who states her case against Faderman in "'Poets and lovers' evermore: the poetry and journals of Michael Field" (1990), citing *Long Ago* as a work replete with female homoerotic instances. White suggests "a more radical theory of lesbian desire and lesbian history" (197) by placing "Michael Field" in lesbian history as lovers and poets who use the Sapphic and the lesbian as well as classical Greek myths to give expression to, through developing a "language of love" (197), same-sex desire between women.

In the book *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* (1992), Angela Leighton dedicates a section to "Michael Field" in which she enters into the debate on

Michael Field and *Long Ago*. She touches on "Michael Field's" appropriation of Sappho and the French tradition, particularly Baudelaire. Leighton views Sappho as "the first lover and poet of 'Lesbos,'" who would become for "Michael Field" an essential poetic figure (210). She reads them as Victorian women poets albeit dissident, atypical, and rebellious ones. Leighton suggests a lesbian reading of *Long Ago* that includes a radical take on the Victorian female imagination.

Tracing metaphors of female desire, sensuality, and sexuality, White in "The One Woman (in virgin haunts of poesie): Michael Field's Sapphic Symbolism" (1995) [3]expands on themes she discussed in "Poets and lovers" White argues that "Michael Field" in "her" (their) poetry, particularly the collections *Long Ago* and *Mystic Trees*, constructs a new language of desire to write of sexual longing and women's bodies in which female poetic skill is "never separated out from sexual experience and erotic desire" (75). With *Long Ago* as the focus of the essay, White examines the relationship between sapphic and heterosexual desire as it relates to the poet's role and the way this relationship connects to the significance of virginity, a condition she views, in *Long Ago*, as necessary to lesbian desire.

Yopie Prins in her book *Victorian Sappho* (1999) devotes a chapter to "Michael Field" titled "Sappho Doubled: Michael Field."[4] She also emphasizes the radical "feminine" side of Michael Field, and offers a lesbian reading of a firm deconstructive nature. Like Leighton, she places Bradley and Cooper in a Victorian context. She focuses mostly on gender, sexuality, the lyric, and what Prins calls the "Sapphic signature." She

[3] Published in *Volcanoes and Pearl Divers*, edited by Suzanne Raitt.
[4] This chapter includes a previously published article from 1995, "A Metaphorical Field: Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper," here a subdivision, titled "A Metaphorical Field," of the chapter. "Sappho Doubled" also had been previously published as a journal article in 1995.

analyzes the Tiresias poems, suggesting that Michael Field produces "him" as "neither masculine or feminine but both simultaneously" (95), opening up a space for "the erotic interchangeability within Michael Field's lyrics" (92). Prins argues that what we now call Sappho is, "in many ways, an artifact of Victorian poetics" (1), a mythic and symbolic figure rather than authentically historic, culturally constructed out of fragments attributed to her, heresy, and glossings of classical texts. Sappho thus is referred to as a "signature" since as Prins sees it, she is not a proper literary figure but a rhetorical effect produced by a history of fragmentation and discursive formations. Prins argues that *Long Ago* complicates and problematizes the Victorian woman poet's claim to authorship and raises questions about "the relationship between lyric subjectivity and sexual identity in Victorian poetry" (74). She views "Michael Field's" volume of Sapphic lyrics, which she argues grounds them in the realm of Victorian Hellenism, as "a complex performance of the Sapphic signature" because it is "simultaneously single and double" and "masculine and feminine" (74). Because of these variations, the Sapphic signature is destabilized once again, and becomes more radical thereby open to multiple readings. The two women poets posing as a man posing as Sappho, according to Prins, allows the signature to be read as plural and lesbian, their lyric voice "an eroticized textual mediation between the two of them rather than the representation of an unmediated solitary utterance" (76). Prins further argues that by imitating Sappho, Bradley and Cooper enter into a "metaphorical" or rhetorical field. This field does not include an essential sexual identity, but rather opens up a space for transgressive sexualities, including lesbian possibilities, which is accessed through "the figure for the lesbian—Sappho of Lesbos, a name and place with multiple significations, a metaphor" (94).

White in "The Tiresian Poet: Michael Field" (1996)[5] develops her ideas on the production of poetry and the female poet by juxtaposing a theory of poetic identity with discussions of historic and mythic female figures used in Michael Field's poetry through which Bradley and Cooper, as women poets, could enable their writing together. White argues that "three principal figures are used in their poetry to provide a framework in which the woman poet can be creative in her own right: Sappho, the Virgin Mary, and Tiresias" (149). Sappho in *Long Ago*, she asserts, is a figure of poetic authority whose community of women is a "site of poetic production" and "the production of the Poet identity;" both are "threatened by men and heterosexuality" (153). "The Virgin Mary makes a late appearance in Field's work, and serves as an ambiguous representation of female creativity and power" (149). White analyzes "Michael Field's" Tiresias as an androgyne. The two women poets reinterpret the myth of Tiresias in which Tiresias embodies a radical femininity, White suggests, "whose strength derives from femaleness and whose authority derives from the masculine Poet identity which can change the world" (161).

Virginia Blain also makes a case for the overt sexual nature of Bradley's and Cooper's relationship. In "'Michael Field,' the Two-headed Nightengale:' lesbian text as palimpsest" (1996), she suggests that *Long Ago* is "a major turning point in Michael Field's career" (250) because of the radical nature of its subject matter, love lyrics between women. Bette London in *Writing Double: Women's Literary Partnerships* (1999) suggests that "the model for all lesbian collaboration" is one with Sappho, and that "Michael Field" with the production of *Long Ago* seems to fit the paradigm (79).

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[5] Published in *Victorian Women Poets: A Critical Reader*, edited by Angela Leighton.

Marion Thain in *Michael Field and Poetic Identity* (2000) attempts to answer the question posed by Prins: "How shall we read these poems written by two women writing as a man writing as Sappho?" by claiming that the double persona "allows Bradley and Cooper to perform the feminine" (29). She also looks at a Tiresias poem, poem LII, seeing it as representative of "the gender drama played out in *Long Ago*" (29).

Holly Laird in "The Coauthored Pseudonym: Two Women Named Michael Field" (2003) discusses the nature of female dual authorships and their pseudonyms, with a focus on "Michael Field," whose poetic identity, she claims, "functioned . . . to multiply and increase identities" (199). In a dialogue with Prins, she adds to Prins' reading of "Michael Field" and Sappho, suggesting that "Michael Field's" "Sapphic signature" is "tripled by Sappho, then indefinitely multiplied by other Sapphic women singers," further expanding the "field" of the Sapphic poetry to include more multiple readings and inventions (199).

My participation in this dialogue on "Michael Field" and *Long Ago*, informed by the work of these critics, will continue the exploration of the Sapphic lyrics and female erotic power but will do so in the context of aestheticism. I will argue that the figure of Sappho, for Bradley and Cooper, represents a transgressive feminine sensibility inside the aesthetic that is inspired by the two women poets' fascination with Victorian Hellenism—sapphism, for women. Their work on Sappho, I will further argue, places them in what is today called a lesbian poetic tradition that is a modernist phenomenon: Sapphic modernism.

II. Sappho in the Late Nineteenth-Century

To understand the significance of Sappho for the Western literary tradition and to help place "Michael Field" in context with regard to this tradition it is useful to discuss a history of Sappho—which constitutes a history of various translations, readings, and interpretations beginning in antiquity--from at least the late nineteenth century.[6]

Before Sappho of Lesbos, a Lesbian, became Sappho the lesbian (Lesbian indicates that she is an inhabitant of a place, Lesbos; lesbian, a modern formation of a sexual category that emerged in the late nineteen century, a sexual identity), she was considered one of the finest poets in Ancient Greece. "Her face was engraved on coinage, her statue erected, and her portrait painted on vases" (7) writes Josephine Balmer in the introduction to *Sappho Poems and Fragments*, her translation of Sappho's lyrics. Perhaps a quote about Solon of Athens, cited by Balmer, will give a sense of the Greek attitude toward Sappho as a poet:

> After his nephew had sung one of Sappho's songs over the wine
> Solon of Athens, the son of Execestides, told the lad to teach it
> to him immediately. When someone asked why he was so eager,
> Solon replied: 'So that I might die knowing it.' (7)

The way Sappho is thought about—Plato called her the tenth Muse--has changed dramatically since the time of Solon. Much of Sappho's work has been lost and the fragments of her poems that have survived have been open to interpretation throughout the centuries. But, as Balmer proposes, "the greatest problem Sappho's poetry presents is

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[6] For a history of representations of Sappho in nineteenth century women's poetry and prose see Margaret Reynolds' "'I lived for art, I lived for love:' The Woman Poet Sings Sappho's Last Song" in *Victorian Women Poets: A Critical Reader*, edited by Angela Leighton, and Leighton's *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart.* These representations include ideas of Sappho as the female embodiment of a brooding Byronic hero and a doomed, self-destructive, heart-broken female poet. Joan DeJean's landmark text, *Fictions of Sappho 1546-1937,* focuses on Sappho and the French literary tradition. She delineates the ways in which Sappho has been imagined by different interpreters and writers at various times in history.

its eroticism—a problem because so many translators and commentators have found it so . . . today her name is synonymous with 'unnatural sexual relations between women'. . . rather than artistic excellence" (7). For centuries knowledge of Sappho's homoeroticism was suppressed. Ovid, who thought of himself as a kindred spirit of Sappho's, promoted the idea of Sappho's exclusive heterosexuality. "The epistle that Ovid imagines from Sappho to her legendary lover Phaon is quite simply the most influential Sapphic fiction ever," writes Joan DeJean, "fictions of Sappho begin when Ovid and Sappho intersect in the early modern imagination"(*Fictions* 12).

In 1885, Henry Thorton Wharton published his highly influential *Sappho: Memoir, Text and Selected Renderings with a Literal Translation*, which was the first translation in English of Sappho's poetry to acknowledge the use of the feminine pronoun. This edition of Sappho was "the first translation into any modern language of the 'Ode to Aphrodite' with a female object of desire" (DeJean 248). The following is the literal translation of the poem, which is important to keep in mind when considering the myriad of interpretations by poets on whom it and the entire collection had an impact, including "Michael Field":

> *Immortal Aphrodite of the broidered throne, daughter of Zeus,*
> *weaver of wiles, I pray thee break not my spirit with anguish and*
> *distress, O Queen. But come hither, if ever before thou didst hear*
> *my voice afar, and listen, and leaving thy father's golden house camest*
> *with chariot yoked, and fair fleet sparrows drew thee, flapping*
> *fast their wings around the dark earth, from heaven through mid*
> *sky. Quickly arrived they; and thou, blessed one, smiling with*
> *immortal countenance, didst ask What now is befallen me, and*
> *Why now I call, and What I in my mad heart most desire to see.*
> *'What beauty now wouldst thou draw to love thee? Who wrongs thee,*
> *Sappho? For even if she flies she shall soon follow, and if she rejects gifts*
> *shall yet give, and if she loves not shall soon love, however loth.' Come,*
> *I pray thee, now too, and release me from cruel cares; and all that my*
> *heart desires to accomplish, accomplish thou, and be thyself, my ally.*[7]
> (sic italics)

On female homoeroticism, John Addington Symonds,[8] an Oxford don and classics scholar, in *Male Love: A Problem in Greek Ethics and Other Writings* writes "Sappho and the Lesbian Poetess gave this female passion an eminent place in Greek literature" (71). A half-century earlier, Sappho entered the French literary tradition, as DeJean notes, "as a figure of female homoerotic desire" (4). But it was Wharton's edition of Sappho that changed the way English turn-of-the-century and modern female writers and poets—"Michael Field," in particular--regarded Sappho because, as Margaret Reynolds in *The Sappho History* notes, this edition

> dismissed the web of myths around Phaon and the Leucadian leap;
> it made claims for Sappho's importance as the first lyric poet; it established
> a standard for English translations; it quietly reproduced Bergk's feminine
> pronouns; and it persuasively argued for the resilience of her poetic model
> throughout English literature. (127)

It is also important to keep in mind the French decadent tradition—a school of "French sexual sensationalism," as DeJean calls it (200), whose depictions of Sappho had

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[7] *Sappho: Memoir, Text, Selected Renderings and a Literal Translation*, p. 46.
[8] Symonds, along with Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter, was an early advocate of homosexual rights. See Jeffrey Weeks' *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present,* and Elaine Showalter's *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin De Siecle.*

a strong influence on the English tradition. With regard to Sappho, Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*, first published in 1845, is particularly resonant. This work included poems—"Lesbos" and two "Condemned Women"-- that for the first time in literary history constructed Sappho as a lesbian, turning her into a sexual rather than literary icon (she was also commonly portrayed as a prostitute). "Baudelaire's portrait of Sappho is most striking because . . . he makes her sapphic," DeJean notes, "And this Sappho is the key to Baudelaire's redefinition of literary lesbianism" (*Fictions* 271). "Baudelaire is the first nineteenth-century author to portray Sappho as a lesbian," writes Jonathon Culler in the introduction to Baudelaire's *The Flowers of Evil.* "Speaking of her as a 'lover' and 'poet,' Baudelaire imagines her as the priestess of a cult based on the impossibility for women to find satisfaction with men " (xvi).

