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THE DESACRALIZATION OF METAPHOR IN NINETEENTH
CENTURY ENGLISH POETRY: THE USE OF WAR
METAPHOR IN *SORDELLO* AND *MAUD*

by

Eleanor M. Langstaff

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
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Abstract

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By

Eleanor M. Langstaff

Adviser: Professor Michael Timko

Poets of every age use war metaphor to give force to the ideas, notions, and emotions imbedded in their writings. In the early Victorian period the way in which war metaphors were employed changed, as both the ideas and their metaphysical equivalents were affected by secularization, and the kind of war experience that marked these decades. In a secularizing state, desacralization, a process in which a sacred object becomes identified with the profane, is also present. As the sacred becomes fully identified with the profane, there can be no sacrifice to propitiate a god, no victims, no scapegoats; hence the identification of war as a religious act is no longer possible. Sacrificing a country's youth on the battlefield will no longer expiate a country's greed or lust for power. What had been ritual gesture became secular, democratized, individual. War metaphor has several sources in the period; this study focuses on the hymns that were then current.

For Browning's *Sordello*, waging war is an occasion to position himself on this sacred/secular continuum, to fulfill himself as an individual. As he finds his place, often in the midst of battle, he comes to understand the true poetic role distinct from that of the past. The speaker in Tennyson's *Maud* seems to resolve his tragic life by resorting to participation in a patriotic war, an outmoded artifact of empire. Perhaps, it is, instead, a spiritual growth culminating in acceptance of an enigmatic future, an embrace accepted in desacralized trust. That something revolutionary was being attempted is suggested from the distancing each poem provides the audience: Pre-Renaissance, Pre Reformation Italy, and the intense introspection of the madhouse. In part, this revolutionary transference was accomplished by desacralized images, at once familiar and strange. Each artist defines himself in his death in these poems of the period, which are consistent in the choice of desacralized tropes reflecting the violence and finality of war—the ultimate gesture, “sought for across the memory of old signs.”

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Chapter 1

The Desacralization of the "Blood Red Blossom of War"

In the chapters that follow I discuss the notion that, although poets of every age use war metaphor to give increased vigor to the ideas and emotions imbedded in their writings, in the early Victorian period the way in which war metaphors were employed changed in significant ways. Both the ideas of war and their metaphysical equivalents were affected by the compelling issues of the times, and the kind of war experience that marked these decades, an experience that was for the most part virtual. Writers turned to other writings to develop their war metaphor, as the institutions of their society continued to increase in secularity. The government began to be seen as responsible for giving alms to the poor, healing the sick, reforming the sinner, educating the ignorant. As the social tasks became entrenched in government, they lost their sacred character. It was no longer God in the hospital bed, in the prison, at the school desk, but an antisocial, or at least sub-standard, citizen.

Desacralization is a process in which a sacred object becomes identified with the profane. It is seen by Eliade as the final stage of civilization. It is allied to war necessarily; both are associated with blood sacrifice. Ultimately the sacral becomes the sacrificed; the victim, the scapegoat, who horribly loaded with the sins of the people, must be left to God. As the sacred becomes fully identified with the profane, there can be no sacrifice; hence there can be no sacrificial death that can expiate a country's greed or lust for power, such as youthful death on the battlefield. There can be no war metaphor because the referents have lost all identity. Keble and Arnold both saw that this was so; Keble in his gentle way making room for poetry in Christian piety, and Arnold, conversely, identifying the one with the other in the Victorian world and replacing piety with poetry.

Browning looked backward and saw the same phenomenon with the rise of the vernacular and the loss or diminishing of a separate poetic language. His *Sordello* was a poet who invented both a poetic vernacular and his own persona. He is a tie between the old world of occult language and the new world of Dante and a de-mystified, desacralized language, a vernacular, a people's language. The speaker in Tennyson's *Maud* seems to resolve his tragic life by resorting to participation in a patriotic war, an outmoded artifact of empire. Perhaps, it is, instead, a spiritual growth culminating in acceptance of an enigmatic future, an embrace accepted in desacralized trust.

In each case what is being desacralized is a blood sacrifice, moved out of the primitive ordeal engaged in to save the social group to the secular war designed to save the state. The sacral act is also moved into a virtual reality. Sordello does not die in battle but of a broken heart; the Maud avatar becomes an abstract fiery rose into which the hero of Maud is subsumed.

Desacralization, in contrast to secularization—a concept closely allied to it and upon which it depends—refers not to the administration of institutions, where one might distinguish a church school and a state school, but to the artifacts of society. In a desacralized artifact one looks for aesthetic values replacing sacred ones, as the grace of a ritual movement is retained when the religious significance is lost. Typically the desacralized artifact has also some kind of socially affirming force as well.

Hymns are graphic representations of moral theology, an attempt to draw a spiritual world in terms of a very simple earthly one. Whatever the intention of the hymnodists, hymns drew the singers deeper into the secular world. Further, as the singers of these hymns become more and more urbanized, the symbol takes an even more tenuous reality based on the text rather than the object. The city dweller's idea of sheep, of banners, of martial trumpets, of spears and swords, is based almost entirely on the image engendered by a hymn, or poem or other text. The sowers of seed have never

planted, the reapers have never harvested, the gleaners have never felt the stubble of the aftermath under their feet. The martial trumpets are heard in marching bands, not in rallies on the field of war. If actual weapons are seen, it is hunters who bear them; the combat is one-sided and far from being a bloody ordeal weighted with redemptive value.

In the Chapter Two we see that war metaphor has had a continuing role in literature; not surprising, if, as Jakobson says, literature is “organized violence on ordinary speech.” A subject, theme or topic in a poets’ universe demanded the vigor, directness and commitment that is associated with a call to arms, appropriate to a world that places a moral value on war or finds war a for of deliverance for the individual participant. At other times, the use of war metaphor was an exploration of, or statement about, the rights of the state to coerce such a commitment. Again, it was a *sub rosa* exploration of the value structures appropriate to a serious individual.

The relating of religion to war—or war to religion— as a key socializing factor in society is especially provocative and allows for the use of a multilevel metaphor bearing significances from both, yet used, in the case of the Browning and Tennyson, in new, nineteenth-century, ways. Today’s readers of nineteenth-century poetry have a perspective that allows them to see the interplay between the substance of the metaphor and the nuances in reading conveyed by references themselves undergoing changes in

the secularizing society—a vision of the poet beating his “sword of lightning” into a newfangled plowshare.

Where war metaphor is used, references shift as language is selected from religion, or derived from the images of the fictional world or from direct experience. A possibly deliberate confusion between imaginative and scientific observation, as Carol Christ demonstrates in *Modern and Victorian Poetics*, is shared by both nineteenth-century and modern poets (Christ 4). This confluence had an early and mid-Victorian manifestation as part of the controversy over the origin of myths, and access to translations of non-Western literatures. After Waterloo and before Crimea, the discussion of war in the press and at policy level frequently centered on reform of the officer corps, implementation of modern field tactics, and the increased control by the elected government—war as heroic and redeeming act was no longer the issue. The nature of the metaphor would have to change.

Desacralization also attacked the god-like poet. If in secular society poets are desacralized, they are not rendered impotent, but they are driven underground. The authoritarian voice of the god must change to the voice of the poet legislator; the gesture of demand must change to a gesture of suggestion. The role may not change but the diction does; meaning may be more submerged, perhaps by becoming more elitist in reach.

The focus of chapter two is on the secularization of Europe and on England. Owen Chadwick's landmark study of general European secularization in the nineteenth century identifies those elements which were formerly sacred but are now seen as secular: science, progress, textual and historical analysis of the Bible and comparative religious studies. Science developed a natural explanation of the universe. Progress resulted as an inevitable effect of man's use of time. Higher Criticism and comparison of the Judeo-Christian world to other major cultures and religions, as their texts became available in English translation, changed the definition of faith. Chadwick establishes a practicable beginning in time, a *terminus a quo*, for the birth of the notion of a secular world, as distinguished from one divinely fashioned for divine purposes, a time that fed directly into the early Victorian period.

While the world was becoming secularized, an old but less used form of worship began to see a resurgence. In part this reflects one result of secularization—the increased importance of the individual and a kind of societal permission to become more concerned with the self. The separation of the priest from his congregation was no longer seen by all as the appropriate expression of man's relation to God.

Nonconformist churches and chapels had services that appealed directly to the emotions, and to the secularly formed tastes of the

congregation. This popularization of religion downplayed ritual, and made popular the religious service that used reading of sacred texts, stirring sermons, and sung music that directly appealed to the emotions— the hymn. War metaphor taken from the Scriptures appears in nearly all of the hymnodists of the time. They aided in the development of the personal courage and independent judgement so desirable in the Victorian citizen. They became pervasive. Dr. Arnold, for instance, habitually quoted hymns in his essays and sermons, and was known for his use of the less common ones.

Sordello, in Browning's poem, unites within himself the warrior and the poet, action and utterance. His life task is to express poetry in action. To show his unique role, he is contrasted with Eglamor, a fellow troubadour. Eglamor has always been important to Sordello's tale. He returns to the poem again at the end; it is he who becomes the forerunner of the New Poet; he has known a modest fame, and been the friend of Queens, even Kings, and he dies when once he has been vanquished in the mock battle of the Court of Love and his usefulness is over. Sordello, the New Poet, seemingly also dies in failure. However, when he dies we see "a triumph lingering in the wide eyes" (6.614). It was a death more glorious than Eglamor's because it was the result of an heroic over-reaching, a striving for a goal that could not be achieved through compromise, an ultimate moral and heroic choice, necessarily fatal because sacrificial. Here again Sordello proved to be a forerunner of a poet, a nineteenth-century poet. Browning's theory of poetry

as producible only through multiple layers of word, ideas, allusions and images is not susceptible of concession.

In *Maud*, a long and sensational monodrama, Tennyson looks at the modern nexus of personal and public responsibility, with special, if unspoken, reference to the poet's life. The unsettling conclusions he draws in this, his most controversial work, raised a chorus of protest, but the protesters could never develop a consensus about what exactly was wrong with the poem. Carlyle took the social commentary of the poem so seriously that he urged Tennyson to abandon poetry and dedicate himself to crusading on behalf of society using his access to a bully pulpit and the polemical weapons that prose offers.

Although much has been written about *Maud* as a domestic poem and as a political statement, little attention has been focused on the persona of Maud. In chapter 6, I argue that, far from being a cardboard effigy, Maud is, in fact, central to the poem. She is its avatar, in the sense of the feminine, domestic, and popular version of the avatar that emerged from the popular literature of the East. She bears the characteristics of a feminine avatar: a divine aura, a divine serpent figures in the life in some way, birth is preordained and death painful. The avatar is androgynous and fills both maternal and paternal roles. The avatar has a following, whose recognition

of her divine aura confirms its existence, and, finally, her supernatural gifts include silence, healing, and a perceptible link with the divine.

Early in the poem, the hero sees in "Maud in the light of her youth and her grace, /Singing of Death, and of Honour that cannot die..." and later desires nothing but to "fall before /Her feet...and adore.../Not her, not her, but a voice." Maud's role at this point in the poem is distinctly feminine: the general corruption of society threatens domestic sanctity and the threat to domestic sanctity menaces the stability of the state. The role is also unifying: "She seem'd to divide in a dream from a band of the blest, / And spoke of a hope for the world in the coming wars—/...and pointed to Mars/ As he glow'd like a ruddy shield on the Lion's breast" (III, iv, l. 10-14). The hero, purified by his madness, can now offer a pure sacrifice. He now becomes one with his ideal, one with the "blossom of war." In this act he has united the domestic relationship and the body politic. In this war metaphor, Tennyson has realized Eliade's vision of the ultimate stage of desacralization. It certainly "illustrates the complete camouflage of the sacred—more precisely its identification with the profane" (Rennie 235).

Chapter 2

Sought for Across the Memory of Old Signs: War Metaphor as Vehicle

“What has the poet to do with Mars?” Ovid asked readers of the *Fasti*. Throughout centuries, the creators of romances, tales, novels, and narrative or lyrical poems have allied themselves with Mars to enhance their roles as spokesperson for and interpreter of the universe. The change in the use of war metaphor during the early Victorian Period was one manifestation of that generally secularizing trend that began in the eighteenth century and ripened in the nineteenth century to prevail in the twentieth century. The heroism associated with war had, up to the beginning of the nineteenth century, been tied to aristocratic ideals in a seemingly static society that shared a common set of religious, political and economic assumptions. A secular society seeing war, not as a test of virtue, but as an arm of state political policy (and for some, a deplorable one), will also read war metaphor differently, especially when encountering it in poetry written by their contemporaries. It is a compelling trope for a new world struggling to be born. In fact, Terry Eagleton quotes Roman Jakobson as defining literature

as "organized violence on ordinary speech (2), and this idea is taken up by other critics. The energy of literary language suggests the energy of battle.

Several themes of the nineteenth century must be considered in analyzing these poems for the ways in which war metaphor is employed. Interest in a new way of analyzing and explaining language have been developed from Müller, Keble, and Anderson. The peculiar vision of the Greek heritage in England from Jenkyns and Turner currently and the writers themselves contemporaneously. Secularization or desacralization is defined by Anderson and Malia. War as pious gesture from the writers about war in literature and religion, especially Sue Mansfield and Lionel Adey for war, and Peter Brooke for the significance of dramatic gesture outside the genre.

Two key poets of the nineteenth century explored this alliance, or misalliance, with Mars in distinct ways. On occasion there was something in these poets' universe that had to be described and discussed with the vigor, directness and commitment that is associated with a call to arms, appropriate to a world that places a moral value on war. At other times, it was an exploration of, or statement about, the rights of the state to coerce such a commitment. Again, it was a *sub rosa* exploration of the value structures appropriate to the contemporary serious individual. Tennyson, for instance, began to examine the military-industrial complex and the citizen soldier in "Rifle Clubs!!!" and the first version of "Riflemen Form," in which he

reflects on the citizen soldier as the new man of virtue. Browning reached back into history for events on which to anchor his own calls to arms, in long narrative poems such as *Sordello*. In these cases, and for these very different poets, it was important that the metaphors not be taken at their face value alone, but that they be nuanced by the age's concern with basic humanistic issues.

These topical themes had another purpose: by using metaphors associated with war, these major poets were able to make covert statements about the role of the poet in general, and themselves in particular, by pointing to issues in ways that could be understood at several levels. It might be argued that poets saw themselves as the only legitimate warriors in a secular society. Paradoxical warriors, to be sure, who, themselves having never engaged in warfare and deriving their metaphors from secondary sources, dared to claim their moral ascendancy over the combatants on the battlefield. Contemporary readers to be sure read *Sordello* as historical narrative—if they read it at all, and found much to distress them in *Maud*. But poets were ever misunderstood, and the ancient lineage of the bard had to be reasserted.

War metaphor has two attributes useful for a fresh reading of nineteenth-century poems. In our century Western society has made conscious attempts to desacralize the rites of war in conclusive ways. The Treaty of Versailles required that the aggressor, the loser, defray the war

costs of the winning states, much as a civil court awards damages to a successful suer, while the Nuremberg trials adjudicated war *crimes*, transferring killing and other acts of violence from the sacred realm, where virtuous violence sacralized and cleansed and ignoble violence degraded and demanded atonement, to the state where violence contrary to law must be punished so that the rule of law is upheld. This legalistic view of war is fairly straightforward, referring to the state, but not to any religious justification. Our time has seen in the Vietnam Conflict a culturally and ideologically complex war, ending inconclusively and seemingly incapable at any point of being viewed with any sense of religious exaltation. The secularizing of war, then, was not a satisfactory improvement to the social fabric, in that it offered neither nationalizing impetus (and that was important to modern Europe) nor religious ecstasy, although put forward by its theorists as a more humane and less exploitive concept, and one in keeping with a government's concern for its people.

The nexus of religion and war as a key socializing factor is especially provocative and demonstrates effectively the complex nature of the multilevel metaphor bearing significances from both, yet used, in the case of the poets, in new, nineteenth-century, ways. Thus, today's readers of nineteenth-century poetry have a perspective that allows them to see the interplay between the substance of the metaphor and the nuances in reading conveyed by references themselves undergoing changes in the secularizing

society—a vision of the poet beating his “sword of lightning” into a newfangled plowshare.

The use of war metaphor by the poets here being considered was inextricably interwoven with the new ways of examining a world grown increasingly secular. The secular world had attributes not heretofore known: a democratizing influence that brought with it the corollaries of general literacy, and a liberalism that gave human respect a primacy above religious doctrine, education, birth or wealth. Both poets of this study benefited from the secularizing society as they positioned themselves within it and probed for its underlying assumptions. Their choices, as was the case among thoughtful persons, depended, as the historian Owen Chadwick writes, on whether they saw this age as moving from a highly religious world into an irreligious one, or moving from a golden age into an increasingly worse one (*Secularization* 4).

With reference to the implications of the secular in the arts in general, the term desacralization, discussed later in this chapter, has been applied to good effect, although its coinage and legitimization have done no more than carve a disciplinary niche for a small group of social historians and contribute a lemma to the second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Given the god-like role of the poet through history, however, it seems that the idea of desacralization has a potential in the study of poetry that has not been

exhausted even by such major works as Miller's *The Disappearance of God* and Bloom's *Ruin the Sacred Truths*, both of which emphasize the nostalgic and do not fully illumine the work of the poet-legislator, a necessarily ever-renewing role for each generation. Miller sees the nineteenth century poet confronted by "...a whole set of changes both spiritual and material [that] happened more or less simultaneously, like a great wave breaking on the shore (4)" leaving him impoverished and alone, bereft of his community. Bloom refers to it as "the literary agon, the struggle on the part of every person to answer the triple question concerning the contending forces of past and present: more? equal to? or less than?" (Ruin 5). Nor does Bloom see secularization as a literary process on the grounds that high literature is impossible to categorize consistently as either secular or sacred, preferring his own categories of strong and weak. He refers to strong poetry as a synonym for high literature. Strong poetry may—but not by him—be described as sacred. Belief, on the contrary, he says, is a weak misreading of literature, not a poet at work (Bloom 4, 53).

Recent criticism dealing with war as metaphor or theme disregards, for the most part, Victorian poetic texts, and looks to other genres and other periods. War in poetry is analysed in such studies as Michael Bright's "'Most Capital Enemy of the Muses: War, Art, and 'Kubla Khan';" G.W. Stevens' "The War Poets: Time for a New View?", Michael Hulse's "The Poetry of James Fenton," and Christine Eaves' "The Significance of Y Goddodin." The

last four mentioned deal with twentieth century writing, although Bright and Eaves are interesting in that they look at the derivative war imagery from earlier sources and develop the misreading in Bloom's sense. A major recent study of a poet closer in time to Browning and Tennyson is Shira Wolosky's . *Emily Dickinson: A Voice of War*, in which she matches the language of New England theology to Dickinson's poetic diction.

Generally speaking, Wolosky argues, Dickinson uses liturgical modes to renounce the doctrine of theodicy and to wrestle actively with the problem of loss and gain, with present suffering and future triumph (xvlll-xx, Ch.3 and 5). Just as Dickinson begins to explore new language and prosody, she is immersed in the Civil War, an event seen by many of her New England neighbors as a peerless national soteriological event. Daily aware of the losses war brings, she associates the public tragedy with the individual's crisis. "Defeat—whets Victory" is only one of many poems that uses war metaphor, "[b]ut in a poem written in 1862, when religious, martial rhetoric has literal military application, the resonance is ominous. Dickinson's religious doubts became acute, or at least expressed, at a time of violence in which religion was implicated. The Civil War, as a war of religious rhetoric, helped undermine that rhetoric as a justification of evil. As a way of God, it helped cast doubt on his ways" (Wolosky 98).

Where war metaphor is used, references shift as language is selected from religion, as in Dickinson, or derived from the images of the fictive world or that of the five senses. A possibly deliberate confusion between imaginative and scientific observation, as Carol Christ demonstrates in *Modern and Victorian Poetics*, is shared by both nineteenth-century and modern poets (Christ 4). This confluence had an early and mid-Victorian manifestation as part of the origin of myths controversy, the two sides of which were lead by Max Müller (1823-1900) and Andrew Lang (1844-1912). Most of the discussions were carried out in the periodical press in publications readily available to the poets of this study. Müller's "disease of language" theory as to the origin of myths was generally accepted, unfairly bolstered as it was, Lang considered, by his position as Professor of Modern Languages and finally, Professor of Philology at Oxford.

Mircea Eliade, reading Müller as an historian of religion, sees his "disease" theory as a way of describing the ongoing process of desacralization (Eliade 229). Müller's codification of his thought, *Essays on Comparative Mythology*, published in 1856 when he was 33, was based on his public lectures from prior years. Later his arch-rival in the origin of myths question was Andrew Lang, whose explanation that early man was unwilling or unable to make a distinction between imaginative and scientific explanation is closer to Carol Christ's much later theory. Eventually Lang, supported by the scholarship of E.B. Tylor, prevailed in that part of cultural

anthropology where it affected poetics (Langstaff 128). However, in the eighteen-forties, -fifties, and -sixties and beyond, for many serious readers, Müller's dual approach to natural religion and language seemed to explain satisfactorily the desacralizing forces at work in poetry. In the secularizing nineteenth century, poetry occupied the niche formerly the domain of religion, and justified the conflation of science and imagination as the source of truth (Christ 5).

In her study, *The Gestalts of War*, Sue Mansfield explains the use of war metaphor in terms of their visual or aural appeal. Battles can satisfy man's desire for excitement, community, transcendence, and beauty (6). Poets using metaphors based on battle scenes can easily evoke strong images in their readers. Salvaged from old religion were the war metaphors used in the poems under consideration whose pious origins were instantly recognized by readers. Their use by the poets, then, could become the stepping-stones to the higher things which had become the new matter of poetry. War metaphor employs concrete images from the battlefield—banners, weapons, maneuvers, even mental and physical disciplinary constraints—to convey poetic meaning. Unlike metaphors of common experience—a distant vista along a deserted city street, dew-spangled daisies, ripe cherries—these metaphors have a vehicle which had never been directly or analogously experienced by either the poets or the vast majority of their readers. The mind-picture created by the trope refers to other poems, the daily

newspapers' reportage of Queen Victoria's "little wars" or, more often, and as Lionel Adey describes in his two volumes, *Hymns and the Christian Myth* and *Class and Idol in the English Hymn*, from hymns learned and sung in schoolroom and church to stiffen the sinews of youth and prepare them for the great struggle of life.

The early Victorian period, like other historical eras, included very few men who had participated in battle.

The historical record suggests that warfare has usually been a minority experience. War has been the lot of at most twenty percent of the male population of the world. It also has had the nature of an elitist activity, contributing little to the economy of the society concerned. Before mass communication non-participants had little contact with or knowledge of war. (Mansfield 4-5).

Somehow, war metaphor remains effective in spite of a reader's lack of direct knowledge. In spite of preoccupation with other matters, enough interest in war continued to justify the topic's being addressed in the periodical literature, especially some ideas concerning the nature of the military that were coming from Prussia.

The discussion of war after Waterloo and before Crimea frequently centered on reform, not the later health reforms of Florence Nightingale, but of the provision of an appropriate officer corps, implementation of modern field tactics, and the role of the elected government. From about 1815 on,

articles and a few books discussed the lessons of the Napoleonic wars. Two military thinkers who influenced English deliberations at this time were the Prussian Karl Clausewitz (1780-1831) and the Swiss Antoine-Henri Jomini (1779-1869). The conventional wisdom is that Clausewitz was unknown in England until 1873 when his major work, *On War*, appeared in English translation, and, perhaps even more emotively, was remembered as having been vividly acted out in Paris and the eastern front during the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71). Christopher Bassford, however, in his recent *Clausewitz in English: The Reception of Clausewitz in Britain and America, 1815-1945*, establishes that Clausewitz was known and read in England as early as 1815 and from 1830 on cropped up regularly in the military-political dialogues about army reform. Clausewitz was a reformer, not the militarist that history has painted, who saw war as the last force to be employed by the state, when diplomacy had failed, a force that should be as limited as would be appropriate to the present need, and cleverly deployed rather than far-reaching. Above all, war was not a duel embodying ritual, but a wrestling match utilizing appropriate skills. He favored social, political and economic reform over force, although with the example of revolutionary France before him, was not a democrat (Bassford *Clausewitz...Work* 20). Jomini, a difficult, romantic thinker in Napoleon's army and prolific writer and publicist saw the battlefield as a place of personal salvation through heroic self-sacrifice, where ritual had a prime place and an acceptable attitude was

“theirs not to wonder why, theirs but to do or die.” War as sacred act was much closer to Jomini’s theories than it was to Clausewitz. Unnecessary casualties merely provided more heroes in Jomini’s view but was excessive force to Clausewitz.

Articles by both Jomini and Clausewitz were available in French so that English readers also had these interpretations available to them, directly or summarized in the English press. That the English public was aware of Clausewitz was due to an army officer, John Mitchell (1785-1859), who served briefly as secretary of war in 1830 and Francis Egerton, Lord Ellesmere, a proponent of military reform and a friend of the Duke of Wellington. Ellesmere’s command of German allowed him to publish one of the earliest translations of Goethe’s *Faust*. Mitchell has been identified by Bassford as the anonymous author of a review essay, “On War,” published in the *Metropolitan Quarterly Magazine* in 1835, which contained many of the basic tenets of Clausewitz and attacked the practice of purchasing commissions. Nearly two decades later Ellesmere wrote on the same topics in the *Quarterly Review* for December 1851, revealing by it that he had access, probably through the Iron Duke, to Clausewitz material not yet published in England.

A loss of some of the ritual significance attaching to the standing army, a democratizing as well as a secularizing trend was playing a role in the reshaping of the social order.

Further, the intriguing possibility exists that the poet may be also legislating new shapes for society, choosing clarion imagery when lamenting the old ceremonials in order to draw attention to some possible fresh rites. In the poems under discussion, war metaphor is used to develop ideas about contemporary society; the past may be not only prologue, but occasion to speak of the present. War in Tennyson's *Maud* looks to produce a whole modern man from the unpromising splinters made by a society governed by false, materialistic values. Browning's *Sordello* uses the legitimization of the vernacular tongue in warring Renaissance Italy—there may have been some Risorgimento issues shaping Browning's vision here—to examine the philosophical problems that are present in art. Both probe the issue of integrity and responsibility for the intellectual in a desacralized society.

If in secular society a poet is desacralized, he is not rendered impotent, but driven underground. The authoritarian voice of the god must change to the voice of the poet legislator; the gesture of demand must change to a gesture of suggestion. As authority moves from subject to object, new tools must be employed. The objects must carry an authority directly perceived by the reader as proper to and emanating from the age. The tools

of the early Victorian poet included images of the grotesque, of antiquity, of nature, of science, and of empire. One set of tools consisted of the metaphors associated with war, and it is these that can be interpreted as being most distanced from the artifacts that suggest the image, and yet communicating with great economy the poet's necessarily subverting idea to the contemporary reader.

War as Pious Gesture

Arguments about war, alarms of war, the civic and theological justifications of war, the moral value of participation in war had been bred into the bone of the Englishman for centuries. Even the sedentary Samuel Johnson mused "every man thinks meanly of himself for not having been a soldier, or not having been at sea" (Rutherford 6). Of what this lack of self-esteem in this regard consisted Johnson does not tell us. Was it perhaps a sense of community that develops, Edward Said suggests in *Culture and Imperialism* when a few endure extremes of danger and hardship in order to fulfill their moral obligation to subjugate, for their own good, a lesser community (139)? It is just this nexus of moral obligation and war that could usefully be reconsidered in light of desacralization because it throws up an array of shared images from which to construct useful metaphors. This chapter suggests that these war metaphors share in a general desacralization of art, and further, provides some reasons why the hymns of the age both

shared in descacralization and contributed to the development of those war metaphors deemed appropriate for expressions of high culture.

