

HOUSE AND HOME IN LATE VICTORIAN WOMEN'S POETRY

BEING A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF PH.D

IN THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

BY

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SEPTEMBER 1999

We flatter ourselves with fancied freedom. We are the slaves of every house that belongs to us. Invisible chains bind us to every chair and table. No sooner have we got rid of them than we begin to long for bonds afresh.

(Mary E. Coleridge, *Non Sequitur* , 1907: 108)

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Preface

Any consideration of the theme of 'house and home' leads into discussion on three different levels of discourse. First of all, houses have biographical and historical significance; they are, after all, real places in which real lives are lived. Secondly, home is an ideologically loaded noun, a bastion of value which is inextricably entwined with the notion of the pure woman. Thirdly, in literature, houses are metaphorical places. This thesis is primarily a study of those metaphorical places. It explores representations of 'house' and 'home' in late Victorian women's poetry. However, it also takes account of the biographical, historical and ideological significance of the house, looking at factors which may have helped to shape each poet's representations of 'house and home'.

The house occupies an ambiguous position in the poetry of the later Victorian period. It is variously imagined as a haunted house, a ruin, an empty house of echoes, and a prison of isolation and despair. At times, the house is a recognisable domestic place (the private house), at others, it is turned into a place of art or poetry, a new aesthetic 'home' for the female imagination. In some poems the house is a focus for nostalgia and homesickness. Yet it is also often a place which must be left behind. What unites the poets I have studied is the fact that the houses they inhabit in their work are never entirely their own and they are rarely entirely at home in them. Home is less roomy as a concept. It tends to carry religious or ideological connotations and is usually represented as a place of duty and responsibility. It also comes to mean the final resting place: the grave. Thus house and home, which are not identical terms, are freighted with different meanings. It is the mismatch of these two terms, the tension between them, which I explore in this thesis.

I am not making any claims for an exclusive tradition. Many of these poems contain echoes of other texts or are haunted by the ghosts of other writers. This thesis is a contextualised study of late Victorian women's poetry

which traces the connections, as well as exploring the differences, between the women's work and that of their male counterparts. For writers like Pater and Ruskin, the house similarly provides a focus for nostalgia and homesickness. The houses in their work are, like those in the women's poetry, often haunted places. The women poets echo the estrangements experienced by Tennyson's speakers, who return to old homes only to find themselves shut out or their place usurped. However, despite these similarities and continuities, a comparison between the male writers and poets and their female counterparts reveals evidence of a divided literary sensibility about the house, the foundations of which lie in the historical and ideological differences between men and women's relation to it.

The social, educational and occupational advances of the 1880s and 1890s gave women the opportunity to extend their horizons beyond the domestic sphere. The movement away from the narrow confines of the private house is echoed in the women's literature of the period, the texts of which recreate the tentative steps outside the home. These poems thus also offer a perspective on the world opening up for women on the other side of the threshold, suggesting new roles and new directions for the female subject. However, the women poets' forays into the 'new' imaginative terrain of the city continually highlight the dangers involved in leaving the familiar ground of the house, addressing the difficulty of establishing and sustaining a new social identity.

As well as moving beyond the private house, the women's poetry of the period also trespasses into male houses of art. In literary terms, the latter decades of the nineteenth century were dominated by the aesthetic movement and its decadent aftermath. Despite their resistance to these movements, the women poets I have studied display a fascination with the exclusive realms of art imaged in a number of aesthetic and decadent texts. However, the ambiguous relationship of women to decadence and aestheticism means that it is hard to fit any of the poets I have studied into traditional perceptions of those movements.

Critics have tended to emphasise the ways in which the movements marginalise and exclude women. For example, Elaine Showalter has described the paradoxical nature of fin-de-siècle culture in which 'strongly anti-patriarchal sentiments could...coexist comfortably with misogyny' (1990:11). Camille Paglia has defined the aesthetic movement as a struggle between male 'aesthetic perception' and 'female nature' (1990:485). However, as Leighton has noted, by concentrating on 'gendered dualisms', these critics tend to trap themselves 'in the very system which is being exposed: man for art, woman for nature'(1997:2). 'Such gendered dualisms', she concludes, 'can close like a vice' (1997:2). I too have attempted to distance myself from those critics by exploring instead the mix of political and aesthetic energies in the women's poetry. Tracing the contradictory impulses of these texts (their political commitments and aesthetic evasions) helps to illuminate the role that gender plays in aestheticism and decadence without reinscribing those 'gendered dualisms'.

However, although these women poets venture into realms beyond the private house, the homing instincts of their imaginations continue to bring them back to it. Charlotte Mew, who brings this 'tradition' to its bleak conclusion, is the most modern of the poets I have studied. She died in 1928, nearly thirty years after the end of Victoria's reign. However, her belated revisitations of the house act as a reminder of the vice-like grip which it retains upon the female poetic imagination. In her poetry, the house has become a ghost of its former self. Yet, as Virginia Woolf remarked in her essay 'Professions for Women'(1929), '[i]t is far harder to kill a phantom than a reality' (1984:60). For these late Victorian women poets, the ghostly, textual presence of the private house proves similarly difficult to destroy.

Chapter One

The Social and Literary Context.

The later Victorian period was marked by a number of advancements in the cause of women's liberation. Legislative reforms like the Married Women's Property Act of 1882 granted wives the same rights as single women over their property and earnings; improvements in education opened up new occupational possibilities. 1869 saw the opening of Girton College, the first residential college for women. The 1880s and 1890s witnessed the emergence of the New Woman and the growth of causes like the Rational Dress Movement, the Anti-Matrimonial League and the Suffrage. The increasing provision of public space for women in the form of clubs, colleges, department stores, cafés and even public lavatories, gave women more freedom of movement, generating 'a new urban female style of "being at home" in the city' (Walkowitz 1992:46). Thus, in theory at least, women found themselves faced with a number of new alternatives to the 'hothouse and stove cultivation' of domestic life (Mill 1906:44). Critics have claimed that the social changes of the later period, particularly the provision of public space for women, were 'as important in undermining the ideal of social duty and the domination of the home as the growing claims of the Suffrage movement' (Davidoff 1973:67).

In an article published in *The Woman's World* in 1888, the novelist and poet Amy Levy surveys the changing social context of women's lives:

In class-room and lecture theatre, office and art-school, college and club-house alike, woman is waking up to a sense of the hundred and one possibilities of social intercourse, possibilities which, save in exceptional circumstances, have hitherto for her been restricted to the narrowest of grooves (1888d: 364).

Her evocation of the numerous potential destinations for women outside the realm of hearth and home, 'class-room and lecture theatre...office and art-school, college and club-house', suggests the extent to which the boundary between the private house and the public sphere was beginning to open up, allowing women from the 'high and dry' regions of residential districts to come down to the 'pleasant shores where the great stream of life is dashing and flowing' (1888d:364). The goal of a life beyond the realm of the private house, 'hitherto...felt as a vague longing', has, she states, 'assumed the definite shape of a practical demand, now that so many women of all ranks are controllers of their own resources' (1888d:364). Women, Levy suggests, are beginning to make room for themselves in the public sphere, envisaging new roles for themselves and new contexts for social interaction and participation.

Many of the new clubs, colleges, shops and cafés for women were established in and around the West End. As Lynne Walker has noted, as well as being a centre of 'male power and pleasure', the West End 'emerges as the site of a women's community within the urban centre, based on the social networks, alliances, and organisations of the Women's movement' (1995:71). Clubs, in particular, provided important venues for women to establish alliances. As Levy states:

What woman engaged in art, in literature, in science has not felt the drawbacks of her isolated position...She has had to fight her way unknown and single-handed; to compete with a guild of craftsmen all more or less known to one another, having easy access to one another, bound together by innumerable links of acquaintance and intercourse (1888d:366).

The first club for women, the Somerville, opened in 1878. Its intention was to provide a place where 'women of all classes met on a common ground for discussion and recreation' (Anstruther 1899:600). By 1899, there were 24 women's clubs in London and more were opening in larger cities around the

country (Anstruther 1899).¹ The aims and purposes of clubs differed. Some, like the Somerville, the Pioneer (1892), and the Grosvenor (1896), devoted themselves to serious debates and discussions, covering 'such time-worn subjects as Vaccination, Vegetarianism and Women's Suffrage...the Condition of Women's Work in the Potteries, and Rational Dress' (Anstruther 1899:599). The object of the Grosvenor Crescent Club was 'to become a nucleus round which all forms of women's work may gather' (Anstruther 1899:599). Others, like the Alexandra (1884) and the Victoria Club (1896) had less lofty ambitions, aiming simply to provide 'places to lunch at in peace, places to stay comfortably, places to which parcels can be sent' (Anstruther 1899:599).

Clubs provided a space which was neither public nor private, a 'convenient neutral territory' (Levy 1888d:364) in which women could meet friends away from the demands of the domestic round:

Here, at last is a chance of seeing A or B or C apart from her sisters, her cousins and her aunts--all excellent people, no doubt, but with whom we personally have nothing in common (Levy 1888d:pp.364-5).

The club was a place which, though still visibly related to the private house, was free of its burdens and duties:

here is a haven of refuge, where we can write out letters and read the news. undisturbed by the importunities of a family circle which can never bring itself to regard feminine leisure and feminine solitude as things to be respected (1888d:365).

Clubs offered opportunities for women to cultivate an independent, self-centred subjectivity which was very different from the ideal of the Angel in the House. Discussing the 'evolution of woman into a clubbable animal', Eva Anstruther notes:

Before long she [the new clubwoman] will share in the illegitimate joy of crouching over the fire and admirably usurping all its warmth, discover how exceedingly comfortable it is to collect some half-dozen

¹The first club to open its doors to women as well as men was located in Albermarle Street, W1. By 1899, the experimental Albermarle Club, established in 1874, had 800 members, of which 600 were women (Anstruther 1899:600).

papers and sit upon them all...discover the joy of talking loudly in the closest proximity to an occupied writing-table; above all, she will soon realise that to shut the door when she leaves a room is quite an unnecessary effort (1899:605).

The club was a space within which women could perform an act of imaginative self-recreation, discovering 'illegitimate' joys and going against the code of feminine domesticity. The hearth-fire, that ubiquitous symbol of Victorian domestic ideology (Hall 1979:25), is reinvisaged here. Anstruther's 'clubwoman' does not watch over the fire, tending it for others, but hogs it, 'usurping all its warmth' for herself. The 'clubwoman' is no guardian of others' privacy and thus need not continually lower her voice, or close doors when she leaves the room. Although clubs and the 'clubwoman' were still in the process of evolving,--Levy notes that 'the female club-lounger, the flâneuse of St. James's Street, latch-key in pocket and eye-glasses on nose, remains a creature of the imagination' (1888d: 366)--they offered the potential for self-development in a safe 'haven' (Levy 1888d:364).

However, the nature of clubs did not suit everyone. As Martha Vicinus has noted, 'clubs...were not intimate places...[and] may have been too public' (1985:299) for many women. Other venues, like the new residential colleges for women, provided a more private and more homely space in which to pursue a independent life. Educational reforms begun in the 1840s had made establishment of separate colleges for women possible.² As well as providing women with access to higher education, they 'offered an important alternative to the traditional family for single women'(1989:125). The scholar Jane Harrison credited women's colleges with the renewal of a wider 'social instinct between women and women': 'This social instinct...has for centuries been well-nigh

²The first women's colleges were founded in London: Queen's College was established in London in 1848 by the Rev F.D. Maurice, and was closely followed by the establishment of Bedford College, founded by Elizabeth Reid, in 1849 (Vicinus 1985:123). Both these colleges were non-residential, however, and the first residential college, Girton College, Cambridge, was not founded until 1869.

dead...But...is reviving, thanks largely to the impulse of collegiate life' (1888:275).

The new residential colleges were viewed with suspicion by many who feared their effects on the young women of England (McDermid 1995:11). Emily Davies, the principal of Girton College, was typically forthright about such opposition, stating: 'I do not believe that our utmost efforts to poison the students' lives at College will make them half so miserable as they are at home'(in Stephen 1927:174). However, other colleges, attempting to allay societal fears, traded on their domesticity. Newnham College, established in 1872, deliberately cultivated a homely atmosphere. The college did not have one communal eating hall, but a series of private dining rooms, so that mealtimes felt more intimate. The architect who designed the college, Basil Champneys, favoured the 'Queen Anne' style which was a popular domestic style during the 1870s (Aslin 1969:36). He managed 'to combine a sense of collegiate life with a wholly feminine atmosphere' (Vicinus 1985:129). Newnham College was fitted out with donated furniture and arranged in such a way as to suggest the interior of a private house. It was hoped that the homely appearance of the college would reassure anxious parents who feared that their daughters would become alienated from family life:

The surroundings, like those of the new boarding schools, bespoke permanence, seriousness of purpose, and the same solidity that marked the middle-class families from which the bulk of the students came (1985:129).

Residential colleges like Newnham housed and sheltered the 'impulse of collegiate life' (Harrison 1888:275), appearing to domesticate it, yet in reality simply disguising it. Both colleges and clubhouses offered women a new context for self-culture and development. Designed and arranged in the image of the private house, colleges and clubhouses were places in which women might feel at home, without being 'at home', and therefore subject to the tiresome duties of the social round. Clubs and colleges annexed the comforts and social

protections of home, establishing centres of female community away from the 'high and dry region of the residential neighbourhood' (Levy 1888d:364).

The homely atmosphere cultivated by clubs and colleges was echoed in department stores. In order to entice women into the city, their interiors were fitted out with 'soft carpets, music, china, and elegant waitresses; restrooms and writing rooms' (Walkowitz 1992:48). Arcades, which were 'increasingly adopted as an essential feature of the high street of many towns and cities' (MacKeith 1985:vii), effectively created 'indoor street[s]' (1985:vii) which sheltered pedestrians both from bad weather and the potential dangers of the world outside. The protections afforded by the department store and the arcade provided women with another 'neutral' (Levy 1888a:71) territory in the city, a space within which they could 'mimic the arts of urban mingling without incurring...risks'(Ryan 1990:76). The 'neutral' territories of the club, the college and the department store offered women the chance to cultivate new interests, develop long-repressed impulses towards society, and even fashion a new 'urban subjectivity' (Walkowitz 1992:49). As the century progressed, a 'new...female style of "being at home" in the city developed:

An ability to get around and self-confidence in public places became the hallmarks of the modern woman. Not only could she be seen in the shopping districts of the West End and in the poor neighbourhoods of the East, but she also made an appearance in other public spaces...at concerts, picture exhibitions, the galleries of Albert Hall and the pits of the playhouse (1992:68).

Thus as well as furnishing women with opportunities to widen their social and intellectual horizons, the new provision of public space also gave women the confidence to venture into hitherto unfamiliar or forbidden areas.

'Advanced women' (Walkowitz 1992:69) of the period tended to move between 'heterosocial spaces and homosocial spaces' (Walkowitz 1992:69). The Reading Room of the British Museum became a regular work-place for many women (Flint 1993:78):Eleanor Marx, Beatrice Webb, Olive Schreiner, E.Nesbit, Mary E. Coleridge, and Amy Levy were among those who read,

studied and wrote there. It conferred a 'peculiar freemasonry' (Briggs 1989:68) of a kind which was different from that offered by the club or the college. As Deborah Nord has noted, many women were reluctant 'to commit themselves to organized or de facto single-sex communities' (1990:734). Perhaps fearing the stigmatising label of 'oddness', they sought to establish informal sites of female community which were not 'geographically or architecturally demarcated' (1990:736). The Reading Room provided one such 'site'. There women worked alongside male scholars and readers and could feel part of a wider community (Briggs 1989:68). The Reading Room also provided those women whose family circumstances did not permit them to join one of the independent colleges with a place to read and study.

Amy Levy wrote an article on the Reading Room for the girl's magazine *Atalanta* describing the relative ease of becoming a member: 'Any person above the age of twenty-one, who can induce one householder to vouch for his good behaviour, has the whole collection of books within his easy reach'(1889b:451). This accessibility meant that the Reading Room attracted a wide variety of readers.³ Beatrice Webb's descriptions of working there imply that at least part of its appeal lay in its motley readership: 'There you see decrepit men, despised foreigners, forlorn widows and soured maids, all knit together by a feeling of fellowship with the great immortals'(1982:266). Her evocation of a collection of misfits and outsiders gathered together under Pannini's great dome suggest that she felt at home there because it was a place full of those who did not really belong anywhere.⁴

The ambivalence of Webb's account offsets the confidence and optimism of articles extolling the virtues of club-life. Her own attempts to forge an independent life are documented in her autobiography, *My Apprenticeship* (1926). She records the difficulties of pursuing a career in a society which was

³ However, as critics have noted, this accessibility tended to put off some readers, both male and female (Altick 1957: 238) (Flint 1993:174).

⁴In the same entry, a passage written in her diary in 1888, Webb describes the 'homey atmosphere' of the Reading Room (Webb 1982:266).

still in thrall to the 'Victorian code of feminine domesticity' (Webb 1971:116). Even within a 'relatively tolerant family', she was forced to keep her 'aspirations and plans for self-culture and self-expression secret' (1971:116). The creation of a new social identity was, perhaps inevitably, a frustrating business which demanded an ongoing negotiation with established codes. As Shani D'Cruze notes, 'the relationship between the apparent autonomy of the "new woman" and changing ideals of domesticity was...complex' (1995:72). Webb was part of a 'scattered London network' (Nord 1990:733) of independently-minded women, including Amy Levy, Eleanor Marx, Clementina Black and Olive Schreiner. In 1889, Levy, who was beginning to enjoy some success as a writer, committed suicide. This event focused Webb's mind as to the difficulties which she, and others like her, were facing:

The very demon of melancholy gripping me, my imagination fastening on Amy Levy's story, a brilliant young authoress of seven-and-twenty, in the hey-day of success, who has chosen to die rather than to stand up longer to live. We talk of courage to meet death; alas, in these terrible days of mental pressure it is courage to *live* that we most lack, not courage to die. It is the supreme courage of fighting a battle for an unknown leader, for an unknown cause, that fails us now and again (1971:399).

Webb's description of 'fighting a battle for an unknown leader, for an unknown cause' suggests the realm beyond the private house as a *terra incognita* without maps, paths or guides. Webb's account is a reminder that despite all the advances of the later period, those pioneer-women who sought a more active role in society continued to face many obstacles. Women were battling from different strengths in this period, and came up against different problems; female independence would remain for some an elusive goal.

However, women were gaining ground during this period, finding ways to accommodate their desire for a wider participation in society, even establishing alternative 'homes' (Vicinus 1985:7) for themselves. The emancipations of the later period brought a fresh impetus to the female literary imagination: 'women

were exhilarated by the prospect of a new age in which female ability would have more scope' (Showalter 1982:182). Furthermore, the rise in women's literacy as a result of the educational reforms of the 1840s meant that by the last two decades of the century, women readers constituted a significant presence in the literary marketplace.

As Rachel Bowlby notes, '[i]n the case of novels, women were the main consumers, the main readers' (1985:7). The question of women's place and role in society provided the focus for much of the women's writing of the 1880s and 1890s: 'Women began to explore women's experience and expose patriarchal issues, not in coded form...but directly'(Gardner 1998:185).⁵ Both in practice and in print, women were beginning to negotiate their way out of the domestic sphere, challenging the codes of Victorian domestic ideology, and envisaging new roles and new social identities for themselves.

While women were heralding an era of new-found political freedoms and championing the revival of the 'social instinct between women'(Harrison 1888:275), the male writers associated with the aesthetic movement were celebrating a 'renaissance' of a more exclusive nature. During his lecture tour of America in 1882, Wilde declared an 'English Renaissance of Art' which, 'in its passionate cult of pure beauty, its flawless devotion to form'(1995:5), seemed devoid of any 'political passion' (1995:5). Rallying around the doctrine of 'art for art's sake', the aesthetes and decadents of the later Victorian period envisaged an autonomous realm of beauty and creativity, divorced from the concerns of the real. For them, art belonged to a realm located beyond morality, responsibility and accountability. The aesthetic movement and its decadent aftermath represented a revolt against the social realism and 'moral earnestness' of 'Victorianism' (Yeats 1936: ix).

⁵Though, as Viv Gardner notes, 'women writers' position on feminist issues...was not uniformly supportive, nor did they hold a single position on individual issues' (1998:180).

Wilde's lecture 'The English Renaissance of Art' offers a complex and non-reductive account of the genesis of the aesthetic movement in England. In his attempt to trace the genealogy of the movement, Wilde's lecture takes in German Idealist philosophy, late French Romanticism, the Hellenic spirit of Ancient Greece, English Romanticism and Pre-Raphaelitism. All these movements and energies in art had an influence on English aestheticism:

It is really from the union of Hellenism, in its breadth, its sanity of purpose, its calm possession of beauty, with the adventure, the intensified individualism, the passionate colour of the romantic spirit, that springs the art of the nineteenth century, as from the marriage of Faust and Helen of Troy sprang the beautiful boy Euphorion (1995:4).⁶

The most obvious and direct influence on the 'hybrid movement' (Gaunt 1988:20) that was English aestheticism came from late French Romantic writers. The term 'aesthetic', which hailed originally from that 'matrix of general ideas, ancient Greece' (Gaunt 1988:15), entered the vocabulary of French Romanticism during the 1830s (Rosenblatt 1930:1). Théophile Gautier wrote the first aesthetic manifesto in the Preface to his novel of 1835, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*. The Preface was important in helping to shape the artistic theories of the aesthetic movement. The arguments formulated by Gautier centre on the doctrine of art for art's sake. Gautier demands a separatist viewpoint: art is to inhabit its own sphere, independent of ethical, religious or social considerations.

Swinburne brought the phrase 'art for art's sake' into English currency, using it in his monograph on William Blake (1868). Swinburne had been attacked by critics for writing poems on forbidden topics such as necrophilia and lesbianism and had already published one defence of his poetry on the advice of his publisher, John Camden Hotten (Small 1979: xiii). In *William Blake*, he makes a more general plea for the freedom of art from exposure to

⁶Wilde's lecture here draws on a passage which appears in Pater's essay on Winckelmann in *The Renaissance* (1873): 'Goethe illustrates that union of the Romantic spirit, in its adventure, its variety, its profound subjectivity of soul, with Hellenism, in its transparency, its rationality, its desire of beauty--that marriage of Faust and Helena--of which the art of the nineteenth century is the child, the beautiful lad Euphorion, as Goethe conceives him (1910: *The Renaissance*, 227).'

'moral...condemnation' (Swinburne 1906:96): 'Art for art's sake first of all' (1906:100). Drawing on ideas from Gautier and Baudelaire, and emphasising the formal qualities of art-- 'save the shape and art will take care of the soul for you'(1906:100)--Swinburne creates a sanctuary for art away from the bourgeois vision of the critics. However, he and other writers associated with aestheticism continued to provoke hostile attacks. The most notorious of these was Robert Buchanan's denunciation of the Pre-Raphaelites in his article on 'The Fleshly School of Poetry' in the *Contemporary Review* in 1871. Buchanan condemns the 'Fleshly School' for its aestheticism, its valuing of sensuality over sense, and form over content: 'The fleshly persons who wish to create form for its own sake are merely pronouncing their own doom' (1871:348).⁷

The arguments rehearsed by Swinburne in his monograph on Blake, and the phrase 'art for art's sake', gained currency in England during the late 1860s and 1870s. Pater, the most influential of all the exponents of aestheticism, echoes the phrase 'art for art's sake' (1868:312) in his essay on William Morris, published anonymously in the *Westminster Review* in 1868.⁸ Following Gautier and Swinburne, Pater adopts the principle that 'beauty of form' is 'an end in itself' (Pater 1868:309) and proceeds to build a philosophy of life around the notion that art heightens and intensifies our experience, bringing the 'highest quality' to each of our 'moments as they pass' (1868:312). Drawing on contemporary theories about the nature of perception, Pater argues that the impressions we receive are the impressions of 'an individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world' (1868:311).⁹

⁷As Ian Small notes, the criticism that aestheticism encounters during the 1870s and 1880s tends to be directed against 'the basic formalism of the Aesthetic movement, the assertion that art and literature could, in some way, be morally neutral' (1979:xiv).

⁸ This essay sets out many of Pater's key ideas. It reappeared in many different forms throughout his career, as Laurel Brake notes: 'the Morris essay attracted adverse criticism...[at the time of its initial publication] and in 1873, when it appeared as the 'Conclusion' to Pater's *Renaissance*. Although Pater removed it from the second edition, he republished it twice in 1888-9, in the third edition of *The Renaissance*, and in a different form as 'Aesthetic Poetry' in *Appreciations* (1889)'(1991:54).

⁹ Pater's essay 'Poems on William Morris' thus unites the aesthetic theories of Gautier with new scientific research. As Paul Turner notes, 'the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art* preached by Théophile

Each impression is in turn 'infinitely divisible': 'all that is actual in it being a single moment, gone while we are trying to apprehend it' (1868:311). Thus life itself is reduced to a 'drift of momentary acts of sight and passion and thought' (1868:310). The 'wisest' way to fill the short interval at our disposal is to devote ourselves wholeheartedly to 'art and song' (1868:312):

For our one chance is in expanding that interval, in getting in as many pulsations as possible into the given time...Of this wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for art's sake, has most (1868:312).

The notorious 'gem-like flame' (1868: 311) which flickers at the heart of Pater's philosophy represents a fixed point in the midst of the flux of modern life:

A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life. How may we see in them all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses? How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy?

To burn always with this hard gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life (1868:311).

The word focus comes from the Latin meaning 'burning point', 'a hearth' (Turner 1989:243). The 'focus', Pater implies, is the 'burning point' of the senses, the point at which our impressions of the outer world are refined by the work of our subjective consciousness. The 'hard gem-like flame' acts as a refining force, a flickering flame of art which arrests the play of those impressions, those 'vital forces'. As Freedman has noted, the merging of the flame with the focus locates a still centre at the heart of Paterian aestheticism:

Pater wants to affirm the mobility, the flickeringness, of the 'quickened multiplied consciousness,' and to hypostatize a moment at which it might be frozen into one perfect moment of perception or revelation (1990:19).

Gautier in 1835, was made to follow logically from the view of life presented by philosophers and scientists as Hume, J.S. Mill, and T.H. Huxley (1989:246).

Thus the 'hard gem-like flame' represents 'a fusion of palpable form with fluid spirit'(Monsman 1977:147). The results of this process of refinement and transformation are to be found, Pater suggests, in 'The House Beautiful'(1901: *Appreciations*, 241); an imaginary gallery contributed to by successive generations of artists and critics, a gallery 'which the creative minds of all generations--the artists and those who have treated life in the spirit of art are always building together' (1901: *Appreciations*, 241). As Iser states:

the 'House Beautiful' is similar to that of the 'Imaginary Museum' which according to Malraux represents a modernist view of art. The treasures of the world are brought to this museum and form a realm of blessed detachment which, nevertheless, is in and out of this world....This treasure house is neither an idea nor an aesthetic canon; it is the continual extraction of perfection from the process of history (1987:82-3).

The art in the 'House Beautiful' is free from 'its responsibilities to its subject or material' (Pater 1901:*The Renaissance*, 138). Such works belong to that species of 'pure' art, art which has become a 'matter of pure perception' (Pater 1901:*The Renaissance*, 138), which it is the job of the aesthetic critic to seek out. What is produced by the artist and the aesthetic critic--Pater suggests that the work of both is art (Freedman 1990:43)--belongs to a separate sphere.

As critics have noted, Pater's vision of the solipsistic, solitary aesthete, enclosed in his 'own dream of a world' (1868:311), devoted to the cultivation of the self and the senses--'not the fruit of experience but experience itself is the end' (1868:311)--provides a model for the decadent figures which appear in the literature of the 1880s and 1890s (Turner 1989:247). Chronologically, decadence in England postdates the aesthetic movement, but there is no straightforward way of separating the two. As David Weir notes,

by the time aestheticism reaches the 1890s...an admixture of *décadisme* and Francophilia has so obscured the original Paterian ideas that the problem of sorting out the meaning of aestheticism and its relation to the subsuming idea of decadence is considerable (1995:60).

If Pater's work contributes to and foreshadows decadence, so does that of Gautier and Baudelaire. The seeds of decadence are already present in late French Romanticism; decadence is a 'dark species' (Ryals 1985:86) of it. Richard Le Gallienne, the poet and critic who helped to popularise the ideas and ideals of both aestheticism and decadence in the reviews he contributed to the *Yellow Book* and the *Pall Mall Gazette* (Stanford 1971:214), characterises decadence as a kind of inverted Romanticism, produced from within the abyss:

The real core of decadence is to be found in its isolated interests. Its effects are gained by regarding life as of but one or two dimensions...M. Huysmans is taken with the colour on a tippler's nose, Gautier with the same effects in a beggars rags, but each ignores the humanity of both...Decadence...comes out of the decadent regarding his theme *in vacuo*, isolated from its various relations--of morality, of pity, of humour, of religion (in Stanford 1971:214-5).

From this isolated and disengaged perspective, life is viewed as if it is a theme or an arrangement of colour and light. The prismatic vision of the decadent represents a deliberate repression of humanity and its 'various relations'.¹⁰

Aesthetic and decadent writings offer visions of art as an escape from, or an alternative to, the mundane realities of everyday life. From its earliest days, aestheticism represents a turn away from the world. For Gautier, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Huysmans, art is a refuge from, and a rebuke to, the bourgeois society they despised. The speaker of Mallarmé's poem 'Les Fenêtres' (1866) turns his back on the vulgarities of life in favour of mystic visions of art and beauty: 'I flee, clinging to all the window frames/From where one can turn one's

¹⁰The 'isolation' of those 'various relations--of morality, of pity, of humour' was not always so easily effected. Though Wilde's *Dorian Gray* is in many ways a decadent text, it is riddled with contradictions (Ellman 1987:292). While on one hand, it appears to endorse the hothouse lifestyle of the decadent who lets life stand in for art, on the other, it radically undermines some of the central tenets of both aestheticism and decadence. Ultimately, the seal around Dorian's house fails to keep out the 'various relations' (Le Gallienne in 1971:214-5). The picture, shut away in the old schoolroom like a decadent version of the madwoman in the attic, represents the presence of all that aestheticism and decadence seeks to repress. And while this 'curious secret' is shut up, 'secure from prying eyes'(1985:152) its hidden presence is signalled by the 'blank space...visible on the wall' (1985:154) downstairs. The novel appears to be sealed off from life and its 'various relations' by its famous Preface. Yet a sense of guilt, like the mark on the wall, is already inside the text, and no number of witty epigrams can conceal it.

back on all this shit' (1994: 12).¹¹ The anti-hero of Husymans' *À Rebours* (1884), who particularly admires the poem 'Les Fenêtres', praises Mallarmé for his rejection of society:

he loved all the works of this poet who, in an age of universal suffrage and a time of commercial greed, lived outside the world of letters, sheltered from the raging folly all around him by his lofty scorn; taking pleasure, far from society, in the caprices of his mind and the visions of his brain (1959:196).¹²

In its deliberate suppression of human interests, decadence represents a profoundly anti-humanist vision, one which isolates 'morality...pity...humour...religion' (Le Gallienne in 1971:214). This oppositional stance can also be found in Pater's writings. For Pater, art represents 'a sort of cloistral refuge from a certain vulgarity in the actual world' (1901: *Appreciations*, 18). In 'Poems by William Morris', he characterises the 'secret of enjoyment' of Morris' poetry as:

that inversion of homesickness known to some, that incurable thirst for the sense of escape, which no actual form of life satisfies, no poetry, even, if it be simple and spontaneous (1868:300).

This definition sets up the endeavours of the poet in opposition to the known and the familiar; only the escapist dreams of art, Pater suggests, will fulfill the restless spirit of the aesthete.¹³

¹¹ 'Je suis et je m'accroche à toutes les croisées/D'où l'on tourne l'épaule à la vie' (1994:12).

¹² Husymans' *Des Esseintes* particularly treasures a few select poems by Mallarmé, of which 'Les Fenêtres' is one (1959: 195).

¹³ However, while Pater suggests that art is partly an escape from life, he recasts the rigid opposition between art and life formulated by Gautier and Mallarmé. For him, 'the love of art for art's sake' (1868:312), the pursuit of beauty, was a way of life which expanded and enhanced the quality of life in 'the narrow chamber of the individual mind'(1868:310). The moral dimension in Pater's work (Iser 1987:34) means that there is a subtle difference between his conception of the relation between life and art, and Gautier's. Pater's aestheticism is about treating 'life in the spirit of art' (1901: *Appreciations*, 241), rather than letting art stand in for, or provide an antidote to, life. Thus life, in Pater's writings, is not set up in opposition to art, but is instead arranged around it. Unlike the intensely prescriptive decadent vision, based on a pre-arranged vetting of environment, Pater's aestheticism is less exclusive. The difference between Paterian aestheticism and decadence lies in the difference between a stylised vision (treating life in the spirit of art), which leaves the door open, and a deliberate shutting out, in which the threshold between art and life is hermetically sealed.

The moral dimension in Pater's work was picked up by T.S.Eliot in his 1930 essay 'Arnold and Pater' (Iser 1987:31). In his work on aestheticism and decadence, Graham Hough notes that morality is present all the way through the aesthetic canon: 'Ruskin treats art from the moral point of view. But Pater and the later aesthetes who insisted on treating morals from the point of view of art were only expressing the same relation from the other end' (1961:18).

As Denis Donoghue has noted, 'aestheticism...[provides] a scene of motifs and images sequestered from our given world'(1995:221). The images in these texts are divorced from the real--Pater's 'hard gem-like flame', for example, does not burn in a domestic hearth, but hallows a sanctuary given over to the contemplation of art: the mind of the solitary aesthete. The fastidiousness of the aesthete and the decadent rejects the humbler elements of everyday life in favour of more refined pleasures. Decadence in particular represents a profoundly anti-domestic movement. In a review of John Gray's *Silverpoints* (1892), Le Gallienne notes that Gray, a poet with 'a very great deal in common with the typical decadent'(in 1971:216), fails to sustain the necessary isolation of human interests. Finding an unexpected vignette of domesticity in which a male speaker fondly addresses his pregnant wife, '[t]ell me my dear, how pure, how brave/Our child will be...What bonny hair our child will have!', Le Gallienne concludes, '[i]s not this absurdly domestic in a decadent?Really Mr. Gray must check these natural impulses'(in 1971:216).

In a number of texts from Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal* to Wilde's *Dorian Gray*, the home becomes a house of art which provides a refuge from the outside world. Baudelaire's 'L'Invitation au voyage' envisions a scented chamber of beauty in which 'all is order and leisure,/Luxury, beauty, and pleasure' (1993:109).¹⁴ In Huysman's *À Rebours*, the anti-hero, Des Esseintes, 'cuts himself off from contemporary life', resolving to 'allow nothing to enter his hermitage which might breed repugnance or regret' (1959:63). He lives in a world of 'exquisite refinement, steeped in an atmosphere of ancient fantasy, wrapped in an aura of antique corruption, divorced from modern times and society'(1959:63). The house in *À Rebours* represents the isolated lair of the neurotic decadent who takes refuge, perversely, even from the natural world. The daylight allowed to penetrate has 'first to pass through the outer window, then through the water [of a 'large aquarium'], and finally through the fixed

¹⁴ 'Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,/Luxe, calme et volupté'(1993:108).

bull's eye in the porthole'(1959:32). Nature is praised only when it appears to mimic the artificial. Des Esseintes is fascinated by 'natural flowers that...look like fakes'(1959:97). This predilection for the artificial is echoed in Wilde's *Dorian Gray* where the silk curtains of Basil Hallward's studio are stretched across the window, making the birds that fly past outside appear as 'fantastic shadows' on a Japanese screen (1985:23). Decadence, after all, prefers the shadow to the substance, versions of life to the stuff of it. In their isolation from the outside world, these decadent hothouses mimic the tenets of Victorian domestic ideology, with its emphasis on rigidly demarcated separate spheres and its intense cult of privacy (Hall 1979:15). However, these retreats are also the negation, the inversion of the hallowed Victorian home. They are a deliberate blasphemy against the home as an emblem of bourgeois life.

In all these male houses of art, the domestic space of the home has been recontextualised. Women, the traditional guardians of the domestic sphere, are admitted to these exclusive realms only when, like the actress Sybil Vane in *Dorian Gray*, they give 'shape and substance to the shadows of [male] art' (Wilde 1985:115). The figures of women in aesthetic and decadent texts are apt to become nightmarish visions, 'idols of perversity' (Dijkstra 1986:*passim*). Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, with its bisexual heroine with a penchant for cross-dressing, is followed by increasingly fetishised visions of sexually ambiguous females in Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal* (a work originally entitled *Les lesbiennes*), Mallarmé's *Hérodiade* and Swinburne's 'Anactoria'. Pater's vision of the 'Mona Lisa' as 'vampire', versed in 'the secrets of the grave'(1901:*The Renaissance*, 125), reveals his taste for the sinister, the morbid, and the strange. In turn, Wilde's *Salomé*, influenced by Mallarmé's *Hérodiade* and Moreau's paintings (Ellman 1987:44), continues the tradition of the *femme fatale*, spawning a number of perverse images such as Aubrey Beardsley grotesques. Woman, like nature, is admired only for her capacity to appear strange and unnatural, a distortion of Victorian womanhood.

Thus the aesthetic chambers of beauty and decadent hothouses represent problematic imaginative spaces for women. Throughout aesthetic and decadent writing, women are denied 'access to spiritual and artistic realms' (Pierrot 1981: 126). In his essay 'Style', Pater describes the 'literary artist' as 'a scholar' (Pater 1901:*Appreciations*, 12). He goes on to define the 'scholarly conscience' as male:

in what he proposes to do [he] will have in mind, first of all, the scholar and the scholarly conscience--the male conscience in this matter, as we must think it, under a system of education which still to so large an extent limits real scholarship to men (1901: *Appreciations*, 12).

While Pater excludes women on the basis of their lack of educational opportunities, other texts in the 'canon' of aesthetic and decadent writing are more hostile in their rejection of women's creative potential. Huysmans' *Des Esseintes* dismisses the work of women writers as 'wretched prattlings', 'based on such stupid concepts and...written in such a nauseating style that they almost acquired a distinctive personality of their own' (1959:150). As Rita Felski has argued, women are identified with the bourgeois consumerism of modern culture and with insipid nature:

In this pessimistic vision, women come to stand for the most despised aspects of both culture and nature, exemplifying the crass vulgarity and emptiness of modern bourgeois society as well as an uncontrolled passion and excessive emotionality that is deeply repugnant to the disengaged stance of the male aesthete (1995:107).

Aestheticism and decadence leave little room for women writers and still less for women aesthetes. Furthermore, the impulse of the aesthetic imagination to remain aloof from social issues throws up a number of contradictions for women writers. The emancipations of the later period provided a creative stimulus for many women, suggesting new directions for the female imagination. However, while women were extending their horizons outwards, men were retreating into a hothouse-style 'cultivation' (Mill 1906:44). The narrow focus of aestheticism, its creation of a separate sphere for art divorced

from the concerns of the real world, closes off the possibility of imaginative engagement with social or political issues. Yet, for all its misogyny, its elitism and exclusivity, aestheticism offered certain imaginative freedoms for women. Despite the contradictions facing women who attempted to engage with aestheticism and decadence, they continued to contribute to the late nineteenth century debates about the value and nature of art. Women writers began, as Showalter has noted, to make room for themselves, 'to purge aestheticism and decadence of their misogyny and to rewrite the myths of art that denigrated women' (1993:x).

From Home to the House Beautiful?

As a result of the cultural dissemination of the tenets and ideals of the aesthetic movement, the lofty realm of art was brought home to the late Victorians in the most literal way imaginable. The effects of the aesthetic movement were felt on many levels of society (Spencer 1972:7). It spawned various cults of beauty, fashions in dress and, notably, trends in interior design. While there were undoubtedly 'differing degrees of 'aesthetic awareness'' (Spencer 1927:7), ranging from the Paterian aesthetic critic whose life was dedicated to the contemplation of beauty, to the Victorian middle classes who bought their wallpapers from William Morris and Co., the movement had a widespread influence.

