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Author: Dinah Ward  
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# **Interpreting Female-Female Love in the Early Poetry of Michael Field**

**Dinah Ward**

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Sheffield**

**School of English Literature, Language and Linguistics**

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**Thesis abstract**

Michael Field was the pen-name of Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper, an aunt and niece who wrote closet drama and lyric poetry from the 1880s through to the 1910s. The two women also conducted an intense love relationship, which caught the interest of feminist scholars from the 1970s onwards. Their poems have been read as evidence for the existence of lesbian sexuality during a historical period that was crucial for the emergence of male homosexuality as a form of identity.

My aim in this thesis is to assess whether the poetry of Michael Field can indeed be understood as communicating an underlying sense of a lesbian self. I explore the homoerotic and heteroerotic discourse they produce, examining the differences and similarities between this writing and writing by three contemporary men key in the development of male homosexuality. I also question whether their representations of female-female love can be understood as part of a feminist or radical development of ideas.

My findings are that while these poems show a strong interest in the formation of identity for the poets, and while that process has some resemblance to the construction of identity in contemporary male writers associated with the emergence of male homosexuality, nevertheless Bradley and Cooper do not produce representations of lesbian sexuality recognisable in the modern sense as a form of sexuality that exists in necessary opposition to female heterosexuality and male homosexuality. Furthermore, I argue that the forms of homoeroticism used to underpin the identities constructed by Bradley and Cooper reproduce and maintain some deeply conservative traditions.

I conclude that feminist critics need to be sensitive to historical difference and development, understanding how modern political positions arise from and against previous possibilities, rather than searching for an imaginary cross-historical similarity amongst women to support a present-day feminist social critique.

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For Sarah and Martin, who were interested in ideas.

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**Introduction**

But the saying most alluring to my soul this morning is ‘since on every crested lark, a crest there must be’. The sureness of the innate quality gives me a sense of quiet; for we have been receiving a socialist guest and the damned mixedness of things in their brains and hearts, the confusion of the glories of the sun and of the moon, the inability to distinguish between the flesh of beasts and of men have disabled me. My little crested bird whom no socialist without maiming can uncrest makes me for an instant almost gay.[1]

**Background to ‘Michael Field’**

Between 1884 and 1914, fifteen plays and eight collections of poetry were published under the name of ‘Michael Field’. By 1888, the joint producers of these plays and poems had been identified as two women: Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper. For a short period in the late 1880s and early 1890s, the work of ‘Michael Field’, published in limited edition copies, enjoyed favourable reviews, and the writers were able to use this minor critical success to make the acquaintance of some of the leading literary figures of the age, including Robert Browning, Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde.

By the mid-1890s, the brief success of ‘Michael Field’ was over, and while Bradley and Cooper continued to write and publish plays and poetry collections, and to have individual poems printed regularly in a number of journals, by the time of their deaths in 1913 and 1914 they had become largely critically ignored. In the following seventy years, there was only one extended study of their work: Mary Sturgeon’s *Michael Field*, published in 1922.[2] Although A.J.A. Symonds included ten of their poems in his 1928 *An Anthology of ‘Nineties’ Verse*, and Yeats, whom they had met in 1902, included nine in the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, which he edited in 1936, both their drama and poetry were on the whole forgotten during most of the twentieth century.[3] The poems were omitted not only from mid-twentieth-century general collections of Victorian poetry, but even from more specialised selections of the work of nineteenth-century female or of 1890s ‘aesthete’ poets. Accounts of the fin-de-siècle occasionally quoted from an edited version of the writers’ journal, *Works and Days*, which was published posthumously by their friend and literary editor, Thomas Sturge Moore.[4] The focus of interest in these mid-twentieth-century accounts was generally upon the two women’s ironic descriptions of more successful writers such as Wilde and Pater, or the lesser-known Lionel Johnson and Arthur

Symons, whose writings were by now far more well-remembered than that of 'Michael Field'. Occasionally, the writers would themselves be mentioned as examples of late-Victorian eccentricity, as hangers-on of literary society, or as shocked female witnesses of decadence.[5]

This widespread lack of interest in the work of 'Michael Field' was not reversed until 1981, when Lillian Faderman drew attention to Bradley and Cooper in her book about female romantic friendship, *Surpassing the Love of Men*. [6] Her description of the relationship between the two women as 'as a Victorian would phrase it – innocent' provoked fierce debate, not only about her general presumption of the absence of a sexual element in most pre-twentieth-century female-female relationships, but also about the nature of this particular relationship. [7] Following this controversy, a steadily increasing number of journal articles, chapters of books, and even a short biography of Bradley and Cooper have been published. Selections of Victorian and of women's poetry compiled since the late 1980s have all included examples of their work, and they can now be considered to have a minor role in the literary canon, the object of study in numerous undergraduate English Literature courses in both Britain and the United States, as well as for a small but steadily increasing number of postgraduate dissertations and theses. [8]

The revival of the work of the Michael Field poets in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century has depended, as had their slender survival during the previous fifty years, not, in the first instance, on the writing itself, but on their personal story. As women who worked single-mindedly to produce plays and poems, and as women who had a relationship with each other which was probably sexual and certainly passionate, the Michael Field poets have become of interest to a generation of feminist literary critics concerned both to revive the memory of Victorian women writers and to discover potential antecedents to modern lesbian relationships.

The motivation behind this feminist interest in Michael Field is not illegitimate. The attempt to widen the Victorian literary canon beyond the narrow male confines of its mid twentieth-century manifestation has increased our understanding of the ways in which it was possible for women to operate as writers at a time when they were severely limited by legal restrictions, social obligations and cultural conventions. It has broadened our knowledge of the historical conditions in which all writing at the time was produced, drawing attention, for example, to a body of short-lived but popular sentimental and religious poetry, against which 'serious' writers like Tennyson and Browning were judged. It has also reintroduced into literary studies some minor poets, like Bradley and Cooper, whose work deserves to be remembered in its own right.

There are similarly legitimate reasons for wishing to build a history of sexuality in which female-female relationships can be acknowledged. Modern self-identity depends in large part on the idea of sexual identity. The lack of a public history of female-female love leads to a discomfiting sense that some sexual identities have no proper space in which to exist. [9] A large amount of work has already been carried out exploring male-male sexual relationships in the late nineteenth century. The insistence that female-female sexual relationships not only existed at this time, but also had some effect on wider cultural developments, is also necessary.

However, the motivations of feminist critics have at times produced some problematic analyses of the poems produced by the Michael Field poets. An over-riding interest in their personal story has often led to a reading of their poetry as descriptive of their personal lives, a reading which fails to take account of Bradley and Cooper's aesthetic practice, in which the Romantic 'overflow of powerful feelings' is self-consciously reproduced in idealised and distanced anti-realist settings. The search for feminist or lesbian antecedents has also led to some dubious and ahistorical analyses of their work, which assume that the Michael Field poets shared

a political and sexual frame of reference with modern feminist and lesbian writers, despite the uneven support of Bradley and the occasional hostility of Cooper to contemporary feminist campaigns, and despite differences between late nineteenth- and late twentieth-century conceptions of both feminism and sexuality.

My aim in this thesis is to provide a reading of the first three collections of Michael Field poetry, which, while acknowledging their interest to both feminist and lesbian studies, retains a sense of the historical and political differences between our modern concerns and those of Bradley and Cooper. Like previous critics, I am interested in the production of identity in their work, and in particular with the relationship between that identity and the expression and development of homoerotic themes in both the poetry collections and the considerable body of prose work that they produced as its context. Building on an awareness that in this period certain men were promoting a particular sense of personal identity, related to male homoerotic narratives, which would eventually lead to them being labelled 'homosexuals', I examine whether Bradley and Cooper were, unwittingly or self-consciously, part of a parallel development of 'lesbian' identity, and if not, what functions homoerotic narratives and themes play in their poetry. I question whether their engagement with homoerotic narratives reveals radical, subversive or feminist motivations, or whether it represents a more conservative response to the challenges of the age, which we should approach with a degree of critical distance. Rather than assuming that homoeroticism necessarily entails a subversion of social convention, I trace the relationship between Bradley and Cooper's elitist belief in their own 'innate quality', hostility to socialist 'damned mixedness', and the mutually appreciative love relationship that could make them 'almost gay'.

## **1. Michael Field criticism since the 1980s**

The question of lesbian identity has been central to recent discussions of Bradley and Cooper, starting with the debate between Faderman and her strongest critic, Chris White. Faderman's aim in *Surpassing the Love of Men* was to define nineteenth-century lesbianism as emotional commitment – 'romantic friendship' – rather than sexual passion. She considered nineteenth-century erotic portrayals of female-female love to be exploitative, unrealistic, and serving the interests and inclinations of men, while non-erotic descriptions of emotionally and spiritually sympathetic female friendship were seen as both reflecting actual experience and suggesting the existence of effective female support systems.[10] While Bradley and Cooper were seen as sexually 'innocent', their relationship could therefore be fitted into a tradition of 'love between women', which, Faderman asserts, 'it is certain that they saw [. . .] as the single most important factor in their lives'.[11]

White's more detailed analysis of Bradley and Cooper's poetry in 'Poets and Lovers Evermore' is in part an attack on the theoretical and political premises of Faderman's book.[12] White considers Faderman's position of 'desexualising' female-female relationship to be 'reactionary'.[13] She insists that Bradley and Cooper's relationship can and should be categorised as sexual, using evidence from their journals and poems, the writing of which she sees as in large part motivated by the desire to express that relationship: she describes them as trying to 'develop a framework in which they could talk about their love and desires'.[14] While acknowledging that Bradley and Cooper did not use the term 'lesbian' to describe themselves, she



treats this as a lexical rather than a semantic issue – they ‘have other terms and metaphors’ to indicate ‘a sexual relationship’.[15] Bradley and Cooper are seen as developing deliberate strategies to express their lesbian identity covertly – ‘while there are no explicit declarations of lesbian desire, there are these embedded constructions of identity expressed through relationship’.[16]

Following White’s article, Angela Leighton included a chapter on ‘Michael Field’ in *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart*. [17] Leighton traces links between a number of women writers of the nineteenth century, who are seen as part of a ‘self-conscious female tradition’.[18] However, Leighton suggests that the Michael Field writers operate ‘altogether outside’ this female tradition, because of their relationship with each other, which she follows White in reading as sexual.[19] Leighton argues that having a female-female sexual relationship at a time when lesbianism had not been named allowed Bradley and Cooper to escape both the contemporary conventionalities of the expression of heterosexual love and the anxiety of later lesbian writers.[20] Like White, she sees the Michael Field poetry as a direct expression of Bradley and Cooper’s relationship, describing the love-poems as the sensual and sexual ‘relaxed self-expression’ of female-female desire.[21]

In the late 1990s, two writers from outside the academic mainstream embarked on extended original research into the Michael Field writers, uncovering empirical evidence which made the direct assignation of lesbian identity to Bradley and Cooper more complex. The first of these was Emma Donoghue, whose *We Are Michael Field*, while written for a general audience and appearing as part of a non-academic series, is nevertheless the product of serious research. Donoghue’s study, which is primarily biographical rather than literary, has the aim of presenting the Michael Field writers as part of a ‘lesbian history’.[22] She produces new evidence to suggest that Bradley and Cooper were probably ‘sexual lovers’, but her book for the first time brought into the public domain awareness that Cooper had for most of her life had a passionate but unrequited attachment to a man – the art critic Bernhard (later Bernard) Berenson.[23]

Despite this discovery, Donoghue’s assessment of the relative importance of the troubled Cooper-Berenson female-male passion and the mutually-supportive Bradley-Cooper female-female relationship is that the latter was by far the more significant commitment, justifying her suggestion that, although Bradley and Cooper never used words like ‘invert’ or ‘lesbian’, they can still be categorised as ‘women-who-loved-women’.[24] Her position is in many ways like Leighton’s, believing that Bradley and Cooper’s historical situation made them part of a transitional generation, ‘too late to have full confidence in the innocence of romantic friendship, but too early to feel much need to either hide their love or assert it shamefacedly as “inverts”’. Like Leighton, she believes that this gave them the possibility of producing in their poetry an undisguised female homoeroticism that she calls the ‘unashamed evocation of desire’.[25]

So far, all of the critics I have discussed have been working within a broadly feminist tradition. However, the most dedicated and thorough Michael Field scholar of the last twenty years has been a determinedly anti-feminist writer working outside academic institutions. Ivor Treby’s *The Michael Field Catalogue* is a somewhat eccentric but invaluable research tool that provides biographical and publishing detail about the Michael Field writers as well as an exhaustive catalogue of their poems, dating their creation and citing their appearances in unpublished notebooks and letters as well as in literary journals or the published collections.[26]

In his foreword and in comments aside throughout the text, as well as in the four collections of Michael Field poems and journal extracts that he has published since *The Michael Field Catalogue*, Treby makes clear his extreme dislike of feminist and lesbian interpretations of

the Michael Field writing.[27] His own position, particularly in this first book, seems to be both to deny a sexual component to Bradley and Cooper's relationship, and to assert the need to refrain from examining the sexual in their writing, an aversion which borders on a physical revulsion against lesbians and lesbian critics – 'those who would anatomise Michael Field on a chilled slab as a uniquely monstrous fish'.[28]

Treby, unlike most feminist critics, reads the majority of the poems as individually separable products of two clearly different poets. His catalogue tries as far as possible to assign separate authorship, and while acknowledging that some poems are collaborations, he assesses Bradley and Cooper's poetic abilities individually, generally preferring Bradley's output to Cooper's. Because of his antagonism to lesbian interpretation he is both triumphant and scathing on the several occasions when he can prove that poems that have been minutely interpreted as lesbian declarations of love have in fact been written in a heteroerotic or non-sexual context (for example, Cooper's poems to Berenson, or the many love-sonnets written to and for Charles Ricketts by Bradley).[29]

His most sustained critique of feminist and lesbian criticism occurs in the introduction to *Uncertain Rain*, though by this date his assertion of the non-sexual nature of the Bradley-Cooper relationship is more tentative than previously, partly in response to Donoghue's book. His argument is largely that Bradley and Cooper's awareness of the possibility of female-female sexual relations is unclear and uneven, though the evidence he presents here tends to suggest the opposite.[30] He does, however, show that both Bradley and Cooper were attracted at times to men and male beauty, that they celebrated the existence of strong differentiation between the sexes, particularly within marriage, and that they consistently revered male authority, while often appearing to despise women in general.[31]

Treby admits that Donoghue may be right to suggest that taken together, the scattered references in their journals and letters to their shared bed and pleasure in each other 'cannot be overlooked, or easily argued away'.[32] However, he points out how often the context of their references to their own relationship as a 'marriage' indicates an interest in the spiritual rather than the physical aspect of the relationship, and draws attention to the fact that – for Bradley in particular – such references invariably occur in relation to a discussion of literary rather than sexual identity.[33]

Not all feminist critics have read the Michael Field poetry as a direct expression of lesbian relationship or identity, with several feminists arguing that there must be some question as to the appropriacy not only of assigning the name 'lesbian', but even of attributing a fixed sexual identity to nineteenth-century women. Others see further difficulties in identifying Bradley and Cooper as 'lesbian in all but name' in the particular circumstances in which their poetry was produced. Yopie Prins, in *Victorian Sappho*, focusing on the Sapphic poems of *Long Ago*, argues that the poems in this collection are already entangled in the complex destabilisation of identity that inevitably follows those who choose to write in the name of Sappho.[34] This choice is here so far further complicated by the adoption of a singular male name which the audience already knows represents a dual female writer, that it is impossible to read any of the individual poems as the self-expressive product of a woman with a fixed lesbian identity.

However, if Prins is reluctant to assume that 'Michael Field' can be named as lesbian, she is one of several critics who argue that although the designation 'lesbian' cannot be read back into a fixed authorial identity responsible for the production of *Long Ago*, it can be seen as constructed

within Bradley and Cooper's writing. She suggests that a number of elements in the poetry of *Long Ago* pre-figure or invite a late twentieth-century 'lesbian reading' of the poems: the construction of a female homoerotic *topos*; an implied erotic interchange between female speaker and female addressee; and a deconstructive repetition and excess around the binary oppositions of male/female and subject/object.

Holly Laird, in 'Contradictory Legacies,' (later Chapter 3 of *Women Coauthors*) is another critic who suggests that if the Michael Field writing is to be understood 'as lesbian', this lesbianism can be found in the writing process rather than in the expression of a pre-existent identity. She agrees with Prins that 'Michael Field' cannot be read as lesbian identity, and indeed questions whether White to some extent 'overstates her case' for Bradley and Cooper's sexual relationship.[35] Nevertheless, she reads their poems as overtly homoerotic, and, like Prins, considers Bradley and Cooper to be producing a 'lesbian writing', a definition which is this time embedded in the female-female collaborative process itself, seen as the expression of an alternative desire.

The sense that lesbian sexuality is constructed through writing rather than that the writing reflects the sexual acts of the writers is also present in Ruth Vanita, whose book *Sappho and the Virgin Mary* takes the position that homoeroticism, including female homoeroticism, is a radical driving force in all cultural production, whatever the sexual practice or gender of the writer.[36] This approach, drawing on 'queer theory', can also be seen in Frederick Roden, who in *Same-Sex Desire in Victorian Religious Culture* places Bradley and Cooper's late conversion to Catholicism firmly within the context of a general move between Hellenistic and Catholic culture that he relates to a 'queer history' to which the Michael Field writers are as integral as their male counterparts.[37]

Robert Fletcher also separates the assignation of sexual identity from the production of homoeroticism in Bradley and Cooper's poetry. In "I leave a page half-writ", Fletcher notes, like Prins and Laird, the difficulty of assigning a gendered lyric voice to the speaker of the Michael Field poems, and suggests that in the love poems of *Underneath the Bough* Bradley and Cooper deliberately produce poems which can be fitted into both homoerotic and heteroerotic narratives, creating a playful 'discoherence' that he suggests is motivated by a pull between the Foucauldian cultural compulsion to 'tell the truth' of sexuality and a personal strategy of 'evasion'.[38]

Martha Vicinus, like Fletcher, argues that Bradley and Cooper's writing defies singular sexual identity. Focusing with some sensitivity on the relationship of both Bradley and Cooper with the male Berenson, she traces the interrelationship of homoerotic and heteroerotic desire in Bradley and Cooper's joint production of the self as the unified aesthete persona of 'Michael Field', showing how Berenson and the idea of Berenson became for Bradley and Cooper embroiled both in their production of self-identity and in their relationship with each other.[39]

However, there are still several recent Michael Field critics who do not believe that the question of a definite lesbian sexual identity for Bradley and Cooper can or should be ruled out. A spirited and accomplished defence of the assignation of lesbian sexual identity to pre-twentieth-century women is made by Terry Castle in her witty critique of Prins' *Victorian Sappho*, 'Always the Bridesmaid, Never the Bride'.[40] Castle's article, couched in deliberately informal and personal language that foregrounds her own lesbian persona, takes issue with Prins' overall line of argument, suggesting that Prins, claiming to be providing a historical demystification of the various Sappho myths of the nineteenth century, is intent on producing a 'Sapphic absence' which refuses the pleasure and celebration which can be enjoyed when reading the Sapphic fragments as

products of a lesbian poet.[41]

Several other Michael Field critics have continued to suggest that the writers can be assumed to have a lesbian or proto-lesbian identity. In short accounts, Bradley and Cooper have become 'the lesbian poets', while longer narratives generally acknowledge the historical lack of the label, but nevertheless name Bradley and Cooper post-facto, so that Virginia Blain can suggest that they were 'what we would now call lesbian'.[42] The idea of the poetry as a direct form of lesbian self-expression also continues to have a good deal of currency, with recent writers such as Hilary Fraser, in 'A Visual Field: Michael Field and the Gaze', and Jill Ehnenn, in 'Looking Strategically: Feminist and Queer Aesthetics in Michael Field's *Sight and Song*', suggesting that Bradley and Cooper's poems are 'articulating their lesbian experience,' or their 'queer and female spectatorship'.

Apart from the question of lesbian identity, a common theme in much feminist Michael Field criticism has been the question of an assumed radical or feminist effect of the writing. For many, this radical effect is seen to be an inevitable consequence of the female homoerotic bond. The majority of feminist critics, whatever their position on the question of lesbian identity, subscribe to the idea that there is always an implicit critique of male-female relationship in female-female bonding, with the latter often seen as having superior qualities such as sympathy, reciprocity, equality, wholesomeness, non-aggression and so on, which are seen in exemplary form in the Bradley-Cooper relationship.

This perception is evident, for example, in Faderman, for whom the ideal non-sexual female-female love relationships of the nineteenth century are viewed as a covert attack on patriarchy, providing a counterpart to twentieth-century lesbian-feminism.[43] Faderman's characterisation of the Bradley-Cooper relationship as both sexually 'innocent', but also 'feminist', because of their 'perfect, absolute equality', is typical of her entire argument.[44] Exactly the same assumption of an automatic feminist effect of female homoerotic love can be seen in White, whose insistence on a sexual content to the Bradley-Cooper relationship is posited in open opposition to Faderman. White imagines Bradley and Cooper as feminists, not only because of their relationship with each other, which is seen as necessarily in opposition to a despised mainstream heterosexuality – 'as lesbians, they can sidestep the limitations of patriarchal and bourgeois married life' – but also through their writing, which White understands as carrying out the political project of expressing lesbian desire outside what she, like Faderman, sees as the 'male appropriation, salaciousness or prurience' of contemporary erotic descriptions of female-female love.[45] The Michael Field writing is thus categorised as 'lesbian writing which, familiarly, needs to think itself free from men'.[46]

This tendency to idealise the Bradley-Cooper relationship as subversive yet mutually-supportive homoerotic bond, and/or to assume an inevitable radical effect in the 'lesbian writing' of the Michael Field poems, is evident in the majority of feminist critics, from Leighton, who associates Bradley and Cooper's relationship with a freedom and closeness to nature, through Prins, who finds in the Sapphics a 'utopian lesbian topos' of egalitarian exchange, to Vanita, who considers that all forms of homoerotic writing are of necessity radical because they are deliberately constructed in opposition to the 'heteronormativity' of the wider culture.

There are several feminist critics, however, who remain unconvinced either that the

relationship between Bradley and Cooper should be unproblematically accepted as idyllically mutually supportive, or that the poems can be read as expressions of that idyll. Virginia Blain, for example, in “Michael Field, the Two-headed Nightingale”, while using a set of previously unpublished letters to support the claim that the relationship between the two women was probably sexual, and indeed characterising them as ‘lesbian when lesbians did not exist’, urges feminist critics not to subscribe to the ‘wash of sameness which so commonly glazes over the woman-woman dyad’.[47] She suggests that the myth of idyllic unity and sameness that has come to surround Bradley and Cooper is in part the result of a deliberate strategy employed by Bradley, in particular, in order to try to reduce the risk of critical rejection that threatened them after the revelation that their writing was the product of dual authorship. Her argument is that the two women deserve to be treated as two very different individuals, and that feminist critics, especially, should afford them this respect.

Bette London’s book about female collaboration, *Writing Double*, is also sceptical about the radical nature of the Bradley-Cooper relationship.[48] London, echoing Blain’s concern that feminist commentators have too uncritically accepted Bradley and Cooper’s self-presentation as ideally harmonious joint literary producers, notes how often nineteenth-century female dual authors and their critics represent their writing as seamless collaboration, under the pressure of a belief in individual genius that drives them to stress that together they form a single author. London, however, takes Blain’s argument further, suggesting that while this emphasis on ideal unity may seem to chime with early feminism’s interest in female unity, it has a regressive side – it relies on traditional female characteristics of nurture, sympathy and selflessness and denies the expression of conflict and difference between women.[49]

For some critics, the perception of the Michael Field poems as radical or subversive is underpinned by the gender of the writers as much as by their production of homoerotic texts, with both poetry and journals read either as implicitly oppositional to nineteenth-century male culture, or even as an explicit critique of the structural organisation of male power that feminist theory calls ‘patriarchy’. This belief ranges from critics like White, who interprets praise for virginity in *Long Ago*, for example, as a ‘challenge to the terms of patriarchal culture’, to the more ambitious Krista Lysack, who in ‘Aesthetic Consumption and the Cultural Production of Michael Field’s *Sight and Song*’ claims that Bradley and Cooper reject ‘the master narrative of representations of women in Western culture and the universalizing male gaze that has historically commodified these images.’[50] Even critics like Vanita and Roden, who see a close link between the homoerotic writing of men and women, tend to suggest that the subversion of heteronormativity that they read here is also an attack on patriarchy, with Vanita arguing that Bradley and Cooper have an ‘anarchist worldview in opposition to dominant Victorian imperialist and patriarchal ideologies’.[51]

Part of the perception of the Michael Field writing as in opposition to a more mainstream ‘male’ or ‘patriarchal’ culture has depended on its recovery as part of a wider search for nineteenth-century female writers, which tends to create a sense of a separate oppositional tradition. In the past ten years, feminist academic understanding both of the position of nineteenth-century women writers and of the writers, both male and female, of the 1890s has undergone some serious revision. There have been several articles suggesting that the urge to revive women poets and to link them to a separate female tradition has created some significant blind spots concerning their relation to their male contemporaries. Erik Gray, in ‘A Bounded Field’,

specifically analyses previous feminist criticism of the Michael Field poem 'The Sleeping Venus' to provide both a metaphor and example of the failure of the feminist approach to nineteenth-century women writers to recognise the connections between female poetry and the wider literary and aesthetic surroundings.[52] He argues that in focusing only on the figure of Venus in the poem as a 'solitary and decontextualized' body, feminist critics have missed the artistic 'landscape' that surrounds it, thus not only failing to appreciate the way in which this particular poem is placed in a specific aesthetic context, but more generally being unable to assess the relationship of the Michael Field writers to the aesthetic culture that surrounded them.[53]

Virginia Blain has also argued consistently from 2000 onwards that, having rescued large numbers of nineteenth-century women writers from oblivion, the current task for feminist academics should be 'to re-integrate men's and women's poetry'.[54] This argument is developed in detail by Ana Parejo Vadillo and Marion Thain, in 'Introduction, Fin-de-Siècle Renaissance', where they argue that while grouping women poets together has served some purpose in promoting their revival, it relies on an idea of a 'shared womanly poetic identity', which now needs some examination.[55] Not only do women poets need to be seen as 'embedded within a male culture', there is also a need to accept and examine the differences and divisions between them, an examination which will also reveal divisions and differences within the term 'Victorian', under which many historically and culturally disparate female poets are currently being read.[56]

In a piece also specifically focused on the 1890s, the introduction to *Women and British Aestheticism*, Kathy Alexis Psomiades and Talia Schaffer examine the way in which feminist appraisal of women writers in this period has tended to underestimate the significant involvement of a number of women, including the Michael Field writers, in late nineteenth-century aestheticism, which has sometimes been categorised by feminists as an exclusively male and even misogynist movement.[57] Psomiades and Schaffer argue that there is important continuity between male and female aesthetes and that lack of acknowledgment of this produces a portrait of the era that is significantly skewed.[58]

In the wake of these developments, which in relation to women writers in general have emphasised the importance of attention to the wider cultural and literary context, and in relation to the Michael Field writers in particular have made clear the significance of their relationships with and respect for several contemporary men, some twenty-first century studies of Bradley and Cooper and their poetry have become more attentive to their connections with the aesthetic and social context within which they wrote.

Julia Saville, for example, in 'The Poetic Imaging of Michael Field', traces the influence of Berenson and Pater on Bradley and Cooper's approach to aesthetics, while Francis O'Gorman, in 'Michael Field and Sapphic Fame,' focuses on a number of 'collective cultural interests' that their poetry engages with, in particular the questioning of authorial identity, which he connects to Swinburne, a poet whose Sapphics have frequently been presented as in direct contrast with those of Michael Field.[59]

Marion Thain is a writer whose longstanding interest in Michael Field perhaps best represents the shift from the perception of Bradley and Cooper as constructing a 'lesbian aesthetic' that is 'outside conventions' and has entirely shaken off 'the masculine tradition' – central to her early pamphlet on *Michael Field and Poetic Identity* – and the more recent perception of them as incomprehensible without some understanding of their relation to mainstream aestheticism.[60] In her 2007 in-depth study, *Michael Field, Poetry, Aestheticism and the Fin de Siècle*, she argues that previous studies of Bradley and Cooper have left them at the margins of history as 'the "odd couple" on the horizon who embody our *perversions du jour*'. [61]

Her book, aims, instead, to reposition them more centrally within aestheticism, in particular exploring the development of Paterian ideas of history, time and identity in their major poetry collections.

This is not to suggest that readings of the Michael Field poems as necessarily oppositional to 'male culture' have disappeared. On the contrary, many twenty-first-century Michael Field critics, while including some discussion of contemporary 'mainstream' thinking, still wish to assert Bradley and Cooper as in some way either necessarily or deliberately producing a critique of these 'male' ideas. Thus Ana Parejo Vadillo, in *'Sight and Song: Transparent Translations and a Manifesto for the Observer'*, spends some time discussing the aesthetic ideas of Walter Pater, before deciding that Bradley and Cooper's collection is a rejection of what she calls his 'phallogocentric' theories of vision.[62] Similarly Lysack **begins with a discussion of the general cultural context of the relationship between aestheticism and consumerism, but soon moves into an argument that Bradley and Cooper are producing a kind of alternative consumerism 'outside the economy of a male gaze.'**[63] Meanwhile, more extreme critics such as Ehnenn read collections such as *Sight and Song* as a deliberate critique of 'Victorian ideologies regarding sex, gender and aesthetics from what today might be called feminist and queer perspectives', while Vickie Taft suggests that Bradley and Cooper have 'a consciousness of sexual politics similar to that which Adrienne Rich expresses in "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence"'. [64]

One reason for the frequently expressed determination to read a radical text or subtext in the Michael Field poems, whether in relation to the perceived superiority of the female homoerotic bond, or in relation to a sense of opposition to masculinity and male culture, is a fascination with Bradley and Cooper's biography, which can too easily appear to demonstrate remarkable correspondence with the desires of modern feminists. Laird at one point describes Michael Field as a 'contemporary feminist critic's dream, almost too perfect'. [65] Suspicion of the effects of this fantasy of Michael Field as lesbian feminists can lead to a rejection of any attempt at feminist appraisal. Rachel Morley, for example, in 'Constructing the Self, Composing the Other', like Laird describing Bradley and Cooper as 'a biographical dream ripe for the picking' suggests that the pressure on modern feminist and lesbian critics towards 'writing the self in the guise of the other' in relation to Michael Field means that any supposedly factual account is necessarily dishonest. [66] Instead, she proposes and produces self-conscious fictional constructions of imaginary love-scenes between Bradley and Cooper that unashamedly acknowledge her desire to be 'in the body' of the Michael Field writers. This approach is also taken by Michelle Lee, who, in *The Journey to Performing Michael Field*, again proposes a self performance as 'Michael Field' that proposes to address itself 'not to analysis, arguments, theories, or solutions, but to personal realizations, process, and passion'. [67]

The anti-feminist Treby, who, as we have seen, is also suspicious of feminism's attraction to Bradley and Cooper, takes an opposite approach, clearly rejecting any attempt to read the Michael Field poems in a political or feminist context. For Treby, the Michael Field poets are 'my ladies', whose cause, that of producing 'Apollonian and Dionysian' art unrelated to any political project, he champions. [68] While Treby's own fantasy around the Michael Field poets is painfully clear – they need a man to rescue their reputation – a more crucial element behind his attack on feminist critics is his belief that politics and sexuality are irrelevant to literary appreciation: critics should simply concern themselves, as he believes Bradley and Cooper did,

with the eternal truths presented in their writing and the beautiful language in which these truths are expressed.[69]

However, it is possible to retain a feminist position in reading the Michael Field poets without surrendering to the temptation to read them as if they were themselves modern lesbian feminists. There are a number of critics, as we have seen, who question Bradley and Cooper's self presentation as idyllic female-female couple. Blain, Donoghue, Vicinus and London all regard the idealised description of both the relationship and the joint writing practice as a strategically-motivated myth.[70]

Several critics, beyond Treby, have also indicated the distance between Bradley and Cooper and contemporary feminist ideas, without therefore denying their interest for feminism. Donoghue argues that Bradley and Cooper viewed their gender as an accident which could be transcended through writing, and recognises that beyond their commitment to each other, their preference in general was for the company and critical appreciation of men, highlighting the social and cultural significance for them not only of their obsessive relationship with Berenson, but also of their friendship with a number of men who also lived with same-sex partners, such as Charles Ricketts and John Gray. Donoghue is also, despite her reading of some of their plays as feminist in theme, less concerned than many feminist critics to view Bradley and Cooper's sexual preference as necessarily leading to a subversive or anti-patriarchal politics, noting several entries in Bradley and Cooper's journals and letters that suggest a conservative, apolitical or even anti-feminist outlook.[71]

Occasionally, feminist critics are even more sceptical about the claim that the Michael Field writing can be categorised as subversive. Saville, for example, while suggesting, like Fletcher, that the many subject positions Michael Field make possible for the reader in a collection like *Sight and Song*, are 'unsettling' to fixed gender positions, argues, unlike Fletcher, for whom such destabilisation has a subversive effect, that this move cannot automatically be read as either radical or feminist.[72] Meanwhile London is one of the few feminist critics to subject to some criticism the idea that what feminist critics should look for in the Michael Field writing is a set of opinions with which they can agree, arguing first, that Bradley and Cooper did not themselves view their writing practice as either progressive or even in any distinctive sense female; secondly, that there is no necessary connection between feminism and female collaboration; and finally, that the image of the idealised female-female couple, given its suppression of difference both within the couple and from those defined as outsiders, should not be considered to provide an approved 'prototype' for a specifically 'lesbian' writing.[73]

My own research follows the path suggested by these last-mentioned critics, in retaining a belief in the legitimacy of producing feminist criticism that does not fall prey to a fantasy reading of Bradley and Cooper as proto-feminist. The question of how and why two women in the late nineteenth century might choose to build a personal identity with a fundamental connection to female homoerotic relationship, and how that identity can be related to their poetry, can only increase our understanding of contemporary formations of female homoeroticism and literary identity. However, for such research to be useful, it must be alert to, and interested in, the differences between past and present, seeing what connects Bradley and Cooper to their historical moment, and noting what is specific and different about them.



## 2. Theoretical basis of my research

This thesis is based on a set of theoretical positions which I have taken as axiomatic. These positions have supported and suggested the detailed analysis that I undertake in the thesis, and it is in the worth or interest of that analysis that the justification for taking these positions must reside. I begin here by pointing to several theoretical or critical writers who have had a significant influence on the research; then I provide definitions of some key terms; and finally I outline some important theoretical assumptions.