In the poem "Lesbos," Baudelaire suggests sterility is the price the beautiful women of Lesbos pay for their pleasures, Sappho, her poetic gift:

> Of Sappho, male in poetry and love,
> Fairer than Venus, though her face be pale!
> --The azure eye is conquered by the black
> Shadowed by circles drawn by all grief
> Of Sappho, male in poetry and love!
> (From "Lesbos" in *The Flowers of Evil*, translated by James McGowan, 235)

For Baudelaire, the poet is coded male, and he confers Sappho with the honor. Compensating Sappho for what he sees as her sterility because of her sexual proclivities, he expands her reproductive capability to include the artistic realm, a traditionally masculine space.

In the poem "Condemned Women: Delphine and Hippolyta," Baudelaire saturates the two women with a dissident sexuality, a way in which he deliberately defines them, refusing to see them as beings apart from their lesbianism:

Stretched calmly at her feet, joyfully satisfied,
Delphine looked up at her with those compelling eyes
Like a strong animal that oversees her prey,
First having taken care to mark it with her teeth.

But then Hippolyta, lifting her troubled head:
--'My Delphine, do not think that I repent our love;
I'm not ungrateful, but I suffer in distress
As if I'd been a part of some strange feast at night.

Have we committed then a strange, forbidden act?
Please, if you can, explain my trouble and my fright:
I shake and tremble when you say to me, "my love!"
And still I feel my mouth is yearning at your call.
(From "Condemned Women: Delphine and Hippolyta" in *The Flowers of Evil*, translated by James McGowan, 239-40)

Here the lesbian Delphine is a kind of predatory monster, corrupting the presumably until now innocent Hippolyta, who, though frightened, cannot get enough of Delphine. She is constructed as a one-dimensional sexual being rather than a human being, a corrosive force. Baudelaire thus produces lesbian sexuality as the essence of decadence.

Bradley and Cooper, though they would not consider themselves decadents, were familiar with Baudelaire's work. "Katherine and Edith certainly knew Baudelaire's work well," asserts Leighton, "they translated one of his poems and they remained, in many ways, more in sympathy with the French than the English tradition" (*Writing* 210). Through "Michael Field," the two women poets, too, sought to be, like Baudelaire's Sappho, often "male in poetry and love."

Charles Algernon Swinburne is perhaps Baudelaire's most well-known English disciple. " Both Baudelaire and Swinburne saw themselves to some extent as Sappho's heirs ," writes Reynolds in *The Sappho Companion* (232). Swinburne had, as Catherine Maxwell suggests, a "passionate sense of kinship with Sappho, the classical Greek poet, whom he considered 'as beyond all question the greatest poet that ever lived'"

(*Swinburne* xv). Swinburne also condemned the prosecution of Baudelaire for including poems on sex between women in *Les Fleurs du Mal* in 1857 in Paris. In his own volume *Poems and Ballads* (1866)--a volume that, as Dellamora proposes, "more than a century" after its initial publication "retains a capacity to shock readers" (*Masculine Desire* 69)--Swinburne follows in Baudelaire's footsteps. He treats some of the same themes, viewing Baudelaire as rejecting a corrosive, oppressive, and limiting morality and justifying art for art's sake under almost any circumstance. Like Baudelaire's, much of Swinburne's poetry was poetry of the body, most scandalously, the lesbian body of Sappho—most notably in the poems "Anactoria," "Sapphics," and "On the Cliffs."

Subscribing to a variation of the androgynous ideal, Swinburne affirmed that, as Dellamora citing Swinburne notes, "'great poets are bisexual; male and female at once'" (*CWS*, 14: 305 cited in *Masculine* 69). Swinburne's "Anactoria," a very long dramatic monologue spoken by Sappho, a pagan speaker, produces a subversive female homoeroticism:

> 'Who doth thee wrong,
> Sappho'? but thou—thy body is the song,
> Thy mouth the music; thou art more than I,
> Though my voice die not till the whole world die;
> Though men that hear it madden; though love weep,
> Though nature change, though shame be charmed to sleep.
> Ah, wilt thou slay me lest I kill thee dead?
>
> That I could drink thy veins as wine, and eat
> Thy breasts like honey! That from face to feet
> Thy body were abolished and consumed,
> And in my flesh thy very flesh entombed!
>
> For my sake when I hurt thee; O that I
> Durst crush thee out of life with love, and die,
> Dies of thy pain and my delight, and be
> Mixed with thy blood and molten into thee!
> (From "Anactoria" in *Poems and Ballads*, 25-33)

For Swinburne, as for Baudelaire, Sappho, in part, was a figure of rebellious sexual deviancy perfect for shocking the bourgeoisie. Contemporary critics have offered a variety of readings on Swinburne's Sappho, whom very early critics viewed as "'the daughter of de Sade.'" [9] Dellamora argues that Swinburne uses "representations of lesbian sexuality to express dissatisfaction with conventional male gender norms" (69). "Swinburne discovers in Sappho the Romantic type of the alienated artist," asserts Maxwell, "who forgoes the regular rewards of everyday life, but experiences its deepest pains and pleasures, expressing them with supreme eloquence" (xv). Gubar cites Swinburne's "sadistic" Sappho as a profound influence on the twentieth century poet Renee Vivien. ("Sapphistries" 48). Taking Swinburne's addiction to flagellation into account, Prins claims that in "Anactoria" Swinburne "turns Sappho's lyricism into a lurid mediation on the pleasure of rhythm: the beating of Sappho the Lesbian into a lesbian body," a kind of "male lesbian body" (*Victorian* 112). Joyce Zonana in "Swinburne's Sappho: The Muse as Sister-Goddess" identifies Swinburne's "Sapphics" as an important poem in which he " introduces a theme that was to dominate both his poetry and prose: Sappho's apotheosis as the tenth Muse whose 'visible song' soars as 'a bird soars'" (39). He develops "his myth of the Muse," she argues, in "Sapphics" as well as "Anactoria" and "On the Cliffs," and doing so, "directly confronts the Western (male) poetic imagination through her fully sexual femaleness" (40-41). Whether Bradley and Cooper learned of Sappho through their contemporaries directly, the figure of Sappho, for

[9] See Margaret Reynolds' *The Sappho Companion*, 232. Swinburne apparently was well versed in the works of the Marquis de Sade. For a fascinating account of Swinburne as decadent and Pater as aesthete see Camille Paglia's *Sexual Personae*.

"Michael Field," serves as a muse who set the stage for a female literary tradition, or at least, as Leighton suggests, "a lifelong poetic model" (*Victorian* 210).

The two women poets were also interested in Baudelaire's other heirs, including Paul Verlaine and Arthur Symons. In 1893, Bradley and Cooper attended a reading of Verlaine's, heavily attended by women, and were fascinated by the criminal homosexual poet who was accompanied by "his young neophyte Symons" (Field *Works* 188). Cooper offered a detailed description of Verlaine's face:

> the face of man is his necessity –one cannot forget it, as one looks at Verlaine's bare-skull line, beautiful in its decisiveness, horrible in its confession; at the tilted eyebrows, the eyes of a Chinese Mephistopheles—only so sad . . . at the nose stolen from an Attic grotesque, at the violent mouth . . . The skin has the appearance of parchment drawn by fire, and every now and then a smile rises that is full of the innocence of hell.
> (*Works* 189)

Cooper obviously is fascinated by Verlaine's appearance (and performance); "It is quite delicious" (189). She continues:

> Indeed Verlaine is so necessarily criminal that it has done him little harm to fulfill himself, and the religious fervour that is the accompanying ecstasy of sin, grows of it as a reward . . . He sat, his legs stretched out—his vagabondism covered by clean and middle-class garments; he looked like the giant Bohemia brought out to be seen by Philistia, and he was very, *very* judicious in the choice of his poems . . . It was such an English scene—Satan in a frock-coat, reading religious poetry and darting pitch-spark glances at company incapable of understanding the tragedies of hell (even the devils believe and tremble) still less bouts of free travel.
> (*Works* 189)

Cooper seems to appreciate the rebellious nature, the danger and daring, that was "the Decadence"—the passage is "rich in '*fin de sieclisms*'"(Leighton *Victorian* 216)-- in the figure of Verlaine, a homosexual criminal poet. She especially seems to enjoy the presence of the "arch-fiend of decadence," as Leighton calls him, among a sedate English audience (216).

Verlaine's Sappho is "a madwoman," who was "overburdened with the sensationalist literary lesbianism of the day " (DeJean *Fictions* 275). Verlaine's decadent Sappho in *Parallellement* (1889), influenced by Baudelaire, is also reflected in Arthur Symons' *Lesbia and Other Poems*, particularly the poem "Hallucination: I " (1902):

> One petal of a blood-red tulip pressed
> Between the pages of a Baudelaire:
> No more; and I was suddenly aware
> Of the white fragrant apple of a breast
> On which my lips were pastured; and I knew
> That dreaming I remembered an old dream.
> Sweeter than any fruit that fruit did seem,
> Which, as my hungry teeth devoured it, grew
> Ever again, and tantalized my taste.
> So, vainly hungering, I seemed to see
> Eve and the serpent and the apple-tree,
> And Adam in the garden, and God laying waste
> Innocent Eden, because men's desire,
> Godlike before, now for a woman's sake
> Descended through the woman to the snake.
> Then as my mouth grew parched, stung as with fire
> By that white fragrant apple, once so fair,
> That seemed to shrink and spire into a flame,
> I cried, and wakened, crying on your name:
> One blood-red petal stained the Baudelaire.
> (*The Sappho Companion* 250)

Bradley and Cooper had met Symons, along with Lionel Johnson, through Walter Pater. In his *Anthology of 'Nineties Verse*, published in 1928, Symons included ten of Michael Field's poems—one from *Long Ago*, "Sweeter far than the Harp, more Gold than Gold." [10] This poem reflects Sappho's occasional use of the vocabulary of male homoeroticism in her fragments, which has to do with, according to DeJean, the "Sapphic expression of desire and that of the older lover in pederastic relations" (21). This kind of male relationship, as mentioned in the last chapter, is the basis for the ideal of spiritual procreancy in aesthetic Hellenism. "Michael Field's" poem is an example of Sappho's

[10] See *Anthology of 'Nineties' Verse*, compiled and edited by J.A. Symons, 56.

use of the vocabulary of male homoeroticism within a seemingly heterosexual context in which Sappho crosses gender and identifies with her fellow, though much lesser poet Alceus:[11]