War is often a manifestation of patriotism, one of the pieties of Western civilization, built on the Greco-Roman tradition in both its realities and its nineteenth-century perceptions of that tradition. These traditions are recently discussed in Frank M. Turner's *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* and Richard Jenkyns' *The Victorians and Ancient Greece*. Both posit a man-centered, a hero-centered society with a duty to the state. Andrew Rutherford notes that for realism there is no safe vantage point, no place to look down, in Frye's phrase, on a stage of superior beings caught up in an epic or tragedy.

The Victorians, who explored domestic relations unremittingly, saw few heroes on the hearth. Since battle has been regarded as the ultimate testing place for heroism, if warfare has to be tossed aside as a wornout concept, the imagery associated with it loses its force, indeed loses its meaning. As Matthew Arnold wrote:

One of the most characteristic features of a modern age, of an age of advanced civilization, is the banishment of the ensigns of war and bloodshed from the intercourse of civil life. Crime still exists and wars are still carried on; but within the limits of the civil life, a circle has been formed within which man can move securely, and develop the arts of peace uninterruptedly. The private man does not go forth to his daily occupation prepared to assail the life of his

neighbour or to have to defend his own. With the disappearance of the constant means of offense the occasions of offence diminish; society at last acquires repose, confidence, and free activity (On the Classical...23, cited in Rutherford, 6.)

In stripping war of its of its religious aura, Browning, Tennyson, and other poets in the nineteenth century employed a semantic code that is susceptible to analysis. The techniques of Michael Riffaterre, a critic who is concerned with both word symbolism and structure can be used, although he usually traces it only through French literary theorists and illustrates with French texts.

Riffaterre repeatedly insists on the necessity for any method of analysis to correspond to the actual reading experience of the text. It is not enough for the textual significance to be actualized in the language (for example in grammatical or lexical structures): for the significance to be poetic it has to be actualized in the process that takes place between text and reader... 'the nature of the poetic phenomenon' implies reading, a reading cleansed of referential aberrations but a reading all the same. (De Man 20)

The process of reading the poems at the level of their war metaphor is a process in which the super-reader can desacralize the trope in evoking a new aesthetic experience.

The term 'desacralization' has been used in literature to label the phenomenon of religious movements from a basic piety so pervasive as to be animistic to the mass self-deification engendered by the individualism of

modern life; a concatenation of subject with object. As the term itself suggests, the referents of desacralization are the symbolic representation, not the reality; not belief, but the expression of belief. Form, as well as semantics, is frequently associated with desacralization, as Simone Dorgeon shows in a study of the choice of eclogue as form in the English Renaissance. The eclogue has certain features common to the dramatic forms of the nineteenth century—dramatic verse, an objective description of the setting by one of the speakers, conscious obscurity and enigma—are all present. Possibly, as will be discussed in Chapter Three, the secularizing of other religious forms of verse is a note of the nineteenth century.

Word as Artifact

In the starkest days of the English Reformation, Decalogue Boards (placards bearing the text of the Ten Commandments) became the foremost symbol and focal point in parish churches; the Word as Text replaced the Cross, now the "tainted" icon of the Word made Flesh (Aston 360-62; 418).

From Post Reformation days to the ripeness of the Tractarian Movement, pre-Reformation icons, far from conjuring up images central to the Christian faith, instead raised the cursed specter of the Scarlet Woman of Rome. Signs of how widespread and deeply felt the notion that icons were

necessarily tainted are still coming to light. Evidence exists that otherwise upright ministers would go so far as to deface library books containing even so minimalist an icon as a cross. John Blatchly in his *The Town Library Of Ipswich Provided for the Use of the Town Preachers in 1599: a History and Catalogue*. (Woodbridge, England, 1989) gives the example of Samuel Ward, who preached in Ipswich from 1604 to 1635 and who conscientiously and piously marked out the religious symbols (see Blatchly).

Margaret Aston begins her magisterial two-volume ecclesiastical history of the Reformation, *England's Iconoclasts*, with a quotation from Philip Larkin's "Going, Going": "And that will be England gone, / The shadows, the meadows, the lanes./ The guildhalls, the carved choirs," and continues:

The social pattern of radical iconoclastic action in the 16th century led, as intended, to sacramental reform, but entailed an excruciatingly minute examination of the relation of sign to reality. The verdict was that while images encouraged moral stasis and idolatry, words induced right actions and pure thoughts. Lettered and decorated boards with the Decalogue replaced church images and symbols. In the early part of the nineteenth century, the Tractarians again looked to the signs, and created a new iconomachy which they called traditional and others papistical. But there was no going back; democracy and the industrial revolution had made the body of Christ, the church, a body politic; empirical science had made the body flesh (Aston 67).

With religion still institutionally central to the lives of the early Victorians, this interplay between reality, symbol, and text was a continuing concern. It displayed itself in the scholarly arguments of the Tractarians and in the often emotional public responses to their tracts. It sought in the secular symbols generated from long discarded religious ones both the expression and the definition of the rapidly changing world of Victoria's England. While images continued to be idolatrous and suspect during the Tractarian sway, and perhaps because of them, imagery in poetry was found to be legitimate by everyone. Words were sufficiently removed from reality, so as not to insist too strongly upon their cultural referents. While painters took care what pictures they painted, the world was free to read and discuss such poems as Browning's *Sordello* (1840) and Tennyson's *Maud* (1855).

The Reformation brought with it the loss of intentional cultural referents to the aesthetics of religious observance. Elizabeth I, as the astute politician she was, acceded to some extent to the extreme asceticism of the Puritans, but she also insisted on a reasonable aesthetic quality. In a letter on the subject of Decalogue boards to Archbishop Parker in 1561, she asked him

to order, that the tables of the commandments be comely set, or hung up in the east end of the chancel, to be not only read for edification, but also to give some comely ornament and demonstration, that the same is a place of religion and prayer (quoted in Aston 363).

Two hundred years later on, in his first lecture on *Heroes and Hero Worship* (1840), Thomas Carlyle again sees iconoclasm as healthily radicalizing, evoking a spare but dramatic image:

It stood preaching in its bare pulpit, with nothing but the Bible in its hand. Nay, a man preaching from his earnest soul into the earnest souls of men: is not this virtually the essence of all Churches whatsoever. The nakedest, savagest reality, I say, is preferable to any semblance, however dignified" (Carlyle. *Heroes* 207).

But the Reformation reality lacked the drama of Carlyle's savage, if imaginary, reality. Whether motivated by the desire to mortify the senses or sheer ineptitude, the rendering of the text of the Decalogue was poor in many churches, thus providing a focal point for the Victorian restorers, whose aesthetic was fueled not only by a nostalgic but also a patriotic harking back to earlier ages which saw the Englishing of the Catholic Church (Aston 363). Matthew Arnold (overriding the sensibilities of his father), would later side in a verbal way, as it were, with the Victorian church decorators, who wished to stimulate piety by rich symbol, stained glass, and, in general, a religious opulence by giving the fullest possible moral weight to poetry and its role in society. Arnold in many ways gives pride of place to poetry among aesthetically pleasing objects, highlighting a nationalistic rationale for this jointure, and suggesting a resident virtue in the spareness of text over image. "It is a great error to think that whatever is thus perceived to be poetry ceases

to be available to religion. The noblest races are those which know how to make the most serious use of poetry" (apRoberts 21).

Two Victorian novelists, Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy, employed the Decalogue boards in their writing. Dickens in *Dombey and Son* (1846-48) provides a devastating scene at St. Margaret's Church where, seeing the sun spotlight the gilded letters of the Commandments, the loveless bride, Edith Granger, quails in terror at her impending sacrilege.

Why does the Bride's eye read them, one by one?
Which one of all the ten appears the plainest to her in
the glare of light? False God; murder; theft; the
honour that she owes her mother;--which is it that
appears to leave the wall, and print itself, in glowing
letters, on her book! (Dickens. 523)

It is possible to read this episode as desacralizing if it is read as an ironic comment on English society's hypocritical double standard. The reader is not yet apprised of Mrs. Granger's bigamous intent, but it is clear that there is more to her fear than any woman's natural reluctance to marry Mr. Dombey.

Hardy, more integrally, used the abandonment of the old liturgical decor in favor of the new and stylish Tractarian return to icons in a complex scene in *Jude the Obscure* (1894-95) where once again the characters are deprived of the most fleeting happiness by a fate that has relentlessly dogged their footsteps from the beginning of their story. Refurbishing decalogue

boards was so passé that only Jude and Sue Bridehead, now an ostracized couple, would take it on. Sue, “who was [as] sentimentally opposed to the horrors of over-restoration,” (310) as she was unaware that the Reformation equated idolatry with adultery (Aston 466) is nearly at peace as she brings to renewed life the words of the Old Dispensation, but “[t]he tables of the Jewish law towered sternly over the utensils of Christian grace, as the chief ornament of the chancel end, in the fine dry style of the last century” (310). Here the word is made flesh in Sue’s advanced pregnancy, and this vessel of life is the source of Sue’s shame, for, although Hardy may suggest that with the coming of a new century, the Word as text has lost its force, Sue feels more ashamed of coming into a church pregnant, an aesthetic rather than a moral value, than she does of her irregular marital status, which breaches the social fabric. There is a Gnostic conflation of aesthetics and religion in Sue’s mind. She sees her swollen, if fecund, body an offence to God, but her denial of the text of her marriage vows is neutral. From a maker of icons when Jude first encounters Sue, she has herself become a desacralized icon (Hardy 313).

The radical iconoclasts of sixteenth and seventeenth century England, among their social and political reforms had, in the religious sphere, produced and affirmed the Book of Common Prayer and laid the ground for a word-based iconography. The Tractarians would later come to grips with it in forging their own spirituality, one heavily dependent, not upon the Iconoclasts’ religious asceticism but a religious aestheticism developed from

literary values formed by an educational establishment to generate a commonality of values, images, and mental references from both classical and Christian traditions that would define the knowledge base of the influential classes. While this renewal of interest in the effect of aesthetic values upon religious life created in the Tractarians a new consciousness as to what sacred messages were appropriately carried by word and image, poets writing from a carefully developed secular world view also made use of these fresh insights to adapt the vitality of sacred images to new uses. Although the fusion of the secular and sacred, the eternal and the now, is as old as Augustine, and new as Teilhard de Chardin, in the decades of the nineteenth century the secularization of human thought in the Western world moved toward its zenith, and as the germ of desacralization began to grow, it affected both content and structure of all genres in English literature. The manner of its coming, as well as the accomplished fact that was the energizing force, makes this notion worth exploring along eclectic and rather Browningsque lines since no one approach can depict it in all its richness.

Certainly, for Harold Bloom's *Ruin the Sacred Truths*, no true distinction can be made for secular and sacred in literature, but he acknowledges that strong poetry has been seen by others as partaking of the sacred. As he develops his argument of new poetry springing from a strong misreading of the old, he asserts that "[a]ll strong poets...must ruin the sacred truths to fable and old song precisely because the essential condition for

poetic strength is that the new song, one's own, always must be a song of one's self. Every sacred truth not one's own becomes a fable, an old song that requires corrective revision" (Bloom, 53, 125). J. Hillis Miller has a different explanation. He develops an argument which shows the process of secularizing as "the gradual withdrawal of God from the world." but he views this as a distancing of the deity, rather than a full disappearance, and the initiative is of God, not man (1). This precise degree of removal, he argues, was potent for a group of nineteenth century poets, among them Browning and Arnold, who consciously resisted this sacred withdrawal and for whom poetry became a way of discovering "hitherto unapprehended symbols which establish a new relation across the gap between man and God" (15).

However satisfactory Miller's perspective may be to modern critics as defining certain shared qualities in nineteenth century poetry, it is, nevertheless, also possible and useful to flesh out this idea by considering reactions to secularization not so much as poets' struggles to reach across chaos to a receding God, but as active attempts at cultural adaptation of sacred systems to new secular codes, an adaptation shared by playwrights, novelists and essayists. To this vision, or more accurately, this process, has been applied the unepithetous term 'desacralization,' attributed to Martin E. Malia as having special application to philosophy and literature (Anderson 6).

Desacralization, in contrast to secularization, a concept closely allied to it and upon which it depends, refers not to the administration of institutions, where one might distinguish a church school and a state school, but to the artifacts of society. In a desacralized artifact one looks for aesthetic values replacing sacred ones, as the grace of a ritual movement is retained when the religious significance is lost. Typically the desacralized artifact has also some kind of socially affirming force as well, even when, as Mary Anderson suggests:

[The] English advocates of 'art for art's sake'...reacted to the cultural crisis of desacralization [by] sharing to varying degrees in a society whose mythology continued to permit the survival of both God and Faust. Their artistic solutions inevitably reflect their sense of that society and images of that survival" (104-05).

In the end, however, she concludes that the inherent sterility of "art for art's sake" assured its early demise; that no spawning of further unsound ideas was possible and credits the impact of Darwinism in the literary criticism of the day, rather than the vociferous objections of religious establishment, for a general lack of acceptance of an amoral aesthetic (101).

In many instances, the concept of desacralization was present before a word was found to express it. Most commonly, secularization is used to cover all instances, as in the Owen Chadwick studies, notably, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*. Max

Weber's word for a similar idea, *Entzauberung*, 'de-magification,' is no more melodious and, moreover, restricts the resonances in a way words coined with 'sacred' do not, although, again, this word is closely allied to the concept as developed by Martin E. Malia. In his studies of Russian and Eastern European history, 'secularization' or *Entzauberung* could not convey the impact of Communism on society. His use of the term *desacralized* to characterize the aesthetics of a world whose key institutions have been secularized in as ritualistic a way as the Orthodox liturgy it supplanted suggests its appropriateness for a specific cultural poetic operating in nineteenth-century England. It seems especially useful to limit the use of *desacralization* to signify what Umberto Eco and other semioticians call either 'overcoding' or 'subcoding,' depending on its degree of innovation within the culture, while retaining 'secular' as a term outside aesthetics (Eco 133-36, 268).

Malia, however, was not the coiner of 'desacralization,' rather the first to restrict its meaning to aesthetics. The second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* shows its earliest use, in 1911, to be in the sense of a ritual removal of taboo, a sense much closer to Weber's idea of de-magification and emanating from nineteenth century anthropological concepts. Northcote W. Thomas, a British government anthropologist in Southern Nigeria, wrote about some classes of taboo that are reversible by acts that *desacralized* them. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 26:338:2. Cited in

OED). A modern instance is the de-oathing ceremony of the Mau Mau devised by Elspeth Huxley and L.S.B. Leakey and used as a pacifying action in the political unrest just prior to Kenyan independence. These are instances hinting at more to come.

Mircea Eliade's landmark *Sacred and Profane* (1959) begins to examine the matter more closely. Eliade (1907-1986) theorizes that desacralization is a chief characteristic of the whole experience of the non-religious man who comprises modern societies (12). He considered the literary experience to be an integral part of the religious experience, or the religious experience to be an integral part of the literary experience, and was convinced that the

sole, but important, religious creation of the modern western world...[is] the ultimate stage of desacralization. The process is of considerable interest to the historian of religions, for it illustrates the complete camouflage of the "sacred"—more precisely, its identification with the 'profane.'
(*History. I:xvi*).

Unfortunately he did not live to complete this synthesis. However, B. S. Rennie, a student of Eliade, undertakes, in "The Religious Creativity of Modern Humanity: Some Observations on Eliade's Unfinished Thought" to suggest how this might have been developed. He writes:

Eliade sees symbol, myth, and ritual as 'hierophanies', that is, manifestations or revelations of the sacred. Hierophany acquaints humanity with archetypal structures, paradigmatic models, or

exemplary patterns. The revelation occurring in a heirophany is not completely 'irresistible'—despite a subjective sensation of powerlessness before it—it can be perceived by some and simultaneously unrecognized by others. He does not consider the sacred as necessarily implying belief in God or gods or spirits....it is the experience of a reality and source of an awareness of existing in the world (Labyrinth 154 cited in Rennie).

Eliade considers that it is the sacred, in his definition, that establishes the world, that defines reality, so that like both Keble and Arnold,

...the non-religious Western man still dreams, reads novels and poetry, listens to music, goes to the theatre, loves "Nature," and so forth. And this means that unconsciously he communicates with the sacred" (*Sacred* 72 Cited in Rennie 227).

In 1964 Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media* asserted that the visual desacralizes the universe and produces the "non-religious man of modern societies," perhaps an unconscious borrowing from Eliade (xv, 155). In this idea, the thinking of Claude Lévi-Strauss is also present, if not overtly. Lévi-Strauss used language as primary material for his anthropological studies, which were most valuable to McLuhan in his contributions regarding exchange, his urging the value of models, and his merging of form and content (Harari 19). This work is essentially anthropological, but it does offer some insights into the process of desacralization. Critics who are examining what underlies the sense of loss experienced by today's anti-hero, see the loss of the sacred properties of a departed Golden Age. The anti-hero suffers from nostalgia, and solipsistically explores his emotion as sensation

than looking for a philosophical rationale. This attitude is not necessarily the only possible response. In contrast, we have an example of an anthropologist working with the same desacralized material and coming up with the opposite conclusion. One example is to be found in Chardin's writings, for instance, *The Phenomenon of Man* and *The Divine Milieu*. Chardin writes

We have gone deeply into these new perspectives: the progress of the universe, and in particular of the human universe...[T]he greater man becomes, the more humanity becomes united, with consciousness of, and mastery of, its potentialities, the more beautiful creation will be...(137).

But at the same time, as Julian Huxley writes of Chardin:

He realized that the appearance of human personality was the culmination of two major evolutionary trends--the trend towards more extreme individuation, and that towards more extensive interrelation and co-operation: personas are individual who transcend their merely organic individuality in conscious participation. (20).

Ritual has gone, symbol has gone, and the beauty resident in creation is restricted to direct experience. If this is a goal for modern man, he has not yet come near to it. Like the early Victorians, late twentieth-century man must make his aesthetic objects from symbols, ranging from "bare, ruined choirs" to ancient weaponry.

For Browning's *Sordello*, waging war is an occasion to position himself on this sacred/secular continuum, to experience himself as an individual. As he finds his place, often in the midst of battle, he comes to

understand the true nature of an emerging beauty distinct from that of the past. The speaker in Tennyson's *Maud* seems to resolve his tragic life by resorting to participation in a patriotic war, an outmoded artifact of empire. For the speaker it is a spiritual growth culminating in acceptance of an enigmatic future, an embrace accepted in desacralized trust. The revolutionary transference was accomplished by desacralized images, at once familiar and strange. The artist defining himself in his death encapsulates the theme in each of these poems of the period, consistent in the choice of desacralized tropes reflecting the violence and finality of war—the ultimate gesture. “sought for across the memory of old signs.”

Chapter 3

The Roots of Desacralization

In March, 1866, Thomas Carlyle was inducted as Rector of his alma mater, Edinburgh University. He ended his speech of acceptance with a favorite poem of Goethe, which he had translated freely in 1842 or 1843. Before he recited it, he explained its importance: "To me it has something of a modern psalm in it, in some measure" characterizing it as "deep and high," "true and clear," and above all "a kind of road-melody or marching music of mankind ("Address" 109).

The Future hides in it
 Gladness and sorrow;
 We press still thorow,
 Naught that abides in it
 Daunting us, --onward.
 And solemn before us,
 Veiled, the dark Portal,
 Goal of all mortal:--
 Stars silent rest o'er us,
 Graves under us silent!
 But heard are the Voices,
 Heard are the Sages,
 The Worlds and the Ages:
 'Choose well; your choice is
 Brief, and yet endless.
 Here eyes do regard you,
 In Eternity's stillness;
 Here is all fullness,

Ye brave, to reward you;
Work, and despair not. ("Address" 109)

The timing is significant. In 1842 or 1843, Carlyle had just finished seeing his lectures on heroes and hero worship through the press and had decided to include the poem in *Past and Present* (1843)(*Poems* 318). Thus Carlyle created a version of Goethe's poem when he was still in mid-career, and had not yet fully embraced the authoritarianism of his latter years.

It is curious that Carlyle never thought of this as his own poem, although its best elements are more his than Goethe's (Francke 97, 98) and in other cases Carlyle seems to have obscured the line between his translations and adaptations of foreign publications, even acceding to his editor's crediting him with authorship. Goethe wrote the poem, "Symbolum" in 1815 for his son's initiation into the Masons in Weimar. The original first verse beginning (in English) "The Mason's ways are / A type of existence" obviously did not suit Carlyle's purpose and was dropped from Carlyle's translation. Goethe's last line, "Wir heissen euch hoffen"— "Then hope ye forever" in Bowring's translation—is far weaker (Goethe 241), although Carlyle used it, in German, as a sort of coda to his speech, repeating the last line, in German at the end of his recitation, with his own "Work, and despair not" echoing in the minds of his auditors. It was a good desacralized hymn for a body of undergraduates. Franke tells us, for instance, that "Work and

Despair Not” is always associated with Thomas Carlyle, not Goethe, in Germany. It was even used as the title of an anthology much read in the dreary days after World War I, when “Work and Despair Not” was a kind of shibboleth for distressed students and intellectuals. In Carlyle’s time the modern penchant for irony was not so pervasive. A correspondent writing in the *Pall Mall Gazette* described the Carlyle reading of the poem at the end of his rectorial address:

The recitation of the beautiful lines from Goethe, at the end was so masterly—so marvelous that one felt in it that Carlyle’s real anathemas against rhetoric were but the expression of his knowledge that there is a rhetoric above all other art. (quoted in Francke 101)

Here one of the greatest seers of his age voices in his closing words to these vociferous representatives of the next generation (the text of Carlyle’s speech included audience reactions), the secular-tending religion he had evolved so painfully within the structure of his traditionally nonconformist family. But his means of transmitting this message used a structure that surely was the paramount religious genre of the age, the hymn. Note the common measure and, in spite of the silence and austerity of its message, the militant rhythm of the beat of Carlyle’s modern psalm and road-song.

Carlyle’s intent in this regard he had made clear in his lecture series, reprinted as *Heroes and Hero-Worship*. In this work, in which Carlyle considers what constitutes both the hero and the attitudes appropriate to

those who admire the hero, he starts with a study of the divine hero as existing in natural religion, moves to the hero as prophet, then poet, then priest in an institutionalized religion, the man of letters, who has the responsibility of coping with the rapidly expanding knowledge base, and ends with the hero as king, in reality a revolutionary figure of political power. He considers whether science has weakened religious truth since it offers another path to truth, using different benchmarks. He distinguishes between the Christian theological system and all others; he affirms orthodoxy while attacking secular, objective humanism, but in the end he concludes that for the hero worshiper these considerations are irrelevant. He writes:

And to me it is very cheering to consider that no sceptical logic, or general triviality, insincerity and aridity of any time and its influences can destroy this noble inborn loyalty and worship that is in man. In times of unbelief, which soon have to become times of revolution, much down-rushing sorrowful decay and ruin is visible to everybody. For myself in these days, I seem to see in this indestructibility of Hero-worship the everlasting adamant lower than which the confused wreck of revolutionary things cannot fall. The confused wreck of things crumbling and even crashing and tumbling round us in these revolutionary ages, will get down so far; no farther. It is an eternal cornerstone, from which they can begin to build themselves up again. That man in some sense or other worships Heroes; that we all of us reverence and must ever reverence Great Men: this is, to me, the living rock amid all rushings-down whatsoever;--the one fixed point in modern revolutionary history, otherwise as if bottomless and shoreless. (15)

Edinburgh University's 1866 installation of its Rector embodies much of the democratizing, desacralizing tendencies of the first half of the

nineteenth century. The democratic election of the Rector by the students was a popularizing act. However, it affected little the formulation of the curriculum or the administration of the university. For it to conclude with a secular hymn, one that ends "Work, and despair not," it seems but another Sign of the Times.

Secularization in the nineteenth century brought about key institutional changes. Its cultural elements mutated from the sacred to the secular, and these changes determined poetic symbol. Usually, says Umberto Eco, "the overcoded entities float—so to speak—among the codes, on the threshold between convention and innovation" (134). The secular words, as do any words, define their culture as much as the culture defines them. It is important to discuss early and tentative critical awareness of the reverberations in poetry of the secularizing phenomenon, with special attention to John Keble's tenure as Professor of Poetry in the University of Oxford. As institutions change, those words depending on institutional qualities for their resonances, change the messages they convey. It is the poet who sees the changes, selects new elements and creates new statements.

Owen Chadwick's landmark study of general European secularization in the nineteenth century identifies those elements which were formerly sacred but are now seen as secular: science developing a natural explanation of the universe; progress as an inevitable effect of man's use of time; the

application of human measures to the study of sacred texts, generally known as the Higher Criticism; and comparison of the Judeo-Christian world to other major cultures and religions, as their texts became available in English translation. He discusses some of the thinkers who brought about these changes, summarizes some of the texts and details historical events that marked the milestones of secularization. Moreover, he establishes a practicable beginning in time, a *terminus a quo*, for the birth of the notion of a secular world, as distinguished from one divinely fashioned for divine purposes:

The subject, though not [in modern form], was invented by students of the European mind in the eighteenth century. Here, in the years between 1650 and 1750, the age of Sir Isaac Newton and Leibnitz, of Fontenelle and Spinoza, of John Locke and David Hume, and finally of Diderot and Voltaire, were the seminal years of modern intellectual history. In these years the Middle Ages ended at last. Here men could study the distant origins of modern science, the beginnings of the idea of progress, the first historical criticism of the Biblical records, the discoveries of the true nature of other great religions and cultures of the world. (5)

Michel Foucault, in *The Order of Things*, agrees with the timing but expresses the result somewhat differently. It was “the product of a radical rupture at the end of the eighteenth century in the unconscious metastructures of Western European thought, which gave new meaning to the empirical phenomena of language, life, and labor” (Stocking 30).

The paradox of secularization may produce a flawed result. McKeon writes:

The idea of secularization is a paradoxical one. Its progressive and optimistic promise is of a faithful accommodation or translation of the sacred to a profane world, of the past to the present, whereby an essential matter is understood to be preserved within an altered form. But secularization may also be a process of mistranslation in which reformation amounts to deformation, purification to corruption--in which to know and experience what has been given is felt to be a crude act of "comprehension," a swallowing up of sacred truth by a secular reduction of it. This paradox haunts seventeenth-century England on every level of thought and activity; it is inseparable even from Francis Bacon's supremely sanguine accounts of the "new philosophy" of empirical method (65).

Epistemological questions first posed by Enlightenment philosophers explored the relationship of mystery to empirical knowledge, and enunciated paradigms to come to grips with the world. Emil Durkheim, for instance, accepted from Comte the thesis that religion was one of the foundations for social and moral life, and used it as a point of departure in *La Vie Religieuse* and other studies. At issue here was the specific impact of religions on societies, especially in their mutual preservation, and whether maintenance of the *status quo* was to be desired above other things which, in themselves, were of more value. Colonialism, for instance, destabilized traditional societies by importing and superimposing on the colonial society Christianity as practiced by the established Church. However, the purpose of the colonizing state was not theological but secular, not to "save souls" but to

provide a social stability distinct from and paramount to the traditional patterns of the colonized society, while adding another link between the colony and the mother country. When this policy was broadened to include nonconformist religious bodies, the move reflected domestic pressures rather than foreign policies. Religious choice was not a priority for the newly colonized; in fact, colonies were frequently partitioned, with missionary groups allocated specified districts. This limited, political vision of religion as social stabilizer, long a fact of existence in any European country, soon expanded to a consideration of what sort of community properly existed between mother country and colony.