### a. Influences

Amongst the many writers whose theories have had an effect on this research, there are four whose ideas have significantly influenced its main currents and directions. The first and most important of these is Michel Foucault, who, in Volume I of *The History of Sexuality*, first drew a distinction between homoerotic activity perceived as non-constitutive of identity and a sense of homosexual personal identity based on sexuality.[74] Foucault argues that the concept of homosexuality as a form of identity is historically relatively recent, suggesting that, in the late nineteenth century, an understanding of the significance of homoeroticism shifted from an emphasis on sexual acts and relationships, to the creation of a particular 'type', whose core identity was entirely saturated and defined by their sexual choice: 'The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life-form and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality'.[75]

Foucault's argument is also a critique of what he calls the 'repressive hypothesis', as he examines and rejects what was previously an almost universally accepted view of the development of sexual discourses from the nineteenth to the twentieth century as a process of progressive liberation from an unreasonable level of prohibition. Foucault suggests instead that the nineteenth century witnessed an explosion of discourses around sex, some of which were regulatory and named prohibitions or restrictions, others of which involved what he called an 'incitement to discourse', a requirement that individuals write or speak about sex in a variety of new contexts.[76] These discourses, Foucault argues, are all sites for the development and maintenance of social power as it defines how, when and where the body may experience sexual pleasures.

Foucault's ideas have met with some criticism: first because there is evidence that perceptions of a homosexual 'type' pre-existed the late nineteenth century; and secondly because his analysis focuses almost exclusively on the development of male sexuality, ignoring the question of female sexual identity.[77] Nevertheless, his ideas remain extremely influential, and can be seen in this thesis in my assumption that homosexual identity is a cultural construct rather than a biological given; that the late nineteenth century is an important moment of consolidation in the process of building such identity; and that the ever-increasing requirement for sexual self-expression is not in itself a necessarily radical or subversive process.

The three other analysts I look at here are all indebted to Foucault's initial rethinking of our understanding of sexuality and its nineteenth-century origins, with their extensions to some extent addressing the criticisms that have been levelled at him. The first, Linda Dowling, suggests that the production of the male homosexual as a distinct personality is at least partly dependent on an intensification of interest in homoerotic relationship, describing, in *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford*, how, during

the nineteenth century, a particular understanding of elevated homoerotic relationship became a key discourse legitimising the emerging male homosexual identity.[78] She argues that Plato's idea of a productive transfer of ideas in the inspirer-listener relationship, which was connected explicitly in the *Symposium* to male-male love relationships, was promoted and extended through the influential Literae Humaniores course at Oxford. The idea of "spiritual procreancy" – that pure intellectual commerce between male lovers which brings forth the arts, philosophy, and wisdom itself' thus came to have a significant effect upon the wider culture, creating the possibility in the late nineteenth century of the production of an elevated and admirable homoerotic discourse which could support the creation of male homosexual identity.[79]

Dowling's ideas are, like Foucault's, centrally concerned with male-male homoeroticism. My thesis builds directly on her research, relating Bradley and Cooper to three Oxford graduates who figure large in her book: Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde and John Addington Symonds. I suggest that the idea of 'spiritual procreancy' is also important to Bradley and Cooper, and examine the complications that arise from its transplantation into a female-female context.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick also works within a Foucauldian framework. In *Epistemology of the Closet* she explores the way in which the construction of male homosexual identity at the end of the nineteenth century depended on structures and figures of knowing/not-knowing, and visibility/hiddenness.[80] Sedgwick circumvents the problem of the pre-existent production of effeminate homosexual 'types' by arguing that different understandings of homoerotic relations co-exist: while the idea of the homosexual as a specific type of person who inverts the masculine and feminine in himself became dominant at the end of the nineteenth century, and grew fundamental to a particular kind of self-conception, it had a previous history, just as the idea of the homoerotic as a drive that is present in all people continued to be influential beyond this point, despite the fundamental contradiction between the two ideas.

Sedgwick's ideas about the importance of the play between visibility/invisibility and knowing/not-knowing in establishing male homosexual identity are important in this thesis, particularly in Chapter 3, where I examine Bradley and Cooper's self-entanglement in images of male homoeroticism. I also throughout discuss the relationship between homosexual-as-type and homosexual-as-history and how its close connection in the nineteenth century with ideas of literary identity and tradition can be seen interacting with Bradley and Cooper's own complex construction of identity.

Judith Butler, like Dowling and Sedgwick, both uses and extends Foucauldian ideas, criticising his 'indifference to sexual difference', while finding his critique of the category of sex and his refusal to search for origins useful principles for her own enquiry. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler begins by questioning the feminist dependence on the unity of woman as a subject.[81] She moves on from this to denaturalise the very idea of a binary sex division and examine the relations of power through which gender is applied to sex, a process she associates with the mechanisms of 'compulsory heterosexuality'. Butler uses the idea of 'performativity' to explain the process of becoming female/male and heterosexual/homosexual as a form of continuous cultural performance, an imitative process revealed as such in the parodic form of 'drag'. Butler's influence on my thesis can be seen in my interest in Bradley and Cooper's production of literary identity through a kind of exaggerated or heightened performance that at times borders on the parodic. Her idea that sexuality, sex and gender are produced through such performances also feeds into my discussion of Bradley and Cooper's self-performances as both male and female homoerotic personae.

## **b. Definitions**

Within the thesis I make a distinction, following Foucault, between the homoerotic/heteroerotic, and the homosexual/heterosexual. I use the terms homoerotic/heteroerotic to describe narratives and relationships between people of the same sex/the opposite sex that involve desire and sensuous pleasure (but not necessarily sexual practices), where these relations are not seen as fundamentally constitutive of identity. I reserve the terms homosexual/heterosexual, on the other hand, for the production of identities that are dependent on a perception of the self as a particular biologically determined sex whose identity is crucially bound up with the choice of sexual love object of either the same or the opposite sex. I see this as an identity which depends on a strong differentiation between sexual and non-sexual love, only the former of which is considered relevant to this kind of self-definition.

Because the distinction between homoerotic/heteroerotic and homosexual/ heterosexual is fundamental to the thesis, and to avoid confusion, I only use the term 'lesbian' to refer to female sexual identity of the latter type.

## **c. Key theoretical assumptions**

There are two areas in which I make important theoretical decisions: that of feminist theory; and that of literary critical theory. In terms of feminist theory, I first reject the idea of a universal female experience and identity unchanging over time. I also reject the idea that all female-female love relationships are part of a 'lesbian continuum' (i.e. that it is possible to include non-sexual relationships such as the mother-daughter relationship or non-sexual female friendship within the category 'lesbian'). Finally, I reject the idea that all female-female love relationships, including lesbian relationships, must necessarily have a feminist or subversive aspect.

In relation to literary criticism, I assume that all forms of writing exist in a necessary relation to historical and contemporary traditions. I reject the idea that experience guarantees truth in writing, and therefore that a female homoerotic writing underwritten by two female bodies will necessarily be more 'genuine' than female homoerotic writing written by a man (and vice versa). Finally, I have some faith in detailed literary analysis, and have spent much of my research time looking closely at individual poems and prose passages, operating under the principle that I should try to remain open to contradictory strands within the writing. The results of this work form the main body of the thesis.

## **3. The development of male homosexual identity in the late nineteenth century**

One aim of this research is to compare the relationship between the production of identity and female homoeroticism in the Michael Field writing with developments in the relationship between identity and male homoeroticism that, following Foucault, are widely seen to have become consolidated in this period into a more substantial and significant sense of male homosexual identity than had previously existed. In order to do this, it is necessary to understand the different ways in which that process of consolidation took place. I have chosen three contemporaries of Bradley and Cooper with whom to compare them: Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde and John Addington Symonds, all of whom produced a considerable body of work that can be seen to reflect both on male homoeroticism and on identity, and all of whom were not only recognisably from the same aesthetic milieu as Bradley and Cooper, but were also both read by them and sought out by them

for more personal acquaintance.

Pater, to whom Bradley and Cooper dedicated one of their plays, and on whose death they provided a sonnet for the *Academy*, was the aesthetic critic they most admired, and their journals often refer to his writings.[82] They had read carefully his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, using material from this to inform their interpretations of Renaissance paintings in *Sight and Song*. [83] They took the trouble both to attend Pater's London lectures, and to cultivate his acquaintance privately. [84] Vadillo has uncovered, amongst the miscellaneous Michael Field writings at the Bodleian, a set of critical notes which engage directly with Pater's aesthetic theories. [85]

Pater did not express any sense of himself in his writing as having a specifically sexually defined homosexual male identity, fundamentally distinguishable from a heterosexual identity, and was never publicly named as homosexual, despite the anxiety expressed by a number of writers about the effect of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* on impressionable young men, and the controversy surrounding his non-appointment to the position of University Proctor at Oxford, a scandal that in the twentieth century has been connected to an indiscreet relationship with a male student. [86]

However, in Pater's writings we can see a number of strands of thought, which, brought together, would be fundamental to the future construction of a particular type of homosexual identity. Some of these are connected to the development of a particular 'type' or 'temperament'. Others relate to an account of male-male relationship. From the early essay 'Diapheneitè', through his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, and more fictional writing such as 'The Child In the House' or *Marius the Epicurean*, Pater interests himself in the description of a particular type of male personality: responsive, passive, and sensitive to pain and beauty. [87] Suggesting that in the modern era, the question of identity is crucial, Pater, through his connection of that sensitive figure to the figure of the artist, and of the artist to the critic, constantly invites the reader to understand this unusual personality as in some way also a self-portrait, an invitation to which the Michael Field writers respond when, in their obituary poem, they assign a memory of Florian, the central character of 'The Child in the House', directly to Pater. [88]

In addition to this development of a particular type of male 'temperament', Pater also places great emphasis on the importance of male-male relationship, producing a history of artistic and critical production in which ideas are passed on from male to male. [89] His essay on Winckelmann in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, for example, traces the influence of Plato upon Winckelmann, and Winckelmann's own influence on the young Goethe. Pater brings himself into the chain of the male-male transfer of ideas, as Goethe's admiration for Winckelmann inspires Pater to write the essay, which, in turn is published within a book whose 'influence' on a generation of younger men becomes legendary. [90] Pater thus constructs in and through the essay a kind of cultural male-male lineage, which he connects both to Winckelmann's own 'romantic fervent friendships' with young men and to himself. Furthermore, participation in the male-male lineage can be seen to be intimately connected to that very particular innate 'nature' or 'temperament' to which Pater again repeatedly refers in this essay. [91]

While Pater's writings enmesh his production of himself both with the production of homoerotic discourse as male-male transfer of ideas, and with the production of a special temperament or 'Greek spirit' that would soon be irrevocably associated with a particular type of male homosexual, he avoided, in his lifetime, that specific and direct association. His pupil Wilde, who can be seen engaging in many of the same self-entanglements, did not. Wilde, like Pater, had some association with Bradley and Cooper, though their admiration for him was far

more qualified than that for Pater. They first met him at a literary soirée, and then on several subsequent occasions, discussing with him, amongst other things, Pater's ideas about aesthetics and pleasure. They also corresponded with him by letter about the staging, by the experimental Independent Theatre Society, of their play, *A Question of Memory*, which he attended; while they in turn went to see a number of his plays, including the posthumous production of *Salomé*.<sup>[92]</sup> Although they did not know Wilde well personally, they became friendly with a number of his close friends, including Charles Ricketts, John Gray, and eventually Robert Ross. Reports of dinner-table discussion about Wilde's prison sentence and self-exile occur several times in their journals.<sup>[93]</sup>

Wilde, as pupil of Pater, expresses and further connects a number of the ideas about male-male relationship and identity that can be found in Pater. Like Pater, Wilde did not specifically define himself as 'a homosexual', with its implied antithetical position in relation to heterosexuality, and as a married man with two children, such a self-definition would have to be complex. However, unlike Pater, Wilde became, during his trial for gross indecency, a public figure in whom later men, as Ed Cohen suggests, would come to recognise themselves 'as homosexual'.<sup>[94]</sup>

Throughout his life, Wilde, like Pater, tended to define himself as a particular 'type' of personality, a self-definition that would be crucial in future recognition of the 'type' of the homosexual male. Also like Pater, Wilde suggested that the question of the development of identity or personality was crucial to modern life. From the early lecture tour of the United States, in which, with carefully chosen clothing, mannerisms and taste, he set out to define himself as an 'aesthete,' through to the highly personal self-defence of *De Profundis*, (presented as a private love-letter), Wilde consistently argued that the cultivation of the self is of fundamental importance in modern life.

The potential entanglement of this production of self-identity with homoerotic discourse is evident in 'The Portrait of Mr W.H.', in which Wilde's narrator becomes engaged in researching the possible existence of a boy-actor, Willie Hughes, whom he posits as the addressee of Shakespeare's sonnets. The relationship between Shakespeare and Willie Hughes provides another example of Dowling's contention that aesthetic creation was promoted by the Oxford Hellenists as a product of male-male relationships, with Shakespeare's dedication to Mr W. H. as the 'onlie begetter' of *The Sonnets* linked in Wilde's text to Bacon's claim that 'the best works [. . .] have proceeded from the unmarried and childless men', Edward Blount's description of Marlowe's works as his 'right children', and a passage in Plato's *Symposium*.<sup>[95]</sup>

From the start, Wilde connects this history of male-male relationship underpinning the production of art with the question of self-identity. 'Art', Wilde's narrator asserts, 'reveals us to ourselves', and our interactions with it 'have given form and substance to what was within us; they have enabled us to realise our personality'.<sup>[96]</sup> As the narrator reads and re-reads the male-addressed sonnets, he finds himself 'deciphering the story of a life that had once been mine'.<sup>[97]</sup>

However, if Wilde's satirical study engages with the search for a history of homoerotic relationship and personal identity, he also suggests that this urge to find confirmation of the true nature of male-male relationship located in the past is a fatal fascination, seductive but inevitably limited. Eventually the narrator of 'The Portrait of Mr W.H.' loses faith in the project. "I wish I could believe it," I rejoined. "I would give anything to be able to do so. But I can't. It is a sort of moonbeam theory, very lovely, very fascinating, but intangible".<sup>[98]</sup> The very real limitations of the power of elevated male-male homoerotic lineage became evident at Wilde's trial, when his evocation of a love 'such as you find in the sonnets of Michelangelo and Shakespeare' failed to

lift his persona into the realm of the aesthetic and elevated and out of the vulgar and criminal.[99]

John Addington Symonds, a third critic whose writings in the late nineteenth century helped to develop the figure of the male homosexual, is the only one of these three to have unambiguously and deliberately, if discreetly, expressed the idea that there was such a thing as a particular homosexual personality that could be understood as existing in a necessary relation of difference to the heterosexual, and to have identified himself as such a figure, despite the fact that he, like Wilde, was married with children. Bradley and Cooper appear never to have met Symonds, but they entered into a written correspondence with him from 1881 until his death in 1893.[100] The correspondence included their sending him their published work, to which he responded in some degree sympathetically and encouragingly.[101] In 1886, they began a more detailed correspondence in preparation for their collection *Long Ago*, asking his advice as an acknowledged expert on Greek culture.[102]

Like Pater, Symonds suffered from a scandal surrounding allegations of an improper relationship with a male student, and accusations of immorality arising from his defence of homoerotic love in *Studies of the Greek Poets*. Like Pater also, Symonds spent a good portion of his literary life writing portraits of artists and thinkers associated with homoerotic love. However, Symonds also spent much of his time directly involved with and instigating legal and medical reform around male-male sexual relationships, privately circulating pamphlets about same-sex love in Greek and modern times and co-writing with Henry Havelock Ellis (also an acquaintance of Bradley and Cooper) *Sexual Inversion*, the first British sexological study of homosexuality.[103]

In his memoirs, Symonds can be seen creating a narrative of his own life, in which he tries to account for his 'peculiar temperament', which he associates directly with his desire for other men.[104] Symonds' 'propensities [. . .] sensibilities [. . .] audacities', are, he believes, 'inborn', and make of him a particular 'variety of type exhibited by nature', one, moreover, which is at times characterised as having some pathological features, such as an 'abnormal strain of nervous energy'.[105] At the same time, Symonds believes that character is formed in a relationship between 'inborn proclivities and external circumstance', and his description of the development of his personality appears, as in the strange aesthetic 'temperaments' that can be found in Pater's writing, in close relation to an appreciation of aesthetic objects.[106]

Symonds describes himself, as a boy, developing a fascination with Shakespeare's Venus and Adonis, which, in a phrase that echoes Wilde's remarks on the influence of Shakespeare's sonnets, 'gave form, ideality and beauty to my previous erotic visions', as he imagines himself, like Venus, 'folding the quick-panting lad in my embrace'.[107] Later, Symonds finds himself poring over a photograph of the Praxitelean Cupid, which 'taught me to feel the secret of Greek sculpture', or 'reading myself into' a story of Apollo and some shepherds, again suggesting that it must have been 'instinct' that led him to choose 'a myth foreshadowing my peculiar temperament and distant future'.[108]

Like both Pater and Wilde, Symonds, as well as meditating on his personality as an example of a particular 'type', which in his case explicitly combines aesthetic with homoerotic 'proclivities', also connects himself to other men through narratives of male-male productive exchange. Indeed, Symonds corresponded with Wilde over the manuscript of 'A Portrait of Mr W.H.'[109] Symonds describes his 'peculiar temperament' as having driven him to a life's work of study of homoerotic figures from the past, the male-male lineage that confirms and strengthens his sense of the elevated nature of male homoerotic relationship. This conscious decision to research and write about artists such as Michelangelo and Leonardo, or dramatists such as

Shakespeare and Marlowe, all of whom he believed had known the same passions as himself, is then seen as feeding into his development of the self conceived as a particular aesthetic/homoerotic 'type'.

However, while Symonds at times uses this aesthetic male-male lineage to produce an elevated vision of homoerotic relationship, he also suggests, in the memoirs, some ambivalence about the effect of such research on his character:

I cannot pretend to think that literature, in the way I have pursued it, is exactly wholesome for a man of my peculiar temperament [. . .]. Trying to evade the congenital disease of my moral nature in work, work has drained my nerves and driven me to find relief in passion.[110]

Symonds has accepted for himself a homosexual identity, the identity of the 'invert', but along with that acceptance comes a medicalisation of what in Pater and Wilde is still a homoeroticism understood in purely aesthetic terms, so that for Symonds, the aesthetic context becomes something that is not 'exactly wholesome', at odds with an inversion understood as a 'congenital disease'.

Symonds can thus be seen as in some measure having made a leap that goes beyond the writings of Pater and Wilde, in the realisation of a homosexual identity that brings with it both negative and positive effects: negative, in becoming embroiled in the vocabulary of disease and of the abnormal; and positive, in providing a basis from which to articulate a discourse of individual rights, a discourse with which Symonds, albeit within limited circles, engaged vigorously, and of which, indeed, he was often the instigator.

While these three writers all differed in the ways they reproduced and related to a male homoerotic tradition, all three were engaged in a process in which self-recognition was entangled with discourses of aesthetic production that depended on the one hand on a sense of self-possession of a 'strange' or carefully-cultivated personality, and on the other on an intense focus on male-male productive relationship. Such an engagement was an important precursor to the late nineteenth-century production of the male homosexual, who can be seen emerging within the writing of Symonds. In this thesis I trace how Bradley and Cooper also construct for themselves a particular, aesthetically-defined personality and note the interest in homoerotic themes and narratives within their work, asking whether they can be seen as pursuing a parallel quest for a self-identity that can be understood as lesbian or pre-lesbian.

#### **4. Structure of the thesis**

The thesis is based, as suggested earlier, on a set of close readings of the writings of 'Michael Field'. It begins with an examination of the non-fictional writing, looking at writing from the 1880s through to Bradley's death in 1914. Later chapters produce an analysis of the early poetry, published from 1889-1893, working through the collections in the order in which they were published. Shortage of time and space mean that I have not examined the dramatic work or the later poetry. While these limitations were imposed by practical considerations, they have allowed

me to focus on a key time period in the formation of male homosexual identity – leading up to the Wilde trial and to the publication of Havelock Ellis' *Sexual Inversion* – and on a form in which literary and cultural materials are most condensed – the lyric.

Chapter 1 of the thesis focuses on the journals and letters written by Bradley and Cooper. It establishes that the journals are used by Bradley and Cooper to construct elevated personal identities through a process of continuous self-performance, and discusses the historical context for that elevated self-construction. It establishes that the identities produced depend on the 'heightened' performance of both female-female and female-male love relationships in an aesthetically transformed environment, and finally compares the identities produced with contemporary male homoerotic identities.

Chapter 2 examines the Sapphic collection, *Long Ago*, establishing that the collection is used to construct an ideal female homoerotic space, and demonstrating the dependency of that construction both on male productions of female homoerotic space and on a simultaneous production of heteroerotic space. It discusses the idealised identity of Sappho produced here and its relation to both the sentimental heteroerotic Sappho of the early nineteenth century and to the idea of the Romantic poet. It also discusses the relation between the Sappho produced here and the production of identity for Bradley and Cooper, asking whether this can be understood as a lesbian or pre-lesbian identity.

Chapter 3 focuses on *Sight and Song*, showing how this collection is used to produce an idealised aesthetic realm, and to suggest the possibility of the performance of elevated identity within that space. The chapter examines the relationship between the viewer and the naked female body set up in the collection. The chapter further describes the production of the male homoerotic figure of Saint Sebastian, and its connection to those contemporary ideas that are beginning to cluster around the emerging figure of 'the homosexual'. It finally discusses the relation between this figure of Sebastian and the creation of identity for Bradley and Cooper, asking whether the production of male homoerotic identity here can be related to the development of a specifically lesbian identity.

Chapter 4 looks at the love poems of *Underneath the Bough*, showing how Bradley and Cooper construct themselves as characters in a personal romantic female-female narrative through connections between personal letters, *Works and Days*, and 'The Third Book of Songs' section of this collection. It discusses the inclusion of heteroerotic and both male and female homoerotic discourses in relation to this romantic narrative; the extent to which the body is represented as a sexual body in the love poems; and the presentation of a diffusive sensuousness and its relation to contemporary male homoerotic writing. This chapter also compares the representation of the Bradley-Cooper relationship with the representation of the Cooper-Berenson relationship to ask whether there is a difference here between the presentation of female homoerotic and heteroerotic desire and whether that difference has radical or conservative effects.

In my conclusion, I draw together the evidence of the thesis to discuss the effects of Bradley and Cooper's use of homoerotic themes and narratives in their early poetry, and to ask how these may be connected to the development of lesbian identity. I further question the political effects of the positions adopted in the Michael Field writing, and evaluate the literary merit of the three collections under review, before making some suggestions for future research.



## Chapter 1: *Works and Days*

### Introduction

Between 1888 and their deaths, in 1913 and 1914, Bradley and Cooper produced a set of handwritten journals – generally one for each year – which they titled *Works and Days*. The edited version of *Works and Days* (published in 1933), alongside numerous extant collections of letters both from and to the writers, and the original manuscript version of the journals, which is housed in the British Library, have provided academics with a large amount of non-fictional prose material by ‘Michael Field’.[111] In the past two decades, readings of the poems have invariably used the prose – and *Works and Days* in particular – as a context for the poetry, producing accounts of the writers’ lives which have become an essential part of the recent positive response to their work. *Works and Days* has become the solid frame within which the poems, whose continuing existence in the mid-twentieth century was so precarious, have become able to establish a small but increasingly stable place within the literary canon.

In this chapter, I argue that this frame was deliberately constructed by the two writers as a support for their poetic and dramatic writing. I approach *Works and Days* not as a source of evidence for the nature of the pre-existent identities of Bradley and Cooper, but as a mechanism consciously constructed by them for the production of very specific literary identities. These ‘private’ literary female personalities – public access to which depended on the proposed posthumous publication of *Works and Days* – were created as an adjunct to the ‘public’ identity of the male writer ‘Michael Field’, which had begun to unravel at the point when the writing of the journals was first undertaken.

I examine the representation of personal identity in this prose writing, in order to establish first whether we can find here a recognisably ‘lesbian’ self that can be related to that sense of a male homosexual self which, as I outlined in the introduction, can be seen crystallising in the writings of Bradley and Cooper’s male contemporaries; and second, whether the motivations and effects of the self-constructions they undertake can be read as a radical challenge to a ‘heteronormative’ society. My first section outlines the motivations proposed by Bradley and Cooper themselves for producing a written representation of their own personal identities; second, I show how they produce these identities, like Pater, Wilde and Symonds, in relation on the one hand to a desire for self-connection with what they perceive as the special community of artists, and on the other to a sense of difference from the norm within their own personalities; third, I examine the representation of non-procreative love-relationship, both homoerotic and heteroerotic, which they use to underpin the identities produced. In the second half, I look at the element of performance in Bradley and Cooper’s production of identity, and the settings within which this performance is realised. Finally, I compare Bradley and Cooper’s self-representations as aesthetes with similar self-presentations in the writing of Pater, Wilde and Symonds, asking whether the consonances between male homoeroticism and aesthetic identity in the late nineteenth century can be extended to include female homoeroticism.

## 1. The production of the elevated self

The writing of any journal involves the organisation of material, the selection of narrative technique, and the assumption of a unified and controlling authorial voice. *Works and Days*, beyond this common tendency of the journal to produce a somewhat orderly version of events and fictionalised authorial identity, provides evidence of a determined and deliberate effort to present, not the mundane facts of everyday life, but a set of idealised memories which can construct the authors as exceptional and elevated individuals.

The manuscript version of *Works and Days* comprises a set of foolscap books with dated entries in the handwriting of both Bradley and Cooper.[112] Alongside descriptions of significant events and people, there are descriptions of landscapes and works of art, with Cooper, in particular, writing lengthy critiques of paintings. There are assessments of books and plays, discussions of ideas, and responses to events in the writers' lives. There are several accounts of the writing process in use by the Michael Field writers, and draft versions of many of the poems which appear in the collections. Occasionally there are clippings from newspapers, or memorabilia such as pressed flowers.

The journals were intended for posthumous publication, and the style of the writing, even in those entries that contain 'confessional' material about personal relationships, maintains a literary rhetoric with a sense of public address, embedded in complex sentences, extended metaphors and carefully chosen euphuistic diction, suggesting a journal deliberately crafted for future readers, and readers, moreover, who will appreciate eloquence and admire erudition.

This impression of careful preparation for a future audience is confirmed by the presence in the original manuscripts of occasional loose leaves of paper on which previous versions of journal entries can be found, while at times one or other writer indicates that they are copying out a piece which was originally written by their colleague.[113] Such documentary evidence shows that journal entries were not written directly into *Works and Days*, but selected from pieces of writing originally written elsewhere, either on individual pieces of paper, or in separate draft books, before being copied into the foolscap manuscript. The journals are clearly not a spontaneous documentation of the author's lives, but an edited presentation of events and ideas.

The intention behind this strong authorial control over the writing of *Works and Days* is established in an entry by Bradley in the first journal:

And one would fain say a word about the care of one's memory, the conservation of those moments that may be significant or influential. Selection may be made even of our remembrances, unworthy ones obliterated by repentance, frivolous ones made void by neglect, those that glorify, exalt or soften dissociated from vulgar contact on approach. We should even be careful of the moods in which we draw near the 'ruins of time'. An old love-scene, visited by cynicism, may be irreparably defaced. We must not traverse with hurrying, worldly feet where we have walked with God.[114]

Memory is fundamental to the writing of any journal. Here Bradley addresses herself directly to the question of how she and Cooper should 'conserve' their memories, her primary concern being the necessity for a ruthless 'selection', in which 'unworthy' memories must be 'obliterated' or 'made void' in order to better protect those that 'glorify, exalt or soften'. The aim of this selection process is the production of a kind of sacred set of memories – 'where we have walked with God' – whose sanctity is to be maintained by their preservation on a separate plane from the everyday, 'dissociated' from the 'vulgar' and the 'worldly', or from the threat of 'defacement' through

‘cynicism’.

For the proposed posthumous readers, the journals provide a point of access to the identities of Bradley and Cooper, so that if the rigorous control proposed here is adhered to, the identities of Bradley and Cooper, known only in their relation to sacred and worthy events, should necessarily be elevated, as becomes clear in the continuation of the journal entry:

We may, notwithstanding, without prejudice, when ill-treated or tarnished by the world, resort to seasons in our lives when what is ideal in us has met with recognition, when poets have claimed us as their race, or love given employ to our higher faculties, and we have wrought some deed that has confessed the scope or intensity of our aspiration.[115]

As the memories chosen will only be those which demonstrate ‘the ideal in us’, or ‘our higher faculties’, the writers, and therefore their readers, in re-visiting these memories are able to reassure themselves that Bradley and Cooper are indeed not only elevated individuals, but members of the exceptional ‘race’ of poets.[116] In this way *Works and Days* is produced as an essential support for establishing and continually re-affirming the identity of Bradley and Cooper as that of poets.

The themes of this early passage – the effort to produce elevated identity, anxiety about the writers’ status as members of the ‘race’ of poets, and above all the context of hostility from ‘the world’ – a reference to the first hostile critical reviews of the work of ‘Michael Field’, which from this point onwards were to become more frequent – will resonate not only throughout the thirty volumes of *Works and Days*, but also through the eight poetry collections. This entry is the first instance of a consistently maintained compensatory narrative running through both *Works and Days* and the poetry, in which Bradley and Cooper award themselves a status not only against, but also above the unappreciative ‘world’, in the realm of ‘the ideal’.

Paradoxically, the very idea that artistic identity must be constructed in opposition to ‘the world’, and on an ideal plane far from the vulgar contemporary, places the Michael Field writers within a very particular late Victorian aesthetic. The concept of the artist as a special kind of individual, different from and superior to the majority, is endemic to a strand of literary commentary which can be traced from the Romantics through the writings of aesthetic theorists of the nineteenth century. David DeLaura has shown how the concept of artists as a ‘small elite fraternity’, articulated early in the century by Newman and later by Arnold, developed in the writing of Pater into a vision of the artist as a particular kind of sensitive individual separated from the concerns of the materialist world. [117] Bradley and Cooper, who include within *Works and Days* approving commentary on Newman, Arnold and above all Pater, place themselves firmly within this tradition, strongly endeavouring to establish their own position as members of that special ‘privileged elite’ of aesthetic producers. [118]

In order to confirm their identities as poets, Bradley and Cooper develop several strategies: one is to assert their relationship with established poets, here registered as a moment of ‘recognition’ or ‘claim’; another is to suggest that they possess particular and unusual characteristics, represented in this passage by the mention of ‘higher faculties’ and the ‘intensity of our aspiration’. A final, key element in the construction of their identities as poets is the assertion of a particular self-realisation through the development of ideal love relationships. The following three sections examine in more depth how these three strategies were deployed both within and beyond the production of *Works and Days*.

## 2. The self and the 'race' of poets

In seeking to legitimise their inclusion in the 'race' of poets, Bradley and Cooper continually refer to themselves as having similarities to the writers they admire, from their early claim, in a letter to Browning, that they work 'after the fashion of Beaumont and Fletcher', through claims in *Works and Days* to a resemblance between themselves and Keats, Sappho, Flaubert, Coleridge, and even Shakespeare, placing themselves in a chain of influence that confirms their status not only as poets, but as poets recognised in the late nineteenth century as examples of 'genius'. Beyond this continual suggestion of affinity with past creators, Bradley and Cooper also made great efforts to make connections with contemporary writers, avidly seeking for that external 'recognition' which could confirm their self-awarded status as great poets. [119]

The most significant early connection was with Robert Browning, to whom they are obliquely referring in the passage quoted earlier ('poets have claimed us as their race'). Browning, with whom they had begun corresponding in 1883, died in the year that *Works and Days* was begun, yet as carefully handled memory he is a constant point of reference throughout the journal, particularly in periods of critical disapprobation, as suggested in the passage quoted above – 'when ill-treated or tarnished by the world'. Browning had expressed admiration for two early Michael Field plays: *Callirrhoë* and *Fair Rosamond*, which he suggested showed 'poetic genius' (as well as some 'crudeness and incompleteness').[120] They met him both publicly and privately about half a dozen times, and he was encouraging of *Long Ago*, in preparation in 1888, not only suggesting revisions, but even contributing the occasional line.[121]

In their pre-*Works and Days* letters to Browning and accounts of their meetings with him, and in their references to him in *Works and Days*, Bradley and Cooper create a sense of a spiritual relationship with Browning which not only legitimises their claim to be poets, but lifts them into the realm of the divine: in their meetings with him they were 'three poets together – conventionality and ceremony put away – we shaped life divinely'.[122] In this sacred space, although all three have a god-like ability for creation, Browning is the figure who is offered unquestioning faith, in return for his acknowledgement of them as true poets – 'We recognised that he was proud to manifest to the world that we were his friends, and we believed in him, in the deep scriptural sense'.[123]

After Browning's death, Bradley and Cooper continued in *Works and Days* to call on him not only to offer them his blessing – 'the benediction of his belief in us' – from the now even more elevated position of Heaven, but also to provide support for their self-construction as ideal selves rather than everyday or material individuals:

Perhaps the Great Dead [Cooper's mother and Browning] are guardians – not with the brush of their wings keeping us from being knocked down by a cab – any little footboy of an angel could do that – but guardians of the ideal in us – of our very selves.[124]

The ideal *Works and Days* selves of Bradley and Cooper are again shown here as existing, under the protection of the heaven-dwelling Browning, beyond the material and temporal, separate from the kind of everyday bodily selves that might be threatened by something as mechanical and contemporary as a cab. These ideal selves are truer than the bodily selves: they are the 'very selves' of the Michael Field writers. Bradley and Cooper's firm division between the real and ideal; association of the real with the physical, the temporal and the temporary; and designation of the ideal as the locus of truth, depends on an admiration for an interpretation of Plato which is, like the emphasis on the elite nature of the poet, thoroughly contemporary.[125] There is also a

class dimension to this vision, again, absolutely of its time: the writers' interest in Heaven is represented by people with status – 'the Great' – who can protect the ideal, rather than the lowly servants – the 'little footboys' – who concern themselves with the vulgar world of 'cabs'. [126]

The poetic identities of Bradley and Cooper, promoted throughout the journals, had a somewhat precarious existence: they seemed to require the approbation of a 'guardian' such as Browning, and although his initial use of the word 'genius' gave crucial support to the construction of an identity for 'Michael Field' as an aesthetically superior individual, this construction was also accompanied by profound anxiety. The writers were clearly disappointed that Browning neither agreed to write a preface to *Long Ago*, nor dedicated *Asolando* to them. [127] That anxious need for 'recognition' of their poetic identity from their peers remains evident in later volumes of *Works and Days*, in the relationships they tried to establish with other acclaimed writers such as Pater or Meredith. These tended to follow a similar trajectory, in which the respected writer's initial interest in 'Michael Field' soon faded. The Michael Field poets would write and visit, but always as petitioners allowed a favour, rather than as spontaneously sought after friends. At Pater's house, they were more often left to talk with Pater's sisters than himself, and in their final meeting with Meredith, in 1895, he barely disguised his boredom and contempt. [128]

At times the effort of maintaining the ideal selves in *Works and Days* without the external recognition to support them appears a burdensome toil which threatens both writers with the despair and the 'cynicism' that Bradley's early entry had eschewed:

There is much to make this year close in cynicism. We have published two books that have been received with silence or with hate. Most of our friends are further from us than last year – at least none of our bonds have been deepened. [129]

Yes: the year 1892 has been almost the bitterest ever spent. We have given our work to a silent world – twice have we given to silence. We have no friends who believe in our work – they are all in the grave. Encouragement is a sound that would make me start. [ . . . ] I scarcely care to learn – I do not care for my work as I used to do [ . . . ]. Hopeless yearning has grown impatient – when this happens, it turns to cynicism. [130]

It was only from 1894, as they began their long-lasting friendship with the artists Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon, that Bradley and Cooper managed to establish a relationship with other artists which was not only more reciprocal and mutually respectful than those they had previously attempted to create with contemporaries, but which could be seen as confirmation of their membership of the ideal community of aesthetes, and therefore recorded at great length within the manuscript of *Works and Days*. Emma Donoghue has documented the way in which the Michael Field couple sought in the Ricketts-Shannon couple a masculine reflection of their own relationship – 'The Artists are more and more our male-doubles'. [131] The significance of this mirroring effect in supporting Bradley and Cooper's aesthetic identities is reflected in the names they chose for Ricketts and Shannon, as, for example, 'brothers in art', or 'the sacred ones'. Mostly they are referred to as 'The Artists' or, later, 'The Painters', a sobriquet which enables the Michael Field writers to appear at last as their own ideal 'very selves' – 'The Poets'. [132]

### 3. The self as genius

The effort to establish relationships with other artists in order to confirm the right of 'Michael Field' to claim the identity of great poet was, in large part, made by Bradley, who tended to write the letters, send out the complimentary copies of plays and poetry collections, and produce most of the conversation when an audience with a writer or artist had been granted. By contrast, Cooper's support for her and Bradley's inclusion in the 'race of poets' rested more strongly on a presentation within *Works and Days* of the writers as representatives of 'genius', possessors of that unusual artistic personality, different from and superior to the norm, which had its origins in the eighteenth century and the Romantic movement. This self-conception as genius rests, in *Works and Days*, on an idea of 'artistic temperament', an unusually heightened sensibility, which can be seen, first of all, in the response of the writers to beauty.[133]

*Works and Days* contains numerous descriptive passages that demonstrate a heightened sensitivity to beauty. In relation to the natural world, Bradley writes as frequently as Cooper, producing scenes that suggest a straightforwardly Romantic approach to nature:

We walk [. . .] among the swirls of ice & wind, blithe in our souls from the sun & the joy of having come to plant Alpine roses at her grave in memory of her lover.[134]

It is much to watch the clouds form, and wander, and fade, to have winding streams for the sunset to fall into, and Scotch firs for the wind to rove amongst. Yesterday morning I made alone for the fir-wood and worshipped. How strange it seemed to me then to go into buildings and make a noise to God – when He is in the air, the cloud, the stormy wind, and the still small voice within us.[135]

Passages such as these describe a sympathetic relationship between nature and the 'soul' of the writer, inspiring an appropriate response: worship. Once again, such a form of worship is not only a playing out of the Romantic idea of nature as sublime, but also part of a process of uplifted self-creation: what is discovered, finally, is the presence of God within Bradley and Cooper – 'He is [. . .] the still small voice within us.'