> Thine elder that I am, thou must not cling
> To me, nor mournful for my love entreat:
> And yet, Alcaeus, as the sudden spring
> Is love, yea, and to veiled Demeter sweet.
>
> Sweeter than tone of harp, more gold than gold
> Is thy young voice to me; yet, ah, the pain
> To learn I am beloved now I am old,
> Who, in my youth, loved, as thou must, in vain.
> (*Anthology of 'Nineties' Verse* 56)

But the decadent fin-de-siecle poets were not the only influence on Bradley's and Cooper's Sapphic verse. In *Studies of the Greek Poets* John Addington Symonds, a friend of Bradley's and Cooper's, describes Lesbos as a beautiful and sensual place where conditions were favorable to the development of women's creativity. He viewed Lesbos as "the island of overmastering passions: the personality of the Greek race burned there with a fierce and steady flame of concentrated feeling" (290). On Lesbian women, including Sappho--whom, according to DeJean, Symonds promoted as a "homosexual, feminist Sappho"—he connected the idea of Greek (male) "ideal love" to women (222):

> While mixing freely with male society, they were highly educated, and accustomed to express their sentiments to an extent unknown elsewhere in history . . . . The Lesbian ladies applied themselves successfully to literature. They formed clubs for the cultivation of poetry and music. They studied the arts of beauty . . . Unrestrained by public opinion, and passionate for the beautiful, they cultivated their senses and emotions, and indulged their wildest passions. All the luxuries and elegances of life which that climate and the rich valleys of Lesbos could afford, were at their disposal; exquisite gardens, where the cyclamen and violet flowered with feathery maiden hair; pine-tree-shadowed coves, where they might bath in the calm of the tireless sea; fruits such as only the southern sun and sea-wind can mature; marble cliffs, starred with jonquil and anemone in spring, aromatic with myrtle and lentisk and

[11] "Besides Sappho, Alcaeus pales" writes Symonds in *Studies of Greek Poets*, 294.

> samphire and wild rosemary through all the months; nightingales that sang in May; temples dim with dusky gold and bright with ivory; statues of heroic forms. In such scenes as these the Lesbian poets lived, and thought of Love. (291)

This voluptuous world of passion, nature, and art--an environment with few social restraints conducive to creativity that Virginia Woolf claimed women lacked after Sappho,[12] is precisely the kind of world Bradley and Cooper sought to create for themselves. At what was to be their final domicile at 1, The Paragon, in Richmond, close to Ricketts and Shannon, they moved into a Georgian house with a luxurious garden that made its way down to the Thames, and created a sanctuary of love, beauty, and art. Donoghue recalls "The Painters'" (Ricketts and Shannon) suggestion to the "ladies," that they should "enter Richmond in a chariot of ivory drawn by leopards." Katherine reminisced in a letter years later:

> 'The pards was a detail not carried out; but of thee, O Bacchus, and of Thy ritual, the open landau piled high with Chow and Field and Michael, doves and manuscripts and sacred plants!—all that is US was there; and we drove consciously to Paradise.'"[13]

Symonds "was not adverse to explaining the niceties of Greek poetry to young ladies" (Reynolds *Sappho Companion* 259). He recommended that Cooper read his *Studies of the Greek Poets*[14] in which he wrote about Sappho with great praise:

> The world has suffered no greater literary loss than the loss of Sappho's poems. (292)
>
> All is so rhythmically and sublimely ordered in the poems of Sappho that supreme art lends solemnity and grandeur to the expression of unmitigated passion. (292)
>
> Of all the poets of the world, of all the illustrious artists of all literatures,

[12] See Gubar's "Sapphistries" for a discussion of Woolf's public argument about women, writing, and social conditions with Desmond MacCarthy, who published a newspaper article claiming that women have produced little poetry of substance since Sappho, 45.
[13] *We Are Michael Field*, 104.
[14] See Angela Leighton's *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart*, 210, and Margaret Reynolds' *The Sappho History*, 193.

> Sappho is the one whose every word has a peculiar and unmistakable perfume, a seal of absolute perfection and inimitable grace. (293)

Symonds privileges Sappho and lesbianism by seriously undermining Ovid's popular version of Sappho as a lover of Phaon and a suicide: "There is enough of heart-devouring passion in Sappho's own verse without the legends of Phaon and the cliff of Leucas" (293). Certainly this kind of sentiment influenced the production of Michael Field's *Long Ago*.

It is not surprising that Symonds sought to reverse, or at least offer an alternative to the perversities of Baudelaire's and Swinburne's decadent version of Sappho with his poem "Accentual Sapphics" (1880):

> When like dawn our Lady of Love, the deathless,
> Rose from waves that whisper around Cythera,
> She with both hands gave to the race of mortals
> Joy for a guerdon.
>
> Stretching arms ambrosial, she divided
> All her realm of beauty to be partaken;
> This way marriage, help, and the hope of children
> Born in the homestead.
>
> Then she bent dim eyes of diviner yearning
> That way o'er foam-fretted and eager ocean,
> Till from darkness, yea and the earth's foundations,
> Came a green island.
>
> Ringed with uncontrollable storms that threaten
> Ringed with envious shoals and a tide rebellious,
> Fair it sleeps, and sirens around it always
> Sing to the sunlight.
>
> Here the goddess set for the souls of poets
> Their abiding place to be won with danger,
> Where for aye, unshaken and uncorrupted,
> Shines the ideal.
> (*The Sappho Companion* 268)

In contrast to the decadent poets, Symonds put emotion and feeling back into the figure of Sappho and the place of Lesbos, as does "Michael Field" in *Long Ago*. Moreover, Symonds sought to restore, as Reynolds asserts, "Lesbos as an ideal state, where poetry, love and art can live without the soiling innuendo of nineteenth-century prudes" (*Sappho Companion* 260).

The late nineteen-century tradition in England, following the earlier tradition in France of a wild, sensual, and sexually transgressive Sappho, was perhaps the most daring in its production of Sappho as anything from a prostitute to a lesbian to a muse and model to be worshipped and followed by all poets. Equally important, Sappho represented the feminine side of Greek learning and culture, which was the province of educated men, and which was in the late century becoming available to certain privileged women who were in greater numbers entering the universities and studying Greek. As mentioned in the last chapter, Katherine Bradley was one such woman, and she shared her educational experience with her niece.

The emergence of a sexually liberated Sappho and the move of some intelligent women to seriously study Greek (and Latin though the emphasis was on Greek) thus opened up a space for the development of what Prins calls "Hellenism and feminism," "the feminine counterdiscourse within the masculine discourses of Victorian Hellenism," influenced by Pater, also discussed in the last chapter ("Greek Maenads" 46). While these women (such as Bradley and Cooper), as Prins argues, appropriated Pater's work on Dionysus and the Greek maenads to articulate feminine desire and alternative social identities for themselves, I would like to suggest that the Sappho narrative that became fashionable in the late century provided yet another feminine counterdiscourse for the

articulation of female homoerotic desire, specifically, and the meaning of selfhood and authorship for the woman artist.

III. Michael Field and Sappho

Long Ago is the outcome of the historical moment of the emergence of Sappho in the late nineteenth century that coincided with thinking Greek for women, as it represents Bradley's and Cooper's own aestheticized and eroticized imaginings of ancient Greece, telling a new story of Sappho, significantly, by two women poets (speaking as a man speaking as Sappho). "Michael Field's" Sapphic lyrics lack the exploitive and pornographic nature of Baudelaire's and Swinburne's verse; rather they meditate on the creative power of female sensuality and sexuality while using the discourse of aesthetic culture, as it was influenced by Victorian Hellenism, to give expression to their own sexuality.

"Michael Field" participates in the production of Sapphic fictions that began, in her (their) own words, "a great while since, a long, long time ago" (*Long Ago* i), in her (their) own case at least since Wharton's English translation of Sappho in 1885, which marks a rupture in Sappho histories. In *Long Ago*, a narrative of female poetic history is constructed. In the background there is an experience of impediment that makes the production of a male pseudonym necessary, and this helps to explain why the two women poets can speak as "Michael Field" speaking as Sappho. Bradley and Cooper first and foremost sought to speak out as an equal to men. Moreover, Sappho speaking through the voice of "Michael Field" gives Bradley and Cooper another role in which to play out their own understanding of their relationship. "Michael Field" treats specific Sapphic themes: heterosexuality through the myth of Phaon and wedding songs, female

homosexuality though Sappho's relationships with various girls and a focus on choruses of maidens, the meaning and representation of desire and women's bodies, and the relationship among the meaning and representation of virginity, lesbianism, and creativity.

A "Note" at the beginning of the volume comments on the cover, explaining it reproduces the head of Sappho taken from an ancient vase, and the frontispiece reproduces a figure of Sappho sitting and reading taken from an ancient vase in a museum in Athens. "Michael Field" then mentions Wharton's edition of Sappho because it was the first in English to use the feminine pronoun:

> *I take this opportunity of expressing my indebtedness to Dr. Wharton's* Sappho, A Memoir and Translation, *a work which will be found of the highest value by those who desire to obtain a vivid impression of the personality, the influence, and the environment of the poet.*
> (italics sic *Long Ago*)

"Michael Field's" interpretation of Wharton's "impression" of Sappho and her world--the volume *Long Ago*--echoes Symonds' move to restore the Isle of Lesbos to an ideal place of poetry, love, and art. This ideal state, for "Michael Field," is also a place where women's creativity, connected to a non-standard sexuality, is dominant. On Michael Field and Sappho, White proposes, "Michael Field hold her up as a paragon among women, and put the passion back into the poet's community of women" ("Poets and lovers" 28).

The "Preface" to *Long Ago* places Sappho, as Swinburne does, in the position of original high priestess of poetry, the model to which all poets should aspire, echoing Wharton: "Such was her unique renown, that she was called 'The Poetess,' just as Homer was 'The Poet'" (25). The lyric, by implication, is exalted as well, reflecting the views of Bradley's and Cooper's peers. "The lyric is, indeed, the most typically poetic of all poetic

forms," writes John Gray in his positive review of *Long Ago* published in *The Academy* in 1889, " that in which we find poetry in subtlest and purest quintessence . . . And the lyric is most characteristically itself . . . in songs such as those we have named . . . in which it is ready to pass into music" (388). "Michael Field's" Sapphic lyrics thus were thought to embody, what is according to Pater, the height of aesthetic achievement—that all art should aspire to the condition of music.

The "Preface" to *Long Ago* reads:

> When, more than a year ago, I wrote to a
> literary friend of my attempt to express
> in English verse the passionate pleasure Dr.
> Wharton's book had brought to me, he replied:
> "That is a delightfully audacious thought—the
> extension of Sappho's fragments into lyrics. I can
> scarcely conceive anything more audacious."
> In simple truth all worship that is not idolatry
> must be audacious; for it involves the blissful
> apprehension of an ideal; it means the very
> phrase of Sappho—
> Devoutly as the fiery-bosomed Greek turned in
> her anguish to Aphrodite, praying her to accomplish
> her heart's desire, I have turned to the one woman
> who has dared to speak unfalteringly of the fearful
> mastery of love, and again and again the dumb
> prayer has risen from my heart—
> (*Long Ago* n.p.)

The figure of Sappho functions as the ideal for the two women poets. As a dominant model of Greek learning, Sappho is another means by which the woman artist claims knowledge and cultural authority, an authority, significantly, that is rich in erotic overtones—"She was on all sides regarded as the greatest erotic poet of antiquity," notes Wharton (38). For "Michael Field," then, Sappho serves as the ultimate female precursor who at once provides a female classical inheritance and gives poetic license to break cultural silence about female desire, particularly, though not exclusively, in the form of

lesbianism. "Where a whole canon of male-male bondings and loves exists," White asserts, "women had only one classical equivalent to draw upon for expressions and strategies of female-female love—the poetry of Sappho" ("Poets and Lovers" 29). Bradley and Cooper, through Sappho, honor their own cultural and feminine presence, including a transgressive feminine sexuality, within the Western literary tradition, and through Michael Field oddly figure into the "gay" maleness of that tradition—mostly because of their interest in aestheticism. With the production of *Long Ago*, the purpose of their collaboration, as Leighton asserts, becomes "a laughingly sexual and rebellious one, dedicated to life and pleasure. "Michael Field" rescues Sappho from her cliff-edge of despair and, with her, the female imagination itself from all the chronically miserable effusions of the heart" (*Victorian* 211).