Benedict Anderson argues that the possibility of seeing this sort of relationship required a sense of nation, and that

the very possibility of imagining the nation only arose historically when, and where, three fundamental cultural conceptions, all of great antiquity, lost their axiomatic grip on men's minds. The first of these was the idea that a particular script-language offered privileged access to ontological truth, precisely because it was an inseparable part of that truth. It was this idea that called into being the great transcontinental sodalities of Christendom, the Ummah Islam, and the rest. Second was the belief that society was naturally organized around and under high centres—monarchs who were persons apart from other human beings and who ruled by some form of cosmological (divine) dispensation. Human loyalties were necessarily hierarchical and centripetal because the ruler, like the sacred script, was a node of access to being and inherent in it. Third was a conception of temporality in which cosmology and history were

indistinguishable, the origins of the world and of men essentially identical. Combined, these ideas rooted human lives firmly in the very nature of things, giving certain meaning to the everyday fatalities of existence (above all death, loss, and servitude) and offering, in various ways, redemption from them.

The slow, uneven decline of these interlinked certainties, first in Western Europe, later elsewhere, under the impact of economic change, discoveries (social and scientific), and the development of increasingly rapid communications, drove a harsh wedge between cosmology and history..Nothing perhaps more precipitated this search [for new ways of linking fraternity, power and time], nor made it more fruitful, than print-capitalism which made it possible for . . .people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways. (40)

One of these profound new ways was that man became the *object* of scientific discovery, as contrasted with being the *subject* of religion and arts. The earliest scientific studies, whose history retains the lurid images of anatomists snatching cadavers from graves for their research, gave way to controlled observation of man, as it were, *in situ*. The social sciences of psychology, sociology and anthropology were developed. Now man could no longer regard himself as simplistically as a monk vowed to obedience to Abbot Samson, responsible only to his religious community. His one community had become multiple, each group sharing different sets of attributes, each set more uncomfortable than the last. As Susan Sontag writes: “[a]nthropology has always struggled with an intense, fascinated repulsion towards its subject” (223). In psychology, man’s behavior is compared, not always favorably, with the lesser creatures. In anthropology,

comparison is often with “lesser breeds;” the great chain of being leading to God was no longer intact, and Leigh Hunt proclaimed in “Abou Ben Adhem” that love for one’s fellowman is as worthy as the love of God.

A recent history of Victorian anthropology by George Stocking examines more closely nineteenth century activities that fall into the category of comparison of the Judeo-Christian world to other major cultures and religions. These “conjectural histories,” also called “histories of civil society” by the Scottish Enlightenment, were consciously pioneering forays into new territories. Using a body of evidence incomplete and fragmented—possibly even more so than the writers appreciated—they established certain broad generalizations that defined some of the questions that were to be asked of each culture: what was its technology, what its cosmology, what its social structure? How did it define the transcendental? What were its gods and moral codes (Stocking 31)?

As more empirical data were amassed, it became increasingly evident to the gatherers that determining the significance of words was more than a search for reasonable equivalents. James Cowles Prichard (1786-1848), now remembered as the “father of ethnology,” seems to have been the first, in his studies on species recognition—How do we know that this group is part of homo sapiens?— to articulate the generalization that men use language as an operational code for similar cultural ends (Stocking 31). The Rosetta Stone,

which was the linguistic breakthrough at the beginning of the nineteenth century, was text to text. Pritchard noted the necessity for extracting the language from the event.

These new studies of man reinforced the growing conviction that the Bible as sole explanation of man's state was inadequate. The continuing barrage of publication of empirical findings reinforced the increasingly secular focus. The close relationship between linguistics and anthropology was an important contributor to the secular path that nineteenth-century scholarship was to pursue. By the time the Crystal Palace had been erected, associations overtly advocating secularism were a commonplace, though in decline after the eighteen eighties (Chadwick 91). Darwin was established as the symbol for the whole range of evolutionary thought (Chadwick 170, 178, Houghton, 20). The Syllabus of 1864 of Pius IX summarized the key elements in continental scholarly discourse, if only to anathematize them. It had energy, violence, and frequent employment of war and revolutionary metaphors; the polemic over this document was to typify other, earlier arguments about secularization and demonstrate the polarization of society that secularization had brought about, and, in fact, by forcing discourse, institutionalizing the secular. At one extreme, were those with Pius IX, who endowed the church with a unique civilizing mission to society; at the other extreme were those who considered society as possessing its own institutions to assure the wellbeing of the state. Areas especially affected were

government and law, education (the Church of England was not fully to cede this right until after World War II) and even religious practices, including music, as ritual was examined in new ways.

The attempt to re-establish a Catholic bishopric on English shores, in 1850, was at base a political question, but influenced the way people thought about their forms of worship. Politically, it so strongly suggested the threat of the Spanish Armada, insurrection in Scotland, and Napoleon's campaigns that it was called 'The Papal Aggression' and rallied the nation. From a religious perspective, it recalled the pre-Reformation English church without vernacular rituals or an English bible. Rather than being a simple administrative matter it became a cause célèbre.

Walter Ralls outlines the causes of the "last great outburst of No-Popery feeling" (Parsons IV:115). In the fall of 1850, governance of the Catholic Church in England became national rather than missionary in structure. The move outraged Protestants who saw it as usurping in some undefined way the rights of the English church. It was also politically unwelcome because it called attention to the Irish immigrant poor, who were in desperate competition with English poor for employment. From at least the 1830's the Roman Catholic church is seen as incompatible with English political institutions; a concern which lasted from 1835 to the 50's. It also made suspect interest in liturgical practices and encouraged the Tractarians to

great circumspection in promoting their liturgical reforms. For the most part, this they did by asserting the Englishness of their movement. Ralls writes:

Probe at virtually any point, and the bitterness and hostility will seem a hundred and twenty years later to be palpable and alive. From Dr. Arnold's first bitter attack in the *Edinburgh Review*, entitled "The Oxford Malignants, and Dr Hampden," wherein he called the Tractaraians 'the peculiar disgrace of the Church of England', through the publishing of Hurrell Froude's mildly scandalous *Remains*, and then the almost ludicrous effort to establish with the German Lutheran Church a joint bishopric of Jerusalem--bringing upon the British government in 1841 a protest from Turkey not dissimilar to that expressed by the English parliament ten years later against the Papal Aggression--through the issuing of Tract 90 with the resultant outcry from all sides, including those most kindly disposed toward the Tractarian movement (here the master of Trinity, Christopher Wordsworth, is typical when he cried, "Oh, what a fall! Its perusal has lowered my opinion of the writer more than I could have thought possible'), there is an atmosphere of unrelieved tension which had not abated by 1850." (Parsons IV:121. Internal quote Webster 108).

The Nonconformist churches had long since developed new rituals and composed new music primarily intended to teach and inspire. Rather than seeking a pure tradition-based liturgy, a directly accessible form of worship was devised that had much of the practical about it and followed more closely the doctrine of redemption by works. The immediate attractiveness of Nonconformist hymns and hymn singing as a cultural pursuit was a factor in the reexamination of religious ritual that was a major concern of the Tractarians—what kind, how much, with what resonances. Pius IX saw his role differently: it was for society to bring itself into line with

received beliefs, not for him to reconcile the old with the new. The new, however, had arrived, and it was secular. Charles Kingsley, who said a visit to the Crystal Palace "was like going into a sacred place," expanded his spirituality in *Yeast*, when through Lancelot Smith, he says:

When your party compare sneeringly Romish Sanctity, and English Civilization, I say, "Take you the Sanctity, and give me the Civilization!...Give me the political economist, the sanity of the reformed, the engineer; and take your saints and virgins, relics and miracles. The spinning-jenny and the railroad, Cunard's liners and the electric telegraph, are to me, if not to you, the signs that we are, on some points at least, in harmony with the universe: that there is a mighty spirit working among us, who cannot be your anarchic and destroying devil, and therefore may be the Ordering and Creating God." (Parsons IV: 132-33, *Yeast* (NY 1851) chapter 4, pp 79, 80).

Christopher Dawson wrote:

The Tractarians were the contemporaries not only of Arnold, and Hampden and Stanley, but of Strauss and Feuerbach and of Comte and Renan. The real religious issue before the age was not whether High Church or Low Church views should prevail in the Church of England, but whether the Christian religion should preserve its spiritual identity, or whether it should be transformed by the spirit of the age and absorbed into the secularized culture of the modern world. (De Laura, 369).

It was not an age of consistency of stance. Comte, for the most part intellectually convinced that experimental science was the only road to truth, celebrated his beloved Clothilde's saint's day and called history the sacred science of humanity, thus blurring the distinction between science and faith,

and leading Emile Littré. to accuse him of “not really being emancipated” (Chadwick. *Secular....* 237). Comte could not live without ritual, and developed in his Positivist calendar his own pantheon. Saints had become secular but continued to exercise their inspirational and intercessory roles and to require their own observances.

According to Emil Durkheim, the human response to fear of natural elements had been the development of protective religious rituals (Chadwick. *Secular... 5*). In contrast to primitive beliefs, former mysteries were explained first by new Enlightenment philosophies and then both elaborated and embodied within the context of the developing natural and social sciences. The urgency—and the dramatic tension—of magic ritual weakened. The world of the unknown was diminished by the removal of matters responsive to empirical research and suggested new approaches to mystery—the higher criticism is the most notable manifestation of this phenomenon. In the social sphere, the mysteries of religion were exchanged for the new de-mystified rituals of sermon attendance and hymn singing, both oriented to present conduct and firmly anchored in the present world.

Consciousness of this exchange in literature tentatively reveals itself in the work of some early Victorian literary theorists, Newman, Keble, Mill and, in the second tier, Proctor and Montgomery—and certainly, in his influence on Tennyson, Arthur Hallam. Built upon romantic theory—

Wordsworth, Coleridge, Goethe, Schiller— criticism of this period benefited by comparisons offered by classicism and romanticism, and was infused by the speculative spirit of the Early Victorian age. Highly selective as to its romantic poetic models, it looked toward democratizing poets (heroes speaking to other men) and away from the poets claiming descent from Apollo, (gods speaking to men). In his essay "On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry" (1831), Arthur Hallam uses the diction of the new disciplines of the nineteenth century when he speaks of the "progress" of literature exemplified in the ability of Shelley and Keats to produce in their poetry a gestalt, or, as Hallam calls it, a picture (Houghton 804). Throughout this discussion he describes in psychological terms how poets related to the sensible world, and the quality and impacts of these "associations" (Houghton 805). Only minor critics, Hunt and Hallam for instance, kept embers of Keats and Shelley alive. The fires of romantic appreciation were not to rekindle until mid-century. Wordsworthian values were the mainstream criteria and were validated on what was perceived to be their natural relations.

Critics were in agreement about the importance of the two classifications, but were divided into those who were more classical in outlook and those who had room for the romantics. The creative works of the Early Victorian Period were evaluated in terms of their genius, insight, manner of handling fact or reality, their degree of truth and sincerity--all used

relative to the content of poetry, not its forms. At this time criticism became more clearly differentiated from appreciation as, in addition to classical rhetorical terminology, critics began to use the language of scientific discourse more in their essays.

A mid-twentieth century overview by Alba Warren summarizes the basic assumptions of Early Victorian criticism and includes the properties which partake of the emerging social sciences and transcendental properties which are still essentially sacral in nature. Poetry, Warren says, was seen to be governed by laws universally valid, as the laws of science, once established, are immutable. Like science, the object of poetry is truth and its matter is reality, spiritual or physical. Paradigms are important in both the sciences and poetry, and the poet's models are Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton and Wordsworth. The sciences produce appropriate applications. So too, poetry must have a practical end. Of the specific social sciences, psychology offers ways of describing the nature of the poet. Insight, a psychological concept, is the agency of poetic genius and depends on the poet's moral perceptions that are to be distinguished from the poet's personal moral system. Style is directly related to the poet's moral being. And again from psychology is the idea that poetic form is determined by the way the imagination expresses itself. As a spiritual or transcendental object, poetry is the product of genius and embodies the idea that beauty is truth made

manifest. Although poetry must contain great ideas, any subject is appropriate for poetry if it is treated “imaginatively” (Warren 6-7).

Although these are points of general agreement and individual disagreement, it is significant that Warren expresses them as articles of faith or post-faith, a manifesto is the term he uses. The term manifesto usually has political overtones and is interesting in its application here. Was the choice determined by Early Victorian conditions or mid-century American consciousness? Hallam would see his essay as a manifesto, as would John Newman and John Keble their writings and sermons, both accustomed as they were to intellectual and religious authority. Mill, too, although not with religious overtones, speaks with authority. Keble, for instance, had one firm foot in the camp of institutional religion—he cared passionately how it fared—and the other in the camp of literature, where he was equally passionate. Keble in his *Tracts on the Lord’s Supper* elucidated his thinking about visible sign and inward meaning. His procedure, however, was to select his arguments from the least controversial of sources; he was aware that he was presenting sacramental ideas to a world grown, at best, scrupulously, ethically secular. The point of the Tractarian liturgical movement is that it offered to its audience a mode of viewing the world radically different from other modes. It was radical in that it attempted to return to a religion many generations removed from its present adherents and that it consciously used aesthetics in representations of the spiritual.

In "Sacred Poetry," however, Keble makes clear that religious intent is no substitute for inherent aesthetic quality and doctrinal soundness (Martin 90). Earnestness is not truth (Keble 86). In his Oxford lectures on poetry—Keble was Professor of Poetry from 1832 to 1841 and gave his lectures in Latin—the poet is seen to be divinely gifted and his hearers receptive to learning the magic within the physical object that is the putative subject. But it is the gift the poet enjoys that is divine: poetry itself is suspect and secular. Keble explains, because the fathers of the church "felt the immense influence poetry must wield in any society" (Keble 2: 477). Poetry was a power distinct from religious authority, and was to be feared by a theocracy.

In critical theory "science" established a basic antithesis to post-Romantic poetics, with a backward look at Romanticism. Science here exhibits pronounced, even exaggerated, characteristics, that reflect the overarching interests of the century: rationalism, materialism, utilitarianism, and borrowings from the newest empirical sciences: biology, geology, economics, anthropology, and a philology merging into linguistics. Modern psychology gathered the raw material for own analysis as enlightenment reason attempted to reconcile anxiety with optimism, critical awareness with belief, and earnestness with enthusiasm. It can be argued that hypocrisy, so completely identified with all that is Victorian, can be ascribed to incomplete reconciliation of opposites.

Underneath, as an organizing force lay Kant's speculative system which gave to the nineteenth century *a priori* forms of intuition (space and time) and categories of understanding—unity, plurality, totality, reality, negation, limitation, substance/accident, cause/effect, action/patience, possibility/impossibility, existence/nonexistence, and necessity/contingency) (Taylor 5). This mode of knowing affected aesthetics.

In order to decide whether anything is beautiful or not, [Kant wrote,] we refer the representation, not by the Understanding to the Object for cognition, but by the Imagination (perhaps in conjunction with the Understanding) to the subject, and its feeling of pleasure or pain. (Kant 375. Quoted in Warren 8).

But in the *Critique of Judgement*, in the section dealing with genius,

Kant writes:

In a word, the aesthetic idea is a representation of the imagination, annexed to a given concept, with which, in the free employment of imagination, such a multiplicity of partial representations are bound up, that no expression indicating a definite concept can be found for it—one which on that account allows a concept to be supplemented in thought by much that is indefinable in words, and the feeling of which quickens the cognitive faculties, and with language, as a mere thing of the letter, binds up the spirit (soul) also. (Quoted in Taylor 49).

To Kant, artistic activity, production through freedom, cannot impose itself upon the nature to which it is relating; it cannot destroy the integrity of nature. The unity of nature and reason can be possible only when the subjectivity and objectivity are one. The identity of reason and nature must

be arrived at by unifying practical and theoretical reason; as the artist relates to himself in and through his object so nature relates to itself in artistic activity. The subjectivity of the artist realizes itself objectively; the objectivity of nature comes to completion in subjective artistic production.
(Taylor 5)

Coleridge uses science to see poetry as different in kind from other thinking or writing. In *Biographia Literaria* he defines a poem as "that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth," (II, 10.), opening wide the doors of the nineteenth century to the *ars gratia artis* of the Decadents. Leigh Hunt, like Coleridge, sees a material difference: poetry begins where science leaves off "to exhibit a further truth [connecting what has gone before] to the world of emotion and its power to produce imaginative pleasure" (Hunt, *Imagination and Fancy*, 1845. 3. cited in Warren). In both approaches, much of the sacramental sense of the ineffable, the mystery of aesthetics has been removed. Wordsworth, in the Preface of 1802, conflates knowledge with other kinds of perception. To know is to feel; therefore poetry is as objective as science. What differentiate the two are their materials and "the use to which the knowledge is put." For Wordsworth, the use of poetry is to bind together "the vast empire of human society" and is therefore moral. Here again, unity is achieved as man identifies with creation, not the creator. The strict distinction between poetry and truth that Coleridge makes in

Biographia Literaria includes his criticism of Wordsworth's notion of the object of poetry as truth, for it destroys, he says, not only the distinction between poetry and prose but between poetry or fictive works in general and philosophy. For Coleridge, imitation and representation are, as it were, secularized sacramentals, functioning without direct reference to truth, which was in any case irrelevant to its immediate purpose, pleasure. Wordsworth, the Baconian, saw the poet as truth-maker and spokesman; Coleridge as image-maker concentrated on the object, pleasure.

Sir Joshua Reynolds contributed the normative or perfectionist notion that what is to be imitated are the "central forms," which do not exist in nature but are generalized from it, by divesting it of particulars and accidental deformities. Wordsworth rejected this theory: to him, what is, is beauty. The creative process blends mind and matter. What is imitated falls short of reality but is excellent as it approaches near to it.

Most post-Romantic critics found themselves agreeing with Coleridge, accepting to some extent his distinction between imagination and fancy even if, like Carlyle, they denied it and assigned other words to it, "insight" in lieu of "imagination" in Carlyle's case. George Henry Lewes, in "Principles of Success in Literature" (1865) explained imagination as image-making. The consensus seemed to be that the poet had a useful role in

society—post-iconic, post-iconoclast and word-oriented—action, not praise defined it.

The idea of poetry as the handmaid to reason, morals, and religion is pervasive in the Victorian Age. Proctor, Keble, Patmore in “The Ethics of Art,” and William Allingham in his essay “On Poetry” (1865), all give detailed summaries of the practical values of poetry. Matthew Arnold, after registering the lone protest against impure aesthetics in his early letters to Clough, comes finally to a view of poetry as a “magister vitae” and a substitute for religion itself (Warren. 22).

In their concern with the iconography of the poetic mind and the moral authority of the poet, the idea of the poet as mediator between the picture in his imagination, or fancy, and his text is somewhat taken for granted. Hallam dismisses this question by suggesting that anyone with rhetorical skills is able to create some kind of poem (Houghton 405). Isobel Armstrong suggests that “it is possible to regard the language and form of nineteenth century poetry as a model of the structure of consciousness [object] or being itself [subject]” founded on a firm epistemological base and used with “great precision and accuracy” (xiii). Armstrong distinguishes between Hopkins’ perceptions of the relationship of words and consciousness of the external world and Coleridge’s. She states that Hopkins says words are substitutes, symbols, for things; Coleridge says words are living powers

(Armstrong 3-4). She further sketches some of the shifts from the earliest positions of the nineteenth century. It is at “the coinciding point of definitions” where the several meanings come together simultaneously moving from the notional to the real that these cultural elements can be distinguished (8-9).

Certainly important— possibly the key to Victorian cultural life among the educated classes— is the role classical studies played in education, and indeed, their impact on the adult lives of those who were classically educated. As a first introduction to cultures other than one’s own, it is useful in making distinctions between the secular and the sacred. The study of the Greek and Roman authors that marked the Renaissance for Western Europe was the thin edge of the wedge of secularization. A useful study of this tendency is Highet’s *The Classical Tradition: Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature* (1949). Where Jenkyn’s *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* and Turner’s *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* look closely at nineteenth century England, Highet traces the transmission of the texts and their impact on learning through all of Western Europe from earliest times. One conclusion to be drawn from Jenkyns and Turner is that the significance of Greek instruction in nineteenth century England was not to secularize but create bonding within a particular group. The Greek classics in the vernacular would secularize, in that they would give a world view

different from the Judeo-Christian, an alternative view of how to govern, how to think.

However, the act of acquiring Greek and Latin set a seal upon the “tiny minority of Victorians” (Jenkyns 64) who read the original language and could move with relative freedom between the classics and English. One result of this male bonding demonstrates many of these conclusions.

Cambridge Compositions: Greek and Latin (1899) is an anthology, one of many published nearly every year, of translations into Latin and Greek of short passages from modern English writers, among them Rossetti, Clough, Shelley, Arnold, and Browning. Women writers, such as Austen, C. Brontë, Barrett Browning are represented, but all of the translators are male. As might be expected, the majority of contributors lectured in the universities, since this intellectual exercise suggests a deep and continuing familiarity with the language, but prelates and politicians are also represented, as evidence of a life-long love for a study that began before their puberty.

That the poets being discussed here represent Cambridge (Tennyson) and the fledgling University of London (Browning) is fortuitous; I have selected them for their stature in the literature of the nineteenth century. But in a consideration of the impact of the classics on the secularizing of society and the desacralization of language, they each exemplify a classical modality: in shorthand, one might say that Oxford sacralized the classics, Cambridge

made them a science, and the University of London made them elective in higher education and eclectic in selection. In the case of Tennyson, whose classical education came from his father, one might also consider his education to have a strong eighteenth-century bent.

Turner says that in England there was no fully objective study of Greek. The Greek heritage existed to shed light on the present political and social condition of England and to prepare for public life. The parts of the Greek heritage that were felt to be inappropriate for these ends—homosexuality and slavery, for instance—were quietly dropped or de-emphasized. Greek was studied with increasing thoroughness as the urgency for precise knowledge in order to solve Victorian problems became more and more felt (Turner 447). He writes:

Arnold's Hellenism, the art criticism of Westmacott, ...the interpretive tradition for Aristotle's Ethics, and the idealist reading of Plato similarly invoked prescriptive images of Greek civilization that supported the social and moral values of the traditional British elites as models for the new middle class leaders of the nation or that aided the traditional elites in reaching an accommodation with the new political realities of the day. (Turner 448)

In Anthony Trollope's *The Duke's Children*, the duke writes a letter to his son, who has just been elected to Parliament, setting out an Athenian code of conduct:

. . . You are there as the guardian of your fellow country-men,--that they may be safe, that they may be prosperous, that they may be well governed and lightly burdened,--above all that they may be free. If you cannot feel this to be your duty, you should not be there at all. . . . Gradually, if you will give your thoughts to it, and above all, your time, the theory of legislation will sink into your mind, and you will find that there will come upon you the ineffable delight of having served your country to the best of your ability. It is the only pleasure in life which has been enjoyed without alloy by your affectionate father, Omnium.
(Trollope. 122-23)

Trollope had been intermittently part of the “tiny populace” who were classically educated, moving from Harrow to Winchester and back to Harrow. Trollope bonded nowhere, but ultimately gained a post office career because of his tangential membership in the elite. The influence of his novels was made possible by the rise of a secular democracy composed of a middle class educated in practical matters; his audience would come to understand the kind of public responsibility so clear to the Duke of Omnium, but indirectly, through recreational reading in novels such as these. After completing this letter, the Duke, Trollope remarks sardonically, feels much refreshed, having escaped from his private cares into public life once more.

A study of the classics, then, was important in developing categories of sacred and profane. However, other forces, what Durkheim calls a “collective consciousness,” among those social groups— the family, tribe, clan, city, state, (the middle three tended to be ignored in nineteenth-century

Britain)—all were beginning to share, in greater and lesser degrees a “collective consciousness,” a secularization of the Christian notion of these corporate entities as figuring the body of Christ, a sort of collective state of grace. Even the massive church-building campaign that marked this period in response to already accomplished population shifts to urban areas, was a secular act of institutionalizing, and seen as such. Fighting against becoming tools of the state, churches are seen as “altars” of freedom of conscience, supporting liberty in the face of a state which defines its perquisite to bestow all human rights. (Chadwick 47).

The rise of the social sciences which so profoundly changed man's mind-set was also seen as a threat to the poet's traditional role—Durkheim explained society, Max Müller explained language and myth, Clausewitz made war a science, Marx and Freud severally showed the poet how to be alienated. Although the secularizing trend was general, modes of thought concerning it differed. One group, which might be labeled the Reconcilers, sought to meld the new science and the old traditional values. Of these Keble and Arnold are examples, the former seeking to retain the traditional God and the latter to reconcile tradition with the new science and a democratized world. It was up to the poet, in the face of such redundancy to become, in new, nineteenth-century ways, “the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire, the influence which is moved not, but moves” (Shelley 522).

Chapter 4

The Desacralization of the Liturgy

On April 28, 1854, a Civic Fast was observed by all of England to ask for divine assistance at the start of the Crimean War. *Punch* observed the fast in two ways. On one hand it poked fun at the establishment by printing in full the Lord Mayor's summons to his aldermen to accompany him to church, conjecturing only a nominal fast so that these London dignitaries might have enough strength to walk humbly from Mansion House to St. Paul's Church (183). On the other hand, it supported the war in stirring verse, and encouraged its advocates to greater fervor by printing a full-page inspirational cartoon, "England's Vigil." This cartoon depicted England/Queen Victoria in the form of an icon of a knight in vigil before battle, sword upraised on a cushion, imploring divine intervention for a personal worthiness that would lead to victory (186).

The Fast--its official name was Day of General Fasting and Humiliation--is as noteworthy for its juxtaposing the usages of private and public devotion as for its political controversy over the wisdom of such a war (Anderson 209). Observance was obligatory by law, the day ranking with a Bank Holiday. The great preachers of London, pacifist and pro-war alike, seized upon the event, for it gave them a fruitful sermon theme of God's wrath visited upon sinners, and guaranteed vast and attentive audiences of the devout or socially conscious middle classes. The sermons themselves would enjoy almost instant publication in *The Penny Pulpit*, which, from 1845 to 1878 enjoyed a circulation among the non-church-going working classes. Olive Anderson says, comparable to that of the serious weeklies during the 1845-1878 period (209n. See also Ensor 140). Anderson's article argues that the commonly held idea that the churches totally supported a united government on Crimean War policy ignores the philosophical and theological context in which public opinion concerning the war was molded. After noting that no wars in the eighteenth century were accompanied by public fasts, Anderson ends that it is not safe to conclude from currently available evidence that any clergy put government policy ahead of the spiritual welfare of the nation. They did not urge the war solely on political grounds, nor did all of them brandish the sword. Not every *Penny Pulpit* reader agreed with Kingsley and Maurice, who preached that refusal to fight in a just war was a sin. Nonconformists generally held that the war led to the neglect of the

"condition of England"; responsibilities at home were more important than continental alliances. The taking of human life was not the issue: the reasons for the war were.

Queen Victoria was less than content to play out her governmentally imposed role. Her attitude toward war provides an occasion for a re-secularization of war metaphor. War was "an arm of the state" and not an occasion for divine retribution upon sinners who had gone too far. She had tried vainly to make the day of prayer both private and voluntary, arguing that politicians cause war, not the sins of her subjects. However, the politicians won this battle (Victoria 3:25). Although "England's Vigil" illustrates the public face of the Day, and emphasizes what is appropriate in public worship—tradition, rites, hierarchy—as preparation for the public act of war, the *Punch* cartoon probably did not please Queen Victoria either, suggesting a leadership of a kind she did not wish to furnish, neither Joan of Arc nor Boadicea.

