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“Individable Incorporate”: Poetic Trends in Women Writers, 1890-1918

BONNIE J. ROBINSON

“Estranged from thyselfe . . . Being strange to me That individable incorpo-
rate Am better than thy deere selves better part” (William Shakespeare,
Comedy of Errors II ii 124).

THIS SPECIAL ISSUE OF *VICTORIAN POETRY* REFLECTS A GROWING INTEREST IN and appreciation for women writers at the turn of the nineteenth century, the Edwardian Age, the *fin de siècle*. The last two decades have seen critical studies of long-overlooked poets, poets such as Augusta Webster, “Michael Field,” E. Nesbit, Emily Watson, and Charlotte Mew, by such scholars as Susan Brown, Angela Leighton, Holly Laird, Yopie Prins, Maria Frawley, Margaret Stetz, Linda Hughes, Suzanne Rait, and Linda Mizejewski. These poets’ lives are being examined in the upcoming *Dictionary of Literary Biography* volume on “Late Victorian and Edwardian Women Poets,” edited by William B. Thesing. Their work is being re-published, in both book and electronic form. Angela Leighton, Margaret Reynolds, Jennifer Breen, and Margaret Higgonet have produced excellent anthologies of Victorian women poets, anthologies which include work from this period. Also, the Victorian Women Writers’ Project, from Indiana University, transcribes into electronic form unpublished works, or works no longer in publication, by these women poets, a work of recovery begun by Margaret Stetz’s “Turning-Points” section of her (now defunct) journal *Turn-of-the-Century Women*.

Only since the 1980s, when *Turn-of-the-Century Women* debuted, have these women poets received close attention. The Modernist canon, which privileged poetry, nevertheless ousted these poets, for various reasons—among which was their association with mass culture and so-called sentimental subjects. Critics such as Celeste Schenck, Deborah Fried, Nancy Miller, Wendy Milford, and Rita Felski have served, first, to interrogate the causes for this ousting, and, second, to suggest counter-values with which to recuperate their work and so to negotiate what Andreas Huyssen called “The Great Divide,” Modernism’s feminized Other, mass culture, defined as the “degraded forms of cultural production circulating among both the

petit bourgeois and the increasingly literate lower classes of Britain at the turn of the century."¹

In her essay entitled "Exiled by Genre: Modernism, Canonicity, and the Politics of Exclusion," for instance, Schenck asks, "If . . . the radical poetics of Modernism often masks a deeply conservative politics, might it also be possibly true that the seemingly genteel, conservative poetics of women poets whose obscurity even feminists have overlooked might pitch a more radical politics than we had considered possible."² Schenck thus offers us alternatives to the male-dominated, male-engendered values of Modernism. With such counter-evaluations as this, critics like Schenck have enabled us to look at the so-called conservatism, or what I call the poetry of incorporation, of these poets as being instead a form of protest, rebellion, difference, and non-conformity—even as it appears to be the opposite.

In negotiating this divide of Modernism/Edwardianism, experimentalism/realism, high culture/mass culture, these critics repeat a negotiation these poets themselves performed, between a naturalized ideological system and the more natural realism they expressed, as they strove toward a world without pairs, or polarities, hierarchies, division, subordination: "Folk shall be neither pairs nor odd" (Amy Levy, "A Ballad of Religion and Marriage," l. 26).³ They did so by writing a poetry of incorporation.

Working within a time of change and opportunity, these women incorporated into their lives and work changes wrought by legal reforms regarding marriage, through such laws as the Infants' Custody Act and the Matrimonial Causes Act; opportunities in higher education, with the founding of Queen's College, Bedford College, and Girton College; the push towards political activism, with suffrage bills brought before Parliament, and the formation of the Anti-Vivisection League; reform in labor laws and education for job skills like typewriting, nursing, and accounting. Still far to go in terms of pay, job opportunities, education, and suffrage, these women nevertheless enjoyed the fruits of such laborers as Mary Wollestonecraft, Annie Besant, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, John Stuart Mill, and Christina Rossetti—liberal thinkers and activists as well as writers. They themselves fostered further growth by actively supporting education for women, political power, and economic autonomy. Emily Hickey, for instance, supports Separate Rule in her poem *Michael Villiers*. And she speaks for both the Irish and women when she declares that they [the Irish] had "not had a chance to be" (l. 41).⁴ Augusta Webster supported the vote and education for women. Mathilde Blind bequeathed her estate to Newnham College, Cambridge to found a scholarship for language and literature. L. S. Bevington advocated the anarchist movement, befriending Prince Kropotkin. And May Kendall supported labor reform.