The lofty Paterian ideal of a 'House Beautiful' of art was domesticated by the proliferation of guidebooks, magazines and journals devoted to the decoration of houses. As a result of the new trend in works on 'art at home', the tenets and ideals of the aesthetic movement were quickly broken down into catchphrases associated with new trends in dress and interior decoration. For example, the phrase 'The House Beautiful' became capacious enough to envelop both a generalised ideal of high culture and a more lowly and localised expression of art in the home. As Freedman notes, it originated in Bunyan's

Pilgrim's Progress, passing subsequently from Pater to Wilde, who used it as the title of a lecture on interior design (1990:106). It also formed the provisional title for the work which Henry James was later to call *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897), although James, as ever, has one eye on the costs, both material and emotional, of this new trend for hoarding works of art, and his novel is really a satire on the 'House Beautiful' and the 'pilgrims' (James 1987:43) who visit this new shrine of art.

The most famous and probably the most influential of all the works on interior design was Charles Eastlake's *Hints on Household Taste* (1868), which emphasised the importance of bringing art home to the English public:

though the question of style and design in art-manufacture has been from time to time treated in various works after a technical, a metaphysical, and an historical fashion, I am not aware that it has yet been discussed in a manner sufficiently practical and familiar to ensure the attention of the general public, without whose support, as every artist knows, all attempts in the direction of aesthetical reform are hopeless (1868:vi).

Eastlake introduces a vogue for aesthetic interiors, and finely crafted furniture. His book marked an important new trend in the contents of manuals concerning the home. It was the first to introduce the notion of the artistic home and proved immensely popular in both Britain and America (Handlin 1979: 232). Following its success, Macmillan published a series entitled *Art At Home* during the 1870s, and by 1880s and 1890s, writings on this subject had spread to magazines and journals. These works produced a new breed of domestic consumers eager for the latest aesthetic designs.

One of the most interesting features of Eastlake's work is his egalitarian, populist approach to art. Bemoaning the remoteness of 'Art' from the 'question of general taste' (1868:3), Eastlake argues that the furnishing of houses is done 'with no more sense of real beauty than if art were a dead letter' (1868:3). 'National art' he states,

is not a thing which we may inclose in a gilt frame and hang upon our walls, or which can be locked up in the cabinet of a virtuoso. To be

genuine and permanent, it ought to animate with the same spirit the blacksmith's forge and the sculptor's *atelier*, the painter's studio and the haberdasher's shop (1868: 34).

Eastlake's democratic vision, drawing on the principles of Ruskin and Morris, proposes that art should be brought home to the public. His accommodating vision suggests that there is room for art at home; that there should be a 'common ground' (1868:7) between art and ordinary life. However, by bringing 'beauty' into the home, Eastlake struck a blow at the foundations of the cult of domesticity. One of the features of all the interest in the physical arrangement, design and appearance of the home was a general shift in emphasis about the nature and function of it. As Freedman notes:

Despite his strenuous moralism, Eastlake's emphasis on the home as a place of public self-presentation, rather than as an efficient, utilitarian locus of family nurture....served to undercut basic tenets of early domestic ideology (1990: 105).

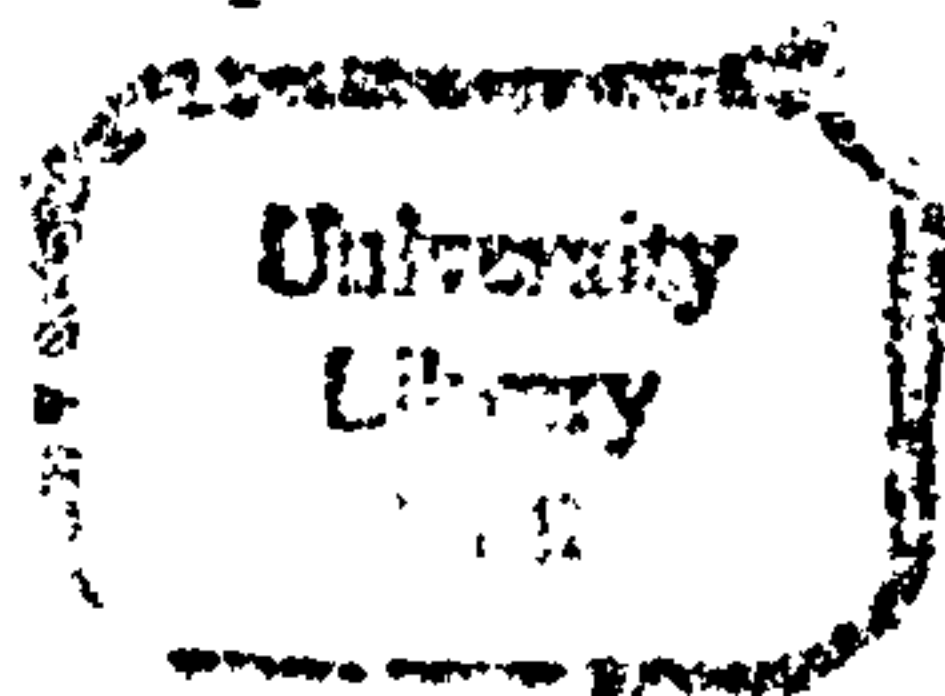
The symbolic centre of that early Victorian domestic ideology was, of course, the fire-place. As G.K.Chesterton observed, 'the Victorians were the first generation to ask their children to worship the hearth without the altar' (1913:44). In his 1904 work on the design of English houses, Hermann Muthesius echoes this view: 'the fireplace is the domestic altar before which, daily and hourly, he [the Englishman] sacrifices to the household gods' (1979:102). The new concentration on the design and presentation of the the home transformed the central symbol of the cult of home. In Eastlake's *Hints On Household Taste*, there is a drawing of a design for mantel-shelves which are adorned with various art objects accompanied by a note: 'A little museum may thus be formed, and remain a source of lasting pleasure to its possessors, seeing that 'a thing of beauty is a joy forever''(1868:121). In place of the angels and idols of domestic ideology, there is an array of art-works designed to nurture sensual rather than moral values. The domestic hearth has become a shrine to the cult of beauty.

In her work on interior design, *The Art of the House*, the poet and novelist Rosamund Marriott Watson, following Eastlake, designates the hearth as an aesthetic focus:

The hearthplace...is--or should be--the natural centre of a room--the decorative hub, as it were, of each separate community of inanimate objects gathered together...within the four walls of a chamber (1897:34).

While it remains central, the hearth operates within a different system of values, providing a focus for the eye rather than the moral sense. For Marriott Watson, the hearth is first and foremost an architectural feature. Intriguingly, the 'community' 'gathered together' around the hearth is not a family group but a collection of 'inanimate objects'. Marriott Watson transforms the room into a kind of museum. The flame which burns in her hearth is not a domestic fire but a quasi-Paterian flame of art. The passage in *The Art of the House* echoes the recontextualisations of domestic space in aesthetic texts. The biblical register of Marriott Watson's phrases, 'a community...gathered together', suggests that if the 'House Beautiful' shakes off its Christian associations, it does not altogether lose all religious sentiments. In the 'House Beautiful' of the design manuals, lectures and guidebooks, art was required to do its 'spiritual ministry' (Ellman 1987:184) in the place of God: 'Beauty...created a pleasing setting...[and] a haven of order and delight away from the shocks, strains and disappointments of existence' (Delaney 1990: 181).

This conception of the house as a shrine to beauty, offered women a new function within the home. Women had always held a central place in Victorian domestic ideology as guardians of the private sphere (Hall 1979: 22). Yet the role of domestic angel in texts like Patmore's *The Angel In The House* (1854-1856) or Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* was as a cipher; woman was a symbol of domestic harmony rather than its agent. However, in the late Victorian cult of beauty, women were enabled to take a more active role. The commercialisation of aestheticism opened the way for women, hitherto excluded from the movement, to participate (Campbell Orr 1995:17). The successful creation of a



'House Beautiful' demanded more of a talent for achieving equanimity of colour and tone, than of moral atmosphere, and taste, it seems, was neither a female nor a male prerogative. In fact, Eastlake's pioneering *Hints On Household Taste* (1868) emphasises the importance of educating women in the appreciation of beauty:

The general impression seems to be that...while a young lady is devoting at school, or under a governess, so many hours a day to music...to languages..to general science, she is all this time forming that sense of the beautiful, which we call taste (1868:7).

In reality, Eastlake argues, most people are lamentably 'deficient' in this quality, a fact which he attributes to the lack of 'early instruction' in the 'most elementary principles....of art' (1868: 8). His work encourages the education of women in the 'established principles of art'(1868:13). The implicit suggestion is that in order to bring art home, one must send women out to encounter it.¹⁵

Whether as a direct or an indirect result of Eastlake's emphasis on the role of women in this revolution in domestic taste, many of the subsequent works dedicated to interior design were written by, or aimed at, women.¹⁶ Far from being the exclusive preserve of men, the cultivation of domestic taste was an enterprise open to them. Rosamund Marriott Watson's *Art Of The House* began life as a column written for the *Pall Mall Gazette* under the heading 'The Wares of Autolycus'. This classical tag was a reference to the son of Hermes, whose ability to make himself and the goods he stole invisible made him a master of deception and thieving (Howatson 1989:82). Whether this classical title was meant to carry any implication is not clear, but it is intriguing, suggesting the

¹⁵Kathy Psomiades detects a tendency in Eastlake's work to prize 'masculine taste' over 'feminine taste'(1997:143). She sees *Hints* as a work which upholds rather than undermines gender hierarchies. However, by conceiving of taste in terms of this rigid gender bias, she perpetuates the separate spheres ideology within the home, dividing the house into masculine and feminine areas. Despite the validity of many of her criticisms of Eastlake's work, her study does not leave any room for a consideration of the positive aspects of *Hints*.

¹⁶ For example, Rhoda and Agnes Garrett, *Suggestions for House Decoration* (London:Macmillan and Co., 1879), Mary Haweis, *Beautiful Houses*, (London: Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1882), and Mrs Orrinsmith's *The Drawing Room* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1878).

author as an invisible thief plundering the treasures of the 'House Beautiful'. The book itself, published as part of the 'Connoisseur series' by George Bell and Sons, is lavishly illustrated with photographs of pieces from private houses and museums.

As well as echoing many of Eastlake's ideas on the importance of cultivating a proper sense of taste, Marriott Watson's *Art Of The House* also hints at the ways in which women might use the discourse of the aesthetic manuals. As her title suggests, she stresses the artistry involved in interior decoration:

The arrangement of furniture is just as difficult and dangerous an art as landscape gardening, or sonnet-making...The art of innuendo, the study of implication, are no less subtle where the juxtaposition of inanimate matter is concerned than when words are the components to be juggled with (1897:80).

By elevating the work of interior design to an art-form, comparing it to the craft of poetry, Marriott Watson not only bestows a cachet on the practice of house decoration, but also hints at its subversive potential, thereby implying that more than the furniture may be rearranged in the process. The 'difficult and dangerous' art of interior decoration is, like writing, an act which offers the possibility of some kind of creative transformation. Marriott Watson suggests that, far from being known and knowable, the domestic realm is ambiguous and unstable. Furthermore, it remains subject to the control of those who inhabit it: 'you can make what you will of the house you live in' (1897:3). Her work hints at the possibilities for creative expression 'and development in the construction of the 'House Beautiful' (1897:80). Favouring a 'House Beautiful' of a 'homelier complexion' (1897:4), she evokes a place 'replete with rich colours and low tones', which 'allows a...[wide] scope for personal idiosyncracies' (1897:4).

Therefore, although women found themselves imaginatively at odds with the dominant literary movements of the 1880s and 1890s, the cultural

dissemination of those movements gave women 'scope' (1897:4) to reimagine their relation to the domestic sphere. Women writers like Marriott Watson found ways to turn the discourse of aestheticism to their own advantage. Borrowing the imaginative construct of the 'House Beautiful', she reinvisages it for women.¹⁷ Women were beginning to redefine their role outside the home during the later period, challenging the established codes of feminine domesticity. However, Marriott Watson's *Art of the House* suggests that they were also finding ways to challenge those domestic codes from within the home itself.

¹⁷Although the art of choosing and arranging furniture may not sound like a material advancement in the cause of female emancipation, it may well have been rare enough for women to exercise their own taste within the home. In Forster's novel *A Room With a View* (1908), Mrs Honeychurch, whose overly -refined prospective son-in-law, Cecil, has been wincing at the furniture of her house, tells her daughter: "No doubt I am neither artistic nor literary nor intellectual nor musical, but I cannot help the drawing room furniture: your father bought it and we must put up with it, will Cecil kindly remember" (1990:154-55).

Chapter Two

‘Echoes, queries, reactions, afterthoughts’: Nostalgia and Homesickness.

It is as the centralisation and the protectress of this sacred influence [of memory] that Architecture is to be regarded by us with the most serious thought. We may live without her, but we cannot remember without her. How cold is all history, how lifeless all imagery, but that which the living nation writes and the uncorrupted marble bears...there are but two conquerors of the forgetfulness of men, Poetry and Architecture; and the latter in some sort includes the former.

(Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* , 1903: VIII, 224)

Architecture, being a thing partly for use, and only partly for beauty, has a mixed morality of its own.

(Vernon Lee, *Belcaro* , 1880: 28)

Ruskin's contributions to the Victorian cult of home are well-known. In 'Of Queen's Gardens' (1865), he helped to frame the view of home as 'the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt and division' (1905: XVIII, 122). Yet Ruskin is also an important contributor to the architecture of nostalgia in the Victorian period. His writings on buildings continually stress the need to shore up the crumbling face of the past, to preserve and protect old buildings. His work helps to lodge the idea of the old house in the consciousness of the Victorians so that it becomes a symbol of the past, an emblem of stability, and a container of memory for the generations that follow.

In his celebration of Gothic architecture in *Stones of Venice* (1851-3), Ruskin praises the 'complete domesticity' (1904: XII, 43) of the work. Its forms, he argues are still visibly related to domestic architecture. Tracing the earliest development of the church spire he affirms, 'they are literally domestic

roofs...executed on a large scale' (1904: XII, 43). For Ruskin, great architecture begins at home:

all good architecture rises out of good and simple domestic work...therefore, before you attempt to build great churches and palaces, you must build good house doors and garret windows (1904: XII, 43).

However, his emphasis on 'good house doors' and 'garret windows' also suggests a desire for protection. It is as if Ruskin does not feel at home, but must barricade himself in. On one hand this sentiment echoes the separate spheres mentality, a policing of the line between the public and the private. However, it might also be read as a direct reaction to the forces of industrialisation and urbanisation which were changing the face of England during the nineteenth century. The ongoing developments of rural land into urban conurbations, and the increasingly fluid nature of the class system, meant that many people, particularly among the middle classes, moved house frequently (Thompson 1988:171). Furthermore, the life-span of some newly built Victorian houses proved increasingly short in the 'unsettling process' (1988:166) of development which had begun in the 1830s and 1840s. Ruskin's reaction to the increasingly nomadic quality of Victorian life was given in a lecture in 1853:

I believe that the wandering habits which have now become almost necessary to our existence, lie more at the root of our bad architecture than any other character of modern time. We always look upon our houses as temporary lodgings (1904: XII, 72).

Ruskin's preferred solution to the problem of the Victorians' 'wandering habits' is, perhaps unsurprisingly, an aesthetic one. He suggests that the firm foundations provided by good architecture will engender a more general stability. Thus the exterior of the house is viewed not only as a buttress against the outside world--home as 'the shelter..from all terror, doubt and division' (1905: XVIII, 122)--but also as an important emblem of security. The house, Ruskin suggests, should supply rootedness and stability in the face of the tide of urbanisation and progress, a fixed point in the midst of change and instability.

Ruskin's autobiography, *Praeterita*, published in twenty-eight parts between 1885 and 1889, provides many insights into the Victorian cult of home. In a work which is largely silent on the interiors of houses, Ruskin recalls the carpets and wall-papers of his first home in Hunter Street, solely because their patterns were his 'chief resources', due to the absence of 'such things as one saw in toy-shops' (1908: XXXV, 21). His descriptions of his second home in Herne Hill, London, linger over a wonderfully fleshy fairy-tale garden whose 'abundant fruit: fresh, soft amber, and rough-bristled crimson bending the spinous branches' (1908: XXXV, 20) were made, it seems, even more desirable because they were forbidden to him. This garden was sizeable enough for his parents to keep milking-cows and grow fruit and vegetables after the self-sufficient model set out in William Cobbett's pamphlets of the 1820s (Kemp 1991:14). Though this garden appears to Ruskin as a kind of Eden in which the moral temptations appear, as they are wont to do in Victorian literature, as a 'feast of fruit' (Rossetti 1979:I, 34), it was in fact designed to allow his parents to withdraw dependency from the 'goblin wares' of the market, providing them with a further 'buttress' against society.¹⁸

Ruskin inherited something of this suspicion of the tempting wares of the market. His descriptions of the Crystal Palace, erected to house the Great Exhibition of 1851, provide a focus for his political and aesthetic concerns about modern society. The Palace circumscribed the view from Herne Hill, and is characterised in *Praeterita* as a monstrous blot on the landscape, 'possessing no more sublimity than a cucumber frame between two chimneys' (1908: XXXV, 36).
36). Its structure was emblematic of everything Ruskin detested: the division of labour, the machine age, and the impermanence of modern society. The 'hollow bulk' (1908: XXXV, 47)

¹⁸Ruskin's biographer notes that Cobbett's pamphlets, though 'aimed at a different, less wealthy audience than the Ruskins contained his basic ideas (to which the family subscribed): 'don't give up your natural means of subsistence, don't trust in the monetarization of labour and exchange, resist the destruction of nature and custom (1991:14).

of the Palace seemed to foreshadow more developments, making the landscape around it appear 'as three long lumps of clay, on lease for building' (1908: XXXV, 47). It was built from pre-fabricated units and it housed exhibits whose 'accurate mouldings' and 'unerring adjustments' represented, for Ruskin, only the reduction of workers to dehumanized tools, their spirits 'racked into the exactness of a line' (1904: X, 193). The visitors it attracted intruded onto the sacred privacy of the Ruskin family home.¹⁹ He recalls 'flood[s] of pedestrians down the footpath, who left it filthy with cigar ashes' and later, rail passengers who 'roared at the cows, and tore down what branches of blossom they could reach over the palings on the enclosed side' (1908: XXXV, 48) of the garden.

Yet despite Ruskin's reverence for the tenets of Victorian domestic ideology, and the stress he placed on the symbolic importance of the house as both a family home and an emblem of stability and rootedness, there remains, in *Praeterita*, a sense of something missing in his evocations of family life at Herne Hill. Ruskin lived there with his parents from 1823 until 1842, and returned there in later life. *Praeterita* is, in fact, written from the vantage point of his old nursery (1908: XXXV, 11). Despite his obvious affection for this old house, there is a palpable tension between the ideal of home and the reality of his experience. Ruskin frames his childhood along conventional lines, using the register and vocabulary of domestic ideology, recalling the 'steady occupations, the beloved samenesses, and the sacred customs of home' (1908: XXXV, 134). However, describing winter evenings spent in the drawing room at Herne Hill, he recalls sitting by the hearth 'in a little recess, with a table in front of it, wholly sacred to me; and in which I remained in the evenings as an Idol in a niche' (1908: XXXV, 39)²⁰. His parents, he states, were like 'visible powers of

¹⁹ 6, 039, 195 people are estimated to have visited the the Crystal Palace. Thomas Cook negotiated with the railways to organise special trains to transport people to the Exhibition (Thompson 1988:260-1).

²⁰This image of the solitary child in his 'niche', seen but not heard, echoes the descriptions of the young Jane Eyre, 'shrined in double retirement'(Brontë 1975:8) in the thickly-curtained window seat at Gateshead.

nature...no more loved than the sun and the moon: only I should have been annoyed and puzzled if either of them had gone out' (1908: XXXV, 44). What is missing in all these descriptions is any sense of real warmth or unity in this little group of household gods; the suggestion is of a house full of necessary functions, ideological ciphers, even. The hollowness which Ruskin detects in society finds its way into these domestic vignettes. Returning, both physically and emotionally, to the site of his childhood experiences, Ruskin finds an empty structure. Home, it seems, is in some ways a dead letter for him; something which was located elsewhere, outside the family house.²¹

Ruskin's own recollections of home life suggest a mismatch between house and home. His nostalgic survey of his past, conducted from the old nursery at Herne Hill, fails to retrieve or locate a homely memory. Yet the symbolic importance of the house which he bequeathed to his fellow Victorians remained an important focus for a wider historical homesickness which is detectable in many Victorian texts (Chapman 1986: *passim*). The fashion for rather drastic restorations of buildings during the 1850s and 1860s led William Morris to write to *The Athenaeum* in protest. This letter led to the formation of the 'Anti-Scrape' society in 1877 (Mandler 1997:160). For both Ruskin and Morris, the importance of preserving the physiognomy of old buildings was a far-reaching project. Ruskin said of old buildings, 'they are not ours. They belong partly to those who built them, and partly to the generations of mankind who are to follow us' (1903: VIII, 244). He felt that restoration was a falsehood, preferring to see buildings torn down than partially rebuilt: 'pull the building down, throw its stones into neglected corners..if you will; but do it honestly, and do not set up a lie in their place' (1903: VII, 244). Yet this attempt to retain the

²¹Recollections of childhood warmth do surface in *Praeterita* , but mainly in relation to an aunt who lived in Croydon. And it was not just Ruskin, it seems, who looked for this 'homeliness' in the house over the shop in Market Street: 'whenever my father was ill, --and hard work and sorrow had already set their mark on him, --we all went down to Croydon to be petted by my homely aunt' (1908: XXXV, 19). These visits to his aunt are characterised as 'occasional glimpses of the rivers of Paradise' (20), which helped to keep the young Ruskin 'contented' (20).

architectural integrity of old buildings, to keep them free from the false fronts of restoration, was not always successful. Furthermore, Ruskin's championing of the Gothic in *Stones of Venice* (1851-3) led to the over-zealous gothicization of many houses and shop fronts. In *Praeterita*, he indexes some changes to the neighbourhood of Herne Hill, noting 'certain Gothic splendours, lately indulged in by..[his] wealthier neighbours', and a new church which is a 'meagre Gothic one with a useless spire' built 'for the fashion of the thing' (1908: XXXV, 34). His nostalgia for the strength and integrity of Gothic resulted, ironically, in a fashion for architectural quotations of the form which bypassed and negated the very elements which Ruskin valued.

However, for those who championed the preservation of old country houses, there were other problems to be faced. The country house, as a symbol of stability and integrity, represented an aesthetic antidote to the problems of urbanisation and a political contradiction. One couple who wrestled with the contradictions between their attachment to the symbol of the old house and their socialist beliefs were E. Nesbit and Hubert Bland, both founder members of the Fabian Society. They saw their own sixteenth-century estate, Well Hall, steadily encroached upon, and found their emotions about it colliding with their commitments to adequate and affordable housing for workers. The landscape surrounding their house and its grounds changed greatly during the first ten years of their ownership: 'the rows of workmen's cottages....came up to the very walls and trams drove backwards and forwards along the main road behind the gates' (Briggs 1989:321). This image of urban development, with its new houses and transport links to the nearest town, pushing up against the walls of an old country house neatly encapsulates the ambivalence felt about urbanisation and progress. Nesbit's biographer quotes the following exchange between Hubert Bland and Harold Millar, Nesbit's illustrator:

On one occasion when Hubert was grouching about the invasion of cheap houses, Harold Millar, Edith's illstrator, pointed out that, as a socialist,

he ought to have been in favour of them: 'you've been calling for them long enough, and here they are.' (1989:321-2).

As Millar noted, while his remark annoyed Hubert, Edith apparently 'laughed and agreed' (1989:232). Well Hall was of considerable importance to Edith. She revelled in its moated grounds and historic associations, and told stories to friends of the many ghosts which haunted its rooms (Briggs 1989:201).²² Her desire to own the property in an age when most people rented their homes went further than aesthetic appreciation and seems to have been linked to her desire to recover something of the security and stability she associated with her own childhood (Briggs 1989:201). The house was paid for out of Edith's literary earnings and she was to write many of her most famous works there. However, the contradiction between her ownership of this grand old property and her socialist beliefs continued to trouble her. This tension continually resurfaces in her poetry in the shape of houses overrun by dispossessed and displaced others. Thus while the country house was both a link to the past, a focus for nostalgia, and a refuge which must be preserved from the encroaching tide of urbanisation, it remained a political contradiction for some.

In a paper delivered to the Fabian Society in 1907, Bland, casting a cooler retrospective eye over the nostalgia and historical homesickness of the 1880s, returns to these contradictions:

The early eighties was a period of Movements, of coteries, literary, artistic and social...and of Influences.....It is gratifying to one's feeling of self-consequence, it engenders a satisfying sense of superiority, to shut oneself up, as it were, in a little mansion of one's own, and with a few eclectic spirits..We felt that we had had the misfortune to be born in a stupid, vulgar every day world, and so we turned away from it to a little world within a world, a world of poetry, of pictures, of music, of old romance, of strangely designed wallpapers, and of sad-coloured velveteen (1914:284).

²² As Julia Briggs notes, 'the back garden [of Well Hall]...had reputedly been the site of a much older house that had once belonged to the Roper family. Sir Thomas More's favourite daughter Margaret, who married William Roper, was supposed to have brought her father's severed head back there for burial (1989:201).

Bland's description of the various cliques and movements of the eighties demonstrates his awareness that turning away from society to a dream of a world, draped in romance and bathed in nostalgia for other ages, was not without its contradictions. The evocation of the 'world within a world' suggests another version of the siege mentality detectable in Ruskin's writings on domestic architecture. The alienating dislocations of the modern world provoked a search for a more homely home in the past. In a sense, the boundary between the houses beautiful of the 1880s and the 'vulgar' world outside echo Ruskin's apparent desire to barricade himself in. Thus, the boundaries between the ideological home and the world outside were not dissolved during the move to the 'House Beautiful', but were simply reinscribed. However, the ironic detachment of Bland's description suggests that this act of turning away had become, by 1907, something of a self-mocking cliché. What he identifies, albeit belatedly, about the spirit of the eighties is that it was based on a recovery, through art, poetry and even wallpapers, of something that was not only already gone, but that was always secondary, a mediated version of the past.

The architectural styles which marked the late Victorian period echo the historical homesickness which Bland identifies. Indeed, the fashion for a nostalgic quotation of old architectural styles continued even after 'Gothic' additions had become unfashionable. The new 'Queen Anne' style which was in its ascendancy during the 1870s, but which had begun to appear as early as 1862, was itself a style which took some elements--the red brick and sash windows--from the seventeenth century, and improvised others (Girouard 1977: 2). The equal measures of nostalgia and innovation behind this style (usually credited to Philip Webb who helped to design the Red House), make it a typical product of the 1870s, and of the generation who inhabited the end of the late Victorian period. Architecture thus revisited other ages in much the same way as the artistic movements of the period. However, despite the feelings of imaginative tenancy in other ages which these fashions generated, the advent of

the aesthetic movement, and the increasing changes to the solid, mid-Victorian house, resulted in a belated nostalgia for a more recent loss.

The change in tastes over the nineteenth-century had completely altered the look of Victorian interiors. The aesthetic movement, at its height during the 1880s, had influenced the decoration of many homes which the loftier tenets and artistic ideals of the movement had not penetrated. The advent of Art Nouveau was viewed with some suspicion--its skeletal outlines caused one prominent interior designer, Charles Annesley Voysey, to label it the 'Glasgow Spook School' (Gere 1989:44). By the 1890s, with the advent of designers like Rennie Mackintosh, furniture had become a ghost of its former self. In fact, the furniture produced by Mackintosh and Co. was often found to be rather delicate in practice. Though Mackintosh was a 'precise' draughtsman, the finished items were 'frequently rough-hewn and badly assembled' (Duncan 1982:171).²³ Its rather make-shift and rickety appearance may simply have fed the suspicion that these pieces were in some way emblematic of the ephemerality and unsubstantiality of the modern world. This apprehension had been prophesied by Marx, in 1848, in the phrase 'all that is solid melts into air' (1967:83).²⁴ The bewildering shifts in the appearance of the house and its furniture seem to have generated a sense of ambivalence which led to a sense of dislocation: should these ghostly shades be embraced or rejected? The ponderous mid-Victorian furniture had had, after all, a comforting solidity, which provoked feelings of security similar to those produced in Ruskin by 'good house doors' and 'garret windows'. Even Walter Benjamin loved 'snuggling up in his grandmother's

²³Duncan notes that, 'eighty years later', pieces by Mackintosh are often found to be 'structurally unsound, coming apart under the slightest pressure or weight' (1982:171).

²⁴ In *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), Marx describes the 'constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted uncertainty and agitation' as the distinguishing characteristics of the 'bourgeois' epoch (1976:83). The survival of modern industrial society depends, he argues, on the continual creation of 'new wants' (1976:84) and new commodities which render the old obsolete. In this 'epoch', he argues, 'all fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions are swept away, all new formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify' (1976:82). For a discussion of Marx's description of the character of the modern world, see Marshall Berman (1982) *All That is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Shuster).

overstuffed chairs,' and recalled the 'immemorial security of bourgeois furniture'(in Heilbut 1996:25).

Something of this nostalgia for the solid objects and structures of the mid-Victorian period is also detectable in descriptions of modern exteriors. In his chapter on 'Street Architecture' in *Hints On Household Taste* , Eastlake bemoans 'the attempts at architectural display..made in the way of shop-fronts' (1868:19):

However elegant the superstructure may be, it has one drawback; it must rest on nothing, or, at least, apparently on nothing, the aim of every modern dealer being to expose his goods for sale behind a single sheet of plate glass (1868:20).²⁵

Eastlake's reaction to the apparent weightlessness of these shop-fronts, whose bow-windows projected their wares into the line of vision of the passer-by, seems to stem from his dislike of the trickeries which fool the eye, concealing the actual supports: 'iron columns are furtively introduced, and as carefully concealed by milinery, upholstery, or sometimes by craftily-contrived mirrors' (1868:20). These aesthetic sleights of hand cause the upper-half of the building to appear as if it is 'absolutely suspended in the air'(1868:20). Eastlake's dislike of this structure echoes Ruskin's comments sentiments : 'Nothing in architecture is half so painful as the apparent want of sufficient support when the weight above is visibly passive' (1903: VIII, 241). In Ruskinian discourse, the *trompe l'oeil* of the design represents a falsehood. Ruskin traces the decline of Gothic back to the point at which the traceries no longer expressed an affinity with the material from which they were produced. The apparent undulating quality of the traceries of late Gothic architecture made, Ruskin argues, the stone appear 'as yielding as a silken chord'(1903: VIII, 92). Architecture, he writes, may violate truth through such a 'direct falsity of assertion respecting the nature of the material (1903: VIII, 59). In Eastlake's work the apparent instability of modern street architecture is accompanied by doubts about the actual stability of the new

²⁵ As Rachel Bowlby has noted, from the 1850s onwards, 'new inventions in glass technology..[made] possible large expanses of transparent display windows' (1985: 2).

buildings erected in London. Surveying the rapid expansion of the city into the 'meadow-land' (1868:21) which lies around it, he concludes:

it will be a miracle if half the houses which are now being raised in..London do not..tumble down long before their allotted time. Unfortunately, their flimsy construction is not always apparent to an inexperienced eye (1868:22).

This palpable apprehension about the pace and appearance of the modern world, and its accompanying laments for a lost security and stability, displaced onto criticisms of the shape and structures of its habitations and furniture, find quiet echoes in other unusual sources. Rosamund Marriot Watson, who championed the advent of the House Beautiful in her *Art of The House* (1897), allows a nostalgic strain to creep into her descriptions in a section on flower arranging. Discussing the use of hothouse flowers, she describes their appearance: 'the fairest and most decorative of spectres; "like ghosts of pilgrims that have died around the Holy Sepulchre"' (1897:45). Her subtle allusion to a sense of belatedness, engendered by the appearance of these flowers which bloom out of season, and once hallowed a religious grave, are a reminder of what had disappeared in the shift from the home to the House Beautiful. Inhabiting, with apparent confidence, this new aesthetic structure, Marriott Watson cannot quite prevent this awareness of what has gone from colouring her writing. Her works, particularly *Tares* (1884), and *Vespertilia* (1895), are full of autumnal poems of loss and regret. The House Beautiful, then, may be built on the ruins of the home, yet the past continues to haunt this new construction. It is as if the Victorian house, empty of its mid-Victorian clutter, has become an echo chamber, providing accessions of belated emotion for its inhabitants.

In much nostalgic literature of the late Victorian period, the remains of the past seem to survive only as ghostly traces, fair, 'decorative...spectres', who linger around the grave of the home. The sense that there are only shadows left of the past can be detected in a number of texts in which the country house

figures as an emblem of other ages and buried histories. The writer and poet Henry Newbolt wrote a number of novels with a nostalgic theme which were often based on grand country houses he had visited (Chitty 1997:97).²⁶ Newbolt married Margaret Duckworth, whom he met through the couple's mutual friend, the poet and novelist, Mary E. Coleridge. The Newbolts were privileged enough to spend their summers in the country houses of wealthy friends. The sense of imaginative tenancy generated by these visits is recreated in Newbolt's novels. The house in *The Old Country* (1906) is based on the Duckworth family home, Orchardleigh (renamed 'Gardenleigh' in the novel). This novel continually evokes a sense of prior inhabitants: 'Are there no voices but ours in these mossy woods and sunlit gardens, no steps but ours by this lake?' (1906:20). The house in the novel acts as a kind of sounding board for echoes of the past. Newbolt himself spent an 'inappropriate' childhood in the industrial heartland of the Black Country (Chitty 1997:1). His works, which describe houses very different from the vicarage at Bilston in which he spent his childhood (1997:4), implicitly transmit a powerful class longing which seems to be inextricably linked to the nostalgia for old houses. Even while Newbolt searches for the tracks and footprints left by old inhabitants of the houses in his fiction, he is kicking over the traces of his own domestic beginnings. He was 'haunted by a sense of the past' (1997:97) when he visited the country houses of his friends, but that nostalgia always neatly bypassed his own childhood home; its focus was not his own lost childhood, but the lives of other unknown people.

This historical homesickness seeks a more homely home in the past, or in textual dreams. William Morris's *The Earthly Paradise* (1868) evokes a realm set outside the real world, its narrator is a 'Dreamer of dreams' who declares himself 'born out of my due time' (1910:1) His sense of alienation and dislocation from the present finds solace in the pleasure of a dream, a dream

²⁶ Newbolt was later to become famous as the author of the popular ballad, 'Drake's Drum' (1896), which caught the attention of several eminent men of letters including Robert Bridges, the poet laureate, and Edmund Gosse.

which is false, in Homer's sense, 'a murmuring rhyme' which 'Beats with light wing against the ivory gate'. The paradise here is an aesthetic realm, a 'shadowy isle of bliss' (1910:1). Male writers of the period embraced this shadowy aesthetic. It provided an escape from the real. It is this kind of nostalgia, whose focus is a shadowy, textual house, located away from the real, which Pater defines as inverse homesickness in his essay 'William Morris', describing the the secret of enjoyment of his poetry as:

that inversion of homesickness known to some, that incurable thirst for the sense of escape, which no actual form of life satisfies, no poetry, even, if it be simple and spontaneous (1868: 300-1).

However, this definition, positing aesthetic poetry as the opposite, the inversion, of homesickness, implies a neat relationship between the two terms. In Morris, the sense of nostalgia,²⁷ borne out of a social, aesthetic and political dissatisfaction with the present, is not so much the opposite of homesickness, as a displaced version of it. The homesickness of aesthetic poetry relocates its desire, its lost object or 'home', beyond the territory of the immediate or the experienced past. Aesthetic poetry may seek to escape the referent of home-- 'that incurable thirst...which no actual form of life satisfies' (Pater 1901:76)-- replacing it with the shady references of poetic language, but it does not escape the condition of homesickness. The followers and poetic precursors of aestheticism who sought to drape their surroundings in lush aesthetic dreams, were, as Hubert Bland suggests, looking for a 'mansion of their own'; their act of turning away was itself borne 'out of an aesthetic homesickness, a homesickness which exchanged the object of home for a shadowy house of poetry. Ruskin's quasi-theological celebration of the home as a sanctuary in *Sesame and Lilies* thus finds a belated expression in aesthetic celebrations of houses and realms of art and poetry. Graham Hough has described Ruskin as

²⁷ The term 'homesickness' originated in the late seventeenth century, defining a condition to which Swiss mercenaries were considered particularly prone. Its symptoms included melancholia, loss of appetite, and, occasionally, attempts at suicide. For a discussion of the history and etymology of the term, see Fred Davis (1979) *Yearning For Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: The Free Press).

'the whole from which many late nineteenth century ideals...are broken fragments' (Hough 1961:18), and the displaced nostalgia attached to aestheticism and decadence might be seen as shards broken from the cult of home which he helped to foster. Thus the increasingly perverse and parodic siege mentalities of the House Beautiful and the decadent hothouse follow logically on from Ruskin's apparent desire to barricade himself in.

The revisions of homesickness in aesthetic poetry seek to relocate home in a realm of art, or, as in Rossetti's *The House of Life*, to assimilate and rearrange life into the pattern of art (Chai 1990:11). The boundary between these houses and realms of art and poetry, and the real world they sought to evade, is a threshold, Pater suggests, on which the work of art is forged. It is a threshold presided over by the operation of a tyrannical subjective consciousness. In his evocations of the House Beautiful, Pater describes the process by which the externality of the real is, through a process of internalisation and assimilation, transcribed by the subjective consciousness. Even historians, he argues, 'moving full of poignant sensibility amid the records of the past, each, after his own sense--modifies--who can tell where and to what degree?' (Pater 1901:*Appreciations*, 9). This process of transcribing our 'sense of' the world, is, for Pater, a prerequisite for the artist, and the means by which the outside world enters the House Beautiful, whose catalogue of art works are testament to the fact that 'all beauty is in the long run only *fineness* of truth (1901:*Appreciations*, 10), worn down by the successive generations of artists who contribute to its treasures. The threshold between the world and the work is the point where inside yields to outside, and vice versa. What is created in that mingling of impressions of outer and inner, objective reality and subjective consciousness, is something which, forged on the threshold, is propelled away from the world by the refining work of the 'alchemy of subjectivity' (Iser 1987:27). Yet the exchange which takes place on the threshold between the world and the work is always a recreation, a textual

echo. While this provides an escape from the world, it relocates the textual house on the side of the shadows.

The aesthetic poets which Pater championed found consolations in the secondary nature of the houses they inhabited. However, a witty short story by Richard Le Gallienne, 'Life In Inverted Commas' (1895), suggests more disturbing implications of this fascination with the echoes and traces of the real. The story opens with its narrator witnessing the arrest of a plagiarising artist, an artist who had stolen from the narrator's own work. Yet his pleasure at this triumph of poetic justice soon wears off as he walks home. As he passes through streets and past buildings, he perceives that everything he sees and says on his journey appears to be accompanied by the presence of quotation marks. Walking towards his house, he finds it, too, is 'wearing inverted commas--2 on the chimney and 2 on the gate' (1895:23-4). His wife similarly sports these marks. Haunted by the oppressions of these indicators of derivation, which dog 'every move' of his wife's 'dear head' (1895:24), the man grows suicidal, realising that his 'whole life' is 'one hideous mockery of originality' (1895:24). However, even though suicide appears to be the only option, he realises, in time, that there is 'nothing quite so commonplace' (1895:26). The tyranny of this secondary world is only overcome through an accommodation, even an embrace of the ghostly quality of life, the self, and the self's thoughts and deeds. Le Gallienne's narrator arrives at an appropriately fin-de-siècle solution to this problem, deciding that if he cannot possess the substance, he will enjoy the pleasures of the shadows left to him:

were not these tender diminutives all the more precious because their vowels had been rounded for us by the sweet lips of lovers dead and gone?--sainted jewels, still warm from the beat of tragic bosoms which their kisses had freighted with immortal meanings (1895:26).

Thus, Le Gallienne's narrator fills the void left by the loss of presence and originality with a hymn to the leftover traces and echoes, the tokens of that lost presence. Le Gallienne's story wittily figures out the implications of the

displaced nostalgia the object of which is a shadowy version of home. The 'house' both stands in for, and triggers an awareness of a fundamental absence: the absence of an original home. The loss of presence and security was a loss felt not just on a metaphorical level, but also on a metaphysical one. This loss is articulated by Pater in his essay on Prosper Mérimée (1890). Discussing Mérimée's apprehension of the absence of anything beyond the physical world, he links, following Heine, this scepticism with the political disillusionment of the early nineteenth century:

Napoleon, sealing the tomb of the Revolution, had foreclosed many a problem, extinguished many a hope, in the sphere of practice....In the mental world too a great outlook had lately been cut off. After Kant's criticism of the mind, its pretensions to pass beyond the limits of individual experience seemed as dead as those of old French royalty (Pater 1901: *Miscellaneous Studies* , 11).