Owen Chadwick (1966, 1975) discusses thematically the surge of religiosity on the continent and the ways in which secularization was a necessary element of it. Olive Anderson describes in detail religious reactions to that war, using as her evidence the published sermons of the day. The influence of sermons was great, but even more pervasive were hymns, and the only general study of this subject is by Susan Tamke. Her book

discusses the dissemination of hymns and the major themes of hymnody. Her discussion of war metaphor is limited to the most overt, such as the Salvation Army's hymns, a relatively late phenomenon and not as influential in poetic inspiration as earlier works. Her history of hymnody, however, is invaluable, as it is possibly the only objective and comprehensive recent study that emphasizes the literary rather than the theological aspects of hymnody.

In the decades preceding the Crimean war, most of the citizens and their leaders in the Low Church and Dissenting congregations had long been accustomed to the war metaphor as, for instance, John and Charles Wesley used it in their hymns, "For Believers, Fighting" (Wesley, 7:398-439). For the Victorians, hymns both read and sung contributed greatly to keeping the tropes of war alive through a generation and a half that had seen no significant wars. Private worship partook of the secular not only by being oriented toward right behavior, a social act, but also by the sensuousness of its imagery. The materials of Low Church and Dissenting observances were to a great extent individually chosen, or provided to children by mother or nurse to inculcate behavior acceptable to the social group, in contrast to the chilly formalism and barrenness of the Established Church's rituals. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, the personal public worship of the Dissenters contrasted sharply with what all church historians agree was a lackluster performance by the established church. Nonconformist churches and chapels appealed directly to the emotions, and to secularly formed tastes

whose referents were to the everyday world of their adherents. This popularization of religion downplayed ritual, (fearing it as the face of Rome), and made popular the religious service that used three forms of individually centered worship: readings from sacred scripture, sermons—those rational discourses that yet strongly appealed to the emotions—and religious verse sung to immediately affective tunes, the hymn.

In the development of personal courage and independent judgment nothing could be more invigorating than martial images, especially those not only sanctified by existing on the pages of the Old Testament, but living again in tales of adventure and in the dress uniform of Britain's heroes and their toy replicas. Some of the hymn-writers, among them Isaac Watts (1674-48), Reginald Heber (1783-1826), and the Wesley brothers, especially Charles (1707-1788), adapted this source to modern uses. Isaac Watts, credited with being the creator of the modern English hymn, was educated at the Nonconformist academy at Stoke Newington, and wrote about six hundred hymns, many when he was between the ages of twenty and twenty-two, although nothing was published until 1707. His "Jesus shall reign where'er the sun/ Doth his successive journeys run" solaced many a colonial in the days of the *British Empire* (Joint 586). Although most of Watts's hymns dealt gently and inwardly with spiritual matters, his "Am I a soldier of the cross" (1724) supplied some staunch war imagery.

Key elements of his hymn:

Stanza 1.
 Am I a soldier of the cross,
 A follower of the lamb?
 And shall I fear to own his cause,
 Or blush to speak his Name?

Stanza 4.
 Sure I must fight if I would reign;
 Increase my courage, Lord:
 I'll bear the cross, endure the pain,
 Supported by thy word.

Stanza 5.
 . . .Thy saints, in all this glorious war,
 Shall conquer, though they die...

Stanza 6.
 . . .When that illustrious day shall rise,
 And all thy armies shine
 In robes of victory through the skies,
 The glory shall be thine. (550)

Another early hymnodist, Reginald Heber, began to publish hymns in 1811, bringing his work together in *Hymns Written and Adapted to the Weekly Church Service of the Year 1827*. His "The Son of God Goes Forth to War" was published in 1812 and was continually before the public thereafter (Joint 459-60). His work dominated *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (1860 and later) in the Anglican Church, supplying sixty texts in all. By the time of his early death at forty-three, Heber had been Oxford don, rector and Bishop of Calcutta.

The most noted of his hymns utilizing war metaphor is the following, excerpted here.

The Son of God goes forth to war,
 A kingly crown to gain:
 His blood-red banner streams afar:
 Who follows in his train?
 Who best can drink his cup of woe,
 Triumphant over pain:
 Who patient bears his cross below
 He follows in his train.

And in the last stanza:

A noble army, men and boys,
 The matron and the maid,
 Around the Saviour's throne rejoice,
 In robes of light arrayed....

Many literary figures supplied text for hymns--"Strong Son of God, immortal Love" is Tennyson's Prologue, 1, 3, 4 and 5, of *In Memoriam*, Christina Rossetti and Kipling provided verse for hymns. Thomas Hughes exemplifies more nearly the desacralizing of war metaphor. The author of *Tom Brown's School Days*, was inspired by F. D. Maurice's sermon "The Word of God Conquering by Sacrifice" reprinted in *Doctrine of Sacrifice* (1854). In its dedication is a telling phrase: "The original man [Maurice defined this phrase later as one who does not take words at second hand] is fighting for his life; he must know whether he has any ground to stand upon; he must ask God to tell him, because man cannot" (quoted in Brose 58).

In the Hughes hymn, "O God of truth, whose living Word..." appear these phrases:

[In stanza 2]
 Set up thy standard, Lord, that we
 Who claim a heav'nly birth
 May march with thee to smite the lies
 That vex the groaning earth.

[Stanza 3]
 We fight for truth? We fight for God?
 Poor slaves of lies and sin!
 He who would fight for thee on earth
 Must first be true within.
 ...Do thine own battle in our hearts,
 And slay the falsehood there.

The later suppressed final stanza includes the line "Still smite, still burn till naught is left..." (Joint 587)

For all this interest in hymns for teaching, and their enthusiastic reception by the public, they were not as much taken for granted as they are today, as Adey, Parsons, and others have pointed out. Hymns were adopted by the Church of England only reluctantly and were not widely used until 1830. Their pronounced subjectivity was contrary to tradition and taste, but it was this change in the pattern of worship, Parsons argues, that held together this institution in a way no secular authority could do (51). Hymns gave a semblance of unity as everyone sang the same words and supplied individual meanings. This very characteristic made it possible for worshipers to define their theological orientation individually while participating in community

worship. This is not to say that the major divisions of the church, Low, Broad, and High, did not engage in rancorous dispute and make use of the civil courts to enforce their beliefs, but they could meet together on extra-liturgical occasions, notably the convocation of the Sunday Schools, and signal a dubious unity in the singing of hymns (52).

Miller determines the beginning of secular worship when he speaks of the move from a God-centered world to a person-centered world. He pinpoints the moment as that when the doctrine of Transubstantiation was transmuted by the Protestant Reformation into a memorial rather than a sacramental miracle, the divines using the phrase "Do this in remembrance..." as key. (In fact both sides of the issue use this phrase, one emphasizing *this* and the other *remembrance*.) But his point is well made: the hymns continue the work of moving from icon, or graphic symbols and artifacts, to word symbols; the immanent God, effecting a miracle in the midst of His worshipers, is no longer recognized, is no longer there. The images of the hymns replace the liturgical metaphors with those of secular experience, recalling as they do the changing seasons, emotions of rejection, dejection, and loss, the stability of natural wonders--except for the war metaphors. War metaphors were not experiential but for the most part came from the texts the people heard in church or chapel or read about in the newspapers, or in history books. The Napoleonic wars and the French Revolution were still

vivid in folk memory, and Carlyle's *French Revolution* or Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* were widely read and highly acclaimed.

It is difficult to separate hymns of the eighteenth and nineteenth century from the politics of the age. Even the august *Encyclopaedia Britannica* used, not a church musician as their authority on hymnody, but the legal reformer and statesman Roundell Palmer, 1st Earl of Selborne. A High Churchman, but not a Ritualist, Selborne fought disestablishment to the detriment of his career, and was convinced that the popularizing impact of hymns would conduce to the desired religious unity within the Established Church. In the preface to *The Book of Praise*, a collection of hymns he edited with David Sedgwick in 1862, Lord Selborne wrote that hymns "bind [. . .] together by the force of a common attraction, more powerful than all causes of difference, times ancient and modern, nations of various race and language, Churchmen and Nonconformists, Churches reformed and unreformed." He does not go on to discuss the nature of this attraction, but it is, arguably, the very domesticity and familiarity of the images and the accessible rhythms and melodies that allow amateur participation in worship, and not only amateur, but participation of the unconsecrated, the unordained.

Extant records on the subject suggest that contemporary occasional (popular) hymns supplemented whatever music the churches used in their services. Nineteenth century scholars, all of whom were, of course,

classically educated, were delighted to note that hymns were essentially Greek not Roman in origin. They shared the hallmarks of nineteenth century hymns : they were lyrical and celebratory, whether the occasions were joyful, solemn or mournful. The earliest Greek Christian hymns were songs of praise and delight, and not didactic. Meters used were the very frequent Anacreontic (trochaic tetrameter) identified with direct and very simple emotional appeal, but other lyrical styles were also used. Several early and mid-nineteenth century editions of early Greek Christian hymns were published. However, they gave an incomplete picture, since many manuscripts were lost when hymns in the Greek Church fell into artistic disrepute in the 10th century.

It is the English hymn of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, following the German model, which is characterized not only by simple and direct emotion, but by a heavily didactic and often partisan purpose. Selborne was content to find in his patristic studies how closely linked to church controversies hymns were as early as the third century. Eventually the early Western world had two main schools, that of Romanos (sixth and seventh century) and the Melodists of the eighth, some of whose hymns seem to have been performed semi-dramatically, in ways reminiscent of the later mystery play. One of the blistering controversies in the early Western church dealt with Scriptural and non-Scriptural sources for hymns. The Council of Toledo in 633 codified the hymns for ecclesiastical use and denounced the

Scripturalists, who limited the words of hymns to Biblical texts. In the early days of the Reformed English Church, Scripturalists would again direct the course of hymnody.

Early hymns served as a gloss on the liturgy and extended the religious experience into the everyday world. Children sang hymns in school and adults sang them in the workplace, especially when harvesting in the fields; singers interspersed them with secular music when singing recreationally. While some tunes used were originally secular, such as the Crusader's Hymn, religious tunes also served secular purposes. A Benedictine monk of the 10th century, Notker Balbulus, wrote a sequence "Media in vita" "In the midst of life we are in death," that was used as a battle song. When its popularity was seen to be based on its supposed magical powers, it was suppressed (Winkworth cited in *Joint 523*). The medieval period saw hymns for local use added to the nucleus of approved sacred music, frequently commemorating saints and often mixing vernacular with Latin. Although church and other leaders saw the use of the vernacular in hymns as debasing, it marked the division of ecclesiastical and popular hymnody. Hymns, as with secular literatures, continued to be written locally and in the vernacular and to share the same images and tunes. The popularity of hymns in the vernacular in the ancient world contributed to the trend toward vernacular liturgies. Martin Luther used hymns to further his reformation of the Christian Church. He not only composed the words of

“Ein feste Burg” but he also formed a group to select hymn tunes for his followers from secular and ecclesiastical sources. Hymns, it is generally agreed, were the key to success of the Reformation, imparting a congregational character to worship. Luther’s “battle hymn of the reformation” was translated over eighty times before 1900 (Joint 324-25). Thomas Carlyle, whose translation was long the preferred version in the English Church, described it as “a sound of Alpine avalanches, or the first murmur of earthquakes” (source Heroes?). His image of the massive, comfortingly impenetrable fortress is far more militant than his paraphrase of Psalm 67, which in another version was sung as a battle-song by the armies of Gustavus Adolphus (Selborne 118). Coverdale’s translation of “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” gives images the common folk can relate to: “Oure God is a defence and towre/ A good armour and good weapen...” (Joint 324)

Reformed England followed the Geneva observances, replacing both liturgical music and hymns with chanted passages from Scripture. Some alleviation from this musical austerity came in the new Prayer Book of 1661-62, after the Restoration, which allowed, “for those who sing,” the use of unspecified anthems. The last official statement about hymns in church ignored any aesthetic issue and focused on a sole criterion of faithfulness to Scripture. And thus it was that the Nonconformists, who did not feel themselves bound by these regulations, figured in the next period of hymnody. John and Charles Wesley, with the rise of “the people called

Methodists" from about 1738 on, produced hymns that resemble closely nineteenth century hymns. While people today see the late (1864) "Onward Christian Soldiers" as representative of nineteenth century evangelical hymnody, it is more typical of revival hymnody. The structurally and verbally sophisticated and subtle Methodist hymns are prototypically evangelical hymns, for they are addressed to the middle classes, whose rise to form a majority after the Industrial Revolution, characterizes the period. Erik Routley writes in his study of John and Charles Wesley:

Charles Wesley never seems to have been interested in writing hymns with refrains in the style of the late nineteenth century evangelicals. There is no better way of making the illiterate sing than by writing narrative hymns with simple choruses--which is what so many of the old carols are, and what the "Sankeys" are at their best. Why, then, in his crusade to redeem the barbarous people of Cornwall and the Black Country, few of whom could read at all, did Charles Wesley not employ this technique? Because the Wesleys distinguished sharply between the educated, whom they sought to interest in singing their complex and profound hymns (and this includes children who were being educated under the influence of their movement) and the utterly illiterate, who could be reached only by direct teaching and appeal. Hence the mannered language and the mannered music. These have nothing to do with the reclamation of the illiterate and the poor. They are for the building up of the literate and substantial, John Wesley's "rich sinners" (Routley 41-42. Quoted in Wesley 7:54).

Charles Wesley (1707-1788) wrote over six thousand hymns, of which about five hundred are still in use. (Joint 590). He never left the Church of England, although his brother John eventually founded the

Methodists as a separate body. Since the first publication, Wesley's hymns have been recognized for their literary qualities that far outshone others published during the heyday of hymnody. The editors of the collected works write:

Wesley was a consummate artist and owed much to his training in the classics. His hymns contain many latinisms, both of words and of grammatical construction, as one would expect in the eighteenth century, and even traces of classical Greek vocabulary. One recalls those polysyllabic words that betray Wesley's authorship: inextinguishable, antepast, millennial, indissolubly, inalienably, amaranthine, and many others. While one suspects that Wesley revelled in his ability to wed such words to English metres, at the same time one realizes that this ability was in part an unconscious echo of years of classical education, both at Westminster School and at Oxford. (Wesley 7:47)

Yet, continues Franz Hildebrant, one of the editors of the *Works of John Wesley* (which includes all of the hymns of both brothers), the hymns are characterized by simplicity, on occasion a controlled mix of Anglo-Saxon verse forms with summative Latin lines, and a sure grasp of antithesis and paradox (Wesley 7:48). There is also a strong dependence on Milton, and the editors gloss the Miltonic elements in their edition. "For Believers Fighting" are hymns based on scripture and hortatory in nature. "The Whole Armour of God," based on Ephesians 6, comprise three hymns, 258-260. The following excerpts give some of their combative spirit: "But above all, lay hold/On faith's victorious shield", and Part III which ends with the lines: "Tread all the powers of darkness down,/ And win the well-fought day;/ Still let the

Spirit cry, 'Come!'/ Till Christ the Lord descends from high,/ And takes the
 conqu'rors home." (Wesley 7:400-403). The next two hymns are equally
 bellicose. 261: "Surrounded by a host of foes; 262: Equip me for the war./
 And teach my hands to fight". 268: part II: "That bloody banner see./ And in
 your Captain's sight/ Fight the good fight of faith with me./My fellow-
 soldiers, fight." It continues: "In mighty phalanx joined/ To battle all
 proceed" (Wesley 7:411-13). The best known of this group, however, is
 "Soldiers of Christ Arise":

Soldiers of Christ, arise,
 And put your armour on,
 Strong in the strength which God supplies
 Through his eternal Son;
 Strong in the Lord of hosts,
 And in his mighty power,
 Who in the strength of Jesus trusts
 Is more than conqueror.

Stand then in his great might,
 With all his strength endured,
 But take, to arm you for the fight,
 The panoply of God;
 That having all things done,
 And all your conflicts passed,
 Ye may o'ercome through Christ alone,
 And stand entire at last.

Stand then against your foes
 In close and firm array;
 Legions of wily fiends oppose
 Throughout the evil day;
 But meet the sons of night,
 But mock their vain design,
 Armed in the arms of heavenly light,
 Of righteousness divine.

Leave no unguarded place,

No weakness of the soul;
 Take every virtue, every grace,
 And fortify the whole;
 Indissolubly joined,
 To battle all proceed,
 But arm yourselves with all the mind
 That was in Christ your head.

Owen Chadwick suggests that there were about two hundred hymns common to all levels of Christian worship, so that if one were Nonconformist, Evangelical, Broad or High, the words of the hymn would be the same even if the tune was different. Although constantly undertaken, there was no successful attempt to standardize hymnals or the selection of hymns for specific occasions. By 1860, there were more than two hundred hymnals in use throughout England and many individuals were engaged in writing, translating, and anthologizing hymns. Hymns began to be important to sum up or to dramatize a point, even when music was not part of the communication. Matthew Arnold's father, for instance, habitually quoted hymns in his essays and sermons, and was known for his use of the less common ones.

The religious ferment in Victorian society had all the characteristics of attention-drawing novelty: enthusiasm, division of opinion, general awareness of the issues, self-consciousness. Massive church building campaigns were secular acts of institutionalizing in the face of unsettling liberalism, and seen as such. Conversely, churches became

houses of conscience, altars of a loyalty which was not loyalty to Caesar, realms where the spirit could be free though the body lay in chains; possessing rights which denied claims by a state to possess all the rights that are. Like the liberal, the Christian maintained the faith that legal right can be moral wrong and that a legislator cannot reject appeals to an ethical standard not derived from his laws (Chadwick 47).

Popular religion was in fashion and in no static way. There was novelty in women occasionally leading public worship in the dissenting sects, the religious exoticism of some of the Tractarians and the general acceptance of the hymn in adult worship. In the first half of the century, one of the social phenomena that reflected the democratization of society in the nineteenth century was the diffusion of the hymn into heretofore untouched segments of society, and, however popular in words, music and images, it provided an enrichment for the mind and spirit. The nature of the genre was what made the Wesleyan strategy so shrewd; if popular, the wording of the hymns posed no threat to the upwardly mobile leaders of the middle classes; if well-crafted, the hymns satisfied the thirst for aesthetic refreshment elsewhere denied this group.

Religious poetry has always had a place in any national literature; hymns, however, because of the way they are used, partake of the popular culture. Their meaning is, at least on one level, immediately accessible, their acceptance as part of the liturgy depends on popular acclaim, rather than artistic value, as Robert Bridges learned from the reception of his *Yattendon*

Hymnal. But, once accepted, hymns, like nursery rhymes, tend to sink deep into the minds of readers and form part of that body of experience against which new perceptions are measured and from which comes the vocabulary by which emotions and ideas are identified and communicated. Although not hymns per se, the verses John Keble published *The Christian Year* in 1827 were a kind of non-musical hymn. By 1872 it had gone through 158 editions, and, it has been said, if one person in a group recited the first two lines of any stanza, anyone else in the group could complete it, so ubiquitous was this piece of mental baggage (Chadwick 1966 I 86). These verses, however, have not lasted into the twentieth century except in the detailed study given them by G. B. Tennyson in *Victorian Devotional Poetry; the Tractarian Mode*.

The Religious Metaphor

What makes war metaphor especially interesting is not only the slow and acrimonious secularizing of the definition of a just war that underlay all uses of war related words, but the complexity of changing metaphors while the tenor itself is in the process of change, in this case, desacralization. It is because of this double change that it may be useful to begin with some ideas offered by William R. Paulson who discusses literature in its cultural content. Following his positioning material, religious metaphor can then be more fruitfully compared to other kinds of metaphor.

Literature has been displaced to the margins of culture: it now might be described as a complex discursive form "that can enrich thought and inspire new moves in the language games of society precisely because it differs from the communicative and instrumental modes of being-in-language that now seem culturally dominant" (Paulson. viii). Assumptions underlying literature include the notion that literature is a noisy transmission channel that assumes its noise so as to be something other than a transmission channel and its corollary, literature, so constituted, functions as the noise of culture, as a perturbation or source of variety in the circulation and production of discourses and ideas. Derrida's idea of textuality works well with literature as the noise of culture, as he extends past the text into the cultural and mental contexts in which literary texts are possible.

Literature's role in culture [can] best be thought of neither as a message nor as an object but rather as a source of differences." This line of argument abandons the notion of literature as vehicle for the teachings central to our culture, and denies that the study of literature reinforces these central teachings over time, thus strengthening the civilization.
(Paulson viii)

Paulson develops arguments in support of strong textualism, for instance Harold Bloom's strong misreading (ix) to construct meaning in a new context, self-organized and distinct from received meaning.

Thomas Kuhn's paradigms—recognized scientific achievements that define acceptable problems and methods— provide a generally accepted conceptual context for further investigation. Newtonian science provided one such paradigm. Once the Newtonian world picture was agreed to (the treatise), the work remaining was to fill in the details (relatively short reports) and define the coming difference in texts. The Romantic age absorbed the Newtonian paradigm and reacted against it, contributing the notion of literature as imaginative, autonomous, non-utilitarian. The Romantics were not against science but against a world ordered along economic and technological lines. It was an underground voice, Shelleyan in nature, a protest against the cultural projection of the Newtonian paradigm of calculable, predictable trajectories. Although Kant (Third Critique) allows free play of aesthetic judgment, he ranks the act below real knowledge, in which understanding is supported by rules and consensus. The German Romantics saw a special kind of knowledge, a unifying knowledge as distinct from and superior to highly specialized knowledge. Friedrich Schlegel (Critical fragment 115):

It is the romantic writers themselves who, because they write, feel themselves to be the true philosophers, feeling themselves no longer called on to know how to write, but bound to the act of writing as to a new knowledge that they learn to recapture by becoming conscious of it. (Paulson 15)

Matthew Arnold compared literature as a cultural artifact in England and France. English literature he said, is a cultural artifact that replaces religion in reducing class tension, thus reducing it to a political crowd-control device. In France it served as a nationalizing, centrist force. In the evolution of literature as a discipline, it imitated the sciences and served as a synecdoche for the cultural totality that existed when the text was the sole authority in the sphere of knowledge. More recently, Paulson takes up. it has become even more circumscribed with the loss of subjects that became the social sciences. It falls back to aesthetics, literary history and/or formalism. In any case, prose became the vehicle for the Arnoldian message (Paulson 16). In his discussion of I. A. Richards's theory of poetry, Paulson discusses the basis of act, the myth which legitimized it and gives it authority, as changing from the religious, the "magical" which have been invalidated, discredited by truths from the sciences. How this works, according to I. A. Richards, is that the discredited pseudostatements are irrelevant, for it is not what the poem says but what it is that matters. This had been foreseen by Arnold (Paulson 18-19).

The remedy," [says Richards,] is to cut our pseudo-statements free from belief, and yet retain them, in this released state, as the main instruments by which we order our attitudes to one another and to the world. Not so desperate a remedy as may appear, for poetry conclusively shows that even the most important among our attitudes can be aroused and maintained without any belief entering in at all. . .(quoted in Paulson 19).

The reader, then, can read a metaphor based on discarded ideas, be they from warfare or religion and still appreciate the aesthetic value supplied.

And finally, Roland Barthes' essay "De la Science... la Littérature" argues that "science and literature can be distinguished as discursive forms, by the status they accord to language and specifically to writing." For science, language is a transmitting vehicle, assuming that "truth and meaning pre-exist the signs that serve "as vehicles. Literature is...being-in-language, assuming a verbal density "as part of its every act." There is no meaning outside signs, outside language (Paulson 20).

Janet Soskice, a writer on both scientific and religious metaphor, explores the use of metaphor in explicating, determining, creating precise analogy, and incrementally establishing a religious meaning where no other mode of expression will suffice. She summarizes three groups of theory—substitution, emotive and incremental—to apply them to religious metaphor. Metaphor, says Thomas Aquinas, using substitution, can make ideas understandable to the uneducated, "who are not ready to take intellectual things neat with nothing else." (Summa Theologica Ia.1,9). Locke points out that this kind of substitution can also confuse (Soskice 20). For poets, the metaphor is the mode by which their poetry can be misread when conveying controversial or revolutionary or radical statements about themselves as poets

to a general audience. A flat statement would be dismissed out of hand (Soskice 24). But does the production of metaphor work in quite this way? Does, in fact, the poet understand the concept only through his metaphor. Would he be incapable of accurately stating it baldly? And why do we search in a poet's prose writings, his essays, and his letters for what he really meant to say? No, metaphor adds significance beyond the direct statement. At its extreme, metaphor is fully non-cognitive, is a consequence of deviancy, as in substitution theory, but has an emotional component that adds an undefined something to the metaphor. Monroe Beardsley, not a supporter of this theory, says that for this explanation to work, the affective content must be consistent, and demonstrates that this is not valid by the example of "sharp" as applied to wind or tongue (negative) or wit (positive) (Soskice 26).

If, as Donald Davidson says, the force of metaphor comes from difference between what a word used to mean and what is not the literal meaning, that it is part of a process; it does something, then we have a clue to understanding war metaphor, especially in poets who refer textually back to the classical age. It is not its richness but its single, direct meaning that makes metaphor difficult to paraphrase. An important role, says Davidson, is that metaphor draws readers' attention to the meaning in the relationships the metaphor is pointing out. This theory works well with metaphors that assert a palpable falsehood— "old fools are babes again," Goneril in *King Lear*— but not in other cases (Soskice 28). This corresponds well with the idea that

literature is the noise of culture, a perturbation, an upheaval. Hopkins writes about peace “ And when Peace here does house/ He comes with work to do, he does not come to coo,/ He comes to brood and sit” (85). This too, is a noise, not its denial. When there is movement, relationships change, and in the expression of these relationships lies the evidence of desacralization.

Beardsley developed a Verbal Opposition theory, distinguishing among designation, denotation, and connotation. The controversion, opposition, or self-contradiction occurs at the designation level, shifting the interpretation to the connotative level, where the reader recognizes and interprets its significance in light of only the meaning of the terms used in the metaphor. Israel Scheffler counters that the intuition must be guided in some way because otherwise the act of intuition could lead to uncounted meanings. The weakness of Beardsley's theory, says Scheffler, is that he includes properties, such as blood or bone types, when metaphor should use credence-properties, characteristics believed to inhere in the object, as in “strong as an ox” (Soskice 32).

It is this very logical opposition within the metaphor that, in fact, does not always exist in a given metaphor. The twist may be in the speaker's intention, an attribute much explored in Victorian England. Soskice argues for intentionality in metaphor (or the author of the metaphor). Metaphors require context, speaker's intention, and reference, says Soskice, to refute

Beardsley's theory. She next examines Black's interactive theory, which is based partially on the work of I.A. Richards but developed with modern analytical philosophy. This theory—that metaphor is a shift in the speaker's meaning and corresponding to the hearer's meaning—she finds most satisfactory and most often cited. [Soskice 40]. Max Black, in his seminal article "Metaphor..." says that the metaphor organizes the reader's concept of the subject by emphasizing some attributes and suppressing others. It is this organizing principle that makes a metaphor incapable of being reduced to a literal meaning. Black says "It would be more illuminating...to say that the metaphor creates the similarity than to say that it formulates some similarity antecedently existing." (Soskice 40.) Soskice cites Black:

In the interactive metaphor, both principal and subsidiary subjects bring with them their own "systems" of "associated commonplaces"; for example, the construal of 'Man is a wolf' relies on both speaker and hearer having a body of shared knowledge or assumptions about the nature of men and the nature of wolves, for example that the latter are clannish, cruel, and so on (Soskice 40).

One important contribution of Black's theory is to make explicit that the efficacy of the metaphor does not depend on the factual accuracy of these commonplaces, but simply on the fact that roughly the same set of associations are made by speaker and hearer. When Black says that in a metaphor the two subjects interact, he means that their two systems of

associated commonplaces interact in such a way as to produce a new, informative, and irreplaceable unit of meaning.