For Bradley, the sublime landscape of the Scottish fir-wood exists in a necessary contradistinction to contemporary human constructs such as 'buildings', even where these buildings are dedicated to religion. Cooper's rarer writings about the natural world suggest a more modern approach, in which evidence of human construction, particularly secular construction, is carefully mediated through the perception of aesthetic characteristics:

We cross the Marsh, preceded by Tramps - on the rail-lines we see Millet's effect – figures in the typical actions of toil against the sky.[136]

Then we roam to Le Cobb, best beloved of breakwaters, & look landward to a coastline full of fine square lines or gradual declivities that grow on one as impressions, and have nothing merely picturesque about them. The gray town, the blue bias, the green slipping land between town & harbour, the set of the hulks, all we see is of Art – as revealed to Whistler.[137]

This landscape bears the marks of human contemporary labour in the form of 'rail-lines', 'breakwaters', and even the humble workforce themselves as they 'toil against the sky'. Such an environment cannot attain the lofty, sublime and divine status of nature untouched by human

activity. However, by aestheticisation – the perception within the contemporary landscape of ‘impressions’ such as those created by contemporary artists – of Millet’s ‘effect’ or Whistler’s ‘Art’, the nineteenth-century vision is saved from the vulgarity of the merely everyday.[138]

Beyond the response to nature, and to the aesthetic within nature, Bradley and Cooper’s sensitivity is shown in *Works and Days* in their sensibility in relation to works of art. Cooper, in particular, fills page after page with detailed descriptions of and responses to paintings. The influence of the art critic Bernhard Berenson, who acted as an artistic teacher to both, as well as being the focus of much painful emotional attention, is evident in much of this commentary.[139] At the same time, both women record a direct physical response to the art object in which the sensitive aesthetic self is overwhelmed by the beauty – or the ugliness – of the art object, registered in the body as ‘thrill’ or as ‘shock’.

We seek out many of the pictures on Bernhard’s list, and enjoy the first thrilling shock of their colour and conception.[140]

One almost hides one’s head from the Rossettis – a single woman-nightmare haunts them all and their colour screams: modelling and tone alike are deficient. I was not prepared for such aesthetic shock.[141]

One thrills as one notes the severe arcades round it & its swelling roof that tell of Italian workmanship.[142]

In this relationship between art and the aesthetic self, the art object is shown as colouring the very life of the observer:

These nocturnes and symphonies show one the living woof of colour in twilight, moonshine, dawn and mist; one sits before them and lives with the elements they show to one through tonality and its beautiful effects of distance.[143]

The presentation of the self as realised through sympathy with the artistic effects of the painting, as the aesthetic self ‘lives with’ the ‘tonality’ and the ‘beautiful effects,’ suggests a merging of artist, critic and artwork, which, as we shall see in Chapter 3, will be thoroughly developed in the picture poems of *Sight and Song*. [144]

The representation of genius as sensitive artistic temperament by Cooper in *Works and Days* is at times extended into a more specifically late nineteenth-century manifestation of genius as a form of sickness. Psychological theories were beginning to transform the ancient idea of genius as ‘divine madness’ into a more medical sense of genius as sickness or amoral disorder. The philosopher Eduard von Hartmann included a passage on genius in his *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, which was copied verbatim into *Works and Days* by Cooper, with the comment ‘true as Truth’s simplicity’.[145] Meanwhile a copy of Cesare Lombroso’s *The Man of Genius*, translated by Havelock Ellis, was sent by him to Bradley and Cooper at Dresden during their visit in 1891.[146]

The account of Cooper’s illness in Dresden gives both writers a chance to demonstrate in the person of Cooper some of the characteristics of genius as disease. The account is mainly in Cooper’s words, but there is a sense, even in Bradley’s account, of the necessity of

acknowledging genius as part of the meaning of Cooper's fevered hallucinations – 'She says she must remember that first night as full of the tumult and freedom of genius'.[147]

Cooper's own account of the fever mixes visions taken from artworks and opera with a commentary which overtly links her fever to aesthetic production – 'delirium is glorious, like being inspired continuously [. . .] forms of art and poetry swim round and into me'.[148] She is also careful to ensure that even beyond the end of the physical fever she continues to show symptoms of artistic frenzy as divine disease. In response to a gift of roses which Berenson sends her as she is recuperating, she writes that, 'an insatiable rapture, almost delirium, haunted my eyes and brain', while her subsequent disappointment at not having attended several of Wagner's operas is recorded as 'worse than fever [. . .] a passion of passions'.[149]

Apart from this detailed focus on a particular period of illness as a manifestation of genius, Cooper's constitution, throughout *Works and Days*, is referred to as 'nervous' and 'delicate', something which requires a certain amount of care.[150] In her terminal illness, which lasted for nearly two years, she further developed this highly-wrought and fragile persona into a figure of Christ-like suffering, the culmination of that presentation of the exceptional self as divine that we have seen operating from the start of *Works and Days*.

The sensitive and responsive poetic 'temperament' of Bradley and Cooper is thus revealed in *Works and Days* through their sensibility to nature, art and physical suffering, and their ability to transform all three into poetry. The experience which above all was connected by them with the possibility of self-revelation as possessors of aesthetic temperament, however, was that of love.

#### **4. The self as androgynous/homoerotic**

The production of the self as genius, whether through self-association with an elite aesthetic community, or through the possession of a sensitive, unusual 'temperament', necessarily links Bradley and Cooper into a history of genius that had been, from the eighteenth century, frequently connected both with **androgyny and with homoerotic narrative, as markers of that difference and originality that were perceived to be its fundamental characteristics.**[151] Bradley and Cooper, separating themselves from the vulgar multitude through their self-production as unusual personalities, also produce themselves as androgynous figures and connect themselves to homoerotic narratives, and it is here, for some critics, that the construction of a definitively lesbian identity can be discerned. Yet in both cases, the connections made by Bradley and Cooper are complex and ambiguous.

Bradley and Cooper's self-figuring as androgynous figures works across a range of different texts, both 'public' and 'private'. The adoption of the male name 'Michael Field' as public aesthetic persona is repeated by the adoption of the male names 'Michael' and 'Henry' as 'private' names to be used not only in *Works and Days*, but also in letters and conversation with intimate friends. In neither case does the male name straightforwardly signify maleness. As Thain suggests, the retention of the name 'Michael Field' after its almost immediate semi-public uncovering by Browning meant that it operated as 'exposed pseudonym', signifying both male and female, and allowing a range of address in the poetry that, she argues, creates 'deliberately amorphous sexual identity'.[152]

This ambiguity, however, was exploited by Bradley and Cooper not in confirmation of



sexual identity, but of poetic identity, since they believed that the true poet should represent both sexes. When Bradley reproduced the myth of Tiresias, the mythical male figure who became female and then male, in *Long Ago*, an approving reviewer in *The Academy* noted how the myth had been used to ‘illustrate, in singularly penetrative fashion, the bi-sexual make of the poet’.[153]

In *Works and Days* and in correspondence with other writers, Bradley and Cooper often refer to their more private, yet still aesthetic, personae as male, beginning with Bradley’s insistence to Browning that ‘Edith and I make a veritable Michael’.[154] Apart from the frequent self-identification of both poets with male writers already noted, Bradley is several times portrayed as having a ‘masterful’ personality.[155] Further self-presentations as male occur in a variety of theatrical contexts, for example, through the creation of male characters in the tragedies – ‘In Herod I create myself man – the make of Herod’s nature is mine’ – or at the theatre watching Sarah Bernhardt – ‘this first act made me Sarah’s lover – I played the man to her every caress’ – or in the ‘dramatic’ setting of Rottingdean, which Bradley reports ‘makes real supermen. I am one’.[156]

Cooper, too, is often figured as androgynous, with Bradley addressing her in letters or in *Works and Days* as ‘my Boy’. When Cooper wrote the late poem ‘Caenis Caeneus’, in which a female figure becomes male and then reverts to female, Bradley not only calls the poem ‘her Tiresias’, but comments ‘surely someday she [Cooper] will be a man’.[157] Cooper, as suggested earlier, cultivated a delicate self-image carefully aligned to the figure of the sensitive and suffering male, a performance that in her final years was refined into that of Christ on the cross.[158]

Despite this continual assertion of maleness within the self, both writers, as Thain acknowledges, distanced themselves from the contemporary sexological suggestion of ‘mannishness’ as symptomatic of female inversion, and indeed produced a standard hostile characterisation of this ‘type’ when they met Vernon Lee.[159] Lee and her two companions are described individually by Bradley as ‘tall and big-jointed [. . .] an untidy mess of perversion [. . .] a glittering crudity’ and together as ‘tailor-made women’ or ‘shirt-fronty women’.[160] Cooper is similarly uncomplimentary, describing Lee as ‘an intellectual Vampire’ with a ‘gigantic memory’, who is ‘like a museum, rather untidily arranged’.[161] While Bradley and Cooper were generally unsympathetic in their portraits of contemporary women, the vocabulary chosen here (‘big-jointed’, ‘perversion’, ‘tailor-made’, ‘Vampire’, ‘gigantic’) produces Lee and her friends as grotesque, even monstrous figures, suggesting that while androgyny was a consistent part of Bradley and Cooper’s self-presentation, they distanced themselves from those women for whom masculine characteristics might be read as a marker of sexual inversion.[162]

Similarly, their self-connection with the female homoerotic narrative of their own love cannot be seen as straightforwardly confirming an identity underpinned by sexual choice. The love-relationship between Bradley and Cooper is key to their self-presentation within *Works and Days*, but its primary function is not to emphasise a female-female physical passion, but to confirm once again their connection with the ideal. This is a love which is, without exception and with countless re-iteration, described as perfect and sublime, a love which, however frequently experienced and expressed, never threatens to become vulgar or commonplace, and which, while much more frequently referred to by Bradley, nevertheless has the reassurance of reciprocity:

I am very happy; giving and receiving perfect love.[163]

How divine, to have a Love who thus recalls and vivifies one’s own better self.[164]

What a divine blessing it is to me to have my Love, who checks no self-expression, who brings beauty to my eyes, and gladness to my life, who loves me, and whom I love with strenuous force, that is half-hidden by our caresses and humorous names and utter familiarity.[165]

Here we have the ‘utter familiarity’ of a relationship which began with Cooper’s birth and which takes place both within a family – Cooper is Bradley’s niece – and in a family setting – for most of the 1880s and 1890s they lived with Cooper’s father and sister. Yet within that familiar and familial setting, Bradley and Cooper construct a relationship which is based on the ideal: ‘perfect’ and ‘divine’; and which ‘vivifies’ the ‘better self’, supporting the possibility of an elevated self. As with the relationship with Ricketts and Shannon, this is a relationship in which mutual self-recognition as aesthetic producers is fundamental – ‘Sixteen years ago, I came to Newnham empty-headed [. . .]. I return a poet and possessing a poet’.[166]

Bradley and Cooper not only used their love relationship to support the production of their ideal and therefore potentially poetic selves, but also suggested that the relationship was inextricably bound up with the writing process itself. Their work from the 1880s onwards was published jointly under a single name.[167] Beyond this, there were, on several occasions, assertions that the plays and poems were composed in a particularly close collaboration that depended on their perfect mutual sympathy. Bradley, for example, suggested in a letter to Havelock Ellis that the writing was ‘perfectly mosaic: we cross and interlace like a company of summer dancing flies.’[168]

As several writers have argued, the descriptions of Bradley and Cooper’s writing practice that can be found within *Works and Days* make the work appear less univocal and more mutually supportive and editorial than is proposed by this assertion.[169] The two women normally wrote in separate rooms, for example, and were often engaged on different projects, sometimes contributing a scene or a line to a text which was regarded as mainly the preserve of the other. The idea of a unitary author with a single voice was at this time a literary ideal, and while within *Works and Days* (unlike in the letters) there is no attempt to disguise the fact that Bradley and Cooper generally wrote separately, there is still a strong emphasis on a kind of ideal unity of the aesthetic selves – ‘P. [Cooper] and I are knit up into one living soul’, ‘Oh that we may be more and more together, closer, growing into one’.[170]

This perfect unity is sometimes described as a kind of literary marriage, in which divine intervention supports the unity of both the lovers and the art. In the letter to Ellis quoted above, for example, in response to a query about which writer had written a particular passage, Bradley states – ‘Let no man think he can put asunder what God has joined’.[171] The idea of a divinely protected literary marriage is underscored in a short paper entitled ‘The gospel according to Saint Matthew’, written after a visit to Browning in 1888. Commenting on the relationship of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Bradley writes – ‘those two poets, man and wife, wrote alone; each wrote, but did not bless or quicken one another at their work; *we are closer married*’.[172]

The suggestion that the Bradley-Cooper relationship is a kind of marriage here moves into the area of what Dowling, following Plato, calls ‘spiritual procreancy’ – the idea that homoerotic relationship produces art and ideas as an alternative to the physical offspring produced through male-female relationship.[173] In the passage above, this procreancy is seen as productive of aesthetic identity as well as aesthetic artefacts, as Bradley and Cooper are able to ‘bless’ and to

‘quicken’ not only the joint children that are their poems and drama, but also ‘one another’, creating themselves as ideal poetic selves, the equivalent, or even the superior of ‘those two poets, man and wife’, the most successful literary couple of the nineteenth century, the Brownings.

The presentation of the Bradley-Cooper relationship thus acts in several ways as an essential support for their self-presentation as ideal poets – its perfect reciprocity allowing them to access and represent an ideal state, its emphasis on their spiritual unity supporting the idea of a single controlling voice in the writing, and its homoeroticism connecting them to a tradition in which the production of art is seen as an alternative to the production of children. This insistence on the centrality of Bradley and Cooper’s female-female homoerotic relationship in their self-construction as poets has at times been understood as the production of both a lesbian identity and a lesbian poetics. Such readings have been complicated by the revelation that the unpublished manuscript of *Works and Days* contains long passages referring to Cooper’s unrequited passion for a man – Bernhard Berenson.[174]

Berenson appears to have had a lightly flirtatious friendship with Cooper that was plunged into crisis when he began an enigmatic relationship with Mary Costelloe, a married woman with ‘advanced’ views. Cooper’s tantalising and troubled relationship with Berenson bleeds relentlessly through the subsequent fifteen years of the *Works and Days* manuscript. On one level, the relationship with Berenson is presented as completely different from that between Bradley and Cooper. The Cooper-Berenson relationship is described as having no pleasure and no mutual support or sympathy, producing a self which is often, as in the following passages, ‘unbearable’:

The magnetic trouble Bernhard and I awake each in each is an incalculable element: & we cannot trust the Sapphic frenzy that forces us, in spite of ourselves, to follow him.[175]

We give one another no pleasure; the fascination we have for each other makes us wretched.[176]

The sultriness of thunder in our moods makes us [. . .] unbearable to each other – & I can say, makes me unbearable to myself.[177]

At times, the relationship even skirts dangerously near to the vulgar, particularly when Berenson, short of money and resenting spending time discussing art with Cooper, allows himself to be negotiated into the position of being paid for his time by the two women:

He is poor, & is seized like Midas with a desire to turn everything he has to do with to gold. Perhaps it is the Jew in him, at last roused to meanness [. . .]. I feel scalded with shame for him, yet determined to act for his advantage.[178]

The arrangement is portrayed in Arnoldian terms, with Berenson’s despised Hebraic racial origins representing a vulgar materialism that throughout *Works and Days* both Bradley and Cooper continually exhort him to rise above.[179] The moment is rescued here by his metamorphosis, at the moment of acceptance, into a Hellenic figure taken from Keats:

‘But it seems so mean’ is the last cry of the friend in him changing to the master – but like the misery of Lamia’s transformation the distress is soon over with him – with me! Oh,

how much there is to bear![180]

Despite the differences clearly presented between the Bradley-Cooper and the Cooper-Berenson relationship, Bradley and Cooper used the latter, as they used the former, to provide further support for their self-construction as poetic personalities. The relationship is used most persistently by Cooper, giving her a further chance to display her 'sensitive' artistic temperament, both in suffering extremes of 'distress' torment, and 'misery', and in the intensity of her unfulfilled passion – the 'Sapphic frenzy' of her 'fascination'. [181]

Furthermore, Cooper's tormented, unrequited love, although presented as utterly different from the ideal love between her and Bradley, is portrayed as an equally effective pre-condition for the production of art:

The summer was drought, torture, ending in revolt against 'The Doctrine' [Berenson] and a farewell sordid – miserable. My one joy was the discovery of a power of using my own sensations in Croquis – the direct consequence of Bernhard's influence. [182]

Even a 'sordid' farewell can arouse 'sensations' in Cooper that can be transmuted into tragedy, and so the relationship with Berenson, like the relationship with Bradley, becomes again confirmation of her status as poet. 'In Love's domain', she writes, after a long passage detailing both the agonies of her longing for Berenson and the joys of her relationship with Bradley, 'I walk with Keats and Sappho'. [183]

Cooper produces her passion for Berenson as a relationship of permanently suspended heteroerotic desire – in 1912, a year before her death, she describes Berenson as 'My life-friend, for whom I delayed the Perpetual Vow of Chastity for a whole year, because I had dreamt that in the future the wonder might happen that we could live together in friendship under a show of marriage'. [184] Cooper's impossible desire (Berenson had already married Costelloe in 1900) is not for a marriage of heterosexual consummation, but for a non-sexual 'show of marriage' of soul-mates.

Martha Vicinus, tracing the path of the relationship carefully, shows a complex interaction between the homoerotic and heteroerotic in relation to all three protagonists. The perception of the androgynous Berenson as 'sister-soul' to the androgynous Cooper; the ways in which the relationship with Berenson was used by both Bradley and Cooper to understand and develop their relationship with each other; and the use both women made of this passion in the production of plays and poetry make it clear that he has a significant role in their self-construction. [185]

For Bradley and Cooper, the construction of identity was fundamentally related to the expression of love, but the crucial element in that love was not for them the choice of a love-object of one sex or the other, but the nature of that love as non-everyday and non-materialist; its inability to be translated into a mundane world of 'normal' marriage and parenthood. Both the homoerotic perfect unity of the Bradley-Cooper relationship and the heteroerotic chaste and unrequited longing of the soul represented by Berenson could equally be used to underpin their sense of ownership of a particular type of aesthetic personality, the original and different 'genius' they aspired to be.

## 5. The self in performance

So far, we have seen how, in *Works and Days* and in other non-fictional writing, Bradley and Cooper constructed themselves as elevated individuals, or geniuses, and supported this self-construction through a self-portrayal as androgynous figures involved in ideal narratives of homoerotic and heteroerotic love. In the second half of the chapter, I show how Bradley and Cooper's self-presentation through relationship became entangled with a kind of heightened self-performance. I also examine the interaction of Bradley and Cooper's performance with its settings, using this as a means of understanding the relationship of the Michael Field writers to their historical and cultural contexts.

The process of producing the self as aesthetic personality undertaken by the Michael Field writers created an identification not only with other artists, but also, since the selves produced were deliberate creations, with art objects. There are many examples in *Works and Days* of this kind of self-identification: in her account of the Dresden fever, for example, Cooper envisions herself as the central figure – male or female – in numerous Renaissance paintings, including Antinous, Venus, Mars, St. Sebastian and Danaë.[186]

This production of the self as a work of art extended beyond the writing of the journals and into Bradley and Cooper's self-presentation to their peers, often taking the form of a kind of aesthetic performance – as registered, for example, by Gordon Bottomley, who, suggesting that 'their lives and their work were one thing', refers to 'the sensation they always gave me of living as a piece of concerted chamber-music lives while it is being played.'[187] Less sympathetically, Mary Costelloe's brother, Logan Pearsall Smith, gives an account of Bradley and Cooper, with their 'wild extravagances of diction' and 'vast pretensions' transforming themselves from 'maiden ladies' into 'Weird Sisters':

As their voices rose and mingled in a kind of chant, the two quietly attired ladies would seem to undergo the most extraordinary transformations; would resume the aspect and airs of disinherited princesses, the tragic Muses, the priestesses of Apollo, the Pythonesses upon their tripods, the Bacchic Meenads, they really were.[188]

Pearsall Smith's sense of Bradley and Cooper's self-performance as a continuous series of, as he puts it, 'extraordinary transformations' that could produce the true selves of the poets as a set of characters who were at the same time mythological creatures and the personalities they 'really were', runs throughout *Works and Days*, as well as in the accounts of those who met them. Putting aside the original identities conferred by their family names and family relationship, Bradley and Cooper insist on the primacy of the aesthetic identities they perform, marked by a series of alternative 'character' names, amongst them, 'Sim', 'Old Fowl', and most frequently 'Michael' for Bradley, and 'Persian', 'Field', and 'Henry' for Cooper. The requirement that others acquiesce in this self-performance as 'Michael' and 'Henry' was maintained to the end: 'We are not Aunt and Niece [. . .] neither are we Cooper and Bradley', Bradley wrote defensively to Mary Costelloe Berenson in 1914, after Cooper's death.[189]

Since the selves that were to be produced as 'Michael' and 'Henry' were the elevated ones we considered earlier, the style of acting required was necessarily that of a heightened performance, whose effect, in its aim to transcend the everyday, frequently appears in *Works and Days*, as in *Reperusals and Re-collections*, as exaggerated or even parodic. Again, the Dresden experience is instructive. Cooper's fever and delirium begin at a performance of Wagner's *Tannhäuser* – 'I sit before Sim [Bradley] in a comfortable box – choking, suffering, full of gladness and divine unease'.[190] As she watches the opera in this unnatural state of pleasure

combined with elevated suffering ('gladness and divine unease'), Cooper feels herself impelled against her will to enter the drama in order to experience a reality more true than the everyday: 'What a situation it is – how it makes one's blood its own, to be swept along as it wills, to be pricked with inner reality!'[191] By the interval, Cooper's sense of involvement in the tragedy has produced a self-conscious performance: 'Muffled up to the ears in wraps – "the beheld of all beholders" – we pace in the gallery'.[192]

This process of extreme identification with the figures in the tragedy eventually creates a situation in which it is impossible to remain as spectators, and Bradley and Cooper flee the theatre in panic at their self-identification with the dead figures presented in the final scene. However, having left the theatre, Cooper does not relinquish the possibilities of self-performance as tragic figure. On the contrary, once back at the hotel, she embraces the possibility of a re-enactment of herself as Tannhäuser:

Tannhäuser is in me – its motives flood me, its hero gives me finer pain than the disease at my throat – that classic purification of passion through tragedy moves me as a joy – I hug the cleansing sorrow with all my nervous strength. I make it mine in the hours faint-lighted by the night-light & still. I should like to have risen and stood while the Pilgrims sang finally their noble chant [. . .] as it was we almost fled before it ended, driven by panic, scared by phantasy.

O those two forms, one over the other, strait, shaped for the grave – lifeless![193]

Cooper's bodily illness is here elevated into the 'finer pain' of Wagner's tragedy, as she wilfully embraces suffering ('I hug the cleansing sorrow [. . .] I make it mine'), using the Aristotelian cathartic transformation effect ('that classic purification of passion through tragedy') to achieve a kind of passionate 'joy'. When the two women finally reach the hospital, the performance is complete, as Cooper, again asserting that 'Tannhäuser feeds the phantasy', sees the Michael Field writers in her delirium occupying the corpses of Wagner's final scene – 'Then I see our two straight beds – they are coffins – we lie near one another in noble peace'.[194] Once again, the transformation is elevating: even death is a 'noble' achievement.

Through performances such as these, Bradley and Cooper construct themselves as characters in a larger-than-life drama; 'Michael' and 'Henry' are exaggerated, noble and tragic figures, who do not conform to everyday expectation. Such performances laid them open to the ridicule of commentators like Pearsall Smith, and yet for Bradley and Cooper they were conceived as essential to their aesthetic success, removing them from the realm of normal, everyday personality and supporting the production of the elevated self.

## **6. The production of elevated settings**

Tragic performances require an appropriate stage. One problem for the Michael Field writers was their perception that the time and place they inhabited did not manifest a tragic scope. Bradley and Cooper's background and living circumstances for much of the time this journal was written were banal and bourgeois and thoroughly embedded in the economic realities of nineteenth-century Britain. The children of Midland tobacco traders, they began life in Birmingham, not far from the family's successful tobacco processing factory, and they lived for much of their adult lives in middle-class family homes in Bristol and Reigate, under the protection of Cooper's father,

who was also Bradley's brother-in-law. Pearsall Smith exploits the gap between this context and the Michael Field tragic writing to comic effect, contrasting Bradley and Cooper's residence in 'the suburbs of Birmingham' and 'the modern and comfortable villa-residence' at Reigate with the 'twenty-eight dramas, full of grandiose passions, dreadful deeds of lust and horror, incest and assassination, hells of jealousy and great empires tottering to their fall.' [195]

Bradley and Cooper were acutely conscious of the problematic disjunction between their origins and their ambition. They saw their childhoods and living circumstances as tainted with a vulgar nineteenth-century philistinism against which and outside of which they sought to define themselves, in the journals as well as in the plays and poems. In composing the journals under Hesiod's title, *Works and Days*, they hoped to evoke a setting for their memories which they considered historically and culturally superior to the nineteenth-century Britain they inhabited: that of Ancient Greece, used throughout the nineteenth century, as Richard Jenkyns suggests, to provide a more uplifting context for the production of art than the 'drab materialism of modern England'. [196]

One way in which the journals deal with the prosaic reality of the Michael Field writers' lives, is, as far as possible, to ignore it. The writers rarely refer to their Midlands childhoods in *Works and Days*, and even their accounts of adult life tend to be focused not on home life, but on periods when they are travelling either in mainland Europe or in remote rural parts of Britain. [197] There is a consistent refusal to produce a description of the urban provincial landscape in which the writers lived, and on the rare occasions when it threatens to obtrude, they determinedly fend it off. In the following extract, they have been attending a cousin's wedding in their native Midlands, while Berenson ('Bernie') is travelling through Italy:

We must rise early. The Rev. Canon insists that we shall see Watford on our way to town. We traverse dull England, reading a letter from Bernie enclosed by father from home. Poggio, San Georgiano . . . and a voice cries Rugby. We read of the little cities that smell like gardens; we feel the distance between there and here. [198]

The writers' cousin is determined that Bradley and Cooper should 'see Watford' and proudly insists on driving them through this modern urban landscape. They keep their eyes fixed, instead, on the letter from Berenson, evoking the 'little cities' of Italy, barely urban and appealing to other senses than the visual – with a smell 'like gardens', and the 'feel' of distance. Meanwhile a treacherous fourth sense allows the ugly sound of 'Rugby' to interrupt the litany of Italian place-names they have found in the letter.

The exclusion of the exterior urban middle-England landscape – 'dull England' – and its replacement by more ideal settings is consistent throughout *Works and Days*, and crucial in understanding the way in which Bradley and Cooper's presentation of both the relationship with Berenson and their relationship to each other contribute to the production of an alternative ideal reality. The relationship with Berenson is invariably shown removed from the prosaic everyday. Berenson spent a good deal of time abroad, eventually settling in Italy, so that much of the relationship could be carried out in the cities of mainland Europe, or in letters which convey the European atmosphere, as in the above extract.

An ideal moment for playing out what Bradley and Cooper perceived as the tragedy of their relationship with him occurred on a difficult visit to Paris. They stayed in an apartment

belonging to Costelloe, whose scandalous relationship with Berenson (she had left husband and child to be with him) is described with a Jamesian mixture of restraint and fascination. The setting is in many respects ideal – that is, reminiscent of Ancient Greece – ‘We wake to a vine at our window (Eroe, Eroe!) and Mary, in a tawny dressing-gown, with streaming hair above it and naked feet below, comes to prepare our cold bath’.[199] Within this ideal setting, they agree to allow Costelloe to read out part of a play manuscript Cooper is working on, with Berenson as audience. The play turns out to be one in which Berenson himself appears, recast as a new character – the tragic betrayer:

We go to lunch at Duval’s by ourselves: then sit long in the Luxembourg gardens, returning to tea. While we drink our tea they persuade Sim [Bradley] to make public some parts of our Lange and Rosalie drama. Mary is the reader, the portions are Mrs. Evelyn’s opening speeches. [. . .] I sit in anguish – a self-conscious pain all over the skin, that seems to contain only the eclipse of the real self – despair. And – horror! – Bernard realises in a moment that he is Lange – that I am Rosalie. [. . .] After this the whole conversation is a very modern, a very exhausting, and to me excruciating love-talk in disguise. [. . .] This goes on two hours, till hunger ends the symposium, and we go forth to Duval’s. There I nearly faint with fatigue, shame, revolt: we order Chateaubriands. [200]

O Bernard, it would be as final if I were ever to speak of my passion as if I were to die.[201]

The extracts demonstrate a complex relationship between the aesthetic output of ‘Michael Field’ and the journal *Works and Days*, in which idealised versions of the relationship with Berenson are performed and re-performed, and all performances contribute to the identity Cooper produces for herself. The script of a Michael Field drama, presented as an idealised version of the lived relationship between Cooper and Berenson, is given a ‘private’ performance in an exotic setting, its Parisian, non-everyday context carefully emphasised in the extract by the framing device of the visits to Duval’s. The performance of the drama provokes a further masquerade performance – a ‘love-talk in disguise’ – which is simultaneously a commentary on and a further development in the Cooper-Berenson relationship. Eventually, this ‘love-talk’ is discovered to be a ‘symposium’ – a re-performance of Plato’s dramatically-presented discussion of the nature of love.

Beyond these dramatic and idealised enactments and re-enactments of the Cooper-Berenson relationship, there is a further level of performance, as the events in Paris are recorded as a dramatic scene in *Works and Days*, to be conserved as a sacred, elevated and painful memory for the greater audience of posterity. Here they are given a ‘private’ level of commentary that allows Cooper the paradoxical luxury of revealing her ‘real self’ through a description of its ‘eclipse’, and of speaking her ‘passion’ for Berenson through an announcement of the impossibility of such speaking. Here there is a further level of performance as Cooper presents for her future audience her ‘private’ self as tragic figure and as sensitive and suffering aesthete. There is also embedded here an element of self-parody that borders on the absurd – ‘I nearly faint with fatigue, shame, revolt: we order Chateaubriands’.

If scenes from the dramatic relationship with Berenson could not always be given the exoticism of a foreign setting, they could, during periods when he was living in England, be



restricted either to outings to rural locations or to aesthetic locations.[202] He is seen at his own bohemian bachelor apartment, surrounded by reproductions of Renaissance art; or on more publicly aesthetic and dramatic stages such as giving lectures at art galleries, or, most appropriately, at the theatre itself, where, as one of the characters amongst the audience rather than on the stage, he becomes the focus of attention for Cooper:

At the Vaudeville we watched the wild Ibsenites enter [. . .]. Turning, I saw the clear happy eyes of Berenson above the Slavonic cheeks. He looked as if he had fattened on some new pasture – Italy could not have altered him & given him that dreadful look of satisfaction. [203]

The ideal love sought by Cooper in relation to Berenson is Keatsian: namely, one of permanently suspended desire. Here, in this moment of intense scrutiny, made surreptitiously as he watches the play, she discovers instead the ‘dreadful look of satisfaction’. The transformation, which surrounding passages hint as having been wrought by his relationship with Costelloe, is characterised as the irruption of vulgarity: he has ‘fattened on some new pasture’, a suggestion of the animal and the domestic which could never be brought about by the purely aesthetic and spiritual pleasures that Cooper associates with ‘Italy’.

While the relationship with Berenson could be played out in foreign or aesthetically appropriate public settings, the performance of Bradley and Cooper’s own relationship necessitated the production of some private interior space, which must at times be the despised bourgeois home. They were acutely conscious of the home as a restricted and specifically female setting in which the grand scope of tragedy was difficult to perform. A letter to Browning from Bradley, written in 1884 on discovering that he had revealed to a journalist that ‘Michael Field’ was in fact the pen-name of two women, cites the bourgeois ‘drawing-room’ as the home of convention and the enemy of drama, arguing that ‘we must be free as dramatists to work out in the open air of nature [. . .] we cannot be stifled in drawing-room conventionalities’.[204] In a later letter, responding to Browning’s concern that they intended to overturn social convention, Bradley glosses this as ‘we could not be scared away, as ladies, from the tragic elements of life’.[205] If *Works and Days* was to represent the relationship between Bradley and Cooper with a sufficiently dramatic and tragic scope, it needed to re-structure the ‘drawing-room’ from a stifling place which sheltered timorous ‘ladies’ into a dramatic space which was large enough to support the unconventional and the tragic.