These women also fostered, as I develop below, further growth through their writing by contesting ideological polarities, confusing the so-called separation of the spheres, of private/public, etc., and by transforming stereotypes. Yet they looked to others profiting from their labors more than they would themselves. The speaker in Dollie Radford's "From Our Emancipated Aunt in Town," for instance, acknowledges that she stands in a "band / Of poor pathetics / Who cannot go alone" (ll. 41-43).⁵ She looks to her "nieces" to "beautify our history book / For coming readers" (ll. 49-50). Yet she cannot resist pointing out that it is she who "prepares your way" (l. 70). May Kendall, in "The Lower Life," gives a satiric thrust to this view when she voices the lament of the superior being, Man, who thinks that "Evolution has not yet / Fulfilled our wishes. / The birds soar higher far than we, / The fish outswims us in the sea" (ll. 2-5).⁶ Man must content himself with "wisdom," though, a wisdom which the speaker implies that man has insufficiently employed in his development—yet development will occur through such writers as May Kendall.

These women, then, wrote with and of tension—between high expectations and modest hopes for change: "Grant in a million years at most" (Amy Levy, "A Ballad of Religion and Marriage," l. 25). A great deal of the tension they labored under occurred from the very fact that they wrote with individual voices, writing poems that, in many ways, could be grouped with trends in male poetry. Consequently, they contradict female stereotypes by resembling their male contemporaries—in the ways that their poetry celebrates the individual, explores alternative religions, transgresses or transcends moral values, or offers Utopian visions. A. Mary F. Robinson and May Kendall both offer progressivist utopian visions in their poetry. And Mary Coleridge offers a utopian vision—of difference, of a difference that cannot be appropriated to serve male needs or male desires—in her poetry, in such poems as "The Clever Woman," "Solo," and "The White Women":

Where dwell the lovely, wild white women folk,
 Mortal to man?
 They never bowed their necks beneath the yoke,
 They dwelt alone when the first morning broke
 And Time began.

 Pure are they as the light; they never sinned,
 But when the rays of the eternal fire
 Kindle the West, their tresses they unbind
 And fling their girdles to the Western wind,
 Swept by desire.
 Lo, maidens to the maidens then are born,
 Strong children of the maidens and the breeze,
 Dreams are not—in the glory of the morn,

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Seen through the gates of ivory and horn—
More fair than these.
And none may find their dwelling. In the shade
Primeval of the forest oaks they hide.
One of our race, lost in an awful glade,
Saw with his human eyes a wild white maid,
And gazing, died. (Mary Coleridge, "The White Women")⁷

These "white women" remain pure and autonomous—essentially negating male existence. While working within a male tradition, of utopian literature, then, Coleridge escapes male tradition.

While I cannot, within the limits of space, review their poetry at length, I can point to other instances of the above by looking at one trope: the power of the creator, and how these women feminize this conventionally paternal power. Mathilde Blind, for example, offers a female origin for "multiple in one" religions in her poem "Nûit." Rather than the anthropomorphized male god, lord and father of all, Nûit is the mother night, the female source itself of religion(s):

The all upholding,
The all enfolding,
The all beholding,
Most secret Night;
From whose abysses,
With wordless blisses,
The Sun's first kisses,
Called gods to light.
One god undying,
But multiplying.
Restlessly trying,
Doing: undone.
Through myriad changes,
He sweeps and ranges;
But life estranges
Many in one.

In wild commotion,
Out of the ocean,
With moan and motion,
Waves upon waves,
Mingling in thunder,
Rise and go under:
Break, life, asunder;
Night has her graves. (Mathilde Blind, "Nûit")⁸

Patriarchal religions have their day, so to speak, but they return to the feminine "Nûit."

Moving from the religious to the secular, Augusta Webster offers insight to the creative, rather than procreative, power of the mother in

partnership with her child. In "Sonnet 16" from *Mother and Daughter*, Webster's daughter has the power to make her unchanging, like art:

She will not have it that my day wanes low,
 Poor of the fire its drooping sun denies,
 That on my brow the thin lines write good-byes
 Which soon may be read plain for all to know.