It is indeed the cognitively irreplaceable status of such metaphors that Black is at pains to stress, and that constitutes, for him, their difference from mere comparison. He says, "This use of a 'subsidiary subject' to foster insight into a 'principal subject' is a distinctive intellectual operation...demanding simultaneous awareness of both subjects but not reducible to any comparison between the two." Furthermore, he points out that in this interaction considerations about both subjects of the metaphor are altered; for "If to call a man a wolf is to put him in a special light, we must not forget that metaphor makes the wolf seem more human than he otherwise would." (Soskice 41, Black "Metaphor" 46, 44)

The weakness in Black, according to Soskice, is that he insists that metaphor has two distinct subjects, and works only with the form "a is a b" and thus lapses into comparison.

Soskice offers an interanimation theory of her own suited to religious concepts, in which metaphor is not a substitute for literal speech, nor is it simply emotive. It is, or may be, fully, uniquely, cognitive, saying what cannot be said another way. Full understanding includes both the speaker's intention as shown in sources, biographical particulars and historical context, while the hearer's reception reveals the context, especially the beliefs held mutually by speaker and hearer, and the patterns of inference the hearer uses to determine the speaker's meaning. Thus metaphor is a use of language "with a unity of subject matter and which yet draws upon two (or more) sets

of associations, and does so, characteristically, by involving the consideration of a model or models" (Soskice 49). The association networks can surround either term, or any term in the metaphor, with an underlying model or models and these models are closely linked to the metaphor itself.

Centrality of Blood Sacrifice

The religious model to which the terrible tropes of war refer is that of the blood sacrifice. The physiology of violence varies little from one culture to another, says Girard; once violence is summoned up, the effects last beyond the cause and may seek out surrogate causes. Blood atonement defines the ultimate gesture, and its aura remains although a surrogate victim is sacrificed. Animal victims of man tend to be those seen as having desirable human characteristics, as the lamb is meek and gentle, and substitution is the most consistent factor in animal sacrifice. Girard suggests that the nature of this substitution is not one of the innocent for the guilty; the substitution requires that a sacrificeable victim, a relatively indifferent victim, replace the persons society most wishes to protect. The victims in the poems under consideration, the speaker in *Maud*, and *Sordello* have links with their societies that imply that they are, in their differing ways, acceptable sacrifices.

Sacrificial substitution implies a degree of misunderstanding, of misreading. Its vitality as an institution within the society depends on its ability to conceal the displacement upon which the rite is based. It must never lose sight entirely, however, of the original object, or cease to be aware of the act of transference from that object to the surrogate victim: without that awareness no substitution can take place and the sacrifice loses all efficacy. (Girard 5).

Sacrifice is an ambivalent gesture. The victim is sacred because he is to be sacrificed. To kill him is criminal, but he is sacralized only if he is sacrificed. Thus murder and sacrifice are in some way reciprocal. The significant distinction between victim and the person for whom he stands surrogate for is his lack of links with the society performing the sacrifice. Traditionally the sacrifice is preceded by a plea for forgiveness for shedding blood, the purpose of which, however, is not to placate the surrogate, but to avert vengeance from the society with which the victim does have links and which has certain obligations to all its members. Sacrificial substitution often implies a misunderstanding that must remain concealed to assure the validity of the sacrifice. It may be absurd, so that Rostand slays Suvorin, or it may be a conspiracy with the enemy to provide appeasement. Frequently a sacrifice is a diversion of violence. Cain and Abel provide an example: Cain did not use his flock of firstborns as sacrifice where his links were strong, but sacrificed his brother.

War, Girard tells us, is a form of violence in which the body politic responds physiologically, with effects lasting beyond the cause and seeking out surrogate causes (19). The Returning Warrior always brings violence back from the war and is in need of purification (Girard 41-42). Thus in Tennyson's "Ulysses," the returned warrior slays his wife's suitors, is restless and finally, sails beyond the sunset, on the lookout for "Some work of noble note.../Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods" (ll. 52-53).

The Victorian age reached out to both the past and the future. The models, or types that were directly called to mind by the hymns, and indirectly by the secular poetry that desacralized religious images, came from the past that had the most interest to the Victorians, such as Greece, and the Renaissance, or the recent past, such as the Crimean War. For the Christian, the central mystery of history is the redemption, encompassing all of the events that lead to it and all the events that follow from it. Thus the events of the Old Testament are types of the New Testament, and for the Victorians, were preordained; they existed so that they could be given new significance in the New Testament. The cosmos is ordered by this mystery and the elements that correspond with Girard's ideas of sacrifice impinge strongly on a reader's notice. Landow sums up the impact on the reader:

Any type, therefore, permits one to meditate upon the whole of God's plan, and any type, furthermore, leads to any other. Considered from the point of view of the writer, whether of hymns or of poems like "The Ring

and the Book," such a powerfully imaginative conception of things means that he may use any type to place the readers in a completely ordered world. Therefore, one of the first things to emphasize about typology for the modern reader is that it is not simply a collection of individual Biblical images, the understanding of which helps one better to appreciate Victorian and earlier literatures, arts, and ways of thought. Rather, typology bears with it a powerful, coherent conception of things which any artist, writer, or thinker may conjure into existence by employing a well-known type (Landow 40).

All was not straightforwardly Christian, however. Hymns kept alive the notion of self-aware types which was increasingly contrary to mainstream theology (Landow 62) and increasingly meaningful to the readers and writers of Victorian England. During that period literary works used typological references to perform the several functions. They were used to convict the speaker of hypocrisy or lying, as do the Decalogue inscriptions in *Dombey and Son*. They also were used to withhold from a listener that which he is not yet ready to learn or hear, while informing the reader of necessary information, and they practice the Tractarian virtue of reserve, leaving unspoken that which self-glorifies in one way or another (Landow 134).

War Metaphor

And in the lowest beasts are slaying men,
 And in the second men are slaying beasts,
 And on the third are warriors, perfect men,

And on the fourth are men with growing wings.
(Tennyson. *Holy Grail* 234-7)

Poets used war metaphor, not in the spirit of the wapentake, a mere brandishing of weapons, but rather to figure an encounter, an engagement, or a struggle. Encounter and engagement suggest the intellectual processes by which the poet takes the offensive; struggle suggests the more defensive stance of the poet aware of a danger overtaking him. The war metaphor derived from religious sources is already an externalization of an internal struggle and further suggests an epic quality that may not be immediately apparent. In the quotation above, the progression suggests evolution as well as orders of perfection.

The literature of war metaphor in creative writing is not extensive. What has been studied, or is being studied now, is the direct use of the metaphor. Rosenblum treats of the aspect of romantic militarism as anti-institutional and anti-bourgeois, of war as providing an arena for heroic human aspiration. John Stuart Mill, she says, rejects the implicit Stoicism of militarism (in *Dissertations and Discussions*) and in so doing expressed a consensus among thoughtful people of his time. The swashbuckling attitude of Rosenblum's romantic militarists was not an attitude manifested by Tennyson. Browning was a different case; he was, especially in his youth, susceptible to the dramatic flourish. "The Lost Leader" has a martial rhythm that reinforces that idea that Wordsworth is AWOL, has deserted from the

army of those who have sworn an oath to uphold both literature and liberalism. "We shall march prospering,---not thro' his presence:/ Songs may inspirit us,---not from his lyre;/ Deeds will be done,---while he boasts his quiescence./ Still bidding crouch whom the rest bade aspire/. . . One more devils'-triumph and sorrow for angels./ One wrong more to man, one more insult to God!" (II:1-4, 7-8). Given the demonstrated high seriousness of the major nineteenth-century poets, it is unsatisfactory to dismiss as gamesmanship or romance their use of war metaphor. It was important as a major vehicle for their most idealistic utterances and contained a means by which they could assert the poet's role in the secular age.

Certain generalizations may be made about the characteristics of the metaphor base using the images and artifacts of war. First, it is associated with the Victorian ethic that the fulfillment of one's duty is the highest personal good. It is not related to power, although war is usually so associated. As a very young poet Tennyson explored this idea over and over. A comparison of Tennyson's "To Poesy" with the poem that he wrote with Arthur Hallam, whose more cosmopolitan experience of the world led him to a stronger moral sense, shows an attempt either to sacralize or give social justification for a poet's position in society.

To Poesy

To Poesy (written with Arthur Hallam)

O God, make this age great that we may

Religion be thy sword; the armoury

be
 As giants in Thy praise! and raise up
 Mind,
 Whose trumpet-tongued, aerial melody
 May blow alarum loud to every wind,
 And startle the dull ears of human kind!
 Methinks I see the world's renewed youth
 A long day's dawn, when Poesy shall bind
 Falsehood beneath the altar of great
 Truth:
 The clouds are sundered toward the
 morning-rise;
 Slumber not now, gird up thy loins for
 fight,
 And get thee forth to conquer. I, even I,
 Shall drink the fulness of thy victory,
 For thou art all unconscious of thy Might.

Of God shall yield it tempered; make
 thy stand
 In this thy Canaan set apart for thee:
 Go forth and in thy right possess the
 land.
 O might I be an arrow in thine hand,
 And not of viewless flight, but trailing
 flame,
 Like the old King's on the Sicilian
 strand,
 Accompanied with tumult of acclaim!
 Not bearing my own triumph in
 conceit
 Of eminence, but gathering all eyes
 Because I seek to bless my native
 earth,
 For this is the condition of our birth,
 That we unto ourselves are only great
 Doing the silent work of charities.

Truth, for the young Tennyson in this poem, is that with which the poet is to "startle the dull ears of human kind" and, even, since Truth is unconscious, be seen to be the conqueror of the world in her name. With Hallam, Tennyson avers that he, as poet, seeks "eminence" only to "bless my native earth"—and even that is only doing his duty.

But duty was not to remain unchallenged as humankind's greatest obligation. Self-fulfillment, self-realization, or, as some have called it, hedonism, replaced this ethic as the ultimate one. War metaphor moved from its former metaphor base to direct metaphor, and thus moved from struggle to violence, or at times vainglorious gesture, continuing, however, to be action

not reflection. War metaphor, nevertheless, continues to be associated with good ends rather than evil ones, and typically relates to the reform either of the individual (*Maud*) or society as a whole (*Sordello*) and still in keeping with the idea of service described above, the most forceful examples are in verbs rather than substantives; the actors of the poems are doers as well as seers, and the wars they are engaged in are not those serving a state. Even in Tennyson's *Maud* in which the internal and external battles mesh, self-realization is the force, not patriotism. A more subtle use is to be found in *In Memoriam* stanza CXXXI, "until we close with those we love," in which the war metaphor makes the force of "close" much stronger, suggesting the grip of a wrestler, or the force of unarmed combat, and evokes in the spirit of the time, the nuanced spiritual expression of the age.

Chapter 5

Sordello:

Bildungsroman of a Nineteenth Century Poet

Glide we by clapping doors, with sudden glare
 Of cressets vented on the dark, nor care
 For aught that's seen or heard until we shut
 The smother in, the lights, all noises but
 The carroch's booming: ... (I: 314-318)

As the rallying point of Renaissance and medieval battles, the carroch—the cart containing both religious and civic symbols, which is used in battle as a rallying point, and in civic displays as a sign of power—provides a wonderful example of a desacralized object. Designed, John Addington Symonds tells us from his extensive knowledge of the Italian Renaissance, by Heribert, the Archbishop of Milan, as a symbol of the city-state, the carroch is associated with a citizen militia, not with either standing armies—mercenaries loyal to their paymaster—, nor chivalric forces—where the men-at-arms are loyal only to their knight. While the meaning of the carroch touches both earth and heaven, it orders its significances in a secular way. It looks both to the future and to the past, for the secular is temporal and the divine eternal. The future is signalized in its communications devices: the bell and trumpeters, which on occasion, summon men to

sacrifice themselves for the commonweal, a modern and democratic act. The city's flag flies from the top of the mast, a pledge of future glory. The past reveals its character by the floating religious banners, and the icons surmounting the altar where the Divine sacrifice will be celebrated. It is a cumbersome device, suggesting this is but one stage in the development of a meliorating society.

In putting this icon into service, Browning not only gives the reader one more detail that tells the reader this is medieval Italy, but also booms a signal for the first of the major themes of the poem: Sordello's development and performance as a major vernacular poet. As the bell on the carroch sounds, Sordello is seen for the first time, as an adult, having just been left by a mysterious woman, whose ". . . wise / And lulling words are yet about the room / Her presence wholly poured upon the gloom / Down even to her vesture's creeping stir" (I:332-5). The narrator then tells us that this foreshadowing scene of Sordello as Dante's great precursor, although premature, is important to introduce Dante's "herald-star." It will not be until Book III when this scene is replayed, only to be interrupted by the carroch sounding the alarm by bell and trumpet, that the reader will learn the details of this meeting, and learn that the poet, who until this moment has been a spiritual and aesthetic being, has become a political figure, a worldly influence.

Historical Background and Critical Reception

Browning started *Sordello* in 1833, before he had seen Italy, and worked on it for six years, first publishing it in 1840, issuing it again in a revised version in 1863. His purpose was to offer to the public a serious work on an important topic that could be relished by persons of a variety of tastes. For those who preferred Mrs. Radcliffe, the Gothic elements would please; for those who loved the historical sweep of Sir Walter Scott, his use of non-fictional personages and battle scenes would attract; for those whose enthusiasm was for the Renaissance or the Middle Ages, his setting would content. He was both disappointed and dismayed to find that his readers, for the most part, found him as obscure as ever. Currently, says Margaret Drabble "...it is now coming to be recognized as one of the finest long poems of the century, and of central importance in the interpretation of Browning's work..." and goes on to urge a re-reading (921). Fine as it is, it is incessantly demanding throughout its six thousand lines in the way a novel or essay can never be. It makes a poetry that stretches toward a unity of truth and beauty, but at a harrowing price. It offers fragments, for only these, Browning says, can be described truly by the poet, the world being delivered to his perceptions prismatically. "The charm of an enigma now attracts students

who feel proud of being able to understand what others find obscure,” wrote Andrew Lang about his near-contemporary Browning. “But this attraction must inevitably become a stumbling-block. Why Mr. Browning is obscure is a long question; probably the answer is that he often could not help himself.” However, Lang then goes on to say, a few lines later of *Men and Women* that “no perversity of humour, no voluntary or involuntary harshness of style, can destroy the merit of these poems, which have nothing like them in the letters of the past, and must remain without successful imitators in the future” (7-8).

Ian Jack says that *Sordello* is “profoundly unhistorical” (175), but that does not exempt the reader from identifying the historical references. Rather, it is necessary to establish first what they are, and then, to see how they are to be used in the poem. History is a re-telling, and the poet reminds the reader that the purpose of this work is to tell *Sordello*’s story. As would be expected in a work of the imagination, Browning’s historical sources were used with great freedom, details were invented, and facts ignored to suit his poetic purpose. As can be seen in the dedication of the 1863 edition, Browning was much criticized at the time for his handling of the historical material by critics who missed the difference between telling and re-telling. The reception of *Sordello* dashed Browning's expectations of being instantly accepted as a major poet at the age of twenty-eight in spite of the pains he took to explain the poetic role, fully, truthfully, cosmically. Instead the poem was seen to be so enigmatic that it became notorious. The poem, however,

was popular with the pre-Raphaelites, dealing honestly as it did with the crux of existence, as they saw it, the obligation to make beautiful and true things. Also, as Irvine and Honan point out, the political sentiments were clearly and rightly republican.

Sordello marked, and to some extent reported on, an important period in Browning's development as a poet. He had enjoyed and yet despised the pleasures of being a poet in the style of Eglamor and was shocked that the sorrows of the poet-legislator manqué, *Sordello*, were possibly also to be his. Park Honan suggests that Browning's upbringing had been so carefully structured that he found success very easily come by, and never had he had to make concessions to achieve it. Certainly, whatever Browning's protestations, there are no concessions in *Sordello* for readers whose mind-sets were different. His supercharged early education both avoided some of the basic methods of discourse, such as selecting a single telling phrase, even at the expense of accuracy, and left him contemptuous of these methods. His moral stance inclined him to the commonweal; his art gave no quarter. Morse quotes him as saying

[f]or your bewilderment especially noted—how shall I help *that*? . . . I know that I don't make out my conception by my language; all poetry being a putting the infinite within the finite. You would have me paint it all plain out, which can't be; but by various artifices I try to make shifts with touches and bits of outlines which *succeed* if they bear the conception from me to you. (Morse 397)

Treating language and the ethics of poetry as it does, *Sordello* provides a text *par excellence* to explore the inter-relatedness of military and religious mimesis in a long poem with an historical theme, (or, more accurately, an apologia with an historical background). Although the precise degree of piety and theological content of Browning's religious experience has, of course, been subjected to a good deal of scrutiny, nowhere has the desacralization of his symbolism been treated. Browning is usually seen as a somewhat stuffy moral mentor, as Lang does in the source quoted above. An interesting example of a more theological treatment is Lawson's study, discussed in a section below.

What is the poet to do; how is he to apprehend a new world? *Sordello* carries Browning's apologia for desacralization at the hermeneutic level for the most part, while at the mimetic level the message is pounded out, sometimes with a savagery more to be seen in the eighteenth century and nowhere at its worst than in *Sordello*'s closing lines.

—all that's left
 Of the Goito lay! And thus bereft,
 Sleep and forget, Sordello! In effect
 He sleeps, the feverish poet—I suspect
 Not utterly companionless; but, friends,
 Wake up! The ghost's gone, and the story ends
 I'd fain hope, sweetly; seeing, peri or ghoul,
 That spirits are conjectured fair or foul,
 Evil or good, judicious authors think,
 According as they vanish in a stink
 Or in a perfume. Friends, be frank! ye snuff
 Civet, I warrant. Really? Like enough!

Merely the savour's rareness; any nose
 May ravage with impunity a rose:
 Rifle a musk-pod and 't will ache like yours!
 I'd tell you that same pungency ensures
 An after-gust, but that were overbold.
 Who would has heard Sordello's story told.
 (VI: 869-886)

The basis of Browning's desecralization scheme was the need to recognize the individuality of all people, so that as *Sordello* draws to its climax, the significance of the two key metaphoric and thematic artifacts, the carroch and the font, become clear. He desecralizes the Rome of the crucifix, the altar, and the banner, and the trappings of the carroch, as he turns from the Ghibelline to the Guelph cause, for purely nineteenth-century reasons. Browning performs a kind of resurrection at the font where Retrude is interred, just as he buries Shelley's failed poet who could not save the world with his word, only make it a bit more joyous.

Browning's friendship with Sarah and Eliza Flower, in his mid to late teens, came at a time when he had passed through the rather timid version of Calvinism that was his mother's, and was still in the throes of his *de rigueur* atheism and Shelleyan aesthetics. As Duerksen says, knowing him as a writer, he thought he knew the man. The Flowers were Unitarians. Both women, among their other creative and cultural interests, wrote hymns, which were published in *Hymns and Anthems* (1840-41), edited by William J. Fox, at the idiosyncratic Unitarian South Place Religious Society. (Fox was later

to become their guardian) (Joint 366, Irvine passim). Through the aptly named Flower sisters Browning met Fox, who was to provide him entrée into the non-conformist literary circle of the Cowden Clarkes, the Novellos and most fortuitously, William Macready who would produce *Stafford*. Texts rather than artifacts formed the basis of their conversations, and images were taken from natural beauty. In this pure, not to say austere, setting, it was only to Rome that they could look for the symbols that move one more deeply into primitive religion with its blood sacrifice. Eliza's reaction to Marie Felicia Malibran's death, as Irvine and Honan show, reveals this link of a religious artifact allied to creative spirit. Malibran (1808-1836) was an extremely gifted singer and actress and the same age as Eliza's sister Sarah. She had just the sort of free spirit allied with her gifts as to fit the model of a veritable Romantic-Gothic genius. In her way she was a female Sordello.

The circumstances that while the Catholic service, crucifix, tapers, and all, was being performed over her, the Cathedral bell was tolling, bring tears that do one good and are a comfort—she an actress—a catholic—a many years mistress—ah, Genius!
(Irvine 25, quoted from R. and E. Garnett. *Life of Fox* (1910)).

Six years in the making, *Sordello* was begun in 1833, but worked on only intermittently. Browning frequently laid it aside to engage in other projects, or because he despaired of it, or to gather new material for it in Italy, a first visit in 1837 or, possibly, just to grow. It is a very ambitious project even for a prodigy. Its publication in 1840 found the few critics and

even fewer readers puzzled and confused. No wonder they seized on its historical inaccuracies as the source of their discomfort. Convinced of its importance in showing the poet to be the modern hero, Browning revised it nearly a quarter of a century later, and in the dedication to J. Milsand in the 1863 edition not only defended his way of using historical sources but underlined that his "stress is on the incidents in the development of a soul" (Jack II 194). This idea Browning amplifies in running titles to make clear this is a poet's soul and all the events that are recounted relate to this apologia.

The Narrative Eye

It is in the matter of the narrative of *Sordello* that some critics have found their expectations disappointed. A narrator typically presents the "facts" of the story and it is this version that the reader accepts prima facie. Yet right from the earliest lines, the narrator of *Sordello* qualifies his objective eye, warning the reader by the Don Quixote incident in which the Don mistakes the dust raised by the sheep with the dust of battle (I: 8-9). The poet goes to some trouble to instruct the reader that the narrator is a player as well as an observer (l. 11.59), in spite of the passing of "six long sad hundred years" (I:8). Further, he warns that what is seen is not an ordered canvas but the detritus of an earthquake, changing shapes: "Lo, the past is hurled / In

train: up-thrust, out-staggering on the world, / subsiding into shape" (I:73-75).

Moral judgment is resident in the narrative eye and is frequently exercised in the description of the people as urban dwellers—noisy, aggressive, assertive, and garrulous. The description of the populace of Verona in lines 91-109 is an early example, but the main purpose of the poet-narrator at this point is to instruct the reader in the correct way to read poetry. Here the "fierce news" is compared to both wine and words, "letting the silent luxury trickle slow" or "gulp[ing] with a delirious glee." If critical reading is a test, most of the critics failed it; only Richard Hengist Horne seemed to see the function of the narrator and to be able to move around in the poem with ease (67-69).

Armstrong explains a central element of *Sordello*, the phenomenon of the "up-thrust past," using as her text "Love among the Ruins." Browning in his work, she tells us, slides from category to category. The work of metaphor is to transform categories. "For Romantic language analogies are made in and through the process of perception and the creation of categories" (27). Metaphor is about the nature of transformation. It questions categories and creates new ones and considers the "capacity of language to transform itself." It was Browning's development of new categories, his insistence on

what he put into his categories, as well as his insistence on completeness of substantiating detail that contributed to his obscurity.

Mimetic Level

Browning's richness of language allows us a nearly unlimited array of mimetic threads. Although I have chosen five modes, there are others possible. These five visual modes work together to show how the two paramount ones work also at the hermeneutic level to desacralize the images associated with war. For convenience I have applied the idea of catalogue to each series and have looked at the stance of the poet both inside and outside the poem conscious of the pun eye/I.

These groups form catalogues of the narrative eye, the painterly eye, the military eye, the literary eye, the religious eye. The narrative eye sees events as moving the poem along; sometimes what it reveals is objective, sometimes it sees from within the poem. The painterly eye is appropriately that of the Renaissance painter scanning his landscape backgrounds, noting their atmosphere, their meticulous detail. Sometimes one feels that it is a strange painter imitating the Renaissance painter; sometimes the painter seems to be a student of historical allegory, as practiced in the nineteenth century. The literary eye looks through past texts to the Sordello text on which it is focused; since the use of literary texts is part of the new poetic role described in the poem. The value is twofold: the matter evoked by the

texts and the process of sharing with the reader alternate readings. The military eye sees not only the trappings of the volunteer armies and the war professionals, and the political implications of bloody acts, but above all, the ritual attending upon them to justify and socialize them. The religious eye goes beyond ritual to principle, and sees it in literature and battle-field heroism, in statuary and tapestry, in the discourses of the narrators and others; the religious eye measures what it sees in terms of final cause.

As early as the opening section Browning tells us that the canvas of the story is "ravaged" (l. 9) which tells the reader both that he is in war-torn Italy and also that he must piece together the hypogram by careful reading. Browning uses the painterly approach to his materials as he is panning in on his subject for the section. In this introductory book, he uses a bravura technique to show battle scenes (l.65-71, 1.81-85, 1.159-187) and an Italianate technique to bring the reader to the castle where Sordello spends his youth, both in the landscape common to the background of Renaissance paintings and in the chiaroscuro of the sunlight playing on the panels of the hidden room (l.374-409, 1.394-409 and again at 1.607ff). In the description of the major symbol of the poem—the font—the reader has a true sense of the three-dimensional nature of the statuary and a sense of plasticity that suggests that the caryatides are living (1.410-424).

A dullish grey-steaked cumbrous font, a group
Round it, —each side of it, where'er one sees, —

Upholds it; shrinking Caryatides
 Of just-tinged marble like Eve's liliated flesh
 Beneath her maker's finger when the fresh
 First pulse of life shot brightening the snow.
 The font's edge burthens every shoulder, so
 They muse upon the ground, eyelids half closed:
 Some, with meek arms behind their backs disposed,
 Some, crossed above their bosoms, some, to veil
 Their eyes, some, propping chin and cheek so pale,
 Some, hanging slack an utter helpless length
 Dead as a buried vestal whose whole strength
 Goes when the grate above shuts heavily.
 So dwell these noiseless girls...

Browning uses his painterly approach to emphasize the aesthetic substance of what he is doing. He will end Book I with the second major symbol of the poem—the tapestry—but only after he has painted in the artists of the time on his own canvas (l.567-585), showing them vigorous, even revolutionary. However, they are not whole men, falling short of the ideal of the Renaissance. The narrator sees on Sordello the purple mark of leprosy, the warning that, for him, in ways we are to learn later, perfection is to be denied. In the tapestry is buried all that makes up Sordello's genius: his parentage, his patron, Ecelin, heroes, especially Apollo, from classical times, the towns and country-side of his region of Italy, the history of Italy—all present but all vicarious, all at a remove from the tranquil non-event that is Sordello's youthful education.

In contrast to this Italianate style of vast but distantly viewed landscape and detailed tapestry, Browning sometimes, as at the beginning of

Book 2, returns to a naturalistic style full of the direct observation that later comes somewhat as a shock in the Venice section of Book 3 where the extended passage has none of the formalistic qualities of the sections described above. Conversely, the battle scenes of Book 4 are full of pictorial horror and the reader relives in them the experience Sordello has as he examines the Ferrara landscape much as he had examined the tapestry at Goito when he was a child. (4.180ff). Another tapestry-like section is developed in Book 5 by which Sordello shows us his ideal city, a new Rome, only to reject it. "Thou archetype / Last of my dreams and loveliest, depart!" (5.67). Bunyan's Shining City mingles with Sordello's Rome as Sordello tries to effect paradise on earth (5.1001), only to realize that although he can be poet, he cannot be legislator.

The poet-narrator instructs the reader as to the nature of the poetic eye (485-522, 1.523-557). In one exposition the poets are "blind at first to aught beyond its [the object's] beauty... / Are fain invest the lifeless thing with life from their own soul" from which time it has life and will of its own (484-495). The reverse of this image is next presented in which the poet desires to lose himself in the object, an unquestioning desire to be one with the object in which the process of loving is all-important and the object of little importance, "Nor ask, as passionate he kneels to it, / Whence grew the idol's empery" (1. 514-15). A second poetic role is that which matches external beauty to something in the soul—a recognition of what has been

dormant, a Platonic model which suggests a need for further action, a replication of this match in the production of poetry (1.523-567). Sordello, placed in the second group, must overcome the stasis of dormant contemplation and find a way to act in this world's "too narrow area," stooping, in order to better mankind, to put "that nature forth, forcing our straitened sphere/ Contain it,—to display completely her/ The mastery another life should learn,/ Thrusting in time eternity's concern.—" (1.558, 1.563-566). Sordello in taking on Apollo's role is doomed to failure. Greatness lies in the ability to bring eternal beauty within reach of others, but the world is too small to accommodate it.