One way of rising to this challenge was to adopt some techniques of the modern domestic drama. This was being introduced into Britain by supporters of Ibsen, such as Shaw, and for a time, the Michael Field writers followed it closely, as they considered, under the influence of Berenson, the possibility of producing a ‘modern’ form of drama. Cooper, generally the more interested in critical writing, wrote notes on several of Ibsen’s plays. Crucial to her understanding of Ibsen is the assertion that his dramas, despite their bourgeois settings, represent exceptional individuals at the centre of tragic action:

Ibsen takes his types from the few, not as most dramatists do from the many. [. . .] Of the millions of people who live today, most belong in their aims, hopes, sanctions and morals – in everything but their mere animal life – to yesterday. The remainder, the moderns, live

by ideas, sensations and action resonant with novelty. The millions can no more understand them than understand the course of comets.[206]

This suggestion that the characters of Ibsen's plays, despite inhabiting a modern bourgeois world, are exceptional individuals, of superior caste to the 'millions' with their 'mere animal life', makes possible an ironic re-enactment of an Ibsen play in the Bradley/Cooper home, in which the Michael Field writers play the exceptional 'few', and other members of the family, the more convention-bound 'many'. An argument about politics between Cooper's father and Bradley, which almost develops into total schism, is described almost entirely using quotes and ideas taken from the play Bradley and Cooper have just attended. As Cooper suggests, 'the play of *The Master Builder* is acted in real life'.[207]

Here is Cooper discussing, in the midst of the argument, whether she should leave the family home with Bradley:

If I go from home entirely [. . .] I should always believe that [her sister Amy's] vocation *had had to be stunted, and crushed, and shattered – in order that mine might force its way to – to a sort of great victory.* [. . .] Is not this *the crack in the chimney and the clothes-cupboard* over again? [. . .]

My Love misreads my anguish – she does not realise that *the troll in me* – the artist, the lover in me, are on her side; the '*helpers and servers*' – volitions and desires – are all hers: only the *sickly conscience* delays, fearing *a raw place on my breast* ever after – and that *the helpers and servers* should in the future keep *flaying pieces of skin* off other people in order to *close my sore* in vain.[208]

The extensive use of lines from Ibsen's play in Cooper's representation of this domestic conflict (indicated above by my italics) both adds an ironic distance to her account and effects a dramatic transformation of the family meal – 'We carry on breakfast like actors'.[209] Eventually Bradley and Cooper undergo a change of heart, 'the tragi-comedy ends' and they resume their lives within the bourgeois family against which they must continue to define their aesthetic selves.[210]

Bradley and Cooper's reluctance to leave the family home suggests that they were closer to being the timid 'ladies' of the drawing room than they cared to admit. While many aspects of their lives were unconventional, in particular the seriousness with which they applied themselves to their literary work, they never made a decisive break for domestic separation from the family, despite their evident enjoyment of periods when Cooper's father and sister were absent. It was only after the death of Cooper's father in 1897 and the marriage of her sister Amy in 1899 that they achieved an independence that allowed them to assert a stronger aesthetic control over their living space.[211] They moved nearer to London, to a house in Richmond whose interior was largely designed by Ricketts and was filled with reproductions of Renaissance art; with original works of art by Ricketts and Shannon; with furnishings by designers such as William Morris; and with careful arrangements of flowers and objets trouvées by Cooper.[212] Within this aestheticised setting, they were finally able to perform their relationship both domestically and in a non-ironic mode, as serious tragedy rather than modern 'tragi-comedy'.

The apotheosis of this self-performance as tragic figures within the drawing-room occurred in 1913, with Cooper terminally ill with cancer and having only three months to live, during a visit from Bradley's cousin, 'the faithful Francis', which was recorded by both writers:

In the evening comes the faithful Francis [. . .] Well, on Friday evening it is moved that I read from Wild Honey [. . .] And I am moved to read to Francis (I believe it is only to him I could read what is so thrilling and sacred to my heart) – I am moved to read Michael's [Bradley's] poems to me [. . .] I am moved to show him triumph and joy in this lovely praise, and in showing him my so often-guarded mood before my glory, I also let my Beloved realise what her poet's gift has been to me – her poet-lover's gift. Think of it! She has often read these lovely poems to me; she has not heard them, tender but high-voiced, from my lips. It is Paradise between us. When we're together eternally, our spirits will be interpenetrated with our loves and our art under the benison of the Vision of God. For it wants another. There was need of Francis to listen to Wild Honey: there will be need of God to assure that immortal oneness of Love with Love, of Praise and being praised and the response of the praised, casting all joy into union with the poet-lover [. . .] Francis dazzled and mystified bade me Good night with a face under ancient spell & the impress on it of ancient acknowledgement of Power. [213]

It is Francis' last night. How spend it? I find I am listening to Henry's [Cooper's] voice – Hennie reading my love poems to her, aloud to Francis [. . .]  
For a little while I am in Paradise. It is infinitely soft between us. Warm buds open. I feel at least I have 'merited' with these gems of passionate love.  
And Francis, who has loved me so well, listens to the singing amid the boughs, that is not for him – listens as he would listen to a nightingale overhead.  
It is an intense moment. A moment not of memory – but of creation.[214]

This carefully choreographed performance is indeed 'a moment not of memory, but of creation'. The apparently private, temporarily 'unguarded' domestic space in which this moment of alternative family romance takes place is transformed, through the performance, into an idealised space similar to that in which many of the Michael Field poems take place: a Hellenic/Edenic idyllic garden, a 'Paradise'. The conventional 'drawing-room' rejected in the letter to Browning has been refashioned as a natural space – that 'open air of nature' which Bradley had suggested was imperative for tragedy to be enacted.

This domestic scene, seemingly casually embarked upon ('Well on Friday night [. . .]'. 'It is Francis' last night. How spend it?'), without the active will of the protagonists: ('It is moved that I read [. . .]'. 'I find I am listening [. . .]'), may suggest a natural space, but it is one which is heavily over-determined by aesthetic reference. The image of the nightingale evoked by Bradley has three important associations, each of which help to confirm Bradley and Cooper's poetic pedigree. The first is to Shelley, who, in *The Defence of Poetry*, suggested:

A poet is a nightingale, who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why.[215]

The 'dazzled and mystified' Francis, appearing as one of the 'men entranced' in Shelley's metaphor, in listening to Cooper performing Bradley's poetry confirms their joint identity as Romantic poet. Also echoing through Bradley's invocation of the nightingale is the 'light-winged Dryad' of Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale,' particularly apt as the impending death of Cooper

infuses the performance with the wistfulness of his poem, her delivery, 'tender but high-voiced' evoking his mood – 'tender is the night' – as well as his sentiment – 'now more than ever seems it rich to die'. [216]

The poet most commonly associated with the nightingale is Sappho, familiar to the Michael Field poets from their work on *Long Ago*, whose fragment 2 ('Peer of the Gods') dramatises a triangular scene between two women and a man, in which a male rival listens to the speaker's beloved and 'in silence hears thee / Silverly speaking'. [217] Sappho's presence, implied both by the nightingale reference and the repetition of the scenario of fragment 2, endows the poems recited by Cooper with particular potency: they have become an 'ancient spell' with 'ancient Power'. Meanwhile the balance of power between the three performers in Sappho's poem has shifted, as Francis, the one-time rejected lover of Bradley, is designated the outsider, as he 'listens to the singing amid the boughs, that is not for him'.

The presence of Francis within the scene alerts us to a final element necessary in the construction of an aesthetic identity for the Michael Field writers: an audience. Although Francis is designated as a supernumerary listener – the singing is 'not for him' – his position is nevertheless essential – 'there was need' of him to make the performance work. Within the personal mythology of the Michael Field poets, 'the faithful Francis' stands in, in the first place, for God, as privileged observer of their relationship, a male figure who draws them together, creating a foretaste of a heaven in which 'our spirits will be interpenetrated with our loves'.

However, Francis, as silent observer, also acts as a figure through whom the imaginary readers of the future are invited to observe the private scene. Written into *Works and Days*, the performance becomes a representation of the posthumous readers' relationship to the private lives of the Michael Field writers. Like Francis, the readers overhear a performance which is not addressed to them, but which requires their listening. Like Francis, they are also called on to perform the final 'benison' of being the medium through which the relationship between Bradley and Cooper can be re-enacted.

The extract also places the lyric poetry of 'Michael Field' within a 'private' context of biography. Yopie Prins suggests in *Victorian Sappho* that the nineteenth-century lyric is 'the written representation of an utterance not addressed to another person but spoken in private, a voice not heard, but "overheard" by the reader'. [218] Lyric truth is increasingly assumed to be guaranteed from the realm of 'the private', the personal biography which was becoming central in the aesthetic appreciation of critics such as Pater. In re-embedding their previously-published poems within their personal narrative, as 'gems of passionate love', Bradley and Cooper re-identify the original speaker, not as the public 'Michael Field', the ambiguous male figure who represents both women, but as the private, yet still carefully-controlled, character of 'Michael', the 'poet-lover', while the addressee is identified as the equally-controlled 'Henry', performing 'Michael's poems to me' as a memorial to her ideal restrained love – 'my so often guarded mood'.

It is no coincidence that the writing of *Works and Days* began at the moment when reviewers first turned against 'Michael Field'. As it became increasingly clear that the strategy of producing as 'Michael Field', the single male author, had not made it possible for Bradley and Cooper to achieve the status of Great Poet within their lifetime, in creating *Works and Days* they aimed nevertheless to rescue their future from obscurity. They initially presented themselves, and wished to be judged, under the male authorial signature, as the voice of 'Michael Field' re-singing Sappho. But through *Works and Days*, for which they arranged publication after their death, they re-constituted their future audience as an audience whose interest would hinge on their personal identities – identities they had carefully constructed as tragic, aesthetic, passionate and ideal.

## 7. The production of homosexual identity

I have shown how, as Bradley and Cooper strove to define themselves as poets, they constructed identities for themselves as elevated, aesthetic individuals with particular characteristics, who could, moreover, be seen in relation to an aesthetic community of similar individuals – the ‘race’ of poets. The terms in which this self-construction was carried out has marked similarities to the construction of identity within the writing of Pater, Symonds and Wilde, all three of whom we saw in the introduction producing a self-definition in relation both to unusual individual characteristics and to a self-placement within an aesthetic tradition. Bradley and Cooper’s writing shares not only the same strategies of self-definition, but also much of the vocabulary and assumptions of these three writers.

Pater, for example, in ‘The Child in the House’, describes the sensitive aesthetic personality developing in response to ‘two streams of impressions, the sentiments of beauty and pain’, which come ‘floating in from the larger world without’, much as Cooper records her own sensitive response to beautiful artworks and to her tormented relationship with Berenson.[219] Meanwhile Symonds, who also describes himself as possessing a ‘peculiar’ temperament with a ‘high degree of nervous sensibility’ that supports his literary productivity, is forced, like Cooper, into an interaction with the modern psychological interpretations of artistic ‘temperament’ from writers such as Lombroso.[220] While Symonds disputes whether ‘so marked a specimen of the artistic temperament’ [i.e. himself] should be classified as ‘morbid’, his self-presentation as ‘nervous’, ‘abnormal’ and subject to ‘hereditary neuroticism’ supports a partially pathological reading of his own character.

The development of a kind of exaggerated self-performance by Bradley and Cooper can also be compared to the stylised aesthetic performances of Wilde, who, arguing that becoming an artist requires above all a self-performance elevated beyond the everyday, suggests that ‘all Art [is] to a certain degree a mode of acting, an attempt to realise one’s own personality on some imaginative plane out of reach of the trammelling accidents and limitations of real life’.[221] Indeed, Wilde’s specific self-identification with Tannhäuser is close enough to Cooper’s to suggest that there may be in *Works and Days* an unspoken debt.[222]

Like Bradley and Cooper, Pater, Symonds and Wilde also operate within a late nineteenth-century Platonic world-view of opposition between the real and the ideal, in which the ideal is identified as the place of a higher truth and in which the aesthetic, located within the ideal, is seen as outside of and superior to the vulgar everyday. As with Bradley and Cooper, the ‘spiritual procreancy’ of non-reproductive relationships is seen as particularly fertile ground for producing the greater truths that can be found within the aesthetic realm.

For Pater, Symonds and Wilde, this self-presentation as aesthete, with, on the one hand, the development of a peculiar and receptive personality, particularly sensitive to beauty and pain, and on the other, an emphasis on homoerotic relationship and male-male ‘influence’ as productive of art, merges seamlessly into the development of a personality that can be recognised, if not by them, then by those who observe them, as ‘homosexual’. However, for Bradley and Cooper, despite the centrality in their writing of an idyllic and romantic female-female relationship, the possibility of relating aesthetic self-definition to sexual self definition in order to produce a similar reading of their identity as recognisably ‘lesbian’ is unrealised.

This is not simply because of the presence of the Cooper-Berenson relationship in Bradley and Cooper’s writing. Both Symonds and Wilde, after all, were married with children, yet these undeniably sexual male-female relationships are invariably seen as existing outside what is conceived as the ‘real’ truth of their identity, in Symonds’ case, as assessed by himself, and in

Wilde's, as assessed by the public who encountered him through his trials. The difficulty of aligning Bradley and Cooper's predominantly homoerotic self-presentations with lesbian identity is rather because of a fundamental 'mismatch' between the aesthetic identities they produce and a specifically female-female homosexual self-definition.

In the first place, this is simply because of the particularly masculine history within which the idea of 'spiritual procreancy' had generally been produced. Where Pater, Wilde and Symonds could understand themselves as having a place in an exclusively male-male lineage in which their own homoerotic desire could tie them in to a literary history, Bradley and Cooper's female homoeroticism could not so easily confirm them as members of the 'race' of poets. In conversation with Wilde, in 1890, Bradley suggested that:

there was one sentence of Mr Pater's wh. I would not say I could never forgive, because I recognised its justice; but from wh. I suffered, and wh. was hard to bear – that in wh. he speaks of the scholarly conscience as male.[223]

Bradley is here caught in an impossible predicament. Pater's essay on 'Style', in *Appreciations*, from which she is quoting (and with which Wilde is so familiar that he can immediately quote the page number and position of the quote) promotes the familiar Paterian idea of a 'select few, those "men of a finer thread" who have formed and maintain the literary ideal'. [224] As we have seen, 'the literary ideal' is a concept to which Bradley, like Wilde, has a strong commitment, and yet in an essay in which Pater suggests that 'the literary artist is of necessity a scholar', she is excluded, as female, from the possibility of numbering herself as one of that 'select few'. She thus finds herself in the position of being forced to 'recognise the justice' of an idea which is also 'hard to bear' – that of her own exclusion from the lineage of those who maintain the ideal in literature.

This sense of exclusion from the tradition they promoted so vigorously underlies the anxious search of the Michael Field writers for recognition from living male writers. Cooper later reports a conversation with Lionel Johnson, who had, as a very young man, been impressed by one of 'Michael Field's' early plays. She has referred to her illness at Dresden in a light-hearted fashion, and comments:

Good Heavens! What demon made me say such a thing to Lionel Johnson 'who is a scholar' – I read in the paper today. The little wren heart must have fluttered in disgust [. . .] I shake from my person all poetry, I demonstrate that women cannot have the scholarly conscience. I am an occasion for cynicism – a stumbling block to youth, the sensibility of male youth: a dream turned into a nightmare, perchance![225]

Pater's comment about 'the scholarly conscience' threatens once again the possibility of Bradley and Cooper being recognised as members of the 'select few', a company in which men like Lionel Johnson, and like Pater, Wilde and Symonds, can recognise not only themselves, but each other. Once again, as the 'sensibility of male youth' is offended, the threat of 'cynicism' hangs in the air.

Because of the perception of the aesthetic lineage as exclusively male, while *Works and Days* stresses the importance of Bradley and Cooper's own homoerotic relationship as both idyllic and aesthetically productive, there is no attempt to insert this relationship into a history of female producers: on the contrary, with the exception of Sappho, it is their relationship with male writers which supports their self-construction as aesthetes. Unlike Pater, Wilde and Symonds, they therefore operate as sexually isolated individuals: special and different and superior to the women around them, and envious of the more natural social support they imagine for men: 'What good times men have, what pipes, what deep communing!' [226]

Beyond the difficulty of relating a female homoerotic identity to a tradition which predicates itself on its masculinity, is a particular problem related to the wider context in which the production of male homosexual identity occurred. Dowling relates the emergence of male homosexuality as a social identity at the end of the nineteenth century to a quest for self-identity that had begun with Mill's introduction into English culture of the German idea of *Bildung*: the search for diversity and individual self-expression against what was perceived as a dangerous stagnation within British society.[227] It is within this context that Pater's Winckelmann essay talks about 'the proper instinct of self culture'.[228] Male homosexual self-identity thus had a particular social and cultural status: it was one form of expression of an aim for diversity, for a 'liberty of the heart' which extended into all parts of society.

There was no similar social and cultural framework in relation to which a lesbian sexuality could be placed. This is made clear in Symonds' second version of *A Problem in Greek Ethics*, in his section on 'feminine homosexual passions'. While Symonds emphasises Greek tolerance for 'Lesbian passion, as the Greeks called it', he follows this with a long list of negative assertions which indicate how far he perceived lesbian love, unlike pederastia, to be an individual rather than a social and cultural phenomenon: lesbian passions in Ancient Greece, he asserts, 'were never worked into the social system, never became educational and military agents [. . .] never obtained the same social sanction as boy-love.' There are 'no legends of the goddesses parallel to those which consecrated pederastia among the male deities'. There is 'no recorded example [. . .] of noble friendships between women rising into political and historical prominence'. Even when considering Sappho and her female followers, Symonds feels constrained to comment that 'the Aeolian women did not found a glorious tradition'. Therefore, he concludes, Lesbian love in Ancient Greece was able to 'follow the same course of degeneracy as it pursues in modern times'.[229]

Here we see that Symonds, as Dowling suggests, did perceive the development of male-male love to have value because of the institutional and social benefit associated with it, not only in ancient times, but also in the modern. Female-female love, falling outside that social framework, rather than being noble and ideal is merely, both then and now, 'degenerate'. It is unlikely that Bradley and Cooper would have had direct access to this material, their friendship with Symonds being distant, and therefore its designation of 'Lesbian passion' as degenerate would not necessarily have directly affected them. It is more possible, given their greater friendship with Havelock Ellis, and their close friendship with Ellis' sister, Louie, who also lived with a female 'companion', that they may have read Ellis and Symonds' *Sexual Inversion*, which, in its somewhat ambivalent account of the 'female invert', while providing case-studies of several women who describe a restrained and affectionate expression of female-female love, also associates lesbian practice with criminality or a coarse masculinity provoked by an 'abnormal balance of the internal secretions'.[230]

It is here that we can see a further difficulty for the Michael Field writers in associating their quest for aesthetic identity with a specifically sexual form of self-definition. Foucault characterises the constitution of homosexuality in the late nineteenth century as 'a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself [. . .] a hermaphroditism of the soul'.[231] For the male homosexual, what is imagined is a male body within which are to be found the feminine characteristics of sensitivity, sympathy and responsiveness. This new male homosexual, as a figure who is more refined and cultured than the common heterosexual man against whom he is defined, is not unlike the Paterian aesthete. However, insofar as this same idea of inversion comes, belatedly, to be applied to women, what is

imagined is its reverse: a female more brutal, coarse and rough than the average woman – degeneracy rather than refinement. Whether they had read contemporary accounts of inversion or not, the Michael Field writers distanced themselves from the ‘mannish’ women they met, who might more easily be fitted into the figure of the female invert as degenerate. In constructing themselves as Paterian aesthetes, they produced in the figures of ‘Michael’ and ‘Henry’ sensitive and responsive characters with a much stronger resemblance to late nineteenth-century concepts of the male hermaphroditic homosexual than the degenerate lesbian.

Because of the lack of legal prohibition of female-female sexual relationships, and perhaps also because nineteenth-century ideas about what constituted sexual activity privileged penetration as the defining element, Bradley and Cooper were under less pressure than contemporary men to produce a fundamental self-definition along sexual lines, and there is no sign within *Works and Days* of any interest or urgency in doing this. In making use of ideas of genius and of Platonic ‘spiritual procreancy’, they were able to present their female-female relationship as both ideal and central to their sense of themselves as aesthetic producers. However, their dependence upon the male-male model prevented this from developing into a recognisably ‘lesbian’ identity.

## **Conclusion**

Bradley and Cooper’s production of identity for themselves was a carefully controlled and constantly maintained process of performance that stretched from their relationship with their peers through the writing of *Works and Days* and, as we shall see in future chapters, into the poetry. By this constant attentive self-performance they hoped to present themselves to a future audience as elevated and refined, ideal and above all artistic. Yet the reception of *Works and Days* in the twentieth century was a reception into a world in which the late nineteenth-century discourses in which their identities were embedded had changed beyond recognition. It was therefore a world in which the identities they produced became open to a range of interpretations.

In the early twentieth century, these interpretations were far from sympathetic. When Thomas Sturge Moore published an edited version of *Works and Days* in 1933, nearly twenty years after their deaths, he framed the journals with a preface which placed Bradley and Cooper securely in a Victorian era which was by now looked on as the antithesis to twentieth-century modernity.[232] Characterising Bradley and Cooper as ‘quaint and dear’, he instructs his readers in the appropriate response to a previous age that is now outgrown – ‘We must expect to laugh’. That earlier era is constructed as an age of innocence in which the Michael Field writers are said to be ‘simplicity itself, as open as children’, being incapable of ‘the reflections that will now seem most obvious’. Most damagingly, Sturge Moore also discovers in his erstwhile friends what has by 1933 come to be considered the most recognisably Victorian of traits, ‘conventionality’.[233]

Sturge Moore’s reconstruction of the Michael Field writers as conventional and somewhat ridiculous ‘Victorian ladies’ coloured later readings of the journals. In *Decadence and the 1890s*, for example, Bradley’s exclamation in April 1891, ‘From decadence good lord deliver us!’, in its original context clearly a reference to the physical decay of old age, is quoted as the shocked reaction of the conventional Victorian public to the ‘decadent’ movement.[234] Furthermore, Sturge Moore’s structuring of the edited version of *Works and Days* around the famous men with whom Bradley and Cooper had been acquainted also influenced their reception in the mid-



twentieth century as quaint literary hangers-on rather than serious writers.[235] Where the work of other minor poets of the 1890s such as Lionel Johnson and Ernest Dowson was preserved, re-printed, and subjected to criticism, the poems of 'Michael Field' were relegated to the cellars of university libraries.

However, if in the mid twentieth century the published version of *Works and Days* created an identity for Bradley and Cooper that contributed to their failure to be taken seriously as writers, in the late twentieth century this same text provided the basis for their literary revival. For a generation of feminist critics interested in rediscovering Victorian women writers, and of lesbian critics looking for antecedents, the story of the Bradley-Cooper relationship – the female identities beyond the male signature of 'Michael Field' – was exactly what was most interesting about them. It is through and in relation to the story of their relationship with each other and its modern significance that Bradley and Cooper's lyrics have been brought up from the cellars, re-read, re-criticised and re-inserted into poetry collections.

Within this rediscovery there has been, once again, a re-definition of identity, as feminist critics, reading Bradley and Cooper as strong, unconventional women motivated by sexual desire, in direct opposition to Sturge Moore's 'Victorian ladies' characterisation, endeavour to discover within their writing some recognisable lesbian or feminist message. The presence within the Michael Field writing of a largely homoerotic aesthetic identity is interpreted as the production of a radical sexual identity opposed to the social and cultural constructs of 'patriarchy' or 'heteronormativity'. Meanwhile the contrast between the portrayal of the painful frustrations of the Cooper-Berenson relationship and the description of the idyllic unity of the Cooper-Bradley relationship is read as an implicit attack on heterosexuality or on men.

As I have argued throughout this chapter, the identities produced by Bradley and Cooper, while undeniably depending in part on the presentation of a female-female relationship, cannot be read as 'lesbian', if 'lesbian' signifies an identity fundamentally dependent on female-female sexual relationship – Foucault's sense of homosexual identity as understood in terms of its essential 'difference' from a heterosexual norm.[236] Bradley and Cooper's carefully-built identities, both the joint 'Michael Field' and the separate 'Michael' and 'Henry', depended, in the first place, not on their sense of essential biological femaleness, but on the ability of both women to 'play the man' while retaining the highly-valued 'feminine' characteristics of aesthetic sensibility and emotional responsiveness. Furthermore, the support they brought to their identities from their presentation of their mutual homoerotic relationship depended not on the gender of object-choice, but, as becomes clear in their presentation of the heteroerotic unrequited desire of Cooper for Berenson, on its status as aesthetically rather than biologically procreative relationship. While such self-fashionings may chime with elements of the writing of Pater, Wilde and Symonds, in producing the self as aesthete, Bradley and Cooper thus tended towards a self-production in which the biological femaleness of both lover and beloved either appeared insignificant or was even denied.

Moreover, the political agenda underpinning the production of identity here is not one of a critique of patriarchy or of heterosexual relations, but rather a deeply conservative ethos of exceptional and elevated individuality conceiving itself as untainted by contemporary context. This position, rather than connecting Bradley and Cooper to modern concerns about sexual or female freedom, trapped them in a world-view that refused to confront the challenges of modern life, as they adopted a set of late-Platonic oppositions that allowed them to inhabit an ideal world separate from the vulgar and relative everyday. This ideal stance they were able to maintain with extraordinary faithfulness throughout their literary career, from the 1880s to the 1910s, embracing

Hellenism, paganism, 'the modern' and finally Catholicism with little change in either the basic tenets of their belief or the language and metaphors through which it was expressed.

Such consistency, as Thain argues, allows *Works and Days* to appear not simply as journal, but as autobiography, a finely-shaped narrative whose final conclusions are foreshadowed in its opening pages, in itself an extraordinary feat.[237] Yet this consistency is also, as we shall see when we study the poetry, Bradley and Cooper's main weakness. As daily life is re-fashioned to allow it to express eternal truths, the particularity of the moment yields to the sameness of the ideal, and those very questions that might be of most interest to feminists are sidestepped. Cooper's remark that she loves 'fads and causes not at all', or that 'the cause of womanhood may go hang' are not simply betrayals of a personal lack of interest in contemporary issues – this stance is essential to the Michael Field world-view.[238]

This is not to say that the Michael Field writing has no interest for lesbian and feminist scholars. The portrayal of an idyllic female-female relationship here draws on traditions which will also influence twentieth and twenty-first-century conceptions of lesbian possibility, while the struggle of two women to find a place within a predominantly masculine tradition illustrates one reaction to the difficulties under which literary women of the late nineteenth century were forced to operate. The production of a kind of heightened and exaggerated self-performance that at times borders on the 'camp' also tends to make us conscious, as Butler has suggested more generally, of the perimeters and artificiality of 'normal' identity.[239] Finally, as we shall see in the remaining chapters, Bradley and Cooper's extreme respect for male literary tradition and strong desire to place themselves within it, make their poetry, which reproduces and combines several literary strands in often-surprising ways, a fascinating place in which to discover and deepen our understanding of the cultural purview of the late nineteenth-century aestheticist milieu which they inhabited. Such increased awareness of the culture in general inevitably contributes to our more specific interest in developments of sexual and female possibility.

## Chapter 2: *Long Ago*

### Introduction

In the previous chapter, we saw how, in September 1913, the Michael Field poets recorded in *Works and Days* the private performance of a reading of some of their previously published love-poems, using the performance to contribute to a personal narrative of idealised female-female homoerotic love that supported the aesthetic identities they produced for themselves and their claim to the status of poet. Amongst the poems recited was “‘Atthis, my darling” of *Long Ago* – the loveliest nocturne of Love ever created’.[240] ‘Atthis, my darling’ was identified by both writers as a love poem from Bradley to Cooper, one of ‘Michael’s poems to me [. . .] her poet-lover’s gift’ (Cooper); or ‘my love poems to her’ (Bradley). Just as the performance in Paris of *Lange and Rosalie* helped to construct Cooper as tormented tragic heroine, so the performance of ‘Atthis my darling’ set up in the drawing room at Richmond helped to produce Bradley as ‘Michael’, the ‘poet-lover’, with Cooper here taking the part of her beloved.

However, ‘Atthis my darling’ had existed in a previous context, the 1889 collection *Long Ago*, a collection based on the surviving fragments of poetry of the Greek poet Sappho, and the first poetry collection to be produced in the name of ‘Michael Field’. Within that collection, ‘Atthis my darling’ contributed to another narrative of homoerotic love, that between Sappho and her follower, Atthis. Bradley and Cooper’s assertion that the poem is also a ‘poet-lover’s gift’ from Bradley to Cooper therefore sets up an equivalence between the identities of Bradley and the ‘poet-lover’ Sappho who appears in *Long Ago*. From references in letters to Browning, we know that most of the poems of *Long Ago* were indeed written by Bradley, supporting this suggestion of correspondence between herself, in particular, and Sappho.[241]

In this chapter, I analyse the identity that Bradley creates for Sappho in *Long Ago*. My argument is that Bradley’s Sappho is neither a ‘realistic’ portrayal of the historical character Sappho, nor a ‘realistic’ expression of the pre-existent identity of Bradley.[242] Nor can she be considered to be the exclusively ‘lesbian’ persona that some critics have found here.[243] I consider her, instead, as a multiple, complex figure, determined by a range of somewhat contradictory traditions of Sapphic identity. In performing ‘as Sappho’ both within and beyond the parameters of *Long Ago*, Bradley, and to a lesser extent Cooper, produce for themselves a complex identity through which they can insert themselves into those literary traditions in which the figure of Sappho has a key role.

The several conventions of Sapphic identity with which *Long Ago* interacts are all concerned primarily with the production of an aesthetic rather than sexual identity, though some are more connected with homoerotic narratives, and others with heteroerotic. There are broadly four traditions here, which, while they overlap both within and beyond the collection, each have somewhat different nuances. First, Sappho is seen as the archetypal poet, producer of the original lyric voice, a ‘singer’ whose oral performances underpin a later written form of poetry.[244] Second, Sappho is represented as an abandoned woman, in a narrative of heteroerotic failure that produces her suicidal body as a site of sentimental and particularly female poetic self-identification. Third is a specifically late nineteenth-century figure of a ‘girl-loving’ Sappho, an older woman inhabiting a homoerotic idyll in which she performs for a group of beautiful admiring maidens. Finally, Bradley and Cooper draw on Sappho’s particular relation to the poetic

sublime, in which her poetry is seen as an embodiment of herself as a figure overwhelmed by passion, a figure that, I argue, is here related to that late nineteenth-century construction of the aesthetic self as a sensitive and responsive figure that we also saw operating in *Works and Days*.

I show how the interaction of these different traditions within the collection draws on and develops a particular late nineteenth-century understanding of the relationship between the aesthetic, the homoerotic and the heteroerotic. I further interrogate the idea that the production of homoerotic space and narratives in the poetry of *Long Ago* can be understood as a straightforwardly feminist or radical endeavour, suggesting instead that there are historical limitations operating here that create a homoeroticism that is in a number of different overlapping movements tied in to an aesthetics of loss and regret.[245]

### 1. Lyric Sappho

The first version of Sappho produced by the collection is that which identifies her as an original 'singer', connecting her to a tradition in which, by virtue both of her residence in Ancient Greece, imagined as an innocent and perfect past, and of her assumed oral production of verse, considered, following Plato, to be closer to a genuine truth than is possible in writing, the surviving fragments of her poems had become the symbol of an initial, pure and uncorrupted lyric poetry. The possibility of reproducing a Sapphic 'song' in the nineteenth century was thus the promise of an authentic ideal poetry in opposition to that imperfect contemporary 'world' we have already seen Bradley and Cooper rejecting in the writing of *Works and Days*.

In order to create this authentic singing Sappho within the collection, Bradley and Cooper first had to establish the distance of these poems from the failing contemporary world, a distance they produced from the title itself, *Long Ago*, which is both a translation of a fragment of Sappho, and an assertion of the temporal distance between the world of the collection and the present. Its repetition on no less than three separate inner title pages – like the use of untranslated fragments of Greek script on almost every page of the collection – operates as a barrier between *Long Ago* and the contemporary, repeatedly reminding the reader of the remoteness of the world being set up here. A further epigraph – 'A great while since, a long, long, time ago' – emphasises the distance: if 'a great while since' is simply a paraphrase of the 'long ago' we have already met, 'a long, long time ago' takes that phrase and doubles the distance.[246]

Having established the collection as sited in a distant past, Bradley and Cooper then provide a preface in which the relationship between that ideal past and the failing present is mediated through the body of Sappho. In order to access the pure truth that is attached to the idea of Sappho as singer, the preface to *Long Ago* proposes the collection as a repetition of Sappho's original performances. The modern poet performs, as Prins suggests is so often the case in nineteenth-century Sappho-inspired poetry, 'as Sappho,' in a re-enactment that requires careful negotiation between a time-laden present and the timeless ideal.[247]

This dramatic re-enactment is complicated by the fact that Bradley and Cooper must first produce a primary performance as the fictional 'Michael Field', the nineteenth-century male writer, and then a further performance in which he can play the part of the female 'singer', Sappho. The preface opens with a narrative: an apparently personal 'story behind the book' (as, later, the family scene with Francis from *Works and Days* will provide an alternative, apparently personal 'story behind the book'):

When, more than a year ago, I wrote to a literary friend of my attempt to express in English verse the passionate pleasure Dr Wharton's book had brought to me, he replied: 'That is a delightfully audacious thought [. . .]. I can scarcely conceive anything more audacious'. [248]

Within the little narrative presented here, the opening phrase – 'When, more than a year ago' – offers the reader a time period in the recent past, invoking the contemporary author's life of literary friendship and letter-writing, and a nineteenth-century inspiration for the collection – Henry Wharton's popularising *Sappho: A Memoir and Translation*, first published in 1885. In this contemporary world, the singular author ('I wrote'), and his male colleague, in a milieu suggestive of male-male 'spiritual procreancy' – the influence of one man on another leading to the procreation of ideas – discuss the possibility of an audacious literary 'conception'.

Having thus briefly situated the collection in relation to a contemporary present in which 'Michael Field' as male writer resides, the preface immediately begins its movement into the timeless ideal – the eternal present inhabited by the female singer, Sappho. The second paragraph opens: 'In simple truth all worship that is not idolatry must be audacious; for it involves the blissful apprehension of an ideal.' [249] We are transported at once into that world of eternal truths that can be opposed to nineteenth-century sophistication ('in simple truth'), through the author's proposal to 'apprehend' the ideal through a process of 'worship'. The temporal world in which 'Michael Field' asserted that 'I wrote' is left behind, as, in a double movement, he enters the body of the long-dead Sappho, and revives one of her ancient fragments into a speaking present:

it means in the very phrase of Sappho –  
E??? ?' ???v??  
??v?? ?v?????[250]

The Michael Field poets do not here provide a translation, but those who can read Greek (educated men) or those familiar with Wharton's *Sappho*, will know that these words can be translated as 'and this I feel in myself'. [251] The 'I' of 'Michael Field' has thus become the E???, or 'I' of Sappho; he feels himself as she feels herself, and speaks himself as he speaks her 'very phrase', resurrecting the dead language of the fragment so that it attains the present tense – 'it means'.