 She will not have it. Loverlike to me,
 She with her happy gaze finds all that's best,
 She sees this fair and that unfretted still,
 And her own sunshine over all the rest:
 So she half keeps me as she'd have me be,
 And I forget to age, through her sweet will. (Augusta Webster, "Sonnet 16")⁹

A baby Pygmalion, Webster's daughter colludes with her mother to return her to the stasis of Galatea—without male intercession.

Similarly, Althea Gyles in her poem "Odi et Amo" aesthetically transcends oppositions of loss and gain, love and hate, through her creative vision of art. In this poem, the speaker encounters a memorial to lost love, a memorial which she transcribes and immortalizes:

O was it Love that conquered Hate?
 Or was it Hate that set her free?—
 To Death all questioners come late.
 The sword and the woman all may see
 And "Odi et Amo" graven there. (Althea Gyles, "Odi et Amo," ll. 9-12)¹⁰

The graven image unites the male image in the sword and the woman, unites love and hate.

Also giving voice to the voiceless and value to the devalued, E. Nesbit has the speaker in "The Things That Matter" declare that the wise woman's apparently ephemeral lore—of medicine, washing, food storage—will exist long after her death. She is a creator as craftsperson—and spokesperson. And she wants this knowledge of the world around her, this concrete, immediate knowledge, to have its counterpart after death and so the transcendent power of art:

Now that I've nearly done my days
 And grown too stiff to sweep or sew,
 I sit and think, till I'm amaze,
 About what lots of things I know:
 Things as I've found out one by one—
 And when I'm fast down in the clay
 My knowing things and how they're done
 Will all be lost and thrown away.

There's things, I know, as won't be lost,
 Things as folks write and talk about:

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The way to keep your roots from frost,
 And how to get your ink spots out;
 What medicine's good for sores and sprains,
 What way to salt your butter down,
 What charms will cure your different pains,
 And what will bright your faded gown.

.....
 Forgetting seems such silly waste!
 I know so many little things,
 And now the Angels will make haste
 To dust it all away with wings!
 O God, you made me like to know,
 You kept the things straight in my head,
 Please God, if you can make it so,
 Let me know *something* when I'm dead."

(E. Nesbit, "The Things That Matter")¹¹

Her confidence in the lasting power of her knowledge, regarding medicine and washing, belies its actual ephemerality and triviality. Her lack of confidence at the poem's close may belie "God's power" (read that as man's power) to keep her eternally "ignorant."

And Caroline Lindsey in "To My Own Face" claims godliness in her aging face—conventionally, the woman's claim to artistry being her own face, her physical being as art object. Here, too, the face artistically belies thoughts and seems to be at odds with life. And like art, it mocks its creator.

Poor face of mine! Right often dost thou lend
 A smile to hide some smileless thoughts that be
 Bound deep in heart, and oft thy kind eyes see
 My soul's great grief and bid their ears attend.

Ah, childish fairness, seeming near, yet far,
 Prized tenderly by dear ones pass'd away,
 Fain I'd recall it! Next an oval grace
 Of girlhood; for thy woman's sorrows are
 Stamped now on lips and forehead day by day,
 Yet God's own image thou—O human face!

(Caroline Lindsey, "To My Own Face")¹²

The speaker's life experiences, her interiority, contradict the "fairness" "prized tenderly" by the dead who wish the speaker to remain in stasis. Yet it is her face, with its experiences and depth, which makes her godly, for her face is "God's own image."

While the poetry of these women resembles that of their male contemporaries—and so exists in tension with their poetry—it resembles that of each other, too. Thus they offer a parallel history to their male contemporaries. One way in which these women resemble each other is in the way

that their male contemporaries—Oscar Wilde, George Gissing, Arthur Symonds, H. G. Wells, Thomas Hardy, W. B. Yeats, and G. B. Shaw—overshadow their careers. For example, Althea Gyles is best known through her association with Yeats, through her illustrating his collections of poems, *The Wind Among the Reeds* and *The Secret Rose*. They resemble each other also in being oppressed by biological definitions of womanhood, in self-destructing over issues of the flesh, in being self-sacrificing, mentally unstable, depressed, and suicidal. Mary Coleridge never crossed the “border” between “Miss” and “Mrs.,” devoting herself to her writing. This life-choice marginalized her even further within her society. “Michael Field” became progressively isolated and estranged from their society and peers. Charlotte Mew, depressed at losing her sister Ann to cancer, committed suicide. These negative similarities attest to the oppression of the ideological system under which these women worked.