The outcome of the tale is never in doubt; the narrator intensifies the brooding quality in the description of the castle at Goito, worthy, Ian Jack suggests, of Mrs. Radcliffe (2.214) and again in the leper's-ulcer image of the hero's fatal flaw. Having firmly established this approach, the next task for the narrator is to view the early development of the main character, a development which is influenced by a lack of social intercourse and, somewhat improbably, of human teachers and reading. However, the child Sordello was free to examine, enjoy and interpret nature and art at will. In this interaction he finds and defines himself as the new Apollo.

The new Apollo meets his first test by concentrating on the quality of his verse, but is dazed by his first direct encounter with his public and tries to

work out a compromise between what he expects of himself and they expect of him. In this passage he is depicted as deliberately working upon the language (2.513-566), “pothoring” with glossaries, fulfilling his historical role at the dawn of the Renaissance, to “present us with ourselves” (2.566). He presents very little of this initial work to his public, however, and ultimately fails to reach his goal of developing the vernacular for high art, evidently because he cannot find the right subject. He returns to the standard themes, clothing them in purer garments than they owned (2.654), on the advice of Naddo, a character who is a distillation of popular critics. Thence forward Sordello has two voices, one for the crowd and one for himself. This stratagem fails and he loses both his popularity and his confidence as a poet.

Book 2.

Sordello, after enjoying an Eglamor-like popularity in besting Eglamor at the Court of Love, realizes that he must not “chain/ Himself to single joys and so refrain / From tasting their quintessence...” (lines 551-3). He then, in the guise of an armorer, applies himself even more seriously to his craft, challenging the “crude mass” of the vernacular, the new speech, wresting from it his creature.

...The first trial was enough:
 He left imagining, to try the stuff
 That held the imaged thing, and, let it writhe
 Never so fiercely, scarce allowed a tithe
 To reach the light-his Language. How he sought
 The cause, conceived a cure, and slow re-wrought

That Language, —welding words into the crude
 Mass from the new speech round him, till a rude
 Armour was hammered out, in time to be
 Approved beyond the roman panoply
 Melted to make it,—boots not. This obtained
 With some ado, no obstacle remained
 To using it; accordingly he took
 An action with its actors, quite forsook
 Himself to live in each, returned anon
 With the result—a creature, and, by one
 And one, proceeded leisurely to equip
 Its limbs in harness of his workmanship.
 “Accomplished! Listen, Mantuans!” Fond essay!
 Piece after piece that armour broke away,
 Because perceptions whole, like that he sought
 To clothe, reject so pure a work of thought
 As language: thought may take perceptions’s place
 But hardly co-exist in any case,
 Being its mere presentment—of the whole
 By parts, the simultaneous and the sole
 By the successive and the many. Lacks
 The crowd perception? painfully it tacks
 Thought to thought, which Sordello, needing such,
 Has rent perception into: its to clutch
 And reconstruct-his office to diffuse,
 Destroy: as hard, then, to obtain a Muse
 As to become Apollo. . . .

(II: 569-601)

Book II, which explores the role of the poet, ends ironically with Taurello’s uncaring behavior when the troubadour Sordello was unable to celebrate him in song. Not only has the poet failed to impose his will on the world, he has now even failed to get his message out. However, the world remains indifferent to its loss. Book III is for the most part a long digression from the events of thirteenth-century Italy. The narrator’s voice changes, the

time changes from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century present. “. . .the poem is in possession of three different historical times, Sordello’s time, the poet’s, writing in the nineteenth century, the reader at any time after that” (Armstrong 143).

After a hiatus, Sordello returns to public performance, although unidentified. The narrative eye sees him as moderately successful in meeting public expectations, but still failing to impose his will on mankind. The reader is introduced to Salinguerra and Palma (more formally than in Book 1), with Salinguerra more a true Renaissance man in his practical approach to learning (4.605). Palma, Sordello’s Beatrice, suggests that governing is the way to impose one’s will and thus self-understanding (present us with ourselves”(2. 63-64). Sordello sees in Salinguerra a man with the necessary skills that Sordello lacks, “and all I should have done, he does” (4.919). Sordello abandons poetry for politics.

Here there is a chance, anachronistically, to impose Shelleyan governance upon the world, but such is not to be. A perfect Shining City is useless without the right kind of men (5.10). When Sordello tries to make peace, the role is at first denied him since, despite his conviction that he has been ordained the world’s champion since its beginning (5.485), poets are not deemed to be men of action. Overcoming this attitude in himself by Sordello’s eloquence concerning the Roman ideal, Taurello gives Sordello

the badge of power, and plans to turn his coat and make his now revealed son, Sordello, and Palma rulers (5.860-1005).

Sordello, in the last Book, confronts finally the question of the role of the poet and decides that action is denied him because he was not able to see the whole transcendent truth but only occasional sparks (6.190). Making his only possible moral choice, he determines to “dash/This badge, and all it brought, to earth,—” (6.194), and dies.

The last section of the poem defends Sordello’s philosophical stance, but his refusal has been costly. Mankind is poorer, for now it must wait for Dante to complete Sordello’s task of vernacular reform. All that remains of Sordello’s gifts to the worlds is the garbled snatch of his Goito lay sung by a shepherd.

The Literary Eye

Unlike the narrator eye, the literary eye sees the events of the tale as inspired by Shelley, and as recalling Don Quixote, but above all, as preparing the way for Dante. Sordello, the troubadour and politician manqué, is important because of his literary values, not his historical ones. *Alastor*, Jack suggests, is a lode that Browning mined for his character. Especially in books one and six, Sordello corresponds to the description given in Shelley’s preface to *Alastor*.

...a youth of uncorrupted feelings and adventurous genius led forth by an imagination inflamed and purified through familiarity with all that is excellent and majestic, to the contemplation of the universe. He drinks deep of the fountains of knowledge and is still insatiate. The magnificence and beauty of the external world sinks profoundly into the frame of his conceptions, and affords to their modifications a variety not to be exhausted. (Shelley 18)

There the images diverge, for the Romantic Alastor seeks a "significant other," while the nineteenth century Sordello looks to interpret his philosophical poetry in political action, however personified in Palma. However, both are, in Shelley's phrases, "blasted" with a strong emotion as a result, and descend to an "untimely grave" (18).

The castle at Goito has literary significance, representing Sordello's poetic being with the notes of art (the tapestry, the "peopled arras"), nature, and even the inmost unexplored recesses of the poetic soul, the forbidden part of the castle. Poetic fancy is developed by experience with nature (1.705-716) in the form of the poppy and poppyseed case and by the romantic evocativeness of the tapestry and the elevating purification of the font. The structure of the poem builds on literary facts, the Court of Love, where art is celebrated as well as love and Sordello makes "...Word... leap/ Out word, rhyme—rhyme" (2.80-88). Sordello learns that the audience is part of the poem (2.476-513), that Naddo sees this as a legitimizer of poetry but Sordello (or Browning) sees this as a problem of construction/deconstruction. Finally understanding that the challenge of "clothing perception in language" (2.590-

98) is a problem not solved by measuring the crowd's pleasure, Sordello throws his crown into the font, returning it to Apollo with a vow never to seek popular acclaim through cheap poetry.

The Venetian interpolation of the third book juxtaposes the image of the late medieval-early Renaissance troubadour who needs a queen, a lady, a political-activist Palma, with the nineteenth-century poet who has a republican duty to mankind to finish his task. In Book IV, however, it is the soldier, the bringer-by-force of the rule of law who is shown to be the only effective agency for the short term. The poet essaying the same end by his art may fail, but his words endure, and prevail over the long term.

In Book V, the poet is shown to have special responsibilities which complement that of the soldier statesman, but yet are not complete. The next age of poetry will allow the poet to develop each facet of human personality to the fullest (5.601-653). Sordello represents the new age of poetry raising both poet and reader to a higher level of being, "How I rose/ And how have you advanced!" aided by "those structure's symmetry" but yet not perfect, "...the vehicle/ Never sufficient" (5.653). Compare this to "...The happy vehicle/ So late allowed" (2.484) and "wondrous vehicle" (2.602) and "spurn [the unworthy] vehicle" (5.260) for every poet is a Sordello forever failing to make his language do what he wills.

The Military Eye

“It is important,” writes Sharrock, “to draw attention to the limitations of intellectual interest in Browning when one approaches his attitude to history.” Sharrock goes on, quoting Dilthey about new theories of historical interpretation in the nineteenth century:

the concepts developed by [Schlegel as Schleiermacher’s mentor] in his brilliant essays on Greek poetry, Goethe and Boccaccio, were those of the inner form of the work, of the evolution of a given writer and of Literature as a systematic whole” (80).

When Browning “studies the inner form of the individual, he sees him in his historical evolution” as in the “changes and self-discoveries of Sordello” (81). Browning used quarried history to illumine his extravagantly peopled world.

The historical matter of *Sordello* centers on the struggle for supremacy between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines, a sad mixture of set battle, treachery, overt political maneuver and subversive ploys. Success was defined as the capture of successive city states. To this already complex situation were added the interests of the Papacy and the Holy Roman Empire, which Browning manages to invest with a pre-Reformation aura of rectitude, resident in the figure of Frederick the Great, until Sordello’s conversion to the side of the people, when Renaissance Rome becomes the ideal.

The question that next needs to be addressed is why Browning chose this scene in which to explore the role of the poet in society, and the essential problem of poetry, its language. Here we find several poetic challenges: the place and role of popular culture and popular criticism, the role of the audience, the significance of language. When Browning depicts the Courts of Love as having become the courts of the people, the courts of the city states, the heritage of the troubadours is seen to be debased. What indeed is the role of the poet when society has been racked and tossed by battle after battle, siege after siege? And the role of the audience: it too has been thrown into a chaos, has lost its discernment, its ordered life. The crowd now prefers the rhymes and measures of Eglamor, providing familiar, predictable entertainment in the midst of chaos. The songs partake of the secular, just as hymns with homelike images replaced the austerity of the liturgy, just as high art, now rejected by the crowd, has been from the time of Apollo identified with the gods and their worship. When the courtly scene is moved from its tapestry at Goito into the nineteenth century, what then? The audience is to be respected in republican terms; but the poet's first obligation is to art. *Sordello's* solution was to break the poet, remove him from the struggle for social justice and from the battle field.

The question why Browning chose this setting still remains unanswered. Is there a parallel between the desacralization of war symbols and desacralization of the poetic role? If all poetic roles are defined by

Apollo, which Apollo? There are parallels between the changes occurring in war metaphor and poetic role: something outside both war and poetry that was working on them both. Is it apocalyptic, suggested by the vision of the Veronese sunset as a torch (1.83-84, 98-100)? If so, did Browning see this so early? Is this what created his chaos? Is this his inchoate version of the apocalyptic vision?

It is shown from the beginning of *Sordello* that the two are related. That the first military image is from Don Quixote and not from the historical Guelphs and Ghibellines warns us that history is to be looked on as literature, thus containing a deeper verity, and that what is reality and what illusion is not going to be readily apparent. The critics early noted that since the narrator continually steps in and out of the poem, the reader never is quite certain where the narrator is on the scale of real versus illusory. It begins with the first image of the poem, the allusion to Pentapolin, an unstoppable warrior who stays in battle without sword, "Named o' the naked arm" (1.4-7). So too will *Sordello* stay in the struggle to create the new language of poetry and to fulfill the full poetic role (poet-legislator) until he and the reader see him to have failed on both counts.

After developing the historical setting at Verona and establishing its warlike spirit, Browning's borrowing begins at the roots of Western civilization and produces war images from Greece, and from the poet Sidney,

soldier-poets. Shelley, he says (60) will not approve his language, the juxtaposition of war and poetry makes for stridency, the passion of a trumpet call (1.65-71), a reference to Aeschylus who fought against the Persians at Marathon. Aristophanes in *The Frogs* has the chorus refer to Aeschylus as loud-thundering (Jack 2.197).

The thunder-phrase of the Athenian, grown
Up out of Marathon,
Would echo like his own sword's griding screech
Braying a Persian shield, —the silver speech
Of Sidney's self, the starry paladin,
Turn intense as a trumpet sounding in
The knights to tilt,—wert thou to hear! What heart
Have I to play my puppets, bear my part
Before these worthies?

Although Browning does not at this point attempt to justify this poem or himself as poet, the question remains in the air, hovers over the poem until its very end, like dust over an imaginary battlefield.

The next section is one of standard war imagery deployed in a Gothic manner— Count Richard as victim of his own trap (1.108-09), the strategic value of a narrow street (1.144-48), the Salinguerra trap, the battle with carnage, strategic destruction of food crops (1.159-087), Ecelin, the hill-cat's defenses (1.261-271). The carroch makes its first appearance, symbolizing in this instance, the relative security of the town, although there is a sense of scheming, of treachery in the hidden passages and peepholes, secret door and

the like (1.316ff). Sordello is described as Dante's herald (1.349), a military rather than religious image, though religion borrows the term.

The arrowy fire (1.502) is in the context of the religious phenomenon of creation compared to poetic creation. A fire arrow begins an encounter, for instance, by announcing an attack, by establishing the first breach in a defense. Used more to symbolize emotions or will, like Blake's arrows of desire, it will add force to the reflection in Book 2 (682-83), when "Apollo, seemed it now, perverse had thrown / Quiver and bow away, the lyre alone / Sufficed." Apollo, arms-giver and fire-bringer, belongs to a religion far older than Browning's Christianity. Alan Johnson says that the elements of myth that explain the practical side of mankind's inventiveness, also, in spite of any inaccuracies, give structure to the poem (327).

The defended and sequestered castle at Goito provides the images for Sordello's developing imagination in this somewhat limiting environment. As the web of the spider (1.668-674) links barbican to battlement, so too Sordello begins to link together his perceptions of his world and their significance, perceptions which can be shattered by a "gallant blow" and then reformed as the scenes of the "up-thrust" narrative must be continually reconstituted. Armstrong concludes that "the poem is not a story or a linear narrative at all. There is a real sense in which the poem is a trick or sleight of hand" (143).

Ecelin is Sordello's hero. Heroes are meant to be emulated; Sordello considers how he can be a hero, but as he lacks the necessary military training—and later it is suggested, the necessary physique—he must settle for a vicarious life (1.821-22). Except as a performer, the poet is never to be directly involved with society, never part of a team, a group. He meets other singers only in competition. Yet Sordello is drawn to the bow, fashioning himself an ash-bow and contemplating the one depicted in the tapestry as having performed so heroically (1.839-43). Again this is Blakean and suggests the duality of roles in Apollo. It also suggests the Wesleyan hymn (1742) "Equip me for the war, / And teach my hands to fight; / My simple, upright heart prepare, / And guide my words aright" (Wesley 404).

The Court of Love in Book 2 moves us from martial equipment to right words. Traditionally a tournament, a self-conscious parody of a tournament of arms (itself a tamer version of warfare), it was a competition of set pieces, suggestive of the battlefield, and the skirmishes of the tenons (improvisations). In its dreamlike quality it is suggestive of the removal from reality of the forever-frozen events in the arras. In Sordello's search for poetic identity after he vanquishes Eglamor the ash-bow is forgotten, and the image of the large singing boulder replaces it, both new and a seismic recall of the past, a wonderful image of the Sisyphean task of the poet to make music of words, and to express the inexpressible.(2.450-461).

As Sordello builds his poetic language he is seen as an armorer working in metals, usually compared to an alchemist working with alembics, since the transformation of base metal to gold is a similar problem. Here Sordello is smelting the "Roman panoply" to create his literary-level vernacular (2.578-79). The castle sinks, falls into ruin (2.978ff), the armor follows the ash-bow to destruction (2.611-13), and as with Apollo, Sordello has thrown away his bow and arrow. Only the lyre remains. Sordello, still identifying with the active approach to the betterment of mankind, takes as his subjects the heroes of the arras. The heroic gesture is physical and demands physical courage; as such it can suggest the infinite within the finite.

In contrast to Jacob's ladder that linked earth to heaven, the ladder Sordello constructs for himself in his attack on greatness, of lasting fame, is in part too weak to provide the support, and in part is misused by Sordello, who, after all, has not been trained in the military arts. He confounds the platform of the siege machine with the pinnacle, and sees himself successful for a time. However, ultimately Sordello realizes that he cannot capture the castle of poetic language, and he returns to the symbol of his failure, the ruined castle at Goito (3.143-156). The ladder is brought into service again when Palma appears, like Beatrice, to guide Sordello into what she perceives to be his true role, governance (3.589-93). Now the ladder is compared to the one used in the capture of Rome when Manlius, warned by the geese, pushes it away from the wall. The modern reader no doubt is more likely to relate to

it as a career ladder. Here Sordello is seen as in his citadel of poetry defending it from invaders who will probably destroy it or damage it in some way. The book ends on an ironic note—the Salinguerras of the world are praised over the Sordellos because they “engage /With, do not gaze at,—carry on a stage, / The work of the world, . . .” (3.915-924).

If lasting fame is the measure of having made a true contribution to the world, Taurello, after reviewing his triumphs in battle and weighing his defeats, concludes that immortality comes more easily to poets than to warriors, and predicts that Sordello’s song will long be sung (4.820). Earlier, Sordello has recalled the battle in which Taurello’s wife, Retrude, had died and his son had been lost (4.715-745). Imagery here offers a picture of hell, fiery, fierce. It recalls the Wesleyan hymn from *For Believers Fighting* which includes these words:

...
 O who can explain This struggle for life!
 This travail and pain, This trembling and strife!
 Plague, earthquake, and famine, And tumult, and war,
 The wonderful coming Of Jesus declare.

For every fight Is dreadful and loud;
 The warrior’s delight Is slaughter and blood,
 His foes overturning, Till all shall expire;
 But this is with burning And fuel of fire.
 . . . (Wesley 408-409)

The burning-arrow beacon image remains in use to the end of the book. The tale of Crescentius climaxes as he “flashes like a phanal, all men

catch/ The flame, Rome's just accomplished!" (4.988-89), only to face capture and crucifixion when Otho returns (4.991-92). However, Sordello is freshly inspired by the idea. "Rome's the Cause! (4.1011) and determines to "Finish the dream grown from the archer's tale" (4.1031).

Sordello is reminded of his warrior past in Ferrara as well as his poet-past but, inspired by his vision of Rome, he now feels himself to be Mankind's legislator and tries to convince Taurello to turn Guelph (5.238-39, 246-251 ff to 360).

This is Sordello's social history of the poet, "A poet must be earth's essential king" (5.506). It is in this passage that a connection should be found setting as twins desacralization and poetic roles. Sordello is quite clear now as to "Who was the lord, who liegemen!" even while admitting he is himself incapable of building the ideal city (5.473); he is justified by being what "such builder should have been (5.477):

...what was stored
 Bit by bit through Sordello's life, outpoured
 That eve, was, for that age, a novel thing:
 And round those three the People formed a ring
 Of visionary judges whose award
 He recognized in full. (5.453-58)

Sordello has now reached the third stage in his progress; he has been an "epoist," an extended word play, referring in both word and work, to the structure of *Sordello* in the Miltonic six-book epic form, and to the earlier,

more rudimentary epic form, the epos. The term "epoist" is from Browning's running notes in the 1863 edition. At first "what shall I unlock by song...I take the task/ And marshal you Life's elemental masque...(5.583-84). The marshaling of the epoist has to do with describing, praising already existing entities which he has no right to modify, a logistical exercise in military terms, but the next stage moves him yet further up the warrior's hierarchy and he uses strategic terms to describe the dramatist or analyst:

The men and women stationed hitherto
 Will I unstation, good and bad conduct
 Each nature to its farthest, or obstruct
 At soonest, in the world. . .
 [because] Light, thwarted breaks
 A limpid purity to rainbow flakes,
 Or shadow, massed, freezes to gloom: behold
 How much with fit assistance to unfold,
 Or obstacles to crush them, disengage
 Their forms, love, hate, hope, fear, peace make, war
 wage,
 In presence of you all! Myself implied
 Superior now, as, by the platform's side,
 I bade them do and suffer...(5.602-13)

Browning's men and women are "stationed" and "unstationed" to further dramatic purpose, pushing each nature to the utmost in order to analyze it. A good strategist makes use of light and darkness to identify his obstacles, to entrap them, to crush them, to split them apart into their components, all this controlled from the platform— which might be part of a siege machine or, as it is usually identified, a stage— and finally to disengage.

Effective as this strategy is, it does not lead to victory of itself; there is one more step, Browning's synthetist level. "Ends accomplished turn to means: my art intends / New structure from the ancient..." (5.641-43), yet in spite of the wealth and variety before him "the vehicle [is] Never sufficient...(5.653-54), and to finally bring the ideas of the poet-legislator to the fore, Taurello dramatically places his own arms on his now recognized son Sordello. In the emotion of the moment Sordello who theoretically has accepted his weakness to synthesize the role (5.477), now nearly collapses under the weight of the honorable armor which his father intends should fulfill him as poet-legislator, but Palma restores the arms to Taurello and sends him forth. It is the poet's role to explore and expose increasingly the essence of the world (5.620), as his audience responds with understanding.

The central military image in the last book is itself a symbol, the badge which represents directly Sordello's chance of recognition as a moral arbiter, if only he will agree to oppress the people. Sordello's last epiphany is understanding that he may not accept the badge of the House of Romano. He could not be a political autocrat, however well-meaning, even had he the physical strength, since he sees the ideals he desires to reveal to Mankind; if he is still in doubt about the right vehicle with which to express himself, warfare is certainly not it. With his last bit of strength, he casts down the emblem of power.

The Religious Eye

Although, as it is claimed, at least one person may have regained his faith after hearing a sermon based on *Sordello*, Browning was more a "vital" Christian, not a "dogmatic" one, and in fact, although he exhibited much energy, was quite inactive in the usual activities of church-going, or in his case, chapel-going. (Fairchild 166). His religion was "a bewildering mixture of traditional Christianity, subjective Christianity and outright romanticism" (Fairchild 134). It may be difficult to identify accurately Browning's religious beliefs. His biographers assure us that he was religiously sensitive from an early age, and encouraged by his mother who saw religion very much as a device of perfectibility, rather than as ritual or institution of worship. Lawson makes the point that that Browning had a true and substantial religious faith and that his consideration of religious matters more resembled the subjective commitment of such modern theologians as Paul Tillich than the religious thinkers of the nineteenth century. Browning's vaunted optimism was achieved in the face of much evidence to the contrary. Browning's religion was one of universals expressed in thought or in

overarching context. It was not a religion of rite, of ritual or of liturgy, or even of deed. The dramatic gestures, the externalizations of the Catholic church provided poetic material lacking in his religious makeup and allowed him to reify his utterance. It not only gave him materials to work with in *Sordello*, but taught him to look for these riches in the “up-thrust” past and present, and introduce them as nuances to the themes of shape his poetry.

Browning desacralizes all images because they are important to his art but not his religion. He is in his way a forerunner of Arnold in his definition of the poetic vocation. The key elements of religion are its system of thought, code of ethics, and frame of reference. The religious eye goes beyond ritual to first principles and sees them in literature and battle-field heroism, in statuary and tapestry, in the discourses of the narrators and others, and measures what it sees in terms of final cause. As the poet is creator—in a sense the final cause of the universe that is his poem—he partakes of the Creator. The poet also sets up a code of behavior for his creations which may or may not have reference to the real. Neither Abbot Samson’s monastery in *Past and Present* nor *Sordello*’s Italy directly relate to a historical reality. Some of the detail, the accidentals may correspond, but they are their maker’s own. Yet Shelley held that, as Morse says, “poets are absolutely central to the constitution of human culture and yet in the modern age they are effectively marginal...[even as] poetry retains its traditional function” (398).

The first picture in the poem is one of war as the expression of ideals. Pentapolin's Naked Arm suggest the might of the right arm of God (1.4-7). Other images that are both military and religious are the "thunder-phrase" (1.65) God traditionally speaking with a voice of thunder, and the apocalyptic violence of the sunset (1.83-84). The snare and the captives of lines 1.108-09 suggest captive of sin as well as captives for the faith, as does the fruit and vine image twisted to bear evil things(1.159-187).

Another important image, absolutely reflecting reality, is the castle of Goito set upon the hill. There are many religious parallels of the city of God (1.60-270). It is of course impossible to escape the sense that Browning sees Sordello is the forerunner of Dante as John is of Christ (1.349ff). The parallels are tenuous but present, essentially as someone whose message was refused, but who prepared the way by essaying it, and both of whom met their end by the sword—John killed by Herod, and Sordello in accepting the arms of Salin guerra which were too heavy for him to bear.

The font is the central religious-aesthetic symbol and the source of inspiration for Sordello throughout his life. At the end of the poem it is revealed that it serves also as his mother's tomb (5.795). The Caryatides are depicted as bearing the weight of the font as punishment for moral wrongdoing, as Vestals were punished for impurity. Sordello visits them daily, sitting with each in turn praying for relief of each one's load. The effect on

Sordello is to enlarge his heart and lighten his step—a very Christina Rossetti conceit, but also ironic (1.410-439).

The creative mystery is shared between the poet and God. When the poet has set his world up and his characters in motion “[v]isibly through his garden walketh God.” (1.507). Both poet and God share the act of creation, and the god-related images are Christian and pagan, the Christian image sometimes with a Gnostic note (1.505-522, 523-567). The sense of omnipotence is soon shattered. The palmer worm, with its hint of original sin, suggests that man’s creation can never be perfect. The reader begins to suspect a flaw which will prove Sordello’s undoing (1.614-716). With the sack of Apollo’s shrine, the destruction of the Singer’s house, the result can only be world disorder, death, famine, pestilence, war. The battle between Guelphs and Ghibellines Sordello sees as re-enacting the events in the Garden of Eden and is horrified by the engines of war (4.302ff) that men employ against each other. The right arm indeed has thunder for its slave. Sordello compares poets and warriors in their specific powers, prefiguring the full development in Book 6 “while songs go up exulting like an escape of angels” (1.877-83).

In Book 2, Sordello contemplates his potential fate. Learning his identity, although a false one, has forced him to abandon some of his plans, and in an agony of self-consciousness Sordello mourns his loss of divinity

(2.356-475). His sense of his divine origin returns when he is seen by the people at the Court of Love as being gifted over even Eglamor, and he knows that his medium, poetry, allows him to exercise power over people, perhaps even mandates it.

Much use is made of apocalyptic materials: burning cities provide several dramatic episodes, and the flashback in which Taurello loses Retrude and the infant Sordello. Sordello learns his mother has long been buried in the font to which he will never return (5.795). Sordello, who has been seen to age throughout the last few books, now has become a perished husk. In Book 5, Browning himself takes over the tale from the flagging Sordello, his Voice speaking to Sordello from lines 81-234.