Finally, the performance of 'Michael Field-as-Sappho' is described as a process of continual repetition that entangles the speaker in an obligation to speak of love:

Devoutly as the fiery bosomed Greek turned in her anguish to Aphrodite [. . .] I have turned to the one woman who has dared to speak unfalteringly of the fearful mastery of love, and again and again the dumb prayer has risen from my heart –

?v ?' ????  
?v????? ?????[252]

'Michael Field', in performing the Sappho whom he worships, finds himself repeating a gesture of worship made by that ideal figure herself in ancient times ('as [Sappho] turned [. . .] I have turned'). Because we are in the realm of the unchanging ideal, this process of repetition becomes

continuous, as ‘again and again’ the prayer which rises from ‘Michael Field’s’ singular heart is a word for word repetition, in Greek, of another of the ‘very phrases’ of Sappho, translated by Wharton as ‘and be thyself my ally’. In turning to and turning into the lyric Sappho, ‘Michael Field’ thus finds himself repeating her prayer to Aphrodite, and therefore obliged, like her, to ‘dare to speak unflinching of the fearful mastery of love’.

The figure of the lyric Sappho is thus used in the preface to suggest that the collection can transport the reader, through a repetitive re-performance of her original and originary song, into an ideal past which is also a timeless present, in which love will be a central theme.[253] The opening poems of the collection complete that journey, both re-iterating Sappho’s words and extending them, in order to confirm our entry into the timeless space of the ideal, where we find ‘Michael Field-as-Sappho’ singing of an ideal love.

The prologue poem begins with a quotation from another of Sappho’s direct invocations to divine figures, this time the Muses, again producing a word-for-word repetition of an apparently oral utterance – *??v?? ??v?? ??????, ??v???? ?????????*. [254] Wharton’s translation – ‘Hither now, Muses, leaving golden . . .’ – forms the poem’s opening words.[255] In the prologue, as in the preface, ‘Michael Field’, through a process of worship and repetition, inscribes himself as Sappho by repeating one of her prayers, while simultaneously expressing the ‘passionate pleasure’ of Wharton’s book.

The remainder of the poem is an elaboration of the ideal space into which the re-performances of Sappho’s songs will bring us. The place from which the Muses are commanded to come – according to mythology the mountains of Ancient Greece – is described here as a rural idyll composed of ‘fresh inspiring wells’, ‘high mountain lands’, ‘cool retreats’ and ‘sweet haunts of summer sound and rest’. This is a description which owes much to the well-documented importation of ideas about Ancient Greece as rural idyll from the German Hellenists Goethe, Schiller and Winckelmann into British intellectual circles in the nineteenth century by writers such as Arnold, Pater and Symonds.[256] For these thinkers, Ancient Greece was perceived as an ideal space, the antithesis of degenerate nineteenth-century Britain: a youthful, natural, uncorrupted, prelapsarian world in which beauty could be worshipped and sensuality celebrated innocently.[257] The timeless idyll at the heart of *Long Ago* is thus a place whose topography is already strongly defined within the nineteenth century, a landscape which is further developed in the second poem of the collection, where its relationship with the belated contemporary becomes clear.

Following the Sapphic fragment *Av??? ????? ?????????????v?*, which Wharton glosses as ‘But charming [maidens] plaited garlands’, Poem I opens – ‘They plaited garlands in their time’. Bradley and Cooper’s first addition to the Sapphic fragment – ‘in their time’ – draws attention to a temporal distance between the speaker and the maidens: if they exist ‘in their time’, then there must be another time, a ‘now’ which belongs to the speaker.[258] The speaker may still be read, not as Sappho, but as ‘Michael Field-performing-as-Sappho’: he does not yet entirely seamlessly inhabit her body, but is still a writer from a later time and place.

The place and time inhabited by the maidens in Poem I is unmistakably Lesbos as described in the fragments of Sappho: in stanza two we are told that ‘they lay / Under the trembling leaves at play, / Bright dreams to follow’, which is a rendering of part of Sapphic fragment number 4 – ‘and slumber streams from quivering leaves’.[259] The Lesbos of Poem I, like the Ancient Greece of the prologue poem, is a rural idyll which has all the attributes of Ancient Greece familiar from Arnold, Pater and Symonds. It is a place whose youthfulness is mentioned in every stanza (‘youth’s sweet prime’, ‘young Apollo’, ‘youth’s deep pleasure’), and

in which the focus is on the activities of the young people: weaving; dancing; kissing each other; learning about love; dreaming; and worshipping Apollo, the god of poetry. It is also a place of harmony between the human and the natural world, a place of pre-lapsarian innocent sensual pleasures, of a 'violet-weaving bliss' in which the maidens lie down under the trees with souls 'unloosed' by the teaching of 'Love's golden mysteries'.

Here, then, 'Michael Field-as-Sappho' begins to fulfil his obligation to 'dare to speak unflinching of the fearful mastery of love', but in an ambiguous setting, where the maidens who are bracketed into Wharton's translation ('But charming [maidens] plaited garlands') are replaced by an ungendered plural pronoun – 'They plaited garlands', producing 'golden mysteries' that hint at the possibility, again following a familiar late nineteenth-century perception of Ancient Greece, that this is a setting for homoerotic pleasures. [260] 'Michael Field-as-Sappho', appearing as that ambiguous male figure infused with femininity that we saw in Chapter 1 in ever-increasing association both with the idea of the poet and with homoerotic narrative, here promotes a repetitive erotic activity of 'kiss / Kiss and re-capture' which, springing from an ungendered 'joy of youth', takes place under the tutelage of a 'young Apollo' who is associated by both Pater and Wilde with homoerotic love.[261]

The poem insists on the active seizure and possession of pleasure by the inhabitants of Lesbos through a series of direct assertions, from the first stanza, in which 'they knew the joy [. . .] / Theirs was the [. . .] bliss', through to the final stanza's 'They crowned the cup, they drank the wine / Of youth's deep pleasure'. However, in the final stanza the active verbs hesitate, as the poem refers to a time in which the speaker may be located, and the idyllic and youthful past of Lesbos is contrasted momentarily with a muted present:

They plaited garlands – heavenly twine,  
They crowned the cup, they drank the wine  
Of youth's deep pleasure.  
Now, lingering for the lyreless god –  
Oh yet, once in their time, they trod  
A choric measure.[262]

In the second stanza, the maidens/youths had in the Lesbian past listened to the lyre of 'young Apollo'. But in the fourth line of this final stanza, we are transported into a present in which he is 'lyreless'. This present ('Now, lingering') is never allowed to resolve itself into a full present tense or even a named subject, so that we do not know whether its subject is I, we, or the maidens/youths, nor what the precise location or features of the 'now' might be. Instead, the line ends in a caesura marked by a dash. The opening syllable of the following line is merely an empty 'Oh', before we are deflected back into the happy Lesbian past – 'yet, once in their time' – in which an oral poetry was possible – 'they trod / A choric measure'.

If the figure of Sappho is understood as the singing originator of the lyric, the Michael Field poets here suggest that the 'now' of the speaker is a time when the lyric is no longer possible. For Bradley and Cooper, the nineteenth-century present has become unspeakable in poetry, represented only by a caesura, an absence. The movement of 'Michael Field' into Lesbos is not simply motivated by the wish to find a more beautiful, innocent or ideal setting for the poems: it is driven by the sense that leaving the 'lyreless' contemporary is a necessary precondition for the production of lyric poetry – it is imperative that 'Michael Field' assume the identity of Sappho the singer in order to be able to sing at all.

In setting up Lesbos as a poetic space in a relation of necessary opposition to the unpoetic contemporary world, through the person of the lyric Sappho, Bradley and Cooper embark on a project that is doomed to failure. This is, after all, not a spoken but a written collection, a demonstration of the demise of the oral tradition. Furthermore, while the caesura they produce here to mark the un-representable urban contemporary delineates an absence that will be maintained throughout the collection, which is presented entirely from the landscape of Lesbos, it is an absence that will also define the collection: the Lesbos which will be produced in *Long Ago* is necessarily not-Birmingham, not-Bristol, not-Reigate – those unsingable places that *Works and Days* assiduously avoided describing, and that *Long Ago* also hopes to leave behind. The contemporary thus inevitably frames and defines the collection, and, as we shall see later, enters all those poems which strive most strongly to define themselves against it.

The turn into the final couplet of Poem I illustrates one way in which the contemporary will shape the Lesbos of *Long Ago*. The ‘Oh’ is followed by ‘yet’, a word with a double meaning: implying both ‘still’ and ‘but’ – both continuity and opposition. This double ‘yet’ – the possibility/impossibility of a relationship between the failing modern and the ideal past – sets up the collection that follows as a wistful dream longed for and thus irrevocably marked by its nineteenth-century origins. The production of lament and loss within the happy landscape is built into the collection from the start. Insofar as the Arcadian rural idyll of prelapsarian innocence and shameless physical pleasure produced here is also associated with homoeroticism, the collection not only confirms the status of the homoerotic as unspeakable within the contemporary, but also inevitably ties its homoeroticism, with the figure of the singing Sappho, into a narrative of loss and regret.

## 2. Sentimental Sappho

The opening of *Long Ago*, as I have noted, in situating the collection within the tradition of Sappho as ideal original lyricist, not only establishes a sense of Ancient Greece as ideal space and of oral performance as guarantee of truth, but also connects the poetry to ancient idyllic homoerotic narratives. The second tradition with which the collection interacts, that of the sentimental or abandoned Sappho, which begins to be instituted from Poem II onwards, is by contrast strongly associated with heteroerotic narrative.

Sappho’s defining story for much of the nineteenth century was her putative failed relationship with the male fisherman Phaon and subsequent suicide, popularised by translations of Ovid’s ‘Sappho to Phaon’, and used by a generation of female poets – ‘the English Sapphos’ – as a figure for tragic aesthetic self-definition.[263] This sentimental tradition of the ‘English Sapphos’ can also be seen operating within *Long Ago*, producing an identity for Sappho which ties her in directly to a heteroerotic narrative of loss and regret.

In the earlier poems, which instituted Lesbos as the place of the collection, I identified the speaker as ‘Michael Field-performing-as-Sappho’, a speaker who we understand as nineteenth-century performer stepping into a distant Lesbian world in order to re-perform the uncorrupted songs of Sappho. Lesbos was in these poems described in a past tense, as the speaker ‘sang’ from a belated modern world that could not be represented in lyric poetry. From Poem II, we find that we have successfully completed the journey into the ideal past. The speaker is established as Sappho herself, (‘Sappho-as-performed-by-Michael Field’), speaking of Lesbos in the present



tense, and producing a lyric 'I' from which to perform this and all the remaining poetry of the collection.

Poem II is a poem of self-definition, containing the word 'I' five times. Yet the construction of identity for Sappho in this poem is tentative, anxious and passive. The first three of the 'I's which appear here are each the subject of a relative clause:

O bring the kiss I could not take  
From lips that would not give;  
Bring me the heart I could not break,  
The bliss for which I live.[264]

Of the final two 'I's, one is conditional, and the other, 'I care not' suggests a disaffected subject – 'I care not if I slumber blest / by fond delusion'. This speaker is defined negatively in relation to a pleasure she cannot attain. Her self-definition is also utterly dependent on heteroerotic relationship: we know for certain that it is Sappho who speaks here only because she names Phaon in the final couplet as the possessor of the kiss, lips, heart and bliss withheld in stanza 2 – 'Put me on Phaon's lips to rest, / And cheat the cruel day!'[265] In naming Phaon at the end of Poem II, the *Long Ago* Sappho indirectly names herself for a nineteenth-century readership familiar with the Sappho-Phaon story. However, since she identifies herself through that failed relationship, she necessarily defines herself as the unhappy Ovidian Sappho who is doomed to self-destruction.

The introduction of Sappho as failed lover of Phaon transforms the happy Lesbian landscape of Poem I, infusing it with a sense of loss and non-fulfilment, as, defining herself through her non-possession of a kiss – 'the kiss I could not take' – Sappho fails to achieve the satisfied 'kiss, / Kiss and recapture' of the earlier poem. If Poem I both celebrated and mourned a lost youthful Lesbos from an assumed contemporary perspective, Poem II suggests that the Lesbian moment we are then offered in *Long Ago* is one in which Sappho herself is already a belated figure mourning a lost youth. This Ovidian Sappho, as a figure for whom maidenly bliss is already a lost past, becomes, as we shall see later in the chapter, another mechanism through which the concerns of a transient and painful contemporary world, defining itself against its own unattainable lost past, creep into the ideal homoerotic maidenly world of Lesbos.

The presence of Phaon in *Long Ago* has long been a challenge to those Michael Field critics whose interest has been in reading the collection as founding a lesbian genre. Angela Leighton and Margaret Reynolds simply ignore the poems which refer to Phaon, while for Ruth Vanita, Phaon's presence is cause to dismiss the whole collection as comparatively 'disappointing'. [266] Prins focuses her attention on the poems where Phaon is absent, justifying this by claiming that Phaon merely 'haunts the margins of *Long Ago*', and that 'gradually he is banished from the other lyrics expressing desire of, for and between women in a different idiom'. [267] Chris White is the only twentieth-century critic to deal with Phaon's presence at some length, and her argument is that his primary function is to produce a critique of heterosexual relationship to set against the more satisfactory female-female community. [268] It is only recently that Phaon's presence has been questioned more rigorously, with Thain suggesting that it is an important indicator that Bradley and Cooper's aim in *Long Ago* is to promote an aesthetically-valuable desire that is 'all-encompassing' rather than restricted by sexuality and gender. [269]

Phaon is the most mentioned character in *Long Ago*. His name occurs in sixteen of the

seventy poems in the collection, and he appears to be the unnamed central subject of a further four poems. No female human figure has anything like the same prominence: Atthis' name appears five times, Gorgo's four, Erinna and Dica twice each, and other named females only once. Even the collective 'maidens' or 'virgins' appear in only fourteen of the poems in the collection. Furthermore, although, as Prins suggests, the poems directly about Phaon are generally clustered around the 'margins' of the collection, he cannot be said to be 'gradually banished'. Following a group of poems at the start of the collection – seven of the first eleven poems are about him – there is a scattering throughout the collection until the final seven poems, five of which mention him by name, while the other two are an implied reaction to his spurning of Sappho's passion.

If Phaon does indeed 'haunt the margins' of *Long Ago*, he is a significant presence whose haunting has a constructive effect on our reading of the figure of Sappho and of the poems which focus more directly on her relationship to her maidens. The poems about Sappho and Phaon in *Long Ago* provide a context within which to read the representations of relations between women. As we shall see, Sappho's relationship with Phaon also creeps in indirectly to many of those poems which appear to be centrally concerned with female-female spaces and relationships, so that he becomes, even within these poems, a defining exterior.

Although no consistent narrative thread runs through *Long Ago* – most poems stand independently, and there are a variety of themes and addressees – the Phaon poems tie in to and represent the familiar pre-existing narrative of Sappho's unrequited passion for the fisherman and subsequent suicide. Following the course of this narrative, the collection ends with a grouping of reproachful poems which culminate in an epilogue in which Sappho flings herself from the rock of Leucas.

Given that Wharton specifically disparages the story of Sappho's passion for Phaon and suicide (even while perpetuating it by including Pope's version of 'Sappho to Phaon' in the book), we have to see this use of the Phaon story as framing mechanism as deliberate on the part of the Michael Field poets.[270] Bringing the unhappy Sappho into the collection, Bradley and Cooper bring in that figure who already had a long history in the nineteenth century, the sentimental speaker of a set of poems which, in a development of the traditional female reproach or complaint poem, produce Sappho as abandoned woman, addressing her faithless lover at the moment before she flings herself into the sea.[271]

These sentimental poetess poems, interacting with contemporary pictorial representations, had represented Sappho, and with her, the female poet who sentimentally identified with her, as woman poet falling into oblivion, simultaneously, as Prins suggests, inspiring and expiring.[272] By presenting her analyses out of chronological order, Prins avoids relating *Long Ago* to this tradition, but a careful comparison of the Sappho and Phaon poems of *Long Ago* with sentimental poems from the poetess tradition shows that several characteristics identified by recent critics as part of that tradition: the direct reproach to the faithless lover; a presentation of the body as beautiful suffering spectacle; the passive helpless overflow of emotion; the obsession with impending death; can be found within this collection, suggesting that Bradley and Cooper also found themselves bound up with this narrative of female aesthetic creation as simultaneous self-production and self-loss.[273]

The final cluster of poems in *Long Ago*, leading up to the suicidal epilogue, can be seen as operating most clearly within this set of conventions. In Poem LXVIII, for example, Sappho both addresses and defines Phaon as her abandoner through a rhetoric of reproach – 'Ah, Phaon, thou who hast abandoned me' – while in Poem LXVI she passively defines herself through her status as abandoned – 'as I suffer, thus / Abandoned, vengeful, covetous'. [274] In Poem LXV she adds

reproach to reproach as she accuses Phaon of being oblivious to her ‘complaint’ – ‘unstricken by complaint or by desire’.[275] Her final leap is, like those of the poetesses’ Sappho, a leap into silence, with the conclusion to the epilogue-poem of *Long Ago* reading:

As thine immortal, let me be  
A dumb sea-bird with breast love-free,  
And feel the waves fall over me.[276]

However, several earlier poems within the collection also include features characteristic of the nineteenth-century expressive/sentimental Sapphic female complaint poem. In Poem XIX, for example, Sappho lies in her bed waiting for a Phaon who never arrives:

The moon is gone, yet he delays,  
The stars are set, but Sappho stays;  
[. . .]  
I stifle in my heart the funeral moan:  
I do not weep the dead;  
I lie alone.[277]

In this poem, as in many poems in the sentimental Sappho tradition, Sappho’s soon-to-be-dead body is on display:

Thus should I be  
Hid in the tomb from all men’s sight!  
O Hades, take this heart, these limbs that yearn,  
Yea, I will give them thee,  
Ash for thine urn![278]

Poem V also includes a number of features drawn from the sentimental Sappho tradition. This poem, which, like Poems LXV, LXVI and LXVIII, addresses Phaon directly, ends:

O Phaon, weary is my pain;  
The tears that from my eyelids rain  
Ease not my cares;  
My beauty droops and fades away  
Just as a trampled blossom’s may.  
Why must thou tread me into earth –  
So dim in death, so bright at birth?[279]

There are many characteristics of the traditional sentimental poem of female complaint evident here: the direct reproach – ‘Why must thou tread me into earth?’; the expression of suffering, or ‘pain’, in an excessive overflow of tears; the pre-figuring of death in the final line, and finally, as in Poem XIX, the presentation of the female self as suffering spectacle – ‘My beauty droops and fades away’.[280]

These poems show that the Michael Field poets' production of Sapphic identity is, at least to some extent, affected by her previous appearances in a popular sentimental poetry of heteroerotic and aesthetic failure, in which poetic production is seen to depend on sympathetic identification with a figure forever rehearsing and performing her own self-destruction. While the sentimental female reproach tradition had been exploited by male poets as well as female – the most famous nineteenth-century example being Tennyson's 'Mariana' – the nineteenth-century sentimental Sappho had been appropriated exclusively by female writers, so that Bradley and Cooper's adoption of this particular version of Sappho risks a self-positioning in a self-defeating female tradition that they were otherwise concerned to avoid.

### 3. Girl-loving Sappho

While the first few *Long Ago* poems to construct Sappho's identity place her within the predominantly heteroerotic sentimental tradition, I noted how Sappho's residence in Ancient Greece was the habitation of a place that was perceived not only as the ideal antithesis to the imperfect contemporary world, but also as a setting for an innocent happy homoeroticism. This section looks at the production within many of the central poems of *Long Ago* of Lesbos as a place of a specifically female homoeroticism, and of Sappho as a recognisably homoerotic figure within that space.

The idea of a girl-loving Sappho was not new in British culture – John Donne had written a poem entitled 'Sappho to Philaenis' that presented female-female love – but in the late nineteenth century, following a long period in which poets such as Pope and the 'English Sapphos' had promoted a predominantly heteroerotic Sappho, it was enjoying something of a revival, with Swinburne's 'Anactoria', Simeon Solomon's painting 'Sappho and Erinna in a Garden at Mytilene', and Wharton's book itself foregrounding Sappho as a lover of girls.[281]

Within *Long Ago*, this distinctly homoerotic Sappho appears as an elder, experienced, instructional figure, an often melancholy performer singing to a band of beautiful, innocent and ideally sympathetic virgins. The production of this figure depends on a range of structures: several poems are addressed directly to the maidens, either individually or as a group, for example 'Come, Gorgo, put the rug in place' (XXXV); 'Erinna, thou art ever fair' (VI); 'Maids, not to you my mind doth change' (XXXIII).[282] Other poems refer to the maidens in the third person, with Sappho frequently expressing her visual delight in the beauty of the surrounding band of maidens, again either individually or en masse: 'Subtle Mnasidica in shape / As firm as the unripened grape / Dica with meeting eyebrows sleek / And Gorgo of the apple-cheek' (XXVI); 'I watch the lovely rout / Of maidens flitting 'mid the honey-bees' (LIV).[283] In several poems Sappho describes her own relationship with and performance for the maidens: 'Not Gello's self loves more than I, the virgin train, my company' (XXVI); 'In turn, to please my maids, / Most deftly will I sing (LIV); 'I sang to women gathered round' (XX).[284]

These persistent references to Sappho amongst her maidens help to build up a picture of Sappho inhabiting a specifically female-female idyll. Several feminist writers have suggested that this idyll of female reciprocity in an exclusively female space marks a lesbian utopia marked by its difference and separation from images of lesbian eroticism produced by contemporary men. I argue in this section that this particular utopian space, while unquestionably female and homoerotic, is strongly defined both by its historical moment and by its relation to a male

tradition. For me these poems cannot be seen as performing a lesbian relationship that is exclusively between women, but are produced in a context in which male perception of female-female relationship is crucial.

Central to the production of the homoerotic scenes of Sappho and her maidens is the fertile and flower-laden landscape of Lesbos that surrounds them. Poem XIII, for example, addressed to 'Dica', a garland-weaving maiden, exhorts her to:

[. . .] seek the fount where feathery,  
Young shoots and tendrils creep,  
For samphire and for rosemary,  
Climb thou the marble steep.  
Turn to the reed-bed by the stream  
For pansies' dark and yellow gleam  
And midmost of the blossoms set  
Narcissus with white coronet.[285]

Bradley and Cooper here create a lush landscape which, as Prins suggests, is inextricably linked to the female homoeroticism of the *Long Ago* Lesbos. This is not, however, an original association, but draws on a tradition of female-female natural idyll whose most recent efflorescence can be seen in the writing of Symonds, with whom Bradley and Cooper had corresponded for information while writing *Long Ago*, and whose description of Lesbos in Wharton's *Sappho* bears some remarkable similarities to the Lesbos that Bradley and Cooper produce:

All the luxuries and elegancies of life which that climate and the rich valleys of Lesbos could afford, were at their disposal; exquisite gardens, in which the rose and the hyacinth spread perfume; river-beds ablaze with the oleander and wild pomegranate; olive groves and fountains, where the cyclamen and violet flowered with feathery maidenhair; pine-shadowed coves, where they might bathe in the calm of a tideless sea; fruits such as the southern sea and sea-wind can mature; marble cliffs starred with jonquil and anemone in spring, aromatic with myrtle and lentisk and samphire and wild rosemary through all the months; nightingales that sang in May; temples dim with dusky gold and bright with ivory.[286]

Bradley and Cooper's production of the Lesbian landscape as a place of fecund luxury owes much to Symond's extravagant description, with references, for example, to 'rosy oleander groves' and 'myrtle nooks' (Poem III); the 'shade of yonder pine / 'Neath which the river flows' (Poem XXIII); the 'many a violet-bed' and 'altar in the olive-wood' (Poem XXXIX), and the 'fragrant breath the sun receives / From the young rose's softening leaves' (Poem LII).[287] The section of Poem XIII quoted above shares no less than five elements with Symonds' paragraph: fountains, feathery tendrils, marble cliffs, samphire and rosemary, all occurring in the same order, and the last two yoked together, just as they are in Symonds.

Similarly, the phrase 'soft as the stream beneath the plane' from Poem XXXIII, cited by Angela Leighton as a piece of 'woman-to-woman's language as suggestively labial as any Irigarayan writing of the body' can also be traced to a male tradition of idyllic landscape currently

enjoying a revival in British culture.[288] This is the place, in Benjamin Jowett's translation of Plato's *Phaedrus*, in which Socrates and Phaedrus stop to discuss the nature of love, a landscape which, like the Lesbos of both Symonds and *Long Ago*, appeals to all senses:

By Here, a fair resting-place, full of summer sounds and scents. Here is this lofty and spreading plane-tree, and the agnus castus high and clustering, in the fullest blossom and the greatest fragrance; and the stream which flows beneath the plane-tree is deliciously cold to the feet.[289]

In the late nineteenth century, the *Phaedrus* was read as a discourse on male homoerotic love, described by Symonds as a 'panegyric of paederastic love' in a letter written to Jowett in 1889 suggesting that it was a 'dangerous text' for certain 'pre-disposed young men'.[290] The setting of the *Phaedrus* is also described teasingly by Wilde in *The Critic as Artist*, as the place 'where young Phaedrus bathed his feet [. . .] under the tall wind-whispering planes'.[291] 'The stream beneath the plane', with its history as landscape produced between Socrates and his young friend Phaedrus, between Plato and his translator Jowett, and between Jowett and his pupils Symonds and Wilde cannot be cited as the place of Irigaray's imaginary 'parler femme', one of those 'places of women-among-themselves'.[292] Even the connection between this ideal setting and the female body that Leighton proposes by her use of the word 'labial' had already been made within the male tradition: both Phaedrus and Socrates define it as an ideally female space, and Wilde remembers it as 'that nymph-haunted meadow'.[293]

The implication of Plato's use of this setting for the dialogue of the *Phaedrus* is that a landscape of fluid boundaries located outside the city walls, pleasant and soothing to all the senses, can be perceived both as an ideally feminine landscape and as an appropriate setting in which to discuss the nature of love, even though, in the *Phaedrus*, the love to be discussed is that between boys and men. Its inclusion within *Long Ago* suggests that the ideal space being produced here, while strongly marked as female space, is neither a 'new' space produced as a result of the gender or sexual practice of the Michael Field poets, nor even necessarily indicative of a specifically female homoeroticism. Rather, it demonstrates the self-placement of Bradley and Cooper, in producing the female idyll of Lesbos, within a respected male tradition of female idyll.

Bradley and Cooper's positioning of the homoerotic Sappho within a male tradition depends especially on the relationship of these poems to Wharton's text, which, as the preface to *Long Ago* suggested, provided the initial inspiration for the collection. Prins argues that Wharton's text is 'an open space out of which the possibility of lesbian writing emerges', suggesting that *Long Ago* is produced in the 'gaps' left by Wharton.[294] My own readings suggest, instead, that the 'gaps' of Wharton's text in which this utopia carves its place are not an 'open space' but a set of historically limited and limiting parameters, within which Bradley and Cooper produce an ideal female homoerotic utopia with specifically nineteenth-century characteristics, including the particularly non-feminist characteristic of a necessary relationship of the female homoerotic space to men.

Prins constructs much of her argument around Poem XLIII of *Long Ago*, a poem based on the Sapphic fragment 4: 'v???? v? (v????) ?v???? ??????? v? v???? ???????, ???v???????? ?? ?v???? ???????v???? (And round about the [breeze] murmurs cool through apple-boughs, and slumber streams from quivering leaves), which, according to Wharton, describes 'the gardens of the nymphs'.[295] In stanza 1, Bradley and Cooper produce Wharton's fragment 4 as a place:

Where hoary shadows keep  
Secluded from man's view  
A little cave that cleaves  
The rock with fissure deep.

Worshipped with milk and oil,  
There dwell the Nymphs [. . .][296]

The idea that this place is near a 'cave' where nymphs live is suggested in Wharton by the inclusion at this point of a fragment of Theocritus - 'while close at hand the sacred water from the Nymph's own cave welled forth with murmurs musical'.[297] Prins, arguing that here 'the landscape is even more explicitly associated with the female body', suggests that 'Bradley and Cooper thus assimilate the nymphs mentioned by Wharton into a lesbian space that is "secluded from man's view"'.[298] But, to consider, as Prins at another point suggests, not what is here 'described', but rather what is 'performed rhetorically' by this addition, it is important to remember that the collection *Long Ago* is far from being a place that is 'secluded from man's view'.[299] Not only did the Michael Field poets correspond, while writing the poems, with several men, including Browning, Wharton and Symonds, for advice, but they also sent the first three copies to three men whose opinions they valued highly - Browning, John Gray, and the critic Richard Holt Hutton, whose responses and reviews in the *Academy* and the *Spectator* were anxiously anticipated and eagerly devoured.[300]

From this evidence, it would appear that the 'ideal reader' of *Long Ago*, for the Michael Field poets, was not female, but male. The phrase 'secluded from man's view' is not a secret lesbian celebration of the pleasures of the female body, but a voyeuristic invitation to a particular, highly respected group of men to view the private female place which promotes its own concealment. Such performance of the female homoerotic for the pleasure of men does not, for a variety of reasons, form a part of the late twentieth-century ideal feminist 'lesbian topos', but for the Michael Field poets the promise that this glimpsed idyll presented to the reader is 'secluded from man's view' guarantees an exclusivity to the offered vision which is an essential part of their conception of an ideal homoerotic world.[301]

Bradley and Cooper's production of the 'lesbian utopia' of *Long Ago* is not only heavily dependent on male traditions of female-female idyll and largely directed at a male audience, but also reproduces many of the traditional male/female, homoerotic/heteroerotic oppositions so strongly marked within nineteenth-century culture. I suggested in relation to Poem 1 that the desire to set up Lesbos as a timeless utopia could not prevent it from being shaped by its historical context, and the production of Lesbos as female homoerotic utopia is similarly marked by the heteroerotic context that it cannot, finally, exclude. In Poem XLIII, the failure of both endeavours is intertwined, as the incursion of time into a happy timeless world brings with it the introduction of both sadness and the heteroerotic into the female-female idyll.

The early stanzas of Poem XLIII are similar to those of Poem I, in presenting to the reader a series of confident direct assertions about the pleasurable activities of the female inhabitants of this ideal place - 'There dwell the Nymphs [. . .] / They listen to the breeze [. . .] / There reign delight and health.' But as Poem XLIII progresses, it moves from a wholly positive depiction of the dwelling place and activities of the nymphs, to an increasingly negative description, dependent on the exterior world from which this space is supposedly 'secluded'. The second half of stanza 3 reads:

For never was such calm,  
Such sound of murmuring stealth,  
Such solace to the brain  
To weariness such balm.[302]

The negative with which this construction begins – ‘For never was’ – calls into question the positive assertions of the previous stanzas, suggesting the potential non-existence of this utopia, as a place that ‘never was’. The comparatives which follow (such calm, / Such sound [. . .] / Such solace [. . .]) begin to deflect our attention away from the idyll as they evoke the lesser places which this utopia surpasses. Finally, the last line of the stanza introduces into the ideal and timeless world of Lesbos a negative emotion which is indissolubly linked to the experience of time – the term ‘weariness’ – suggesting that this idyllic place is not simply an independent site for the happy nymphs, but has a curative function for those living in the non-ideal world: it is to be a ‘balm’ for those suffering from a surfeit of time.

This introduction of time into the timeless world effects the transformation, in the final stanza, of that ‘secluded’ utopia, inhabited in the early stanzas only by the pleasure-loving nymphs, into a place of respite for those who have suffered at the hands of time:

Even a lover’s pains,  
Though fiercely they have raged,  
Here find at last relief:  
The heart by sorrow aged  
Divinely youth regains;  
Tears steal through parchèd grief:  
All passion is assuaged.[303]

The timeless homoerotic utopia has become an asylum one may enter ‘at last’ – after the painful experiences of a life within time – for ‘relief’. Escaping the inevitable degeneration of a time-bound world, an aged heart becomes young again. But the later migrants to the nymphs’ paradise, though miraculously made both divine and youthful by entering it, bring with them the unhappiness they wish to leave behind. At the start of the poem, in an opening heavily dependent on the headline Sapphic fragment, ‘Cool water gurgles through / The apple-boughs’. By the final couplet, this idyllic fluid female landscape has been transformed as ‘Tears steal through parchèd grief’.

The incursion of time and the non-ideal into the idyllic landscape of Lesbos is in part, as I suggested earlier, an inevitable consequence of its construction as oppositional: the contemporary thus necessarily becomes a defining feature of the idyll. But the introduction of time-weary sorrow into the idyllic female-female world of Poem XLIII can also be traced back to those male-authored texts in whose ‘gaps’ it has been produced: Wharton, and, through him, Ovid. At the end of his commentary on fragment 4, Wharton, providing another example of the dwelling place of the nymphs, quotes a phrase from Pope’s translation of Ovid’s ‘Sappho to Phaon’ – ‘A spring there is whose silver waters show’.[304] In the section of Pope’s translation to which Wharton is referring, we find not only another version of the landscape of stanza 1 of Poem XLIII – ‘a flowery lotus spreads its arms above / Shades all the banks and seems itself a grove’ – but also some explanation for the ‘tears’ of the final stanza of Bradley and Cooper’s poem, as Sappho, here mourning the loss of Phaon, makes the decision to end her life – ‘Here as I lay, and swelled



with tears the flood'.[305]

This reference suggests that the pain brought into the initially happy landscape as a result of the irruption of time into the ideal world in the final stanza brings with it the sorrow associated with Sappho's unhappy relationship with Phaon. The suggestion is strengthened further when we compare the opening couplet of this stanza – 'Even a lover's pains, / Though fiercely they have raged' – to line 241 of Pope's translation of Ovid – 'But ah, how fiercely burn the lover's fires!'[306] By the end of Poem XLIII, the happy female-female relationships imaginable between the nymphs have become subordinated to the sorrows associated with Sappho's relationship to Phaon. Finally, it is 'here', in the idyllic space inhabited by the nymphs, that Sappho's painful unrequited 'passion' for Phaon will be 'assuaged'. This female homoerotic utopia is not only infected by the sickness of time, but also finds itself in a subordinate relationship to a troubled heteroerotic passion, to whose painful symptoms it is its function to bring 'relief'.

The subordination of the idyllic homoerotic to the painful heteroerotic in *Long Ago* is not limited to a single poem. Poem XXXIII, the poem which reproduces Plato's ideal landscape of the 'stream beneath the plane' follows a similar pattern, producing again a specifically nineteenth-century female homoerotic utopia that must define itself against a painful and time-wearied world of heteroerotic love for which it is also obliged to provide a convalescent environment.