But they resemble each other in more positive ways, in the ways in which they reacted to this ideological system. For in a world of polarities, division, as well as resemblance, these women see with a doubled vision, a vision which contradicts conventions: “No contradictions were thought / As truthfully combined” (May Kendall, “A Pure Hypothesis,” ll. 39-40). Consequently, they write a poetry of incorporation, of incorporate thought, incorporate ideals, incorporate goals. Relegated to relative status and subordinate roles, these so-called “relative” beings effectively individualize this relativity by transforming “difference” and division into a blended poetics, writing a poetry of connection and continuity, even as they pointed out discontinuities, discord—a “reality” discordant with their own.

They do absorb into their work male predecessors like William Wordsworth, P. B. Shelley, John Ruskin, and Walter Pater. Also, they absorb the “female” voice cultivated by such female predecessors as Letitia Landon, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Christina Rossetti, women who wrote within the territory marked out and sanctioned for them by male writers, sanctioned since it reflects male interests. Margaret Higonnet, in her Introduction to *British Women Poets of the Nineteenth Century*, delineates these accepted areas as “nature,” “love,” and “the spirit” (pp. xvii-xxxv). Also, they absorb a cultural system less distinctly assignable though still definable and enforced through such verbalized “texts” and contexts as the Angel in the House, the Mother, the Good.

Operating within these parameters, limits, tensions, these women writers offer an art of interchange and incorporation, between the individual, that is, themselves, and the art form, both poetic and patriarchal, effecting thereby self-definition, or re-definition, through their poetry. Their poetry equivocates, in ways that redefine their femininity, inwardness and outwardness, subjectivity and objectivity. And their poetry contains both

implicit and explicit criticism of their female experience, because, for these women, self-consciousness and criticism coalesce.

They take the abstract of Victorian "femininity" and offer an interchange of the concrete, that is, their actual femininity, with this abstract idea in an autonomous art-object, even as they assert their own autonomy. Their poetry therefore allows their imaginative self-realization as what "essentially" they are. By allowing their selves to surface—publicly—they effect an interchange that initiates themselves as "Victorian women"—"private" beings—with themselves as individuals, who conflate "public" and "private." This initiation itself increases/intensifies their self-consciousness, for, again, to create (in ways other than reproductively) was to criticize, rebel, non-conform, protest. Yet their work is conservative, as well, since in their poems, these women both collude with and criticize conventions and orthodoxies, both poetic and feminine. Their poetry, in effect, offers a doubled vision which transforms/feminizes both poetry (poetic images) and femininity.

These women, for example, sought to uplift the gifts of nature overthrown by man, feminine gifts of will-power, anger, and animation which were deemed "unfeminine." We can see an example of this attempt and this incorporation in May Kendall's "In the Toy Shop":

The child had longings all unspoken—
 She was a naughty child.
 She had "a will that must be broken."
 Her brothers drove her wild.
 She read the tale, but skipped the moral.
 She thought: "One *might* be good
 If one could never scream and quarrel,
 If one were only wood!
 Meanwhile, the doll: "Ah, fatal chasm!
 Although I've real curls,
 I am not made of protoplasm
 Like other little girls.
 You see on every wooden feature
 My animation's nil.
 How nice to be a human creature,
 Get cross, and have a will!"

Accepting the equation of "little girls" and "dolls", this poem nevertheless overturns this equation. The little girl in the poem knows the story of her life—her own experiences—but interprets it differently than do her male authors, with their "moral." She could be good in the ways they expect her to be if she were wooden. Thus, "To be a human creature," for these women poets, leaves a woman at odds with herself, her image. To counteract this tension, these women advocated/supported an encompassing scope, breadth

of vision, an embrace of reality and of nature “defiled or undefiled” (Mathilde Blind, “Noonday Rest,” l. 22), pure or tainted, unique or common, but always incorporated.