Ay, your own art
 Shall serve us: put the poet's mimes apart—
 Close with the poet's self, and lo, a dim
 Yet too plain form divides itself from him! (5.105-07)

and at line 116: "You get no whole or perfect / Poet—still / "New Ninas, Alcamos, til time's mid-night / "Shrouds all—or better say, the shutting light / "Of a forgotten yesterday" (5.116-119). Again the carroch bell is used at line 199, a dramatic touch to tie in the Voice to the present, Sordello being in Ferrara. The point of discussion is to reveal to Sordello, who has first chosen Knowledge, then Force, that the world is moving from Force to Knowledge. Strength is of several kinds. "[B]reeding Strength by

other aid / Than Strength, is safe"(5.196-197). Browning is desacralizing the spiritual Strength offered by a religious institution, here the Pope and the force represented by the Crusades. Preparing to introduce a new poetic order in the world, he continues, he speaks through the Voice:

" . . . The League—or trick of turning Strength
 "Against Pernicious Strength, is safe at length.
 " . . . God's Truce—or trick to supersede
 "The Very use of Strength, is safe. Indeed
 "We trench upon the future. Who is found
 "To take next step, next age—trail o'er the ground—
 "Shall I say, gourd like?—not the flower's display
 "Nor the root's prowess, but the plenteous way
 "O' the plant—produced by joy and sorrow, whence
 "Unfeeling and yet feeling, strongest thence?
 "Knowledge by stress of merely Knowledge? No—
 "E'en were Sordello ready to forgo
 "His life for this, 't were overleaping work
 "Some one has first to do, howe'er it irk. . . (5.199-
 214)

and looking at a kind of sentient vegetation which partakes of both,
 and yet works within society quite differently, the Voice directly informs
 Sordello:

"Ferrara's reached, Goito's left behind:
 "As you then were, as half yourself, desist!
 "—The warrior-part of you may, an it list,
 "Finding real faulchions difficult to poise,
 "Fling them afar and taste the cream of joys
 "By wielding such in fancy,—what is bard
 "Of you may spurn the vehicle that marred
 "Elys so much, and in free fancy glut
 "His sense, yet write no verses—you have but
 "To please yourself for law, and once could please
 "What once appeared yourself, by dreaming these
 "Rather than doing these, in days gone by.
 "But all is changed the moment you descry

"Mankind as half yourself,—then fancy's trade
 "Ends once and always: how may half evade
 "The other half? Men are found half of you. (5.240-53)

Political choices are compromise; artistic commitment is not. Here at line 394, Sordello is trying to infuse in his secular world a motif that partakes of the religious and evangelical. Knowledge iconicized as the Pope and that can serve as the basis for political action.

Sordello then invokes, in his turncoat speech to Taurello, his authority as poet, ordained from eternity as the world's champion, but far weaker in the sword arm than Taurello. It is, as Girard might say, a reenactment of the original generative process inherent in sacrifice. Sordello is the bloodless blood sacrifice that will save his city and his world, the literary scapegoat that by his unfulfilled death enables a future for a new kind of poetry, as subversive and pervasive as a vine. Girard allies Sordello to the Biblical giants Paul and Moses, the historical figures Charlemagne and Hildebrand, in his struggle. This whole section acts out

the ritualistic imagination [that] strives to repeat the original generative process. The unanimity that regulates, pacifies, and reconciles supplants the opposite situation, displacing the paroxysm of violence that divides, destroys, and levels....The two different faces of the primordial experience are juxtaposed; unanimity is attained in the course of a brief and terrifying meeting of opposites (Girard 114).

Thus Browning/Sordello continues to develop his poetic theory. The more the poet is involved in the work of the world, the more is the world progressing. The poet, however, has no easy task. The poet is to look for a pure idea, but not a simple one; rather, ideas are transmitted in rainbow flakes as light through a prism. From these fragments the poet must make manifest that fusion of Knowledge and Force that up to now have been at odds.

Meanwhile, what Sordello has proposed (returning to the dimension of Time) is that Salinguerra change his allegiance from Ghibelline to Guelph. Salinguerra is feeling defeated on his present course, and with the pragmatism of the politician, says it is as good a plan as any. As Taurello gives the too real regalia of sword and armor to Sordello, the scene fades to Goito, where we are shown the font with the Caryatides maintaining their ambiguous and eternal vigil. Sordello is dead at the end of book 5, but there are still some necessary points to be made. Although Morse's comparison of Sordello to Hamlet is intriguing, the root of the indecision is very different. As the king's son, Hamlet is in a justifiable position to wreak his revenge. That Sordello is in direct succession from Apollo is a far more doubtful case. Taurello currently controls the House of Romano merely by default. His unacknowledged son has an even more tenuous right to such authority. Very literally is Sordello an unacknowledged legislator.

Eglamor has always been important to Sordello's tale. He returns to the poem again at the end; it is he who becomes the forerunner of the New Poet; he has known a modest fame, and been the friend of Queens, even Kings, and he dies when once he has been vanquished in the mock battle of the Court of Love and his usefulness is over. Sordello assumes Eglamor's place, enjoying in his own turn the modest fame of his predecessor. Soon, however, he becomes aware of a higher, more perfect calling, the need to serve Mankind, but just as Palma in book 2 admits to needing a mentor, so too does Sordello need an "out-soul" in this endeavor, "A soul, in Palma's phrase, above his soul, / Power to uplift his power (6.41-2). In this way, he can succeed in an evangelical way to "fulfill a course" and win "life's crown" as "...a certain fruit / Of having lived in his degree, —a stage, / Earlier or later in men's pilgrimage" but still the "alien glory" that is theirs, yet evades them.

Collins argues that "[t]he sorrow of Sordello's life is that because of his youthful self-deception, his inability to pursue a clearly defined goal, and his unwillingness to recognize the necessity of compromise, his potential role as a poet in society remained unfulfilled "(61). To this could be added the narrator's conclusion that what was lacking was a sense of a poet-guide who could have made him see more clearly his synthesizing role. Although this is palpably true on one level, it is not the main conclusion that should be drawn. Sordello's death, "a triumph lingering in the wide eyes" (6.614)

was more glorious than Eglamor's because it was the result of an heroic over-reaching, a striving for a goal that could not be achieved through compromise, an ultimate moral and heroic choice, necessarily fatal because sacrificial. Here again *Sordello* proved to be a forerunner of a poet, a nineteenth-century poet. Browning's theory of poetry as produceable only through multiple layers of word, ideas, allusions and images is not susceptible of concession. In this he is like another notoriously obscure poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, who, as Armstrong says, uncompromisingly sought out language for "holding a fluent world still" (1982:18). The religious eye became informed through the long passages of *Sordello* until, at the last, it looked to those elements of existence that bridge the gap between reality and the ideal, between what man thinks and what he should think, what he does and what he should do.

Chapter 6

"An aegis covering startling propositions": Tennyson's *Maud*

The publication of *Maud* (1855) comes roughly at mid-point in Tennyson's long career. With *The Princess* (1847) he had addressed The Woman Question, and three years later made his case for the committed life with *In Memoriam*. Now with this long and sensational monodrama, Tennyson looks at the modern nexus of personal and public responsibility, with special, if unspoken, reference to the poet's life. The unsettling conclusions he draws in this, his most controversial work, raised a chorus of protest, but the protesters could never develop a consensus about what exactly was wrong with the poem.

Half a century later, Andrew Lang came to write his study and appreciation of Tennyson in the Modern English Writers series. At the very end of Victoria's reign (1901), and nearly a dozen years after Tennyson made his final emendations to the text of *Maud*, Lang came down firmly on the

Arnoldian side of poetic theory and wrote: "To one age Tennyson may seem weakly superstitious; to another needlessly skeptical. After all, what he must live by is, not his opinions, but his poetry" (ix).

It is never the struggle of the poet that comes to the forefront in Lang's criticism but the struggle within the poetry, and that is always (and only) semiotically personal. The nature of patriotism, of civic duty, was a theme to which Lang returned repeatedly in his own writings. Lang saw civic duty as individual ennoblement; this is possibly the only interpretation open to loyal Scots, historically seen as heroic if short-lived "flowers of the forest." Lang wrote this Tennyson criticism during the divisive and controversial Boer War. Habitually apocalyptic in his vision, Lang seriously addressed the bellicose elements in the public and private aspects of *Maud*, but devoted himself more fully to a discussion of the private aspects of the poem. He especially enumerated the similarities between it and Scott's *The Bride of Lammermoor*, equating some of the supporting characters of the novel and the private plot of *Maud*. Lang always made a practice of including Scottish writers as points of reference in his literary criticisms; he was an expert on Scott at a time when Scott was read mainly by readers over fifteen years of age. Lang took obvious satisfaction in delineating affinities between the hero of *Maud* and the young Master of Ravenswood (85).

A comprehensive body of literature discusses sources in *Maud*, including the similarities between *Maud* and *The Bride of Lammermoor*. Christopher Ricks has produced a detailed enumeration of sources. Shatto, in her comprehensive edition of *Maud*, lists a selection that ranges from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the more closely contemporaneous Keats's "Isabella," Kingsley's *Alton Locke*, Thomas Hood's "The Dream of Eugene Aram, the Murderer," and Bulwer-Lytton's *Falkland*, the last two not included in Ricks (Shatto 34; Ricks II 515-16). Although Lang was an amateur psychologist—he shared the presidency of the prestigious Society for Psychical Research with both Freud and Jung—he steadfastly refused to plumb the depths of any poet's soul, including the late Laureate's.

More recent critics, notably Herbert F. Tucker, depicts a Tennyson engaged in "Pyrrhic Victorianism," a poet engaged in a wonderfully energetic if futile struggle with his world. Tucker's long study reaches the same conclusion as Lang's deliberately etiolated consideration of the hero of *Maud* as *le beau ténébreux*. Tucker is sympathetic to Victorian values, to more utilitarian beliefs. He looks to the intended function of the triad of *The Princess*, *In Memoriam* and *Maud*, than did Lang (1844-1912), who in common with most critics of the last decades of the Empress's reign self-consciously abandoned parts of the tainted ideologies of his Victorian youth.

Some critics, in seeking to come to grips with the problems of *Maud*, commonly propose that *Maud* had the same significance for Tennyson that *David Copperfield* had for Dickens, namely, a retelling of his story to himself in an attempt to make it add up to a different sum. Marion Shaw writes: "Maud is about the desire not to have been born, or since that cannot be, about the desire to undo the flaw of the speaker's birth, to start again without the taint of mortality" (134). If this statement is as cogent as it seems, then this would provide a distinction between the two writers' histories and their visions of the Victorian world. Besides the textual evidence for this similarity, it explains Tennyson's habit of reading this poem to assemblies of cultural peers. Dickens' approach to self-reaffirmation was more far-flung; his interior anguish was eased by the effect on crowds at public readings. While Tennyson, of course, read all his current projects to Emily and to whoever was visiting, Tucker says that *Maud* remained for Tennyson a work in progress. However, Tennyson modified the poem over time; he left his final draft statement on this theme as an unfinished and unfinishable symphony. This urge to repetitive reading can be expanded, Tucker suggests, into the need Tennyson had, as Poet Laureate and poet-legislator, to make a public comment on the condition of England (406).

Contemporaneously, Carlyle saw *Maud* as proof that Tennyson should abandon poetry and engage himself more directly, as Carlyle saw it, in the amelioration of society. If Tennyson, Carlyle seems to say, could

appreciate so clearly the ills from which England was suffering, his highest obligation was to select appropriate tools—his access to a bully pulpit and the polemical weapon of prose—to effect a cure. Sanders quotes a letter Carlyle wrote to Tennyson after reading *Poems, 1842* which defines Carlyle's opinion of the poet:

[I]t is long since in any English Book, Poetry or Prose, I have felt the pulse of a real man's heart as I do in this same. A right valiant, true fighting, victorious heart; strong as a lion's, yet gentle, loving and full of music: what I call a genuine singer's heart!" (193).

However, it is the case that Carlyle disapproved of poetry in its usual forms and recommended to Tennyson, as he consistently did to anyone who crossed his critical path, that he shift to prose as his medium (206). The process of writing, for Carlyle, as Timko, shows us, is to "body forth" an idea (142). Reality is supralingual, expressible only imperfectly; and poetry, bound as it is by irrelevant strictures demanded by rhythm and sound, was not serious enough a medium, perhaps, to attempt this expression (143). Prose, for Carlyle, acknowledged in itself imperfectness and thus could legitimately be used for seduction of readers; poetry suggesting an ultimate perfection by its form could be no further manipulated.

Modes of expression aside, the poet was serious enough in his reading. Tennyson engaged in "obsessive" social reading which "demanded ratification" and which would lead toward the "assuagement of inward

uncertainty", says Tucker, who, after examining the cultural referents of *Maud* can only conclude that it is a powerful statement about the doom of culture, "an achievement of lethal force" (430). However, *Maud* remained for Carlyle a "cobwebby" production on the unsympathetic topic of the Crimean War (Sanders 212).

Tennyson's sensitivity to cultural forces has not always been directly addressed. Henry Van Dyke, who felt a certain assurance in speaking for literature, came to see the purpose of *Maud* quite differently, after he had heard Tennyson read the poem aloud. Charles Tennyson says that this reading, excessively tiring for the poet who was in his last months of life, was organized expressly for Van Dyke, who had been critical of the poem (529). Be that as it may, Van Dyke was captivated by the reading and, although he is most struck by the integral nature of the work, and by its musicality, recalls in this essay some of the poet's comments on the psychology of the narrator. Revising his former opinion of *Maud*, Van Dyke now finds the meaning of the poem to be "the power that redeems from self" (Van Dyke 85-101, Tennyson, Charles 101).

Tennyson's serious concern with social issues, however intense, was shared (as Richard Altick points out) with a large body of English readers whose addiction to the newspaper Altick graphically documents in *The Presence of the Present*, especially in its first chapter, "The Glare of the

Present." Even more to the point is Altick's thesis that underlying all Victorian thought is a fundamental concern with the consciously Victorian experience. It was not the medieval Arthur but the Victorian Arthur who inspired the *Idylls*. However remote the kingdom of *The Princess*, its heroines were felt by Victorian readers to be modern women. Also, however mad *Maud's* hero may have been, he affirms the validity of a poetic elaboration of the present in whichever chaos he found himself, be it madhouse or cannon's mouth.

I examine *Maud* with reference to the public response to *Maud's* depiction of the nexus of religion and war. I also examine how these aspects of the poem were altered from 1837 to 1884 into desacralized war imagery which, the more it looks inward, the more it insists on embodying a cosmic statement. The role of Maud herself is one of the focal points for this discussion, as are the correspondences between the germinal "Go not, happy day" and "O That t'were possible" and the final two sections of the poem.

Tennyson published *Maud* in a full form in 1855. He continued, however, to make changes, additions and deletions for the next thirty-four years. Shatto based her variorum edition (1986) on that of 1889, itself a slightly corrected version of the January 1884 edition (38). Tennyson had

been writing and publishing poetry for twenty years when *Maud* first appeared, having found his vocation early. Tennyson's early reviews do not add appreciably to our appreciation of his work as much as they tell us something about the reviewing of the time (Shannon 1). If his youthful poetry, *Poems by Two Brothers* (1827), for instance, was well reviewed as "a graceful addition to our domestic poetry" (*Gentleman's Magazine*, June 1827, quoted in Shannon 1), so were many other youthful efforts that appeared in print. The tone of the early Tennyson reviews was much the same as for the poems and tales produced by Jane Taylor (1783-1824), for instance, her well-known "Twinkle, twinkle, Little Star." The Taylor sisters's verses were praised by Scott, parodied by Byron, and much commended in the Non-conformist press as exemplifying a means of keeping young people healthily diverted (Langstaff 438).

After Tennyson won the Poetry Prize for "Timbuctoo," the Apostles used their varied family influences to further Tennyson's career with his fullest cooperation—except for writing poetry to order. The most enduring example of this group's efforts was Arthur Hallam's article, "On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry and on the Lyrical Poems of Alfred Tennyson," published in *The Englishman's Magazine* of August, 1831. But surely, as Houghton and Stange say in their note to this essay, the sentiments expressed are those of Tennyson (Houghton 848).

Hallam in his essay first follows established critics by classifying modern poetry into the Shelley-Keatsian emotive division and the Wordsworthian classical division. Hallam next identifies five significant characteristics of Tennyson's poetry—his strong imaginative powers; his ideal characters or moods that give the predominant emotion of the poem, and drive the story or episode, his vivid delineation of objects, furthering the emotional theme, his variety of lyrical measures and modulated cadences, and his elevated habits of thought that deepen the implicit communication of the love of beauty to the heart, where beauty and goodness are one (Houghton 853).

Nowhere in these texts is there expressed Carlyle's idea of poetic duty, the responsibility for the poet to come to grips with the condition of England. Nor is there expression of a duty toward religion. Keble, whose high seriousness cannot be questioned, in summing up in the forty lectures he delivered to Oxford's undergraduates as Professor of English, suggests that poetry paves the way for theology, is the handmaid of piety (II, Lecture 40). However, women commentators, excluded from the Oxford experience, do address the issue of the Victorian poet's role. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, for instance, writes "poets should 'represent the age, not Charlemagne's'" (Lucas 179).

Modern critics frequently follow Hallam's line or use it as a point of departure. For T. S. Eliot, Tennyson's greatness rests on his qualities of abundance, variety, and competence in handling the crafts of poetic language. Tennyson's ability to get across a story is comparatively weak (11). As Eliot writes, "...his poems are always descriptive and always picturesque; they are never really narrative" (13). *Maud* Eliot found to be unreal; neither the insanity nor the bellicosity rings true to him; its fury is shrill (15). Already in *In Memoriam*, Eliot felt, Tennyson had marked the furthest development of his spirituality and his later poems were surface flattery, not critical commentary on his own time. If Eliot was looking for the traditionally oriented spirituality that marked his own Anglo-Catholicism, he necessarily undervalued the separation Tennyson was making between cultural artifacts and inward faith. Tennyson's higher moralities matched no pattern Eliot could recognize.

Like Hallam, Harold Bloom sees Tennyson as an emotive poet. In the introduction to his 1985 selection of essays on Tennyson, Bloom sees Tennyson and Browning as failed Romantics. Tennyson was the heir of Keats as Browning was of Shelley, yet Tennyson betrayed Keats's imaginative honesty and autonomy as Browning did Shelley's (2). Bloom says that Hallam is Tennyson's best critic (which is somewhat circular if the main source is Tennyson himself), and lists the attributes from Hallam's essay. Bloom's strict Freudian analysis denies the duality that Tennyson deliberately

places in his major poems, a duality of earthly and spiritual values however defined. Bloom limits poetic statement to ideas relating only to selfhood, and thus asserts that the Victorian reading of *In Memoriam* as a poem of consolation and moral resolution is mistaken. Bloom sees it as a romantic document, an extreme example of personal love as unrestrained as Heathcliff's (9).

Yet, when the first edition of *Maud* (1855) appeared, it was the social commentary of the young Laureate that featured in reviews, that caused a critical reaction that astounded Tennyson. After all, when *The Princess* was published (1847), the concerns were different. *The Princess* had been well received, even if some thought the subject could have been nobler and the form different, ever the lament of critics. Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote: "Isn't the world too old and fond of steam for blank verse poems in ever so many books, to be written about the fairies?" (Shannon 205). However, Tennyson's next poem, *In Memoriam*, was considered to be exceptional on all points. It was generally assumed that *In Memoriam* treated serious standard subjects of poetry—religion and bereavement—and had an unusual but pleasing form. Although some critics concerned themselves with testing the validity of Tennyson's theology, *In Memoriam* did not raise hackles as *Maud* did. Shannon assures us that Tennyson was an exponent of his age, not a teacher, but his contemporaries, recalling the proud heritage of ancient Greece, could not make that distinction for a poet (ix).

Maud's revisions tended to reinforce the idea of poet as spokesman, with overtones that transcend the responsibilities of a poet to report to his age. The changes from the first edition provided the introduction of a public voice that balanced more deeply and consistently each private event of the poem. In *Maud*, the rival lover is identified with the coal-mining industry and is rebuked for enjoying the profits derived from its inhumane treatment of its workers, both male and female. In spite of this kind of externalization, the revisions deepened the introspective nature of the poem as a whole, even pushing the title character aside, leading Shatto to call it "the chamber drama of the narrator's own interiority" (33).

***Maud's* Nexus of Religion and War**

A conventional view of Tennyson as a specific believer in no way differentiated by his trade as poet from other religious persons, is found in Gordon. Although Gordon uses "institution" in reference to Tennyson's view of religion—"institution" suggesting church rather than worship—his examples from the poems tend to be both personal and direct statements of moral (or immoral) behavior according to generally accepted if not clearly defined norms.

Gordon holds that Tennyson saw in the church a "great institution of society" (152). He selects examples that show grace at work: "closer is He

than breathing / And nearer than hands and feet" ("The Higher Pantheism") (153). In *Maud* "I have not made the world, and He that made it will guide." In the "Passing of Arthur" some lines suggest that men fail to see these workings of grace: "These eyes of men are dense and dim, / And have not the power to see it as it is." God's role in the world to Tennyson, Gordon concludes, was wisdom and love (154). Gordon adduces as evidence *In Memoriam* XXXVI, which refers to the textuality of wisdom and love, in its transmission by the Bible:

Though truths in manhood darkly join
 Deep-seated in our mystic frame,
 We yield all blessing to the name
 Of Him that made them current coin:

For Wisdom dealt with mortal powers
 Where truth in closest words shall fail,
 When truth embodied in a tale
 Shall enter in at lowly doors.

And so the Word had breath, and wrought
 With human hands the creed of creeds
 In loveliness of perfect deeds,
 More strong than all poetic thought;

Which he may read that binds the sheaf,
 Or builds the house, or digs the grave,
 And those wild eyes that watch the wave
 In roarings round the coral reef.

Neither of these features—the extratextual grace at work nor the power of the Word— are really institutional in the sense Chadwick uses when discussing Victorian religion (see my Chapter 3). More of the institutional trappings, those belonging to the organizational aspects of formal religion—

Put down the passions that make earth Hell!
 Down with ambition, avarice, pride,
 Jealousy, down! cut off from the mind
 The bitter springs of anger and fear;
 Down too, down at your own fireside,
 With the evil tongue and the evil ear,
 For each is at war with mankind. (Part 1, X, 3)

Tennyson's stance here is extreme. He asserts that peace—a peace without honor is implied—has no higher purpose than to assure continued profits. But in view of the extra-institutionality of the lowest of the Low Church and Nonconformist sects, it should be remembered that these itinerant preachers were not only reaching out to the poor, but also, even especially, seeking more educated, affluent, and enterprising members. This proselytized group was to provide a strong infrastructure, for the church as institution needed the same sound structure as any organization, any business. The message, then, was for two audiences. First, and as the occasion for the second, there was public preaching. The message to the masses was designed to pique the curiosity of disenfranchised leaders. To assure them that the message of peace was appropriate to their social and spiritual needs, its immediate economic value was emphasized (Wesley 54; see my Chapter 4).

Tennyson's use of a political cartoon that showed John Bright as a Quaker preacher to demonstrate what he saw as a disruptive and hypocritical element in society has been well documented and measured, but the key to understanding this caricature, if that is what it is, is why Tennyson's used this

metaphor. As Thomas Aquinas says, metaphor can make ideas understandable to the uneducated, "who are not ready to take intellectual things neat with nothing else." [Summa Theologica Ia.1,9]. Locke points out that this kind of substitution can also confuse (Soskice 26). Whatever the outcry, it cannot be argued that Tennyson chose ineffectively. Tennyson's public was already familiar with the cartoon of John Bright as Quaker. The icon could be used, if one is a ruthless artist, to point to an idea which, if not as rarefied as Aquinas' thought, yet is complex and active. Embedded in society is self-interest, however enlightened, and the manipulating of that self-interest is used repeatedly to further the aims of interest groups. Tennyson's Negative Capability drove him to this choice of icons—Bright as cartoon was such a useful piece of grotesquery, and well represented all those politicians and church leaders who were using material greed as bait for new recruits to their causes. Tennyson could not see, did not care to see beyond this image.

In his attempt to counter the unexpected criticism that flooded over him upon the publication of *Maud*, Tennyson reassessed his political philosophy. Tennyson, in working closely with Robert Mann in *Maud Vindicated*, attempted to dilute his image as a poet who saw soldiering as the purest heroic act of generous patriotism. He wrote to Mann "In that note on the Quaker ought you not to say something of the true war being the war of

evil in the heart? What we call war is but one of the symptoms" (Tennyson. *Letters* 2:145-6).

From the ways in which the public outcry was handled—*Maud Vindicated* did not get the kind of circulation Tennyson had in mind—it appears that public interest was strangely selective. There seems to be general consensus that the "snowy-banded dilettante, /Delicate-handed priest" (310-311) intoning while the hero daydreams of *Maud* provides fair comment on the established clergy and a purely objective description of churchmen's stereotypical conduct. The intoning in this poem, associated as it is with psalmody and hymnody, is interesting here. The context suggests that it must have contributed to the sourly negative verdict of the "*beau ténébreux*" as Lang classifies him (86); the hero of *Maud* could find no pleasure apart from his beloved and certainly not in the public worship of a possibly handsome cleric. The word "intoning" itself was used only in this instance, if Baker's concordance is accurate here. But it is a Low Church word, and rhymes with "droning." It recalls the early sonnet "To J.M.K." whom Tennyson addresses as "a latter Luther and a soldier-priest":

Thou art no sabbath-drawler of old saws,
 Distilled from some worm-cankered homily;
 But spurred at heart with fieriest energy
 To embattail and to wall about they cause
 With iron-worded proof, hating to hark
 The humming of the drowsy pulpit-drone
 Half God's good sabbath, while the worn-out clerk
 Brow-beats his desk below. Thou from a throne

Mounted in heaven wilt shoot into the dark
 Arrows of lightnings. I will stand and mark. (*Poems*,
 I, 280-81 .

Tennyson expressed himself on the subject to Arthur Gurney, writing
 to him on 6 December 1855:

I wish to say one word about *Maud* which you and others so strangely misinterpret. I have had Peace party papers sent to me claiming me as being on their side because I had put the cry for war into the mouth of a madman. Surely that is not half so wrong a criticism as some I have seen. Strictly speaking I do not see how from the poem I could be pronounced with certainty either peace man or war man. I wonder that you and others did not find out that all along the man was intended to have an hereditary vein of insanity, and that he fall foul on the swindling, on the times, because he feels that his father has been killed by the work of the lie, and that all through he fears the coming madness. How could you or anyone suppose that if I had had to speak in my own person my own opinion of this war generally I should have spoken with so little moderation. The whole was intended to be a new form of dramatic composition. I took a man constitutionally diseased and dipt him into the circumstances of the time and took him out on fire. I shall show this better in a second edition...I do not mean that my madman does not speak truths too.
 (Letters II 137)

The hero of *Maud* subsumes his image of Maud into himself during the development of the narrative of the poem. At first attracted by her physical beauty, he finally sees her as something more than human, more on a

plane with Athena, Hippolita, or Boadicea, a warrior heroine, ideal woman and completion of his soul.

Pictures of Maud in popular editions of the poem typically depict a simpering miss taking each emotional hurdle—falling in love with the boy next door, the flattering attentions of a rich suitor, the shock of sibling bereavement by duel—with a reasonable amount of finishing school coolness. Only once in the first part of *Maud* do we see her fulfilling her ghostly role in the poem, as she mysteriously sings

A passionate ballad gallant and gay
A martial song like a trumpet's call!
Singing alone in the morning of life,
In the happy morning of life and of May
Singing of men that in battle array
Ready in heart and ready in hand,
March with banner and bugle and fife
To the death for their native land. (164-173)

That she is the symbolic warrior of Tennyson's poetic soul, that part of Tennyson's soul represented by *Maud's* narrator, we come to learn with the hero as he puts the fragments of his true self together during the action of the poem. We see Maud as he does, only in memory or in visions, but as reality fades, with ever-increasing significance.