First "Michael Field" in *Long Ago* projects Sappho back to ancient Greece where she was constructed as its finest lyric poet. This first poem sets the stage for a return to the sensual, artistic, and beautiful world of the Isle of Lesbos, inhabited by a female choir of muses, evoking a nostalgia for a lost land:

> They plaited garlands in their time;
> They knew the joy of youth's sweet prime,
> Quick breath and rapture:
> Theirs was the violet-weaving bliss,
> And theirs the white, wreathed brow to kiss,
> Kiss and recapture.
>
> They plaited garlands even these;
> They learnt Love's golden mysteries
> Of young Apollo;
> The lyre unloosed their souls; they lay
> Under the trembling leaves at play,
> Bright dreams to follow.
>
> They plaited garlands—heavenly twine!
> They crowned the cup, they drank the wine

Of youth's deep pleasure.
Now, lingering for the lyreless god—
Oh, yet, once in their time, they trod
A choric measure.
(*Long Ago* xi)

This poem captures the aesthetic theme of the work put forward by John Gray, who calls "Michael Field's" Sappho "the supreme lover of 'Long Ago'" (*The Academy* 388). Echoing Symonds' lush description of Lesbos, Gray writes:

> The theme of the book is the loveliness of visible things—of nature, in that sweet Aeolian land, and of the fair humanity to which this nature was the fitting setting; the overmastering power of the passion; and the struggles of the poet's soul, irresistibly impelled to seek perfect expression for both: surely a sufficiently ample gamut for the music of any poet. (388)

Moreover, a common feature in both Sappho's fragments and *Long Ago* are garlands--garlands "in vase painting," notes Balmer, was "a common feature of homosexual courtship" (15). [15]

"Michael Field" then has Sappho invoke the Muses to further situate a feminine sensibility, with female homoerotic implications, at the center of cultural authority.

Hither now Muses! leaving golden seats,
Hither! Forsake the fresh, inspiring wells,
Flee the high mountain lands, the cool retreats
Where in the temperate air your influence dwells,
Leave your sweet haunts of summer sound and rest,
Hither, O maiden choir, and make me blest.
(*Long Ago* n.p.)

For "Michael Field's" Sappho, female homoeroticism is the catalyst for women's creativity while heterosexuality is the deterrent. In poem VI, Sappho celebrates the beauty, sensuality, and inspiration of Erinna, one of her girls, possibly a poet:

Erinna, thou art ever fair,
Not as the young spring flowers,

[15] See also Jane McIntosh Snyder's *Lesbian Desire in the Lyrics of Sappho*, passim.

We who have laurel in our hair—
Eternal youth is ours.
The roses that Pieria's dew
Hath washed can ne'er decline;
On Orpheus' tomb at first they grew,
And there the Sacred Nine,
'Mid quivering moonlight, seek the groves
Guarding the minstrel's tomb;
Each for the poet that she loves
Plucks an immortal bloom.
Soon as my girl's sweet voice she caught,
Thither Euterpe sped,
And, singing, too a garland wrought
To crown Erinna's head.
(*Long Ago* xvi)

While the Muses guard Orpheus' tomb, Euterpe, the Muse of music, is seduced by Erinna's "sweet voice," which inspires the divinity to sing and crown Erinna with the coveted garland, which signifies sexuality and creativity, the hallmark of sapphism.

Female erotic ties are linked to creativity and virginity. "The poet or Poet is a virginal figure," notes Chris White ("Tiresian" 151). In the poem XVII, Sappho laments the loss of her virginity presumably because of her relationship with Phaon as well as the split that loss causes between her and her beautiful maidens. The emphasis on sameness is gone, and Sappho despairs. The maidens in the light of the moon, "the perfect, virgin orb," gather in a circle and respond to Sappho's song. Silence then falls upon the maidens and Sappho is left alone to play her lyre:

Oh, wither art thou gone from me?
Come back again, virginity!
For maidenhood still do I long,
The freedom and the joyance strong
Of that most blessed secret state
That makes a maiden great.
(*Long Ago* xxx)

White proposes in her analysis of a poem on Leto and Niobe that "heterosexuality kills friendship between women;" for the poems in the entire collection she claims, rightly, that "the possession of virginity is the sole source of female power, freedom, and joy" (152). Virginity becomes a sensual condition associated with same-sex amorosity, and also the source of inspiration and creativity. The loss of Sappho's virginity puts an end to her sensuality, desire, and longing, which is represented by the separation of Sappho from her maids:

> O moon, be fair to me as these
> "And my regretful passion ease;
> Restore to me my only good,
> My maidenhood, my maidenhood!"
> She sang: and through the clouded night
> An answer came of cruel might—
> "To thee I never come again."
> O Sappho, bitter was thy pain!
> Then did thy heavy steps retire,
> And leave, moon-bathed, the virgin quire.
> (*Long Ago* xxx)

The theme of virginity and women's creativity, which are both connected to same-sex desire, is further explored in poem xx, as represented by the first and last stanzas:

> I sang to women gathered round;
> Forth from my own heart-springs
> Welled out the passion; of the pain
> I sang if the beloved in vain
> Is sighed for—when
> They stood untouched, as at the sound
> Of unfamiliar things,
> Oh, then my heart turned cold, and then
> I dropt my wings.
>
> Or by the white cliff's cypress mound,
> My music wildly rings;
> I watch the hoar sails on the track
> Of moonlight; they are turning back;

Night falls; and when
By maiden-arms to enwound
Ashore to fisher flings,
Oh, then my heart turns cold, and then
I dropt my wings.
(*Long Ago* xxxv)

It is the circle of girls, a lesbian community, that fires up Sappho's passion and serves as her main source of inspiration. Once Sappho's virginity is lost to Phaon, her poetic talent dries up. Heterosexuality, though often represented as an intense passion throughout the collection, is corrosive to the act of women creating art. In poem xxvi Sappho happily consorts with her "virgin train" in a feminized world of desire, creativity, and nature:

Not Gello's self loves more than I
The virgin train, my company.
No thought of Eros doth appal
Their cheeks; their strong, clear eyes let fall
No tears; they dream their days will be
All laughter, love, serenity
And violet-weaving at my knee—
(*Long Ago* xliii)

Michael Field, through Sappho, locates the longing and desire within Hellenism in constructions of female homoeroticism. A number of poems in *Long Ago* aestheticize and eroticize the female body by celebrating its physicality. Often the emphasis is on images of the breast, which are, in a conventional "male" poetic way, as White proposes, "used repeatedly to represent feminine beauty and desirability" ("One Woman" 76):

Lift, lover, thy long-shadowed eyne!
Why should thy sleepless lids decline,
Thy breast so deeply sigh?
Seek we the shade of yonder pine,
'Neath which the river flows;
There we the sweet flower-test will try
For healing of thy woes.
(*Long Ago* xxxix)

In poem lvii, Tiresias addresses Hera:

Deep-bosomed Queen fain would'st thou hide
The mystic raptures of the bride!
(*Long Ago* lxxviii)

In poem lxiii, Sappho invokes Aphrodite (Cypris) to make Anactoria return her love to her so that her poetic gift will be restored, as shown by the first and last stanzas:

Grow vocal to me, O my shell divine!
I cannot rest;
Not so doth Cypris pine
To raise her love to her undinted breast
When sun first warms the earth, as I require,
To roll the heavy death from my recumbent.

Apollo, Dionysus passes by,
Adonis wakes,
Zephyr and Chloris sigh:
To me, alas, my lyre no music makes,
Though tortured, fluttering toward the stride
Mad as for Anactoria's lovely laugh and sigh.
(*Long Ago* xcix)

In poem xxxv, "Michael Field's" Sappho constructs a higher eros through the erotic gaze of woman (or women) upon woman, producing a female parallel to the heroic ideal of Greek paiderastia. Sappho gazes upon Gorgo, who is admiring a ring on her finger, possibly given to her by a male suitor:

Come, Gorgo, put the rug in place,
And passionate recline;
I love to see thy grace;
Dark, virulent, divine.
But wherefore thus thy proud eyes fix
Upon a jeweled band?
Art thou so glad, the sardonyx
Becomes thy shapely hand?

Bethink thee! 'Tis for such as thou
Zeus leaves his lofty seat;
'Tis at thy beauty's bidding bow
Man's mortal life shall fleet;
Those fair hands—dost thou forget
Their power to thrill and cling?

O foolish woman, dost thou set
Thy pride upon a ring?
(*Long Ago* liii)

Sappho competes with Zeus as well as the ring for Gorgo's love and attention. She then makes a point of reminding her lover of a thrilling sexual encounter they had once had, which underscores Sappho's longing and desire for her own sex.

In poem xxvii, Sappho enjoys an eyeful of Mnasidica for whom she also longs and desires:

But when Mnasidica doth raise
Her arm to feed the lamp I gaze
Glad at thy lovely curve;
And when her pitcher at the spring
She fills, I watch her tresses swerve
And drip, then pause to see her wring
Her hair, and back the bright drops fling.

And now she leaves my maiden train!
Those whom I love most give me pain:
Why should I love her so?
Gyrinna hath a gentle face,
And the harmonious soul, I know,
Not very long can lack the trace,
O Aphrodite, of thy grace.
(*Long Ago* xliv)

Constructions of desire and longing in "Michael Field's" *Long Ago* produce a female transformative power that all but eliminates the common associations of female sexuality with pregnancy and motherhood. Bradley and Cooper thus are free to pursue the reproduction of art in the fashion of the male homosexual aesthetes. Lesbianism becomes, in Gubar's words, "the preferred eroticism" ("Sapphistries" 51) on a par with the privileging of male homosexuality by Pater and Wilde.

Within the context of aesthetic Hellenism, the two women poets in this volume of Sapphic lyrics interpret, imitate, and rewrite Sappho, to help produce themselves as a

poet, as well as produce a place—their poetry—to put their own erotic energy. With *Long Ago*, the male poetic identity "Michael Field" becomes a site of the modern androgynous imagination that combines the ultimate in a feminine poetic consciousness with a masculine other self.

IV. Sapphic Modernism

To place "Michael Field" in the context of female literary communities inspired by the figure of Sappho that flourished in the early twentieth century in France and England, it is essential to attempt to define what contemporary feminist critics call "Sapphic modernism," a strand of literary modernism that is exclusively female centered. [16]

As with aestheticism, there are many strains of modernism. While trying to define modernism and its many terrains, with their often political and social upheavals, is too large a task to attempt here, it is possible to assume that the following ideas are fundamental to canonical modernist thought: an emphasis on individual consciousness rather than the outwardly social, an idea that creating reality is in the art of perceiving it, and an emphasis on "making it new," Ezra Pound's dictum (Canto 53), in art and literature. Generally, the modernist period is understood as beginning with the First World War in 1914, to be marked by the devastation of that event, followed by the development of experimentation and bursting creativity of the nineteen twenties. (That said, given the plethora of artists in literature, art, and architecture that emerged during this time, it is safe to say that modernist projects were born well before 1914). Economic

[16] Essential to understanding the development of Sapphic modernism as a critical discourse are two key articles by Blanche Wiesen Cook: "The Historical Denial of Lesbianism" in *Radical History Review* 20 (1979), pgs. 60-65, and "'Women Alone Stir My Imagination:' Lesbianism and the Cultural Tradition" in *Signs* 4 (1979), pgs. 719-39.

hardship followed in the nineteen thirties, along with the Spanish Civil War, and then there was the catastrophe that was the Second World War. Within this broad scope, prose literature, influenced by the psychology of Freud, exhibited fresh forms, particularly with the exploration of the inner self and stream-of-consciousness, as demonstrated in the novels of Joyce and Woolf. A new poetry also emerged in the 1920s, a time traditionally known as high modernism, culminating with the publication of T.S. Eliot's highly experimental *The Waste Land.*

But modernism was not a monolithic movement. Women were prominent in the development of literary modernism's influential culture, and Sapphic modernism can be thought of as a part of that culture. Paris, the Left Bank especially, was the place where American and English expatriate women gravitated to both participate in and help shape the histories of the modernist experiment. Shari Benstock in *Women of the Left Bank* asserts that "the Left Bank itself . . . assumes both a historical and a literary identity, " and was "transformed in the fiction of such writers as Jean Rhys, Anais Nin, Gertrude Stein, and Djuna Barnes" (ix), or the poet Renee Vivien. London was the preferred city of H.D. and Woolf for creative inspiration.