For Mérimée, born in 1803, Pater argues, the effect was great: 'Almost everywhere he could detect the hollow ring of fundamental nothingness under the apparent surface of things' (1901: *Miscellaneous Studies*, 14). Thus, Pater argues, his works, those 'singularly sculpturesque creations' (1901: *Miscellaneous Studies*, 15), are always surrounded by the 'empty space' (1901: *Miscellaneous Studies*, 15) of that awareness. However, though Mérimée defiantly includes the absence he detects under the 'apparent surface' of the real, Pater, proceeding with more caution, asserts that:

Fundamental belief gone, in almost all of us, at least some relics remain--queries, echoes, reactions, afterthoughts; and they help to make an atmosphere, a mental atmosphere, hazy perhaps, yet with many secrets of soothing light and shade (1901: *Miscellaneous Studies*, 15).

Pater here suggests that most let go of religious belief through a process of slow negotiation, and emerge clutching the relics, the souvenirs, of presence. The word 'relics' stands out as something tangible and bodily, something which indicates loss, but is designed to fill an absence. Unlike the 'queries, echoes, reactions, afterthoughts', it is something one can touch--representing an attempt to turn the sensible into the tangible. But there is something else about these

'echoes' and 'afterthoughts' which disrupt our sense of temporality and linearity. They emerge after the fact, after religion has become understood as fiction. They are thus anachronistic, and survive (or are saved) from a shrine which has not only been dismantled, but is reckoned never to have been present: 'Fundamental belief gone...'. These relics are always echoes of an absence.

In his book *Real Presences*, George Steiner theorises the fin-de-siècle apprehension of absence, arguing that the nineteenth century is marked by a series of turning-points in literary works from which return is impossible. Citing Mallarmé's 'disjunction of language from external reference' and Rimbaud's 'deconstruction of the first person singular' as examples, he states:

We can, I think, cite certain things said or unsaid irretrievably, in which Western consciousness, in respect of its literacy and commitment to an 'examined life' (the Socratic groundrule), moves house (1989:94).

The assertions of Rimbaud and Mallarmé turn language itself into a false front which stands for nothing beyond itself, conveying, in its play, only a sense of referential absence: the word 'rose' affirms only 'l'absence de tout rose' (Mallarmé in Steiner 1989:94). While Pater tentatively inhabits the 'house' built on the apprehension of absence, he does so with a sense of discreet homesickness, betrayed by the presence of those 'relics' and 'afterthoughts'. Pater is in many ways a transitional writer whose 'destined theme' was transition itself (Donoghue 1995:307). What he rescues from Mérimée's 'empty space[s]' are 'relics', things which are in-between presence and absence, traces which inhabit a chain of indeterminate signifiers, ghosts which only ever generate a provisional presence. The apprehension of this gulf between the words and their lost referents suggests, as Le Gallienne's story implies, that the only possible way of reclaiming or revisiting the past is through the mediations of language. The textual recreations of the past will never forge a link back to the real, but will only ever 'stand for' its absence (Steiner 1989:98). While Pater embraces the freedoms offered by the enfranchisement of language from the

'servitude of representation' (Steiner 1989:97), he retains a provisional nostalgia for the 'relics' of presence.

Pater's essay 'The Child in The House', was first published in 1878. In his letters, Pater describes the work as 'the germinating, original source, specimen, of all my imaginative work' (1970:xxix). Its first title was 'The House And The Child', and this separation helps to explain something about the piece itself. In a letter of 1878, Pater wrote to the editor of Macmillan's Magazine saying that he wished this first essay to be part of a series of 'imaginary portraits'. These portraits would each, in their turn, he hoped, engender a speculative curiosity in the reader about the subject of each, so that they might enquire 'what became of him?' (1970:30). However, the 'House' of the title provides a fit subject for speculation itself. The essay is a work of imaginary autobiography. Its theme is the process by which early childhood impressions shape the imagination and the artistic sensibility, tracing back the threads of style, the process by which the child's appreciation of beauty shapes the aesthetic sense of the man.

Florian Deleal, the 'child' of the title, looks back, from the distance of middle age, on his childhood home. The piece consists of little more than the recollection of a series of impressions which have shaped his adult consciousness, an investigation of the mental architecture of a 'house of thought' (1901: *Miscellaneous Studies*, 184). However, this essay is not simply a nostalgic retrospective. Rather than focusing on the 'steady occupations, the beloved samenesses, and the sacred customs of home' (Ruskin 1908: XXXV, 134), Pater dwells upon the shifts and changes in the child's apprehensions of the house. The essay ends with a recollection of the day the child came to leave home. Far from dreading this day, he longs for it, 'jealously counting the days till the time fixed for departure should come' (1901: *Miscellaneous Studies*, 195). In his haste to leave he forgets a caged bird and returns to the 'closed house' (1901: *Miscellaneous Studies*, 196) to retrieve it. The house, bereft of occupants, has an aspect like 'the face of one dead' (1901: *Miscellaneous*

Studies, 196). As he rescues the bird, the realisation of his loss dawns 'capriciously' upon him, instilling, apparently by chance, a sense of 'homesickness' (1901: *Miscellaneous Studies*, 196) which he retains for the rest of his life.

This piece may have foundations in 'actual recollections' (Monsman 1977: 75), but it presents an idealized picture of Pater's childhood, excluding the 'inessential and incongruous aspects' (1977:75). Writing on Pater before any trustworthy biographies or collections of letters had been published, Richard Aldington notes that if one were to look for biographical hints in his own works, the impression derived would imply 'an imposing background of impoverished aristocrats living in old manor houses' (1968:2). There is, however, a huge discrepancy between the 'House' of the title--an old manor house--and the collection of small suburban villas in which Pater lived. The discrepancy between the villa in Enfield and this 'old house' with its 'element of French descent' (1901: *Miscellaneous Studies*, 174) reveals Pater's class longings. This imaginary portrait is a typically Paterian evasion, representing a self-conscious aestheticizing of memory.

For Pater, a writer who, as critics have noted, was indifferent to 'beginnings' (Iser 1987:79), memory is a creative process rather than a spontaneous act. The mental return home in the essay is to a 'half-spiritualised house' that is 'half, tint and trace and accident of homely colour and form, from the wood and the bricks, half, mere soul-stuff, floated thither from who knows how far' (1901: *Miscellaneous Studies*, 173):

With the image of the place so clear and favourable upon him, he fell to thinking of himself therein, and how his thoughts had grown up to him. In that half-spiritualised house he could watch the better, over again, the gradual expansion of the soul which had come to be there (1901: *Miscellaneous Studies*, 173).

In an intriguing shift, the house is spiritualised as the notion of the soul is despiritualised. The description of the thought as something that grows up 'to'

rather than 'in' the mind suggests its origin and meaning are indeterminate: the thought is othered, coming from outside. The self-consciousness with which memory is allowed to perform its retrospective elaborations suggests that Pater is at ease in this ghostly, secondary house. The house in this essay is not a solid object, inhabited through the replay of memory, but a structure which is self-consciously dogged by inverted commas. As in *Praeterita*, there is a mismatch, a tension between house and home. Yet the line between the two in Pater's essay is drawn between the traces of the real, which lodge, in their 'homely' (1901: *Miscellaneous Studies*, 173) accidental way in the mind, and the aesthetic structure which houses them. While Ruskin apprehends the absence of homely warmth in *Praeterita*, Pater adds aesthetic finishing touches, restoring the home to a house of memory

with tints more musically blent on wall and floor, and some finer light and shadow running in and out along its curves and angles, and with all its carving daintier (1901: *Miscellaneous Studies*, 172).

Pater's house is thus bathed in the comparative 'finer light' cast by his aesthetic mind.

The recovery of the past is not Pater's primary aim, and memory, in this essay, goes beyond ordinary retrospect :

He calls it memory, though he might just as well have called it the mind in its enhancing or transfiguring character. The walls and doors appear as in a dream, free of empirical duty...The purpose of memory in his fiction is not to reclass an old experience but to create a new one, acting upon the fiat of dreams, visions, fears, desires, absolute because personal (Donoghue 1995:181-2).

The 'new experience' is the transfigured work of art, the 'finer truth' which has shed any claims or duties to reality (1995:182). Thus Florian finds, through the accidental retrospective of a dream, that the 'material objects' of his 'old house' have actually 'become a part' of him: 'inward and outward being woven through each other into one inextricable texture' (1901: *Miscellaneous Studies*, 173). Furthermore, the boundary between memory, dream and text extends back

somewhat further than the childhood of the boy. An attic in the house reveals itself to be 'an infinite, unexplored wonderland of childish treasures, glass beads, empty scent bottles still sweet, thrum of coloured silks'(1901: *Miscellaneous Studies*, 175). This attic, which represents the lumber-room of consciousness in Pater's 'house of thought', is intriguing. Despite his typical disclaimer-- 'childish treasures'--the things collected here have the air of aesthetic trinkets, though there is an innocence about them, if only because they are empty. However, the presence of the lingering sweetness suggests a residuality, as if the mind is inhabited not only by the ghosts of its own memory, but by the leftover traces of previous occupants.

The suggestion of residual presences is furthered by Pater's description of the mind's indexing of impressions, the process by which the 'sensible things' of childhood 'figure themselves on the white paper, the smooth wax of our ingenuous souls' (1901: *Miscellaneous Studies*, 177). Pater's evocation of the processes of memory is indebted to De Quincey's description of the palimpsestic quality of the brain in the *Confessions* (1821), whose memories are retained as 'secret inscriptions' (1985:69), covered and uncovered by accidents of thought and incident: 'veiled or unveiled', De Quincey insists, these 'inscriptions' remain 'for ever' (1985:69). However, the concidences of expression go beyond Pater's borrowing of De Quincey's palimpsest; other echoes of De Quincey's work are detectable in 'The Child In The House'. For instance, De Quincey's memoir of childhood, *Suspiria De Profundis*, is structured around the pivotal experience of the death of his sister. This event opens up 'worlds of death and darkness' in the house which 'never again' close (1985:92). De Quincey's Blakean metaphor for this newly acquired knowledge is of a worm gnawing at his heart--a 'worm that could not die' (1985:107). At the funeral the 'coffin is lowered into its home', and the grave becomes the house's macabre double. This childhood experience engenders a sense of exclusion from the home: 'I was shut out forever' (1985:108).

Pater's essay inhabits De Quincey's palimpsestic model, so that the sight of a grave, which induces an awareness of mortality in the child, resurrects the emotions expressed in *Suspiria*. In 'The Child in the House', the freshly-dug grave of a child opens up a similar abyss in the child's imagination. The open grave which Florian encounters in the churchyard-- 'a dark space on the brilliant grass'--brings the death of his father home to him: 'No benign, grave figure in beautiful soldier's things any longer abroad in the world for his protection' (1901: *Miscellaneous Studies*, 191). As in *Suspiria*, the child's home is altered, haunted by this knowledge. Hearing the tales of homeless ghosts who seek asylum in their old houses, the child assimilates these superstitious relics to an awareness of the absence of his father:

All night the figure sat beside him in the reveries of his broken sleep, and was not quite gone in the morning--an odd, irreconcilable new member of the household, making the sweet familiar chambers unfriendly and suspect by its uncertain presence (1901: *Miscellaneous Studies*, 191).

The ghost which migrates into the house in Pater's essay is a homeless presence, a 'fugitive' (1901: *Miscellaneous Studies*, 191), a relic left-over from the child's attempt to realise the absence of his father. The ghost haunts the absence left by the death of Florian's father. Yet the ghost itself is suggested by the tales told by an old woman in the village who had 'seen one of the dead sitting beside her' (1901: *Miscellaneous Studies*, 191). The haunting is not so much a projection as a re-projection, an 'afterthought'. This sense of belatedness is also present in the description of the homesickness which arises, almost perversely, when the child, who has left his old home so urgently-- 'in his great desire to reach the new place'--leaves a pet bird behind and returns to rescue it. It is this return, after his original departure, which retrieves the emotion of homesickness:

the aspect of the place touched him like the face of one dead; and a clinging back towards it came over him...And so, with the bird found, but himself in an agony of homesickness, thus capriciously sprung up

within him, he was driven quickly away (1901: *Miscellaneous Studies*, 196).

Here, homesickness is characterised as a belated recognition of loss, a 'capricious' emotion which is intertwined with the action of leaving, which is inextricable from the desire to escape. Furthermore, homesickness is described in physical terms as a 'clinging back' to the old house--a phrase which suggests a childlike abandonment of self, and which sits oddly with the assertive self who is desperate to leave.

What these borrowed, textual 'memories' and belated emotions suggest is that Pater may only retrace his steps to a reproduced version of 'the *old house*' (1901: *Miscellaneous Studies*, 174) which, in turn, is built upon the shifting ground of De Quincey's palimpsest. The home rests upon things not fully covered over. The previous writings, like the previous owners of the house, in De Quincey's terms, 'had seemed to be displaced' but were 'not displaced' (1985:145). We have no true originary home, Pater suggests. The home is a 'trace', the 'origin of the origin' (Derrida 1976: 61), constantly revealing layers of foundations beneath itself. What Pater does is to convey the sense that the return home is a fiction--it becomes textual, and we end up in someone else's 'old house'. Thus the homesickness which dawns 'capriciously' (1901: *Miscellaneous Studies*, 196) upon the child is yet another residual emotion, the legacy, via De Quincey, of Romanticism. In Pater's essay the house itself is always secondary, something built on the foundations of other texts, something overlaid with the recollections of others.

Yet, we might ask, what exactly do the ghosts and relics left over in Pater's work suggest? On one hand, the very presence of such ghosts seems both anachronistic and uncharacteristic. For Pater, a Lucretian materialist whose feet are placed, with due provisionality, on the shifting surface of the modern world, would seem to have outgrown the need for ghosts or relics of homesickness. So are these ghosts enacting a Freudian return of all that Pater has repressed? There

would be a certain irony to that explanation, as if Pater has ransacked the grave and the house with the confidence that there are no ghosts and unwittingly released them. On the other hand, perhaps these ghosts, the residual emotions of nostalgia and homesickness, are merely aestheticised relics that the relative spirit can no longer experience as full emotion, but only as fragments, 'fineness' of emotion. What is haunting 'The Child in the House' are the ghostly relics of distanced and displaced emotions; those souvenirs and tokens of presence which Pater has brought, self-consciously, from the foreign country of the past. These relics, understood as inhabiting the mind, emerge as partly a projection, as if the fugitive spirit of the modern world must replay those 'relics, queries, echoes and afterthoughts', in its own mind, must haunt itself. These relics and echoes which return in that strange temporal sense as 'afterthoughts' in the modern age trouble Pater's aestheticism, his conception of a materialist universe. Materialism, in Pater's work, is haunted by its own loss.

T.S. Eliot picks up on this tendency in Pater, quoting his words on Coleridge, but applying them to their author: 'Pater represents more positively than Coleridge of whom he wrote the words, 'that inexhaustible discontent, languor and homesickness..the chords of which ring through our modern literature' (1960:391). The tone of Eliot's essay suggests blame, as if Pater is the architect of the modern condition of homesickness through his desecration of the shrines which housed the spirit. For there is a strange paradox about Pater; despite the fact that he appears to be very much 'at home' in the relativist, materialist modern world, where all 'melts under our feet' (1868: 311), he carries homesickness with him as a kind of belated memento, a *memento mori* perhaps, signifying the death of, the absence of, home. This strange ambiguity about the house continues to haunt texts up to and beyond Modernism. The house has lost its presence, but has not quite overcome its ghosts.

Chapter Three

The Haunted House: Rossetti, Marriott Watson, Nesbit.

There are ruins and ruins, --ruins which have lost their ghosts, and gone back to be mere unhaunted bits of wood and stone, fragments that Nature has claimed again, and re-enchanted--and other ruins over which there broods a humming sense of life that time cannot silence.

(Mary E. Coleridge, *Non-Sequitur* (1900: 179))

Several poems from Rossetti's 1862 collection *Goblin Market and Other Poems* set up a curious relation between the speaker and 'home'. 'Echo', 'At Home' and the long poem 'From House to Home' explore a strange borderland between house and home. This territory is often a place between life and death, earth and heaven, in which the speaker lingers, confronting herself as a displaced subject or a journeying soul who has been distracted from her spiritual goal. These poems set up a tension between the lure of an earthly paradise and an awareness of the soul's true 'home'. The proper journey's end of Rossetti's travelling speakers is something which is always there in these poems, but as a knowledge which has been suppressed in some way, so that it emerges as something remembered towards the end. In 'From House To Home', the 'house' of the poem is a dream-like castle, 'glittering and frail' (Rossetti 1979 I :82), in whose 'stately' grounds the speaker lingers, postponing her journey towards the heavenly 'home' of the title. This poem asks a plaintive question, one which is relevant not only to Rossetti, but to the later Victorian women poets who follow her lead, dramatising their own returns to old houses or building castles in the air only to be denied entry or to witness their ruin: 'Why raise the fair delusion to the skies/But to be dashed again?' (Rossetti 1979: I 82). What haunts both Rossetti's work and that of her successors is the tension between house and

home. Their poetic inhabitations of the house are always compromised by the uneasy imaginative link between women and the home.

For the greater part of 'From House to Home', the speaker is caught in a limbo between earth and heaven, lingering in a strange pastoral or 'pleasance' (1979: I, 82), a place of postponement and delay, which keeps her from the inevitable 'goal':

The first was like a dream thro' summer heat,
 The second like a tedious numbing swoon,
 While the half-frozen pulses lagged to beat
 Beneath a winter moon.

"But," says my friend, "what was this thing and where?"
 It was a pleasure-place within my soul;
 An earthly paradise supremely fair
 That lured me from the goal.

The first part was a tissue of hugged lies;
 The second was its ruin fraught with pain:
 Why raise the fair delusion to the skies
 But to be dashed again?

(1979: I, 82)

The first stanza's definitions are understood, implicitly, rather than explicitly, as descriptions of 'house' and 'home'. The 'house' seems to represent a secular paradise while the second is the heavenly 'home' where the soul must repose.

However, as Jerome McGann points out:

That "first" and that "second" are never actually located or identified in the poem. They remain cryptic words to the end and stand as signs of the poem's own portentous yet finally mysterious title...In the end, we will be able to interpret it, but only on the following conditions: that we recognise the arbitrariness--the semiology of the interpretation (1987:12).

'House' and 'home' are provisional terms, provisional destinations; they remain subject to the shifting register of the poem's language. The ambiguity of the terms emerges in the revisions of the third stanza. The 'dream' of the 'first' is

recognised as a 'tissue' woven of deceit, and the 'second' as its negation and 'ruin'. Yet even in this recognition of the necessity of renunciation, the speaker recalls the soul's dalliance in the 'first part' its tissue of hugged lies', revelling, as indeed the poem does, in its garden of 'flowers and fruit', of exotic animals, and 'calls and recalls and echoes of delight' (1979 : I, 83).

The 'house' in the poem seems to represent an idea of earthly paradise; the speaker's 'summer dream' takes place in the 'stately' grounds of a castle. The garden is the real scene of the speaker's dalliance, and the speaker's journey through its 'earthly paradise' makes up the main body of the poem. The journey is, as Dolores Rosenblum has noted, a journey of gradual 'estrangement' (1986:87). To get 'home', the speaker must endure the destruction of the garden. Yet where 'home' is in this poem is, perhaps, never absolutely clear. Although by the end of the poem the speaker resides with God, and although the implicit design of the poem signals that it moves 'from house to home', the sense of where the speaker is 'at home' remains questionable. Rosenblum articulates this in terms of the garden and its relation to the female self, comparing the poem to *Goblin Market* :

Both poems offer similar definitions of the female garden: it can be possessed only temporarily; it is defined by loss and lack; and it is ravaged both by the exertion of power and the withdrawal of power, both the eating of the fruits and their denial.....the garden of self-sufficiency and self-possession is impossible to maintain (1986:88-89).

Thus the garden, for the woman poet, is a scene of 'desire and renunciation', an allegory for the 'shift from childhood to adulthood', and one particularly appropriate to Rossetti herself, whose brother-poet's own expansive poetic home dwarfs her 'much smaller and sparser territory' (Rosenblum 1986:90). What is interesting in the comparison with a male aesthetic poet, as Pater defined him, is that Rossetti shares his inverse homesickness (Pater 1868:300) . She wants to linger in this garden, this 'earthly paradise', yet recognises that her stay there must always be short, that the 'goal' of her journey

cannot be postponed too long. The 'inversion of homesickness' is the quality which Pater defined as 'the incurable thirst for the sense of escape, which no actual form of life satisfies, no poetry even, if it be merely simple and spontaneous' (1868:300-1). Pater focuses on the pre-Raphaelite poets who construct and inhabit their own 'house of life', a house which they possess as an antidote to more homely and familiar poetic dwellings, a house which provides them with an aesthetic home away from home. Viewed in Paterian terms, Rossetti's 'house' is a similarly evasive and escapist. Intriguingly, the speaker's visionary double, who appears after the disappearance of the male angel, has (pre) Paterian eyes which are 'like some fire-enshrining gem' (1979: I, 85). Yet Rossetti's own brief tenancy in this earthly paradise designates her as a more plaintive figure, an intermittent aesthete forced to view the ruin of her own house of life and poetry. For Rossetti, this borrowed territory must ultimately be renounced. It is only ever a stage on a journey. It is not the 'goal' itself as it is for the 'brotherhood'.

The 'lure' of the earthly paradise in Rossetti's poem is the lure of a place which is, paradoxically, both a female poetic home and the polar opposite of 'home'. That which lures the speaker from home is something which the woman poet can indulge in very briefly. Yet the longing for possession is there in Rossetti's poem: 'My castle stood of white transparent glass/ Glittering and frail with many a fretted spire,' (1979 : I, 82). The use of the personal pronoun here designates the castle as the poet's own. However, although the greater part of her poem is given over to this place, its language hugging the 'tissue of...[its] lies', the garden is, after all, only a stage on the journey 'from house to home'. The title signals the self-deception of the speaker, assuring the reader that this dalliance with 'inverse homesickness' will be a brief indulgence before the soul re-routes its journey. The acknowledgement of the soul's true 'home', which begins in the second stanza-- 'An earthly paradise supremely fair / That lured

me from the goal'--is picked up when the angelic figure, who appeared as an intermittent companion, turns away from her:

Running miles and miles he went,
 But once looked back to beckon with his hand
 And cry: "Come home, O love, from banishment:
 Come to the distant land."--

(1979: I, 84)

'Home' here is a 'distant land', but one which the speaker must inevitably move towards. And the recognition of this is characterised throughout the poem in terms of a belated duty. The definitions of the first stanza foreshadow this characterisation. The 'second' stage of the journey of the title is described as being 'like a tedious numbing swoon,/While the half-frozen pulses lagged to beat/Beneath a winter moon'(1979: I, 84). These lines designate this as a stage of catching up. The speaker must gain the ground lost through her dalliance. The 'beat' of the pulse which lags behind under a 'winter moon' seems to acknowledge that the self too has been suspended by this detour on the journey. And the association of the moon, which is wintry now, but which will inevitably recover its wan appearance, genders the subject and her journey's end.

This sense of belatedness, of a suppressed inevitability, is what characterises the mood of the poem. The question which the third stanza asks so plaintively 'Why raise the fair delusion to the skies/But to be dashed again?' is the key question of the poem. The 'house' of the title is not a private house of domestic duty, but a poetic one, an imaginative space which may be revelled in for a while, but which must, ultimately, be renounced. For Rossetti, the 'house' is a place of postponement and delay, the garden in which she lingers signifying an inevitably doomed attempt to dodge the 'goal' of salvation. She constructs a poetic 'house' which can only ever be a temporary lodging. The structure of the 'house', 'glittering and frail', is a sign of its ephemerality. Its inevitable ruin lies its very foundations:

My castle stood of white transparent glass
 Glittering and frail with many a fretted spire,

But when the summer sunset came to pass
 It kindled into fire
 (1979: I, 82)

Thus Rossetti is both the dreamer and the destroyer of her own house of poetry. The initial image of it is coupled with the image of its own destruction. This destructive impulse is woven in and through Rossetti's poetic creation. What the poem uncovers is what Rosenblum has called 'the asceticism of Rossetti's aesthetic' 1986:85). The 'house' 'is a place which must be destroyed and renounced, and the poet must re-define herself by and through 'what remains' (1986:88).

The belated remembrance of the goal of 'home' in Rossetti's poem is not borne out of nostalgia. 'Home' is not returned to, but journeyed towards, a future prospect which is compact of religious and metaphysical significance (the truer housing place of the soul). And it is this fact which helps to explain the sense in which home is 'remembered' by the 'heart' (88), but not the feet. What is remembered is less a place than a locus of value and duty. So, in Rossetti's poem, home is something which the woman must suppress (albeit momentarily) in order to gain any creative ground, ground which must, ultimately be given up, destroyed, and remapped elsewhere. And 'home' as a destination is, for her, religiously determined, another fact which separates her from the male writers. The gendered aspect of the possibilities of this indulgence in inverse homesickness is something which Pater, with his eye on the pre-Raphaelites, takes for granted. For Rossetti, on the other hand, the house of poetry is both an aesthetic evasion of home and a dereliction of duty. Her poem remains ultimately committed to the goal of 'home'.

But there is another text here which frames Rossetti's journey 'from house to home', and that is Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1684), another text which links Rossetti and Pater. Her title is an echo of the sub-title of his work, *From This World to That Which Is to Come*, and she borrows its shift in tense. Setting her poem against Bunyan's title helps to explain further the sense of

'home' as something ahead of the speaker, rather than something behind her. It is this sense which is missing from the journey in Pater's 'The Child in the House'. The house in his essay has been stripped of Christian association, and both the journey which Florian embarks on, and his return to the 'old house'(1901:*Miscellaneous Studies* , 174) are no longer religiously oriented destinations. Both Pater and Rossetti may borrow from John Bunyan--Pater's lifting of the phrase 'The House Beautiful' is an obvious example--but he does so with the instinct of a collector, rather than a reluctant believer. Pater does not inhabit the text and its mapped-out journey in the way that Rossetti does. Her use of this (male) structure allows her a narrative space in which to rehearse her own (female) pattern of that journey, offering a nuanced version of it which ends up, dragged both by form and faith, in its proper home.

For Rossetti, the home is not simply the opposite of the house of poetry. Creativity does not end when her speaker enters its gates, but it, and the self, must be remade in terms of what Rosenblum has defined as 'a female aesthetic' of 'desire and renunciation' (1986:88). This element may be summed up by two stanzas towards the end of the poem:

Therefore, O friend, I would not if I might
 Rebuild my house of lies, wherein I joyed
 One time to dwell: my soul shall walk in white,
 Cast down but not destroyed.

Therefore in patience I possess my soul;
 Yea, therefore as a flint I set my face,
 To pluck down, to build up again the whole--
 But in a distant place.

(1979: I, 87-8)

Rossetti's poem ends with this act of simultaneous destruction and creation. The soul, re-imagined outside the garden (or inside its ruins), has gained some agency, 'my soul shall walk in white/ Cast down but not destroyed', and the woman has regained possession of it. But the soul is only re-possessed through the destruction of the garden of pleasure, and must remake its home in a 'distant

place' that the heart 'remembers' yet. The speaker is left in limbo, she 'walks in white' towards this ultimate goal, which the poem promises 'tomorrow'. What frames the ending in this poem, and points towards the final destination of 'home', is the biblical imagery of salvation through suffering, and the promise of the soul's life after death. 'Home', for Rossetti, is the future place of the soul, and one must 'move house' to get there. The answer to that question 'Why raise the fair delusion to the skies/But to be dashed again?' seems to reside with the promise of this eventual 'home', the goal which has been suppressed and then recovered. What this means is that there is an end beyond the poem, a distant goal, a home for the speaker beyond this state of limbo. The self remains among the ruins of the 'house' in Rossetti's poem, the speaker is still engaged in a creative act, although her house of poetry must be remade and relocated.

This movement between the two locations of earthly house and spiritual home is repeated in another poem from Rossetti's 1862 volume. In 'At Home', Rossetti retraces her steps, travelling this time from home to house:

When I was dead, my spirit turned
 To seek the much frequented house:
 I passed the door, and saw my friends
 Feasting beneath green orange boughs;
 From hand to hand they pushed the wine,
 They sucked the pulp of plum and peach;
 They sang, they jested, and they laughed,
 For each was loved of each

(1979: I, 28)

The arresting use of the past tense in the first line catches the speaker up in a curious limbo. By rehearsing her own death in the past tense, rather than imagining it as a future event, she finds herself in both a place and a tense which she cannot get back from. She cannot go through the door, but passes it, linking her own passing explicitly with her estrangement from the house. This sense of her own lack of connection is set against her erstwhile friends who collectively devour a summer feast of fruit, passing wine 'from hand to hand'. 'They' are

linked both actively and grammatically in a way that excludes the speaker. The last two stanzas continue this exclusion, leaving the speaker to listen to their plans which, conducted in the future tense, necessarily leave her out:

“Tomorrow,” said they, strong with hope,
 And dwelt upon the pleasant way:
 “Tomorrow,” cried they one and all,
 While no one spoke of yesterday.
 Their life stood full at blessed noon;
 I, only I, had passed away:
 “Tomorrow and today, “ they cried;
 I was of yesterday.

I shivered comfortless, but cast
 No chill across the tablecloth;
 I all-forgotten shivered, sad
 To stay and yet to part how loth:
 I passed from the familiar room,
 I from whom love had passed away,
 Like the remembrance of a guest
 That tarrieth but a day.

(1979: I, 28)

The friends who ‘dwell’ in this future tense enforce the exile of the speaker, their resolute concentration on ‘tomorrow and today’ ghosting the speaking subject whose negative shadowy presence belongs to neither: ‘I was of yesterday’. The play in the final stanza on passing and being passed by-- ‘I passed from the familiar room,/I from whom love had passed away’--slips between the active and the passive in a movement which foreshadows the transition of the speaker from host to guest.

Her failed attempt to reverse the journey (from heavenly ‘home’ to ‘much frequented house’) suggests important implications for the female poetic subject who effects this act of imaginative return. While the poem decentres and displaces the speaking subject, it also bestows on her a certain degree of power.

After all, the speaker is not 'At Home' and need not greet her guests or entertain them. The title of the poem signals this element, designating the home as both the loved, familiar old house and also the scene of the tedious round of social duty. The second line hints at this in its stress upon the 'much frequented house', bringing into play a sense of ambivalence about the place, its guests and duties. By turning herself into a ghostly presence, the speaker can avoid being 'At Home'. The ghosting of the subject thus acts as yet another tactic of evasion and avoidance, a means of dodging duty. It is a tactic which Rossetti uses throughout her poetry (Leighton 1996: pp.143-145). This may be one reason why the woman becomes the ghost herself, staging her return in a way that enables her to bypass those guests who linger in her old home. This element is an important difference between Pater and the women poets. When he returns it is to an empty house which he can inhabit freely, without attendant duties. The women, on the other hand, rarely get past the front door before they encounter someone. Thus the return is divided along gender lines in a manner which echoes the Victorian ideology of separate spheres. The ideological divide is translated into a poetics of separate spheres. Seen in this light, the last lines of Rossetti's 'At Home' have an air of wish-fulfillment about them: 'Like the remembrance of a guest/That tarrieth but a day'.

The imaginative past-tense staging of the speaker's return from the grave in 'At Home' allows Rossetti to posit a ghostly centre at the heart of the poem, while narrating from a position both *after* and during the events: 'I passed from the familiar room./I from whom loved had passed'. As Rosenblum has noted:

she narrates in the past tense from some omniscient perspective, seeing, as always, herself being seen...she is the quintessential outsider, both eavesdropper and voyeur (1986:130)

For Rossetti, this ghostly return is a way of keeping narrative control. The ghostly 'I' that returns is both subject and narrator, the 'I' that passes and the 'I' from whom life has passed: the subject is both 'at home' in the poem, and absent from it. As critics have noted, this offers Rossetti a certain power,

enabling her to indulge vicariously in life's forbidden fruits: 'By being out of life, ghostly and unknown, she can feel its pulses all the more strongly and waywardly' (Leighton 1992:151). However, the speaker of 'At Home' also pays a price for this power, in the inevitable estrangement which this ghostly relation to life involves.

Haunting this territory between house and home is thus an ambivalent act for Rossetti. The women poets who follow the paths taken by their predecessor undergo similar negotiations between duty and desire. Their speakers are, like Rossetti's, in limbo, in a state or stage between inside and outside, possession and loss. What is missing, however, in the work of later Victorian women poets, is the future consolation (albeit a stark one) of a heavenly 'home'. For the later poets, writing in a tradition of a less secure religious faith, writing, often, as agnostics or atheists, the soul and its inevitable 'goal' has disappeared from the equation. However, the tension between 'house' and 'home' remains, though their relation has become earth-bound and secular.

In the work of the two poets I want now to consider, house and home are less obliquely referential destinations than they are for Rossetti. Both Rosamund Marriott Watson and E. Nesbit had turbulent home lives, a fact which may well have influenced the way they wrote about the house. In their work, the house is nearly always a recognisably domestic place and its ghosts are often recognisably domestic ghosts. However, like Rossetti, the later women poets are haunted by the idea of home as an ideological construct. Their poetic returns to and inhabitations of the house involve similar negotiations of the ideology of home and its meanings for women.

Both women achieved a certain amount of fame, even notoriety, in the literary circles, cliques and coteries of the 1880s and '90s. As poets, journalists and novelists, they played an active role and achieved a good deal of success in

a field outside the confines of the family home. E. Nesbit was one of the founder members of the Fabian society, and, as part of that group of social reformers and intellectuals, had a wide acquaintance with some of the most influential writers and thinkers of the period. She knew George Bernard Shaw (and enjoyed a brief affair with him), Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Eleanor Marx, and H.G Wells. Her sister Mary, who died of TB. at the age of nineteen, was acquainted with many members of the pre-Raphaelite circle, including the Rossettis--she was 'on visiting terms' with Christina (Briggs 1989:30)--and William Morris. Edith herself was part of the group of women who established a home away from home in the British Museum Reading Room. She also knew Rosamund Marriott Watson and was a contributor to *Sylvia's Journal* during the former's stint as editor. Both women were regular hostesses to a sections of the literary elite of London, presiding over their own salons. Rosamund Marriott Watson was a famous society beauty as well as a poet, and is thought to have been the model for the character of Mrs Pine-Avon in Hardy's *The Well-Beloved* (1893) (Millgate 1973:254). However, Marriott Watson's circle of acquaintance, which included Andrew Lang, Alice Meynell, Amy Levy, and, on occasion, Oscar Wilde, was split when she divorced her second husband, the artist Arthur Tomson. The scandal in her home life also affected her working life, making it increasingly difficult for her to maintain the reputation she had begun to establish in literary and artistic circles as a poet. As Linda Hughes notes, 'Any reviewer who mentioned "Graham R. Tomson" would touch on the plight of Arthur and the abandoned son Graham Tomson and introduce disturbing issues' (1995:95). It was not just Marriott Watson whose private life was unconventional, however. The family circumstances both women found themselves in conflicted with the dominant ideological version of the home. Yet while Nesbit's own family dramas remained private until after her death, Rosamund Marriot Watson's family and marital history entered public discourse

via the law reports of her two divorces published in the *London Times* (Hughes 1996:182 n.1).

Rosamund Ball married her first husband, George Armitage, in 1879, but the marriage failed after six years, during which Rosamund had published (anonymously) her first volume of poetry, *Tares* (1884). The swiftness with which the appearance of the poet was followed by the disappearance of the wife is worth noting. As Linda Hughes has stated, these two events may not be mutually exclusive (1996: 162). The couple's divorce was finalised in 1886, after a year of legal separation, and Armitage gained custody of their two daughters. Rosamund subsequently married and had a child by the painter Arthur Graham Tomson, the man she had begun living with during the separation from Armitage. This second marriage also provided her with a (pseudonymous) literary identity. Her second volume of poetry, *The Bird-Bride*, appeared under the name of 'Graham R. Tomson'. However, by 1896 her second marriage was over. Rosamund left Tomson in 1894, becoming the lover of the writer Henry Brereton Marriott Watson. They had a child together, a son, born in 1895. She was divorced from Tomson in 1896 and, yet again, the court awarded custody of the children to her husband. Rosamund and Henry never married, but she did take possession of his surname, renaming herself as a writer, though not as a wife.

The confusing remainder of names which litter the publishing history of Rosamund Marriott Watson are a reminder of the way in which marriage subsumes women's identities, conferring a 'new' relational identity each time the contract is entered into. A further glimpse of the legal dramas of ownership is offered by the names of her four children. Only the two girls, Eulalie and Daphne Armitage, share a surname. Rosamund bore two sons, Graham Tomson and Richard Marriott Watson, yet of all these children, only one, Richard, remained with her. This unsettling process of naming and renaming is, in its turn, linked with the marital home itself. Entry into the husband's house

involves, each time, the assumption, and loss of identity. Even though Rosamund's last relationship was never legally binding, no doubt the demands of social propriety had a hand in her decision to annex her husband's name. It is worth noting that each time she left her husbands, she also left their houses. Her first husband was a wealthy man who had provided a large house for her to live in during their legal separation. She left this home, taking up lodgings in a Cornish farmhouse with the artist who became her second husband. For Marriott Watson, leaving the house also involved, each time, the keener loss of three of her children. The evidence of their existence was also left out of literary commentaries on her work. As Linda Hughes notes, the omission of any mention of her children in her obituary in the *Athenaeum*, written sixteen years after the second divorce, indicates the 'scandal her behaviour provoked' (1995: 99). Though the majority of critical voices stayed silent about her marital history, one commentator, the American critic E.C. Stedman, explicitly linked the writer with this chequered procession of abandoned legal identities in a letter to Robert Bridges, 'The Armytage--Tomson--Watson sequence is interesting. Well, a woman who can write such ballads has a right to be her own mistress' (in Mix 1960:130).

Although Edith Nesbit kept her name throughout her career as a poet and novelist, she wrote as 'E. Nesbit', a name which did not openly declare or deny her gender. She married twice. Her first husband was the journalist and author Hubert Bland, a founder member of the Fabian society. Her second was a marine engineer, Thomas Henry Tucker, known as 'the Skipper', whom she married, three years after Hubert's death, in 1917. In a letter to her brother announcing her marriage she signs herself 'E.N. Bland-Tucker' (in Briggs 1989:374). While this triple-barrelled name may suggest a clear path of legally defined marital identity (as well as suggesting her own need to signal, in initials, her own pre-marital identity), the actual circumstances of Nesbit's married life with Bland, and her own status and position as his wife, were complex. While

she maintained her role as Bland's legally sanctioned companion, and the mother of his children, in public, the private realities of their marriage were almost as turbulent as those of Marriott Watson.

For the greater part of her married life, Edith shared her husband with other women. Hubert Bland effectively played the role of husband in two households: the legally sanctioned one with Edith, and another with an earlier lover of his, Maggie Doran, with whom he had a child. However, the complexities of the Blands' married life did not end there. From 1886 until Bland's death in 1914 there was effectively a second wife, Alice Hoatson, in the marriage. Hoatson, a close friend of Edith's, had moved into their home in order to nurse Edith through the birth of her third child in 1886. While she was staying in the house she embarked on an affair with Hubert, a man whom, as Edith's biographer Julia Briggs notes, 'few women could resist' (1989:112). Edith gave birth to a girl, but the child was either still-born, or died shortly afterwards. It was left to Hoatson to try and persuade a 'distraught' Edith to let go of the baby so that they could bury her. In an ironic twist of fate 'as she struggled to wrench [Hubert's] dead child from Edith's grasp, she was, though she did not know it, already carrying his living child within her' (1989:112-3). Edith discovered Alice was pregnant without realising who the father was, and decided to adopt the baby in order to protect her friend, reasoning that in this way Alice would be sheltered and shielded from the harsh punishments meted out by society to unmarried mothers. By taking her into her marital home, and claiming the child as her own, Edith rescued her friend from the inevitable exclusion and obscurity which was the traditional lot of 'fallen' women in society. This fact is a reminder that for women, the home was always more than a physical shelter: it also bestowed and confirmed respectability.