The poem by May Kendall I just partially quoted incorporates the all-embracing woman/Mother with socialized views of women. While accepting “motherhood” as a woman’s defining role, this poem nevertheless redefines “motherhood” by embracing the mother of an illegitimate, or unauthorized, child:

O’er what strange ways may not these feet have trod
That match the cracking clay?
Man had no pity on her—no, nor God—
A nameless castaway!

But Mother Earth now hugs her to her breast,
Defiled or undefiled;
And willows rock the weary soul to rest,
As she, even she, her child.

The woman’s feet, her feet of clay, match the earth; they are, in effect, natural. And Mother Earth embraces her nature, unlike man and the god made in man’s image.

This incorporation, or embrace, appears also in the feminizing of natural images that have been appropriated by the male. The very significance of signifiers, thus, is undermined even as it is accepted. For instance, “Michael Field,” in their poem “Maidenhair,” turn stalactites and rocks—phallic and hard—to soft rifts that grow live with maidenhair; again, Nature incorporates a “truer” nature:

Plato of the clear, dreaming eye and brave
Imagings, conceived, withdrawn from light,
The hollow of man’s heart even as a cave.
With century-slow dropping stalactite
My heart was dripping tedious in despair.
But yesterday, while, before I slept:
I wake to find it live with maidenhair
And mosses to the spiky pendants crept.

Great prodigies there are—Jehovah’s flood
Widening the margin of the Red Sea shore—
Great marvel when the moon is turned to blood
It is to mortals, yet I marvel more
At the sore rifts, the pushings at my heart,
That lift the great stones of its rock apart. (“Michael Field,” “Maidenhair”)¹³

Man’s sterile abstractions that make “hollow” a woman’s heart are enlivened when women’s fertility, concrete reality, cover over the stalactites and lift up the rock, the burden.

Their poetry further combines universal beauty, woman as material, woman as confused with nature, with a distinct impress of the individual woman. The artist-poet Althea Gyles writes such a poem of incorporation in "To X . . . who wrote in praise of my hands." Here, she focuses on the power of her hands, to write, to draw, to express. Yet when her hands are viewed by a male artist, her hands express nothing of her reality—only her objective beauty. Even so, she asks "X" to incorporate her hands into his art, just as she has done for him in hers:

You made my hands a little hymn
Of praise. Calling them white
Beyond all hands—than all more slim,
Acolytes of delight.

But would you learn the truth, these hands
Grew wan in floods of fire,
And wan with want in desert lands
Outstretched in vain desire.

Friend, when Death folds them on my breast,
Enshrine them in your art,
Calling them happy that they rest
Upon a heedless heart.

(Althea Gyles, "To X . . . who wrote in praise of my hands")

Understanding this poetry as a poetry of incorporation helps us to re-evaluate it and to contradict the tenets of Modernism, tenets which privilege difficulty, discord, gaps, rifts, and division. Of course, some women, like H.D., have, even so, been brought into the Modernist canon. As Marianne DeKoven has pointed out, there exists a "separate, previously buried or discredited tradition (or anti-tradition) of women's writing that is radically different in many ways from 'high canonical male modernism.'"¹⁴ Yet this separate tradition resembles and so privileges the Modernist aesthetic, an aesthetic which has tended to obscure these women. Others, who do not resemble the Modernist aesthetic, are still being recovered into the canon through our appreciating the "radical politics" they "pitched" from the margins, from our understanding their counter-values. Tethering the Angel in the House, like Alice Meynell; invading the marketplace, like Amy Lowell; exploring sexual autonomy and lesbianism, like "Michael Field" and Charlotte Mew; acknowledging the effort, and so protesting the effort, of overcoming male expectations, like A. Mary F. Robinson and Mary Coleridge; supporting each other by writing biographies of women authors, offering friendships and mentorships: these women have a place in this future that they envisaged for others—not as "mothers" but as artists.

These counter-values receive excellent exploration in the following

essays. "*Sight and Song: Transparent Translations and a Manifesto for the Observer*," by Ana I. Parejo Vadillo, examines the aesthetic tenets of "Michael Field," an aesthetic that reflects the male aestheticism of Walter Pater in its synthesis of the arts, in its aspiring to the condition of music. This reflection reverses the absorption of women into male art, woman as object to man's subject, though, through its sexualized observer. Thus, "Michael Field" resist "the erasure of other subjectivities." They revise (offer a re-vision of) the transparent hero—Diaphaneité—as the usually transparent "I" of the female object translates into the "I/you" of artistic interchange, an interchange that allows the autonomy of both object and subject.