Generally, all these women writers sought ways to undo masculine constructs of the "virile" modernist aesthetic, and one way was to embrace representations, in Gubar's words, of "the person and poetics of Sappho" ("Sapphistries" 44) in the aesthetic and decadent poetry that emerged at the end of the century. To say again what Gubar notes in "Sapphistries," (which laid the ground for the feminist remapping of modernism with Sapphic modernism), "Sappho's status as a female precursor empowered a number of female modernists to collaborate in exuberant linguistic experiments. Like 'Michael

Fields'(sic) . . . whose volume of Sapphics were entitled *Long Ago* " (44). Gubar thus places "Michael Field," as do I, in the context of female modernist poets—H.D., Renee Vivien, and though not a poet, Woolf--who embraced Sappho, particularly the lesbian Sappho, as a precursor. Sappho is to be understood, as Diana Collecott suggests in *H.D. and Sapphic modernism,* " as an imaginative construct as well as a body of writing" (2).

Arguing for a female literary history beginning with Sappho whom female modernist writers "could create in their own image" (47), Gubar claims:

> Sappho . . . represents all the lost women of genius in literary history, especially all the lesbian artists whose work has been destroyed, sanitized, or heterosexualized . . . Antithetically, the effort to recover Sappho illustrates how twentieth century women poets try to solve the problem of poetic isolation and imputed inferiority . . . Sappho is a very special precursor. ("Sapphistries" 46)

". . . 'Sapphic' modernism has emerged as a term for manifestations (however obscure or disruptive) that privileges the *Sapphic*," asserts Collecott, "This word has multiple meanings embracing aesthetics and intersubjectivity as well as sexual practice, with all that these involve for women in patriarchal culture" (4). Adrienne Rich's concept of the "lesbian continuum," mentioned in the last chapter, is useful in elaborating on the Sapphic, as it includes a broad spectrum of relationships between women, such as those involving subjects about which Sappho wrote—mother-daughter relationships, female friendships, and female erotic connections.

Sapphic modernism, more generally, can be theorized as a modern women's literary movement in which the female imagination, as Benstock notes in "Expatriate Sapphic Modernism: Entering Literary History," is "fueled by Sapphic erotic power" (183). Collecott points out that Benstock's essay "partly owes its understanding of the *Sapphic* to a black poet's understanding of the *erotic*" (*Sapphic modernism* 4). Audre

Lorde's theory of the erotic, outlined in her essay "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," is useful in understanding multiple meanings of the erotic that have wide implications for women. According to Lorde, the erotic (or female sexual desire) is an independent source of power within women, which, historically driven into exile by political and social forces, must be welcomed since it is the route to selfhood, joy, and creativity:

> There are many kinds of power, used and unused, acknowledged or otherwise. The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling. In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can find energy for change. For women this has meant a suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information within our lives. (*Sister Outsider* 53)
>
> The erotic functions for me in several ways, and the first is in providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. (56)

Indeed Bradley and Cooper, from the invention of the dandy-androgyne, "Michael Field," to the production of *Long Ago* and other works, to their radical (for two women) aesthetic lifestyle, attempted to exercise this construction of the erotic to their own ends even though their quest for self-affirmation was met with much opposition from the male dominant culture. "Of course, women so empowered are dangerous," writes Lorde (55).

The erotic, which is highly sensual if not sexual, as defined by Lorde, has been reformulated in Sapphic modernism as "Sapphic erotic power." This power is dependent on the bond of sexual desire and writing between women—the "physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest" within them. This power manifests itself in the idea of the female imagination being aroused by the eroticism between partners in female same-sex relationships as well as in the idea of

Sappho as a literary precursor for women poets and writers. Through Sappho, these women poets, including "Michael Field," "offer divergent interpretations of what lesbianism means as an imaginative force," as Gubar proposes--their relationship with Sappho involves "fantastic collaborations" that are related to "the eroticized female relationships that quite literally empowered them to write" (47). Sapphic modernism, then, is a feminist move to confront canonical modernism as a conceptual category while at the same time to embrace the new and experimental elements, theories, and themes characteristic of the prevailing male modernism. With the figure of Sappho positioned as a literary foremother, the significance of women's friendships, women's communities, the emphasis on the female body, and the ways in which female desire is encoded in texts become crucial to the evolution of the woman artist at this historical moment. As Benstock claims, Sapphic modernism "seeks to discover the relations among gender, sexual orientation, and creativity" ("Expatriate" 185).

According to Cassandra Laity in "H.D. and A.C. Swinburne: Decadence and Sapphic Modernism," Swinburne, with his emphasis on bisexuality as the preferred condition for the artistic temper, was just as important to some women modernists, particularly H.D. and Renee Vivien, as Sappho.[17] Rejecting the tradition of nineteenth century women poets, these women modernists

> 'used' the Decadents to fashion a feminist poetics of desire. While Yeats, Eliot, and Pound found Swinburne's experimental articulations of desire 'perverse,' several women modernists . . . discovered in Swinburne's more fluid explorations of sexuality and gender roles a radical alternative to the modernist poetics of male desire, which, as Shari Benstock and others have noted, silenced and effaced the

[17] H.D. (and Woolf) may be viewed as literary artists of what may be called British Sapphic modernism while Vivien a literary artist of French Sapphic modernism both of which, it can be argued, influenced each other.

twentieth century woman writer.[18] ("H.D." 218)

While male modernists such as Pound, Yeats, and Eliot feared the male dandies of the 1890s—Swinburne, Pater, and Wilde, among others—because of their perceived "effeminacy" in both their person and work, H.D. and Vivien saw themselves as inheritors of this tradition, transforming it into a female poetic tradition that embraced a late Victorian-Romantic influence that male modernists shunned.[19] "Michael Field" was a part of this dandy-artistic heritage since--intertwined with their invention of a dandy persona--their life and work was inflected by the decadence though they were more aesthetes than decadents, as those two terms tend to blur as the nineteenth century wore on. In a way, they could be viewed as kind of "effeminate" men-- they were two women living among mostly homosexual men sharing their passions and interests. But writing at the same time as Swinburne, Bradley and Cooper did not have the historical distance, as did Vivien and H.D., required to mythologize him. Swinburne was a contemporary of the two women poets (they sometimes published in the same publications) about whom in their diaries they made casual comments, and they rejected some of Swinburne's more otre language as Andre Raffalovich recognized in 1884 when he wrote in a letter that their work had, "inner fervour and originality of the form, the passion of which does not bubble over to Swinburnian ecstasy. [20]

Ironically, "Michael Field" seems closer to the "virile" male modernists in the rejection of Swinburne's sadomasochistic Sappho. However, doing so, in another ironic

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[18] Laity suggests we see Shari Benstock's *Women of the Left Bank*, Marianne DeKoven's *A Different Language: Gertrude Stein's Experimental Language*, and Taffy Martin's *Marianne Moore: Subversive Modernist* for an exploration of "how modernist women writers disrupt the patriarchal constructs of the high modernist aesthetic" (*Lesbian Texts and Contexts* 236).

[19] See Cassandra Laity's "H.D. and A.C. Swinburne: Decadence and Sapphic Modernism" for a detailed account of Swinburne's influence on H.D., particularly the tracing of Swinburnian tropes in H.D.'s sapphic novel, *Her*.

[20] This letter is held in the British Library under the title "Michael Field Manuscripts "Add. 45851, vol. 1.

twist, the two women poets sought to fashion a necessary and high feminine standard, a powerful "feminist poetics of desire." Bradley and Cooper were the first women to write a daring version of Sappho using the feminine pronoun, suggesting a initiatory moment for Sapphic modernism. After them, the figure of Sappho, as for H.D. and Vivien, could be central. "H.D. saw herself both as a writer in Sappho's tradition and as a Sapphic writer," asserts Rachell Blau DuPlessis in *H.D. the Career of that Struggle* (24). The same can be said for Vivien except that, in Gubar's words, "her recovery of Sappho results in a decadent aesthetic" ("Sapphistries" 47). Yet all three—"Michael Field," H.D., and Vivien-- have in common the holding out of "the promise of excavating a long-lost ecstatic lyricism that inscribes female desire as the ancient source of song" (47).

DuPlessis designates H.D.'s "Sappho poems" as "'coming out' texts in which H.D. allows herself to name the lesbian aspect of her sexuality" (24).[21] ("'I sing and I sing beautifully like this, in order to please my friends—my girlfriends,'" says H.D.'s Sappho in "The Wise Sappho").[22] "Fragment Forty-One" is a good example of this theme.

In this poem of a lover's betrayal, the speaker is in dialogue with Aphrodite in which she admonishes herself for veering off the road that leads to the goddess' altar:

1
. . . *thou flittest to Andromeda.*—Sappho.

Am I blind alas,
am I blind?
I too have followed
her path.
I too have bent at her feet.
I too have wakened to pluck

[21] These poems are "Fragment 113," "Fragment 36," "Fragment 40," "Fragment 41," "Fragment 68," and "Calliope." See *H.D. The Career of That Struggle*, 24.
[22] *Notes on Thought and Vision*, 62.

amaranth in the straight shaft,
amaranth purple in the cup,
scorched at the edge to white.

2
. . . O my lover,
shameless, and still radiant,
I tell you this:

I was not asleep,
I did not lie asleep on those hot rocks
while you waited.

3
I offer more than the lad
singing at your steps,
praise of himself,
his mirror his friend's face,
more than any girl,
I offer you this:
(grant only strength
that I withdraw not my gift,)
the love of my lover
for his mistress.
(From "Fragment Forty-one" in *Collected* 181-4)

The poem's seemingly heterosexual ending has prompted Gubar to suggest that "H.D. is strikingly reticent about the homosexual content of Sappho's verse" ("Sapphistires" 53). However, Collecott in uncovering the textual transmission of the poem has discovered that the original draft reads " '*her* mistress' instead of '*his* mistress' in what are now the poem's final lines,"[23] indicating that, in her words, the "original version of the poem was homosexual " (21). Given Sappho's well-known poem, "Ode to Aphrodite," invocation to Aphrodite is a common theme in Sapphic poetry, including Michael Field's.

[23] The emphasis is Collecott's. See *H.D. and Sapphic Modernism*, pg. 21.