Accounts differ as to how and when Edith found out the truth of the baby's parentage, but ultimately she came to accept the situation and the marriage continued as a *ménage-a-trois*. The presence of this second wife suited Edith in

many ways, relieving her of some of the burdens of domesticity. Alice appears to have been content with a secondary role as ‘humble satellite to a comet’ (in Briggs 1989:120). While Edith was pursuing literary fame, Alice helped to fill ‘a gap’ in the Blands’ household, effectively becoming a ‘wife’ to both her and Hubert (Briggs 1989:122). However, there were also moments of great unhappiness, and Edith apparently had thoughts of leaving the marital home. Yet it is likely that Nesbit stopped short of this step because she realised the heavy penalties involved in such an act, the inevitable loss of her children, her home, and her reputation. As Julia Briggs has noted, while Edith:

often expressed her contempt for convention, she valued the good opinion of friends and acquaintances too much to allow her passionate life and needs to decide all her actions (1989:118).

In a poem of 1886, ‘The Wife of All Ages’, the speaker sketches out the double standards inherent in society’s treatment of men and women who stray outside marriage:

Suppose *I* yearned, and longed, and dreamed, and fluttered
 What would you say or think, or further do?
 Why should one rule be fit for me to follow,
 While there exists a different law for you?
 If all these fires and fancies came my way,
 Would you believe love was so far away?
 (Nesbit 1886:82-3).

The title of the poem, which is a companion piece to ‘The Husband of Today’, signals the extent to which the figure of the wife lags behind the times. Although the poem indulges in a brief flight of fancy, imagining life outside the rules of marriage, the speaker cannot quite sustain this dream of escape, and the poem ends with a reckoning of the probable costs of such a transgression:

The world, no doubt, has fairest fruits and blossoms
 To give to you; but what, ah! what for me?
 Nay, after all I am your slave and bondmaid,
 And all my world is in my slavery.
 So, as before, I welcome any part
 Which you may choose to give me of your heart

(1886:83)

The speaker's imagination seems to falter when it tries to picture an existence outside marriage. The words of the second stanza-- 'Suppose *I* yearned, and longed, and dreamed, and fluttered'--suggest a powerful desire for such excitements, yet they are balanced by an awareness of the relative differences between society's treatment of men and women. While the man's status is not entirely defined in relation to his virtue, leaving him free to roam outside the worlds of home and marriage, the speaker's draws a blank when she attempts to imagine her own position outside its confines. Though her words, 'but what, ah! what for me?' shrink from describing her probable fate, the sense of an unspoken knowledge is conveyed. *The poem suggests* that, despite the ever-widening sphere of women's freedoms and influence, women were still bound by the invisible threads of sexual ideology. The limits of the wife of today's freedom reach no further than the confines of her marital home. On a more personal note, the final bitterly ironic reference to the divided heart of the husband may well derive from the circumstances of Nesbit's own crowded marriage.

The harsh realities of setting oneself up in direct opposition to the Victorian moral code can be illustrated by a comparison of these two women's survival into the twentieth century. Both women enjoyed a good deal of success during the 1880s and 1890s. They contributed to journals and periodicals including the *Pall Mall Magazine* and *The Yellow Book* and in 1904 Marriott Watson took over from Nesbit as poetry reviewer for the *Athenaeum*. Yet, although arguably the better poet, Marriott Watson's survival as an artist was undoubtedly compromised by her chequered marital history (Hughes 1996:164). While Nesbit's posthumous reputation has been built mainly on the strength of her children's books, it is unlikely that she would have achieved the sustained fame her work has enjoyed into the twentieth century if the secrets of her marriage had come to light earlier. The fact that she was willing to pay lip-

service to Victorian convention, using the house she shared with her husband as a cover story of sorts, demonstrates her awareness of the conventions which bound women to the home.

While the extent to which these personal histories may be relevant to their output as poets is always questionable, this should not, as Linda Hughes has argued in relation to Marriott Watson, erase their 'cultural significance' (1996:164). As Hughes states, there is evidence that Marriott Watson's readers kept one eye on the marital history while the other scanned the poetry (1996:165). William Archer's comment on Marriott Watson in *Poets of The Younger Generation* (1902) is particularly revealing of the ways in which the discourses of private life and poetic love became entangled in the reader's mind:

The personal note in her poetry is exceedingly discreet. The heart-throb is always there, but it is not obtruded upon us. She hits the happy mean between absolute impersonality and tactless self-exposure (1902:470).

The implications of his comments are clear: the private 'self' inhabits the poem, but 'discreetly'. The fine line Archer sketches between emotional withdrawal ('absolute impersonality') and its opposite ('tactless self-exposure') suggests that the poem can only contain so much emotional intensity, positing a threshold, beyond which expression becomes 'self-exposure'. E. Nesbit published her own disclaimer on this subject, claiming that she 'could never bring herself to lay...[her] soul naked before the public that reads books' (in Briggs 1989:71). However, despite these denials and disclaimers, the personal histories of both poets provide ways into their poetry. Nesbit's poems often appear to be working over a troubled drama of possession which may well derive from her own difficult family life. Julia Briggs, commenting on this element in Nesbit's poetry, has noted that her poems 'are often indirectly revealing, in ways that she herself failed to recognise; they reproduce situations which are suprisingly close to her own' (1987:71-2). Similarly, the biographical facts of Marriott Watson's home life offer an intriguing and illuminating context in which to view certain poems.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the houses which Nesbit and Marriott Watson inhabit in their poetry are haunted by an awareness of women's socio-economic relation to the home and of the wider implications of possession and dispossession. They are rarely at home with the idea of the house as an aesthetic place of poetry. Rossetti manages a brief sojourn in her 'earthly paradise' (1979: I, 82), yet Marriott Watson and Nesbit rarely stray far from home. However, their poetry continues to suggest the ways in which the house, as an imaginative space, is never quite free from the ideological baggage of home.

A poem of 1895 by Marriott Watson continues the theme of journeying towards a place of poetic and aesthetic dreams:

When Spring was mine and all the ways were green,
 And all the valleys veiled in golden mist,
 And all the shadows pearl and amethyst,
 Through the dim maze of morrows unforeseen
 Fair and far-glimmering as the dusky fire
 That lights a pine-wood when the sunset dies--
 Faint as the cuckoo calling as it flies--
 Sweet as the Spring's own secret-smitten lyre--
 Now shining clear with sun-washed roof and spire,
 Now, wrapped and compassed round with mysteries--
 A haunted palace bowered in ancient trees--
 I knew the City of my Heart's Desire.

Even as a late-remembered tryst, it drew
 My wandering feet forever to the quest:
 Dreaming, I saw it through the grey dawn dew,
 Waking, I dreamed for aye to find the clue,
 Past this tree--shadowed slope--that blue hill's
 crest--
 Eager I sought my paradise anew
 With every sun that fared from east to west.

The autumn evening closes, mild and grey,
 Lit by a fading sunset's narrow gleam,
 And still to-morrow wards I turn and say
 -- 'There, peradventure, I shall find the way'--
 And still a strange voice calls by wood and stream,
 And still the vision glimmers strangely bright--
 The wide world o'er I wander, wander, yet,
 And still to-morrow-wards my face is set
 To seek the city of my heart's delight.

By pastoral plains with purple rivers twinned,
 My gardens red with amaranths and rose,
 Where crumbling towns lie steeped in rich repose,
 The grey towers sleeping in the sun and wind,
 By gabled street and grassy orchard-close,
 I go--and all as painted shadows seem--
 Nor moved to linger, nor to look behind
 I pass, and many a happy pleasance find,
 But never the town, the country, of my dream.

(1895: 7-9)

'The City of Dream' is a poem of displaced nostalgia. Marriott Watson's speaker has not found her 'haunted palace' of dreams, and this missing of the 'goal' (the 'city of dream') is indicated by the sense of belatedness which hangs over the poem. Thus the future prospect and hope of the first stanza, which sketches out the 'dim maze of morrows unforeseen' is, by its end, a remembered goal: 'I knew the City of my Heart's Desire'. The aesthetic potential of this place is signalled by the 'golden mist' and 'shadows pearl and amethyst', whose jewelled colours locate the poem in its 'Nineties context. Here, however, while the speaker dimly apprehends the delight of this 'house beautiful', in fact she never crosses its threshold. An aesthete's instincts are hinted at by this attempt to render shadow into jewelled substance. But the treasures are never sampled. The house of poetry remains as an enigmatic prospect: 'wrapped and compassed

round with mysteries'; both a borrowed, textual dream --'a haunted palace bowered in ancient trees', and an unwritten poem, 'sweet as the Spring's own secret-smitten lyre'. Typically, it is already inhabited-- 'a haunted palace'--and the speaker longs for its textual ghosts.

The poem implicitly echoes the sense in Rossetti's poetry that the house, as an emblem of the woman's aesthetic home, is ultimately both a dream and a 'fair delusion' (Rossetti 1979: I 82). Yet while Rossetti at least gets to sample the delights of her house of poetry, Marriott Watson is left eternally without. Marriott Watson's speaker may find 'many a happy pleasaunce', but none of them are hers, none are the 'town, the country' of her dream. Thus the brief sense of ownership which Rossetti's speaker enjoys--'My castle stood of white transparent glass'(1979 : I, 82)--is denied in Marriott Watson's poem. The similarities and differences between Rossetti's 'From House To Home' and 'The City of Dream' are intriguing. While the house of poetry in Watson's poem appears to be the object of the quest, the goal rather than a distraction from the goal ('home' in Rossetti's poem), both ultimately deny or inhibit possession of this aesthetic home; Rossetti by its 'ruin', and Marriott Watson because she keeps it out of sight. The lack of a heavenly home in 'The City of Dream' adds to the sense of an interminable exile. Marriott Watson's speaker is left wandering, searching for a neo-Platonic house of poetry amongst the 'painted shadows'.

Some of the most interesting features of 'The City of Dream' stem from the fact that it is ultimately a poem of mis-possession, rather than re-possession or brief tenancy. This element emerges in the tense shifts between present journeying, 'And still to-morrow-wards I turn and say', and the past tense regret: 'Even as a late-remembered tryst, it drew/My wandering feet forever to the quest'. The sense of belatedness ('late-remembered') here sets the object of the quest paradoxically behind the speaker. This belatedness undercuts the more positive voice which still travels hopefully: "There, peradventure, I shall find

the way''. Without the presence of an inevitable 'goal' (Rossetti 1979: I, 82), the poem, as the metrical pun on 'wandering feet' suggests, loses direction. Marriott Watson's poem undoes the meaning of 'goal', leaving the quest and its object out of joint. The speaker, though haunted by desire for this dream-like place of poetry, remains homeless.

Imaginatively, Marriott Watson remains haunted by the idea of mis-possession and dispossession. Her subjects are often exiled, left outside the house, or wandering in search of it. In 'The House of Dream', a work which may be a sister poem to 'The City of Dream', the speaker returns to her old home:

Still stands the mansion, glorious as of old,
 My earliest citadel,
 My strong impregnable hold,
 Where veriest dross was turned to purest gold,
 Where my best hours befell.

These winter days are colourless and cold,
 Yet I remember well
 The painted books, the pictures on the walls,
 The shadowy maze of corridors and halls;
 The sweet secluded cell
 Where through the casement crept the clustering vine,
 And late, red sun-rays warmed my heart like wine
 With joy unspeakable!

But I am banished from that dear demesne,
 The tale is told, the spring-tide songs are sung:
 Strange faces mock me, beautiful and young,
 From the clear window-pane
 Lit like a topaz; and I hear within
 Clamour of shrill young voices, and the din
 Of dancing feet upon the chamber floor,
 While I, without, in the November rain,
 Turn from the open door;

Raising the siege, ah, desperate quest and vain!
Of my old home that knows me now no more.

Void is the vow, and naught the magic name,
Once you could give what now I could not claim,
Once you were dear and I the honoured guest--
The old order changeth at grey Time's behest--
His be the blame!

O House beloved--unchanged!
Eld hath divided us and years estranged,
You stand immortal still--
Youth presses gaily through your open door,
But I--no more.

(1891: 20-22)

This house is, like Florian's, a 'half-spiritualised house' (Pater 1901: *Miscellaneous Studies*, 173), a 'house of dream', conjured in retrospect. The class longings of Pater's essay are echoed here in the evocation of a glorious mansion filled with 'painted books' and 'pictures', its windows stained with coloured glass. However, in Pater's essay the temporal distance is a benefit to his retrospective aesthetic: 'he could watch the better, over again, the gradual expansion of the soul which had come to be there' (1901: *Miscellaneous Studies*, 173). For Marriott Watson, on the other hand, time works to displace her speaker: 'Eld hath divided us and years estranged'. There is no possibility of imaginative repossession: 'I am banished from that dear demesne, /The tale is told. . .' The return is disowning: 'Strange faces mock me, beautiful and young. . . /While I, without. . . /Turn from the open door'. The 'I' in the poem is left doubly without: both excluded and dispossessed.

The motif of exclusion echoes the estrangements of Tennyson's 'Enoch Arden' and *In Memoriam*, where speakers return to old homes only to find their place usurped or the door closed against them. However, in Marriott Watson's poem, the door to the house is not shut fast, but open. The key to the poem

seems to lie in this hesitation on the threshold. The return to this site is a return to the scene of an old emotional transaction: 'Once you were dear and I the honoured guest--/The old order changeth at grey Time's behest'. Thresholds are the places where guests are welcomed. But they are also the things brides are carried over when they enter their husband's house: 'Void is the vow, and naught the magic name,/Once would you give what now I could not claim'. The word 'vow' secularises the poem and points to a drama of love and marriage underneath. The reference to a legal contract which has been broken, invalidated, 'void is the vow', exposes the real reason for the speaker's estrangement from her old home. While once this house offered her entry, now she cannot 'claim it'. The contingency of the 'I', whose connection to its old home has been severed, points up the fact that women do not own their homes by right; they come into men's homes through marriage. Thus breaking the (marriage) vow, divorces the self: 'I, without. . .I could not claim. . . I--no more'. The poem is haunted by the socio-economic implications of women's entry into, and tenancy of, their marital homes. The walls of Marriott Watson's 'house of dream' never shed their relation to the real.

Thus for Marriott Watson the poetic (Tennysonian) metaphors of the house are dogged by the ideology of home. Homesickness and nostalgia are not simply aesthetic motifs in these poems, but are charged with socio-economic and ideological significance. In both Marriott Watson and Nesbit's poetry, the exclusions and disposessions, even the very ghosts themselves, seem to be loaded with an awareness of the uneasy imaginative link between women and the home. They make explicit what is implicit in Rossetti's poems about house and home.

The many ghosts in Nesbit's poems function both as an indicator of the uneasy imaginative link between women and the home and as a reminder of the politics of possession. Her poem of 1892, 'The Haunted House', fills the house with ghostly visitors:

The house is haunted; when the little feet
 Go pattering about it in their play,
 I tremble lest the little ones should meet
 The ghosts that haunt the happy night and day.

And yet I think they only come to me;
 They come through night of ease and pleasant day
 To whisper of the torment that must be
 If I some day should be, alas! as they.

And when the child is lying warm asleep,
 The ghosts draw back the curtain of my bed,
 And past them through the dreadful dark I creep,
 Clasp close the child, and so am comforted.

Cling close, cling close, my darling, my delight,
 Sad voices on the wind come thin and wild,
 Ghosts of poor mothers crying in the night--
 "Father, have pity--once I had a child!"

(1898: 123-4)

What is notable in this poem is the sense of a connection between the haunters and the haunted. These ghosts are the 'ghosts of poor mothers crying in the night', ghosts who are themselves childless. They haunt the mother and her children, overshadowing her 'happy night and day' with their presence. The speaker's feelings about these ghostly doubles is deeply ambivalent. While at first the mother fears they might frighten her children, she later acknowledges that it is her they have come to haunt. By associating these ghosts with live figures-- 'Ghosts of poor mothers crying in the night'--Nesbit seems to be trying to shake off any possible Gothic associations. Instead what comes across is a sense of guilt. The presence of these empty-handed mothers turns the embrace between the speaker and her children into a guilt-ridden act of exclusion. By framing the mother and child's embrace with the hungry eyes of these

dispossessed others, Nesbit widens the focus of the poem. The private view of the mother and child takes in these homeless and childless others. The words which describe the embrace, 'cling close, cling close, my darling, my delight, express a desire to shut out the ghostly voyeurs. But the 'sad voices' of the childless mothers are left echoing at the end of the poem.

By leaving the house open to ghostly visitors, Nesbit disrupts the boundary between public and private. In 'The Gray Folk' (1895), the threshold is crossed in an act of ghostly rebellion:

The house, with blind unhappy face
 Stands lonely in the last year's corn,
 And in the grayness of the morn
 The gray folk come about the place.

By many pathways, gliding gray
 They come past meadow, wood, and wold,
 Come by the farm and by the fold
 From the green fields of yesterday.

Past lock and chain and bolt and bar
 They press, to stand about my bed,
 And like the faces of the dead
 I know their hidden faces are.

They will not leave me in the day
 And when night falls they will not go,
 Because I silenced, long ago,
 The only voice that they obey.

(1895 : 60)

While the ghosts of this poem are perhaps not so easily identified as those in 'The Haunted House', several clues to their identity appear. The presence of 'last year's' ungathered corn suggests that the land surrounding the house has been left untended. The gray folk themselves come from a time of 'green fields', when the estate, the 'farm' and its 'fold' were better maintained. These figures

may perhaps be the ghostly figures of old workers, whose jobs and homes have gone as a result of the unnamed act committed by the woman: 'I silenced, long ago,/ The only voice that they obey'.

The gray folk find a way past the firmly bolted door of the private house. Gliding over the ideological boundary, they effect a merging of separate *spheres*.

Yet if the ghosts are disenfranchised workers, or just less fortunate figures than the lady of the house, the threshold is no longer simply a boundary between public and private; it marks a barrier between classes, too. Thus the poem politicises the figure of the ghost, as well as acting as a reminder that Nesbit's own nostalgic sentiments about old houses were not easily squared with her socialist beliefs. These ghosts reclaim the house through an act of insurrection. In 'The Gray Folk' and 'The Haunted House', the ghosts embody political, rather than 'spiritual values' (Briggs 1977: 17).²⁸

For Nesbit, the presence of ghosts in the house seems to signal an awareness that her possession of a home implicates her in the dispossession of others. It is this fact, perhaps, which makes her aware, in 'The Haunted House', of the empty arms of others while she 'clasps' her child. The stubborn persistence of these outsiders in the private houses of Nesbit's poems is accompanied by a sense of their right to be there. Both these haunted poems end with a justification of the ghosts' presence in terms which suggest both sympathy and guilt in equal measure. These are not just voyeuristic intruders, she seems to suggest, but outsiders whom she wishes to bring in. Nesbit may not be at home with these ghosts, but she is always 'at home' to them. The reasons

²⁸ In her study of ghost stories, Julia Briggs notes that the form depends, as Freud noted, 'on a tension between an outmoded, but not entirely abandoned belief and an enlightened scepticism'. This tension, she argues, was:

notably present in the last [i.e. the nineteenth century], when the material and spiritual conceptions of life were locked in a continuous conflict which no intellectual could entirely avoid...The ghost story was well suited to express ambivalent reactions, the sense of loss and gain, for it seemed at the outset to invite the reader's modern cynicism, only to vanquish it with a reassertion of older and more spiritual values (Briggs 1977: 17).

for her ghostly erection of haunted houses stem from a wish to show the absence of home elsewhere.

However, like Marriott Watson, Nesbit is haunted by more personal ghosts, too. The troubled history of her marriage and family-life may well have found its way into her poetry, despite all her protests to the contrary. 'Possession' (1905) for example, seems to tread a particularly fine line between art and life:

The child was yours and none of mine,
 And yet you gave it me to keep,
 And bade me sew it raiment fine,
 And wrap my kisses round its sleep
 I carried it upon my breast,
 I fed it in a world apart,
 I wrapped my kisses round its rest,
 I rocked its cradle with my heart
 When in mad nights of rain and storm
 You turned us homeless from your door,
 I wrapped it close, I kept it warm,
 And brought it safe to you once more.

But the last time you drove us forth,
 The snow was wrapped about its head,
 That night the wind blew from the North,
 And on my heart the child was dead.

The child is mine and none of yours,
 My life was his while he had breath,
 What of your claim to him endures,
 Who only gave him birth and death?

(1905: 75)

The ostensible subject of this poem is the troubled relationship between a child and its adopted mother, possibly a nurse. It is an odd, awkwardly phrased poem which, in the light of Edith's own act of adoption, seems to invite a biographical reading. The unexpectedness of its language results in a continual clash between

the abstract and the specific: 'I wrapped my kisses round its rest,/ I rocked its cradle with my heart'. Instead of the two bodies of adoptive mother and child meeting, they remain separate through a curious evasion. The heartfelt sentiment is undermined, even undone, by the absence of connection: The woman's lips kiss only the baby's 'rest' and her hand never touches the cradle. The use of the abstract 'rest' is an act of substitution which prevents the unity of woman and child. Nesbit's poem continually postpones the embrace between the two. The use of the impersonal pronoun, 'I carried it upon my breast, /I fed it in a world apart', which turns the baby into a thing, prefigures the image in the fourth stanza in which the child becomes a (literal) dead weight which lies 'on' the woman's heart: 'And on my heart the child was dead'. Even here, the use of 'on' rather than 'in' keeps the child outside the speaker's heart.

The tensions which emerge in the language of this poem may well derive from Nesbit's own marital history; the apparent unity of the Bland's household lies, after all, on a similarly troubling foundation. The ambivalence of Edith's feelings towards the child she adopted (Briggs 1989:208) may contribute to the awkward phrasing of the poem's sentiment. If we read with the biographical history, perhaps reading the accused 'you' as Alice Hoatson, we are presented with a fascinating psychological act of catharsis. The linguistic exclusions in 'Possession' make little sense in terms of the poem's narrative. However, if read biographically, they provide Nesbit with the opportunity to give Alice Hoatson the power-position in the home. She, in the guise of the put-upon, banished speaker, retells the story of their *ménage-a-trois*. It is as if in contemplating her situation she finds herself on the outside--the act of being turned out in the poem equalling an emotional cold shoulder in life. Though she was the wife, and Alice the mistress, by identifying herself with the homeless figure in the poem, Nesbit is able to explore her own feelings of exclusion within the marital home.

The presence of the 'ghosts' of biography and ideology in these poems keeps a line of connection open between art and life. These poems do not effect

a Paterian evasion of the real. Instead they confront it. Even apparently 'neutral' poems which focus on nostalgia for an 'old house' retain a sense of the ideological significance of home. Marriott Watson's poem of 1904 'The House Desolate' turns the house into a ghostly shadow of its former self:

So still the old house lies, so dull, so grey,
 The dews of dawn forget to hallow it;
 Here come no sweet birds singing, night or day,
 By these bare eaves no building swallows flit. . .

Pale as the dead are they that dwell herein,
 Worn with vain strife and wrung with vain
 regret;
 Theirs but to watch the world go by to win
 That glimmering goal their hearts remember
 yet.

They lean among the lilacs by the door,
 To watch the winding road with wistful eyes,
 The long, white dusty way that nevermore
 Shall bear them hope, or wonder, or surprise.

Sometimes they call, but answer comes there
 none;
 Sometimes they beckon--none will turn aside.
 The long procession glitters in the sun;
 With echoing tramp the motley pilgrims ride.

Some in the twilight chambers, wide and low,
 Around a cold hearth gather, murmuring
 Vague, half-remembered tales of long ago,
 Songs half-forgot, of Travel and the Spring.

Wan faces peer from the uncurtained pane,
 Across the weedy garden, fain to see
 The wayfarers that pass in sun or rain,
 The blue, far-shining stream that threads the

lea.

Here falls no sign from any passer-by,
 None lifts the latch of this forgotten gate;
 Only faint winds about the lintel sigh,
 “Your house is left unto you desolate”

(1904: 57-9).

This poem presents the house as the relic of a bygone age. It is also a textual ruin: there are shades of Tennyson's 'Mariana' in the unlifted latch and the absence of nesting birds, intimations too that this house is no longer a sacred shelter in the Ruskinian sense, as the 'dews of dawn forget to hallow it'. The pilgrims pass by this former shrine in favour of another, more glittering 'goal'. The pale figures who gather around the 'cold hearth' exist at a metaphysical exile from life: 'Here falls no sign from any passer-by, /None lifts the latch of this forgotten gate'. The 'desolate house' may well represent a sense of anachronistic survival, anchoring the poem as a turn-of-the-century work about the waning of the century.²⁹ This would explain the sense of dislocation and belatedness: 'Theirs but to watch the world go by to win/That glimmering goal their hearts remember yet'. The strange shift in tense in these lines puts the goal behind, rather than in front of the dwellers in the 'twilight chambers', undoing the very meaning of the concept, inhibiting the possibility of further progress.

However, although this house is presented as a ruin, as the 'cold hearth', the 'uncurtained pane' and the roofless chambers suggest, the structure of the house is still largely intact. The ideology of home survives, albeit in a ghostly, ruined form. The persistence of these relics of ideology is a constant theme of Marriott Watson's poetry. She witnesses the gradual ruin of the 'old house', watching as it becomes a shadow of its former self, yet holds back from destroying it altogether. Thus the ghosts and relics of domestic ideology continue to haunt her imagination:

²⁹This poem may well have influenced De La Mare's 'The Listeners' (1912), which inverts Marriott Watson's poem. In his poem, the ghostly exile is the traveller who knocks on the door of the 'lone house' (1979:12) waiting vainly for an answer.

Roofless and ruinous lies the little homestead,
 All the grey walls of it crumbling to the
 ground;

Only the hearth-place, steadfast and unshaken,
 Stands, like a tomb, 'mid the lusty leafage
 round.

(Watson 1904 :42)

The ideological significance of this poem is signalled by its title: 'A Ruined Altar'. Here the house is, once again, a ruin, 'crumbling to the ground'. Nature encroaches on the house, invading its space: 'the vagrant swallow/Nests in the niche where cup and trencher stood' (1904:45). Marriott Watson is aware of an alternative sexualised energy outside, the Tennysonian 'lusty leafage' which transgresses the boundaries of the house. However, though the dialectic between inside and outside is collapsing, and a 'gaunt nettle' now grows 'high on the threshold' (1904:45) the hearth-place remains, 'steadfast and unshaken'. Although it now marks the grave of home, it retains a quasi-religious symbolism--the 'ruined altar' of the poem's title. Thus while Marriott Watson lays waste to the house, the hearth-place survives as a cipher, a tomb of domestic ideology. The desire to preserve this relic indicates the persistence of the ideology of home in Marriott Watson's imagination. The impulse to destroy the house, to allow nature in, thereby undoing the dialectic between inside and outside, is countered by a contradictory impulse to preserve the sanctity of its space.

For both Nesbit and Marriott Watson, the house is a haunted place, filled with the ghosts of personal history and ideology. They uncover all that Pater and the aesthetes repress, suggesting that, like their predecessor, Christina Rossetti, their poetic inhabitations of the house are always compromised by the ideology of home. In Nesbit and Marriott Watson's work the internal dramas and secrets of the private house are laid open, its once sacred symbols are exposed. Unlike

Pater, who experiences such relics aesthetically, these women poets preserve a strong sense of their ideological significance. For them, the act of writing about the house unearths the stubborn legal, political and socio-economic divisions which lie beneath the threshold. Their poems uncover hidden narratives which indicate their own uneasy imaginative relation to the home. The houses in these poems, houses which exclude and estrange the speakers who return to them, or which turn out to be haunted, never lose the burdens shed so easily by the male aesthetes, of responsibility and empirical duty.

Chapter Four

The House of Poetry: Mary E. Coleridge

Whereas for Nesbit and Marriott Watson the ghosts which haunt the house are players from a domestic drama of troubled ownership, Coleridge gestures towards a house of poetry which is haunted by the ghosts of older texts and poets. For Coleridge, the house is the domain of poetic precursors, a structure which is overlaid by the shadowy figures of other texts. However, although she appears more free to imagine the house as a place of poetry and creativity than either of the former poets, she cannot quite shake off the ghosts which haunt their work. Furthermore, though the house is for her potentially a place of inspiration, the presence of other poets means that it is often inhabited by, or subject to the control of, someone else.

Mary Coleridge lived at home all her life. The daughter of artistic parents--both were keen amateur musicians and held soirées at which Tennyson, Ruskin, Browning, the singer Jenny Lind and the actress Fanny Kemble were regular guests--Coleridge saw her family home open to a charmed circle of the literary élite. The 'roomy' (Whistler 1954:30) family home in Cromwell Place, London was usually so full of guests that Mary and her sister Florence continued to share a tiny attic bedroom well into adulthood. As a child Mary was painted by Millais, and retained a strong affection for the pre-Raphaelites. Her last work, completed a few weeks before she died, was a study of Holman Hunt. Coleridge's early encounters with literary and artistic figures may well have nurtured her own ambitions.

The family connections with famous poets also extended back into literary history. Mary was the great-great niece of Samuel Taylor and some of her best poems betray his influence. Throughout her life she was to feel the mixed

blessings of laying claim to such a famous ancestor. The long shadow cast by her 'fairy great-great uncle' (Coleridge 1910:11) made her reticent about her literary efforts. In a memoir written a few years after Mary's untimely death from appendicitis in 1907, her friend Edith Sichel recalls that 'she suffered from a constitutional secretiveness about her work which made her...have recourse to any subterfuge, rather than reveal what she was writing--even to those who were nearest to her' (1910:22-3). She refused to publish her poems under her own name during her lifetime and instead re-christened herself 'Anodos', taking the name from the wanderer-hero of George Macdonald's *Phantastes* (1858).

Though educated largely at home, Coleridge also attended classes at King's College for Women. She indulged in hours of study in the libraries of the South Kensington Museum (later the Victoria and Albert museum), situated conveniently close to the house in Cromwell Road, and was a regular visitor to the reading room of the British Museum. 'I should have been content to read all my life long' she wrote in her diary (1910:8). This love of scholarship for its own sake was made possible by the relatively wealthy status of her family. Thus, unlike George Gissing's fictional drudge Marian Yule, for whom the 'book-lined circumference' of Pannini's room appears as a 'featureless prison-limit' (1891: 99), for Coleridge the museum was a place in which, through reading, her horizons were infinitely expanded:

With such an appetite did I set out that all books resolved themselves into one huge volume, and although blindly conscious that I should never live to finish it, I was wild to begin it, not as wise people do, here and there, but everywhere that every one had begun it before me (1910: 8).

In contrast, Margaret Duckworth, a member of Mary's close circle of female friends, suffered from a more rigidly conventional family life, in which her reading habits were severely circumscribed. Duckworth's granddaughter, Theresa Whistler, describes her grandmother's home as one in which 'an article by Darwin would still be cut from a magazine before she was allowed to read it,

even when she was over twenty' (1954:45). In order to ensure 'undisturbed hours of reading, she had to rise before the family were astir...[bringing] on a breakdown by this secret study' (1954:45). Mary's reading seems to have suffered less from this kind of policing. In a letter of 1905 to Eleanor Viscountess Cecil she strongly recommends Théophile Gautier while adding that she has 'the gravest doubts that he is altogether suitable for family reading' (Coleridge 1951:162).

Like a number of nineteenth-century women whose 'reminiscences indicate impressive schemes of reading--historical, classical, scriptural, mathematical' (Flint 1993:223), Coleridge engaged on a course of reading which took in philosophy and science as well as literature (Sichel 1910:9). At the age of twelve, intrigued by the strange shapes of Hebrew letters, she asked her father to teach her the language. By nineteen, she had also mastered German, French and Italian, and had begun to teach herself Greek. The latter endeavour was to have a considerable impact on Coleridge's work. Her study of Greek continued well into adulthood under the guidance of a friend of her father's, William Cory. A schoolmaster, poet and scholar of some repute, Cory's career at Eton had been cut short in 1872 after a scandal arose over a letter written to a favourite pupil. At the time, the reasons for Cory's lightning departure from Eton--Cory's biographer records that 'The Mousetrap (the nickname for Cory's Eton lodgings) was deserted in a night' (Mackenzie 1950:61)--were 'veiled in discretion', though rumours quickly began to circulate (De Honey 1977:190). The then William Johnson renamed himself and moved to Hampstead where he began giving classes in Greek and Latin to Mary and a group of her friends. Cory fondly referred to these young women as his 'Grecian Ladies' (Mackenzie 1950:129). Unlike the fictional heroine of Charlotte Yonge's *The Daisy Chain* (1854), whose own thwarted attempt to learn Greek is set against the superior education and easy progress through the classics of her brother, these young women gained access, through Cory, to a classical education which had

traditionally been the preserve of boys: 'It's rather funny that you and Ella and I should all be at "the Republic" at the same time' Coleridge wrote to a friend (1910: 10). This female academy which benefitted from the same expert tutelage given to the boys at one of the top public schools in England is a fascinating example of the way girls might, whether by luck or by design, escape the narrowly limiting concepts of suitable female education.

During the 1890s, Mary began giving classes in English Literature to a group of young working women. These lessons took place at the family home in Cromwell Place. In 1895, she became a regular teacher at the Working Women's College in Fitzroy Square. She continued teaching there for twelve years. The college, run by Frances Martin, aimed to educate, through evening classes, those women whose education had been 'defective' (Martin 1879:483), or non-existent, and to provide the 'stimulus and interest of social life, rational entertainment, and intellectual pursuit' to the many 'young friendless and solitary' (Martin 1879:483) working women of London. The college began life in Queen Square, Holborn. However, when it was decided that the college should open its doors to men, a minority of the original committee decided to re-establish the college in Fitzroy Street, preserving its exclusive nature. Through her work at the college, Mary helped to extend the benefits of education and the advantages of a collegiate life to a group of women who would otherwise have gone without.

Mary's own academy of female friends could afford to 'prolong their education well into their thirties' (Whistler in Coleridge 1954: 41). They also travelled abroad together, visiting France, Germany and Italy. Describing the latter experience in her diary, Mary writes: 'I felt as if I'd come not to a Fatherland, but to a Motherland that I had always longed for and never known (1910:53). With a few favoured friends, and one honorary male, the poet and novelist Henry Newbolt,³⁰ Mary formed a reading group who met regularly to

³⁰Mary met Newbolt when he married her friend, Margaret Duckworth in 1889.

discuss their work. This group was facetiously nicknamed ‘The Settee’ by excluded friends and given a motto-- ‘sedet eternumque sedebit’--by her father (Newbolt 1932:179). As Newbolt’s biographer, Susan Chitty, remarks ‘Ladies were supposed to sit and *do* something in those days. These ladies just sat’(1997:94). This group of women indulged themselves in talk of art and literature, keeping domestic matters as far in the background as possible. In a witty essay, ‘Compact of Jars’, Coleridge notes the distracting effects produced by a mishandling of tea-things:

the most dove-like woman...will make tea without remorse...serenely ignorant that she is waking....an impulse to commit murder because of the horrible clatter of cups and saucers [which] keeps them out of their blessed Nirvana (1900:17).

For these young women such domestic distractions were kept to a minimum. And, as Whistler observes, perhaps fearing an alternative answer, ‘it is not strange perhaps that so many of Mary’s circle remained unmarried, untroubled as they were by financial security or loneliness, with full and delightful lives’(1954:44-5).

Many of Coleridge’s poems celebrate love and friendship within communities of women. Her evocations of communal same-sex desire echo the ‘idealistic-erotic platonism’ (Leighton 1995:610) of William Cory’s poems. His anonymously published volume of poetry *Ionica* (1858)³¹, whose verses celebrate the beauty of youth, and young men in particular, was no doubt familiar to Mary. One poem, ‘A Dirge’, mourns the passing of a fair youth, Anteros (meaning ‘love-for-love’ or ‘love-in return’):

On a flickering wave we gaze
 Not upon his answering eyes:
 Flower and bird we scarce can praise,
 Having lost his sweet replies;
 Cold and mute the river flows

³¹Cory published the first volume of *Ionica* in 1858. A subsequent volume, entitled *Ionica II*, appeared in 1877, and a collected edition, *Ionica*, was published in 1891.

With our tears for Anteros
(1891: 21).

The absence of the youth is represented by the absence of a reflection: there is nothing to give back the speaker's love. The rippled surface of the river whose 'flickering wave' disturbs the gaze of the speaker thus becomes a representation of the loss of a lover whose love, and by implication, face, once mirrored his own. This re-working of the Narcissus myth suggests the reflecting surface as an image of reciprocal desire. However, this image of love is not oppressed by the tyranny of the eye, for the lost lover had a voice as well as a face. The poet mourns the loss of Anteros' 'sweet replies'. His death has made the river 'mute'. Cory's poem seems to represent a desire to unite the figures of Echo and Narcissus, to give the embodied image back to one, and to break the stalemate absorption of the other. Though ostensibly a poem about loss, on another level it gives voice to a homoerotic desire which is represented as both freely reciprocal and also communal. Just as the object is not fixed by the gaze of the eye, the lyric voice is not confined to an 'I'. The mourning voice of the poem is a communal 'we' which speaks for more than one.

Furthermore, Cory's poem situates same-sex desire within a natural landscape. Unlike Wilde's novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) which, taking its cue from Huysmans, retreats into an oppressively scented House Beautiful in which homosexuality is pictured as a monstrous secret shut up in the old schoolroom (Bristow 1992:51), the homoerotic desire which runs through Cory's *Ionica* is pictured as something which flows with, rather than against, nature. It is only the death of the loved one in 'Anteros' which results in the silencing of the natural world. Yet even here the river mirrors the grief of the speakers: 'Cold and mute the river flows/ With our tears for Anteros' (1891:21).

John Addington Symonds was given a copy of *Ionica* by his Latin tutor, John Connington, another classicist who 'sympathised with romantic attachments for boys' (Symonds 1984:109). Symonds records in his memoir that

the volume 'inflamed his imagination' (1984:109). He entered into a correspondence with Cory who wrote to him:

a long epistle on pederastia in modern times, defending it and laying down the principle that affection between people of the same sex is not less natural and rational than the ordinary passionate relations (1984:109).

Despite the sense of unoppressed and uncloseted homosexual desire in Cory's verse, Symonds, with a keen sense for these things (he had asked Cory to address the letter to O.D.Y at the Oxford Union) detected 'a wistful yearning sadness', a 'note of disappointment and forced abstention'--a note which, he claims: I have never found...absent in lovers of my sort and Johnson's, unless the men have cast prudence to the winds and staked their all on cynicism'(1984:110). Mary and the other girls whom Cory taught must have been aware that there was a fine line between poetry and life which, when crossed, invoked severe penalties. Cory not only lost his job, but saw his name removed from the textbook he had written (Mackenzie 1950:64). While a strain of similarly communal same-sex desire runs through many of Coleridge's poems it is 'more covert' (Leighton 1995: 610), flowing against the tide of interpretation and punctuated by textual elisions and cryptic utterances.

For example, 'A Clever Woman' (1893), though ostensibly a poem about the opposite claims of love and learning, in fact suggests a risky link between the two:

You thought I had the strength of men,
 Because with men I dared to speak,
 And courted Science now and then,
 And studied Latin for a week;
 But woman's woman, even when
 She reads her ethics in the Greek.

You thought me wiser than my kind;
 You thought me "more than common tall;"
 You thought because I had a mind,

That I could have no heart at all;
 But woman's woman you will find,
 Whether she be great or small.

And then you needs must die--ah, well!
 I knew you not, you loved not me.
 'Twas not because that darkness fell,
 You saw not what there was to see.
 But I that saw and could not tell--
 O evil Angel, set me free!

(1954:94)

Mary recalled the admonitions of the actress Fanny Kemble, a family friend who, 'looking at her crumpled brown silk which had been lying in a drawer for months,' said "'You deserve to be called a *scribbling woman*....You are that thing men call *a blue*'" (1900:186). There are hints of oddness in the poem-- suggestions of Amazonian height and an underdeveloped, or even absent, heart-- and comments about the often random course of a woman's education: 'And courted science now and then/And studied Latin for a week'. Yet by the end of the poem the failed love-affair has been shifted to the margins. The heartless 'And then you needs must die--ah well!/ I knew you not, you loved not me' is followed up by a cryptic allusion to some other unspeakable heartbreak which goes unseen by men: 'You saw not what there was to see./But I that saw and could not tell--/Oh evil Angel set me free'. The clever woman, it seems, is one who knows something else, something which lies outside men's knowledge. Yet the gap signalled by the dashes hides something from view from the reader, too. For this other, alternative knowledge is also a curse or a spell, the curse perhaps of a woman's problematic interpretation of Greek Ethics.³² The suggestion of a dangerous knowledge or desire runs through Coleridge's work. It recurs as something which women see and feel, but which is thwarted by traditional heterosexual dramas of love and marriage.