Sharon Smulders, in "Looking 'Past Wordsworth and the Rest': Pretexts for Revision in Alice Meynell's 'The Shepherdess,'" points to this same re-visioning, this time of male poetic images, in Alice Meynell's "The Shepherdess," an image of "acceptable" femininity, a focus of male desire from the Renaissance era onward. "She reinvents the Romantic (as well as the Elizabethan) lyric to dispute the legitimacy of this convention and redress the portrayal of the lady of the lyrics." In effect, Meynell offers, in a subversive way, a subjective rendering of a male object of desire.

Talia Schaffer, in "A Tethered Angel: The Martyrology of Alice Meynell" also examines this re-formation, transformation of outmoded images, "gender dynamics," by suggesting how Meynell, far from passively receiving stereotypical modes of being, instead fosters and shapes her own identity as/identity with the Angel in the House. For instance, she insists on her sexual reality, on a sexualized view of and the sexual charge from the Angel. For her male contemporaries, the intermingling of privacy and publicity in Meynell's life and art seems erotic. Mingling highlights difference, then, for her male contemporaries, who continue to objectify the woman. But Meynell transforms this objectification by using it as an aesthetic object herself; thus, she transforms the aesthetic ideal of revelation and concealment of the artist through the play of revelation and concealment of Alice Meynell in the Angel.

This play of revelation and concealment receives further analysis in Maria Frawley's "The Tides of the Mind': Alice Meynell's Poetry of Perception." This essay analyzes Meynell's interiority, her "thinking about thought," in both her poetry and prose. Indeed, Frawley links Meynell's poetry and prose, addressing the organic quality of her work. "In intellectually challenging language that scrutinizes the connections between perception, thought, emotion, and expression," Frawley writes, "Her poems study the dynamics of the mind, both as it processes experience and, more critically, in its consciousness of this act." This self-consciousness of the mind's processes lends multi-dimensionality to the woman, explores the

woman's interiority as being multiple and dynamic. Thus Meynell altogether transcends her society's interest in woman as surface.

Working women in Victorian society were denied interiority on the grounds of both sex and class. And in her essay, "*Whilst Working at My Frame: The Poetic Production of Ethel Carnie*," an essay on an especially marginalized poet, Susan Alves points to the struggles involved for women who work and who are at the same time afflicted by gendered expectations of women as passive, quiet, and still. She echoes women like Elizabeth Barrett Browning who "sought to extend the domestic sphere of the true woman into the public domain." And as a working woman, Carnie negates the separation of the spheres, reaches from her public sphere into Browning's private one, conflating the two. She locates herself "between the pious, pure, and private sphere of true womanhood and the impious, practical and public sphere of commerce associated with men." She expresses the ambivalence caused by a natural role as worker made unnaturally difficult by the cult of domesticity. And she speaks from this "public" realm of emotional concerns, giving agency to the prostitute, and voice to the abused and murdered.

A poet who similarly gives voice to the voiceless, A. Mary F. Robinson has generally been silenced, dismissed, as a poet of "light" verse. Linda Ely, in "'Not a Song to Sell': Re-Presenting A. Mary F. Robinson," realigns Robinson's poetry with that of serious thought and intent. "She labors to understand and to break the curse of false images through which she has seen and presented the world," Ely writes. Just as she has been abstracted, so also have been the poor, the lower class. So Robinson humanizes them in ways to which she claims full humanity herself.

LeeAnn Richardson, in "Naturally Radical: The Subversive Poetics of Dollie Radford," similarly advocates new views, of Dollie Radford, describing her as "naturally radical," while seeming to reinscribe social codes of domesticity, love, nature. Richardson points out how Radford subverts these tropes, radicalizes these codes, through "subtextual politics" which "naturalize" female ambition, passion, and the desire for the new.