The Michael Field poets, like Plato, produce 'the stream beneath the plane' as the context for a discussion about the nature of love. They suggest here a distinction between the homoerotic and the heteroerotic, in which the homoerotic is associated with timeless idyll and the heteroerotic with temporal disappointment, as an ideal changeless female-female love ('Maids, not to you my mind doth change') is contrasted with a male-female love which is both more painful and more temporary ('Soon doth a lover's patience tire').[307] The ideal love between Sappho and her maids, which exists in the space of the speaking of the poem – 'between us' – is from the start dependent on its difference from the non-ideal relationship with the absent 'men', whom 'I defy, allure, estrange'.

In line 5 of stanza 1 this ideal female-female love is performed by Sappho for the 'maids' who are the listeners of the poem – 'To you I sing my love's refrain'. This phrase, for Prins, signals the reciprocity that she sees as central to the poem's enactment of a lesbian idyll – "'You" and "I" are interfused in the reciprocal exchange of "love's refrain"'. [308] However, there is a limit to this reciprocity, not least because this is, in the end, a monologue: as throughout *Long Ago*, it is only Sappho who sings here; the maids are a silent audience. This is not a relationship between equals, but a relationship between a named, exceptional individual, (Sappho) and a band of individually undistinguished supporters (maids).

The singing here by Sappho of 'my love's refrain' again suggests a performance that has a particularly nineteenth-century inflection. The implication is firstly that an ideal love, as it is constant and unchanging, will produce lyric repetition – a 'refrain' is a repeated unchanging phrase.[309] But the phrase 'my love's refrain' also hints at a love operating under self-restraint, like the ideal love in the *Phaedrus*, which Symonds anxiously sought to imitate as a young man, and which Wilde regretted his inability to maintain in *De Profundis*. [310]

This sense of refrain as self-restraint is developed in the poem through the production of a list of what Sappho will refrain from singing or speaking to her maids. Her refraining depends again upon the production of negatives – what is 'between us' in stanza 1, when Sappho sings to her maidens, is 'no thought of pain, / Peril, satiety', while in stanza 2, Sappho again negatively describes the performance of a restrained speaking – 'To you I never breathe a sign / Of inward

want or woe'. What is performed by these promises of non-performances is inevitably the opposite of what is promised: Sappho has now produced quite a list of her 'inward' symptoms – pain, peril, satiety, want and woe – which in this way she brings into both the poem and her relationship with the maids, once again with the expectation that, like the nymphs of Poem XLIII, who offer 'balm' and 'relief' to 'a lover's pains', they will operate as nurses of the battered soul – 'When injuries my spirit bruise, / Allaying virtue ye infuse / With unobtrusive skill'.

Poem XXXIII thus relies from the start for the production of its ideal space on the naming of a set of negatives which enter the space of the poem, so that what is produced within the ideal is the non-ideal. As in Poem XLIII, this incursion of the non-ideal into the ideal is resolved by constructing the ideal as a place of soothing respite from the 'pain' and 'peril' experienced outside. The ideal world thus becomes secondary to the non-ideal, so that insofar as this world is conceived as an ideal world of female homoeroticism, it involves a female homoeroticism that is subordinate to the world of relationships with men. Furthermore, the relationship produced here between Sappho and her 'maids' is one in which the maids are also subordinate – in tending to Sappho so selflessly ('ye to manifold desire / Can yield response') these unobtrusive 'maids' have more than a nominal resemblance to nineteenth-century domestic servants. Reciprocity between themselves and Sappho has its limits.

The presence in *Long Ago* of a girl-loving Sappho inhabiting a female-female idyll cannot be read as a simple effect of Bradley or Cooper's 'lesbian' identity.[311] As I have shown, this is a representation of homoerotic relationship and female idyll that is heavily dependent both on a historical male tradition and on direct interaction with the Wharton text. Furthermore, this homoeroticism is conditioned by nineteenth-century perceptions of ideal feminine behaviour, of love and of a division between the exceptional individual and the group, as Sappho performs for and is tended by a band of silent, conflict-free maidens in an atmosphere of mutual sympathy and restraint.

The influence of the nineteenth-century context is also evident in the double function of the *Long Ago* idyllic Lesbian landscape as anti-relativist timeless ideal and as ideal female-female space. The female homoerotic space that is set up here not only shares the characteristics of the nineteenth-century late-Platonic ideal: innocent, happy, timeless and so on, but also acquires all the problems associated with the defiant setting up of that ideal: it is necessarily always elsewhere and ungraspable, and its construction is secondary and dependent on negation. As we have seen, this produces an idyllic homoeroticism that appears as a wistful and impossible dream, existing in a necessary and secondary relationship to a painful, but nevertheless highly valued heteroerotic passion.

#### **4. Sublime Sappho**

So far, I have described three distinct traditions of Sapphic identity within *Long Ago*: the lyric Sappho; the sentimental Sappho; and the girl-loving Sappho. A fourth tradition of Sapphic identity that can, I believe, be seen operating in the poems of *Long Ago*, is that which connects her to the poetic sublime, an identity that links her to both heteroerotic and homoerotic narratives of love. The association between Sappho and the sublime can be dated back in British culture to those translations and explications of Longinus' third-century treatise, *On the Sublime*, that underpinned the production of Romantic poetry and the idea of the Romantic poet. As Ruth Vanita has argued, the figure of Sappho had a crucial role to play here, since Longinus' definition

of the lyric sublime depends entirely on Sapphic fragment 2: ???????? ??? ????? ('That man seems to me').[312]

This complex fragment, in which, as outlined in Chapter 1, a female speaker describes her physical responses as she sees and hears a female beloved addressing a male rival, is designated by Longinus as a poem of 'delirious passion'.[313] He suggests that what the poem produces is the body of Sappho herself:

Are you not amazed how at one instant she summons, as though they were all alien from herself and dispersed, soul, body, ears, tongue, eyes, colour? Uniting contradictions, she is, at one and the same time, hot and cold, in her senses and out of her mind, for she is either terrified or at the point of death. The effect desired is that not one passion only should be seen in her, but a concourse of the passions.[314]

Sappho, as writer of the poem, 'summons' the parts of the body, 'as if they were all alien from herself'. But 'at one and the same time', the body in the poem 'is' Sappho. Inviting into herself the threatening and violent contradictory 'passions' that terrify her and bring her to 'the point of death', she displays them in her body/poem as 'effect desired' – they are 'seen in her'. Following Longinus, Sappho, and through her the figure of the ideal poet, came to be understood by Romantic and post-Romantic poets as an exceptionally sensitive individual violently overwhelmed by passion, whose poetry is the necessary expression of his/her identity.[315]

In *Long Ago*, Bradley and Cooper's Sappho also takes on the character of Romantic poet, appearing as a responsive individual physically overcome by passion. Her relation to both poetry and love is seen as one of self-surrender to the (male) awe-inspiring divine figures of Apollo and Eros, from the moment in the preface when she is described as speaking of the 'fearful mastery' of love, to the final epilogue poem where she pleads with Apollo as 'lord of speech' and 'my King' to 'free me' from love's 'incommunicable woe'. Poetic inspiration is figured as a 'seizing' or 'piercing' of the poet by Apollo, which produces a kind of 'trembling', 'throbbing' or 'thrilling' in the responsive body of Sappho:

Trembling I seek thy holy ground,  
Apollo, lord of kings;  
Thou hast the darts that kill. Oh, free  
The senseless world of apathy,  
Pierce it![316]

Apollo seized me, and aloud  
Tumultuous I sang  
[. . .]  
I paused: the whistling air was stilled  
Then through my chords the godhead thrilled.[317]

This idea of poetic inspiration as passionate self-surrender is developed in several of the poems of *Long Ago* into the metaphor of divine rape, an uncomfortable choice for those critics who wish to read the Michael Field poems as containing a modern feminist or lesbian

message.[318] Rape is always presented as a positive experience within *Long Ago*. Two poems feature the rape of Philomel, who as nightingale represents the poet singing the pain of her experience as object of rape.[319] Poem LII presents the myth of Tiresias, a figure who, in being transformed from man to woman acquires both ‘the sovereign guise / Of passion’, and those features of the ideal feminised aesthete that we saw Bradley and Cooper claim for themselves in *Works and Days* – ‘receptivity of soul’ and ‘a finer sense for bliss and dole’.[320] White, discussing this poem as the production of a hermaphrodite poetic persona for Bradley and Cooper, fails to notice here the representation of rape as a sublime experience whose value Tiresias now understands. Amongst the examples cited in this poem of females erotically overwhelmed by ‘mystic rapture’ as they are vanquished by ‘man’s strong nature’, is the divine rape of the child Persephone, an event characterised as ‘sweet’.[321]

In Poem LXI, the only *Long Ago* poem known for certain to have been written by Cooper, the myth of Dryope is used to produce an image of the ideal poet as object of divine rape.[322] The poem emphasises that Apollo’s rape of Dryope is a violent act in which she is forcibly held, powerless and terrified. Dryope, as her breath ‘in terror fails [. . .] almost dies’, recalling Longinus’ Sappho, who, he suggests, is in fragment 2 ‘either terrified or at the point of death’. And as with Longinus’ Sappho, this terror and near death mark the experience as sublime: in response to the rape, Dryope, feeling the ‘god within’ experiences ‘wonder’ as well as terror, which registers in her responsive body as a ‘thrill’.

Cooper draws a parallel between Apollo’s ‘mortal love’ expressed by his rape of Dryope, and his relation to poets, who he will ‘either bless or slay’ by his dominating ‘rapture’. In the final stanzas, the responsive Dryope ‘shudders with a joy / Which no childish fears alloy’, and glowing in response to Apollo’s ‘power’ joins the privileged band of those favoured by him:

For she joins the troop of those  
Dedicate to joys and woes  
Whom by stricture of his love  
Leto’s son has raised above  
Other mortals [. . .][323]

In Chapter 1, we saw Bradley and Cooper anxiously determined to prove their membership of the sensitive and elevated ‘race of poets’. Here we find access to that ‘troop’, seen again as particularly sensitive to the ‘joys and woes’ of experience, and ‘raised above / Other mortals’, guaranteed through a self-figuring as object of divine rape.

The use of divine rape within *Long Ago* as a support for the self-production of Sappho, and through her Bradley and Cooper, as Romantic poet, not only emphasises the creation here of the sublime Sappho as a responsive, passive figure, but also suggests an essential connection between her passionate nature and painful experience. Like Pater’s figure in ‘The Child in the House’, or like Cooper in *Works and Days*, her artistic temperament is revealed in her sensitivity not only to beauty, but also to pain. Therefore, the passionate love that is also central to her self-presentation is continually and inevitably associated with pain.

This necessary connection between passion and pain extends beyond the presentation of Sappho’s unrequited love for Phaon, which we saw earlier shading into a sentimental presentation of a suffering Sappho that could be contrasted with the happy homoerotic idyll where she resided with her maidens, and moves into Sappho’s passionate relationships with individual females. The presentation of a passionate but painful female-female love is seen most clearly in Poem XLVI.

The poem opens with a self-defining assertion of Sappho's exceptional passive sensitivity:

'Fool, faint not thou!  
[. . .]  
I feel my senses swoon  
Or quicken with delight  
At nature's simplest boon:  
Unmoved I cannot pass  
The fine bloom of the grass  
Or watch the dimpling shadows on the white,  
Vibrating poplar with unshaken frame.[324]

The second stanza moves on from this description of Sappho's physically responsive, swooning and shaking 'frame', to an enactment of Sapphic fragment 2, the fragment that Longinus used to demonstrate the relationship between the responsive body of the poet and the lyric sublime:

'Faint not', I said – and yet my breath  
Comes sharp as I were nigh to death  
If suddenly across the grove  
The lovely laugh I hear,  
Or catch the lovely speech  
Of one who makes a peer  
Of the blest gods above  
The man she deigns to love.[325]

This presentation of a painful love that is also homoerotic is underlined in the final couplet, where the beloved is addressed directly as Anactoria, in a rhetorical question in which the 'I' speaks of herself in the third person as 'Sappho' and 'she':

O Anactoria, wast thou born to teach  
Sappho how vainly she admonisheth?[326]

Poem XLVI moves beyond the perfect homoerotic/painful heteroerotic opposition that we saw operating in the poems of maidenly idyll, and in doing so re-configures the homoerotic scene. In the 'idyllic' poems, Sappho can be seen performing to a band of un-named and silent 'maids', who are both idealised and infantilised, 'violet weaving, at my knee' or 'as on my breast / They lean', listening to the advice of the elder Sappho, as she teaches them about love.[327] Anactoria, named here as individual beloved, reverses this ideal pedagogic relationship. Not only is the beloved here able to speak, producing a 'lovely laugh' and 'lovely speech' to which Sappho is obliged to listen, but Anactoria is also able to 'teach / Sappho' a lesson about her own painful susceptibility to love.

In the homoerotic idyll poems, the band of indiscriminate loving 'maids' or 'nymphs' offer Sappho a sympathetic 'relief' from the pain of her relationship with a man. The individual female lovers of Poem XLVI, however, not only fail to provide such nurturing support, but are

themselves identified as figures who provoke torment and loss. While the second stanza has Anactoria engaged with a male rival, in the third stanza the theme of jealous passion provoking near-death experiences is continued by Atthis' independent self-positioning next to a named female rival, Andromeda:

'Faint not' – the poet must dare all;  
Me no experience shall appal,  
No pang that can make shrill my song:  
    Though Atthis, hateful, flit  
    From my fond arms and by  
    Andromeda dare sit,  
    I will not let my strong  
    Heart fail, will bear the wrong,  
With piercing accents for Adonis cry,  
Or thrice on perished Timas vainly call.[328]

As I have already demonstrated in relation to previous poems, a persistent use of negatives produces a mixed message: the 'me' who in the opening tercet of this stanza 'no experience shall appal, / No pang that can make shrill my song', is by the closing couplet singing shrilly ('with piercing accents') to Adonis, the symbol of fleeting time. Meanwhile the determined negative promise – 'I will not let my strong / Heart fail' – in the central section is seriously undermined by enjambment, which not only breaks Sappho's 'strong / Heart' across the line end, but also forces the first two words of the following line to be read as a spondee, pushing the emphasis onto a heart failure that links the loss of nerve to a potential loss of life. Here we have a homoerotic triangle – Sappho, Atthis and Andromeda – which brings Sappho as near to death as any 'wrong' committed by Phaon.

The necessity for the production of pain in response to these homoerotic affairs rests on Sappho's identity in this poem as sublime poet. The admonition to 'faint not', opening this stanza as it opened the previous three, has become here a direct instruction to Sappho as poet.[329] Linked to a quotation from the end of the Sapphic fragment 2 – 'But I must dare all' – it is transformed into an argument about the essential preconditions for poetic production, developed further in the final stanza into a re-affirmation of the necessary relationship in the sublime Sappho between a physical, sensitive, trembling response to violent passion and the production of poetry:

'Faint not', I said. Would'st thou be great,  
Thou must with every shock vibrate  
That life can bring thee; seek and yearn;  
    Feel in thyself the stroke  
    Of love, although it rive  
    As mountain wind an oak.[330]

The production of the sublime responsive Sappho here provides yet another route to a poetry of loss and regret, as the command to those who would be poets to 'seek and yearn', picking up a phrase from Sappho's fragment 25, emphasises a poet searching for unfulfilled desire rather than passionate fulfilment, an unfulfilled desire whose characteristic feature – the 'stroke' of love which will 'rive' the recipient – is the violence that elevated Dryope into the poetic 'troop'. [331]

In following the imperative that poets seek out the 'shock' of a painful and unrequited love, the sublime Sappho of *Long Ago* reveals her particular late nineteenth-century flowering as a poet not only of passive sensuous response, but also of essential non-fulfilment, in a self-production whose clearest manifesto occurs in Poem XXXIX.[332] The fourth stanza opens with a statement which is central to this particular expression of Sapphic identity, yoking together the lover and poet under the sign of regret: 'Regret – it is the lover's, poet's sign'.

The poem continues:

Of Zeus and Memory the sacred Nine  
Themselves are offspring; each enduring strain  
Springs from the issues of an ancient pain.

'Tis for his dead girl-love Apollo weaves  
His poet's crown of deathless laurel-leaves;  
By Ladon's river long must slowly bleed  
Pan's heart ere music permeate his reed.

Bradley and Cooper, as 'Sappho-performed-by-Michael Field', here suggest that poetry is always based on painful memory – 'each enduring strain / Springs from the issues of an ancient pain'. Hence those gods particularly associated with the production of poetry and music – Apollo and Pan – are motivated, it is suggested, by the remembrance of a painful event. What is striking about the painful events that are here proposed as initial inspiration of the divine figures, is that each centres on unconsummated passion: Apollo's would-be rape of Daphne is foiled by her metamorphosis into a laurel tree, while Pan's fruitless pursuit of Syrinx similarly ends with her escape through transformation into some reeds. In both cases, the object of unfulfilled passion is then again transformed: in Apollo's case being woven into 'his poet's crown of deathless laurel-leaves', while Pan turns the reeds into pan-pipes, through which the slow bleeding of his heart permeates as music.

Poetry is defined here as necessarily built on loss. It arises not from consummation, but from non-consummation, produced literally from the body of the lover who has evaded capture. Because poetry commemorates the pain of non-fulfilment, it remains timeless, like the figures on Keats' Grecian urn, forever in pursuit of an ideal that will never be captured. It is eternal, 'deathless', but also lifeless, evading the degeneration of the real. Thus Sappho, and with her the homoerotic passion with which she has come to be identified is, by yet another path, identified in *Long Ago* with inevitable distance and loss.

For late nineteenth-century aesthetes, for whom art represented a rejection of the material, the perfect poetry was necessarily predicated on material loss.[333] Indeed, the fact that Sappho's poems are themselves in great measure lost helped to create her as a figure for poetic perfection. Swinburne, quoted in Wharton, describes the remaining fragments as 'akin to fire and air, being themselves all "air and fire"', and yet 'the supreme success, the final achievement of poetic art'.[334] Meanwhile Symonds, also quoted in Wharton, writes:

The world has suffered no greater literary loss than the loss of Sappho's poems. So perfect are the smallest fragments [. . .] that we muse in a sad rapture of astonishment to think what the complete poems must have been. [. . .] Of all the poets of the world, of all the illustrious artists of all literatures, Sappho is the one whose every word has a peculiar and

unmistakable perfume, a seal of absolute perfection and inimitable grace.[335]

The loss of Sappho here provokes sublime response – ‘a sad rapture’ – as it exudes an enigmatic aroma – ‘a peculiar and unmistakable perfume’ – that results in an excess of hyperbole, raising her first above ‘all the poets of the world’, then above ‘all the illustrious artists of all literatures’ and finally to ‘absolute perfection’. Bradley and Cooper’s adoption of the sublime personification of Sappho is unmistakably entangled with this sense of her as the most perfect of sublime poets precisely through her ‘lost’ status. If loss and regret are the ‘lover’s, poet’s sign’, then Bradley, as ‘Michael’, the ‘poet-lover’ enacting Sappho, must also be connected irrevocably with loss and regret.

### 5. Homoerotic/heteroerotic Sappho

I have outlined four separate traditions that can be seen to underpin the construction of identity for the Sappho of *Long Ago*: Sappho as original singer, Sappho as abandoned female, Sappho as lover of girls, and Sappho as sublime poet. I have shown how some of these traditions are associated with homoerotic narratives, some with heteroerotic, and some with both. Within the collection, most poems are produced mainly within one tradition or within another. Yet it is also possible to discern, as I suggested in relation to Poem XLIII and Poem XXXIII, a connection between the sentimental Sappho of the Phaon poems and the girl-loving Sappho who sings to her maidens. In the current section I look in more detail at the complex web of relationship between the different Sapphic identities in *Long Ago*, examining the implied relationship between the homoerotic and heteroerotic and the multiple ways in which they are associated both with the production of aesthetic identity and with that mood of sadness and regret that permeates the collection.

We have already seen how the heteroerotic is introduced into the homoerotic world through an interaction between the poems of *Long Ago* and Pope’s translation of Ovid, provoking Sappho’s performances of heteroerotic lament and regret within the homoerotic idyll. This process can also be seen operating internally within *Long Ago* through the metaphor of Sappho’s heart, an organ to which, either as heart itself, or as the more feminine ‘breast’ or ‘bosom’, she refers throughout *Long Ago*. It is possible to produce a narrative reading of Sappho’s ‘heart’ in *Long Ago*, in which, as physical organ, it carries the traces of her injuries at Phaon’s hands, the injuries of his refusal of a relationship, into the relationship she has with her maidens. Indeed, Sappho’s heart invites such a reading. In Poem V, one of the poems we have already looked at as part of the tradition of a sentimental Sappho, the final stanza opens:

So underneath thy scorn and pride  
My heart is bowed, and cannot hide  
How it despairs.[336]

Sappho’s heart, ‘bowed’, servant-like, ‘underneath’ Phaon’s show of superiority – ‘thy scorn and pride’ finds itself forced into an unwilling self-exposure – it ‘cannot hide / How it despairs’. Later in the collection, however, in Poem XXXIII, the ‘homoerotic utopia’ poem of the ‘stream beneath the plane’, part of the ‘skill’ of the maids is seen as their ability to read the things that Sappho’s heart ‘cannot hide’ – ‘But ye [. . .] / The presage at my heart divine’, and what the maids find in Sappho’s heart in Poem XXXIII is the drooping and fading Sappho of Poem V – ‘ye know / When



for long, museful days I pine'.[337]

A similar relationship can be traced between Sappho's 'heart' in the heteroerotic despair of Poem XIX, and her 'bosom' in the homoerotic utopia of XXXIII. The former is offered to death – 'O Hades, take this heart' – and defined as a place where she 'stifles' simultaneously both herself and the expression of pain – 'I stifle in my heart the funeral moan'.[338] This self-silencing as rehearsal of Sappho's eventual self-caused death, a typical feature of nineteenth-century sentimental presentations of Sappho, is reversed, and the heart temporarily rescued from death by the revitalisation offered by the maids of Poem XXXIII:

And if care frets ye come to me  
As fresh as nymph from stream or tree  
And with your soft vitality  
My weary bosom fill.[339]

Meanwhile in Poem XLIII, in the company of the nymphs themselves, Sappho, having brought into their idyllic world the 'weariness' and 'lover's pains' that she reproached Phaon with in Poem V ('O Phaon, weary is my pain'), again seeks in the idyll the injection of new life into her heart – 'The heart by sorrow aged / Divinely youth regains'.[340]

We can thus see across the collection a covert narrative of interaction between the homoerotic and heteroerotic, negotiated within the body of Sappho, in which the homoerotic is associated with sympathy and respite, and the heteroerotic with frustration, weariness and failure. The interaction here between the different Sapphic traditions promotes an essential opposition between homoerotic and heteroerotic love, but not one which can produce a specific sexual identity: Sappho, rather than being read 'as lesbian' contains within herself both possibilities, and is the medium through which they can be understood in relation to each other.

The interaction between the homoerotic and heteroerotic in *Long Ago* extends beyond the production of the homoerotic as peaceful asylum for those suffering from heteroerotic failure, and produces the homoerotic space itself as a scene of loss. In the Sappho and Phaon poems, Sappho is produced as a belated figure lamenting the loss of Phaon, a grief which she carries into the homoerotic space of Poems XXXIII and XLIII. In other poems where Sappho appears with her maidens, however, the lost past she mourns is located even further back, in the loss of her virginity. In Poem XVII, Sappho sings the opening words of the Sapphic fragment – 'O whither art thou gone from me?' – to which she adds a plea for the restoration of her maidenhood:

Come back again, virginity!  
For maidenhood still do I long,  
The freedom and the joyance strong  
Of that most blessed secret state  
That makes the tenderest maiden great.[341]

Following a reply from the virgin Artemis, speaking the words of another Sapphic fragment – 'To thee I never come again,' – the poem produces a lament – 'O Sappho, bitter was thy pain!' that echoes the words used to Phaon in Poem V ('O Phaon, weary is my pain'). The complaint to Phaon about his abandonment of Sappho has been transformed into a complaint about the loss of virginity. In the preface and opening poems of *Long Ago*, Sappho was presented as a figure through whom a belated modern audience could access an ideal and innocent past. In this poem,

performing within what should be the innocent and ideal landscape of Lesbos, a belated Sappho sings of the loss of her own ideal past, producing Lesbos itself as a space for the performance of loss.

For Chris White, the relationship between the homoerotic and heteroerotic mapped out within *Long Ago* is clear: the Phaon story is fundamentally about ‘the crushing of virginity by men’, while virginity itself is associated both with ‘lesbian desire’ and with the production of poetry – ‘Sappho the poet is always represented as Sappho the virgin poet (unviolated by man or the desire for a man) when at the height of her powers. Violation, by deed or desire, destroys the poetic gift’.[342] She sees Poem XVII as ‘a warning about the dangers of becoming not-virgin’.

However, it is noticeable in Poem XVII, as in Poem XXXIII, that it is the non-virgin Sappho, not the ‘virgin quire’ who is endowed with the gift of poetry. Virginity is praised, but from a position of loss. The maidens themselves are unable to produce their own song: for a single line they ‘lift the song’ which Sappho has surreptitiously introduced into their company, but then fall back into ‘silence’ – a silence which characterises their existence in *Long Ago*. This silence is revealed in Poem XVII as a necessary condition of virginity, operating through a ‘shame’ which guards the secrecy of virginity:

Then once again the silence came  
Their lips were blanched as if with shame  
That they in maidenhood were bold  
Its sacred worship to unfold.[343]

If virginity is properly associated with silence and secrecy, those who praise it must be non-virgins, and can only praise it from the point of view of its loss: Sappho is left as the sole voice praising virginity, but her song is necessarily painful – ‘And Sappho touched the lyre alone, / Until she made the bright strings moan’. Far from virginity being equated with the production of poetry in this collection, virginity is an empty cipher, an ideal innocent state which has nothing to sing, whereas Sappho, scarred by experience, defines herself against the innocence of her maidens, and sings at length of her regrets. The relationship proposed here between homoeroticism and heteroeroticism is one in which the painful heteroerotic, by interrupting the happy homoerotic, both constructs the homoerotic as a place of lost innocence, and makes possible that poetry of loss and regret that we saw earlier as a fundamental condition for the production of Sappho as sublime poet.

Sappho laments here the loss of her own virginity. However, the collection represents virginity more generally as a state which is always defined in relation to its loss: the ‘most blessed secret state’, praised by Sappho in Poem XVII, is, throughout *Long Ago*, portrayed as necessarily temporary. Sappho’s virgins, suspended in a perfect virginity which does not degenerate over time, nevertheless eventually cross the boundary into marriage and leave their maidenhood behind. Despite their ideal female-female relationships, they all choose to leave the ‘maiden quire’. Virginity, in *Long Ago*, is a pre-marital state, whose loss is continually being re-enacted and re-mourned.

At times, Sappho can be seen lamenting the loss of her virgins to heteroerotic love. In Poem XXVII, Sappho reacts with regret to the news that one of her maidens is soon to be married:

And now she leaves my maiden train!  
Those whom I love most give me pain:  
Why should I love her so?[344]

If the transience of the maidens' virginity is cause for regret, then we might expect Sappho to wish to delay their entry into marriage. Yet despite her lamentations over the ephemeral nature of virginity, we find that the main agent in the reproduction of the loss of maiden innocence in *Long Ago* is Sappho herself, delivering her maidens up to marriage as a part of her role as their protector. Poem XXVI, which begins with the assertion that 'Not Gello's self loves more than I / The virgin train, my company' proceeds to suggest that, while the maidens are currently defined through their ignorance of 'Eros', they will inevitably become involved with a longing for men, which will threaten their current life of 'laughter, love, serenity'. [345] Sappho, recruiting a single exceptional maiden (Erinna) for poetry, relinquishes the remainder to Aphrodite and marriage:

That these should e'er as Sappho pine,  
Goddess forbid! The little thing  
From Telos must be taught to sing;  
The rest to Hymen's portals bring!

This ending, with its suggestion that in order to avoid sorrow in love, it is essential that the maidens' virginity ends in marriage, provides justification for the role that the Sappho of *Long Ago* takes on as facilitator of marriage between her beloved maidens and their potential bridegrooms, a role which adds significance to the several epithalamia included in the collection. This is not a role invented by the Michael Field poets, but is already outlined in a lengthy passage from Himerius which Wharton quotes as part of the commentary on fragment 93 – *???? ?? ??v?v????? ???v????? ??? ? ? ? ? ? [ . . ]* ('As the sweet-apple blushes on the end of the bough [ . . ]'):

'Aphrodite's orgies we leave to Sappho of Lesbos, to sing to the lyre and make the bride-chamber her theme. [ . . ] It was for Sappho to liken the maiden to an apple, allowing to those who would pluck before the time to touch not even with the finger-tip, but to him who was to gather the apple in season to watch its ripe beauty; to compare the bridegroom with Achilles, to match the youth's deeds with the hero's.' Further on he says: 'Come then, we will lead him into the bride-chamber and persuade him to meet the beauty of the bride.' [346]

In the epithalamia of *Long Ago*, Bradley and Cooper's Sappho acts out many of the details suggested by Himerius. Poems XLII, XLVII and LIII, each of which address a bridegroom, perform the function of 'leading him into the bedchamber and persuading him to meet the beauty of the bride'. [347] Poem XLII has an enumeration of the qualities of the bride, who is 'endowed to bless / with bounteous loveliness'. [348] She is repeatedly offered to the groom – 'She comes to do thy pleasure / With all her heart' – while he is exhorted to respond to her – 'She comes, and she rejoices, / Rejoice with her, / O bridegroom!'

Poem LIII takes up Himerius' suggestion that Sappho compare the bridegroom to Achilles:

Thou hast the brow of Peleus' godlike son  
Thou hast his yellow hair, and thou art one  
Who deed for deed could match him in the fray.  
Heroic is thy strain! [349]

Meanwhile Poem XLVII, which is based on Fragment 93 ('As the sweet-apple blushes [. . .]'), uses the fragment very much as suggested by Himerius, with Sappho offering the virgin as an object of exclusive voyeuristic pleasure to the restrained groom, who will in time 'gather the apple':

She has been kept for thee, I know not how;  
As, undescried,  
A blushing apple on the topmost bough,  
Heaven kept thy bride  
A fragrant, rare, inviolate thing  
For season of thy cherishing.[350]

Sappho also refers to her role as marriage facilitator in several poems in *Long Ago* that are not epithalamia. Poem XXII describes the role explicitly and at length:

To me the tender, blushing bride  
Doth come with lips that fail;  
I feel her heart beat at my side,  
And cry – 'like Ares in his pride,  
Hail, noble bridegroom, hail!'

And to the doubting boy afraid  
Of too ambitious bliss  
I whisper – 'None is like thy maid,  
And I her fond heart will persuade  
To feel thou feelest this'.[351]

In this way the Sappho of *Long Ago*, speaking on behalf of her silent maidens, with their 'lips that fail', continues to reproduce the loss she regrets by offering them in marriage. The 'fond heart' of the maiden that, in the first stanza quoted here, is felt by Sappho beating 'at my side', is in the second stanza persuaded to respond to the feelings of the 'doubting boy', setting up for Sappho yet another self-imposed loss.

Just as the relationship between the homoerotic and heteroerotic set up by the Phaon story in *Long Ago* has effects within poems that at first sight appear to be poems of exclusively homoerotic idyll, so the relationship between the homoerotic and the heteroerotic set up by the epithalamia can also be seen to permeate the female-female homoerotic landscape. Poem LIV, for example, is quoted by many of the critics who are interested in reading *Long Ago* as 'lesbian writing'.[352] This poem, based on the Sapphic fragment 11 – 'This will I now sing deftly to please my girlfriends' is used as White's primary example of a poem where Sappho appears as 'a woman at the centre of a loving community of women, a community which she must keep safe from the intrusions of men'.[353] White argues that in this poem 'the relationship between Sappho and her maids is premised upon a need to keep the women away from marriage'.[354] As proof of Sappho's concern to keep the maidens 'away from marriage', White quotes three lines from the final stanza: 'No girls let fall /

Their maiden zone / At Hymen's call'.[355]

Prins also focuses on Poem LIV as an example of a poem in which the Lesbian landscape is both prominent and becomes readable as lesbian landscape, pointing out that what Sappho sings deftly to her girlfriends in stanza 2 is the landscape of Sappho's fragment 4 ('Cool water gurgles through the apple-boughs'.)

In turn, to please my maids  
Most deftly will I sing  
Of their soft cherishing  
In apple orchards with cool waters by

Prins suggest that the appearance of Cypris (Aphrodite) later on in the stanza, as she 'seems / To bend and sigh, / Her golden calyx offering amorously' within the landscape 'emphasises its lesbian eroticism'.[356]

Both Prins and White draw attention to stanza 3, in which the maidens are compared to a rose unfurling:

When on my breast  
They lean, and say,  
All that they would,  
Opening their glorious, candid maidenhood.

For White, taken in conjunction with the three lines of the final stanza quoted in her earlier article, these lines constitute a 'warning' about the loss of virginity, like the 'warning' she described in Poem XVII – 'the loss of "their glorious candid maidenhood" would be a grievous subtraction from their pleasures and their desirability'.[357] Prins also connects this scene to the final stanza, which, like White, she reads as a rejection of marriage.[358]

However, reading the final stanza in its entirety, in the context of the epithalamia and the production within *Long Ago* of Sappho as facilitator of the marriage of her maidens, we can see that Poem LIV combines female homoeroticism not with a refusal of marriage, but with its promotion:

To that pure band alone  
I sing of marriage-loves;  
As Aphrodite's doves  
Glance in the sun their colour comes and goes:  
No girls let fall  
Their maiden zone  
At Hymen's call  
Serene as those  
Taught by a poet why sweet Hesper glows.

Sappho is shown here singing not only the Lesbian landscape, but also its loss. While the maidens have, in the previous stanza, been persuaded to 'open their glorious, candid maidenhood' to Sappho, what she finally seductively sings to them in response in this stanza is 'marriage-

loves'. If we finish the sentence whose opening is read by both Prins and White as a rejection of marriage, we discover that it has the opposite meaning to that they ascribe to it: 'No girls let fall / Their maiden zone / [. . .] / Serene as those / Taught by a poet why sweet Hesper glows'. In other words, Sappho's maidens, following her sexual education, become able to relinquish their 'maiden zone', or hymen, even more serenely than those who do not follow Sappho.[359] Here we have a female homoeroticism, which, unpalatably for a late twentieth-century audience, is the ideal preparation for marital sexuality, and a Sappho who is more than complicit in the loss of maiden virginity that she regrets.