³² John Addington Symonds pamphlet *A Problem in Greek Ethics* was privately printed in 1883, but a shorter version of the work appears in the final chapter of *Studies of the Greek Poets* (London: A. and C. Black, 1876).

As critics have noted, the model of Platonic love between men was 'enshrined at the institutional heart of elite Victorian values' (Dowling 1994:77) due to the importance of the classics within the public school and university curricula. However, Mary and her fellow 'Grecian Ladies' gained access to body of texts which offered visions of communal same-sex desire between women: Sappho's poetry. Although the history of Sappho was, in the late nineteenth century, still subject to some censorship and revision, the society of women Sappho describes provided an important model of women's community for many late Victorian women writers. In her essay 'The Pictures of Sappho', Jane Harrison insists upon the importance of reclaiming the history of Sappho for modern women:

Perhaps nowadays it were more decent for the modern scribbler when the name of Sappho is mentioned to lay down her pen; and yet while one word, one scrap of ancient evidence is still untold, surely a woman may write it for the reading of women (1888: 274).

The 'ancient evidence' of Lesbian society, she argues:

bring[s] back...a lovely and pleasant phase of Lesbian life and a society where women were free to live and free to know, and not only just such things as should render them servicable, but all things--to the uttermost (1888:276).

Harrison suggests an exclusive separate knowledge and way of life which is similar to that evoked in Coleridge's poem 'A Clever Woman'. Though the language she uses is evasive and elliptic, 'free to know...all things--to the uttermost', she describes a community bound by something other than the concerns of domestic life. By concentrating upon the 'evidence' of female community which the Sapphic fragments provide, Harrison points up the 'social instinct' of that particular 'phase of Lesbian life', and in doing so, to suggest its relevance to her contemporaries:

These lesbian women had their clubs, in which they developed to the full that peculiar form of social enjoyment which comes to women from the society of women only...These Lesbian clubs and societies met, not for the discussion of domestic machinery...but for the keen and emulous

culture of the arts. This social instinct between women and women has for centuries been well-nigh dead; how should they care to meet and talk when they had nothing, or but two things to talk of...for the middle classes--economy and husbands...for the upper--fashion and scandal...But...[the social instinct between women] is reviving, thanks largely to the impulse of collegiate life...Women, we are told are not clubbable. Well, who knows? They *were* in Sappho's days (1888:275).

While Harrison's essay evades the problem hinted at in the first lines of her essay, it builds up to a provocative invitation for women to rethink the limits placed around their interaction with each other. The 'social instinct', she suggests, has been suppressed and stifled by a society which regulates women's experience and knowledge. Harrison sets up an opposition between the mechanical 'domestic machinery' and the natural 'social instinct' and 'impulse of collegiate life', thereby challenging the ideology that women who ventured outside were 'odd' and unnatural. The home, Harrison implies, is the place of emotional and intellectual privation; checking and repressing the natural 'impulses' and 'instincts' women have towards society. By rediscovering the history of this society, Harrison argues, modern women might uncover a 'social instinct between women and women [which] has for centuries been well-nigh dead' (1888:275).

Harrison's appeal that Sappho's story must be told by and for women-- 'surely a woman may write it for the reading of women' (1888:274)--implies that women may uncover another version of it for themselves. By the late nineteenth century the heterosexual 'version' of Sappho's legend, a version in which art and love were 'mutually exclusive' (Reynolds 1996:278), had largely been supplanted.³³ Henry Wharton's 'highly influential' (Reynolds 1996:294)

³³ The expeditions to Egypt mounted in the 1880s and 1890s turned up a number of ancient papyrus texts which added to the number of surviving fragments of Sappho's work. The funding for these expeditions was ensured, as Margaret Williamson notes, by 'the traditions of classical education for the upper classes' (Williamson 1995:47). Thus again the male classical tradition provided, indirectly, the means by which women gained their own access to this important female poetic ancestor. By the late Victorian period, 'systematic work on the manuscripts and language of the poems had produced a relatively stable text in place of the wildly differing variants printed in the early editions (Williamson 1995:46).

translation of 1885, *Sappho: Memoir, Text Selected Renderings and A Literal Translation*, restored the feminine pronouns. It was this translation which Michael Field used for their lyrics based on Sapphic fragments, *Long Ago* (Reynolds 1996:295). The restoration of the feminine pronoun gives late Victorian women poets access to a text via a route which avoids the cliff's edge; art and life are no longer set up in opposition to each other, and the fragmentary nature of the remains are 'no longer problematic':

these late Victorian women poets embraced Sappho's literary remains for the freedoms she offered in her lost phrases, her ellipses and empty spaces. Instead of being posed and still, instead of the formulaic model of the repeated 'last song', writers like Field, Robinson and Coleridge experiment with a kinetic verse which is suggestive and subtle, hinting at more than what is said and leaving space for guessing in (Reynolds 1996:299).

Along with her fellow Victorian women poets, Coleridge inherits a vision of an all-female community with historic and poetic precedence. The restored feminine pronouns offer her a way of enunciating, albeit subtly, desire between women.

As Theresa Whistler has noted, Mary and her friends lived very sheltered lives in many ways: 'the daughters of well-to-do Victorian gentlemen, they subscribed to the conventions of their upbringing' (1954:39). Yet despite this apparent conventionality, Coleridge's life and work are littered with examples of going against the grain of domestic ideology. For her, the family home was a place where study, writing, and even work, were permitted, possibly even encouraged. Her classical education gave her an alternative model of female culture, opening up an imaginative space into which she could project her own visions of female art and society. Like Rossetti, Marriott Watson and Nesbit, the house retains a claim upon her poetic imagination. However, Coleridge hints at alternative communities within that imaginative space, and even begins to suggest alternative destinations for the woman poet.

The house in Coleridge's work is a house of poetry and influence: an echo-chamber of different poetic voices; a haunted house full of the ghosts of other texts. Some poets, like Sappho, offer Coleridge an imaginative space and a poetics which she can turn to her own advantage. The 'empty spaces and ellipses' (Reynolds 1996:299) of the Sapphic fragments leave room for her own poetic voice to come through, giving her access to a female tradition within which she can hint at textual and sexual sameness. However, other poets, particularly the figure of her famous literary ancestor, Samuel Taylor, prove more obstructive to her imagination. Coleridge negotiates a house of poetry which is not only dogged by the ideological framework of the home, but which is structured by the dreams of other poets.

Coleridge's latter-day Sapphic lyrics echo the *parthenoi*, or maiden songs, celebrating a community of women in a phase before marriage. Her imagination seizes on the alternative model of female society and female desire which these poems envision. Like Sappho's verses, Coleridge's lyrics avoid a rigid distinction between subject and object. Instead there is a sense of the communality of desire. In these lyrics, Coleridge turns the house into a place full of maidens and song, effectively remaking the home into an exclusive club:

About the little chambers of my heart
 Friends have been coming--going--many a year.
 The doors stand open there.
 Some, lightly stepping, enter; some depart.

 Freely they come and freely go, at will.
 The walls give back their laughter; all day long
 They fill the house with song.
 One door alone is shut, one chamber still.
 (1954:120)

In this poem of 1888, 'Gone', the heart is a house whose doors are always open. The threshold is not a bar or an ideological marker, but something easily

crossed. The step into the house is both lightly taken and easily reversible: 'friends have been coming--going--many a year'. These women are not brides carried over the threshold, but cross it as if it were a barrier of no importance. Entry is not premised on the taking of vows, but is an exercise of will. The presence of many doors suggests plurality: this is a heart whose affections are open to many. As in William Cory's poem, 'Anteros', there is a clear sense of easy reciprocation. The walls of the chambers 'give back' the laughter of the women. By implication, the rooms are not just echo chambers, but halls of mirrors, and the sense of identification and similitude between the subject and object of desire is subtly suggested. 'Gone' evokes a house of doors through which maidens come and go.

However, the door which remains closed signals the absence of one of these 'lightly stepping' friends. Marriage remains a constant threat to the community of maidens, a threat indicated by the poem's title, 'Gone'. The sense of division evoked by the closed door in 'Gone' mirrors the division between maiden and wife, a division which are picked up in a later poem, 'Marriage':

No more alone sleeping, no more alone waking,
 Thy dreams divided, thy prayers in twain;
 Thy merry sisters to-night forsaking,
 Never shall we see thee, maiden, again.

Never shall we see thee, thine eyes glancing,
 Flashing with laughter and wild in glee,
 Under the mistletoe kissing and dancing,
 Wantonly free.

There shall come a matron walking sedately,
 Low-voiced, gentle, wise in reply.
 Tell me, O tell me, can I love her greatly?
 All for her sake must the maiden die!
 (1954:215).

Here, the divisive art of the law regulates and restricts, its domain extending even into imaginative and spiritual realms: 'thy dreams divided, thy prayers in twain'. This division is perceived in sharp contrast to the multiplied consciousness of the maiden, whose gaze does not fix but glances, whose movements remain untamed and untempered, 'wild in glee'. In the expansive, 'wantonly free', community of women, desire is linked by the 'kissing and dancing', the 'glancing and flashing' movements of the eye and the voice, so that it does not stop, but is passed from one to another. This dance takes place outside the conventions of religious bonds, under the pagan sign of mistletoe. To remain a maiden, Coleridge suggests, is to escape the checks which regulate life and desire.

Marriage, the poem's structure implies, does not only regulate desire, but poetry, too. The rhythm of the third stanza echoes the difference between maiden and wife, replicating the Sapphic verse form with its shortened last line. This difference offsets the regulated metre of the surrounding verses. In an early entry in her diary, Coleridge, writing on the subject of her pseudonym, 'Anodos', stated:

lest this *I* should grow troublesome and importunate, I will christen myself over again...and name myself after my favourite hero, Anodos in *Phantastes* ...If Anodos dies or gets married, the work will be discontinued; no one writes diaries in Paradise (1910:23-4).

Marriage and death are linked in this witty aside, and both stop the flow of writing. Coleridge's awareness of marriage as a threat may be linked to the fact that the Sapphic model of community, however liberating, and positive, was itself constantly under threat from the same thing. Sappho's poems are, after all, written about girls 'on the threshold of adult status' (Williamson 1995:79), for whom this communal life is a phase rather than an ending. These lyrics cut a dialectic between inside and outside, a dialectic which divides the maiden and the wife. Thus although the houses in these poems are beginning to challenge

and even to shrug off the ideological baggage of the home, they are still haunted by the framework of that ideology.

Coleridge's attempts to mark out a specifically female space, untroubled by divisions, are further complicated by the fact that the poet from whom she draws her inspiration became an important literary icon for many male poets during the later period. This appropriation of Sappho by male poets continued a tradition which extended back as far as Catullus and Ovid (Dellamora 1990:75). The decadent male imagination seized on the figure of Sappho to express forbidden desire, desire which went against nature.³⁴ In Baudelaire's poem 'Lesbos', the speaker styles himself as the elected voice of Sappho:

Since I am Lesbos' choice from all on earth
To sing the secret of her flowering maids,
And I from childhood worshipped in the cult
Of frenzied laughter mixed with sombre tears--
Since I am Lesbos' choice from all on earth
(1993:237)³⁵

As Susan Gubar, echoing Renée Vivien, has argued, male poets like Baudelaire and Swinburne, 'shrouded' Sappho in the 'scented darkness of fin-de-siècle decadence' (1984:48). In their dark visions, Sappho is driven inside a decadent House Beautiful and preserved against nature; an act which keeps late Victorian women poets at arm's length from their own tradition. In order to rescue Sappho, Coleridge had to find a way to re-illumine the history and voice of Sappho. Her poem of 1903, 'Unity', seems to hint at this project:

The sense of fellowship is grown
A radiant mystery.
The dark is shot with light; the stone
Is light unto the eyes that see.

³⁴The original title of Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal* was *Les Lesbiennes* (Culler in 1993: xiii).

³⁵ 'Car Lesbos entre tous m'a choisi sur la terre
Pour chanter le secret de se vierges en fleurs,
Et je fus dès l'enfance admis au noir mystère
Des rires effrénés mêlés aux sombres pleurs;
Car Lesbos entre nous tous m'a choisi sur la terre
(1993:236).

No more the wild, confused main
 Is tossed about with storms of fear.
 The sea is singing; and the rain
 Is music to the ears that hear.
 (1954:230)

Here, a communal secret is invoked. There is no single outsider-poet to sing of Sappho, but instead a 'sense of fellowship', of shared knowledge and bonds. The stress upon a knowledge and vision shared only by women recalls the separatist knowledge of 'A Clever Woman' and the vision of the maidens in 'Marriage'. By implication, if 'the stone is light unto the eyes that see', others who see only darkness project their own vision onto the history. The second stanza takes its point of view to the cliff top of Sappho's legendary suicide, but it rewrites the tragic ending, stressing instead the music found beyond the darkling plain. These notes sing out of confusion, audible only to 'the ears that hear'. This is an enlightened, revisioned version of Sappho. Yet it is not a general enlightenment, but a carefully mediated one. The secret of Sappho is open-- 'a radiant mystery'-- but only to those who see and hear it. Coleridge is able to play off the secrecy surrounding Sappho used by Baudelaire and Swinburne, but she prevents the fetishisation of the secret, and the voyeurism of Baudelaire, by stressing communal knowledge and fellowship.

A similar movement can be traced in Coleridge's poem 'A Day-dream' (1895) which conjures an desert landscape which is clear and light, lacking, as Leighton notes, the darkness and the 'stuffy atmosphere of decay and mystery'(1995:22) which is common to many male treatments of the Egyptian theme . In Coleridge's version a maiden and a crone sit, illuminated by 'straight, bright shafts of light' (1954:176). The only shadows in the landscape are those produced by the tombs of three Kings which 'shut out three spaces of the golden sky' (1954:176). Turning away from these tombs whose shadows block out the light, the speaker looks into the maiden's eyes:

Then did I turn me to the maiden's eyes,
 And they were as the sea, brimming and deep.
 Within them lay the secret of the skies,
 The rhythmical tranquillity of sleep.
 They were more quiet than a windless calm
 Among the isles of spices and of balm.

Now music is an echo in mine ear,
 And common stillness but the lack of noise;
 For the true music I shall never hear,
 Nor the true silence, mother of all joys.
 They dwell apart on that enchanted ground
 Where not a shadow falls and not a sound.

(1954:177)

The maiden's eyes reveal a secret which is not dark or entombed, but light and open: 'the secret of the skies'. The eyes of the crone are, like the maiden's, 'full of song' (1954:177), they hold the rhythms of an older, unheard music against which all other 'music' sounds as an echo. Coleridge negotiates the shadows and echoes of other texts, the Baudelairean 'isles of spices and of balm', seeking this lost landscape, this lost music which 'dwell[s] apart' on an 'enchanted ground'. As in 'Unity', Coleridge evokes a kind of open secret, seen in and through the eyes of women.

In both these poems, the structure of secrecy is kept, but the register has changed. Unlike the dark secrets and mysteries evoked by decadent texts, the secrets of Coleridge's poems are not inlaid with transgression, but shot through, riddled with light. Coleridge thus keeps her secret in the dark, yet avoids the decadent sense of perversity. These poetic strategies enable Coleridge to hint suggestively at textual and sexual sameness without recourse to the decadent haunts, allowing her to sidestep the notoriety which comes with that territory. In 'Unity' and 'A Day-dream' the lesbian Sappho is reworked and rewritten, she is reclaimed as an older poetic self, rather than a dark Baudelairean Other.

Coleridge thus rescues and reclaims the history of Sappho from a decadent house of poetic voyeurism.

'Unity' and 'A Day-Dream' uncover a double desire which runs through Coleridge's poetry. Her desire for the maidens who inhabit her house of poetry and song is twinned with a longing for an older music, a lost female voice which must be reclaimed from the entombing texts of men. In a poem of 1902, 'On the Arrival of a Visitor', Coleridge turns her attention to the ghosts of older texts:

Lo, when the house is empty, live the dreams
Of the old poets--and my chamber seems
A palace for the women long ago
That, whilst the living shadows round me move,
Are shadows also, dumb remote from love,
Vain figures, vainly mouthing at a show!
(1954:222)

The ghosts she chases are textual ghosts, visitors from the dreams of other poets. While the house is full, the figures of those ghosts are thrown into shadows of relief: they become 'dumb' and 'remote'. Thus, Coleridge empties the house of its 'living shadows', giving precedence to the 'women long ago'. The phrase 'long ago' recalls the title of Michael Field's 1889 collection of poems based on Sapphic fragments, and 'On the Arrival of a Visitor' suggests a similar impulse to turn towards the past for inspiration. Coleridge's poem expresses a desire to give back a voice to the 'vain figures', to re-house the remote shadows of older texts, creating 'a palace for the women long ago'.

The presence of those textual visitors indicates that Coleridge's house of poetry is not a free imaginative space, but a structure which is haunted by the guests and ghosts of other poems. This creative haunting, in which the act of writing conjures up ghosts of other poems and texts takes place in every writer's

imagination to some extent.³⁶ However, Coleridge's own 'anxiety of influence' (Bloom 1973: *passim*) is exacerbated by the fact that one of the precursors whose work haunts her creative imagination is Samuel Taylor, her great-great uncle.³⁷ J. Hillis Miller's comment that a literary text is 'inhabited by a long chain of allusions, guests, ghosts of previous texts' (1977:466) suddenly seems more literal when the ghosts are blood relations. Mary's description of her 'anxiety of influence' suggests the double power of her famous ancestor:

I have no fairy godmother...but lay claim to a fairy great-great-uncle which is perhaps the reason that I am condemned to wander restlessly around the Gates of Fairyland, although I have never yet passed them (1910:11).

While this 'fairy great-great-uncle' seems to hold a key to the 'Gates of Fairyland', he also blocks the entry. Mary finds herself outside the gates, condemned to 'wander restlessly' in search of inspiration.

Coleridge's most explicit poetic statement on the subject of her famous ancestor's textual ghosts can be found in a work of 1892, 'The Witch'. Of all her poems, 'The Witch' is the one most obviously haunted by her 'fairy great-great uncle'. It suggests the contradictory impulses she had towards his poetic legacy. In this poem, Mary takes up the voice of Geraldine from Samuel Taylor's 'Christabel'. In 'Christabel', Geraldine is at once 'damsel in distress, witch, sorceress, lamia-snake, nature goddess, daemonic spirit' (Holmes 1990:288). In 'The Witch', the Geraldine figure enters the poem as 'damsel in distress':

I have walked a great while over the snow,
And I am not tall or strong.
My clothes are wet, and my teeth are set,
And the way was hard and long.
I have wandered over the fruitful earth,

³⁶As the theories and models of influence proposed by critics like Harold Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), and Gilbert and Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979) suggest.

³⁷An earlier version of this discussion appeared as 'The Restless Wanderer at the Gates: Hosts, Guests and Ghosts in the Poetry of Mary E. Coleridge', in Leighton ed. *Victorian Women Poets: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

But I never came here before.
 Oh, lift me over the threshold, and let me in at the door!

The cutting wind is a cruel foe.
 I dare not stand in the blast.
 My hands are stone, and my voice a groan,
 And the worst of death is past.
 I am but a little maiden still,
 My little white feet are sore.
 Oh, lift me over the threshold, and let me in at the door!

Her voice was the voice that women have,
 Who plead for their heart's desire.
 She came--she came--and the quivering flame
 Sank and died in the fire.
 It never was lit again on my hearth
 Since I hurried over the threshold, and let her in at the door.

(1954: 145)

The discrepancy between the title of the poem and the frail figure who emerges is marked. Mary dispels the bewitching influences of Samuel Taylor's poem, turning the threatening Geraldine into a plaintive little white maiden who pleads admittance: 'Oh lift me over the threshold, and let me in at the door!'.

As Leighton has noted, Coleridge transposes the third person narrative of her ancestor's poem using a present tense 'I' which 'does duty for two speakers, shifting intimately between the witch and her host' (1995: 20). Coleridge uses this shape-shifting 'I' to blur and confuse the relationship between the two figures in the poem, thereby altering its tenor and atmosphere. While for the 'male Romantic, the witch is the other, sexually and narratively', for 'the female Victorian, the witch is the self, but split in two' (Leighton 1995:20). The women in Mary's poem are thus released from the Romantic oppositions of self and other by the liberating movement of the 'I' which can speak for both.

This shifting and swapping of identities takes place at the threshold, a boundary which is more fluid and unstable than the rigid one at the castle in

'Christabel': 'The gate that was ironed within and without,' (Coleridge 1993:263). In Samuel Taylor's poem, the crossing of the threshold is marked by a 'flit of flame' (1993:264), which flares up as Geraldine passes. This 'tongue of light'(1993:264), which rises from the dying embers of the fire, foreshadows the moment when Geraldine reveals the unspeakable mark to Christabel: 'A sight to dream of, not to tell!/O shield her, shield sweet Christabel' (1993:266). Thus Samuel Taylor's poem is structured around a moment of horror which divides the women. In contrast, 'The Witch' lets in the possibility of an alternative, implicit narrative of desire between the two figures on either side of the threshold. The fire that burns in Mary's poem may represent an illegitimate flame of desire: a 'quivering flame' which eagerly anticipates a consummation. However, the crossing of the threshold in 'The Witch' is qualified by the hint of some sort of sacrifice. The poem frustrates its own expectation: the flame is extinguished, never to be lit again:

She came--she came--and the quivering flame
Sank and died in the fire.
It was never lit again on my hearth
Since I hurried across the floor,
To lift her over the threshold, and let her in at the door.

Thus the implicit, covert narrative of desire is thwarted, or perhaps remains hidden. As in many of her poems, there is a gap between seeing and telling, suggesting that what her speaker envisions, she cannot bring herself to speak of.

However, the ambiguous nature of the poem's ending may also have something to do with the explicit desire voiced by the figure outside. The 'heart's desire' of the witch is to be let in: 'Oh, lift me over the threshold and let me in at the door!'. This plea recalls the metaphor of exclusion which Mary chose to express her own anxiety of influence: 'I am condemned to wander restlessly around the Gates of Fairyland, although I have never yet passed them' (1910:11). While Samuel Taylor's Geraldine is let in from the outside by Christabel, the witch is let in by somebody already inside. Seen in this light, the

restless 'I' which shifts between the two speakers on either side of the threshold may represent Coleridge's attempt to assert her own poetic identity against that of her famous ancestor. It is as if Mary is speaking from the gates of her own imaginary landscape, pleading admittance to the 'Fairyland' of her great-great-uncle's poem. The threshold is both the focus of her poem, and the point of its intersection with his.

Yet the witch's plea 'Oh, lift me over the threshold and let me in at the door', is a reminder of the traditional heterosexual dramas which take place at the threshold. The house of poetry is structured around a boundary which divides the women. This fact may explain the ambivalence at the end of Mary's poem. The moment of convergence on the threshold in 'The Witch' seems to signal an attempt to undo the dialectics of inside and outside which turn maiden into wife, sister into stranger. Thus the two worlds on either side of the threshold, the inside of hearth and home and the outside of snow and 'cutting wind' merge, the snow quenching the hearth-fire. Yet in bringing together these two mutually destructive elements, Coleridge kills the figurative flame of desire, or of inspiration, which flickers in the hearth. The restless 'I' in 'The Witch' sums up Coleridge's contradictory relation to her ancestor's poem. Its shifts between inside and outside suggest her desire to get in and out of the structure of his house of poetry and influence.

The complex and contradictory impulses which are played out in 'The Witch' find echoes in a later poem, 'Wilderspin' (1897).

In the little red house by the river,
 When the short night fell,
 Beside his web sat the weaver,
 Weaving a twisted spell.
 Mary and the Saints deliver
 My soul from the nethermost Hell!

In the little red house by the rushes
 It grew not dark at all,

For day dawned over the bushes
 Before night could fall.
 Where now a torrent rushes,
 The brook ran thin and small.

In the little red house a chamber
 Was set with jewels fair;
 There did a vine clamber
 Along the clambering stair,
 And grapes that shone like amber
 Hung at the windows there.

Will the loom not cease whirring?
 Will the house never be still?
 Is never a horseman stirring
 Out and about on the hill?
 Was it the cat purring?
 Did someone knock at the sill?

To the little red house a rider
 Was bound to come that night.
 A cup of sheeny cider
 Stood ready for his delight.
 And like a great black spider,
 The weaver watched on the right.

To the little red house by the river
 I came when the short night fell.
 I broke the web for ever,
 I broke my heart as well.
 Michael and the saints deliver
 My soul from the nethermost Hell!

(1954:200-1)

This poem cuts a dialectic between inside and outside which is reminiscent of 'The Witch'. The host of the innocuous-sounding 'little red house' is a wizard-

weaver whose 'twisted spells' exert a powerful draw: 'To the little red house a rider/Was bound to come that night'. The rider is both an expected guest and the victim of a lure. While the 'cup of sheeny cider promises hospitality, the presence of the weaver/spider suggests the unspecified danger which awaits. Yet the feeling of enticement, of invitation, is matched by a responding desire to enter. The grapes which 'shine like amber' at the window signal to the outsider the delights within, tempting like a goblin feast of fruit. The chamber in the house, 'set with jewels fair' suggests aesthetic treasure. However, the evil suggested by the fervent prayer of the first stanza suggests that, as in Rossetti's *Goblin Market* where a fairy economy calls a similarly twisted tune, these tempting treasures will demand their price.

The delights and temptation of the 'little red house' are offset by the sense of impediments evoked in the second stanza: night is stopped from falling, the power of the torrent is reduced to a thin brook. This general blocking is echoed by the shortened metre. Control is located, it seems, with the figure inside 'little red house', rather than with the narrator outside. It is as if the twistedness of the weaver's spells wreaks havoc on the internal logic of the poem itself. Meaning is impeded, the poem bewilders, treading a fine line between sense and a perverse, 'twisted' non-sense. The weaver in the house is not the welcoming host of 'The Witch', but someone more obstructive. The 'fairy great-great-uncle' figure here proves a more complex figure in Mary's imagination. The absence of the 'I', which does not appear until the final stanza, adds to the sense that the 'host' of this poem is more autonomous and obstructive. The fourth stanza speaks not only from inside the house, but also perhaps with another voice:

Will the loom not cease whirring?
 Will the house never be still?
 Is never a horseman stirring
 Out and about on the hill?
 Was it the cat purring?

Did someone knock at the sill?

The urgent questioning of the stanza creates a listener, demands a reply--as if the whirring of the loom requires the intervention of the horseman to silence or perhaps even answer it. Yet whatever finally takes place in the 'little red house' remains hidden.

As in 'The Witch' the desire to cross the threshold is accompanied by a contradictory impulse to destroy: 'I broke the web for ever'. Coleridge inverts the narrative of Tennyson's 'Lady of Shalott', bringing an unspecified curse upon the figure who enters. The web seems to represent not only the 'work' of someone else which must be broken (recalling the Oedipal struggle of Bloom's battling 'father' and 'son' poets), but also a figure of entanglement. The figure outside is 'bound' to come, suggesting the idea of a magical draw, the irresistible pull of the weaver, the desire to enter. The 'I' who enters the poem is drawn into a web of poetry and influence--a web which can never be unravelled and whose secrets can never be spelled out. Yet the price, it seems, of asserting poetic identity, is a broken heart: 'I broke the web forever./ I broke my heart as well. As in 'The Witch', the crossing of the threshold is implicated in the breaking of the heart. Furthermore, the movement into the 'little red house' in 'Wilderspin' takes place when the 'short night' falls. The title of the poem, which punningly suggests spinsters being led astray, adds to the sense that the entry into the house drags in a heterosexual drama of love and marriage which breaks the speaker's heart.

The threshold in Coleridge's poetry is a boundary which, when crossed, involves a simultaneous gain and loss. It is both the goal of her speakers who would enter the house of poetry, and the end of their desire. The threshold is the place where guest meets host in Mary Coleridge's imagination, a place of reciprocal desire, yet also of loss. The curious relation between the two figures either side of the threshold: poet and precursor, great-great-uncle and niece, weaver and rider, expresses both a desire for union and a desire for difference.

The threshold is the place of making and destroying, between the new poem and the entangling web of the old which weaves the spell of inspiration. Yet ultimately the threshold complicates the drama--the quest for poetry becomes entangled in the narrative of love and marriage which lies beneath these poems. This narrative confusion results in the simultaneous breaking of the web and the heart.

Coleridge seems trapped herself within this network of poetry and influence. She is caught somewhere between destruction and desire, like a female version of the Bloomian poet 'condemned to learn his profoundest yearnings through an awareness of other selves. The poem is within him, yet he experiences the shame and splendour of being found by poems outside him' (1973:26). The 'I' in 'The Witch' and 'Wilderspin' becomes a figure itself for change and inconstancy, for the gain and loss in the process of asserting poetic identity. However, this process is made more complex when the poet is female, a fact which is signalled by the pleading of the witch and the broken heart of the rider. The 'I' itself is, like the woman poet, interstitial, caught on the threshold of a house of poetry which is not only already inhabited, but whose structure inhibits her possession of it.

Therefore, while Coleridge's poems offer visions of the house as a place of poetry, she continues to be haunted by the ideological framework of the home. The recurrent imagery of chambers, doors and thresholds in her poetry suggests the extent to which her imagination is dogged by the ideological baggage of the home. Her visions of a fellowship of women linked by poetry, song and mutual desire remain subject to the divisions between inside and outside, maiden and wife, which structure society. And her attempts to assert her poetic identity, to enter the house of poetry, are thwarted by the fact that it is still visibly and structurally related to the private house. Thus, although it promises inspiration, the only way in is to cross the threshold, a movement which in Mary Coleridge's work inevitably feels like an arrival and an end.

Chapter Five

The House of Art: Mary E. Coleridge

“A character like that, “ he said to himself, “a real little passionate force to see at play is the finest thing in nature. It is finer than the finest work of art--than a Greek bas-relief, than a great Titian, than a Gothic cathedral. I had never been...more bored, than for a week before she came; I had never expected less that something agreeable might happen. Suddenly, I receive a Titian, by the post, to hang on the wall--a Greek bas-relief to stick over my chimney piece. The key of a beautiful edifice is thrust into my hand, and I am told to walk in and admire.” (James 1984:116).

In this passage from Henry James’ novel *The Portrait of a Lady* (1882), Ralph Touchett muses on the appeal of his newly-arrived cousin, Isabel Archer. Isabel, James’ prototype New Woman, is a woman with ‘intentions of her own’ (1984:116). Ralph decides to speculate, both literally and figuratively, on her. Furnishing her with half of his own inheritance, he settles back to watch her career unfold, telling her: ‘I content myself with watching you--with the deepest interest’ (1984:202). However, though initially fascinated by the ‘real’ woman, whose character seems to him to be the ‘finest thing in nature’, Ralph’s vision transforms her into a static work of art, ‘a Titian...a Greek bas-relief’. As Freedman has noted, Isabel’s ‘vital’ (1990:154) energies, whose “play” transcends that of any work of art’ (1990:145), are frozen, ‘unwittingly’ (1990:154), by Ralph’s idealising gaze. Ralph becomes a victim of his own aesthetic vision; his gaze traps Isabel in its frame in a manner that foreshadows her imprisonment in Gilbert Osmond’s oppressive house of art.

In James’ novel, the aesthetic gaze leads inevitably to this moment of reification. Like the ‘focus’ in Paterian aestheticism, the point at which ‘vital forces’ merge into a ‘hard gem-like flame’ (1868:311), the gaze of James’ aesthetes arrests the ‘flame-like spirit’ (James 1984:105) of Isabel Archer. As

she crosses the threshold of Osmond's house, she becomes part of his collection; his sterile mind only able to apprehend her with the same disinterested appraisal with which he views his *objets d'art*. The stifling effects of Osmond's house indicate the dangers of succumbing to the 'deep art' (1984:390) of male aestheticism. Osmond's house is 'the house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation', his 'beautiful mind' gives it neither the 'light nor air' (1984:478) necessary to feed Isabel's 'flame-like spirit': 'When she saw this rigid system close about her, draped though it was in pictured tapestries...that sense of darkness and suffocation...took possession of her' (1984:480).

As James' critique of aestheticism suggests, the houses of art, particularly when they are identified with the 'beautiful mind' (1984:478) of a male aesthete, represent problematic spaces for women. The aesthetic gaze is structured around a moment of hypostasy at which the Paterian "quicken, multiplied consciousness"...might be frozen into one perfect moment of perception of revelation' (Freedman 1990:19). Women who come within the range of the aesthetic gaze risk being trapped into a pictorial frame, arrested into an image of still perfection. Those women poets and writers, who, like the fictional Isabel Archer, would cultivate an aesthetic vision and a 'flame-like' (James 1984:105) sensibility, find themselves in a complex and contradictory position. Aestheticism as a doctrine leaves little room for female creativity, as Pater's gendering of the 'scholarly conscience' as male in his essay 'Style' suggests (Pater 1901: *Appreciations* , 12). Although women feature in the aesthetic canon, they are framed into muses, monsters and femme fatales. The house of art is an imaginative construct which women enter warily. In order to clear a creative space for themselves they must negotiate the business of the male gaze, avoiding the potentially entombing vision of the aesthete which has a tendency to close off any potential for the free-play of 'vital forces' (Pater 1868:311).

Women poets who trespass into the predominately male tradition of aestheticism find themselves in a house of art which is haunted by the ghostly

shadows of themselves. Their poetic and fictional negotiations of the spaces, surfaces, and boundaries of the house of art suggests the contradictory impulses they have towards aestheticism. While on one hand aestheticism offers women writers a certain creative stimulus, on the other, it represents an evasion of responsibility and accountability which seems to trouble the female imagination. In many ways, the women poets who engage with aestheticism effect a return of all that aestheticism represses, opening up the rigidly defined boundaries between art and life, aesthetics and ethics. However, they also attempt to go beyond the dualities of aestheticism, letting in the possibility of a dialogue between, for example, art and nature. Thus while often fascinated by aestheticism, and the creative freedom and potential which it represents, women poets like Mary Coleridge and her contemporaries leave room for subtle allusions and links back to the real world.

For Coleridge, the imaginative terrain of the house of art represents a haunted territory which, like the houses in poems like 'Wilderspin' and 'The Witch', is not only already inhabited, but is also a place of potential entrapment. She wrote two prose works which trespass into various houses of art: a short story, 'The Devil at the Guildhall' and a novel, *The Shadow on the Wall* (1904). In both works, a picture exerts a strange power over those who encounter it. The dominating influence of the work of art in both 'The Devil at the Guildhall' and *The Shadow on the Wall* may well owe something to Pater. His celebration of Da Vinci's 'Mona Lisa' in *The Renaissance* grants the picture a peculiar influence:

She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave; and has been a diver in deep seas and keeps their fallen day about her (1910: *The Renaissance*, 125).

Imagining the picture as a vampire, something which escapes linear time, morality and mortality, Pater gives it a posthumous life beyond its own age and

culture. For him, the Mona Lisa occupies a space in which the old and the new may meet:

The fancy of a perpetual life, sweeping together ten thousand experiences, is an old one; and modern thought has conceived the idea of humanity as wrought upon by and summing up in itself, all modes of thought and life. Certainly Lady Lisa might stand as the embodiment of the old fancy, the symbol of the modern idea (1910: *The Renaissance* , 126).

For Pater, the vampire is no mere gothic touch, but an attempt to express the immortality of art at a time when other immortalities were no longer believed. The painting takes on the mantle of posthumous life from the soul. The Mona Lisa becomes an aesthetic trace in this essay, 'older than the rocks upon which she sits', effacing all signs of origin. The picture is something which 'lives on' (Derrida 1979:102), creating its own trace structure which breaks open a path of influence.

Pater's release of the Mona Lisa from the bonds of time, history, and contemporaneity was followed by her own formal and thematic escape from the context of his essay. Pater's words are translated into free verse as the first 'modern' poem by Yeats in the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, and thereby released into modernism. But his strange dream of the work of art also haunts the imagination of late nineteenth century writers. The transference of power, from artist or spectator to art-work which Pater envisions, escapes into the increasingly Gothic texts of the fin-de-siècle--*The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Coleridge's *The Shadow on The Wall*. Pater's use of the figure of the vampire creates an image of the painting as a phantom which captivates its viewers, draining them of the blood of life, demanding its own passionate devotion to the life of art. In this new context, the work of art returns as a sinister double, a vampire leaching the blood of its transfixed victims.

'The Devil at the Guildhall' is a fragment, undated and unfinished, which plays upon the idea of the powerful draw exerted by a work of art. The story begins in an art-gallery and ends, rather inconclusively, in a jeweller's shop. The

eponymous 'Devil' refers to a painting by Millais, 'The Enemy Sowing Tares' (1865). This work appears to have held a peculiar fascination for Coleridge. Properly entitled 'The Parable of the Tares', but more commonly known as 'The Enemy Sowing Tares' or 'The Evil One Sowing Tares', the picture was originally exhibited with a quotation from Matthew xiii. 25, 'But while the men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat'(Spielman 1971:78).³⁸ Contemplating Millais' representation of the devil alongside others, Coleridge writes:

Is it not Tintoretto who makes the Tempter a young and beautiful man? I have always wanted to see that picture at Venice. In Tissot's he was an old and hideous brown man, holding up two stones which had a ghastly look of skulls about them. The Temptation on the roof of the Temple was very fine--the Evil One a kind of spider's web of shadow behind, everywhere--nowhere--at once. (Millais' Evil One sowing tares is the finest I ever saw, I think, for concentrated rage, envy, baseness, love of evil for evil) (1910:254).

Millais' devil has none of the dignified stature of Milton's Satan but is instead depicted as a rather shifty figure, glancing over his shoulder as he scatters his tares. Snakes slither towards him in the foreground of the picture and a wolf prowls around behind him. The scene is dimly lit by a small patch of light in the background while the rest of the picture is enveloped by darkness. For Mary, Millais' picture is a Mona Lisa figure; a devil whose evil is worked, in fin-de-siècle terms, for its own sake, whose presence is incorporeal and diffuse, flitting over the surface of the picture, 'everywhere and--nowhere at once', ready to net his victims in a captivating web of shadow. Her evocation of Millais' 'Devil' is reminiscent of the wizard-weaver in 'Wilderspin', a figure who exerts a similarly powerful draw.

In 'The Devil at the Guildhall', Millais' picture acts as a focus for different responses to art. The story opens with a man and a woman discussing the work:

³⁸Millais had intended to submit the picture as part of his diploma work, but it was rejected by the Royal Academy apparently because it resembled some of the Council's members a little too closely (Spielman 1971:79).

'I don't believe in him,' said a girl.

'I do,' said a man.

They were standing at the Guildhall, in front of Millais' picture of 'The Enemy sowing Tares'. The words were forced from them by the overmastering power which a work of art exerts over certain natures, the tyrannical convincingness of an assertion compelling instant negation or consent (Coleridge 1910:63).

The balance of power between the work and its interpreters has shifted, so that it is the work which 'speaks' them. The use of the passive, 'were forced from them' signals this transference. The work of art is granted a supremely dominating position in this scene, its authority conferred by a litany of adjectives and verbs -- 'overmastering', 'tyrannical', 'compelling'-- all of which testify to its influence over the spectators in the gallery. The man is an aesthete, a collector. Dressed with 'prim correctness', he walks around the exhibition fixing each picture with 'a long critical stare' and marking his catalogue with a 'minute magenta pencil' (1910:63). The girl, on the other hand, is an amateur, who takes notes 'with such scrupulous care that no one watching her could possibly have been aware of what she was doing' (1910:65). Implicitly, these differences colour the speakers' opposite responses to the 'Devil', provoking a 'curious duet' which juggles two subjects at once:

"If you do believe in him,' Althea said, using the pronoun as she often used it when talking to herself for another form of the word *I*, ' what becomes of the power of God?'

'If you don't believe in it, can you not see that God is not God alone, but the devil?'

'If you do believe in him, 'said Althea again, 'you shrink from fathoming the depths of evil in yourself.'

'If you don't believe in it, there is no refuge left but suicide.'"