Dennis Denisoff finds "subtextual politics" in Charlotte Mew's graveyard poetry. In his essay, "Grave Passions: Enclosure and Exposure in Charlotte Mew's Graveyard Poetry," Denisoff points to the cemetery as a site of contestation between Mew's sense of (personal) discord and her desire for true, or just, order. Since death is a leveler, the site of the dead, the cemetery or graveyard, provokes Mew's displeasure with the accepted yet unjust hierarchies of her society. Mew accepts dichotomies of body and soul, religion and death, only to confuse, to violate them. Through her graveyard poems, Mew expresses her emotional detachment/entrap-

ment, her feeling of being “mewed” up within herself, a feeling she sees as both a curse and a blessing. Death as a reward for this personal focus is what Mew transforms into her graveyard poetry. And Denisoff identifies Mew’s transitional status—forward and backward—looking/liminality through her ghostly echoes of the graveyard trope that Mew transforms into criticism.

Contradicting such Modernist critics as Ezra Pound, and so writing a poetry of criticism herself, Amy Lowell contests Modernism’s view of the aesthetic object of the poem versus its existence as a marketable commodity; so points out Melissa Bradshaw in her essay “Outselling the Modernisms of Men: Amy Lowell and the Art of Self-Commodification.” Instead of herself being a commodity for exchange, Lowell transfers objective value to her art as itself a commodity within commercial mass culture. The hierarchical divisions of high/mass are transgressed by Lowell so as to “illuminate [the] arbitrariness of categories.” She offers her work (rather than herself) as spectacle, then, even as she promotes “new poetry.” Further, she develops doctrines, theories, poetics, and manifestoes, publicly defining the new poetry, giving her own definition which, unlike that of male modernists, embraces rather than excludes diverse poetry: “Now her poetry, as well as H.D.’s or Aldington’s or Pound’s, qualifies as Imagist as long as it offers a clear presentation of whatever she wants to say, an impossibly easy ‘rule’ to comply with.”

And Norman Kelvin, in “H.D. and the Years of World War I,” indicates how H. D. marks out her own Modernist territory, writing of her self-exploration/self-discovery as she negotiates the divide between man/woman, victim/artist, hard/soft, flower/rock. With a non-linear sense of development, H. D. establishes a palimpsest of being, with the “uttermost layer . . . [being] the years of the First World War.” Through this negotiation and palimpsest, H.D. grows organically—organologically—into an incorporated being, or artist. She achieves, thus, a Pre-Raphaelite synthesis through a “Pre-Raphaelite past leading toward, rather than back to, the years 1912-1918.” In her novels, then, H.D. palimpsestically lives the lives of William Morris, D. G. Rossetti, and Lizzie Siddal. “My own purposes are best served,” Kelvin writes, “by seeking in the novel [“White Rose and the Red”] the extraordinary effort to which H.D. goes to disengage from the bases the attributes of polarized entities and then to mix and rearrange them in a complex yearning for unity between the alleged opposites.”

Notes

- 1 Andreas Huyssen, “Mass Culture as Women: Modernism’s Other,” *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press,

- 1986), p. 49.
- 2 In *Women's Writing in Exile*, ed. Mary Lynn Broe and Angela Ingram (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1989), p. 231.
 - 3 Quotations from Levy's poetry are taken from *British Women Poets of the 19th Century*, ed. Margaret Randolph Higonnet (New York: Meridian, 1996), p. 501.
 - 4 Quotations from Hickey's poetry are taken from *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology*, ed. Angela Leighton and Margaret Reynolds (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 483.
 - 5 Quotations from Radford's poetry are taken from Higonnet, p. 469.
 - 6 Quotations from Kendall's poetry are taken from Leighton and Reynolds, p. 639.
 - 7 Quotations from Coleridge's poetry are taken from Leighton and Reynolds, p. 624.
 - 8 Quotations from Blind's poetry are taken from Higonnet, p. 416.
 - 9 Quotations from Webster's poetry are taken from Higonnet, p. 414.
 - 10 Quotations from Gyles's poetry are taken from the Althea Gyles Special Collection at the University of Reading.
 - 11 Quotations from Nesbit's poetry are taken from Higonnet, p. 476.
 - 12 Quotations from Lindsey's poetry are taken from Leighton and Reynolds, p. 476.
 - 13 Quotations from "Michael Field"'s poetry are taken from Higonnet, p. 437.
 - 14 Marianne DeKoven, "Gendered Doubleness and the Origins of Modernist Form," *TSWL* 8 (1989): 19.