H.D. was familiar with "Michael Field's" work, having known about "her" ("them") from Wharton's *Sappho*, and Sturgeon's 1922 biography, *Michael Field.*[24] "Fragment Forty-one's" epigraph referencing "Andromeda" involves an intertextuality with "Michael Field's" "XLVI, " the first line of which is "'Fool faint not thou!' I laughed in blame" (*Long Ago* lxv-lxvi). In Sappho's writings, Andromeda, as Jane Snyder in *Lesbian Desire in the Lyrics of Sappho* asserts, "is but one of many names associated with *eros* in her songs " (142). In H.D.'s fragment, the epigraph, ". . . *thou flittest to Andromeda*," suggests, as Collecott claims, "that the speaker is a woman caught in an erotic triangle with two other women" (21). The final stanza, though, suggests a variation on the theme of the triangle, in Collecott's words, "an erotic triangle of two women and one man" (21). Either way, the poem produces an obvious female homoeroticism. In "Michael Field's" intensely female homoerotic poem, Sappho speaks of her brother Larichus' impending wedding in the same breath that she swoons ("I feel my senses swoon/ Or quicken with delight") over the beauty of her natural surroundings ("Unmoved I cannot pass/The fine bloom of the grass"). But it is hearing the laugh of the bride while the speaker is standing in the grove that causes her to feel the most passion:

> "Faint not," I said—and yet my breath
> Comes sharp as I were nigh to death
> If suddenly across the grove
> The lovely laugh I hear
> Or catch the lovely speech
> Of one who makes a peer
> Of the blest gods above
> The man she deigns to love.
> (*Long Ago* lxv)

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[24] See Collecott, 297n15. "Ah for Adonis" is the Michael Field poem cited in Wharton, pg. 110. Also, Collecott makes the case that the relationship between H.D. and Winifred Bryher, as expressed in a photomontage created by Kenneth Macpherson, is "a modernist version of the coupling between Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper," pg. 179.

Sappho in this poem then starts to name all of her female lovers—Anactoria, Atthis, Andromeda, and Rhodope—and their betrayal of her that causes her to feel "jealous passion" burning inside of her:

> O Anactoria, wast thou born to teach
> Sappho how vainly she admonisheth?
>
> Though Atthis, hateful, flit
> From my fond arms, and by
> Andromeda dare sit,
>
> "Faint not," I said. Woud'st thou be great,
> Thou must with every shock vibrate
> That life can bring thee; seek and yearn;
> Feel in thyself the stroke
> Of love, although it rive
> As mountain-wind an oak;
> Let jealous passion burn
> If Rhodope must turn
> To other love; and laugh that age should strive
> The ardours of thy bosom to abate.
> (*Long Ago* xlvi)

The textual strategy of deploying younger women as objects of the speaking subject's--Sappho's--burning desire suggests once again the theme of spiritual procreancy for women. The elder Sappho's love for her girls does not diminish with age, rather it seems to heat up. "Michael Field" thus produce an Aeolian counterpart, exclusively female, to the Dorian, exclusively male, best described by Symonds when he associates pedastry with combat: "To be loved was honorable, for it implied being worthy to be died for. To love was glorious, since it pledged the lover to self-sacrifice in case of need. In these conditions the paideristic passion may have well combined manly virtue with carnal appetite" (*Male Love* 17). While fighting a ground war is foreign to women, the erotic intensity experienced by these Dorian male relationships in which love is associated with honor, virtue, and nobility, is not. The Aeolian female relationships produced in Sapphic

modern poetry inspired by, or in the form of, a creative dialogue with Sappho are similarly erotically charged. Such are the nature of these relationships in H.D.'s reworking of the Sapphic fragments, though there is no reference to age, as in "Michael Field's." For "Michael Field," it is the poet who will conquer all ("Faint not"—the poet must dare all; Me no experience shall appal/ No pang that can make shrill my song"—poem xlvi), suggesting that the sapphic—the erotic exchange between women of art and bodies, the textual and sexual--is responsible for the production of unmitigated passion, and by extension, pleasure, a heightened experience aestheticized and eroticized in the poem. In H.D.'s poem, the poet is self-flagellating; pain and suffering, a very beautifully articulated pain and suffering, are the dominant themes.

Renee Vivien was born eleven years earlier than H.D. in 1877, and fifteen years later than Cooper, yet she is still almost in the same generation as Bradley. She is an important figure to Sapphic modernism in that she was also greatly influenced by Wharton's translation of Sappho:

> on a trip to London at the turn of the century Natalie Clifford Barney came across the volume . . . The very nature of that edition, its open expression of female homosexual passion tempered by a biographical sketch compatible with a chastity defense, can help explain the passion with which her longtime companion and fellow Sapphic poet, Renee Vivien, sought to rewrite the presentation of Sappho's life. (DeJean *Fictions* 249)

Writing mostly in French, the Anglo-American expatriate, who learned Greek to be able to translate Sappho from the original, produced a daring Sappho narrative[25] that emphasized her lesbianism more than prior translations—"Vivien self-consciously dramatized her efforts to regain Sappho's erotic language specifically for lesbians," notes Gubar ("Sapphistires" 47). While staking her claim to a female literary tradition

[25] In 1903, Vivien published *Sapho* in French.

beginning with Sappho and a recreation of Mytilene, Vivien also embraced the morbid Sappho of the decadent poets, developing an attraction to, as Benstock puts it, "the decadent alliance of homosexuality and evil" (*Left Bank* 285). Though influenced by Baudelaire in particular (as well as Swinburne), her Sapphic verse is not all disease, decay, and despair, "but rather imagine," as Benstock proposes, "a world of female freedom in which lesbian love is cut free of the morbidity implicit in the Symbolist model . . . Vivien's poetry imagines a refuge for lesbianism outside the patriarchal construct, establishes a female literary tradition, and redefines the female body" (285-6). "Michael Field" did something similar in her (their) interpretation of Wharton in *Long Ago* and other work, but in a more subtle way than Vivien does.

Stanzas from the following poem "Sappho Lives Again" represent Vivien's image of a lesbian Sappho and the beautiful Island of Lesbos populated by virgins:

> Sappho garlanded her face with august violets
> And celebrated Eros who swept down like a wind
> On the oaks . . . Atthis heard it while dreaming
> And the roses opened their warm, moist scent boxes.
>
> The shore glisten, blond with the weight of the sun. . .
> The virgins instruct beautiful strangers
> How the shade is auspicious to light their caresses,
> And the sky and the sea unfold their scenery.
>
> Certain among us have conserved the rites
> Of shining Lesbos golden as an altar
>
> Our bodies are for their bodies a reflecting mirror.
> Our companions, with breasts like spring snow,
> Know in what strange and suave manner
> Sappho once bent Atthis to her desire.
>
> Sappho lives again and reigns in our quivering bodies;
> Like her we have heard the siren,
> Like her, we have serene souls,
> We who do not heed the insults of passerby.

(*At the Sweet Hour of Hand in Hand* 2-4)

Vivien's collaboration with Sappho fills her with erotic poetic power. "Vivien sees herself, " as Karla Jay notes in *The Amazon and the Page*, "more of an heir of the Sapphic tradition because she has preserved the rites established by Sappho" (66). The theme of virginity suggests a sexual and creative purity that is attained by avoiding contact with men and confronting contact with women. The emphasis on sameness, overtly homosexual, is the route to joy, beauty, and creativity. As Jay suggests, Vivien's "fascination with Sappho" led her to create some of her best work, the work most devoid of self-pity and morbidity" (66)—though these decadent themes are apparent in her work.

Vivien's contradictory poetic styles play out in her life as well. She was a part of a Sapphic circle in Paris that included long time lover, Natalie Barney, a fellow author of much lesser quality than Vivien. She was determined "to live a beautiful life, to make life itself a work of art " (Benstock *Left Bank* 286). This is reminiscent of Bradley's and Cooper's creation of "Michael Field" as a dandy persona as a move to merge art and life. Vivien, too, sought to make her life a work of art, but the outcome was tragic, as she internalized the decadent or "satanic Sappho," in Gubar's words, "living shrouded in the scented darkness of fin-de-siecle decadence, wasting away in a twilight of anorexic self-incarceration" [26] ("Sapphistries" 49) only to starve herself to death at the age of thirty. Before her descent into darkness, Vivien established an "aesthetic" home in Paris that exhibited the perfection, exactness, and exquisiteness of Bradley's and Cooper's homes in England. Considering herself an aesthete influenced by Baudelaire, Vivien, according to a contemporary, "lived in a luxurious first-floor apartment which opened on a Japanese garden bordering the avenue" (introduction to *Muse* 7). She was ritualistic and dandy-

[26] Colette, *The Pure and the Impure*, trans. Herma Briffault (1932; reprint ed., London: Penguin, 1971), 36.

like, "wearing an empress's kimono and carrying a sheaf of roses in her arms," which she offered to her visitor as a "way of greeting" (9). The poet's birth name was Pauline Mary Tarn. The changing of her name to Renee Vivien suggests a self-inventive gesture reminiscent of the French dandies as well as Bradley's and Cooper's creation of Michael Field. Her decorative, highly-stylized, and dramatic home displayed heavy black velvet drapes, furniture from the Far East, glassware from Ceylon, Buddhas, incense, stained glass windows, and tons of flowers. She rejected Christianity choosing instead to live as a pagan, as did Bradley and Cooper in their earlier years, in pursuit of pleasure. There was a shrine to Sappho where she offered incense and flowers.[27] Like Bradley and Cooper, she was a great admirer of the actress Sarah Bernhardt, and greatly admired as a poet in her own day.

In Virginia Woolf's short story, "A Society," an early work and a satirical feminist tale, a group of intellectual women, reminiscent of Sappho's circle of women on the Isle of Lesbos, in modern terms,"A Society of Outsiders," gather together to question the prevailing patriarchal attitude that women's duty is to bear and bring up children while men's is to produce culture and civilize the planet. One woman, Castilia, has visited Oxbridge to examine a large edition of the works of Sappho by Professor Hobkin in which he profusely defends her chastity, which has been refuted by a German professor. The women discuss the male viewpoint. Eleonor reads aloud to them from "a weekly newspaper:" "Since Sappho there has been no female of first rate " ("A Society" 127). This reflected Woolf's public argument with Desmond McCarthy who, as "Affable Hawk," wrote in a newspaper article that women were inferior to men intellectually and

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[27] For a vivid description of Vivien's home and person, see the introduction to Vivien's collection *The Muse of the Violets*, 7-20.

creatively. Woolf contended in a letter of rebuttal that since the time of Sappho, women have not had the necessary social, cultural, and economic conditions conducive to the fostering of the intellect or creativity:

> if Affable Hawk sincerely wishes to discover a great poetess, why does he let himself be fobbed of with a possible authoress of the Odyssey? Naturally I cannot claim to know Greek as Mr.Bennett and Affable Hawk know it, but I have often been told that Sappho was a woman, and that Plato and Aristotle placed her with Homer and Archilochus among the greatest of their poets. That Mr. Bennett can name fifty of the male sex who are indisputably her superiors is therefore a welcome surprise, and if he will publish their names I will promise, as an act of submission which is so dear to my sex, not only to buy their works but, so far as my facilities allow, to learn them by heart. (cited in Reynolds *History* 232)

Not knowing Greek was always a sore spot for Woolf;[28] unlike Bradley, she was not able to be one of the increasing number of women who attended university to learn Greek.

In "A Society" (and *The Voyage Out*), Sappho, as Jane Marcus asserts, "is the woman reader's heroine," (*Languages* 88), and by extension, I would argue, the female author's heroine. Moreover, Woolf in "A Society," as Marcus proposes, "made the most radical assertion of the idea that the production of culture and the reproduction of children were incompatible" (76). This is an idea familiar to "Michael Field" since she (they) sought to be a part of an elite male homosexual world in which human reproduction, viewed as the lot of women, was thought of as not only physically revolting, but the antithesis to artistic production. Sappho's enchanting world of Lesbos centers on women, not children—the two not necessarily intertwined--virginity is privileged (though it has been argued that Sappho had a daughter). Further, Woolf's short story did not escape public calumny. "A Society," as Marcus notes, "was published in *Monday or Tuesday* in 1921 and never reprinted because of the hostility of male critics"

[28] See Woolf's essay "On Not Knowing Greek" in *The Common Reader*, 23-39.

(78). Similarly, the male literary establishment tried to discourage the work of Bradley and Cooper despite their use of a male pseudonym though the two women poets never deliberately suppressed their own work.