(1910: 63)

On one hand the couple appear to be discussing art, and on another, theology. The overlap is revealed by a continual switch in pronouns. While the girl refers to 'him', the devil, the man substitutes the impersonal, 'it', making the work the object of his sentences. Thus their words have a different end in sight, both

literally and grammatically. While for the girl the categories of good and evil, heaven and hell retain a moral and a religious significance, for the man, the work exists beyond such categories. For him the only absolute is the work of art which, in the best aestheticist tradition, represents the last 'refuge'. 'Art...', Mary Coleridge once wrote, 'does away with all possibility of hell and all necessity of heaven' (1910:276-8).

However, it is not only their different reactions to the picture which distinguish the two visitors in the gallery. The girl is not simply a spectator. As she looks at the picture, she herself is under surveillance:

"What a picture that girl is," said a young man, entering the room, to a lady who accompanied him. 'Innocence watching the Serpent. Look at the purity of her forehead' (65).

The man turns the girl into 'a picture', an allegory: 'Innocence watching the Serpent'.

Throughout the story, the girl, Althea, is caught within a gaze which frames her into an icon of 'Innocence', 'Beauty' or 'Truth'. Her very name may well allude to Plato's concept of higher truth. Aletheia, in Platonic doctrine, is the opposite of those shadowy forms which are viewed on the walls of the cave.³⁹ The story moves from the gallery into a 'dingy' jeweller's shop where Althea wishes to sell a bracelet. Yet here again she finds herself the object of a male gaze. The owner, who has 'an eye for beauty' (1910:70), sees her hesitate outside and watches her secretly from his vantage point within: 'Each time, as soon as she had gone beyond him, he lifted his eyes, letting them fall again directly she turned round' (1910: 70). When Althea enters, the artful positioning of a mirror enables him to become the consummate voyeur:

The instant she crossed the threshold, he became absorbed in his work. A mirror hung upon the wall in front of him, and he was thus enabled to watch her movements without appearing to do so (1910: 70).

³⁹Although the 'true' derivative of Plato's Aletheia is Alatheia (literally 'truth'), the names were often confused (Withycombe 1959:12).

All this is, of course, framed by the eye of the reader who watches him as he spies on the girl. Althea's transactions with the jeweller, himself an 'ugly, diminutive' (1910:71) figure, are in turn framed by the man from the gallery. He enters the shop and catches sight of the unlikely pair, freezing them into yet another static image: 'Between deformity and beauty what a strange link was this' (1910:pp. 76-7).

The rigid structure of the male gaze in 'The Devil at the Guildhall' is ordered around a moral and aesthetic opposition which fixes Althea as 'Innocence watching the serpent'; Truth gazing at the shadowy forms of art; 'beauty' linking itself to 'deformity'. Though the story finishes abruptly, leaving no clue as to how it might have been developed, it emphasises the fact that women enter the spaces which display or sell art and jewels on different terms from their male counterparts. 'The Devil at the Guildhall' suggests the gallery and the jeweller's shop as spaces dominated, both literally and figuratively, by male devils, devils who would sell or sow something, whose influence is both fascinating and obscurely malign. However, it is not only the potential moral danger of these places which must be negotiated. Women, Coleridge suggests, are also subjected to a continual surveillance. Crossing the thresholds of these places, they find themselves caught within the frame of an objectifying male gaze: they are as much on display as the pictures and jewels themselves.

Coleridge's awareness of the sexual divisions which structure the gallery also inform her novel of 1904, *The Shadow on the Wall*. Like 'The Devil at the Guildhall', *The Shadow on the Wall*, centres on a single picture. However, the novel develops the Gothic possibilities of the picture and the gallery. It opens in Burlington House on the eve of an exhibition. The Royal Academy at night is a 'phantom-haunted desert' (1904:4) whose ghosts are the pictures which hang on the walls of its galleries. The pictures are vampires, whose 'lifeless immortality will long outlast the mortal life to which they owe it' (Coleridge 1904:4). The gallery is also a cryptic place, a 'collection of tombs' (1904:182) in which the

difference between the 'worst and best' of the paintings is 'the difference between a blot and a riddle without an answer' (1904:4). Coleridge's novel plays suggestively on the idea of the entombing secrets of male art. The portrait at the centre of the novel holds a deadly secret which spells disaster for those around it. The picture in question is a self-portrait which depicts the artist holding 'sheet of paper against a clean white palette. White on white' (1904:29). The night before the picture is due to be exhibited, a man breaks into the gallery and adds a suggestive 'spot of red, like a stain of blood' (1904:9) to this palette. The plot revolves around this blot added to the canvas, a blot which adds a decidedly un-aestheticist sense of guilt to the novel.

Though it owes much to Pater, Coleridge's novel is also reminiscent of Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray*. The title of Coleridge's work picks up on the mark, the 'blank space visible on the wall' (Wilde 1986:154), which is left after Dorian has taken the corrupted portrait upstairs to the old school room. Both novels contain a homosexual sub-plot and both novels centre around a portrait with a secret. However, despite these similarities, Coleridge's novel is more cryptic, more ambiguous and perhaps more playful than Wilde's. Her title may simply refer to the shadow cast by the picture's tilted frame as it hangs upon the wall.⁴⁰ The corruption of the painting in Wilde's *Dorian Gray* is monstrously visible, a 'hideous face on the canvas'(1985:189), yet in Coleridge's novel the secret is simply a blank: 'a sheet of paper against a clean white palette. White on white' (1904:29).

The chief protagonists of the novel are two sets of artists: Blanche Campbell and George Flack, Nettie Lister and Basil Daymer. Their relationships provide the backdrop to the drama which unfolds around the picture. Though these couples eventually marry, what really unites them are their preferences for their own sex. Basil and Nettie are 'alike' in that 'as she cared most for a

⁴⁰As Mario Praz notes in his *Illustrated History of Interior Decoration*, the method of hanging pictures so that their frames tilted forward became increasingly fashionable during the late Victorian period (1964:325).

woman, so he cared most for a man' (1904:70). When Basil has proposed to Nettie, he consoles his friend, 'Shall such a little thing as that come between us? Is any woman worth it?' (1904:85). The greater part of the novel is taken up with the complicated intrigue surrounding the male artists. Basil Daymer has killed his friend Charles Rackenham (the subject of the picture) in a duel, suspecting him of betraying their pact to be brother-artists who will not let women come between them. As Rackenham dies, he gives Basil a letter with instructions to pass it to his bride on their wedding night. This complex history is revealed to Nettie, who turns out to be Rackenham's long-lost sister, on the night in question. However, when Basil opens the letter, it reveals Rackenham's innocence: 'Tell Basil that he saved me after all--that I was innocent' (1904:284). This revelation kills Basil, thus also implicitly 'saving' the innocence of his bride.

Although the novel appears to focus on a male brotherhood of artists, its denouement leaves the woman artist at the centre. Once the intrigue surrounding the picture has been cleared up and the 'blot' of guilt, the 'stain' on Rackenham's character, has, figuratively speaking, been removed, Nettie is left alone in Basil's studio. As the dawn breaks, she finds herself sitting before the portrait:

While she sat there...the gleam of the fire growing less and less and the shadows folding them in more closely, the sound of bells fell upon her ear, borne softly on the tranquil air...The sound was light also; pure spiritual light, without form, colour or shade (1904:284-5).

The final revelation of the novel is a specifically female revelation. By the end of *The Shadow on the Wall*, the woman artist has been left with a creative space of her own, a space which is untroubled by blots and shadows. The movement away from the entombing secrets of male art towards a female enlightenment echoes Coleridge's poem 'A Day-Dream'. Coleridge spells out the secrets of that 'blot' on the portrait, leaving the reader with a different kind of secret, a female secret which is heard rather than seen, which is, like the secret of the

maiden's eyes in 'A Day-Dream', 'the secret of the skies' (1954:117). What remains is perhaps another riddle, but this time it is light and open, 'a riddle without an answer' (1904:4).

In both 'The Devil at the Guildhall' and *The Shadow on the Wall*, Coleridge indicates that the male houses of art, the gallery and the studio, are full of shadows and secrets. Women, she suggests, must negotiate their way around the ghosts and tombs of male art, avoiding its dark secrets and evading the frames which trap them into icons. However, as well as hinting at the potential dangers for women within the various houses of art explored in both works, Coleridge also attempts to clear a space for women, hinting, albeit tentatively, at artistic and aesthetic possibilities for the female artist and the female aesthete. Although the house of art is filled up with the paraphernalia of the male artist, overshadowed by his darkly guilty secrets, Coleridge finds some room for female creativity within that space.

The idea that the male houses of art offer some potential for female creativity is echoed in several poems by Coleridge and her contemporaries. For example, Michael Field's poem of 1908, which borrows explicitly 'From Baudelaire':

There shall be beds full of light odours blent,
Divan, great couches, deep, profound as tombs
And, grown for us, in light magnificent,
Over the flower stand there shall droop strange blooms.

Careful of their last flame declining
As two vast torches our hearts shall flare
And our two spirits in their double shining
Reflect the double lights reflected there.

One night--a night of mystic blue, of rose,
A look will pass supreme from me, from you,
Like a long sob, laden with long adieux.

And later on, an angel shall uncloset
 The door, and, entering joyously, re-light
 The tarnished mirrors and flames blown to the night.
 (Field 1908:39)

In this poem, Michael Field performs an act of imaginative trespass, entering a chamber of sensual beauty. The poem reworks Baudelaire's 'L'invitation au voyage' (1857), translating its vision of an aesthetic realm of beauty and pleasure. The refrain of Baudelaire's original, 'There, all is order and leisure, /Luxury, beauty and pleasure' (1993: 109),⁴¹ signals that this place exists at a remove from the world, far from the mundanities of domesticity. Michael Field's revision of Baudelaire's poem similarly relocates the house to an aesthetic plane, suggesting a place where the senses, rather than the conscience, are salved. The profits to be had in this hothouse of scents and 'strange blooms' are, following Baudelaire, sensual and artistic.

However, Field's poem also suggests the house of art as an alternative refuge for the woman poet. 'From Baudelaire' hints at the ways in which the house of beauty envisaged in Baudelaire's poem undermines the tenets of domestic ideology. The 'strange blooms', 'grown for us', in Field's poem are not the lilies of Ruskinian ideology, but fleurs du mal. The angel who appears in this house of beauty is an androgynous muse, returned to inspire the imaginations of women poets. The house in this poem offers a new self-centred subjectivity for the woman poet, a house of poetry and delight whose unmoralised 'angel' is both its guardian and its muse. Although this poem offers a borrowed vision of creativity--the looks which glance off the surface of the mirror, 'a look of mystic blue, or rose', seen through the coloured prism of late French Romanticism--it manages to accommodate the particular twinned vision of creativity and erotic union which Michael Field expresses in poems like 'Prologue' (1893): 'My love and I took hands and swore, /Against the world, to

⁴¹'Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté, /Luxe, calme et volupté' (Baudelaire 1993: 108).

be/Poets and lovers evermore' (*Underneath The Bough* : 73).⁴² Furthermore, the doubling work of the mirror gives back an image of twinned spirits, who, in their turn, 'reflect the double lights reflected there'. This reciprocity, suggested by the play between the mirror and the 'doubled shining' of the figures in the poem, blocks any sense of objectification. Thus, although there are hints of Pater's influence, in the evocation of a flame-like sensibility, 'as two vast torches our hearts shall flare', there is no moment of hypostasy. 'From Baudelaire' indicates both the aesthetic freedoms and the artistic potential that women poets might find in the male houses of art. Looking into Baudelaire's text, Michael Field conjures a vision of female creativity, the traces of which are *deposited* on the 'tarnished' surface of the mirror at the end of the poem.

The subtle negotiations of Field's poem, which enjoys Baudelaire's vision of a realm of sensual and aesthetic beauty while avoiding any moment of reification, is typical of the ways in which women poets approach the houses of art envisaged in male texts. However, the aesthetic freedoms of the house of art are not always enjoyed without costs. In a poem of 1882, Coleridge uncovers the 'other side' of a mirror of art, finding it haunted by the shadowy figure of a ghostly other:

'The Other Side of the Mirror'

I sat before my glass one day,
 And conjured up a vision bare,
 Unlike the aspects glad and gay,
 That erst were found reflected there-
 The vision of a woman, wild
 With more than womanly despair.

Her hair stood back on either side
 A face bereft of loveliness.

⁴²For discussions of this union of love and work, see Christine White, "'Poets and lovers evermore": Interpreting Female Love in the Poetry and Journals of Michael Field', (*Textual Practice* , 4 (1990), 197-212), and Angela Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against The Heart* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992, pp. 208-211).

It had no envy now to hide
 What once no man on earth could guess.
 It formed the thorny aureole
 Of hard unsanctified distress.

Her lips were open-not a sound
 Came through the parted lines of red.
 Whate'er it was, the hideous wound
 In silence and in secret bled.
 No sigh relieved her speechless woe,
 She had no voice to speak her dread.

And in her lurid eyes there shone
 The dying flame of life's desire,
 Made mad because its hope was gone,
 And kindled at the leaping fire
 Of jealousy, and fierce revenge,
 And strength that could not change nor tire.

Shade of a shadow in the glass,
 O set the crystal surface free!
 Pass-as the fairer visions pass-
 Nor ever more return, to be
 The ghost of a distracted hour,
 That heard me whisper, "I am she!"

(1954:612-3)⁴³

This poem suggests the contradictory relationship that Coleridge has with aestheticism. Like the mirror in Field's 'From Baudelaire', this mirror is less a reflective surface than a creative, aesthetic one: 'I sat before my glass one day, /And conjured up a vision bare'. However, Coleridge recognises two facets to the symbolic mirror of art: a pure 'crystal surface' free of obligations and empirical duty, and a side which effects a return of all that aestheticism

⁴³ This poem has been interpreted as a poem which describes a 'confrontation between the female self and its monstrous Other: an 'enraged prisoner' from the male dominated world of literary texts (Gilbert and Gubar 1979:15). The poem is thus a 'yearning towards that sane and serious self concealed on the other side of the mirror'. It represents 'a longing to escape from the many-faceted glass coffins of the patriarchal texts' (1979:43-4). However, what complicates this reading is the plea in the final stanza: 'O set the crystal surface free!'. Thus, as Leighton has argued, it ends with 'a protest *against* protest, in a plea for blankness' (1997:11).

represses. Like Dorian Gray's corrupted portrait, the 'other side' of Coleridge's mirror gives back the underside of aestheticism.

The 'vision bare' which Coleridge conjures in her glass suggests a return of ethical commitments. Her speaker is troubled by the 'shade of a shadow' as her repetitions of the image's lack suggest: 'a face bereft, 'not a sound', 'no voice', 'hope...gone'. This powerless ghost has no voice and no agency; its 'hideous wound' must bleed 'in silence and in secret'. There are hints of the monstrous figures which haunt the surfaces of aestheticism and decadence in the evocation of the 'lurid eyes', 'leaping fire of jealousy' and 'strength that could not change or tire', suggesting that Coleridge's mirror reflects the shadows of male art. The ghost on the surface also recalls Whistler's 'Symphony in White, No. 2' (1864) in which a portrait of a woman in white is shadowed by the reflection of a ghostly second self in the glass behind her. As Psomiades has noted, 'Symphony in White, No.2' gives back two images, two sides of its female subject: 'one beautiful and empty, the other somehow distorted and freighted with unidentifiable emotion' (1997:108). The mirror in Whistler's picture thus suggests 'the repressed, secret content of a lovely form' (1997:108). Coleridge's poem similarly suggests the underside of the 'free' 'crystal surface. There may well also be a subtle link back to Pater's Mona Lisa in Coleridge's poem. Yet here, 'What once no man on earth could guess'--the cryptic smile of Leonardo's famous creation--is viewed as a 'thorny aureole/ of hard unsanctified distress'. Coleridge's poem suggests the sacrifice of women on the altar of aestheticism.

However, the speaker's moment of tentative identification with the shadowy other in the glass is only a 'whisper'. The image itself is insubstantial, a reflection of a reflection: 'a shade of a shadow', produced in a moment of 'distraction'. Furthermore, the apparently heartfelt plea at the end of the poem is not a cry of sympathy for the ghost trapped in the mirror, but a plea for the freedoms of the 'crystal surface': 'O set the crystal surface free!' The

contradictory impulses in this poem suggest the complex relationship Coleridge has with aestheticism. The moment of troubled recognition in the poem, 'The ghost of a distracted hour, /That heard me whisper, 'I am she!', reinforces its evocation of the specific problems facing the woman aesthete: Coleridge is aware that her own act of licensed free-play traps a female other between the mirrors of her art.

The movements in the poem between these two 'side[s]', or facets, of the mirror are typical of Coleridge's attitude towards aestheticism: the 'crystal surface' represents the aesthetic medium, apparently free from obligation and duty. Yet this 'side' remains subject to a return of those ghosts from the 'other side', the side of guilt and ethical responsibility. While she is intrigued by the freedoms of its 'crystal surface[s]', she recognises their potential negation and othering of female 'distress'. Her uncovering of this 'other side' of the symbolic mirror of art indicates her awareness of what aestheticism represses. The impulse to recover what is lost or suppressed by aestheticism--the ghosts which haunt the 'other side' of the crystal surface, the prisoners trapped in the framing gaze of the aesthete--remains alongside her fascination with the freedoms of the crystal surface itself. Thus for Coleridge, as for many of her contemporaries, the creative potential which aestheticism offers the woman poet is offset by a sense of its negative 'other side'.

The contradictory impulses of Coleridge's 'The Other Side of a Mirror' are echoed in a poem by another late Victorian woman poet, A. Mary F. Robinson. 'Art and Life: A Sonnet', sets up a tension between the two apparently mutually exclusive realms, trading on the aesthete's tendency to turn away from the real in order to celebrate the eternal pleasures of 'Art':

When Autumn comes, my orchard trees alone,
Shall bear no fruit to deck the reddening year--

When apple gatherers climb the branches sere
Only on mine no harvest shall be grown.

For when the pearly blossom first was blown,
 I filled my hands with delicate *buds* and dear,
 I dipped them in thine icy waters clear,
 O well of Art! and turned them all to stone.

Therefore, when winter comes, I shall not eat
 Of mellow apples such as others prize:

I shall go hungry in a magic spring!--
 All round my head and bright before mine eyes
 The barren, strange, eternal blossoms meet,
 While I, not less an-hungered, gaze and sing.

(1902: 43)

In this poem, the speaker turns away from nature's bounty in order to celebrate a harvest of a rather different kind. The fruits of this harvest are not the 'mellow apples' of autumn, ripened over time, but 'barren, strange, eternal blossoms', arrested in a perpetual spring. Like the hothouse flowers, 'strange blooms', of Michael Field's 'From Baudelaire', these 'blossoms' are preserved against nature. Robinson emphasises their static perfection, contrasting them with images of seasonal fruition. The 'magic spring' of the speaker's 'eternal' present is thus offset by changing seasons: 'When Autumn comes', 'the reddening year'. Despite the speaker's apparent preference for these 'eternal blossoms': 'a magic spring!--/All round my head and bright before my eyes', the positive notes struck are all but overwhelmed by the continual expressions of loss and lack: 'alone', 'no fruit', 'no harvest', 'I shall not eat', 'I shall go hungry', 'I, not less an-hungered'. The speaker appears to make a deliberate choice in favour of these petrified treasures: 'I dipped them in thine icy waters clear and turned them all to stone'. However, this choice leaves the speaking subject trapped within a static realm of negatives, 'I shall not...', 'I, not less an-hungered...'. which undermine the second stanza's affirmations. Although the poem acknowledges the pleasures of this 'eternal', 'magic spring', its blossoms are sterile, 'barren'. Ultimately, the realm of Art is both 'strange' and estranging, divorcing the speaker from the natural world.

By contrasting the 'barren' pleasures of the realm of art with the 'mellow' fruits of the natural world, Robinson points up the fact that the act of turning away from the real involves an inevitable sacrifice. The price her speaker pays for the 'eternal' 'magic spring' is its sterility, its fruitlessness. The petrifying 'well of Art' may preserve the pleasures of spring, but it also imprisons them. Furthermore, the speaker herself is trapped in the act of looking, transfixed by the 'bright', 'eternal' blossoms:

All round my head and bright before mine eyes
The barren, strange, eternal blossoms meet,
While I, not less an-hungered, gaze and sing.

Although the blossoms of the realm of art offer a creative stimulus for Robinson's speaker, 'I...gaze and sing', they cannot feed her hunger: 'I, not less an-hungered'. The speaking subject is caught somewhere between desire for the petrified blossoms of art and hunger for the fruits of the real. By acknowledging the deprivations of the realm of Art, the simultaneous gains and losses involved in this turn away from 'Life', Robinson admits the possibility of a dialectic between 'Art' and 'Life', echoing the movement between the two 'side[s]' of the crystal surface in 'The Other Side of the Mirror'. The 'well of Art', like the crystal surface, offers the promise of creative inspiration, but it also represents a suppression of other sympathies and other appetites. Like 'The Other Side of the Mirror', 'Art and Life' effects a return of all that aestheticism represses. The 'strange blossoms' drawn from the 'well of Art' are preserved against time, and against nature. Neither poem resolves the tensions between aesthetics and ethics, 'Art' and 'Life', but instead leaves room for a dialogue between the two. For the woman poet, it seems, the strange blooms and blossoms, the mirrors and crystal surfaces, of the houses and realms of art, are rarely enjoyed without an awareness of some kind of loss or suppression. Their celebrations of its aesthetic pleasures are overshadowed by a sense of lack, of the gains and losses involved in a turn away from the real.

The contrast between the ‘mellow’ fruits of nature and the stony, petrified blossoms of ‘Art’ in Robinson’s poem also implicitly challenges the hierarchies of many aesthetic and decadent texts in which nature is only valued for its capacity to imitate or to resemble art. For example, Wilde’s ‘Symphony in Yellow’ (1889), whose title echoes Gautier’s ‘Symphony in White Major’ (1835) and Whistler’s ‘Symphony in White’, celebrates the fashionably decadent colours of green and yellow in an autumn landscape:

The yellow leaves begin to fade
 And flutter from the Temple elms,
 And at my feet the pale green Thames
 Lies like a rod of rippled jade.
 (in Beckson 1981:240)⁴⁴

For Wilde, the Thames appears as a ‘rod’ of precious stone, an object which ‘lies’ passively at the speaker’s feet. Echoing Pater’s merging of the ‘focus’ of ‘vital forces’ with the ‘hard gem-like flame’ (1868:311), Wilde arrests the flux of the river into the undulations in a piece of ‘rippled jade’. Rejecting the fluidity of nature, ‘Symphony in Yellow’ finds its pleasure in the hard and obdurate form of art. In his likening of the river to a ‘rod of rippled jade’, Wilde turns the river into an inanimate object, substituting art for nature, and thereby cutting a rigid distinction between the two. His decadent ‘picture’ is produced at the expense of something else. As in a number of aesthetic and decadent texts, nature is stilled into an icon of timeless perfection (Freedman 1990:pp.14-18). The tendency of the aesthetic gaze to fix its subject into a static image arrests the play of nature’s ‘vital forces’ (Pater 1868:311). Wilde’s vision encloses the natural landscape, setting it within a frame which leaves no room for the ebb and flow of the water itself.

In contrast, Coleridge’s poem of 1894, ‘*L’Oiseau Bleu*’, suggest an impulse not to catch its subject, but to let it fly free:

⁴⁴ ‘Symphony in Yellow’ first appeared in *Centennial Magazine: An Australasian Monthly Illustrated*, 1 (5 February 1889), 437.

The lake lay blue below the hill.
 O'er it, as I looked, there flew
 Across the waters cold and still,
 A bird whose wings were palest blue.

The sky above was blue at last,
 The sky beneath me blue in blue.
 A moment, ere the bird had passed,
 It caught his image as he flew.

(1954: 163)

In this poem, Coleridge avoids the trapping potential of the reflecting surface by the momentary capturing of the bird. It is only when the bird flies over the lake that the reflecting surface of the lake is activated, and then only for a moment: 'A moment, ere the bird had passed, /It caught his image as he flew'. What is absent from the woman poet's symphony in blue is the frame. The speaker's eye only glimpses the bird as it flies. Coleridge lets in what Wilde's jaded vision shuts out: time and motion, thereby avoiding the arresting decadence of 'Symphony in Yellow'. '*L'Oiseau Bleu*' does not enclose its subject, but catches its 'image' as the bird flies. Coleridge gives back a sense of provisionality--what is seen is merely a fleeting image--that is missing in Wilde's artfully framed vision.

While '*L'Oiseau Bleu*' appears to have no relation to anything real, there may well be a subtle allusion at work, an allusion signified by its title, which comes from D'Aulnoy's fairy tale of that name. The seventeenth-century D'Aulnoy story had enjoyed a renaissance in the nineteenth-century, and several editions were published during Victoria's reign (Warner 1994:166) The original tale is an attack on arranged marriage. The blue bird appears as a symbol for the freedoms to be gained outside the cages of courtly life and love. The bird flies above the courtiers' heads as they arrange the marriage of the heroine to a man whom she does not love. The heroine summons the bird to help her effect an escape: 'Blue bird, colour of time, /Fly to me quickly' (Warner 1994:166). The

story's theme may well have appealed to Coleridge, whose own poetry contains many implicit and explicit attacks on the divisive and repressive power of marriage. However, the heroine's summons, which identifies the bird as the 'colour of time', provides a clue to the momentary nature of the image in Coleridge's poem.

The original story spawned many imitations during the late nineteenth-century. Charles Conder painted a picture entitled '*L'Oiseau Bleu*' in 1895, a year after Coleridge's poem was written. His picture in turn inspired several works itself.⁴⁵ It formed the basis for Gordon Bottomley's poem of 1901 '*L'Oiseau Bleu*' (After Charles Conder)⁴⁶, and Max Beerbohm's prose poem of 1909, '*L'Oiseau Bleu : A Painting on Silk by Charles Conder*'. However, for the male writers, the blue bird stands for something rather different, as Beerbohm's piece indicates:

Perhaps, who knows, the bird will be trapped...Ah look! Monsieur le Duc almost touched its wing...Had he caught it and caged it, and hung the gilt cage in the boudoir of Madame la Duchess, doubtless the bird would have turned out to be but a moping, drooping, moulting creature, with not a song to its throat; doubtless the blue colour is but dye, and would soon have faded...Allons? The little rogue is still at large (Beerbohm in Stanford 1971:205).

Beerbohm's jaded view of the bird, 'doubtless the blue colour is but dye,' suggests the colour-sated *ennui* of the decadent. For him, the blue bird is an icon of artificiality, 'doubtless the blue colour is but dye', something preserved against nature. For Coleridge, on the other hand, the bird seems to represent something which cannot be caught--time, motion, or freedom itself. Rather than let her subject be preserved against nature, Coleridge lets it fly free into nature.

Thus Coleridge gestures towards an alternative picture which does not arrest its

⁴⁵Conder's biographer, John Rothenstein, remarks, 'it is difficult to recall another painter of his generation whose work inspired so many literary compositions' (1938:221).

⁴⁶Gordon Bottomley (1874-1948) was a friend of the artists Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon. many of his poems are written in response to their designs, lithographs and paintings, e.g. 'The White Watch' (1894) and 'The Orchard Feast' (1893). Further information about Bottomley's life can be found in Claude Collier Abbot and Anthony Bertram (eds.) *Poet and Painter, Being the Correspondence between Gordon Bottomley and Paul Nash 1910-1946*, 1955. A collected edition of his works, *Poems of Thirty Years*, appeared in 1925.

subject, but which leaves room for the play of 'vital forces'. She is aware that her aesthetic vision has the potential to entomb or entrap its object within a stringent frame. In this context, the frame of art becomes a cage which threatens to trap its flighty subject. For Coleridge, the picture, like the 'free' crystal surface in 'The Other Side of a Mirror', will always be enjoyed at the expense of something else. By letting the bird fly free in '*L'Oiseau Bleu*', Coleridge suggests an awareness that to capture it would be to render it immobile, to turn it into an inanimate object like the 'rod of rippled jade' in Wilde's poem.

Coleridge's renegotiations of the frames, surfaces and hierarchies of many aesthetic texts suggests the extent to which aestheticism, for the woman poet, represents a 'rigid system' (James 1984:478) which is structured around a reifying gaze which takes possession of its subjects. Although the realm of art offers eternal, perfect pleasures, its detachment from the real, from the passing of time and the seasons, renders them sterile, like the 'barren' blossoms of Mary Robinson's 'Art and Life'. However, rather than simply offering a critique of the exclusive refinements of the houses of art, the women's poetry of this period moves towards a reconfiguration of them. In a poem of 1908, 'Old Ivories', Michael Field contemplates, both literally and figuratively, another house of art, this time an antique shop:

A window full of ancient things, and while,
Lured by their solemn tints, I crossed the street,
A face was there that in its tranquil style,
Almost obscure, at once remote and sweet,
Moved me by pleasure of similitude--
For, flanked by golden ivories, that face,
Her face, looked forth in even and subdued
Deep power, while all the shining, all the grace
Came from the passing of Time over her,
Sorrow with Time, there was no age, no spring:
On those smooth brows no promise was astir,
No hope outlived: herself a perfect thing,
She stood by that time-burnished reliquary

Simple as Aphrodite by the sea.

(1908: 166)

The antique shop in this poem was based upon one owned by a friend of Edith Cooper and Katherine Bradley (the two poets who wrote as 'Michael Field').⁴⁷

The shop, started by Logan Pearsall Smith⁴⁸ in 1899, aimed to exploit the new market for antiques.⁴⁹ As Strachey notes, the establishment was called:

'Miss Toplady'--a joke referring to the fact that the proprietors were too exquisite to talk money, and always referred clients to "the lady who lives at the top of the house" for such details (1981:164).⁵⁰

The speaker in Field's poem crosses the street in order to look at the antiques displayed in the shop window. However, rather than framing the art-objects collected there in a reifying gaze of desire, the speaker's eyes form an image which is curiously indefinite. The 'face' in the window becomes apparent as the speaker draws closer, '...while, lured by their solemn tints, I crossed the street, /A face was there...', suggesting that it is a reflection of the speaker surrounded by the 'solemn tints' of 'ancient things'. However, the image in the window may equally belong to a statue in the shop, or even to someone inside, 'flanked by golden ivories',--'that face, /Her face'. It may be Katherine's, Edith's, or even, as Reynolds suggests, Sappho's (1996:304). The image remains curiously suspended between art and life, between a reflection and a picture. Lacking a sharp focus, the hazy composition of the image in the window

⁴⁷In an entry in their joint diary, *Works and Days*, in 1899, Katherine Bradley copies out the poem, recording underneath it: 'This I write of Henrie [Bradley's nickname for Cooper], seen in Toplady's shop (BL Add, Ms. 46788, fol. 59a).

⁴⁸Logan Pearsall Smith was the brother of Mary Costelloe (née Pearsall Smith), whom Bradley and Cooper met through their friendship with Bernard Berenson. Mary Costelloe was Berenson's companion for many years. She married him after the death of her first husband in 1899.

For further information on the Pearsall Smith family, see Barbara Strachey, *Remarkable Relations: The Story of the Pearsall Smith Family*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1981).

⁴⁹In the Preface to his 1897 work *The Spoils of Poynton*, James writes of collecting antiques as 'that most modern of our current passions, the fierce appetite for the upholsterer's and joiner's and brazier's work, the chairs and tables, the cabinets and presses, the material odds and ends, of the more labouring classes' (1987:26).

⁵⁰Cooper and Bradley's joint diaries record several visits to 'Miss Toplady's'. On one visit, in April 1899, Cooper notes: 'a gentleman doubted the existence of Toplady--he was invited to meet her at afternoon tea--great tension due to hope. A telegram "Ill--unable to come, many regrets, sell suite for £70--Toplady"'. 'Surely', she adds, 'the telegram proved the real existence!' (BL Add. Ms. 46788, fol. 61b.).

prevents objectification. As in 'From Baudelaire', there is no moment of hypostasy; the eye of the onlooker does not fix its subject into an icon or enclose it within a frame. Instead, the poem suggests the possibility of some kind of interaction between the speaker and the image in the window.

Thus the window does not separate the figures on either side of the window, but instead becomes the medium which connects them:

A face was there that in its tranquil style,
Almost obscure, at once remote and sweet,
Moved me by pleasure of similitude--

The speaker is 'moved' into an act of creative possession: two are blurred into one for a moment. The suggestion of some sort of exchange or interaction blurs the line between inside and outside, and implicitly, between art and life. The poem avoids a rigid distinction between the art-objects and the speaker who perceives them. The 'ancient things' in the shop may be 'remote', far-fetched, but they are not entirely divorced or detached from the world of the speaker. These treasures are not eternal or timeless, but are enhanced by age, 'burnished' by the passage of time. The image conjured in the surface of the window belongs neither to the sphere of art or life. The window collapses the boundary between the two, giving back an image which partakes of both:

...there was no age, no spring:
On those smooth brows no promise was astir,
No hope outlived: herself a perfect thing...

The contradictions in these lines, the face is both old and young, aged and ageless, suggest the simultaneous doubling and reflecting work of the window. The window both forges a link between the two figures inside and outside, but it also provides a space in-between the two in which an alternative picture is formed. Looking at this display of old things, this shrine to the ancient and the antique, Michael Field visualizes a new image which is neither lifeless nor artful, an image which does not reinforce the boundary between art and life, but which begins to blur it.

'Old Ivories' gives back an image of female creativity which is forged on the threshold of a house of art. It is a poem which, as Reynolds has noted, sounds like 'a revision and a promise' (1996:304). Field's impulse to undo the dialectic between inside and outside, art and life, leaves the woman poet with a intriguing space in which to conjure her own specifically female aesthetic. Although the image formed in the window remains indeterminate, a trace, it enables Michael Field to gesture towards some sort of female tradition with a future as well as a past. This movement away from the rigidly defined boundaries and frames which separate art from life in many aesthetic and decadent texts in order to suggest some kind of continuity between the two spheres or realms can be traced in a poem by Mary Coleridge, 'On a Bas-relief of Pelops and Hippodameia'⁵¹: which was wrecked and lay for many years under the sea'. Coleridge's poem, written in 1895, retrieves a ruined art-object from the depths of the sea:

Thus did a nameless and immortal hand
 Make of rough stone, the thing least like to
 life,
 The husband and the wife
 That the Most High, ere his creation, planned.
 Hundreds of years they lay, unsunned, un-
 scanned,
 Where the waves cut more smoothly than the
 knife,
 What time the winds tossed them about in
 strife,
 And filled those lips and eyes with the soft sand.

Art, that from Nature stole the human form
 By slow device of brain by simple strength,

⁵¹ In Greek myth, Pelops was the son of Tantalus. In order to win the hand of Hippodaemia, he had to beat her father, Oenomaus, in a chariot race. Pelops sabotaged the king's chariot and Oenomaus was killed during the race, leaving Pelops to claim his bride (Howatson 1989:418).

Lent it to Nature's artless force to keep.
 So with the human sculptor wrought the storm
 To round those lines of beauty, till at length
 A perfect thing was rescued from the deep.
 (1954:182)

In addition to its critique of an oppositional view of the relationship between art and nature, the poem also contains a sly dig at the institution of marriage. The subject of the sculpture, a husband and his wife, is 'the thing least like to life'. Thus the smoothing work of the waves implicitly undoes more than the work of the artist's hands. The sculpture in this poem is a found object, something which has lain out of sight for many years. However, this treasure has not been preserved against, but *by* nature. Furthermore, nature has a hand in perfecting the art-work, rounding its 'lines of beauty' with her 'artless force'. By placing this spoil of art in the hands of 'artless' nature, Coleridge punningly brings the two mutually exclusive things back together. Art-less nature, from whom art 'stole the human form' is given back the sculpture for a while and smoothes out those borrowed lines of beauty. Thus art and nature work together over time, 'at length', the element missing in a number of aesthetic texts from Pater's 'Mona Lisa' and Wilde's *Dorian Gray*. Instead, as in 'Old Ivories', time enhances the beauty of the work, filling and softening its lines. Nature gives back to the sculpture what the artist copied: its form, its body. The weathering work of nature thus smoothes out the knife's work of the artist, and the knife's edge between art and life. Because the caressing work of nature works with, rather than against the 'nameless and immortal artist', the poem neatly avoids an oppositional struggle between art and nature.⁵²

⁵² In *Sexual Personae*, Camille Paglia adds a gender dimension to this struggle. Her reading of a number of aesthetic and decadent texts detects a conflict between male 'aesthetic perception' and female nature: 'Aesthetic perception', she argues, is 'at war with its archenemy, female nature. The Appollonian eye of the male connoisseur is under siege from...[a] baleful Gorgon eye' (1990:485). Coleridge's poem avoids such rigid gender distinctions, instead suggesting that nature and art work together. Although the poem implicitly gives back an image of female creativity, it does so without recourse to essentialist categories of male art and female nature.

In this poem, Coleridge does not simply reverse the hierarchy between art and nature posited by aestheticism, instead she deconstructs it. The 'perfect thing' created is an object whose origins have been unmade and then remade: 'So with the human sculptor wrought the storm/To round those lines of beauty'. The enjambment in these lines brings both the making, 'wrought the storm', and the completion, 'to round those lines', together; the sense of priority and origin is deconstructed. The sculpture has its own moment of creation traced away by the waves until its maker and its original form are indistinguishable, yet the mothering work of nature gives it back body by rounding its lines of beauty. The refined work of art is retraced by the play of nature's 'vital forces' (Pater 1868:311). The poem does not tend towards *ekphrasis*, recreating the work of art in words. Instead it offers an image of unmaking and remaking. The newly remade work, 'the perfect thing', 'rescued from the deep' remains^{out} of sight; it cannot be fixed or fetishised by the eye of the reader. There is a sense of something removed from the eyes of others, whose 'lines of beauty' will remain 'unscanned'. Thus the poem forms an image which is similar to the unfocused, provisional trace in the window in 'Old Ivories'. The metrical pun 'unscanned' also suggests an element of self-reflexivity, as though the poem itself is, like 'Old Ivories', a 'revision and a promise' (Reynolds 1996:304). Both poems shape a new form out of old things, creating something whose perfection lies not in its static, timeless beauty, but in its fluidity, its mutability.

Like Michael Field, Mary Coleridge rescues and reclaim treasures from an exclusive house of art, finding a new home for them in her poetry. Her poems negotiate the 'rigid system' (James 1984:478) of aestheticism, avoiding its potential to enclose and entomb its subjects. Much of the creative impetus of these poems derives from their explorations of the negative aspects of aesthetic texts, identifying the 'ghosts' which haunt the underside of aestheticism, figuring out the frames and boundaries which separate art from life. However, Coleridge does not simply offer a critique of aestheticism. Instead, she and her

contemporaries bend its rules and blur its boundaries. Their strategic revisions of the images and art-works which belong to a predominantly male tradition clear a space for women. Coleridge's poetry, like Michael Field's, plunders treasures from a haunted and inhabited house of art and takes possession of them. These women poets retrieve souvenirs which they then remake in their own image. Looking into the windows and mirrors of the house of art, they improvise a female aesthetic, creating their own legacy of artistic subjects whose form reflects their own.

Chapter Six

At The Cross-Roads: Amy Levy

Levy is a transitional poet, a poet whose work suggests new beginnings, new directions and new roles for the female subject. In the epigraph to her 1889 volume of poetry, *A London Plane Tree*, Amy Levy proclaims the city as her poetic homeland: “Mine is an urban Muse and bound/By some strange law to paven ground” (1889:1). Her poetry takes this tradition to the cross-roads, looking forward to a world beyond the private house.

Amy Levy ended her life at her parent’s home in London in 1889, a week after she had corrected the proofs of her final volume of poetry. She was part of the vanguard of aspiring ‘new’ women, a poet, novelist and journalist, whose haunts included the new London clubs for women and the literary ‘at homes’ of some of the most famous figures of the day. Levy was friends with many of the leading women writers, thinkers and campaigners of the 1880s and ‘90s—Olive Schreiner and Vernon Lee, Beatrice Webb, Eleanor Marx and Clementina Black—and she published numerous articles in journals like the *The Woman’s World*, *London Society* and *The Jewish Chronicle*. She also wrote for the girl’s magazine *Atalanta*, which published articles, poems and short stories which were emancipatory in spirit.⁵³ However, like many other women of the time, Levy’s attempt to establish herself outside the narrow confines of the domestic sphere appears to have been a struggle. Contemporary accounts of encounters with Levy often suggest a rather isolated and marginal figure. Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper, who encountered her at literary soirées held by mutual

⁵³ *Atalanta* was a ‘sixpenny monthly with an ambitious plan and a good deal of high calibre work’ (Mitchell 1995:11). It was founded by L.T. Meade in 1887. Meade was a member of the managing committee of the Pioneer Club.

friends, recall her as a 'delightful, silent smoking companion..[who]..was deaf and often quiet' (BL Add. MS. 46779, ff. 33b).