The female homoerotic utopia produced here is an ideal state condemned to be continually interrupted by the less than ideal world. Although it is set in Ancient Greece, its parameters would not be unfamiliar to a nineteenth-century middle-class readership, with its experience of a homoerotically-charged single-sex education system which was, for most students, left behind as they entered the 'real' adult world of marriage and family responsibility. In this context, the idea of Sappho as both girl-loving pedagogue and marriage facilitator in *Long Ago* is as unsurprising as the construction of a homoerotic idyll in a lost and eternally youthful past.[360]

The lost past of *Long Ago* is a place which is always elsewhere: in the preface and opening poems it seems to be located within Lesbos; when we enter Lesbos, we discover that it has shifted back to a time before the loss of Phaon; as we move into the community of Sappho and her maidens, it appears to be located in the era of Sappho's lost virginity. The virgins themselves are presented as forever on the brink of being lost, or, like Sappho, they dream of a vanished golden age, which, even within *Long Ago*, is already 'long ago':

Thus when they lie and dream  
Of happy things,  
The golden age reburns;  
When youth to slumber turns  
Beneath the Cynthian beam  
Again it brings  
To life such bliss and glow  
As vanished long ago.[361]

The preface to *Long Ago* proposed a move into an idyllic past: what we find, through the performances of 'Michael Field-as Sappho' in the idyllic past of *Long Ago*, is that the innocent ideal is already lost, and therefore lost permanently, lost in the permanent present tense of the ideal.[362] This production of Lesbos as irretrievably lost past, as we have seen, is inextricably entangled with its production of narratives of homoerotic and heteroerotic relationships, created under a number of aesthetic imperatives that encourage the production of a poetry of lament and failure.

## Conclusion

In my introduction to this chapter, I noted the appearance of one of the poems from *Long Ago*, 'Atthis, my darling', (Poem XIV in the collection) in *Works and Days*, where it was defined as a love poem from Bradley to Cooper. If the effect of that designation is to name Bradley as the

'poet-lover', Sappho, then it is equally to define Cooper as the female beloved, 'Atthis'. In this final section I would like to begin by examining how Bradley and Cooper's performance in *Works and Days* of their personal relationship as Sappho and Atthis contributes to their literary production of identity.

In her appearances within *Long Ago*, Atthis performs many roles: that of infantilised maiden ('little Atthis'), in Poem LXVI, that of object of jealous passion in Poem XLVI, as we saw earlier, and that of an ex-lover who provokes jealousy in a rival in Poem XLIV.[363] In Poem LXVII, one of the final cluster of pre-suicide poems, she is remembered as a 'long dead' lost lover appearing in a dream to an almost-dead Sappho, who can no longer quite summon the inspiration to sing about her.

But Atthis loved of yore  
Returns, and all my hungry, sore  
Death-stricken senses close round her once more.

Of one, once loved, long dead,  
My plectrum fain would speak;  
But a vague chorus haunts my head,  
Confused, I yearn and seek.[364]

This association of Atthis with loss and death is also evident in Poem XIV, the poem recited by Cooper in *Works and Days*. [365] The poem is based on a short fragment late in Wharton's collection, fragment 126 – (( (((((( (((((( – translated by Wharton as 'My darling'. [366] Imagining a time in which Atthis and Sappho are still lovers, the poem is based on anxiety about her potential future loss, an anxiety which makes this a far-from-happy love poem:

#### XIV

(( (((((( ((((((  
Atthis, my darling, thou did'st stray  
A few feet to the rushy bed,  
When a great fear and passion shook  
My heart lest haply thou wert dead;  
It grew so still about the brook,  
As if a soul were drawn away.

Anon thy clear eyes, silver-blue,  
Shone through the tamarisk-branches fine;  
To pluck me iris thou had'st sprung  
Through galingale and celandine;  
Away, away the flowers I flung  
And thee down to my breast I drew.

My darling! Nay, our very breath

Nor light nor darkness shall divide;  
Queen Dawn shall find us on one bed,  
Nor must thou flutter from my side  
An instant, lest I feel the dread,  
Atthis, the immanence of death.

Poem XIV possesses many features which we can now recognise as typical of the poems of *Long Ago*. A landscape is produced which is marked as ideally Greek by the inclusion of the Mediterranean ‘tamarisk-branches’, and ideally feminine by the listing of flowers and the liquidity of the ‘rushy bed’ or ‘brook’. Sappho appears, as we have come to expect, with a heart shaken by a ‘passion’ infused with ‘fear’. The poem is bound up with the idea of love defined in relation to loss, here figured as a fear of losing the beloved to death – ‘a great fear and passion shook / My heart lest haply thou wert dead’. This building of love on the fear of loss is reflected in the final stanza by the extensive use of negatives: ‘Nay [. . .] / Nor [. . .] nor [. . .] / [. . .] / Nor [. . .]’ which construct the relationship on an oppositional basis which cannot brook separation – ‘our very breath / Nor light nor darkness can divide’ – motivating, in the final three lines, the lovers remaining together throughout the night.

An anxious grip is kept on Atthis, which is expressed as an extreme prohibition to the younger woman – ‘Nor must thou flutter from my side / An instant’.[367] The anxiety of this phrase, related to Sappho’s fragment 38: ?? ?? ???? ???? ?????? ??????v????? – ‘And I flutter like a child after her mother’ is as much maternal as lover-like, but designed to protect the elder Sappho rather than the younger Atthis ‘lest I feel the dread, / Atthis, the immanence of death’. As always with those *Long Ago* poems in which the ideal is constructed through negativity, the gesture fails, as the final line of the poem expresses the dread which Atthis’ presence is supposed to keep at bay: the ‘immanence of death’ which remains as final rhyme for the living ‘breath’ of the lovers.

When Poem XIV is removed from its context in *Long Ago*, and embedded within *Works and Days*, it is being moved into a context in which death is also present. The ‘Henry’ (Cooper) who now performs this poem, and who identifies herself as its addressee – ‘I am moved to read Michael (Bradley)’s poems to me’ – is herself now very close to death, so that the poem which expresses Sappho’s anxiety over the loss of Atthis to death, is now given added pathos as it is repeated, by Cooper, as a poem which expresses Bradley’s anxiety over the loss of Cooper to death.[368]

Cooper’s future death becomes a factor in the accounts of the performance which each of the women construct. Bradley reports the experience as a future memory for those who remain alive – ‘A moment never to be forgotten of Francis or of me’. Meanwhile Cooper expresses her faith that death will provide the perfect context for the ideal love that exists between herself and Bradley: ‘When we’re together eternally, our spirits will be interpenetrated with our loves and our art under the benison of the Vision of God’. This is the logical extension of the construction of an ideal homoerotic love in an idyllic context set against a hostile world: its proper place is not the failing here and now, but the perfect future of death.[369]

In performing as Sappho and Atthis, Bradley and Cooper thus present their relationship as the performance of an elder-younger homoerotic bond, anxiously maintained in opposition to the contemporary and in the face of an ever-present threat of loss and death, projecting itself beyond the everyday into an ideal moment of spiritual and aesthetic commingling (‘our spirits will be



interpenetrated with our loves and our art'), in the timeless idyll, first of Lesbos, and then of Heaven. This presentation of the relationship is one we will meet again in *Underneath the Bough*.

However, the possibilities of Sapphic identification held out through Cooper's drawing-room performance of 'Atthis, my darling' extend beyond the lover-beloved split which indirectly, through her description of the poem as Bradley's 'poet-lover's gift to me', names her as Atthis. This is a dual performance, in which both Bradley and Cooper also perform as Sappho. Bradley, identified as the originator of the Atthis poem that purports to be the spoken utterance of Sappho, sits, like the Sappho of fragment 2, and listens to Cooper's performance. However, Cooper, in speaking Sappho's poem, also necessarily performs here as Sappho. To perform 'as Sappho', as we have seen, is a process that inevitably involves repetition of an original song. Cooper's performance of Bradley's Sapphic poem here, coupled with her careful copying out of all the *Long Ago* poems, most of which were also written by Bradley, into her own handwriting, confirms a sense that she too wishes to access the potential implicit in such repetitive Sapphic self-identification.

Performing as Sappho gives Cooper, as well as Bradley, the possibility of a self-figuring within all the roles that the *Long Ago* Sappho adopts: that of 'pure' lyric performer in a rural idyll constructed against the modern urban world; that of tragic suffering victim of heteroerotic failure; that of melancholy performer within an ideal homoerotic idyll, and that of possessor of an unusually sensitive aesthetic temperament.

Through the many self-entanglements Bradley and Cooper make possible through their performance as 'Michael Field-as-Sappho' in *Long Ago*, it is possible to discern a number of features that suggest the potential in the late nineteenth century for an understanding of the self in relation to female-female homoerotic narrative. We can see here, on the one hand, the development of a sense of opposition between homoerotic and heteroerotic, in which the homoerotic is produced as a space with a privileged relation to the ideal and to the production of poetry. We can also see the production of a particular feminised exceptional 'type' of sensitive and responsive personality, androgynously presented through the device of 'Michael-Field-as-Sappho', who is again closely linked to the creation of poetry.

However, as in *Works and Days*, heteroeroticism is also an essential feature of *Long Ago*, whether this is linked to the production of the collection itself, clearly embedded, as I have shown, within a male tradition, and addressed to a male audience; within the relationships produced between Sappho and the other female actors of the collection, in which the ideal homoerotic is continually seen in a relation of subordination to the failing heteroerotic; or in the personality of Sappho herself, who, either as sentimental singer of failure with Phaon, or as a figure inviting rape by Apollo, continues to be constructed in imaginary erotic relationship with men. As with *Works and Days*, the over-riding interest of the collection is with the interaction of all these non-physically procreative relationships with the production of art.[370]

Nevertheless, *Long Ago*, given its production of female homoerotic scenes and suggestion of the possibility of self-identification within them, could usefully be identified as a 'pre-lesbian' text, helping to open up the possibility for future generations of women of a figuring of the self in purely homoerotic terms. My further argument within this chapter has been to demonstrate that as pre-lesbian text it cannot be read as the production of a radical erotics. The history of lesbian self-definition in the twentieth century became entangled with a history of the defence of individual

rights and of a critique of heterosexual relations. In the late nineteenth century this radical context was absent. The female homoeroticism we find here, in its adoption of a tradition of female-female idyll, prefigures what Castle has called the 'beautification' of the lesbian theme in women's lyric poetry of the twentieth century, but it also has some profoundly conservative features: it is identified with pre-urban innocence and pre-marital immaturity; its features of idyllic sympathy and care support an ideology of female self-sacrifice and subservience; and it is embroiled in an erotics of over-protective anxiety and pre-occupation with death.[371]

There is also here an anxious aesthetic self-definition which can again produce an identity that is far from radical. The issue of poetic survival, as we have seen, becomes in *Long Ago* entangled in a rhetoric of failure, whether through its relationship to the sentimental Sappho who sings about her own extinction, through its production of a sublime Sappho who sings always of loss, or because of its overall strategy of producing an ideal Platonic world in opposition to nineteenth-century materialism, occupying a literary dead-end which has to be seen as at least a part of the reason for the failure of *Long Ago* to, as Laird puts it, 'survive its moment'.[372]

A female homoeroticism which uses this ideal world as imaginary context for an 'impossible' love, can also find itself in a dead-end, literally in the case of poem XIV, in which the beloved, removed from a recognisable nineteenth-century context, and exhorted to remain unmoving, exists in an anxiously maintained and undeveloping idyll that is suffused both with the fear and with the presence of death. Modern lesbian self-definition may require an understanding of this pre-lesbian writing as a part of its history, but it should be careful not to promote it as a vision for future aspiration.

## Chapter 3: *Sight and Song*

### Introduction

In the previous two chapters I have discussed the relationship between aesthetic production and the presentation of personal identity in the writing of 'Michael Field', looking first at the journal *Works and Days*, and secondly at Bradley and Cooper's first joint poetry collection, *Long Ago*. My concern has been to question how far and in what ways Bradley and Cooper can be understood to produce a specifically 'lesbian' writing. I have drawn attention to the importance for them of the deliberate construction of an identity primarily defined by its relationship to aesthetic production and appreciation, and I have also looked at elements of female homoeroticism within that construction of identity, showing the relationship of this homoeroticism both to a male tradition and to a contemporary context.

The current chapter, which looks at Bradley and Cooper's 1892 poetry collection, *Sight and Song*, in which each poem is related to an individual painting, continues this examination of the entanglement within their work of questions of identity, aesthetic production and homoeroticism. I argue that, despite the differences in tone between the two collections, with *Long Ago* presenting a personal, passionate poetry as the utterance of an emotionally-saturated Sappho, and *Sight and Song* producing an apparently 'objective' poetry of descriptive restraint, the later collection continues to develop many of the themes and concerns of the earlier.[373] The Michael Field writers here again produce an idyllic timeless space in opposition to the contemporary everyday, and again present performances within that space of an aesthetic and elevated identity. As within the poetry of *Long Ago*, this aesthetic identity becomes enmeshed in contemporary understandings of homoerotic identity.

Looking at the particular features of *Sight and Song*, I suggest that in espousing what they perceive as a particularly 'pure' and 'masculine' aesthetics, Bradley and Cooper license for themselves a steady gaze at both the female and the male body. I relate this 'masculine' gaze to the possibility of both homoerotic and heteroerotic interaction with the art-works, examining its effects in relation firstly to the look at the female body, and secondly to the look at the male body. I argue that Bradley and Cooper's poetic rendering of the former reproduces and reinforces the male voyeuristic gaze at the female body. Meanwhile in their production of the latter, they interact with late nineteenth-century configurations of the male homoerotic persona to produce an identity which is closer to that of the male homosexual than that of the lesbian. I again question, throughout, the appropriateness and usefulness of the many attempts to interpret the homoerotic writing of *Sight and Song* as motivated by, or supportive of a radical sexual politics.

### 1. The development of a 'masculine' aesthetics

Before considering the individual poems of *Long Ago*, I noted how Bradley and Cooper produced a set of strong contextualising cues within the collection – the opening titles; the epigraph; the fragments of Greek heading each poem – to mark the poems as temporally distant from the nineteenth century, creating a space in which it was possible to insist on a timeless ideal that could operate in opposition to the contemporary. I also suggested that Bradley and Cooper used the

preface of *Long Ago* both to situate the collection in relation to nineteenth-century male culture and to outline the basic premise of the collection – that of a self-performance as Sappho.

*Sight and Song*, like *Long Ago*, depends on a set of specific cues to set up a context marked by distance, this time the distance between the world of the everyday and the timeless world of art. As with *Long Ago*, the assertion of distance from the contemporary must be delicately balanced against the need to situate the collection in a suitably elevated late-nineteenth-century milieu. The position here chosen – that of late-nineteenth-century ‘aestheticism’ – is hinted at even before the book is opened, in the choice of publisher and cover design. *Sight and Song* was one of the first books to be brought out by the new elite publishing partnership Mathews and Lane, appearing as part of an esoteric list which included Oscar Wilde’s *Poems*, Richard Le Gallienne’s *English Poems*, John Gray’s *Silverpoints* and Arthur Symonds’ *Silhouettes*.<sup>[374]</sup> With its elegant olive cover and frontispiece designed by Selwyn Image, it announces itself, more than *Long Ago*, or indeed any later collection of Michael Field poems, as having a connection with those loosely associated late nineteenth-century writers who came to be characterised as aesthetes.

Beyond the aestheticist associations provided by the publishing context and cover of *Sight and Song* are a set of contextualising references within the collection itself. The subjects chosen are mainly Renaissance paintings hung in various European galleries, though three are based on paintings by Watteau. The choice of non-nineteenth-century paintings again suggests a distance between the world of the collection and everyday life, though the choice of the Renaissance as the dominant epoch reflects an interest that is thoroughly contemporary: Pater and Symonds both produced major pieces of writing defining and analysing this period.<sup>[375]</sup> Meanwhile Pater had also written an essay on Watteau as one of his ‘Imaginary Portraits’.<sup>[376]</sup>

Moreover, the basic premise of the collection – a poetry whose referents are works of art in another genre, that of painting – suggests a synaesthetic relationship between the visual arts and poetry which was thoroughly modern, and again strongly associated with aestheticism. Baudelaire had first made the suggestion that ‘it is one of the characteristic symptoms of the spiritual condition of our age that the arts aspire if not to take one another’s place, at least reciprocally to lend one another new powers’.<sup>[377]</sup> This idea is repeated in Pater – ‘The arts are able, not indeed to supply the place of each other, but reciprocally to lend each other new forces’.<sup>[378]</sup> More recently, Wilde had suggested (borrowing from Pater’s borrowing) that ‘in a very ugly and sensible age, the arts borrow, not from life, but from each other’.<sup>[379]</sup> The context Wilde produces for the necessity in modern times of synaesthetic exchange: the contrast between, on the one hand, an ‘ugly and sensible’ contemporary life and on the other, the separate realm of ‘the arts’, echoes the concerns of the Michael Field writers that we saw operating throughout *Works and Days* as they strove to create a context for their writing that was removed from the ugliness of contemporary urban life. The choice of painting as a subject is motivated by a desire to withdraw not only from the mundaneness of the everyday, but from the particular conditions prevalent in late nineteenth-century Britain.

As a further sign of the withdrawal of the collection from ordinary life, each poem in *Sight and Song* is carefully situated in relation to an individual painting by the use throughout the collection of triple titles, specifying first, a painting, secondly, an artist, and finally, a gallery. The triple titles operate, as with the Greek fragments that preface each of the poems in *Long Ago*, to mark the boundary between the everyday and the space of the poem, but they also have more specific effects. The name of the painting frames each poem as in the first instance related to an individual piece of art, isolated from historical context or inter-relationship. Although the name of the artist is then appended, it functions here, as we shall see later in the chapter, not to indicate

a particular personal style or more specific local or historical origin for the work, but to lend a general sense of distance and weight to the poems; all the artists named are long dead, and all possess names which at this time signify greatness or undisputed 'genius'. Finally, the naming of the art galleries – a range of galleries from a number of European countries – mimics and emphasises that withdrawal of art from the everyday that had already been effected in the nineteenth century through the removal of individual pieces of art into specialist galleries.[380]

Like *Long Ago, Sight and Song* has a short prose preface in which the aesthetic theory underpinning the collection is more overtly mapped out, and it is here that the relationship between the collection and contemporary aestheticism is most clearly evident. In the opening paragraph it is suggested that the 'aim' of the poems in the collection is:

to translate into verse what the lines and colours of certain chosen pictures sing in themselves; to express not so much what these pictures mean to the poet, but rather what poetry they objectively incarnate.[381]

In order to gain access to the poetry that is already 'objectively' present in the art-work, Bradley and Cooper further assert that they will need to exercise a 'patient, continuous sight as pure as the gazer can refine it of theory, fancies, or his mere subjective enjoyment'. Crucial to the process of synaesthetic exchange proposed here is the development of a 'pure' gaze, 'refined' of subjectivity.

This emphasis on an 'objective' gaze marks for Bradley and Cooper their adoption of what they perceived as a particularly masculine style of looking at art. Julia Saville has documented the way in which Bradley and Cooper, strongly influenced by Bernhard Berenson, adopted an approach to art appreciation which combined an aesthetic of self-restraint initially propounded by Pater with the rigorous attention to factual detail demanded by the Italian 'scientific' art historian Giovanni Morelli.[382] Berenson, who first met Bradley and Cooper in Paris in 1890, was in the process of becoming one of Britain's leading experts on Renaissance art. Bradley and Cooper adopted him as a mentor to replace Browning, who had died in 1889, and he was intensely involved with the preparation for *Sight and Song*, not only advising the poets which paintings they should view, but also teaching them how to view them in the correct 'Morellian' manner.[383]

The adoption of an 'objective' approach to art was perceived by Bradley and Cooper as giving them access to that Paterian male 'scholarly conscience' from which, as we saw in Chapter 1, they had felt excluded. In a letter to Berenson requesting information about the factual detail of Giorgione's 'Venus', in preparation for a poem that was to appear in *Sight and Song*, Bradley quotes Pater's phrase in justification of her approach:

Can you tell me whether Giorgione's Venus is a noon-tide picture? It seems to MF it is, but out on seeming! 'the male conscience' – exclusion of fancy & all sentiment not truly of the picture as the drop of honey oozing from a plum is our aim.[384]

Bradley here makes clear the aspiration of the 'Michael Field' writers to that scholarly authority that they already attributed to Berenson, to whom they had given the cognomen of 'the Doctrine'.

Bradley and Cooper soon came to feel uneasy with their experiment of producing under an austere 'objective' approach. There is a hint of ironic distance in their naming of Berenson as 'the Doctrine', and their dependence on his authority became something of a source of anxiety. Reading through the poems of *Sight and Song* immediately after it was published, Cooper suggests in *Works and Days* that the poems seem to 'lack music tho' the workmanship is good'

and that the whole volume is ‘too much of another, too wholly due to our friendship with Bernhard’.[385]

Still operating under Berenson’s influence, however, Bradley and Cooper propose in the preface to *Sight and Song* an initial identity for the poet as austere observer, the art critic who, as ‘the gazer’ on pictures is the self-controlled subject of a ‘pure’ and ‘refined’ scrutiny of art. Such a severe self-figuring may seem distant from the production of the self as the responsive, sensuous figure of Sappho who appeared in *Long Ago*, yet, just as the literary gentleman ‘Michael Field’ who was produced in the initial paragraph of the preface to *Long Ago* proposes in later paragraphs a self-performance as Sappho within the idyllic landscape of Lesbos, so the ‘Michael Field’ who as restrained masculine critic is so carefully produced at the opening of the *Sight and Song* preface proposes in later paragraphs, albeit tentatively, a possible self-performance as a figure within Renaissance art.

In the second paragraph of the preface, Bradley and Cooper quote Flaubert: ‘Il faut, par un effort d’esprit, se transporter dans les personnages, et non les attirer à soi’.[386] They then define their ‘method of art study’ as an imitation of Flaubert’s, in which, however, they substitute the word ‘*peintures*’ for ‘*personnages*’, so that what they propose is to carry themselves (‘se transporter’) into the work of art. They justify this movement as a continuation of their initial ‘objectivity’, since:

the effort to see things from their own centre, by suppressing the habitual centralisation of the visible in ourselves, is a process by which we eliminate our idiosyncrasies and obtain an impression clearer, less passive, more intimate.[387]

In other words, having set aside the ‘soi’, the pre-existent self, with its ‘idiosyncrasies’, they are able to move into the painting and ‘see things from their own centre’, becoming, in the process, an ‘intimate’ part of the painting itself.

This movement into the ‘centre’ of the art-work as the emptying-out of the pre-existent self does not extinguish the question of identity altogether, for, in the final paragraph of the preface, the ‘play’ of an ‘inevitable force of individuality’ and ‘temperament’ is allowed, phrases which suggest that Bradley and Cooper have retained those notions of a particular ‘type’ of aesthetic personality that we saw operating in *Works and Days*. [388] What is proposed is, as in *Long Ago*, the relinquishing of the mundane, everyday self in the performance, or ‘play’ of an elevated aesthetic identity within a timeless and ideal space: this time, the space of Renaissance painting.[389]

The ‘aim’ of *Sight and Song* as set out in the preface can thus be seen as twofold: firstly, to adopt an objective masculine gaze at the paintings presented in the collection, and secondly, to allow the performance of an aesthetic temperament by stepping in to the space of the paintings. Each of these somewhat contrary objectives relies on a rejection of everyday identity, and the assumption of a more ‘refined’ or ‘forceful’ personality, which can, in different ways, be linked to an idea of the self as ‘the aesthete’. Each of them also depends, as in the poems of *Long Ago*, on the production of an ideal space in relation to which, or within which, the ‘poet-aesthete’ can perform. In the following section I examine in greater detail the production of Renaissance art as ideal space in the poems of *Sight and Song*.

## 2. The painting as ideal space

Bradley and Cooper's espousal of a 'pure' and 'refined' gaze in the poems of *Sight and Song* has been the subject of much analysis. Several critics have argued either that the poems expose the 'heteropatriarchal' bias inherent in male painting, or that they criticise masculine exploitative modes of looking, or that they produce an alternative non-voyeuristic female or lesbian gaze.[390]

My argument in this section will be that the aesthetic adopted by Bradley and Cooper in *Sight and Song* is not a radical aesthetic aimed at criticising the 'patriarchal' production of art. They are concerned here neither with the social context in which art is produced, nor with the production of art as an exercise of male power over women. Rather, their aim is to promote art as a space which exists above and beyond the particular social conditions and relationships from which it arises.

The aesthetic principles that govern *Sight and Song* are in many ways similar to those of *Long Ago*. The world of Renaissance painting described in *Sight and Song* is an ideal timeless Platonic space, existing outside of and against the mundane and failing contemporary, like the world of Ancient Greece produced within *Long Ago*. As in *Long Ago*, that space is conceived as an idyllic rural landscape of groves and valleys, replete with the detail of specific flowers and trees. Within this ideal rural space, Bradley and Cooper are able to promote a set of unchanging permanent truths to set against the perceived relativity of the contemporary urban world. Performing within the landscape of *Sight and Song*, instead of the Sappho of *Long Ago*, are a range of ideal mythological or divine 'types', whose existence is often announced in the present tense at the start of the poem, proposing their uncomplicated presence – 'Tis Leda lovely', 'Fair stands Apollo', 'A mother bent on the body of her Son'.[391]

The preface to *Sight and Song*, as we saw, proposes that the observer, having 'refined' their gaze of everyday 'idiosyncracies', can 'carry themselves' ('se transporter') into the paintings. The use of the present tense throughout the collection, allowing us to inhabit the same time-frame as the paintings, emphasises this possibility of movement into the paintings, producing a sense of direct access to the timeless idyll. Our habitation of the time of the painting is underscored in poems such as 'The Sleeping Venus', which begins 'Here is Venus by our homes', claiming the simple village buildings visible in the background of Giorgione's painting as 'our homes', so that we know that we have indeed left the contemporary urban environment, to 'transport' ourselves into an idyll in which, the closing stanza of the poem asserts, Venus, goddess of a foreign and long-dead religion, is both local and eternal:

For she does not come from far,  
She is of the things that are,  
And she will not pass  
While the sun shines on the grass.[392]

The Morellian influence on the poems is evident in the way they evoke the detail of landscape and body through a faithful listing of the shapes, textures and colours of the paintings. The opening of 'The Death of Procris' is typical:

Ah, foolish Procris! - short and brown  
She lies upon the leafy, littoral plain;  
Her scarlet cloak, her veil have both slipped down  
And rest  
Across her loins; the naked feet are bound  
With sandals of dull gold, their thongs being wide

And interlaced; the body's swelling side  
Crushes the arm; each sterile breast  
Is grey; upon the throat there is a stain  
Of blood and on the hand along the ground.[393]

The 'lines and colours' that the preface of the collection promised to 'translate' are carefully delineated here, in the 'scarlet cloak', the 'dull gold' sandals, and the 'body's swelling side'. A Paterian restraint is also evident in the dispassionate tone in which the dead body parts – the 'grey' and 'sterile' breast and the throat with its 'stain / Of blood' – are named. However, the addition of a critical authorial note at the start of the poem, ('foolish Procris!'), indicates one of the contradictions of the collection, pointing to an earlier nineteenth-century tradition of reading paintings as moral narrative which works against that masculine restrained aesthetic to which Bradley and Cooper aspired.

As with the poems of *Long Ago*, *Sight and Song* struggles to maintain the fiction of an ideal timeless present throughout the collection. The present tense of the painting is often interrupted by an incursion of narrative tenses which strive to extend the 'other world' visible within the art-works, speculating about the personal motivation of the characters depicted there, or about their activities in an imaginary time before or after the moment captured in the painting.[394] So, for example, 'The Faun's Punishment' opens with the question 'What has the tortured, old Faun been doing?' and eventually provides a fictional pre-history for the painting:

There was no ill-will  
That day until  
With fun the grey-beard shook  
At the Maenads' torn  
Spread hair, their brave,  
Tumultuous wave  
Dancing [. . .].[395]

Similarly, 'L'Embarquement pour Cythere' produces some imaginary conversation taking place between the young men and women depicted in the painting, and ends with an imaginary future, in which they will have left the frame:

ere fall of night  
The red-prowed shallop will have passed from sight  
And the stone Venus by herself remain  
Ironical above that wide, embrowning plain.[396]

As with the poems of *Long Ago*, this incursion of narrative tenses and the processes of time tends to bring with it a profusion of negatives, creating throughout the collection a wistful mood of longing, which can be seen even in those poems that are most clearly presentations of a Renaissance idyll, such as 'The Sleeping Venus':

And her resting is so strong  
That while we gaze it seems as though



She had lain thus the solemn glebes among  
In the ages far ago  
And would continue, till the long  
Last evening of Earth's summer glow.[397]

Speculation – 'it seems as though' – here introduces into the picture a swathe of time from 'the ages far ago' until the 'long last evening of Earth's summer glow', producing a melancholy declining context that brings with it a string of anxious negatives to frame the final assertion of Venus' timeless persistence:

We can never fear that she  
From Italian fields will flee  
For she does not come from far  
She is of the things that are;  
And she will not pass  
While the sun shines on the grass.[398]

The presentation of the paintings as sites of an ideal mythical or religious reality depends on the repression, in all of the poems in the collection, of any reference to the painting as a material object in itself, as paint on canvas, since such a reference could only draw attention to the fictionality of both the landscapes and the figures within them. It also relies, in most of these poems, on the invisibility of the labour of the artist. Although the name of the artist appears in each title, the somewhat random arrangement of the poems refuses any sense of the painters as related to each other by style or era, and within the body of almost all of the poems, in order to facilitate the sense of direct access to the landscape of the picture and the ideal figures within it, there is no reference either to the painter or to the moment of painting, so that the paintings become a kind of transparent window through which to view the ideal world, or an open door through which to pass into that world.

This deflection of attention from both the artist and the process of production of the artwork marks one of the major differences between *Sight and Song* and *Long Ago*, in which the figure of Sappho, as we saw, was used extensively to represent the poet as a particular sensitive type, and in which the moment of production of poetry was continually shown as a form of idealised oral performance. It also limits the extent to which the collection can be said to produce a critique of masculine modes of looking: the role of the artist in controlling the viewer's perception of the figures in the painting is here almost completely erased. The assumption of *Sight and Song* is that the poet-aesthete's refined gaze at the figures in the painting is entirely unmediated by the previous gaze of the artist.[399]

There are two poems in *Sight and Song* which provide exceptions to this suppression of the process of aesthetic production, one based on Leonardo da Vinci's drawing of roses and violets, the other on a portrait by Bartolommeo Veneto, each of which, however, confirm the sense that the viewer's perception of the painting is unaffected by the particular subject position of the artist. The da Vinci poem is striking because, unlike in any of the other poems in the collection, da Vinci himself appears as a character in the poem. His primary function is to bring a human presence to a poem which would otherwise lack one because of the non-human subject of the drawing on which it is based, and the poem opens with his name, as the names of Procris,

Venus or Madonna open other poems. However, while the mythological or divine subjects of the paintings are, as I suggested earlier, normally given immediate presence in the opening lines of their poems, ('Here is Venus' etc.), da Vinci is here distanced by a past tense which is defined and further distanced in the second line of the poem – 'Leonardo saw the spring / Centuries ago'. [400]

If 'Leonardo' as artist is trapped in the past, there is nevertheless a present tense in this poem, the present tense of the flowers, interleaved throughout the poem with the past tense of 'Leonardo'. This is most marked in the third stanza:

Leonardo loved the still  
    Violet as it blows,  
Plucked it from the darkness of its leaves,  
    Where it shoots  
    From wet roots;  
Found in it the precious smile that weaves  
Sweetness round Madonna's mouth and heaves  
    Her secret lips, then goes  
    At its fine will,  
    About her face  
He loved to trace. [401]

The particular moment of production of the painting, 'centuries ago', a point fixed in time, where the artist 'loved', 'plucked', and 'found' is opposed to the eternal present inherent in the painting, in which the violet still 'blows' and 'shoots'. This eternal present belongs not only to the overt subject of the painting, the flowers, which recur each spring, but also to the metaphorical subject, the timeless figure of Madonna, who embodies an immutable religious truth and around whose mouth a smile permanently 'weaves' and 'heaves'. Although the artist as living person is trapped within a particular time, as artist he discovers within that time a timeless truth – 'found in it the precious smile that weaves / Sweetness round Madonna's mouth' – which he reproduces in the painting.

In this way the poem can be seen to support the general premise of the collection – the space of art is the place of eternal truth – while adding detail to that premise: certain 'eternal' subjects – natural and female beauty, religion, love – are appropriate to art. The poem also gives some indication of the process by which art is produced, which, as in the process of poetry production described in *Long Ago*, is dominated by the idea of 'love' as a sign of aesthetic responsiveness. Da Vinci is presented as someone whose receptivity to nature – he 'saw the spring and loved in it its flowers' – is also a receptivity to female beauty, connected through metaphorical intertwining – 'he saw / In the rose's amorous, open coil / Women's placid temples'.

This receptive love of the flower/female body leads, like Sappho's passive responsiveness in love, to a passive, unwilling production of drawing, also figured as 'love' – 'How his subtle pencil loved its toil, / Loved to draw!' [402]

In the third stanza, quoted above, both kinds of receptive 'love' – the love of the female body and the love of drawing – are brought together in the image of da Vinci 'tracing' the 'secret lips' of the Madonna. This 'tracing', while intimately following the line of the body, also delineates the ideal within it and thus rescues the body from its usual degeneration through the processes of time. The role of the artist in creating immutable beauty against the ravages of time

is spelt out explicitly in the poem's final stanza, as the 'flowers he chose should never after fade' guarantee, again in a somewhat melancholy and negative context, that the particular blossoming that he witnessed should survive – 'That season did not die, / Like everything, / Of ruin's blight / and April's flight.' [403]

Bradley and Cooper's representation of da Vinci in this poem is in part dependent on a contemporary understanding of this specific painter, who in the nineteenth century had increasingly come to be seen as a 'psychological' painter who could read and portray the hidden secrets of the human face. [404] Both Symonds and Pater, rival commentators on Renaissance art, produce da Vinci as an artist with a particular affinity to nature and an unusual love of human beauty, and each in different ways suggest that he made a connection between the two, in terms that are reminiscent of Bradley and Cooper's metaphor of da Vinci 'tracing' the human body as he draws the roses and violets:

The branching of flower-stems, the outlines of fig-leaves [ . . . ] were rendered by him with the same consummate skill as the dimple on a cheek or the fine curves of a young man's lips. [405]

He brooded over the hidden virtues of plants and crystals, the lines traced by the stars as they moved in the sky, over the correspondences which exist between the different orders of living things. [406]

Both writers also suggest, like Bradley and Cooper, that da Vinci spent much of his life searching for and reproducing that enigmatic feminine smile that is eventually found on the lips of the Mona Lisa. Moreover, many of the particular cluster of adjectives that Pater draws around da Vinci – 'strange', 'subtle', 'secret', 'mysterious' – are also to be found in this poem.