Woolf, indeed, like "Michael Field," viewed Sappho as her precursor, a literary foremother. The construct and writings of Sappho were a part of her personal consciousness, and she associated the name of Sappho with female homoerotic desire. As Reynolds claims, "Woolf re-invented 'Sappho' as a muse, as a poet, as an icon, as a feminist, and as a friend and lover of women" (*History* 231). Woolf used the word "sapphist" to suggest lesbianism, linking creativity with sexuality for women, including herself. She connected sapphism to two women in particular—Vita Sackville West and Jane Harrison. Vita was a friend and lover, the subject of Woolf's grand "love letter," *Orlando*, which can be read as a counter feminist discourse within the greater modernist project, a shining example of Sapphic modernism. When referring to Vita, Woolf often used the term "sapphist:" "These Sapphists love women; friendship is never untinged with amorosity." [29] Through her perception of Vita and her own inventiveness, Woolf thus formulated a model of creativity through which she lived out her own sapphic fantasy in *Orlando*.

Woolf's interest in Jane Harrison, a classics scholar and contemporary of Bradley's though there is no indication that they knew each other, focuses on Harrison's astounding knowledge of Greek, which led her to teach classics at Cambridge, as well as the ways in which she redefined the role of women in a family setting and challenged dominant meanings of gender. Harrison, as Prins notes, "resolutely refusing to become 'Aunt,' chose the communal life of a women's college where she cultivated passionate

[29] *The Diary of Virginia Woolf,* Vol. III, 51-2.

friendships with colleagues and students" ("Greek Maenads" 47). One passionate friendship that interested Woolf was Harrison's friendship with Hope Mirrless, a favored student with whom Harrison lived. In addition to publishing Harrison's *Reminiscences of a Student's Life* at Hogarth Press, Woolf reviewed Mirrlees' *Madeleine: One of Love's Jansenists* for the *Times Literary Supplement*. Woolf in a letter to Clive Bell commented, " It's all sapphism so far as I've got—Jane and herself."[30]

For these modernist women writers, beginning with "Michael Field," the idea of Sappho, her fragments, and her island, represented longing and desire within the context of female friendships that Pater recognized in Victorian Hellenism for male relationships. These female relationships produced literary and intellectual works that depended on the erotic exchange between partners, which represented a political tactic as well as a speaking of a sexuality. H.D., Vivien, and Woolf, each in their own way, often placed emotional and erotic bonds between women at the center of their work. H.D. and Vivien overtly rejected the Ovidian interpretation of Sappho while "Michael Field" rewrote it to suggest that phallic romance kills women's poetic power. It is, as Sapphic modernism asserts, the collaboration between women that began with a reclamation of Sappho as a precursor that enabled these women, through writing, to rupture the universalizing male experience in life and art. This produced a modernist poetics of female desire that is prevalent in the work of "Michael Field," placing Bradley and Cooper more in a modernist context than previously thought:

> Maids, not to you my mind doth change;
> Men I defy, allure, estrange,
> Prostrate, make bond or free:
> Soft as the stream beneath the plane
> To you I sing my love's refrain:

[30] Letter dated September 24, 1919 in *The Letters of Virginia Woolf,* Vol. II, 391.

Between us is no thought of pain,
Peril, satiety.
(poem xxxlll in *Long Ago* l)

Afterword: Tragedy and Conversion

In this book I have located the larger cultural forces that coincide in time with a biographical situation and personal desires the make the persona of "Michael Field" possible. "He" can be thought of as a configuration of significations of verbal and aural signs, the visual being much more complicated, that is dispersed in communities and constitute Bradley's and Cooper's recognition value of their work and lives. This historical overview has presented the invention of "Michael Field" as a signifier for an aesthete dandy "gay" male persona, articulated as a dandy-androgyne, for two women poets, Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper, aunt and niece literary collaborators with a possible lesbian connection. While this project has focused mostly on "Michael Field's" aesthetic period and poetry, Bradley and Cooper were also prolific playwrights, with an output of twenty-seven plays and a masque. They wrote a body of religious poetry after their conversion to Catholicism in 1907. A brief examination of selections from these works, especially the plays, will reveal an overtly feminist, if not lesbian consciousness—"the high female standard of the ought to be"--as well as anticipate the coming of a new era connecting to the whole project of "Michael Field."

I. The Plays

With the invention of "Michael Field," Bradley and Cooper set out on a radical mission, taking what is the equivalent of marriage vows in the spirit of love and art, and made their way into literature with the writing of plays.[1] "Michael Field" write against the cultural grain of strict Victorian gender codes in their plays, which are mostly

[1] Apparently Bradley and Cooper talked about the characters in their plays as if they were real people. "The persons of their dramas were like living beings of whom they would talk by the hour, whose opinions they would quote or surmise as if they were shall we say Mary Berenson or Robert Browning," writes Charles Ricketts in *Michael Field*, 5.

tragedies that are ancient, European, or English in spirit. Sturgeon divides "Michael Field's" plays into three groups—"her English, Latin, and Eastern periods" (*Michael* 118). While historical in character, the plays contain, as David J. Moriarity notes in his article on "Michael Field's" plays, "a contemporary feminist message" (123). [2]Populated with rebellious, radical, and strong female characters, sympathetic femme fatales, a humanized tragic queen, and female lovers, to name a few; these tragedies are more political in tone than the poetry.

"Michael Field's" career as playwrights began with the publication of *Callirrhoe* in 1884, a story of a maiden and a Dionysian priest who calls down a curse on her city when she refuses to return his love. The play, which was met with wide critical acclaim, evokes a Nietzchian quality, the conflict between the Apollonian rational and Dionysian irrational, with the two women poets finding, as Moriarity asserts in " 'Michael Field' (Edith Cooper and Katherine Bradley) and Their Male Critics," "a precise metaphor for their mission as tragic poets in the mad priestesses, the Maenads, who officiated at the Dionysian rites" (123).

The writing of the plays, as with most of "Michael Field's" work, coincides with the crisis in gender identification that emerged at the end of the century, which gave rise to, in Bram Dijkstra's words, "a cultural war on women." In Dijkstra's book on representations of women in the visual arts during the latter half of the nineteenth century, *Idols of Perversity*, he "tries to pull many strands together in order to show that virulent misogyny infected all the arts to an extent understood by very few specialists in the cultural history of the turn of the century" (viii). The femme fatale is one example of this misogyny, and perhaps Oscar Wilde's Salome—a figure of female sexuality for male

artists for years--in the play of the same name, her most well-known incarnation, becoming "a household word for pernicious sexual perversity" (Dijkstra 396). Marcus reads the heroine as "a scapegoat" "for a decadent patriarchal world" (*Languages* 43). Taking a different approach, Showalter reads *Salome* "in the contemporary sense of a heterosexual play by a homosexual writer that has a gay sexual subtext" (*Sexual* 150). Whatever the case, the Salome theme is one of temptation: the struggle between bestial, hungry, and base woman and ideal, intellectual, and rational man, who falls because he cannot resist the femme fatale's wily sexuality.

The icon of the femme fatale is important to "Michael Field," as "she" (they) invest her with new meaning in "her" (their) dramas. *Fair Rosamund* (1884) features two women, Elinor of Aquitaine, wife of King Henry Plantagenet, and his mistress, Rosamund, a femme fatale figure, who vie for his attention. Rosamund, though, is "treated with sympathy by the women " (Moriarity "Michael" 136 f6). The king informs Elinor of his love for Rosamund, and Elinor then plans to kill her. Meanwhile, Rosamund decides to bid the king farewell rather than further disrupt his marriage, hardly the action expected of a temptress. A later work, *Stephania, a Trialogue* (1892) not only was "one of the first examples of a *genuine* symbolist drama produced in England" (Moriarity 125)--symbolism is considered an early modern movement--but once again the heroine is a sympathetic femme fatale figure. "The point of the play is to expose the reality that the symbolic role of the temptress is not congenial to women," Moriarity notes, "Indeed as Stephania observes, it can be a rather tedious burden:"

> O God, how tedious is the harlot's part,
> The mimic vanity, the mimic rage,
> The waiting upon appetite! I loathe
> My gems, my unguents, all the fragrent lights

I scatter on my hair. To dress for him
To garnish infamy, to give one's face
The vermeil of a flower! I have such need
Of rest, to lay the cerecloth over him!
A lethargy falls on me like hell
Pressed inward—ah, I have such need of sleep,
The Change, the peace! (*Stephania*, p. 91)[3]

This passage suggests that the category of the seductive woman is a male construction imposed upon women to fulfill a male fantasy.

Mary Stuart is an historical figure whom many nineteenth century dramatists depicted as a femme fatale, portraying, as Vickie L. Taft proposes in "*The Tragic Mary*: A Case Study in Michael Field's Understanding of Sexual Politics," "the Queen as possessing one characteristic that created or resolved much of the tension in her life: an almost magical ability to inspire men to risk their lives in pursuit of her love and favor" (266). "Michael Field's" play, *The Tragic Mary* (1890) [4] (the title is borrowed from Walter Pater), however, depicts Mary Stuart more compassionately, drawing the Queen, as Moriarity asserts, "with a sympathy that humanizes the character, stripping away the symbolic overtones of the *femme fatale* image and allowing the reader to examine Mary as a queen held captive " (125). Taft suggests homoerotic overtones in "Michael Field's" play, arguing that the Queen is attractive to women as well as men. "Michael Field . . . makes the enduring and noble nature of female same-sex desire as a focal point of the thematic development of *The Tragic Mary*" ("*The Tragic Mary*" 268). The Queen's women in waiting, Mary Seton, Mary Livingstone, and Mary Fleming—the three Maries of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*—, unlike the men in Mary Stuart's life who

[3] Cited in David Moriarity's " 'Michael Field' (Edith Cooper and Katherine Bradley) and Their Male Critics", 127.
[4] This is the play that won Bradley and Cooper the admiration and friendship of Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon. See the introduction to Ricketts' *Michael Field*, iii.

seek political power, "desire to possess only the Queen's love, companionship and erotic attentions" (272). Bradley's and Cooper's unique representation of the Queen earned them the admiration of Oscar Wilde, who wrote in a letter dated August 13th, 1890: "Your Queen is a splendid creature, a live woman to her finger-tips. I feel the warmth of her breath as I listen to her. She is closer to flesh and blood than the Mary of Swinburne's *Bothwel l*" (*The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde* 449-450).

Canute the Great (1887), a drama about the Norseman's conflict with Edmund Ironsides, is female centered with a homoerotic theme. The play is "most notable for a rather explicit love scene between two women " (Moriarity 124). As Canute wishes to erase his past, Edith wants to escape the misogynistic domination of her husband, Edric. She tries to kill him, unsuccessfully, then starts to falter mentally. Saved from madness by Elgiva, Edith falls in love with Elgiva and vice versa.

In addition to depicting alternative models of love and sexuality, "Michael Field" in the dramas treat the themes of the oppression of marriage and a woman's right to independence. *Attila, My Attila* (1896) features a New Woman figure, Honoria,[5] and is set "during the decadence of the Holy Roman Empire" and Byzantium, which, according to Moriarity "was associated in *fin de siecle* mythology with the corrupt aristocratic order of the nineteenth century " (128). To escape the confines of her class, the patrician born Honoria forms an illicit liaison with a household slave, and becomes pregnant. After the child is discarded and the slave is banished to the salt mines by her angry traditionally minded family, Honoria is sent to live in Byzantium with relatives, who hold her captive. Meanwhile, Honoria dreams of escaping, "fantasizing that Attila, a Third World force,

[5] Sarah Bernhardt, whom both Bradley and Cooper greatly admired as an artist, was the model for Honoria. "Honoria was conceived with Sarah Bernhardt before us all the while" (Field *Works* 97).

will liberate her" (Moriarity 128). To prevent her from escaping, the family calls the slave from the salt mines to marry her, but as fate would have it, he has been murdered by a young woman who was forced to marry him.