The physical impairment of her deafness no doubt made her attempts to forge links in the outside world difficult. However, another factor, her Jewishness, simply added to the problems she faced. In an article published in *The Jewish Chronicle* (17 September 1886) she discusses the particular plight of 'Middle Class Jewish Women of To-Day':

a thoughtful person surveying the feminine half of [Anglo-Jewish society]...sees [on one hand] an ever increasing minority of eager women beating themselves in vain against the solid masonry of our ancient fortifications, long grown obsolete and no use save as obstructions; sometimes succeeding in scaling the wall and departing, never to return, to the world beyond. On the other, a crowd of half-educated, idealess, pampered creatures absorbed in material enjoyments...Looking on them it is perhaps hard to realise the extent of our undeveloped social resources...I for one believe that our Conservatism with regard to women, is one of the most deeply rooted, the most enduring sentiments of the race, and one that will die harder than any other; for die it must in the face of modern thought, modern liberty and, above all, of modern economic pressure (1886:6).

Levy's description of the Jewish traditions which relegate women to lives of enforced idleness is expressed through an architectural metaphor, one which catches the sense of the petrification of custom and ritual.⁵⁴ Like the hearth-place which remains, 'steadfast and unshaken', as a symbol of bourgeois domestic ideology in Marriott Watson's 'A Ruined Altar' (1904:42-3), Levy's evocation of the 'solid masonry' which encircles the Anglo-Jewish community stresses the extent to which ideological or religious tenets could harden into insurmountable mental barriers. The sense of an exclusion zone surrounding the community, its walls compact of social, religious and ideological significance,

⁵⁴Levy was by no means alone in her criticism of the restricted society of Jewish women. Earlier in the century, writers like Grace Aguilar and Charlotte Montefiore had explored the peculiar situation of the Anglo-Jewish woman writer. See Edward Calisch, *The Jew in English Literature* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1969) and more recently, Michael Galchinsky, *The Origin of the Modern Jewish Woman Writer Romance and Reform in Victorian England* (Detroit: Wayne University State Press, 1996).

also hints at the inevitable exile of those who would leave its walls, 'never to return'. While this article stresses that these 'ancient fortifications' must yield to the pressure of 'modern thought, modern liberty and..modern economic[s]', allowing for new growth, a sense of the difficulties of life without the social protections and structures of such a community, however restrictive, can be gleaned from the history of Levy's own short life. Her failure to capitalise on her own literary successes is starkly illustrated by her suicide, just a week after completing what was to be her last volume of poetry.

In life, Levy's forays beyond the domestic sphere appear to have been rather short-lived and unsuccessful. In 1879 she left home to study at Cambridge University, becoming the first female Jewish student at Newnham College. However, she remained there only four months before returning to her father's house in Euston. The reasons for her departure remain unclear, though she may have felt that Newnham, with its carefully constructed homely atmosphere, had less to offer than the West End of London which was home to a number of the new women's clubs, residential chambers and restaurants (Walker 1995:71). Deborah Nord has noted that Levy and a number of her friends and contemporaries appear to have been united in their desire to bypass the conventions of family life without choosing the alternative female communities of collegiate life (1990: 733).

Despite her own withdrawal from Cambridge, Levy continued to support and champion the provision of public space for women. Her return from Cambridge was not simply a retreat into domestic life. As well as writing poems and novels, she took an interest in the ever-widening sphere of women's lives. In her article 'Women and Club Life', she describes the 'hundred and one possibilities' which the territory of city and clubland has to offer, stating that 'the desire among women for a corporate life...for a richer social opportunity--has assumed the definite shape of a practical demand' (1888d: 364). She was well placed to survey this new landscape. Her father's house in Euston was

situated conveniently close to the West End of London where so many of these establishments were located. She also kept an eye out for the generation of women who would follow her. In an article for *Atalanta*, the monthly magazine for girls, Levy describes the atmosphere of the Reading Room at the British Museum:

Rich and poor, old and young, competent and incompetent, the successes and failures of life and of literature may be met beneath the dome in indistinguishable fellowship...for some it is a workshop, for others a lounge; there are those who put it to the highest uses, while in many cases it serves as a shelter,--a refuge, in more sense than one, for the destitute (1889b:453-4).

The impression she gives to her young readers is of a library able to accommodate all needs, sexes and classes. Her description of the inclusive atmosphere and motley membership of the Reading Room echoes Beatrice Webb: 'there you see decrepit men, despised foreigners, forlorn widows and soured maids, all knit together by a feeling of fellowship with the great immortals' (Webb 1982:266).

The 'indistinguishable fellowship' which Levy detected in the Reading Room may well have appealed to her personally. This was as a place in which outsiders were not singled out, where she, a perennial outsider, might feel at home. Despite her championing of the new provision of communal space for women in her essay 'Women and Club Life', Levy's life and work suggest a profound lack of connection with it, both emotionally and physically. It is ironic that this fervent supporter of the club should turn out to have been a figure who was by nature unclubbable. Deborah Nord describes Levy's profound sense of her own 'oddness':

She regarded herself as singular in a world of the paired and, because she was a Jew and an unmarried woman, as an outsider and virtual foreigner in English society (1990:740).

In 1885, Levy visited a friend (and fellow 'odd woman') at her home in Florence. Vernon Lee (Violet Paget), a novelist, philosopher and art-critic, lived

with her family and 'passionate female friend' (Strachey 1981:124) Anstruther Thompson, at Maiano, near Fiesole. Lee was a notoriously unconventional figure, but Florence, at that time was, as writers have noted:

an ideal place for the unconventional Anglo-Saxon...and the large expatriate community abounded in "Sapphists", eccentrics and those whose marital arrangements were irregular (Strachey 1981:124).

The art-critic Bernard Berenson lived nearby with his lover, later his wife, Mary Costelloe (née Pearsall Smith). Mary formed a friendship with Lee and her friend Maud Cruttwell (another aspiring artist), when she first moved to Florence. She recalled that both women 'tended to dress in shortish tweed skirts and a man's collar and tie' (Strachey 1981:124). Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper also knew Lee, whom they met when they stayed with the Berensons in 1895. However, the two poets, who tended to shrink from 'oddness' in others, appear to have found the women at 'Il Palmerino'(Lee's house) rather uncongenial. In a diary entry Edith writes: 'They are a new and terrible band--the old-maids of intellect' (BL Add. Ms. 46783, fol. 68b). Levy, on the other hand, might have been expected to feel at home in this company, her own sense of exile and oddness finding a fellowship in this eccentric community. However, even among these odd women, social outcasts and misfits, Levy appears to have felt her old sense of unbelonging. Two poems, 'A Reminiscence' and 'To Vernon Lee', which derive from her experiences in Florence, are tinged with the familiar notes of estrangement and isolation:

Thereby ran on of Art and Life our speech;
And of the gifts the gods had given to each--
Hope unto you, and unto me Despair
(1889a:74).

Having failed to find a spiritual home in Italy, Levy returned to London where she continued to write articles and poems. She published a great deal of work during the last years of her life and became 'noted for her stories of Jewish life' (Beckson 1987:47). Yet her literary successes seem ultimately to have offered little comfort. In a letter written to Olive Schreiner shortly before her

suicide, Levy states: 'You care for science and art and helping your fellow-men, therefore life is worth living to you: to me it is worth nothing (Schreiner 1924:207). Levy killed herself by inhaling the charcoal fumes from a stove at home. This sad, domestic suicide, at the age of twenty-seven, might be seen as an act which not only underlines her sense of her own homelessness, but which denies the possibility of a heavenly 'home'.

A bleak poem of 1884, 'A Cross-Road Epitaph', takes for its epigraph the old legend that those who commit suicide should be buried at the cross-roads.⁵⁵ This location seems grimly apt for Levy, a figure whose life and work suggests a sense of liminality, of half-reached goals and half-way houses. The figure of the cross-roads provides a key to Levy's work. Her subjects find themselves on the threshold of new realm. Yet they are continually held back by old bars and barriers which prevent them from reaching their goal.

Levy's political commitments to a way of life beyond the expected paths of marriage and domesticity are aired, with Utopian fervour, in her poem 'A Ballad of Religion and Marriage'. It was finally published in 1915, six years after her death. Twelve copies were printed for private circulation:

Swept into limbo is the host
 Of heavenly angels, row on row;
 The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
 Pale and defeated rise and go.
 The great Jehovah is laid low,
 Vanished his burning bush and rod--
 Say, are we doomed to deeper woe?
 Shall marriage go the way of God?

Monogamous, still at our post,
 Reluctantly we undergo
 Domestic round of boiled and roast,

⁵⁵ *Am Kreuzweg wird begraben
 Wer selber brachte sich um* (1884:94).

Yet deem the whole proceeding slow.

Daily the secret murmurs grow;
 We are no more content to plod
 Along the beaten paths--and so
 Marriage must go the way of God.

Soon, before all men, each shall toast
 The seven strings unto his bow,
 Like beacon fires along the coast,
 The flames of love shall glance and glow.
 Nor let hindrance man shall know,
 From natal bath to funeral sod;
 Perennial shall his pleasures flow
 When marriage goes the way of God.

Grant in a million years at most,
 Folk shall be neither pairs nor odd--
 Alas! we sha'n't be there to boast
 'Marriage has gone the way of God!'
 (1915).

Dislodging God and his 'host of angels' from their heavenly home, the speaker imagines the same fate for marriage. In a poem which dismantles the very structures which bourgeois domestic life is built on, Levy replaces the patriarchal trimuverate of 'Father, Son and Holy Ghost' and the 'Domestic round of boiled and roast' with a triumphalist vision of unbounded pleasure. The carefully tended domestic hearth-flame is to be replaced by 'flames of love' which shall 'glance and glow', recalling the flickering flame of desire in Coleridge's 'The Witch'. The poem offers a powerful critique of marriage and domestic life. Its voicing of dissent against the dominant social order, and its evocation of the resistance of others, make it an extraordinary poem for its time.

However, the futuristic vision of an alternative way of life is a far cry for the speaker of Levy's ballad, as the wry tone of the final stanza suggests: 'Grant in a million years at most,/ Folk shall be neither pairs nor odd'. Although this

knowledge does not negate or disarm the poem's critique of marriage, it introduces an ambivalent note. The pessimistic end to the poem undercuts the hopeful rhetoric of previous verses, suggesting that the goal which the poem moves towards is beyond reach, something which will be achieved by others: 'Alas! we shan't be there to boast/ " Marriage has gone the way of God!"'. The poem's vision of a new social order is projected into the dim and distant future. By acknowledging the anachronism of her cause, the speaker leaves herself stranded between an old order and a new way of life which she will never be part of.

The ambivalence of 'A Ballad of Religion and Marriage' is typical of Levy's work. Some of the confidence found in articles like 'Women and Club-Life' finds its way into her poems and novels. However, Levy's progressive vision of a society in which women might play a more active role is, more often than not, tempered with a sense of the obstacles that stand in the way of their emancipation. Levy's two novels of 1888, *The Romance of a Shop* and *Reuben Sachs*, offer different portraits of female experience. *Reuben Sachs* depicts the restricted lives of women within a tightly-knit community of middle-class Jews. *The Romance of a Shop* centres on four independently-minded sisters who set up a photography business. However, both novels are informed throughout by a sense of a conflict between female vocation and societal expectation. They suggest the ways in which a desire for independence and emancipation might open up divisions within the female self.

Levy received some criticism for her bleak portrayal of Jewish women's lives in *Reuben Sachs* (Calisch 1969:159). Its descriptions--'it is difficult to conceive a training, an existence, more curiously limited, more completely provincial' (1888a:38)--echo the sentiments voiced by Levy in her article 'Middle-class Jewish Women of To-day'. The real focus of the novel is not the eponymous Reuben Sachs, but the thwarted and contingent existence of his cousin, Judith Quixano. While Reuben pursues a career in public life, surveying

a future that appears 'almost boundless' (1888a: 126), Judith sees herself 'merely as one of a vast crowd of girls awaiting their promotion by marriage' (1888a: 35). Her experiences of the world are secondhand ones: 'it may be said that she [Judith] had seen nothing at first hand; had looked at it all, not with her own eyes, but with the eyes of Reuben Sachs' (1888a:18).

Throughout the novel, Levy emphasises the tranquilising effects of domestic life. The women in *Reuben Sachs* live sheltered lives, lives of inactivity; Levy stresses their lack of engagement with the world around them. For Reuben, the city of London is 'full of life and sound, a living, solid reality', yet for his cousin, Judith, it is 'a dream city' that melts and fades away (1888a: 264). The woman's world, is a mimic world, a mockery of 'little offices' (1888a: 188). The only real escape from this secondhand, mediated existence comes in the form of brief forays into the city. Whiteleys, England's first department store (Walkowitz 1992:49), features prominently in the novel. The department store functions as a site of female community a 'neutral territory' (1888a: 71) in which women from different neighbourhoods might meet to exchange news and hunt for bargains:

Here...where Bayswater nodded to Maida Vale, and South Kensington took Bayswater by the hand, here could...boundless curiosity be gratified, here could...love of gossip have free play (1888a: 71).

The department store is a place where women give way to impulses which are checked or reined in at home. The 'social aspects of the place' are loved 'no less than its business ones' (1888a: 71). What is purchased in the store is the exchange of the known and familiar for a new field of interest. The store offers the possibility of social interaction and the chance to perform different roles.

However, although these occasional, first-hand glimpses of a world beyond the domestic sphere are liberating and stimulating, they also serve to highlight the secondhand quality of everyday life at home. Confronted by the array of goods and faces in the department store, eyes become 'dancing, glittering, hard little organs of vision' (1888a: 71). The curiousness of this

description lies in its emphasis on looking, 'organs of vision', as if to suggest that these eyes are performing their proper function for the first time. This emphasis upon sensory stimulation is echoed in a description of Judith's manner in the store:

Was there...some intoxication in the hazy, gold-coloured air, that she, the practical, sensible Judith, went about like a hashish-eater under the first delightful influence of the dangerous drug?(1888a: 70)

To enter the shop is to enter a world of 'intoxication', a Goblin market of dangerous influence and heady delights reminiscent of the tempting fruits in Rossetti's poem. However, Levy's novel ultimately suggests that the real narcotic is not found in the market, but in the 'false calmness' (1888a: 183) of domestic life which acts like a soporific drug.

After Judith's hopes for a marriage with Reuben have been dashed by his political ambitions, her very real sensation of loss triggers an awareness of the falseness of the role she has been performing: 'The conventions, the disguises, which she had been taught to regard as the only realities, fell down suddenly' (1888a:182). Catching sight of herself in a mirror, she confronts an unfamiliar face with 'wild eyes and flushed cheeks':

her face was usually so calm...Calm? Had she ever been calm, save with the false calmness which narcotic drugs bestow? She was frightened of herself, of her own daring, of the wild, strange thoughts and feelings which struggled for mastery within her. There is nothing more terrible, more tragic than this ignorance of a woman of her own nature, her own possibilities, her own passions (1888a: 183).

The moment of mis-recognition in the mirror posits a split between the calm outer self which is presented to the world and the 'wild, strange thoughts and feelings within'. When the mask of her 'calm' self slips, it reveals the extent to which Judith's own thoughts and passions have been suppressed, even othered, by the 'conventions' and codes of feminine domesticity, thereby leaving her ignorant of her potential, her 'possibilities'. This key moment in the novel, which suggests the awakening of a hitherto unknown series of feelings, thoughts

and passions, seems to represent a turning point for Judith. However, despite her acknowledgement of, and tentative identification with, the strange face in the mirror, she cannot act upon the 'wild thoughts and feelings within'.

Unable to move forward, Judith falls back into her old 'unconsciousness' (1888a:188). She accepts a proposal of marriage from a man she does not love: 'Her duties as *fiancée* were clearly marked out; anything was better than those days of chaos, of upheaval, which had preceded her engagement' (1888a:244). The role of *fiancée* offers a structured existence which, though it gives her no chance of 'free play' (1888a:71), appears preferable to the 'chaos' of 'wild' thoughts and unformed 'possibilities'. However, Judith is continually reminded of a friend's pronouncements on marriage: 'Esther's favourite phrase, that marriage was an opiate, had occurred to her more than once during the past week' (1888a:244). In *Reuben Sachs*, Levy suggests that the limitations imposed upon female subjectivity by the rituals and conventions of that society serve to confine and repress any potential or ambition. The 'wild, strange' energies beneath the mask of 'false calmness' (1888a:183) have no real outlet within the restricted society of middle-class Jewish life; a society whose structure does not admit the possibility of a life for women beyond the 'clear path[s]' (1888a: 244) of marital and familial duty. Levy's novel demystifies domestic ideology, while at the same time suggesting the absence of any viable alternatives to domestic life.

Levy's second novel of 1888, *The Romance of a Shop*, explores the fortunes of a family of sisters, Gertrude, Lucy, Phyllis and Frances, who leave home in order to set up a photographic studio. Unlike the women in *Reuben Sachs*, the Lorimer sisters do not experience the world secondhand, but scan the horizon with 'searching and intensely modern eyes' (1888c:12). The progressive vision and modernity of these women is continually emphasised. Rejecting the traditional female roles, they pursue the goal of a career in business: 'a business--that is so different. It is progressive; a creature capable of growth; the very

qualities in which women's work is dreadfully lacking' (1888c:10). As its title suggests, the real romance of the novel is with the world of business, a world which offers the potential for 'growth' and development which the domestic sphere lacks. The sisters' business venture is ultimately short-lived. Although the photography business becomes a prosperous concern, the pressures of surviving alone prove too great. By the end of the novel, the women have retreated into the more conventional roles of wives and mothers. Whether the conventional ending is due to the form of the novel, which demands a neat resolution, or to Levy's own faltering imagination, remains unclear. However, if the sisters only travel half-way towards an independent life, this may well be Levy's point. For this novel is all about a negotiation between different worlds: the old world of family duties and domestic life and the new world of business and work.

The Romance of a Shop opens with the sale of the Lorimer sisters' family home following the death of their father. The house is described in terms which suggests its anachronism and its failure to remain aloof from the pressures of market forces:

the whole place wore a dejected and dismantled appearance; while in the windows and on the outer wall of the garden were fixed black and white posters, announcing a sale of effects to take place on that day week (1888c:2).

Through this symbolic dismantling and clearing out of the home, the sale posters on the walls heralding the imminent disruption of its privacy and the sale of its contents, Levy opens up the possibility of a new way of life for her forward-thinking protagonists. But there are signs too that this house has not simply been home to domestic angels. A conservatory, whose glass walls might have been expected to be lined with 'palms and orchids' (1888c:3), is instead 'fitted up as a photographer's studio'.⁵⁶ This domestic outpost bears the visible though

⁵⁶ In her autobiographical essay, 'Annals of My Glass House' (written in 1874) Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879) records that her first 'glass house' was transformed from 'a glazed fowl house' she had given her children (*Photographic Journal*, 1927, 296-301).

disordered signs of work: 'a nondescript heap of professional litter--were scattered about the place from end to end' (1888c: 4). The word 'professional' acts as a signpost, suggesting the ultimate destination of this 'nondescript heap'. This amateur pursuit is an embryonic form of work. The old house in this novel is not where female existence begins and ends, but the starting point on a journey towards socio-economic independence.

The location of the sister's 'new home'(1888c:44) in the premises of their photographic studio is emblematic of their new life. The space of the studio is divided into living and working quarters and furnished with a minimum of cheap gimcrack furniture and photographs of art-works by Durer and Botticelli. This division of space signifies the new union of life and work, a union celebrated by the sisters:

““Oh Lucy,” cried Gertrude, in a burst of enthusiasm, as they stood together in the studio, “this is work, this is life, I think we have never worked or lived together before”” (1888c:63).

However, although this merging of the private and public spheres is initially welcomed, this new home over the shop also provokes feelings of instability. At times this space seems like a makeshift home which serves to underline the sisters' fragile position. In a moment of doubt Gertrude, the prime mover behind their new way of life, finds herself questioning the whole enterprise:

Was this life, this ceaseless messing about in a pokey glass out-house, this eating and drinking and sleeping in the shabby London rooms? Was any human creature to be blamed who rebelled against it? Did not flesh and blood cry out against such sordidness (1888c:144).

While on one hand the sisters new home represents a new beginning, a union of life and work, on the other, it feels like a temporary lodging. The foundations of this new life are ultimately rather insecure.

This ambivalence runs through the novel. *The Romance of a Shop* continually questions the pitfalls of the move to the 'new home'. The exhilarations and excitements of the sisters' new life are offset by a sense of its

dangers. After a neighbour attempts suicide following the failure of her business, Gertrude begins to apprehend the tenuousness of their position:

Fenced in as she had hitherto been from the grosser realities of life, she was only beginning to realise the meaning of life. Only a plank--a plank between them and the pitiless, fathomless ocean on which they had set out with such unknowing fearlessness; into whose boiling depths hundreds sank daily and disappeared (1888c:91).

This description of the city contrasts starkly with representations of city-life in Levy's journalism. For example, in her essay 'Women and Club-Life', the city is a thrilling 'great stream of human life' (1888d:364). These contrasting visions of the city--on one hand 'a great stream', on the other 'a pitiless, fathomless ocean' indicate her awareness of the different aspects of city-life. While it offers excitements and the potential for self-development, the city is also a place fraught with risks. *The Romance of a Shop* suggests that leaving the 'high and dry region of the residential neighbourhood' in order to join 'the great stream of human life' (1888d:364) is a potentially dangerous enterprise.

When a fight breaks out in the street below the studio, the sisters' proximity to the violence is stressed: 'their ears were assailed by the sound of shrill cries...the floor and the windows of the little sitting room shook and rattled in a most alarming manner' (1888c:84). In an intriguing reaction, Phyllis, the youngest sister, stands gazing at the scene with 'a strange bright look in her eyes...the unimpassioned, impersonal excitement of a spectator at a thrilling play' (1888c:84). The shocking unfamiliarity of the violence renders it unreal. Unable to fully comprehend or engage with what is unfolding before her eyes, Phyllis turns it into a spectacle. Levy's concentration on the subjectivity of the observer is typical of the novel. Throughout *The Romance of a Shop*, she emphasises the fact that despite their 'searching and intensely modern eyes' (1888c:12), these women are not at home in the visual field of the city. The windows of the new home over the shop offer the sisters a new perspective on the world. They open onto a bewildering array of new sights which are very

different from those glimpsed from the safe environs of the old house, sights which create a new viewing subject.

As well as exposing them to unfamiliar sights, the sisters' move to the city makes them vulnerable to the hostile stares of others. Returning from a morning's study at the British Museum, Gertrude is observed riding on an omnibus by a aunt who disapproves of the sisters' new way of life:

Gertrude came careering up the street on the summit of a tall, green omnibus, her hair blowing gaily in the breeze, her ill-gloved hands clasped about a bulky notebook....it is impossible to be dignified on the top of an omnibus, and Gertrude received her aunt's frozen stare of non-recognition with a humiliating consciousness of the disadvantages of her own position (1888c:101-2).

There is an interesting mix here of triumph and awkwardness. Gertrude's position 'on the summit' implies a certain mastery. However, imagining herself through the eyes of her aunt, she is conscious only of 'the disadvantages' of her position, of her unfeminine appearance: 'her hair blowing...in the breeze, her ill-gloved hands clasped about a bulky notebook'. Levy emphasises her visibility and her vulnerability. Caught in her aunt's gaze-- 'a frozen stare of non-recognition', she is at once painfully visible, but socially invisible; at once both below and also beyond her aunt's notice. This sense of invisibility is echoed in a later scene in which Gertrude attends a 'Show Sunday' party held by one of the artists who live in the sister's new neighbourhood. She stands, tellingly, on the threshold of the room, 'looking about her with a rather wistful interest' (1888c:129). Unnoticed by the guests, 'no one had taken any notice of the young woman by the doorway with her pale face suit of rusty black', Gertrude confesses to her host that she feels 'like a ghost' (1888c: 129). Caught between the an old world full of familiar faces who give back blank 'stare[s] of non-recognition', and an array of new ones who do not know her, her sense of identity begins to slip away. Without the confirmation of presence offered by the framing gaze of others, she becomes a shadow of her former self, a ghost of yesterday.

The sense of dislocation and alienation which dogs Levy's embryonic new women emphasises the difficulties involved in forging a new social identity. Leaving their old home, the sisters find themselves in a *terra incognita*. The problems they face are similar to those voiced by Beatrice Webb after Levy's suicide: 'in these terrible days of mental pressure it is courage to *live* that we most lack...the supreme courage of fighting a battle for an unknown leader, for an unknown cause, that fails us now and again' (1979:399). At the end of the novel, Gertrude reflects on the end of her 'romance' with the world of work and business. Walking across the room to look at herself in a mirror which hangs over the mantelpiece, she is reminded of a passage from *Villette* :

" I saw myself in the glass, in my mourning dress a faded, hollow-eyed vision. Yet I thought little of the wan spectacle...I still felt life at life's sources."

That was the worst of it; one was so terribly vital (1888c:284).⁵⁷

The use of Brontë's words in this context is particularly arresting. Seeking to confirm her own subjectivity by looking into the mirror, the 'searching and intensely modern eyes' of Levy's protagonist encounter a ghost from an older text; it is as if the figure of 'old', odd Victorian womanhood haunts the consciousness of the 'new'. The mismatch between inner vitality, 'I still felt life at life's sources', and the ghostly 'vision' in the mirror suggests the tenuousness of Gertrude's identity. The mirror does not validate her sense of identity but gives back an image of a 'faded' ghostly other. Gertrude is defeated by the contradictions of her transitional world:

The majority are born to new spheres, for them the face of things has changed completely. But nearly always there is one, at least, who, after the storm is over, finds himself stranded and desolate, no further advanced on his journey than before (1888c:283).

The novel's evocations of thwarted hopes and lost opportunities is typical of Levy's work. Levy's progressive vision shapes a future full of potential and possibility. She signals new directions for the female subject. Yet she continues

⁵⁷ Levy's novel here recalls the moment in *Villette* when Lucy Snowe, having lost touch with Mrs Bretton, seeks new employment in London.

to be haunted by a sense of the difficulties involved in moving towards the goal of an independent life. It is as if Levy herself is imaginatively stranded, caught between a desire to move forward and the drag of the past.

Levy's poetry, like her novels, evokes a sense of displacement and alienation. Her speakers are homeless figures, outcasts who belong nowhere. Two poems which recall Levy's visit to Florence in 1885, sum up the feeling of estrangement and unbelonging which characterises her poetry. Levy's visit to Vernon Lee's house offered her a glimpse of home-life rather different to the monotonous 'domestic round' described in poems like 'A Ballad of Religion and Marriage'. She recorded her impressions of the place in 'To Vernon Lee' and 'A Reminiscence' (1889). The former recalls the idyllic surroundings of 'Il Palmerino' (Lee's house):

On Bellesguardo, when the year was young,
We wandered, seeking for the daffodil
And dark anemone, whose purples fill
The peasant's plot, between the corn shoots sprung.

Over the grey, low wall the olive flung
Her deeper greyness; far off, hill on hill
Sloped to the sky, which, pearly-pale and still,
Above the large and luminous landscape hung.

A snowy blackthorn flowered beyond my reach;
You broke a branch and gave it to me there;
I found for you a scarlet blossom rare.

Thereby ran on of Art and Life our speech;
And of the gifts the gods had given to each--
Hope unto you, and unto me despair

(1889a:74)

Levy frames the scene into a picture, a 'large and luminous landscape' which is full of promise and possibility. The hidden potential of nature is revealed in the flowering buds which 'fill/The peasant's plot'. However, Levy estranges

herself from this scene of renewal and potential. The subtle implication of the poem, with its seasonal puns--‘When the year was young’, ‘the corn shoots sprung’, ‘Hope unto you’--is that even in the season of renewal, only ‘despair’ springs eternal for Levy. The ‘gift’ of ‘despair’ is, like the flowering thorn, a deeply ambivalent thing to lay claim to. Yet her creative imagination thrives on a sense of its alienation and isolation.

The emotional trajectory of ‘To Vernon Lee’ is echoed in its companion-piece, ‘A Reminiscence’, which frames a memory of a fireside conversation with her host:

It is so long gone by, and yet
 How clearly now I see it all!
 The glimmer of your cigarette,
 The little chamber, narrow and tall.

Perseus; your picture in its frame;
 (How near they seem and yet how far!)
 The blaze of kindled logs; the flame
 Of tulips in a mighty jar.

Florence and spring-time: surely each
 Glad things unto the spirit saith.
 Why did you lead me in your speech
 To those dark mysteries of death?
 (1889a: 47)

Levy’s poetic reminiscence of ‘Il Palmerino’ offers a different perspective on the private house. Here the house is a place where women sit, smoking and talking of art and philosophy. The hearth-fire is not a sanctified flame of domesticity, but a good ‘blaze of kindled logs’, and the flowers which decorate the room are not retiring lilies, but tulips which dazzle with colour. The hearth is not the focus of the poem, but is merely one of a number of ‘flames’ which flicker in the room, from the ‘glimmer of a cigarette’ to the ‘flame’ of tulips. By dispersing the flame in this way, Levy neatly avoids the heavy symbolism of the

hearth-place. These individual flames of colour and light recall the flame imagined in 'A Ballad of Religion and Marriage'; a 'flame of love' set up to 'glance and glow' in the place of the hearth-fire.

Yet even in these undomestic surroundings, Levy does not feel at home. The implicit contradictions of 'To Vernon Lee', in which the speaker can find only 'despair' in the midst of the season of hope and renewal, are made explicit here: 'Florence and spring time: surely each/Glad things unto the spirit saith'. Instead of musing on these 'glad things', the speaker's conversation with her host takes a 'dark turn' towards the 'mysteries of death'. The ambivalent note struck at the end of 'To Vernon Lee' and 'A Reminiscence' undermines the suggestion of promise and new beginnings in both poems. Levy's speaker turns away from the Florentine spring, from the congenial warmth and hospitality in 'A Reminiscence', divorcing herself from the 'glad things' which these surroundings offer. The sense of a deliberate withdrawal in both poems, which appears to stem from the speaker's deep-rooted sense of dislocation, is a movement which can be traced in many of Levy's poems

The feeling of emotional detachment and isolation expressed in 'To Vernon Lee' and 'A Reminiscence' is echoed in the illustrations which accompany the volume in which both poems appear, *A London Plane Tree*. As Deborah Nord has noted, one drawing:

shows a young woman seated hand-on-brow at a desk...Placed in front of an open window through which the spire and tops of city buildings can be glimpsed, she is the quintessential woman writer alone with her work in a London garret (1990:748).

The sense of detachment evoked by this image of the solitary writer in her garret undermines the epigraph of *A London Plane Tree*, "Mine is an urban Muse and bound/by some strange law to paven ground". This epigraph, borrowed from Austin Dobson, suggests the volume as the work of a poet-*flâneuse*, a female version of Baudelaire's urban hero. However, as Benjamin has noted,

Baudelaire's *flâneur* makes his home in the city-streets themselves. They become:

a dwelling for the *flâneur*...To him the shiny, enamelled signs of business are at least as good a wall ornament as an oil painting is to a bourgeois in his salon. The walls are the desk against which he presses his notebook; new-stands are his libraries and the terraces of cafés are the balconies from which he looks down on his household after his work is done (1976:37).

The *flâneur* turns the city into his study, his work-place. The city encloses him like the walls of a room, the 'signs of business' are his art-works, the newstands are his libraries. The sense of engagement, even ownership, which characterises the *flâneur's* relation to the city is in sharp contrast to the images found in Levy's *A London Plane Tree*. Though the city, as the epigraph suggests, is her 'Muse', the woman poet contemplates it at a physical and emotional distance. Like Judith in *Reuben Sachs*, for whom the city is a 'dream city', rather than a 'living, solid reality' (1888a:264), for her, the city is a far off spectacle. She can see its buildings and rooftops, but she is not part of it. It remains inaccessible and remote.

The literal and figurative location of the garret is explored in the title-poem of Levy's 1884 volume, *A Minor Poet and Other Verse*. 'A Minor Poet' is a dramatic monologue, spoken by a male poet who is on the verge of suicide. From the vantage point of his garret, he can see the rooftops of London laid out before him:

...How it falls
 Across that endless sea of London roofs,
 Weaving such golden wonders on the grey,
 That almost, for the moment, we forget
 The world of woe beneath them.

(1884:16)

The alchemic work of the sun transfigures the city's grey roofs, turning them into 'golden wonders'. Yet this transformation is only a trick of light, something which momentarily blinds the poet to 'the world of woe beneath them':

'Underneath, /For all the sunset's glory, Pain is king' (1884:16). The brief glimmer of hope offered by the sun is thus merely a illusion. Looking out over the 'sea of roofs', he perceives only 'Pain'. The speaker's bleak vision of the world is heightened by his isolation. The bird's eye positioning of the garret provides a vantage point for him to view his own and invisibility: 'There is no place for me in all the world' (1884:15). Though a place of artistic endeavour, the garret is also symbolic of failure; it is the haunt of the minor poet, the poet who goes unheard, the poet with 'no place'.

Levy's identification with the figure of the (male) minor poet may in part derive from her feelings of artistic failure. The speaker's suicide in his attic room grimly foretells her own suicide, five years later, at her father's house. The borrowed voice of the minor poet is similar to her own poetic voice. His sense of detachment is not simply a result of his sense of failure, but goes to the heart of his identity:

I must confess it; I can feel the pulse
A-beating at my heart, yet never knew
The throb of cosmic pulses.
(1884:15).

As Scheinberg has noted, the speaker in 'A Minor Poet':

disavows that any man can feel what another feels; in so doing, he undercuts a major assumption about the function of poetry itself, namely that poetry can link individual readers to...[a] cosmic (universal) "throb" of common existence (1997: 183).

Furthermore, the speaker's anxiety about his artistic ability, translated into images of textual, visual and aural inadequacy, suggests singularity as well as ineptitude:

A creature maimed and marr'd
From very birth. A blot, a blur, a note
All out of tune in this world's instrument.
(1884:15)

The minor poet's 'failure' is, as Scheinberg has suggested, bound up in his difference: 'because the minor poet voices language that is so far from the dominant Victorian epistemology of "the common good", his words are not necessarily heard' (Scheinberg 1997:183). Speaking with the voice of the minor poet, a poet whose voice is 'out of tune' (1884:15) with the world, Levy, as a Jewish woman writer, may well be hinting at her own struggle to assert her poetic identity. Like the speaker in 'A Minor Poet', her birth marks her out as different. Thus the dramatic monologue provides her with a vehicle to explore her own sense of literary obscurity and creative isolation.

The riddling contradictions which structure 'A Minor Poet' trap the speaker in a series of paradoxes. He is at once:

A base thing, yet not knowing to fulfil
 Base functions. A high thing, yet all unmeet
 For work that's high. A dweller on the earth,
 Yet not content to dig with other men
 Because of certain sudden sights and sounds
 (Bars of broke music; furtive, fleeting glimpse
 Of angel faces 'thwart the grating seen)
 Perceived in Heaven.

(1884: 15)

The speaker is caught between his poetic ambitions and his sense of his own unfitness. In this context, the minor poet's moments of inspiration seem like a cruel joke. Like the 'gift' of despair which the speaker lays claim to in 'To Vernon Lee', the muse's visitations leave him empty-handed, serving only to highlight his failures:

Yet when I approach to catch
 The sound's completeness, to absorb
 The faces' full perfection, Heaven's gate,
 Which then had stood ajar, sudden falls to,
 And I, a-shiver in the dark and cold,
 Scarce hear afar the mocking tones of men:

(1884:14)

The minor poet's imperfect access to his muse, his failure to apprehend the fugitive notes of poetic inspiration, is characterised by an metaphor of exclusion. The flickering images are themselves agents of this creative blocking, as the pun on thwarting suggests--'angel faces 'thwart the grating seen'. The minor poet is turned into a voyeur who must catch a 'furtive fleeting glimpse' of his muse. The teasing movement of the door is reminiscent of Rossetti's 'Echo', which envisions Paradise as a place:

Where thirsting longing eyes
 Watch the slow door
 That opening, letting in, lets out no more.
 (1979: I, 46)

However, Levy's 'base' speaker remains on the other side of the door, trapped between 'Heaven' and earth. Caught on the verge of a neo-Platonic realm of poetic plenitude, the poet is denied entry. The 'sound's completeness', the 'faces' full perfection' remain just out of reach. 'A Minor Poet' suggests that poetic inspiration, for Levy as for Coleridge, lies beyond the gates, on the other side of a threshold. Yet the threshold, which Coleridge's speakers cross, proves an impassable boundary for Levy's poetic subjects.

The threshold is a deeply ambivalent image in Levy's work. While it appears to signal the possibility of advancement, of an entry into a new state or stage, it also marks out a dividing line which separates her speakers from their goal. They thus find themselves stranded; doomed, like the speaker in 'A Minor Poet', to remain in sight and sound of an object they cannot possess, a realm they will never enter. Levy's poetry continually frames scenes and sights which exist at some irrevocable remove from her speakers. Her poem 'On the Threshold' is narrated by a speaker who imagines the death of a lover:

O God, my dream! I dreamed that you were dead;
 Your mother hung above the couch and wept
 Whereon you lay all white, and garlanded
 With blooms of waxen whiteness. I had crept
 Up to your chamber-door, which stood ajar,

And in the doorway watched you from afar,
 Nor dared advance to kiss your lips and brow.
 I had no part in you nor lot in you as now;
 Death had not broken between us the old bar;
 Nor torn out my heart the old, cold sense
 Of your misprision and my impotence.

(1889: 39)

The threshold in this poem divides the speaker from an unclaimable other. The speaker lingers in the doorway gazing at the remote 'garlanded' body of her loss. However, it is not death which has wrought this separation. The speaker's dream serves only to reinforce the emotional distance between her and her beloved in life: 'I had no part, nor lot in you, as now'. The doubling effect of the flowers which lie, white on white', over the body of the beloved, is echoed by alliteration: 'you lay all white, and garlanded/With blooms of waxen whiteness'. The layered 'waxen whiteness' which lies between the speaker and her beloved suggests the 'old bar' which separates the two is multiplied after death.

The speaker's dream is also a dream of an older text. 'On the Threshold' rewrites Rossetti's 'A Pause':

They made the chamber sweet with flowers and leaves,
 And the bed sweet with flowers on which I lay;
 While my soul, love-bound, loitered on its way.
 I did not hear the birds about the eaves,
 Nor hear the reapers talk among the sheaves:
 Only my soul kept watch from day to day,
 My thirsty soul kept watch for one away:--
 Perhaps he loves, I thought, remembers, grieves.
 At length there came the step upon the stair,
 Upon the lock the old familiar hand:
 Then first my spirit seemed to scent the air
 Of Paradise; then first the tardy sand
 Of time ran golden; and I felt my hair
 Put on a glory, and my soul expand.

(1979: III, 215-16).

'A Pause' is narrated by a figure inside the chamber: the dead woman whose soul, typically for Rossetti, loiters on the way to Paradise. The 'love-bound' speaker keeps up a vigil for her lover: 'My thirsty soul kept watch for one away'. This poem moves towards some sort of posthumous encounter between the woman and her lover, 'At length there came the step upon the stair, /Upon the lock the old familiar hand', which it then abruptly denies. The soul's belated journey to its heavenly 'home' begins as the speaker hears her lover's step on the stair. As his hand unlocks the door, it release the speaker from her 'love-bound' state. As Leighton has noted, there is an element of 'caprice' (1992:163) in the soul's sudden departure. Her untimely withdrawal from the chamber at the very moment when her lover arrives, introduces an ironic note which undermines the apparently heart-felt sentiment of previous lines: 'Perhaps he loves, I thought, remembers, grieves'. The speaker's 'pause' is thus a teasing, heart-less dalliance. The soul's fulfillment comes through the speaker's evasion of the romantic encounter: 'I felt my hair/Put on a glory, and my soul expand'.