Before looking at Maud as warrior and ideal woman, it is useful to return to earlier works of Tennyson. The idealized, iconographic or semiotic woman is common in literature. For Christians, the Virgin Mary has been the

prototype: the ideal woman in a poem or tale is such only as she manifests characteristics attributed to the Virgin. Even the mistresses of medieval lays were known for their generous and perfecting love. In his major poems, Tennyson created a new kind of woman (itself a Victorian act) and this new woman partakes more of the nature of an ideal than of the mythicized Virgin Mary. Given the distrust the English felt for Rome, the Virgin Mary model would not make a satisfactory basis for a Tennysonian new woman, since shadowing it would be the image of the Scarlet Woman. Tennyson would need to find a new basis for his ideal woman.

Both the Lady of Shalott and the ancestress in the Prologue of *The Princess* share certain emblematic qualities with Maud, and both partake of the domestic, the individual, the personal, the romantic and sentimental. In "The Lady of Shalott," however, the situation is entirely domestic, if unrequited love can be given that term, although in the poem it is an aristocratic, not a bourgeois domesticity. Action takes place in a medieval tower. A richly embossed mirror reflects and shapes a scene suited to a medieval Book of Hours or a moral allegory of the soul, the seat of the higher faculties of knowledge and judgment. The ultimately fragile mirror removes the action from the real world and, as Culler suggests, destabilizes, fragments it (1050-06).

In *The Princess*, the Boadicea-like ancestress of the Prologue, although deeply submerged in the poem, is key to its polemic. It is her history that is carried by the narrator into the story to create the intertextual dialogue, to show that Victorian life partakes of the public responsibility of a new breed of aristocrat, more characterized by middle class attitudes towards duty than those of aristocrats of earlier periods.

The poem is enclosed in modern times, the Victorian present. Sir Walter Vivian gives a lawn party for his tenants, their families, and the members of his adult education institute. The day is spent in exploring science with leaders in the various disciplines, showing examples of each science: geologic specimens, experiments with electricity, models of boats and railway engines. "Sport went hand in hand with Science." However progressive the activity, the past lays the foundations of all cognitive referents, "Greek, set with busts" (l. 11) betokens the educational foundation of the nineteenth century English gentleman, whose rationality rests upon the Greco-Roman ruins of the past. The geologic specimens suggest the New Science of the Age of Enlightenment, and "His own forefathers' arms and armour" (l. 24) evoke both the glorious past of England and an aristocrat's state responsibilities, which stretch back into that past of England.

The narrator takes the book with him to a Gothic ruin, carrying the ancestress into a circle of women, which includes Lilia, a young girl questing

for the meaning of life but in the infantile manner demanded by the present society. Lilia has made some sort of symbolic statement by draping a classical statue of a warrior with gay feminine scarves, turning it into an Amazon, which prompts the narrator to ask "Where lives such a woman now?" Also in the group is Aunt Elizabeth, the single, (thus "incomplete"), woman, who threatens with her very presence those who do not arrange to marry. This plot device relies on the sad but usual presence of the single woman in the households of a Victorian England whose young men went to war or India to die for Empire, rather than a semiotic figure of free choice and independence.

The Princess relies on the conventions of oral tradition: the group moves both outside and inside the oral text of the tale, telling it antiphonally. The men describe a female university in a far-off kingdom, and the women, who by the rules of the game must respond emotively in song and may not engage in discourse of a rational nature, return the company to the present by means of the interludes. *The Princess* will fail to discover a true Amazon; *Maud*, as we will shortly see, will define this presence more successfully. The semiotic force of the interplay of text and setting of *The Princess* directs the reader's understanding of the text by insisting on certain extratextual matters. The tale in the poem ends with acknowledgment of the complementary nature of man and woman; success will come when men and women are "Yoked in all exercise of noble end." Marion Shaw sees this

equality at a practical level, an equality that is signified in the equal-partnership marriages of Jane Eyre and Aurora Leigh, and promulgated in Clough's *Bothie* in the double egalitarianism of class and gender (Shaw 42).

Is a marriage of equal partners—the yoke suggests both a side by side position and an outward look—the desacralized answer to the Virgin ideal? What is the role of sexual union in a marriage of equals? The consummation of marriage or the absence of such consummation is emblematic of another level of significance, that which considers fragmentation or wholeness. With companionate marriage, equality is gained with union, while the enigmatic, the partial, the unrevealed, in sum, the mystery, ceases to exist. Companionate marriage, however equal, however mutually supportive, suggests a business-like spirit, the prosaic.

In *Maud*, however, the heroine is a creature of mystery, of elusive significance, who, as she is transformed by the hero in part two, takes on life-giving importance. She can be seen simultaneously as a deservedly lost love and also as ideal woman. Being ideal, she can really exist in the hero's mind, so that, as he evolves an understanding of her nature, so he comes to understand his own. I suggest in this chapter that Maud is an avatar, because of the role she comes to play in the poem after the hero of the poem has idealized her. "Avatar" in this sense follows the less theological meaning that has come to be associated with the word. However, the word in this

sense has a meaning closer to "Amazon" or "goddess" than "avenging fury with full godlike powers;" a sense neither solely Western nor modern. "Avatar" is popularized in much the same way hymns are: secular in their referents and accessible through the senses. As hymns desacralize the liturgy, the avatar, in this sense, desacralizes the link between the heavens and the earth. Eliade tells us that the female avatar figures only in popular Hinduism, and is usually identified with one or other local deity. (Eliade 6:350).

"Avatar" or "avatara" refers to the descent of a deity or near-deity to mankind for a specific purpose, and is a recurring phenomenon throughout Hindu classical and popular literature (Eliade). In the lines from the Bhagavadgita below the reasons for the creation of an avatar are given. The hero of *Maud* can create within himself his own avatar to engulf his spirit and lead him to his final end.

Whenever righteousness wanes and unrighteousness
increases,
I send myself forth.
[in van Buitenen's translation: I create myself.]
In order to protect the good and punish the wicked,
In order to make a firm foundation for righteousness
I come into being age after age.
(Bhagavadgita 4. 7-8. Cited in Eliade 2:14.)

Avatars are related to cosmic order, and, although sometimes violent, are a positive force. They are described by anthropologists and sociologists as enabling Hinduism to subsume local deities and thus unify spiritual

experience, an inclusiveness that seems to have led to a popularization, a domestication of the concept,

especially in devotional contexts, avatars no longer function primarily to restore cosmic order. Rather their *raison d'être* is to bless devotees with the presence of the divine, to rescue devotees from peril, or to reward them for heroic devotion or service" (Eliade 2:15).

However secularized avatars are, and however domestic the setting of the tale, they continue to have the aura of cosmic significance, a Victorian juxtaposition of the dual interests of empire and home.

The concept is given four distinct meanings by the OED. The first meaning is that of Hindu mythology: the descent of a deity in an incarnate form. It is the earliest use in English and the one related to the sacred texts then being translated into the Western languages. The second meaning is simply the "a manifestation in human form; incarnation." Scott refers to Napoleon and an unnamed American writer to General McClellan. A third meaning is "Manifestation or presentation to the world as a ruling power or manifestation." David Masson uses it as a personification of the spirit of the times: "Glad that the avatar of Donne, as an intermediate power between Spenser and Milton, was so brief and partial" (*Milton* I:447, 1859). A music critic used it in "avatars of art" in referring to the Bayreuth festivals. A

fourth meaning is "manifestation, display, phase" as in Stephen's "Wit and sense are but different avatars of the same spirit." (1.814)

Avatars in the tales these authors read may have been warlike creatures, or they may have been thinking of the tenth avatar, not yet come, who, in the form of a white-winged horse, will destroy the earth, bringing an end to our time. Poe, for instance, begins "The Masque of the Red Death": "The 'RED DEATH' had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal, or so hideous. Blood was its Avatar and its seal--the redness and the horror of blood" (Poe 485). Possibly this association is reflected in the passage that gave the initial verse to Maud:

I hate the dreadful hollow behind the little wood,
Its lips in the field above are dabbled with blood-red
heath,
The red-ribb'd ledges drip with a silent horror of
blood,
And Echo there, whatever is ask'd her, answers
'Death.'

An angry beginning to the poem, Shires says, "one of the angriest in [Tennyson's] corpus" (269), beginning with a catalogue of evils from which the hero escapes into a worship of Maud. Although the point of her article is different, she does look at Tennyson's awareness of a "powerful feminine force" that escapes from the role of Echo to sing of the death of men (270, 271). She concludes that it is through Maud that the hero becomes

remasculinized. Thus Maud is in some form a savior of the speaker of the poem.

Daniel Bassuk associates "avatar" with "avatarana," a Sanskrit term describing the entry of an actor upon the stage, specifically in making his appearance from behind a curtain, and suggests "advent", "coming," rather than "descent," as a better verb. "Advent" has cultural resonances suggesting that the actor is divine and that this coming marks a beginning or turning point in time (3). Moreover this association suggests that this is a role within a drama, a text outside of which the reader exists, a play for which there is an audience, a mission.

The avatara, appearing in times of crisis, concerns himself or herself with the resolution of "conflicts between ideals" renunciation contrasted to domesticity, killing as against "desiring not to kill;" often mixed caste issues are present. The supremacy of the dharma, the law, is present, but tales climax at "moments that crystallize the realization of one character or another of the liberating vision of the divine" (Eliade 6:350).

No major study of Maud as avatar seems to have been published. However, there are some reasons why this might be an effective description for the Maud character. Maud has the characteristics of an avatar and functions as an avatar in the poem as will be seen shortly. Previous studies of

Tennyson's influences have linked Persian influences to Maud, but not Hindu, Jones' later area of research. Sir William Jones's multivolume studies were in the library at Somersby. Their garden designs and flora have been identified by several critics with Persian sources; the pre-natal betrothal scene has been paralleled in the *Arabian Nights* (Killham 197-97, Paden 30). But these are comparatively insignificant compared to the complex creation which is Maud.

Myth, Avatar, Incarnation

"The unconscious," writes Jung, "naturally does not produce its images from conscious reflections, but from the worldwide propensity of the human system to form such conceptions as the...Avatars of Hinduism" (*Collected Works* 9, 1:310, cited in Bassuk 192). Myth-making is a process of selection that assures that details appropriate to the truth of an event or a person's life are present in its story, its record. Later, the appropriateness is used to confirm the myth. However circular the argument, the sense of appropriate closure, of completion, is perfect. When Bultmann demythologized Christianity, his version did not become more acceptable to modern man. Instead he used his relatively new disciplines of the social sciences, especially history, to create an historical Jesus (Bassuk 196). Here is an instance of demythologizing to remove the sacral, an essential part of Bultmann's truth. His post World War II work continues what early science did in the nineteenth century, where the act of separating mythic elements

from 'science' was the focus. All ages suffer from violence and materialism, and all persons hope, at one time or another, to see behind the veil. The advent of a messenger, or better, a God-Man or God-Woman suggests that they will be given a chance to see into the unknown (Bassuk 194). The Hindu religion that nurtured avatars, nurtured theosophy and other essentially European/American religions that took root in England in the nineteenth century. However, the East had for a century or more before this intrigued the English imagination. Although avatar as a word entered the English language (1784) via an essay in *Asiatic Researches* by Sir William Jones, an author whose works were in the library of the rectory at Somersby, it was Sir Charles Wilkins who is responsible for bringing the text to the English reader. He translated the *Bhagavad Gita* or as he transcribed it, the *Bhagvad Gheeta*, in 1785. William Blake immortalized both the event and a turban-crowned Sir Charles in his painting "The Brahmins," glossing it: "Mr. Wilkins Translating the Geeta" (Bassuk 107). *Maud*, as a poem, also addresses the two issues of violence and materialism, giving both a domestic and a national focus to these themes which English readers were also exploring in the literature of the East.

Maud's marks as avatar

The criteria for avatarhood generally applied are based on several mythemes. Notable are the presence of a divine aura, a divine serpent figures

in the life in some way, birth is preordained and death painful. The avatar is androgynous and fills both maternal and paternal roles. The avatar has a following, whose recognition of her divine aura confirms its existence, and, finally, her supernatural gifts include silence, healing, and a perceptible link with the divine. Possibly the most striking mytheme for Maud is the preordained birth, a section of the poem that has been much discussed, but there are other points of resemblance.

The golden aura of Maud is both physical and traditional—traditional because her name, a variant of Matilda, is regal, even imperial, suggesting that most militant of twelfth century warrior queens, whose struggles to be accepted as the rightful sovereign of England were achieved only by the most pronounced pressure of her sonless father, Henry I. He wished to assure his line's succession, and ended only with the acknowledgment of her son, later Henry II, as ruler, her brief years of rule being marked by rebellion and civil war.

Maud bears regal attributes in part I, ii: "...a cold and clear-cut face, as I found when her carriage past,/ Perfectly beautiful.../..."Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null,/ Dead perfection...". The golden aura of the mytheme is literally golden in color, so that it is appropriate for Maud to be fair, and "star-sweet" "and up in the high Hall-garden...pass like a light." But

this royal aura, lacking a Victorian populist cast, is rejected by the would-be disciple: "Sorrow seize me if ever that light be my leading star!"

In the next parts of the poem, the hero considers the nature of man as he has developed over millennia: "He is now the first, but is he the last? Is he not too base?" (I 6). This initial part of a discourse requires the answering avatar's cry: "Whenever righteousness wanes and unrighteousness increases, I send myself forth" (Bhagavadgita 4. 7-8. Cited in Eliade 2:14). And in the lead-in to the singing of the martial air is the picture of Maud, "milk-white fawn...fed on the roses and [comforted by] the lilies of life." This life of isolation and tedium ("Your mother is mute in her grave/...Your father is ever in London") has produced a degree of seriousness, a silence and contemplation. The hero acknowledges this in "Maud in the light of her youth and her grace, /Singing of Death, and of Honour that cannot die..."

During the development of their growing friendship of Maud and the hero as adults, Maud manifests such an unworldliness and remoteness that the hero speaks of her in spiritual, rather than physical terms: "fall before /Her feet...and adore.../Not her, not her, but a voice." She is "a delicate spark/ Of glowing and growing light." Even her hair is "sunny" (all quotations from I vi).

One event in the life of an avatar is a manifestation of power over a dangerous animal. The most likely candidate for subjection of an animal is the lion in section vi which can be tied in to the architectural symbols used in the poem. Lucas concentrates on the Great House and enclosed gardens, both prominent in *Maud*, but makes the point (depending heavily on Kozicki) that *Maud* is about the commercial anarchy in the England of that era (189). What better image is there but Maud as scion of a commercially successful family that is increasingly threatening to the hero, who sees himself as the true spirit of England:

What if with her sunny hair,
 ...
 She meant to weave me a snare
 Of some coquettish deceit,
 Cleopatra-like as of old
 To entangle me when we met
 To have her lion roll in a silken net
 And fawn at the victor's feet. (I vi 4)

The hero's thinking is never far from the affairs of state, from active participation in which he is excluded by lack of commercial success, even when inspired by a beautiful young woman. As Lucas writes:

[Tennyson] came ...to see tensions between private and public life as producing stark choices or alternatives; and that these focused particularly on the aggressive forces of the emergent ethos which led not only to war within the state ("the heart of the citizen hissing in war on his own hearthstone"), but war between states, and therefore to choices about how to register Englishness. [These forces are] the real cause of what happens (193).

In the hero's mood swings, his father, wicked because a suicide, and Maud's father, profiting by the father's losses that precipitated the suicide, conflate into a materialist generation that has to be saved by the blood of the sons and daughters. Both Maud and the hero assume public and redeeming roles in this imperfect Victorian world. Maud by becoming spiritualized in the middle part of the poem, and the hero by sacrifice at the end of it. Here Maud fulfills her Tennysonian destiny:

She must train herself to do the large work that lies before her, even though she may not be destined to be wife or mother, cultivating her understanding not her memory only, her imagination in its highest phases, her inform spirituality and her sympathy with all that is pure, noble and beautiful, rather than mere social accomplishments; then and then only will she further the progress of humanity, than and then only men will continue to hold her in reverence. (Tennyson, H. I: 250)

The Ending of Maud

The abiding horror of Part III arises [Tucker says] when the hero's defection into jingoism leaves us [the readers] to take up the ethical slack, without a clue to imagining a credible alternative course of events. The hero's unacknowledged contradictions remain, to sear the critical conscience that would free itself of patriotic heroics without falling into step with some other cultural or countercultural troop. (Tucker 429)

Tucker concludes that Tennyson failed his readers in this poem (433).

Like the mathematics instructor explaining yet again an equation, Tennyson

tried to increase his readers' understanding by iteration, but they seem unable to this day to make the same imaginative leap of desacralized faith.

Killham describes the modern reading of *Maud* as an embarrassed one. Tucker speaks of "lobotomized jingoism" and, as we have seen above, accuses the poet of leaving the reader without sufficient readings. However, Killham urges the reader to refrain from identifying the poem's war with what a modern interpretation makes of the historical Crimean War (223). Kant's view of war may be relevant as Tennyson's source, more than the overheated journalism of the 1850's:

War itself, provided it is conducted with order and a sacred respect for the rights of civilians, has something sublime about it, and gives nations that carry it on in such a manner a stamp of mind only the more sublime the more numerous the dangers to which they are exposed, and which they are able to meet with fortitude. On the other hand, a prolonged peace favours the predominance of a mere commercial spirit, and with it a debasing self-interest, cowardice, and effeminacy, and tends to degrade the character of the nation. (Kant)

For Killham, the only possible explanation for the hero's dilemma is to be found in psychological relativism. Going to war was the solution of a disordered mind (219), but war is a public, not a private, act. As Ehrenreich says, war can be seen as a now partially secularized blood sacrifice, providing a kind of religious exaltation, "a guilty ecstasy, haunted by a subconscious residue of moral trespass or violation" (Ignatieff 10). The private and the

public themes of *Maud* concern the taking of human life. In the first instance, the hero engages in trial by combat, and in the ending, in war, the poet, like a government with new recruits, will retrain the reader and the characters of the poem in moral assessment. The private life, as the family, in this case the potential nucleus of the hero and Maud, is but the microcosm of the state. General corruption of society threatens domestic sanctity and the threat to domestic sanctity (the replacement of the Established Church) menaces the stability of the State (Timko 220-22).

This unification of the two levels is achieved by Maud's appearing to the hero at the start of Part III: "She seem'd to divide in a dream from a band of the blest, / And spoke of a hope for the world in the coming wars—/...and pointed to Mars/ As he glow'd like a ruddy shield on the Lion's breast" (III, iv, 1, 10-14). The red shield is the clue, as the color's significance mutates from horror to glory. O'Neill reminds us that Mars has a dual role, both war and agriculture; it is necessary realize this to see Maud as a regenerator (O'Neill 169). Killham uses the red color of Mars to tie together his argument about the psychological reading of the poem.

Indeed it is the main characteristic of Tennyson's art in *Maud* that several groups of images develop simultaneously and show occasional interdependence. The introduction of the Marvellian line [from "The Nymph Complaining for the Death of her Faun"] is a stage in a process by which the colour red, powerfully and neurotically associated with violent death and blood, is discharged of its baleful associations by

being assimilated to the image of the rose, first mentioned contemptuously in a context of poison flowers (I.III.X) (source of the cruel madness of love), but progressively developed until at the end of Part I it represents sexual passion. Finally as an indication of his being cured, the colour reverts to a reference to violence, but with the flower image now serving along with it: "The blood-red blossom of war with a heart of fire" (Killham 230-31).

The hero, passing out of his madness, purified by it, can now offer a pure sacrifice. In following her command from beyond the grave, the hero has become one with his ideal. He becomes one with the "blossom of war" in a fire reminiscent of the effects of the "latter fire" in "The Kraken," "Then once by man and angels to be seen, /In roaring he shall rise and on the surface die." Here we have a strong closure strengthened by its many ambiguities that continue to resonate long after the reading.

Chapter 7

“Under his foot the badge”

Sordello's long quest for the integration of the two roles of the poet—that of legislator to a democratic world and spokesman for it as well—came to its sad ending as he lies, the symbol of his office discarded, drawing his last breath in the arms of Palma. Sordello has completed his poetic mission, the success or failure of which has nothing to do with history, but much to do with change. He has announced that new language is necessary to write poetry for the age—the vernacular is suited to the highest poetic expression, in part because he believes in the people. He has attempted to demonstrate in his life the new way in which the poet is law-giver, not speaking with divine authority, but as a soldier-politician whose self-appointed role is to provide the highest principles to a secular government, a city-state. However, Sordello's attempt was too feeble, and in a soil not yet receptive enough for such ideas to take root. As Sordello's remains are placed next to those of his mother in the font-tomb, his spirit returns to boyhood and “up and up goes he, singing all the while” (6. 864-65). Sordello's joy springs from the knowledge

that like the hero of Maud embracing his fate in the Crimea, he has made his sacrifice and now is free.

In the preceding chapters we have explored the notion of what it means to be a nineteenth century poet, existing in a society that makes new demands on him. We have looked at English society as it increasingly secularized its institutions, as the state replaced the church as an ameliorating power, giving succor to the poor, education to the ignorant, and, in an increasingly democratized society, replaced with rules of civic conduct definitions of sin and virtue. We have seen that even as the state was replacing the church as the agent of social well-being, the very worship of the church was moving in two diametrically opposed directions.

In the one direction, a popularizing trend moved away from liturgical observances, and used the more common tools of human interaction, speaking and singing, to link the spiritual to the lives of the masses. To develop an appropriate mode of worship the Nonconformists used hymns to instill the ideas of the Christian religion in ways that directly recalled the everyday life of their new adherents. This was a move away from the spiritual world, and a focus upon the secular world. It was not, however, as direct a link as might be thought, for much of the imagery was taken from Biblical sources. What gave it popular appeal was the directness and physicality of the imagery.

On the other hand, the Tractarian Movement accepted extra-liturgical activities reluctantly and in a spirit of compromise. It shared with the eighteenth century church a vision of a pure liturgical worship stretching toward God. In looking for means to enliven this austere and non-participatory form of prayer it turned to the farthest reaches of the ancient church and called for a return to symbols that would link man to his Maker.

Since vigor was also desirable, use was made of war metaphor to add energy to the message of the hymns and join the civic world to that of the spirit. In this milieu, where war metaphor was employed so frequently by writers who had never been to war for the benefit of those who also had never borne arms, the poet was faced with a group of images that in themselves embodied what they pointed to. Images that were known from either the Bible or from sacred texts, and that, as they were taken into the poetry of the early nineteenth century lost their reference to the sacrifice that would save society. They became desacralized, having only new, nineteenth century referents.

In *Maud* Tennyson looks at the modern nexus of personal and public responsibility, with special, if unspoken, reference to the poet's life. He uses his modern hero/anti-hero to suggest, by means of his modern war, a new sacrifice offered to the state as a rite of purification. In this poem, the

personification of these ideals, Maud, is herself a desacralized avatar who becomes an abstract fiery rose into which the hero of Maud is subsumed.

Although we have looked at the desacralization of war metaphor in the first half of the nineteenth century as a process that moves from the sacred to the secular, it is itself, as Eliade concludes in his study of the world's religions, the identification of the sacred with the profane. It is a union of both, a completion. Eliade sees it as the final stage of Western civilization. If this is true, then the element of desacralization will be present in the poetry and fiction of succeeding generations.

Towards the end of the century, for example, Walter Pater moved desacralization in the opposite direction, from the secular philosophy his character Marius the Epicurean pursued lifelong, to his ending where he joins, but not in a believing way, a community of Christians. Although *Marius the Epicurean* could be read as a novel of religious conversion, it is transcendent, moving beyond the Christian process. As Eliade writes

It is characteristic of what I have called 'hierophany' that the sacred is thereby both revealed and concealed in the profane. To give but one example, a sacred tree which embodies the sacred to the worshippers of the religion under consideration remains merely a tree of a certain type to all others. The same dialectic: profane-sacred-profane, explains what I have called 'the unrecognizable aspect of miracle,' awareness of a miracle is only straightforward for those who are prepared, by their personal experience and their religious background to recognize it as such. To

others the 'miracle' is not evident, it does not exist; in fact, it is concealed in everyday objects and events. (Mademoiselle Christina 7, Rennie's translation. Cited in Rennie)

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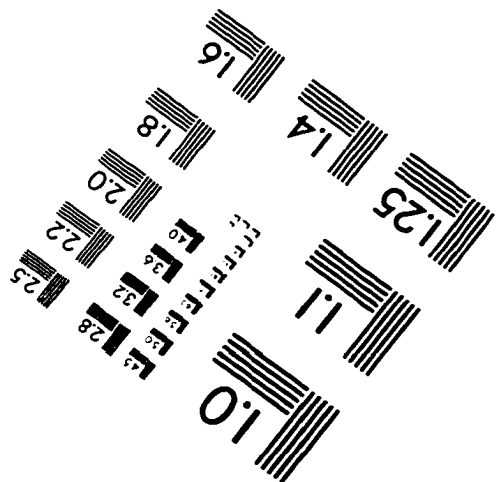
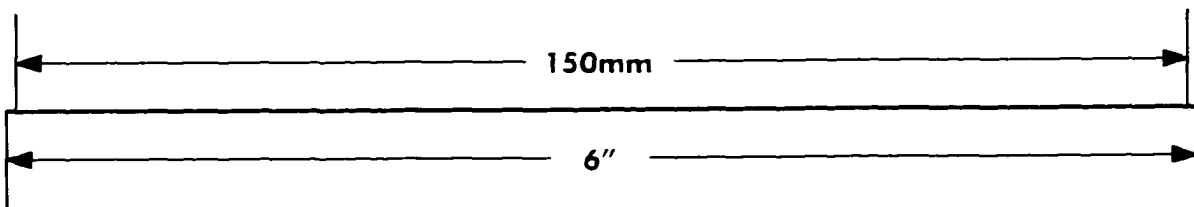
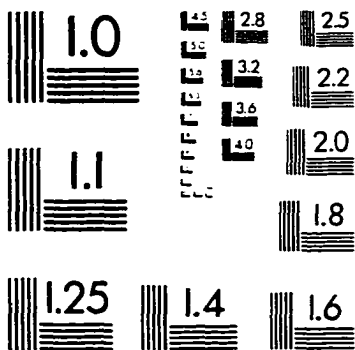
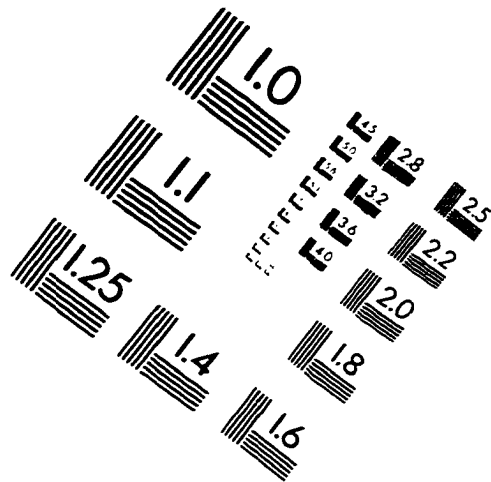
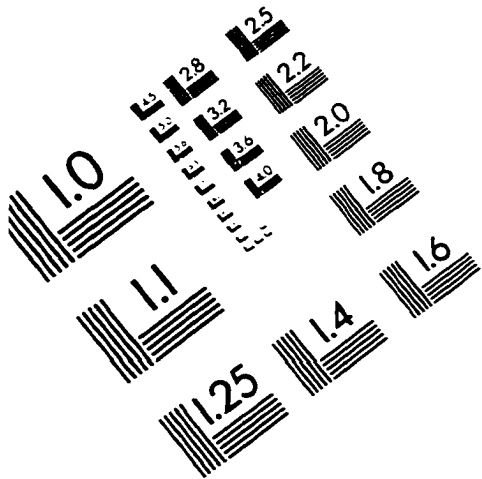
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