Though the liberation of Honoria is unsuccessful, her struggle is in keeping with "one theme of the *fin de siecle* that consistently appears in the women's work, the call for the destruction of the old, restrictive, patriarchal ordering of society" (Moriarity 139 f25). This reordering of society, for "Michael Field," demands a reconsideration of women's place within that society. An earlier play, *The Father's Tragedy* (1885), a story about a contentious relationship between father and son, "calls for an end to patriarchal tyranny and for mutual love and understanding between the generations" (Moriarity 124). *Brutus Ultor* (1886) depicts "the struggle between the noble Brutus, champion of freedom and 'the outraged Earth,' and the evil Sextus, the aptly named tyrannical and misogynistic rapist of the piece " (Moriarity 124). The irony is that the conflict between these two quite "manly" men in the play coincides with "a discussion of the role of women in the revolutionary process as the idea of women's fulfillment in motherhood is challenged in favor of women's active participation in the overthrow of tyrannous convention" (Moriarity 124). In both plays, the two women poets cleverly use patriarchal themes as a vehicle for political agendas that attack gender hierarchies detrimental to women's growth, choices, and freedom, calling for a complete overthrow of the prevailing order.

A Question of Memory (1893), a work of a different order, was the only play of "Michael Field's" to be performed publicly at J. T. Grein's Independent Theater. The event was a highlight of the two women poets' lives. While the play thematically reflects "Michael Field's" other dramas—the ending is rather daring as one woman and two men

decide to live together—the play differs stylistically. Ibsenesque rather than ancient or Elizabethan, the play exhibits common prose, realism, a contemporary setting and everyday characters. The play is more modern than the others--except perhaps for *Attila, My Attila* with Honoria depicted as a modern woman—especially with regard to language, anticipating the stream-of-consciousness prose of Woolf and Joyce. This type of dialogue seemed disconcerting to critics, particularly William Archer, a *Times* critic, who expressed his reservations about the play in the following review:

> The authors. . . write a curious short-winded prose. . . .
> . . . In the first, second, and fourth acts there is scarcely a single natural sequence of thought, feeling, and expression. The dialogue is always flying off at unexpected tangents, and trying to obtain subtlety by means of incoherence. The authors have observed, quite justly, that feeling *is* incoherent—or rather, that consciousness is like a swirling stream, in which the unexpected and apparently irrelevant objects are always floating to the surface for a moment and then disappearing again, in obedience to laws which we can not formulate. . . Dialogue. . . is not the dialogue of life, but a world evolved from the playwright's inner consciousness. [6]

Little did Archer realize that "Michael Field" with *A Question of Memory* was at the forefront of an exciting, new, and revolutionary literary movement that would emerge in the twentieth century, making Bradley and Cooper artists who were way ahead of their time.

II. The Religious Poetry

With the conversion of Bradley and Cooper to Catholicism came the publication of two volumes of religious poetry, *Poems of Adoration* in 1912, and *Mystic Trees* in 1913. Though the two volumes bear the name "Michael Field," *Poems of Adoration* is mostly Cooper's work with the exception of two poems, and *Mystic Trees* mostly Bradley's work again with the exception of two poems. Cooper's volume was published

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[6] Cited in Moriarity, 127.

two months before her death while she was suffering from the ravages of cancer. She had refused to take morphine for pain relief so her mind would remain clear and she could keep on working—" Miss Cooper, though very weak, sat day after day—writing and writing" (Sturgeon *Michael* 56).

The trajectory of their conversion to Catholicism began with the death of their beloved dog, Whym Chow (though Cooper had shown an attraction to Catholicism years earlier).[7] Frederick Roden in his chapter on "Michael Field" in *Same-Sex Desire in Victorian Religious Culture* calls "Michael Field's" rather unique brand of Catholicism, "canine Catholicism" (190). After the dog's death, this devotion takes on a new note of religious fervor, suggesting, as Roden asserts, the "love of Whym Chow led Michael Field to Catholicism" (195). Even Bradley herself before the dog's death had written, perceptively, "I suppose our new love of animals is a desire to get into another kingdom." Just before the dog was put down, the two women poets received a letter from Ricketts saying how "he was sick of their 'morbid preoccupation' with the petty illness of their spoiled pet. 'Well may he be jealous,' Edith raged; 'Michael and I love Chow as we have loved no human being'" (Donoghue *We* 122). They certainly loved their pet enough to dedicate a volume of poetry to him, titled *Whym Chow: Flame of Love* in which the dog is depicted, as Leighton observes, not as " a friend of man," but as "a fierce-souled Bacchus of inspiration, power and unfettered lust" (*Victorian* 221).

The three of them form a trinity, as the poem titled "The Trinity" suggests:

I did not love him for myself alone:
I loved him that he loved my dearest love.

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[7] Cooper seemed to be attracted to the pagan elements in Catholicism. She wrote in her diary in 1906: "The Bacchic Joy of Benediction was shed on me years and years ago at the Oratory—though rarely going to it, I have loved its flame-lit gratitude" (*Works and Days*, p. 272). Also, Edith's sister Amy married Dr. John Ryan, a Catholic, and entered the Church in 1907. This might have played a part in Edith's conversion.

O God, no blasphemy
It is to feel we loved in trinity,
To tell Thee that I loved him as Thy Dove
Is loved, and is Thy own,
That comforted the moan
Of Thy Beloved, when the earth could give no balm
And in Thy Presence makes His tenderest calm.

So I possess this creature of Love's flame,
So loving what I love he lives from me;
Not white, a thing of fire,
Of seraph-plumed limbs and desire,
That is my heart's own, and shall ever be:
An animal—with aim
Thy Dove avers the same
O Symbol of our perfect union, strange
Unconscious Bearer of Love's interchange.
(*Whym Chow* 16)

The dog is imagined as "the Dove," or Holy Ghost of the Catholic Trinity. "Michael Field" thus elevates "her" (their) earthly trinity—the chow dog and "two mommies"—to a divine one, suggesting they will together one day achieve everlasting life in heaven.

Strangely enough, Cooper was the first to convert without her aunt's knowledge. "According to Ricketts, when Katherine was told of Edith's conversation she 'helplessly exclaimed . . . but this is terrible, it means that I too shall have to become a Catholic."[8] Cooper's conversion seemed to have something to do with her sexuality, which she referred to in her diary as her "secret sins."[9] She questioned how she could talk to Father Goscommon, her confessor, "'of the anguish of the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Verses of Femme Damnees?'"[10] She was concerned that her confessor was thinking that she was going to, as she wrote, "' confess forbidden relations to men' . . . 'with whom the relations of my

[8] Cited in Ruth Vanita's *Sappho and the Virgin Mary*, 133. For Bradley's quote see Charles Ricketts' *Some Letters*, 6.
[9] Cited in Donoghue, 126.
[10] Donoghue, 126. These two 1857 poems by Baudelaire were banned in France until 1947.

lifetime have been abstract and blameless.'"[11] At her first Confession, Cooper made a "'vow of chastity,' as a gift to God at this time, and Goss did not probe."[12]

Moreover, conversions to Catholicism by male aesthetes were hardly unusual at the time, and Bradley and Cooper might have been following suit. As Hillary Fraser in "The Religious Poetry of Michael Field" proposes, " like many of their contemporaries—Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper experienced a mystical, aesthetic and highly eroticised attraction to Roman Catholicism; for them, religious experience, whether Christian or pagan, was always intersected by desire " (128). Religion as solace for a beloved departed pet fit in perfectly with the two women poets' aesthetic leanings.

Whatever the case of the two women poets' conversion to Catholicism, it did not result in the production of their best poetry. Most of the poems in *Mystic Trees* and *Poems of Adoration* read like a student of religion trying to get a handle on new doctrine; yet, in spirit, these volumes share with the pagan poetry a certain enthusiasm and passion. Some of the religious poetry exhibits, as Roden argues, "an erotic energy, that might be expressed as love, sublimated in friendship" . . . that is "embraced as religious ecstasy" (4). Vanita sees in the religious poetry "a continuing theme" of "the celebration of the senses and of women's beauty and vitality" (*Sappho* 133). Leighton points out, for instance, that the first stanza of Cooper's "Descent from the Cross" (1912) is reminiscent of "the free passions of the past" in which "language comes to life" (*Victorian* 223):

> Come down from the Cross, my soul, and save
> thyself—come down!
> Thou wilt be free as wind. None meeting thee
> will know.
> How thou wert hanging stark, my soul, outside
> the town.

[11] Donoghue, 126.
[12] Donoghue, 127.

Thou wilt fare to and fro;
Thy feet in grass will smell of faithful thyme; thy
head . . .
Think of the thorns, my soul—how thou wilt cast
them off,
With shudder at the bleeding clench they hold!
But on their wounds thou wilt a balm spread,
And over that a verdurous circle rolled
With gathered violets, sweet bright voices, sweet
As incense of the thyme on thy free feet;
A wreath thou wilt not give away, nor wilt thou
doff.
(*Poems of Adoration* 96)

"Michael Field" casts thorns off the soul, heals wounds with balm, and finds solace in the senses—through the experience of the beauty of flowers and incense. As Leighton asserts, "the desire to shake off the 'bleeding clench' of sin and suffering results in a celebration of old natural pleasures" (*Victorian* 223). "Michael Field" thus remains an aesthetic personality despite "her" (their) conversion.

In "The Captain Jewel" from *Mystic Trees* "Michael Field" aestheticizes Christ's wounds and adorns his feet and hands with gems:

We love Thy ruddy Wounds,
We love them pout by pout:
It is as when the stars come out,
One after one—
We are
As watchers for the Morning Star.

The jewels of Thy Feet,
The jewels of Thy Hands!. . .
Lo, a Centurion stands,
Openeth Thy Side: Water and Blood there beat
In fountain sweet:
Our master-jewel now we dote on!
(*Mystic Trees* 27)

This poem, as much of the religious poetry, exhibits decadent motifs though, ironically, the two women poets shunned the decadence in their pagan years.

It seems as if the conversion to Catholicism of Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper, the two distinct personalities who produced an actual lived identity through "Michael Field," was a mere extension of their aesthetic lives that celebrated the beauty of nature and the spirit of the ancient Greeks. A look at the preface "Michael Field" wrote for the sermons of Father Vincent McNabb, titled *The Orchard Floor* (1912) exemplifies this idea as the two women poets weave images of nature, particularly the wind, that parallel the spirit of God:

> The ancients believed that a wind, scattering inscribed leaves, received an oracle (v)
>
> While the leaves in the gale—as the wind dismisses them—tell us the tragedy of those things that are past and must pass away. And the stars of the snow and the foam-wreaths on the hurricane are winter's confession of the peace and infinity at the heart of its struggles. (vii)
>
> Like all these wonderful gatherings of the wind, the fragments of this book are suggestive and "more is meant than meets the eye." For the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of Comfort, and the Spirit of Revelation is made known to man as a Wind, as a Breath; and it is by His motion alone that the words of these fragments may become a message day by day and as the days form into the great seasons of the Church. They can only prophesy as the Wind of God listeth. Symbols as they are, of what is most significant and sibylline in the expression of a singularly spiritual and imaginative mind, they are humbly dependent on the Breath of the Holy Ghost to render up their right meaning and to allow what beauty they may have of form and adornment to reach other minds with the force and purport of disclosure. (viii)

"Michael Field" aestheticizes the teachings of the Church, blending pagan and Christian imagery, establishing a connection between their present and past lives.

Aesthetes to the end, the two women poets forged an identity that could be understood as a means to self-creation that allowed them to encompass a field of opposites that inspired the best of their works and lives together. The time has come, finally, over a hundred years after Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper have lived, for the

world to discover the two very unique women poets who constituted themselves as "Michael Field."

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