Levy's reworking of Rossetti's poem is intriguing. She approaches the poem from a different perspective, taking on the voice of the forsaken lover. This shift of perspective has the effect of keeping the speaking voice earthbound. The narrator of Levy's poem has no prospect of heaven before her, but is caught 'on the threshold', framing her own exclusion from the flower-decked chamber. Thus unlike Mary Coleridge's 'The Witch', which brings the women on either side of the threshold together, rewriting 'Christabel' as a narrative of desire, Levy's revision of Rossetti's poem emphasises the distance between them. Levy's identification with the earthbound lover further suggests her sense of creative isolation. It is as if, in contemplating her relation to her predecessor, she finds herself wanting. Unable to take on the voice of the transported soul, Levy positions herself outside the chamber, experiencing the 'old, cold sense' of worthlessness and 'impotence'. Although the door to the chamber stands ajar, like the gate in 'A Minor Poet', her speaker cannot enter:

'Nor dared advance to kiss your lips and brow./I had no part nor lot in you as now'.

Unable to establish a poetic home for herself, Levy remains imaginatively exiled. The phrase 'I had no part nor lot in you' sums up a general atmosphere in Levy's work, a sense of homelessness which runs through her poetry and her prose. Her work conveys a sense of being stranded, of being caught between new and old worlds, yet belonging properly to neither. As in 'On the Threshold', Levy's speakers are often near the object of their desire, or have some goal in sight, but they cannot advance to claim it; deeply divided against themselves, they are unable to progress. The conflicts and contradictions in Levy's poetry seem to stem in part from her sense of her own unfitness and unbelonging. However, she also highlights the difficulties facing women during this transitional period; the difficulties of being 'at the cross-roads'. The cross-roads is potentially a place of new direction, yet it is also the place where suicides, those eternally homeless souls, are buried.

Chapter Seven

The Empty House: Charlotte Mew

I, no longer I,
Climbed home, the homeless ghost I was to be
(Charlotte Mew, 'Péri en Mer', 1981: 61)

Charlotte Mew's imaginative returns to the Victorian house feel like the end of a tradition. Mew empties out the house, ridding it of its connotations of security, origins and presence. It survives in her work as a ghostly, hollow structure which serves only to frame and confirm her sense of homelessness. The 'I' that returns in her poetry is not simply haunted, shut out, or dispossessed, but suffers a more fundamental sense of displacement.

Mew was born in London in 1869. Her father, Fred Mew, the son of farmers from the Isle of Wight, trained as an architect, joining the firm of H.E.Kendall as a junior assistant in 1862 (Fitzgerald 1984:24). Charlotte's mother, Maria Marden Kendall, was the daughter of the eminent Victorian architect, H.E.Kendall⁵⁸ who had been responsible for a number of important buildings, including St. Pauls, in London (Monro 1953:viii). The walls of the house in Doughty Street were covered with framed architectural sketches and drawings, amongst which was a watercolour by Charlotte's grandfather depicting basilicas, marble staircases and monuments, which had been admired by Baudelaire when it was exhibited at the Paris Salon (Fitzgerald 1984:26). Mew inherits something of an architect's eye for the proportion and fine detail of buildings, though her aesthetic sense is twinned with a keen awareness of the hidden truths which elegant exteriors may conceal.

⁵⁸ H. E. Kendall senior had been a pupil of Thomas Liverton and a friend of Pugin.

Mew's childhood was punctuated by the deaths and disappearances of her brothers and sisters. The first death occurred before Charlotte's birth and was followed by the deaths of two more brothers, Christopher and Richard, in 1876. As Mew's biographer notes, 'Charlotte, at seven years old, was certainly brought in, as elder sisters were in the 1870s, to see her little brother (Richard) 'in death' (Fitzgerald 1984:17). It was an experience which was to haunt her imagination, one which suggested the house as an unhomely place, a point of disappearance. However, childhood deaths were not the only cause of disappearance in the Mew family. The firm of architects for whom Charlotte's father worked specialised in 'private houses...Board Schools, and lunatic asylums' (Fitzgerald 1984:12). By a cruel irony, Mew was to lose a brother and a sister to the latter institution. Her brother Henry (the only boy to survive childhood) was diagnosed as suffering from *dementia praecox* in 1888. He was confined to institutions for the rest of his life. In the early 1890s Freda, the youngest child, was diagnosed with the same condition. She was sent to the Isle of Wight and lived out her life in Whitelands Hospital in Carisbrooke (Fitzgerald, 43-4). Freda's breakdown appears to have been particularly devastating. Losing this adored younger sister, the family favourite, the flame-like (Monro 1953: ix) Freda, as well as her elder brother, was to haunt Charlotte throughout her life.

When Charlotte was nineteen the family moved to a large house in Gordon Square, Bloomsbury. Just around the corner was the Gower Street school, run by the suffragist and educational campaigner Lucy Harrison, where Mew had spent several happy years. She had persuaded her father to let her board at Harrison's own house with a number of other girls, benefiting from extra literature lessons in the evening. Thus, like Mary Coleridge, she was able to share the experience of a communal existence devoted to literature and learning which opened up horizons beyond the sphere of dutiful Victorian girlhood and the claims of home and family. Mew also helped, as Coleridge did through her teaching, to extend

this privilege to those less fortunate, in her work for the organisation set up by Miss Paget to establish clubs for working girls (Monro 1953:vi).⁵⁹ The house in Gordon Square was conveniently close to ^{the} British Museum where Mew, like so many of her contemporaries, read and worked. Charlotte's sister Anne attended the nearby Female School of Art in Queen Square. Her talent and training was, like Charlotte's writing, to provide a much needed, though barely adequate source of income in later years.

Despite the advances made during the late Victorian period, Charlotte appears to have benefitted little, in material terms at least, from the tentative moves towards female emancipation. Burdened by responsibilities, financial and emotional, Mew was tied to the family home while her parents were alive, and left little money to establish a home for herself after their death. Though she, like Anne, enjoyed some tentative freedoms, neither were fully able to capitalise on them. In later years, Mew assigned the blame for her own relatively small output of poems to the distractions and duties of domestic life, recalling the 'constant interruptions' (Monro 1953:xviii) which disrupted her writing. When Fred Mew died in 1898, leaving little money, his two surviving daughters were left to support their mother. In order to help pay the bills Charlotte continued to write and Anne took up work re-touching seventeenth-century furniture in order to satisfy the new craze for collecting antiques. The latter was poorly-paid work which Charlotte regarded as 'sweat-shop labour' (Fitzgerald 1984:98). After their mother died, and the small annuity she had received had gone, the two girls moved to Anne's studio in Charlotte Street setting up a makeshift home there (Monro 1953:xvii).

⁵⁹In an article in *Nineteenth Century*, Maude Stanley describes the importance of these clubs in providing 'recreation...after ten or eleven hours of monotonous work' and offering an alternative to less wholesome venues such as 'the music hall, the cheap theatres, the gin palaces, the dancing saloons'. all of which might] precipitate the 'easy sliding into..sin, the degradation of all womanly virtue'. She concludes that although these clubs for working girls are 'one of the most modern of all schemes..the rapid spread of such institutions, in less than 10 years, over England, and Scotland and America, shows how great they were needed' (1889:76-77).

Charlotte's literary endeavours began, in a limited way, to pay off during the 1890s. A short story of hers, 'Passed' (1894), was accepted by Henry Harland for the second edition of the notorious 'Nineties quarterly, *The Yellow Book*. However, Mew's brush with decadence came unfortunately when the movement was at its last gasp. After the negative publicity of the Wilde trial, the house style of John Lane's publication was deemed even more unpalatable, and was boycotted by many (Gaunt 1988:162). Thus Mew, who might have found a literary home in the canon of the 1890s (Leighton 1992:275), found her brief success over, almost before it had begun. However, her association with decadence did not end with the collapse of *The Yellow Book*. Her poetry carries echoes of its colour and its excesses well into the twentieth century. *The Yellow Book* also brought her into contact with fellow contributor Ella D'Arcy, with whom Mew fell, unrequitedly, in love (Fitzgerald 1984:133).⁶⁰ Mew visited D'Arcy at her lodgings in Paris in 1902 and apparently confessed her feelings there (1984:86). A short lyric published in 1916 which details various rooms in 'which have had their part/in the sad slowing down of the heart' (1981:38) may derive, in part, from the memory of this frustrated passion.

After her return from France, Mew appears to have withdrawn into the routine of caring for her mother in the house in Gordon Square. However, in 1912 she was introduced to a Mrs Dawson Scott (known as 'Sappho' after the title of her first published work), a literary patron *par excellence* whose combined qualities of generosity, determination and ruthlessness (Fitzgerald 1984: 105) enabled her to persuade a reluctant Mew to give readings at her 'Harden', her house in Southall. Thus Mew was introduced, albeit belatedly, to the cult of celebrity.⁶¹ Her performance at these gatherings--'Smirking and

⁶⁰Some years later, Mew fell in love with May Sinclair. Though once again her feelings were not reciprocated (Fitzgerald 1984:133).

⁶¹For discussions of the late Victorian cult of celebrity, see Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy Of Renown* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), and Regenia Gagnier, *Idylls of The Marketplace* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986).

speaking rather loud'—is viewed with ironic detachment in her poem 'Fame' (1916). A further glimpse of fame came a few years later with the publication of her first volume of poetry, *The Farmer's Bride*, in 1916. *The Farmer's Bride* was published by The Poetry Bookshop Press, run by Harold and Alida Monro. Charlotte attended readings in the room above the Bookshop Press' offices (Monro 1953: xviii), and forged a friendship with her editors. Alida in particular became a close friend of Charlotte and Anne.

Mew's mother died in 1923 when Charlotte was 54. With little money and no house of their own, Charlotte and Anne's liberation from the burden of caring for their sick parent came too late to be of any practical value. In a sense, the death of their mother severed their physical links with the Victorian house and the duties of Victorian womanhood. Yet this, for them, belated end to the Victorian era failed to yield many new prospects. Furthermore, those silent unspeakable links back to the traumas of childhood were left open.⁶² Henry died in 1901, and this second and final loss served only to remind Charlotte of the horror of his initial disappearance from her life (Fitzgerald 1984: 75). Freda, who was to outlive both her sisters, still required financial support. Charlotte and Anne struggled on for a few more years, living in Anne's studio, and were helped when Charlotte was awarded a small civil list pension (Monro 1953:xv).

A few years later, Anne was found to be suffering from cancer. When Anne died, in 1927, the shock was so much for Charlotte that she suffered a break down. She was eventually persuaded by her doctor to enter a nursing home in Beaumont Street, just off Marylebone High Street (Fitzgerald 1984:364) and only a few miles from the old house in Gordon Square. Mew's last few weeks were spent in this bleak 'home' in the middle of the city. Alida Monro visited her there, just a few days before her death:

It was a house with no outlook. She had a bedroom at the back looking on to a high brick wall, and the last time I saw her there she pointed to

⁶² Alida Monro was never told of the fates of Charlotte and Anne's brother and younger sister, and was not aware of their existence until after Charlotte's death, when a close friend related their sad histories (Monro 1953:ix).

this wall, on which an occasional pigeon perched, and said how very depressed she felt gazing on to the grey bricks where no sun seemed to come (Monro 1953:xii).

Mew killed herself the next morning by drinking a bottle of domestic disinfectant (1953:xiii). Like Levy, her suicide was not a grand poetic gesture, but a quiet, even homely affair. There is a kind of bleak poetic justice in the final, unhomely 'home' in which Mew found herself. Houses with 'no outlook', no hope, recur throughout her work.

Like Amy Levy, whose work offers a glimpse of a world beyond the private house, Mew's poems venture out into the imaginative terrain of the city, a landscape which provides its own peculiar shocks and dislocations.⁶³ Her work brings home the city's capacity to unsettle the already tenuous position of the female subject. However, Mew, like Levy, fails to find a home for herself in the city streets. She continually highlights the fact that women's histories and griefs go unnoticed in the (male) literary landscape of the city. She inhabits the imaginative territory of the city with an awareness that women occupy a marginal place there.

Mew's poem 'Monsieur Qui Passe' (1916) signals her awareness of the gender politics of the literature of modernity. The poem takes on the voice of Baudelaire's flâneur:

A purple blot against the dead white door
 In my friend's rooms, bathed in their vile pink light,
 I had not noticed her before
 She snatched my eyes and threw them back to me:
 She did not speak till we came out into the night,
 Paused at this bench beside the kiosk on the quay.
 (1981:38).

The initial symphony of colour, the 'purple blot' thrown into relief by the 'dead white door', recalls the prismatic vision of Huysmans and Gautier. Yet in

⁶³ In his work on Baudelaire, Benjamin distinguishes 'shock' as an experience peculiar to the modern world (1976:125).

Mew's poem, the speaker's attempt to isolate this 'blot', keeping it at bay as a patch of colour at the edges of his vision, is hindered by the theft enacted by the woman, 'She snatched my eyes and threw them back to me'. The shift undoes the hierarchy between the flâneur and the subject of his gaze; instead of passing-by, he is forced to hear her story. The physicality bestowed on the act of looking echoes conventional figures of speech--a 'stolen' glance, 'holding' someone's gaze--yet the snatch and grab of Mew's lines evokes a more forceful desperation. The woman tells her story, 'a twisted skein' of which the man catches threads, 'here and there'; it is a story of a seduction and abandonment which has driven the woman mad, leaving her bereft even of the pretence, the mask, of sanity:

Then suddenly she stripped, the very skin
 Came off her soul, --a mere girl clings
 Longer to some last rag, however thin,
 When she has shown you--well--all sorts of things:

(1981:39)

This act of spiritual disrobing, 'the very skin came off her soul', collides with the speaker's recollection of other physical (and erotic) revelations in a way that highlights the fragility of the woman's psychological defences-- 'a mere girl clings longer to some last rag, however thin'. Furthermore, the act of showing is too intimate even for the wordly sensibilities of the speaker who has seen 'all sorts of things'; this view of woman is, at least, still arresting, even shocking.

She stopped like a shot bird that flutters still,
 And drops, and tries to run again, and swerves.
 The tale should end in some walled house upon a hill.
 My eyes, at least won't play such havoc there, --
 Or hers--But she had hair!--blood dipped in gold;
 And there she left me throwing back the first odd stare.
 Some sort of beauty once, but turning yellow, getting old.
 Pouah! These women and their nerves!
 God! but the night is cold!

(1981:39)

The woman's disabled narrative stops, starts again, and then skews off in another direction, like the abortive attempts of a 'shot bird' to gain the air again. Its 'end' is supplied by the flâneur: 'some walled house upon a hill', out of sight, where his eyes will not have such a disturbing effect. Yet it is not only his eyes, as he belatedly recognises, which 'play..havoc'. He also seeks asylum from 'hers'. Her eyes continue to disrupt his field of vision, blocking his attempts to frame her into an object by 'throwing back' that 'first odd stare' which, crucially, was hers. Rather than forming the focus of his description, his assessment of her looks strikes him belatedly, and even then he gives an unsettling account of them-- 'blood dipped in gold'.⁶⁴ As his aestheticising gaze reasserts itself, he concludes that her beauty has long since lost its value, 'turning yellow, getting old'. However, despite the final couplet, which attempts to frame the encounter as an annoying distraction from an hysterical *femme passante*, the final lines fail to repair the 'havoc' caused by the woman's arresting looks, looks which held him captive long enough for her to have her say.

'Monsieur Qui Passe' offers an answer to Baudelaire's 'A Une Passante' (1845). In Baudelaire's poem, the flâneur catches a glimpse of a widow who passes by in 'douleur majestueuse'(Baudelaire 1993:188); a statuesque beauty from whose eyes the speaker drinks. Briefly, the woman returns his glance:

One lightning flash...then night! Sweet fugitive,
Whose glance has made me suddenly reborn,
Will we not meet again this side of death?

Far from this place! too late! *never* perhaps!
Neither one knowing where the other goes,
O you I might have loved, as well you know!

⁶⁴'Bright Hair' held a particular fascination for Mew. Her friend Sidney Cockerell, who was the director of the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, once showed her a lock of Lizzie Siddal's hair (Monro 1953:xviii), which according to myth, had stayed bright even after death. For a discussion of this, see Angela Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against The Heart* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992, pp.276-277).

(1993:189)⁶⁵

Though the *femme passante* looks back, it is a swift 'glance' which confirms and renews the identity of the flâneur, making him feel reborn. It is a look which is the opposite of those looks which unlook in Levy's *The Romance of A Shop*. Here, the brevity of the glance and the fleeting, anonymous nature of the encounter is what gives the speaker pleasure. The poem, which takes place within the crowded space of the city, 'deals with the function of the crowd not in the life of the citizen but in the life of the erotic person':

At first glance this function appears to be a negative one, but it is not. Far from eluding the erotic in the crowd, the apparition which fascinates him is brought to him by this very crowd. The delight of the city dweller is not so much love at first sight as love at last sight (Benjamin 1976:45).

Thus the very impossibility of seeing or meeting the woman again is what makes the encounter for the flâneur. The woman is only 'sweet' because she is a 'fugitive' (Baudelaire 1993:189): 'The *never* marks the high point of the encounter, when the poet's passion seems to be frustrated but in reality bursts out of him like a flame' (Benjamin 1976:45). The 'havoc' (Mew 1953:39) of the look here is carefully controlled, the thrills and killing 'pleasure' (Baudelaire 1993:189) are based upon a moment of fleeting apprehension and framed by a supposition: 'O you I might have loved' (Baudelaire 1993:189).

What Mew's poem 'Monsieur Qui Passe' underlines is that the coordinating and objectifying gaze of the flâneur never actually contends with the looks of others. As Wolff has noted, although the flâneur's eyes frame women--the prostitute, the lesbian, or the *femme passante*--they frame them into objects of desire: 'none of these women meet the poet as his equal. They are subjects of his gaze, objects of his botanizing' (1990:42). Unlike the swift looks

65 'Un éclair... puis la nuit!--Fugitive beauté
Dont le regard m'a fait soudainement renâître,
Ne te verrai-je plus que dans l'éternité?

Ailleurs, bein loin d'ici! trop tard! *jamais* peut-être!
Car j'ignore où tu fuis, tu ne sais où je vais,
Ô toi que j'eusse aimée, ô toi qui le savais!
(1993: 188)

which glance off the speaker in 'A Une Passante', the looks thrown back by Mew's *femme passante* disrupt and disturb the flâneur. The grief of the mourning woman in 'A Une Passante' is left untold, but the speaker in 'Monsieur Qui Passe' is forced to listen to a broken narrative, a tale whose 'twisted skein' cannot be woven into an artfully brief lyric. The irony of Mew's 'Monsieur Qui Passe' is heightened by the contrast between its title and the events which unfold in the body of the poem; her flâneur is not permitted to pass-by.

Mew's short story 'Passed', published in *The Yellow Book* in 1894, where it appeared alongside works by Henry James, Ella D'Arcy and John Davidson (Fitzgerald 1984:62) is similar in some respects to 'Monsieur Qui Passe'.⁶⁶ However, in 'Passed' the role of the *flâneur* is taken on by the story's female narrator. The story opens with its female narrator leaving the comforts of home and feminine pursuits in favour of a stroll on a frosty afternoon: 'I put down my sewing and left tame glories of fire-light' (Mew 1981:65). Finding herself in a poor district, she is reminded of a church located nearby, 'newly built by an infallible architect'(1981:69). However, it is the houses in this district which catch the woman's eye. Their squalor shocks and alienates the woman, provoking a disturbing vision in which she returns to her own comfortable home only to find no trace of her existence-- 'the things by which I had touched life were nothing' (1981:71-2).

'Passed' suggests the contradictions involved in attempting to recreate or mimic the role of the *flâneur*. Mew's narrator leaves the cosy hearth-side of her private house in order to roam the streets, with little thought, initially at least, for destination. The pleasure of this active bracing walk, unaccompanied and unchaperoned, after the drowsy warmth of the hearth, is highlighted; the narrator describes the 'delirium of enchanting motion' (1981:65). This purposeless and

⁶⁶ *The Yellow Book*, was a quarterly launched by John Lane and his partner, Elkin Matthews. For a discussion of *The Yellow Book* and its contributors, see Katherine Lyon Mix, *A Study In Yellow* (London: Constable, 1960).

solitary beginning echoes the aimless strolling of the Baudelairean *flâneur*. However, the domestic opening of Mew's story, with its carefully coded evocation of female space, 'I put down my sewing and left tame glories of fire-light' (1981: 65), points up the gulf between the space of the bourgeois private house and the city streets beyond it. She highlights the way in which the protected environment of the residential district gradually recedes as her narrator enters the city. The tree-lined suburban roads give way to 'rows of flaring gas jets,⁶⁷ displaying shops of new aspect and evil smell' (65). Thus unlike the *flâneur*, who is 'as much at home among the façades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls' (Benjamin 1976:37), Mew's *flâneuse* is quite clearly leaving home well behind her.

When the narrator enters a residential street in a poor district, a 'row of cramped houses, with the unpardonable bow window, projecting squalor into prominence' (Mew 1981:65) comes into view. The bow window thrusts the 'squalor' of the interior into the narrator's line of vision: 'Through spattered panes faces of diseased and dirty children leered into the street' (1981:65). The word 'leered' (another kind of looking) echoes the sense of projection; there is an intrusive quality about it. The dispossession of the children is brought home to Mew's *flâneuse* at first hand. She confronts and is confronted by these 'travesties' of 'grand place called home' (1981:66). The sense of a breakdown between inside and outside--the squalid interior of the houses 'projecting' into the street--is echoed when the narrator leaves the row of terraces. Rushing from the street, the narrator finds herself in a large square, 'a roomy space...bounded by three-storey dwellings. The use of this interior adjective, 'roomy', serves as an ironic contrast to the contracted living conditions of the families in the terrace. Here outside is more 'roomy' than inside, the 'bewildering expanse' of

⁶⁷ Gaslit streets feature prominently in the literature of modernity. As Walter Benjamin has noted, Poe 'lingers over the city by gaslight. The appearance of the street as an *intérieur* in which the phantasmagoria of the *flâneur* is concentrated is hard to separate from the gaslight' (1976:50). However, in Mew's version the gaslight does not engender this feeling of security, but instead only serves to highlight the 'evil' aspect of the new shops (Mew 1981:66).

the square throws into relief the cramped quarters of the poor dwellers in the terrace. When the narrator enters the church which she had set out to visit, the 'gloom' and 'obscurity' of its interior give off an air of 'stuffy sanctity', provoking a sense of inner contraction (an echo of the physical crampedness of the terraced houses) which leaves her 'longing for space again'. Through this continual awareness of spatial proportions, Mew points up the hidden costs of being imaginatively free in the city.

The implications of what she has seen in the city are brought home to Mew's *flâneuse* belatedly in the form of a vision. (1981:66). Musing on the unhomely nature of the terraced houses, 'What withheld from them, as poverty and sin could not, a title to the sacred name?' (1981:66), she concludes: 'Theirs was not the desolation of something lost, but of something that had never been' (1981:66). The homelessness of these houses is figured as a bleak absence, without lingering ghosts or relics. In fact, the relics of home are inappropriate here as these makeshift 'shelters' (1981:65) were never sacred: 'not the desolation of something lost, but of something that had never been' (1981:66). The speaker's vision, in which she returns home to find a strangely empty house, acts as the 'delayed' 'interpretation' (1981:66) of her thoughts about the 'desolation' of the terraces:

My heart went home. The dear place was desolate. No echo of its many voices on the threshold or stair. My footsteps made no sound as I went rapidly up to a well-known room. Here I besought the mirror for the reassurance of my own reflection. It denied me human portraiture and threw back cold glare. As I opened mechanically a treasured book, I noticed the leaves were blank, not even blurred by spot or line....The things by which I had touched life were nothing. Here, as I called the dearest names, their echoes came back again with the sound of an unlearned language. I did not recognise them, and yet I framed them. What was had never been! (Mew 1981: 71-2).

The 'I' that returns is not estranged, shut out, or haunted, instead what she confronts is absence: 'No echo..no sound' (1981:71). The affirmation which the self seeks in the familiar things of home is denied; the house is open, but vacant,

Like the bow windows of the terraced row which thrust the dispossession of others into her line of vision, the mirror projects her absence: 'It denied me human portraiture and threw back cold glare'. The 'cold glare' which dispossesses the self of its own reflection is another echo of those incorporealising looks encountered in Levy's *The Romance of a Shop*. This vision suggests that the narrator's new awareness of the dispossessions of others, of their make-shift existences in 'homes' that never were, displace her sense of her own place in the world. The bleak economy of the city is thus brought home to Mew's flâneuse in a painfully literal way. Berman has commented that 'the manifestations of class divisions in the modern city open up new divisions in the modern self' (1982:153). However, in 'Passed', the 'I' is not divided against itself, but has become an existential stranger to itself, 'a double negative... a ghost of what 'had never been' (Leighton 1992:267).

The visionary return in 'Passed' echoes Rossetti's 'At Home' (Leighton 1992: 280). Indeed, the very title of Mew's story seems to echo Rossetti's play on passing and being passed by: 'I passed from the familiar room, / I from whom love had passed away' (Rossetti 1979: I, 28). Yet in Mew's version, the speaker is not in some ghostly exile from the old house, instead her relation to life has been displaced: 'the things by which I had touched life were nothing' (1981:72). The speaker's lips frame a language that has become 'foreign', whose 'echoes' are the echoes of an absence. The use of this architectural metaphor recalls the bow windows of the terrace which project the absence of home. Here, the framing of words has become a similarly empty gesture. In the stranded realm of the vision, the speaker's words issue into an empty space, they neither connect with the world around them, nor provide links back to the past: 'their echoes came back again with the sound of an unlearned language. I did not recognise, and yet I framed them' (1981:72). The narrator's belated apprehension of what Pater called 'the hollow ring of fundamental nothingness under the apparent surface of things' (1901: *Miscellaneous Studies*, 14), severs

all connection with her old tokens of presence, leaving no room for the 'relics' and 'echoes' of that lost security.

The bleak emptiness of the house in 'Passed' is echoed in many of Mew's poems. The houses in Mew's work no longer offer any confirmation of identity or subjectivity. They are not full of old familiar things, nor are they haunted by ghosts. Instead they are simply vacant, blank. This image of the house as a desolate and empty place may well stem from Mew's childhood experiences of loss. Mew's biographer describes her as a poet of 'delayed shock' (Fitzgerald 1984: 45) whose poetry represents a working out of repressed childhood experiences. One poem, 'To a Child in Death', which probably derives from the memory of the deaths of her two young brothers, but which was written thirty years after those events, stands as a reminder of the emotional scars left by those abrupt disappearances (Fitzgerald 1984:17):

When you so quietly slipped away
With half the music of the world unheard.
What shall we do with this strange summer, meant for you,--
Dear, if we see the winter through
What shall be done with spring?
(1981:49).

Mew's evocation of a 'strange summer' recalls *Suspiria De Profundis* in which De Quincey records his own childhood experience of the 'collision' of death and summer: 'each exalts the other into stronger relief' (1985:103). These narratives of childhood loss polarise death and the natural world, figuring grief into an unseasonal remembrance. De Quincey recalls *watching* a 'vault...open in the zenith of the far blue sky' (1985:105), an idea echoed by Pater in 'The Child In The House' when Florian comes upon a child's open grave on a summer's day:
a dark space on the brilliant grass--the black mould lying heaped up around it, weighing down the little jewelled branches of the..rose-bushes in flower. And therewith came, full-grown...the certainty that even children do sometimes die (Pater 1901: *Miscellaneous Studies* , 191).

These childhood intimations of mortality open up points of disappearance, the 'dark space' on the grass, the 'vault' opening up in the blue sky. In these post-romantic visions the child is set at odds with nature; it is as if these spaces represent not abysses but anti-matter, 'black mould weighing down the jewelled branches', which usurps and swallows up. In Pater's essay, the child's realization of his own mortality makes the house unhomely, its chambers haunted by a ghostly figure, 'an odd, irreconcilable new member of the household, making the sweet familiar chambers unfriendly' (Pater 1901: *Miscellaneous Studies*, 191). However, such intimations of the brevity of life enhance the aesthetic experience, 'each exalts the other into stronger relief', of Pater and De Quincey, adding a touch of strangeness and morbidity.⁶⁸ Mew's speakers, on the other hand, confront a world without their playmate, and are left to wonder--if they manage to 'see the winter through' themselves--'what shall be done with spring?'; no ghosts migrating into the house, just a 'strange summer' and a bleak year to get through.⁶⁹

The sense of living on evoked in 'To a Child in Death' is echoed in Mew's poem 'The Quiet House' (1916), a poem which Mew described as the 'most subjective' (Monro 1953:xv) of any she had written. Narrated by a speaker who has outlived the deaths of her brother, sister and mother, it epitomises the bleak existence of surviving in a house which has long since lost its warmth and life:

When we were children old Nurse used to say
The house was like an auction or a fair
Until the lot of us were safe in bed.
It has been quiet as the country-side
Since Ted and Janey and then Mother died

⁶⁸ This idea is highlighted in 'The Child In The House': 'For with this desire of physical beauty mingled itself early the fear of death--the fear of death intensified by the desire of beauty' (Pater 1901: *Miscellaneous Studies*, 190).

⁶⁹ This sense of being out of season with the natural world offers a new twist upon the idea of turning 'against nature', the humanistic underside to Huysmans loss of patience with its 'revolting uniformity of landscapes and skylscapes' (1959:36). The turning away from nature in Mew's poem is not an aesthetic choice but stems instead from the terrible facts of loss and death.

And Tom crossed Father and was sent away.
 After the lawsuit he could not hold up his head,
 Poor Father, and he does not care
 For people here, or to go anywhere.

To get away to Aunt's for that week-end
 Was hard enough; (since then, a year ago,
 He scarcely lets me slip out of his sight--)
 At first I did not like my cousin's friend
 I did not think I should remember him:
 His voice is gone, his face is growing dim
 And if I like him now I do not know.
 He frightened me before he smiled
 He did not ask me if he might--
 He said that he would come one Sunday night,
 He spoke to me as if I were a child.

(1981 : 17-18)

The present quietness of the house is an implicit and silently rhymed contrast to that produced when the children had gone to bed. For the children, and their mother, are not 'safe in bed', but dead. The tone of this first stanza with its matter-of-fact cataloguing of these disappearances (through death or scandal) has a studied casualness about it which suggests the numbness of too much grief. The house here is a prison of isolation and silence. The girl's father, eschewing company-- 'he does not care/ For people here, or to go anywhere'--, keeps his last child close by him in case she too should 'slip out of his sight' in a more literal sense.

When the speaker does venture out she meets a young man at her Aunt's house. The ambivalence of her feelings : 'At first I did not like my cousin's friend', 'if I like him now I do not know', seems to stem from the fact that she is unacquainted with the emotions he arouses, as if she does not quite know how to judge or name them. The man has that mix of predator and flirt-- 'He frightened me before he smiled' about him, almost as if he recognises her awakening but undeveloped sexuality: 'He spoke to me as if I were a child'. However, the

young man's promise comes to nothing, and it is as if this brief encounter in the outside world only serves to give her a heightened awareness of all that she misses in the isolated house:

But everything has burned and not quite through.
 The colours of the world have turned
 To flame, the blue, the gold has burned
 In what used to be such a leaden sky.
 When you are burned quite through you die.

(1981:18)

The intensity of these awakened feelings burn (red-hot) through the drabness of her previous life. For this encounter (so lightly felt by the man) has changed her life: 'No year has been like this that has just gone by'. The sense that the speaker is being destroyed by these frustrated feelings is evoked through the last line of this stanza: 'When you are burned quite through you die'. The emphasis here is on a slow destruction, rather than fierce consummation.

Red is the strangest pain to bear;
 In Spring the leaves on the budding trees;
 In summer the roses are worse than these,
 More terrible than they are sweet:
 A rose can stab you across the street
 Deeper than any knife:
 And the crimson haunts you everywhere--
 Thin shafts of sunlight, like the ghosts of reddened swords have
 struck our stair
 As if, coming down, you had spilt your life.

I think that my soul is red
 Like the soul of a sword or a scarlet flower:
 But when these are dead
 They have had their hour.

I shall have had mine, too,
 For from head to feet,
 I am burned and stabbed half through,

And the pain is deadly sweet.

(1981:18-19)

The colour red so beloved of Swinburne and later the Rhymers club poets⁷⁰ is used here not to evoke the promise of rapture or the satiety of excess and indulgence, but as a symbol of intensity and passion going on elsewhere; something kept always visible, but at arms length. The red also recalls her female precursors for whom the 'scarlet and white imagery of a moral sexual code' was 'ordered around an opposition of innocence and experience which carries heavy penalties either way' (Leighton 1992:278). The imagery of 'budding' trees and the voluptuous full-blown roses of summer recall the suggestion of nascent sexuality in the previous stanzas. Yet here the rose acts as a reminder of her own thwarted desire. The use of a decadent register (strangeness, pain, 'deadly' sweetness, masochistic desire) strikes an odd note in this context, as all this intensity is at a remove from the speaker. The roses 'more terrible' than 'sweet' 'stab' from 'across the street', and the crimson that 'haunts' is ghostly: 'Thin shafts of sunlight, like the ghosts of reddened swords have struck our stair / As if, coming down, you had spilt your life'. These lines form a strange conjunction. The Swinburnean imagery of penetration, 'shafts' and 'reddened swords' carried on from the previous lines has become ghostly, washed out into a pale, almost mocking imitation. And there is something at once tragic and mundanely domestic about the next line, as if this life here is not spent, but accidentally 'spilt' before it is tasted.

The sense of life wasted painfully but quietly is powerfully evoked. The flower imagery, evoked in the context of decadent intensity produces a strange

⁷⁰ The Rhymers' Club, was formed in 1891 by a group of young poets whose manifesto was, as Yeats put it to 'purify poetry of all that is not poetry' (Yeats (ed) *The Oxford Book Of Modern Verse* (Oxford: OUP, 1936, ix). The group, which was set up in direct opposition to the Victorian literary establishment, met regularly at the Cheshire Cheese tavern in London. Among its members were Lionel Johnson (1867-1902) and Ernest Dowson (1867-1900 and Richard Le Gallienne (1866-1947). They published their work in journals like *The Yellow Book* (to which Charlotte Mew was also a contributor) and their own collective *Book of the Rhymers Club* (of which there were two editions (1892 and 1894). See Mix, *A Study in Yellow* (1960) and Jackson, *The Eighteen-Nineties* (London: Grant Richards, 1913).

hybrid. For this flower is not the profit or product of vice, like Baudelaire's fleurs du mal, or Swinburne's roses, but Gray's desert flower wasting its sweetness. All the intensity and sensuality in the poem is fiercely felt, but never consummated: 'I am burned and stabbed half through'. This is decadence ghost-written, its colours struggling through the stained glass of a window. Though the seclusion of the house mirrors the hermetically sealed lair of the neurotic decadent, the woman's isolation is founded upon loss and grief ('Poor father...he does not care/ For people here, or to go anywhere'). It is a place where life is not cultivated as art, or spent in the pursuit of the strange fruits of decadent sensual experimentation, but accidentally 'spilt' before it is experienced.

And nothing lives here but the fire,
 While Father watches from his chair
 Day follows day
 The same, or now and then, a different grey,
 Till, like his hair,
 Which Mother said was wavy once and bright,
 They will all turn white.

To-night I heard a bell again--
 Outside it was the same mist of fine rain,
 The lamps just lighted down the long dim street,
 No one for me--
 I think it is myself I go to meet:
 I do not care; some day I *shall* not think; I shall not *be* !

(1981: 19)

Mew gradually empties out the house in this poem, until there is nothing but blankness-- 'They will all turn white'. The house here is being unwritten, whitened out. The speaker's step across the threshold, 'I think it is myself I go to meet', is a step towards a strange meeting with another 'I'. However, this meeting does not affirm the self, but cancels it out: 'some day I *shall* not think; I shall not *be*!'.

This nihilistic impulse of 'The Quiet House' leaves Mew imaginatively homeless. Having emptied out the house, Mew is left without a place. However, her poetry continues to seek out other houses, houses which provide a makeshift home:

Sometimes in the over-heated house, but not for long,
 Smirking and speaking rather loud,
 I see myself among the crowd,
 Where no one fits the singer to his song,
 Or sifts the unpainted from the painted faces
 Of the people who are always on my stair;
 They were not with me when I walked in heavenly places;
 But could I spare
 In the blind Earth's great silences and spaces,
 The din, the scuffle, the long stare
 If I went back and it was not there?

(1981 :2-3)

In this poem, the speaker catches sight of herself in the house of 'Fame': 'Smirking and speaking rather loud, /I see myself among the crowd'. This 'over-heated house' is not a private house of duty, but, in an implicit word-play, a hothouse cultivating talent. The boundary between inside and outside has disappeared and the crowd is inside. Thus the speaker can only find herself briefly among a crowd of famous faces blurred together by the 'long stare' of 'Fame': 'no one fits the singer to his song, /Or sifts the unpainted from the painted faces'. The subjectivity, the validation of identity which the house of fame offers is contingent and provisional; a makeshift self which may not 'fit'.

However, the house of fame gives back something which is missing in the isolated 'Quiet House' of Mew's imagination: 'The din, the scuffle, the long stare'. Although the self assembled in the house of fame bestows only a token presence--it is a prop, a mask, an improvisation--it frames the speaker into 'human portraiture' (1981: 71-2). This choice between the blank anonymity of the 'Quiet House' and the makeshift self of 'Fame' is not resolved but is left open. However, a line in 'Fame' which echoes an image in 'The Quiet House',

'Yet, to leave Fame, still with such eyes and that bright hair!'--suggests quite plainly the risks of slipping back into obscurity. The speaker's question:

But could I spare
 In the blind Earth's great silences and spaces,
 The din, the scuffle, the long stare
 If I went back and it was not there?

leaves the 'I' poised uncertainly on the threshold, stranded between the token presence offered by the house of fame and the bleak absence of 'the blind Earth's great silences and spaces'.

Although Mew's homeless speakers continue to seek asylum in makeshift houses, the self and its proper home have disappeared. Thus all that remains, as a poem of 1916 suggests, are temporary lodgings:

'Rooms'

I remember rooms that have had their part
 In the steady slowing down of the heart.
 The room in Paris, the room at Geneva,
 The little damp room with the seaweed smell,
 And that ceaseless maddening sound of the tide--
 Rooms where for good or ill--things died.
 But there is the room where we (two) lie dead,
 Though every morning we seem to wake again and might just as
 well seem to sleep again
 As we shall somewhere in the other quieter, dustier bed
 Out there in the sun--in the rain

(1981: 38)

Having emptied out the house, Mew turns her attention to what is left--these bleakly anonymous rooms which have borne witness to the death of the heart. Here, the blank repetition of the word 'room' pulls against the suggestion of each new location: 'The room in Paris, the room at Geneva/The little damp room with the seaweed smell'. Each 'room' is a more-or-less featureless cell; the speaker refuses to furnish them, leaving them deliberately empty. The

unspecified deaths in these rooms, 'rooms where for good or ill—things died', where perhaps the deaths of love, or hope, but the speaker does not care to catalogue or describe them. The mechanical 'steady, slowing down of the heart' adds to the sense of detachment, suggesting a speaker who is not only not 'at home' in these surroundings, but who is also curiously divorced from her own emotions.

These foreign rented rooms do not appear to open up a new landscape for Mew, but seem instead simply to multiply and disperse the emptiness and isolation found in 'The Quiet House'. The speakers in both poems find themselves in rooms with no outlook, rooms where things 'lie dead'. Similarly, both poems contain impulses towards self-annihilation. The girl in 'The Quiet House' looks towards a future empty of herself: 'some day I *shall* not think; I shall not *be*' (1981:19), while the speaker in 'Rooms' looks towards that final home: the grave. To be 'out there' in 'the other quieter, dustier bed' is apparently the speaker's goal. Yet despite its bleak atmosphere, 'Rooms' suggests a territory beyond the private house. It is a poem which, in its evocation of rented hotel rooms and apartments, anticipates the imaginative home of a future generation of women writers. The sense of rootlessness and anonymity of 'Rooms' also anticipates a theme which proves seminal to much modernist writing: the theme of exile.

Thus while it appears to close down the possibility of a new 'home' for Mew's speaker, engendering only a sense of homelessness and alienation, 'Rooms' in fact opens up a new imaginative space for the woman poet. Like so many of her contemporaries, Mew is not only negotiating between ideas of house and home, but is also beginning to break new ground, to look beyond the territory of the private house. The impulse to move beyond the private house is common to many of the women poets I have studied, suggesting the experimental quality of much of their work. Though this final poem of Mew's locates the woman poet in an uncertain territory, a temporary lodging, and

though many of the old tensions between inside and outside are still there, it takes her out of the ideological constructs of house and home.

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