However, while Bradley and Cooper's 'Leonardo' is recognisably the artist produced by Symonds and Pater, he is here removed from the specific history in which both Symonds and Pater place him, and stripped of almost all the unique aspects of his personality, so that reduced to a set of abstractions – sympathy with nature, a yearning for beauty, a responsiveness to love – he is created less as an individual artist than as a cipher for the ideal artist. Kenneth Ireland notes that *Sight and Song*, omitting the more 'manly' Renaissance painters such as Michelangelo and Titian, focuses on painters whose work is associated with a somewhat feminine 'grace and charm'. [407] The 'Leonardo' produced here as responsive and passive sensuous figure operating under the influence of love is thus able to stand as a representative of the general 'type' of the *Sight and Song* artist, just as the responsive and sensuous Sappho of *Long Ago* could represent the 'type' of the poet. This is not an artist who imposes a vision on his painting or on the female figures within it – crucial to the poem is the idea that Leonardo simply sympathetically 'traces' a truth that is already present within the body of the Madonna.

'Drawing of Roses and Violets' is the only poem in *Sight and Song* in which the figure of the artist appears. However, one other poem, titled 'A Portrait, Bartolommeo Veneto, The Städelsche Institut at Frankfurt' draws attention to the painting as the result of an aesthetic process. [408] Bradley and Cooper again use this poem as an opportunity to comment on the relationship between the time-bound moment in which the painting is produced, and the timeless space which it produces. The poem is produced as a narrative in which the subject of the painting, traditionally at this time supposed to be Lucrezia Borgia, but identified here only as a 'courtesan', is imagined as a beautiful but 'cruel' woman, who, anxious that her beauty is destined to decay, determines to preserve it for ever by having herself painted.

The role of the artist is minimised even more strongly than in the 'Leonardo' poem. Between the statement of the courtesan's 'resolution' at the opening of the third stanza that 'she will be painted', removing the artist as a painting subject through its use of the passive, and the statement, also passive, marking the portrait's completion at the start of the fifth – 'so was she painted' – is a description of a completely self-directed process of symbolic adorning and disrobing of the body in which the artist and his labour are entirely invisible:

Forth to the field she goes and questions long  
Which flowers to choose  
[. . .]

Next on her head, veiled with well-bleachen white  
And bound across the brow with azure blue,  
She sets the box-tree leaf [. . .]  
[. . .]

Then to the prompting of her strange, emphatic instinct true,  
She bares one breast, half-freeing it of robe  
And hangs green-water gem and cord beside the naked globe.[409]

This total control of the courtesan over the production of her image has led many commentators to detect a feminist message here.[410] Such readings, suggesting authorial approval of the role of the courtesan in this poem, ignore the moral overtone evident here, an overtone that is connected to that belief in 'love' as a guarantee of eternal truth that we saw operating in the da Vinci poem. The over-perfect, 'flawless' beauty of the courtesan is attributed at the start of the poem to her disengagement from the time in which she is living, a disengagement which is also a refusal of love – 'A crystal, flawless beauty on the brows / Where neither love nor time has conquered space'. This inability to submit to the processes of love and time is presented critically throughout the poem as a serious lack – 'She had no memories [. . .] / [. . .] naught to say / Of love [. . .] / [. . .] no hopes'.

Because of this lack of 'love', while the courtesan can preserve an enduring likeness of her beauty, she can only produce herself as empty portrait – her smile 'endows / The gazer with no tidings from the face'. So, although, like Leonardo's flowers, she has 'conquered death' through being painted, her image is seen as the representation of a deathlike, 'cold' figure, with eyes 'chill as a glowworm's' and hair 'stiff as dead, yellow snakes', a figure who was never alive within her time – a 'fair, blank form, unverified by life'. The final image is one in which an unbreathing smile – 'The small, close mouth, leaving no room for breath' – produces a 'perfect, still pollution' a deathly persistence, rather than eternal life.

Far from criticising the oppressive patriarchal gaze at the female body, the poem suggests that the courtesan's control over her image includes the calculated exploitation of her own body to invite the male gaze, when, 'true' only to her own 'emphatic insight', she deliberately uncovers one breast, to ensure that the 'cold and vacant eminence' of her beauty might 'persist, for all men to behold!' The 'critique' offered here is not of the male observer, but of the female figure who resists the passive relinquishing of the self to love and whose subsequent seizure of control over her image is presented as a hollow, meaningless victory. The poet as observer is directly referred to, as 'the gazer', but this is not the gaze of a sympathetic female observer, but of a dispassionate

‘masculine’ critic – Michael Field-as-aesthete’ – who perceives the truth of the painting: that it is a painting not of a truly living person, but of a beautiful ‘blank form.’

These two poems underscore how far the aesthetic of *Sight and Song* deflects attention away from the labour of the artist. ‘Drawing of Roses and Violets’ produces him as a responsive rather than a proactive figure, recording faithfully the timeless attributes already present within his subjects, while ‘A Portrait’ implies that he has no control over the female model or her image. There is no narrative here of art as the result of a work-process, taking place in a specific historical context, nor of the compromises made by artists in the face of aesthetic and economic pressures, as in so many of Browning’s poems that feature works of art.[411] Instead, the focus is on the unmediated ‘refined’ gaze of the poet-aesthete at the painting and on his ability to discern the timeless ideal within it.

Ironically, while Bradley and Cooper’s poetic strategy is so concerned to produce an ideal aesthetic space distanced from the historical reality in which art-works are produced and received, it is itself marked by its own historical moment, not only because of its determined late nineteenth-century Platonist associations, but also because of its emphasis on the moment of aesthetic consumption – the gaze of the critic – rather than aesthetic production – the work of the artist. This focus on consumption is typical of late nineteenth-century aestheticism, which was inextricably entangled with the nineteenth-century increase of consumerism and with a corresponding increase in the commodification of art.[412]

Krista Lysack has shown how fully Bradley and Cooper were implicated in aestheticism’s involvement with consumerism.[413] Their self-production as poet-aesthetes depended on a process of discriminating consumption, as they purchased and recorded their enjoyment of William Morris furniture, specially commissioned dresses and hats, art reproductions, theatre trips and innumerable holidays. The production of an identity for themselves in *Sight and Song* as ‘refined’ connoisseurs of art was to be more fully realised in 1899 when they moved to their last home in Richmond, ‘The Paragon’, where, as Sturge Moore notes, they ‘displayed with artful carelessness’ a profusion of ‘rare’ ornaments and jewellery in an ‘exquisite’ setting containing ‘severely elegant’ furniture and both original works of art and Renaissance reproductions, with ‘gilded frames of beautiful proportions’.[414]

Furthermore, *Sight and Song* is itself a prime example of the increasing commodification of art. Not only does it present individual pieces of art packaged as separable value-laden objects in their display context, with the artist’s name adding value to the package, but the book itself is produced, as Lysack suggests, as a beautiful object of consumable luxury. Bradley and Cooper, directly and minutely instructing the publisher not only about the design of the cover for the volume, but also about every detail of paper, type, and page design, deliberately produced *Sight and Song* not only as a poetry collection, but also as a ‘collectors’ item’.[415]

However deeply they were enmeshed in aestheticism’s refined consumerism, and despite their production of an identity for ‘Michael Field’ within *Sight and Song* as poet-aesthete, Bradley and Cooper’s relationship with aestheticism was often, as I suggested earlier, somewhat strained, a discomfort that was at times expressed through conflict with Berenson. This unease sometimes registers as disagreement over the balance of importance between production and consumption, or the respective value of the artist and the critic, with Bradley and Cooper maintaining a Romantic vision of artistic genius that wishes to maintain its supremacy over its audience, at least in relation to themselves. In 1894, in an angry exchange with Berenson, Cooper rejects his insistence on the superiority of the critic over the artist, asserting against him that ‘creation is a greater gift than that of the critic.’[416] While competitive disappointment may have a role to play in this

asseveration, it suggests another aspect in relation to which the two poets came to feel a little distanced from the aestheticist poems of *Sight and Song*, with their emphasis on the moment of appreciation rather than 'creation'.

A part of this unease can also be seen in their reaction to Berenson's economic success. For Bradley and Cooper, the crucial element in their adoption of a 'refined' gaze at art was its potential to lift them into an elevated space, just as the removal of art into galleries, those special places reserved for art and its quiet contemplation during the free time of those who have the wealth and leisure to travel, removes art objects from the reach of the vulgar populace. Berenson, however, whose Morellian skills were in later life put to use authenticating paintings for wealthy American purchasers, used his 'refined gaze' for direct economic gain, becoming a central figure in the commodification of art at the turn of the nineteenth century.[417]

Bradley and Cooper's distaste for this economic success is registered throughout *Works and Days*, often as criticism of their rival Mary Costelloe, whom they saw as central to Berenson's rapid transformation from sensitive Paterian academic to successful art-market professional.[418] The struggle with Costelloe marks another kind of discomfort with the direction of aestheticism, and the terms in which it is conducted – that of economic success versus untainted idealism – suggest a further 'pure' antagonism to materialism that, like the promotion of a poetry of loss and regret in the poems of *Long Ago*, marks a self-fettering in a rhetoric of inevitable contemporary failure.

Bradley and Cooper thus produced *Sight and Song* under a predominantly conservative ethos that tends to minimise the possibility of social critique, and indeed reflects their lack of interest in such an endeavour. The nature of the production of images by the artist is not here interrogated, being assumed to be that of reproducing an immutable truth that is already present within the subject matter. The look that is foregrounded in this collection is that of the aesthete: the critic rather than the artist. In the following two sections, I shall examine that look more closely, asking in what ways this predominantly aesthetic look intersects with or is affected by an erotic look. I shall first examine the production in *Sight and Song* of a critical look at the female body, and secondly, the production of a look at the male body, asking, in each case, how such a look can be seen as productive of or entangled with the production of either homoerotic or heteroerotic identity.

### **3. The female body and the look**

As I suggested in the previous section, many recent analysts of *Sight and Song* have maintained that the collection contains on the one hand a critique of the masculine voyeuristic look at the female body, and on the other an alternative non-voyeuristic female or lesbian erotic look. I have already argued that the collection's aspiration to remove itself and the art-works that it describes from a social and historical context makes it difficult to read the poetry as a mechanism for social critique. In the current section, I look at two further assumptions that underpin the suggestion that *Sight and Song* is critical of the masculine voyeur: first, that the poems of the collection describe and denounce a reprehensible male-female imbalance of power in heteroerotic relations; and secondly, that voyeurism in relation to the female body is critically or differently represented here.

I begin by examining the several different models of male-female relationship that are presented in the poems of *Sight and Song*, asking how male power is presented and evaluated within these relationships. I then look at the representation within these poems of the male voyeuristic look, again considering how that look is used and evaluated. Finally I examine the look that is implied in the poems between the poets and the paintings, asking how far this look can be read as a separable, non-voyeuristic 'lesbian' look, in some way different from or outside the masculine 'economy of vision'. [419]

In analysing the representation of power in male-female relations in *Sight and Song*, I begin by looking at those poems which directly contrast heteroerotic relationship with homoerotic. Within *Long Ago*, the question of erotic relations centrally revolved around the relationship between the heteroerotic and the homoerotic, mutually defined by the association of homoeroticism with a suspended moment of youth and the association of heteroeroticism with the ravages of time and experience. In *Sight and Song*, female-female eroticism is rarely represented, so that the predominantly heteroerotic relationships depicted exist on the whole independently. There are, however, two poems in the collection, both based on Botticelli's 'Primavera', which construct a heteroerotic-homoerotic relationship familiar from *Long Ago*: that of a sad heteroeroticism that interrupts the innocent timeless world of female-female intimacy, bringing with it the inevitable degeneration of time.

'Spring', probably written by Cooper, is the longer poem, beginning 'Venus is sad among the wanton powers', and following with a wealth of Morellian description in rhyming couplets. [420] The first stanza is dedicated to the 'wanton' figures on the right of the painting, placing them in a clearly heteroerotic context of future 'reckless' passion, in which Zephyr is about to 'seize' a 'wind-inspired and mad' Eos, while Flora, with her dress 'riggishly [. . .] whipped / By little gusts fantastic', contemplates whether 'To toss her double-roses, or refrain'.

The second stanza opens with a description of the three 'maidens' dancing to the left of Venus. At the end of this stanza, the three figures are named as figures of homoerotic innocence – 'the Graces in their virgin youth' – and this identification is followed by two questions that both introduce a sense of time into the painting, and return us to an interrogation of the meaning of Venus' sad countenance:

And does it touch their Deity with ruth  
That they must fade when Eros speeds his dart?  
Is this the grief and forethought of her heart? [421]

The answer, as in the poems of *Long Ago*, is that love brings sorrow into the perfect world of virginal innocence, as a heteroerotic love interrupts a perfect but 'cold' homoerotic and 'unspent' youth:

Love,  
Blind and tyrannous above,  
Shoots his childish flame to mar  
Those without defect, who are  
Yet unspent and cold with peace. [422]

As in the poems of *Long Ago*, the introduction of love and time into the idyll is also the first step on a path that leads inexorably to degeneration and death. As Hermes plucks the orange, he

reveals himself as a messenger from the underworld – ‘the guide of ghosts / To the dead, Plutonian coasts’ – and the poem ends with the inevitable wistful cry of ‘Alas’, as Venus, ignoring the ‘play’ of ‘Youth and April’ looks beyond the painting and ‘Beholds the mead with all the dancers gone’.

‘The Figure of Venus in “Spring”’ probably Bradley’s composition, follows, more simply, a very similar trajectory. Opening again with a reference to Venus’ sadness – ‘A simple lady full of heavy thought’ – several lines of description are followed by a questioning of the impact of love on the virginal maidens, here identified as ‘her girl-votaries’:

Must her coming cause  
Their stately freedom quite to disappear?  
Brings Love in truth a bitterness to blight  
The yet unstricken gladness of the year?[423]

As in Cooper’s poem, the suggestion is that the arrival of a ‘wanton’ heteroerotic love inevitably brings sorrow, and ultimately leads to death:

What boots it therefore that so light of breath  
Comes Flora, from her lapful tossing flowers,  
Come Zephyrus and fleeing nymph, if these  
Are travelling wanton toward the infernal powers?[424]

Although a heteroerotic ‘wanton’ love is here associated with ‘bitterness’, and the virginal homoerotic scene with ‘freedom’ and ‘unstricken gladness’, it would be a mistake to read this as part of a general critique of male-female relations and preference for female-female.[425] Cooper’s characterisation of the Graces as ‘cold’ suggests a negative reading of virginity that is maintained throughout *Sight and Song*, marking a significant difference from the poems of *Long Ago*, in which, as we saw in Chapter 2, virginity is often praised. This negative reading is confirmed by the critical response to Botticelli’s ‘Birth of Venus’ recorded by both Bradley and Cooper in *Works and Days*, a response which is primarily to her presentation as a ‘cold’ virgin:

Not the Greek Venus, joyous and unabashed [. . .] she does not even by amorous bend of the head indicate her knowledge of that lusty sweeping[?] male force on the left.[426]

The ‘wind-inspired woman’ of Mr Berenson is to me somewhat repulsive. The indecency of awkwardness I cannot forgive and the swollen azure apparition of Zephyrus is scarcely less unattractive.[427]

It is clear that for Bradley, a more satisfactory and ‘joyous’ Venus would be responsive to the ‘lust, sweeping male’, while Cooper’s remark about an ‘indecent of awkwardness’, referring to the unrealistic tresses of hair that are forced across the figure to hide the genitals, indicates that she too finds the modest virgin less appealing than an ‘unabashed’ and thoroughly naked Venus in the Greek style. This reading is confirmed in the poem about ‘Birth of Venus’ (probably by Cooper) that appears in *Sight and Song*, in which a ‘chilled’, ‘wan’, ‘tearful’ and ‘reluctant’



Venus is characterised critically in the final line as – ‘Love that hath not loved’.[428]

In these few poems and the surrounding material in *Works and Days*, the experience of heteroerotic relationship is constructed in opposition to an innocent homoeroticism, but in a context in which the perfection and modesty of virginity is seen as ‘cold’ and lacking in ‘joyousness’. Furthermore, if sadness is seen as an inevitable corollary of love, nevertheless love is seen as process, like the seasons, to which humans must inevitably submit.

However, the innocent virginal homoerotic scene has very little part to play in most of the poems of *Sight and Song*, with the focus on erotic relations being more generally concerned with the experience of sensual heteroerotic love. In the previous section we looked closely at the two poems of *Sight and Song* that deal directly with aesthetic production – ‘A Drawing of Roses and Violets’ and ‘A Portrait’. In both poems, I suggested that a central theme was that of a responsive love (or lack of it), and its ability to confer inner meaning on the images produced. This theme of the crucial importance of responsive love can be seen running throughout the heteroerotic poems of *Sight and Song*, dividing the poems into those of ideal fulfilment, always dependent on a female responsive abandonment to love, and those of sadness or frustration, generally involving a ‘cold’ and critically presented female figure, who, like the courtesan of ‘A Portrait’, is unable to abandon herself to passion.[429]

The willing female embrace of an explicitly heteroerotic passion is celebrated in ‘A Pen-drawing of Leda’, based on the Sodoma drawing at Weimar. Here Leda, ‘wild and free’, ‘fondles’ the Swan/Zeus, drawing him down towards her. However, while this caress suggests an active involvement in love, Leda’s subsequent presentation of her body to her lover combines pleasure with a gesture of female submission:

She joys to bend in the live light  
Her glistening body toward her love, how much more bright![430]

Bradley’s regret that Botticelli’s non-‘joyous’ Venus does not ‘bend amorously’ to the ‘lusty’ male is here answered in Sodoma’s drawing, as Leda ‘joys to bend’, towards the swan. Leda’s performance of a responsive self-abandon further involves a self-exposure to the gaze of the viewer, as it draws the divine light of ‘Heaven’s concentrated rays’, onto her ‘glistening body’ and ‘breast’. Leda’s own look is defined as a ‘meek, smitten gaze’, underscoring the submissive element in her acceptance of divine love.[431]

The clearest statement in *Sight and Song* that female self-fulfilment can be achieved through self-abandonment to heteroerotic passion, however, occurs in a poem based on a Tintoretto painting – ‘The Rescue’.[432] The poem proposes an essential opposition between the two enchained female figures seen in the painting. One of them, like Leda, is presented as actively embracing a submissive love in a joyful bending of the body, as, pressing her body against a male rescuer, she ‘Bows to confer / Herself on her deliverer’. Meanwhile her ‘sister-captive’ is described in pursuit of a self-delivered freedom, striking at the fetters on her ankle, ‘eager to dislumber it of chain’.

The poem imagines the future triumphant liberty of the self-released prisoner:

She will not halt,  
But spring delighted to the salt,  
When fetterless her ample form  
Can beat the refluent of the waves back to their crested storm.[433]

However, the poem also makes clear that the freedom pursued by this self-possessed sister is inferior to that claimed by her companion. Her attack on the chains that bind her is seen as motivated by a false perception – ‘as though / It were full liberty ungyved to go’. True freedom, according to this poem, can only be found in submission to love, epitomised by the sister embracing the armoured knight, with the contrast between the two women emphasised by the use of italics:

*Her* bondage irks not; *she* has very truth  
Of freedom who within her lover’s face can seek  
For answer to her eyes, her breath, the blood within her cheek.[434]

The submissive sister, held tightly by her male rescuer as ‘the man’s hand [. . .] grips her undulating waist’ is both vanquished and uplifted by love – ‘half-overcome, half braced’.

Despite the sensuality of the language in ‘The Rescue’, with its references to the woman’s ‘white’ and ‘dazzling’ naked body glowing against the man’s ‘dark armour’, the ideal love presented here is, like the ideal heteroerotic love we saw in both *Works and Days* and *Long Ago*, an explicitly unconsummated passion:

So these pure twain espouse  
And without ravishment, mistrust or vows  
Of constancy fulfil their youth.[435]

The submissive female is able to give herself fearlessly and un-self-consciously – ‘She has forgot her shining nakedness’ – precisely because there is here a ‘pure’ and passionate desire without the threat of ‘ravishment’.

There are several poems within *Sight and Song* that present, by contrast, consummated sensual heteroerotic relationships, but in many of these the female figures are critically presented, as, unlike the submissive sister of ‘The Rescue’, they refuse to abandon themselves to love. Like the courtesan of ‘A Portrait’, these female characters, deliberately using the power of sexual attraction to gain ascendancy over men, imply a balance of power between male and female in heteroerotic sexual relationship which is far from patriarchal, while the speaker of these poems directly blames the female partner for that sadness and association with death that in the poems on Botticelli’s ‘Primavera’ was seen as an inevitable consequence of an engagement with heteroerotic love.

‘La Gioconda’, for example, with its Paterian presentation of the Mona Lisa as a femme fatale, describes her as a cruel predator, who has paused for the portrait with her hand ‘in its rest / Of cruelty that waits and doth not seek for prey’.[436] The ‘evanescent’ brightness of the landscape is seen here as a mirage, ‘suppressive’ of the truth – ‘those vicissitudes by which men die’ – mortality here appearing as the end product of a process in which men are hunted and consumed by a cruel woman.

A third Botticelli Venus, that within his portrait of ‘Venus and Mars’ in the National Gallery, is also presented as a cold but experienced femme fatale, exercising the powers of sexual attraction without herself being moved by passion.[437] The post-coital body of Mars ‘who fell from her caress, when love had had its sway’, is seen as vanquished and exposed, lying in ‘perfect death’, an object of ridicule to the satyrs that play around him. Meanwhile Venus is recognisable as that figure who, in Bradley’s account of ‘The Birth of Venus’, refused to ‘bend amorously’,

having here a dominant and upright posture – ‘she rears from off the ground [. . .] triumphant as a stem / That hath received the rains’. This poised and self-controlled figure is characterised as a ‘cold enchantress’ who, ‘ironical [. . .] sees / without regret, the work her kiss has done’. Again, female ‘cold’ness makes possible a female power over men that is presented without sympathy by Bradley and Cooper’s masculine poet-aesthete.

The two Watteau poems at the centre and end of the collection also contain a ‘cold’ and ‘ironical’ Venus, here petrified into an unfeeling statue who presides over a series of unsatisfactory heteroerotic exchanges, in which, once again, a female inability to abandon the self to passion is presented critically. In the central poem, ‘A Fête Champêtre’, a group of young people, Bradley and Cooper suggest, are engaged in an empty and temporary loveless erotic play, a ‘facile merriment’ with the ‘coldness of mere pleasure’, which only a single male observer, a ‘gallant’, is able to truly perceive.[438]

Meanwhile the final poem, ‘L’Embarquement pour Cythere’ has as its central theme the reluctance of its heavily-clothed female protagonists to make the journey back to the ancient dream-island of simple pleasure. Here, a dialogue is produced in which both male and female are engaged together in those sexual equivocations, stratagems, and threats appropriate to a sophisticated, post-Renaissance age:

‘Forth to the fairy water, come; thine hand . . .  
Nay then, by force; it is a god’s command  
And I by rape will bring thee to thy bliss.’  
‘What, sweet, so slow!’ – ‘But ere I leave the land  
Give me more vows; oh, bind thee to me fast;  
Speak, speak! I do not crave thy kiss.  
To-morrow . . .’ – ‘Love, the tide is rising swift;  
Shall we not talk aboard? Your skirts are wet;  
If once I lift  
You in!’[439]

While the male voices here exert undeniable pressure on their female companions, to the point of threatened rape, it is the females who are at the centre of the poem’s criticism of modern love. The male ‘gallants’, as ‘virile votaries’ of Venus, ‘leap to give her praise’ and ‘joy as they were mad’, but their female counterparts are by contrast characterised as ‘uncertain lovers, / That parley and grow pale’, a fearful group who are dominated by ‘terror’ and ‘strange distaste’, and exhibit ‘no joy’. A single exceptional female ‘who chooses / The voyage as a queen, / Conscious of what she wins and what she loses’ is contrasted with the pusillanimous female majority, and the reader is left in no doubt of the sympathies of the poet-observer:

Ah me, how long must these fond gallants blind  
The fears and waive the light distresses  
Of the coy girls who stay behind![440]

We have seen here several models of heteroerotic relationship: that of the heteroerotic as the inevitable incursion of time into timeless virginal innocence; that of the submissive female finding freedom in abandoning herself to the male; that of the cold female wielding power over the male through control of sexual relations; and that of the reluctant female unable to access the simple pleasures of sensuality. None of these suggest a fundamental critique of the male role in

heteroerotic relationships. On the contrary, the strength of the male and submission of the female is celebrated, and where criticism of the relationship is suggested, it is always of the female partner who is seen to wield too much power in her refusal to abandon herself to passion.

Not only is there no general critique within *Sight and Song* of male power in male-female erotic relations, but the male voyeuristic look at the female body is always represented sympathetically and is replicated in Bradley and Cooper's own presentation of the female body. Two poems in the collection directly represent the male look at the naked female body. In the first of these poems, 'The Death of Procris', whose opening two stanzas present in unemotional tone the dead body of Procris piece by piece, the description begins and ends with an enactment of her unveiling:

Her scarlet cloak, her veil have both slipped down  
And rest  
Across her loins [. . .].

[. . .]

And thus she lies half-veiled, half-bare,  
Deep in the midst of nature [. . .].[441]

The voyeuristic exposure of the naked female body is thus performed by Bradley and Cooper within the poem. Meanwhile the look of the male observer at the unveiled body is represented in the poem by 'the gaze / Of the wild man' who fingers her body – 'his left hand grips / Her shoulder and the right along / Her forehead moves'. In this poem, the male viewer, with his 'expression of amaze / And deep, / Respectful yearning', and his 'coarse pity' is represented sympathetically, while 'foolish Procris' is seen as agent of her own destruction, transforming herself into a 'prostrate, human mass', a symbol of 'perished jealousy and woe'. Indeed the terms in which the poem describes the gaze of the male 'faun' and his dog – 'these two watchers pass / Out of themselves' as they 'sit and gaze' at the dead figure 'by mortal grief unstirred' – are reminiscent of the look of the poet-aesthetes described in the preface to the collection, who with their restrained but 'intimate' gaze are also able to 'pass / Out of themselves' as they relinquish their everyday identity to 'transport' themselves into the centre of the painting.

A kinder presentation of the female body exposed to a male observer occurs in 'Antiope', based on Correggio's painting in the Louvre.[442] Here a somnolent and fulfilled Antiope whose 'white arm with sweep / Of languor falls around her head' is seen, lying with a Cupid who 'sprawls satisfied' beside her. Her body is offered to the viewer 'uplifted to the burning air / And with repletion fallen apart', while the 'objective' listing of the body parts visible ('the form is bare') again allows our gaze to scan the naked figure:

Her white throat globes,  
Thrown backward, and her breasts sink down  
With the supineness of her sleep,

Leaf-fringed and deep'.[443]

As with 'The Death of Procris', our look at the naked female body is represented in the poem by that of a male viewer, Zeus, who, 'As satyr keeps / His watch above the woman's brows'. Zeus, both man and god, with 'rough pelt and body strong', but with a 'head and piercing eyes' that 'must in truth belong / To some Olympian in disguise' is presented here as the agent of Antiope's unveiling as he 'backwards sweeps / Her cloak to flood her with the noon'. The scene is the reverse of that described in 'Venus and Mars', as the exposed female figure is here shown 'conquered', and, like Mars, 'almost dead / Asleep', while the male figure of Zeus remains, like Venus, awake. However, unlike Venus, the wakeful Zeus is not here criticised as 'cold'. Instead, the poem provides a direct licence for Zeus' unveiling of Antiope and voyeuristic look as it suggests that although his interest in her body is sensual – 'curious and fond' – yet he is 'by a clear / Joy in the boon / Of beauty franchised' to uncover her nakedness. The divine appreciation of beauty, and ability to experience pure pleasure as 'clear / Joy' permits both the look and the exposure of the female body.[444]

In these two poems, we see how Bradley and Cooper not only present a sympathetic account of the male look at the female body, but also appear to replicate that look in their own presentation of the female figure, awarding themselves, like Zeus, a 'franchise' both to look at and to unveil for the reader the naked female body found within Renaissance painting. This adoption of a male voyeuristic position can be related to the adoption we noted in the preface of a 'masculine' gaze at the painting. The combination, within *Sight and Song*, of on the one hand an aesthetics of Paterian withholding and restraint, and on the other of a Morellian obligation to convey accurately the detail of the painting, permits and even sanctions, as Saville suggests, this focus on the naked body.[445]

Such a look is also dependent on the sense of 'purity' and 'refinement' that is a crucial part of the construction of the elevated poet-aesthete of *Sight and Song*. Pater had suggested in regard to Winckelmann that due to his 'indifference' or 'serenity' he 'fingers those pagan marbles with unsinged hands, with no sense of shame or loss'.[446] Within *Sight and Song* and the surrounding material in *Works and Days*, the absolute division between the vulgar everyday and the refined perception of art creates an emphasis, first on a kind of shameless purity of nakedness, and then on an obligation to 'finger the marbles' in that 'tracing' of the ideal line of the body that we saw promoted in the poem on Leonardo da Vinci.

The presentation of nakedness thus becomes proof of the purity and refinement of the gaze of the poet-observer. It is this that underpins Cooper's characterisation in *Works and Days* of Botticelli's covering of Venus' nakedness with her hair as an 'indecent of awkwardness'. In her preparatory description of 'The Rescue', she conveys a similar distaste for the partially nude body:

She forgets all the shining truth of her nakedness [. . .] she gives herself the moment she is free [. . .]. The women's bodies are superbly lighted, superbly drawn; the meaningless chain across the descending woman's loins, that could not stay where it is lifted, is a compromising error in art and taste.[447]

Nakedness is here seen as an emblem of 'shining truth' that will be evident to the refined viewer,

while its artificial disguise is understood as a lapse into vulgarity, whether this is the ‘indecenty’ of Botticelli, or the ‘compromising error in [. . .] taste’ of Tintoretto.

It is therefore imperative that in the poems of *Sight and Song*, Bradley and Cooper maintain their steady gaze in looking at the female body, in order the more clearly to emphasise their acquisition of an elevated and ‘masculine’ critical identity. This is nowhere more evident than in their presentation of Giorgione’s ‘Sleeping Venus’, the archetypal female nude.[448] This is a poem which has attracted much attention from feminist critics, being read either as a celebration of lesbian sexuality or as a direct challenge to the masculine exploitative voyeuristic look. Such readings focus, typically, on Bradley and Cooper’s status as female observers of the female body; on the presence of female homoerotic elements within the poem; or on the production of Venus as a figure shamelessly unconscious of the viewer. My own reading concentrates instead on the male context within which Bradley and Cooper’s poem is set, and on their own perception of the refined masculine gaze that we have seen informing the presentation of the female body elsewhere in the collection. Using this ‘masculine’ gaze, I argue, they present Giorgione’s Venus as a figure who is both homoerotic and offered up for the pleasure of the male viewer.

The painting was much admired by the two poets, who visited it a number of times and wrote extensive commentary on it in *Works and Days*. Both poem and journal entries present the painting as a scene of ideal sympathy between Venus and a landscape identified as female, producing an idyllic female-female space of sexual maturity that is very different from the virginal homoerotic space of Sappho’s maidens that they had produced in *Long Ago*. Venus is here explicitly presented in contrast to the virginal Venus of Botticelli, with the opening stanza suggesting, as Erik Gray remarks, an aesthetic prehistory in which she has journeyed from his painting of ‘The Birth of Venus’ – ‘She has left her archèd shell / Has left the barren wave that foams’.[449] The formulation suggests how crucial Venus’ current non-virginity or ‘barrenness’ is to this image.

Giorgione’s Venus, like Antiope lying asleep in satisfied self-abandon in natural surroundings, provides the perfect opportunity for Bradley and Cooper both to dwell at length on the idyllic Renaissance landscape and to emphasise the centrality of responsive love to their conception of an ideal world, in a setting which, unlike that of the Antiope poem, is marked as a female-female idyll. The poem literally proposes a golden age of sympathy between woman and nature, in which Venus’ ‘olive gold’ skin and hair ‘in colour like to old copper’ match the Italian Renaissance landscape with its ‘glow that steeps / its grain of richer depth’, as she offers up her body to the ‘desirous’ female environment that it resembles:

Circular as lovely knolls  
Up to which a landscape rolls  
With desirous sway, each breast  
Rises from the level chest,  
One in contour, one in round –  
Either exquisite, low mound  
Firm in shape and given  
To the August warmth of heaven.[450]

The insistent account of the detail of Venus’ naked body and comparison with the surrounding landscape is maintained throughout the seven central stanzas of the poem, languorously tracing the line of the body, crossing and re-crossing from head to foot, as ‘From the

elbow raised aloft / Down to the crossing knees a line descends / Unimpeachable and soft' then 'From hip to herbage-cushioned foot the line / Of her left leg stretching shows / Against the turf direct and fine', finally culminating in the slope of the left arm, 'beside / The plastic body's lower heaves', which it follows down to the hand:

Her hand the thigh's tense surface leaves,  
Falling inward. Not even sleep  
Dare invalidate the deep,  
Universal pleasure sex  
Must unto itself annex –  
Even the stillest sleep; at peace,  
More profound with rest's increase,  
She enjoys the good  
Of delicious womanhood.[451]

The Morellian line drawn by Bradley and Cooper here halts at the point at which the hand covers the genitals, and, licensed by the purity of the aesthetic gaze, continues 'inward' to refer to the 'sex', hidden in the picture, as source of a 'universal pleasure' that is the essential meaning of femininity – 'the good / of delicious womanhood'.

The poet-aesthete, like the 'Leonardo' of 'A Drawing of Roses and Violets', is here able to find a deeper truth in 'tracing' the 'secret lips' of the ideal female figure. The ability to draw this line rests both on that 'refined' and 'pure' gaze of the critic that we have discussed in relation to previous poems, and on a perceived 'purity' within the figure of Venus. The poem insists that despite her non-virginity, Venus is:

Pure as are the things that man  
Needs for life and using can  
Never violate nor spot.[452]

Just as this innocent yet sensual purity allowed the un-self-conscious presentation of the body of the submissive female figure of 'The Rescue' as 'shining nakedness', so it here allows Venus to lie exposed in the open countryside:

Thus she slumbers in no grot,  
But on open ground,  
With the great hill-sides around.[453]

Furthermore, the ideal homoerotic relationship between Venus and the landscape is itself a kind of 'holiness' that frees them from modesty or shame:

For the sex that forms them each  
Is a bond, a holiness,  
That unconsciously must bless  
And unite them, as they lie  
Shameless underneath the sky.

This presentation by two female poets of a 'shameless' and sympathetic female homoeroticism has encouraged many critics to describe this as a poem of lesbian celebration. Several commentators have also argued that a direct rejection of the male gaze is implied both by the connection made between Venus' hand and the pleasure of her sex, suggesting 'auto-erotic pleasure', and by the reference to her eyes – 'closed although they might be flowers' – and lips that 'shut in / Gracious secrets'.<sup>[454]</sup> However, Bradley and Cooper's poem, explicitly homoerotic though it is, cannot be divorced either from male culture or from the male voyeuristic gaze. The female-female idyll of Venus and Earth, like the homoerotic idyll of Lesbos, already has a long history within male culture, as Cooper herself acknowledges in *Works and Days* when, in talking about the painting, she refers to 'that ideal sympathy between woman and the land which the nations have divined when they made their countries feminine'.<sup>[455]</sup>

Furthermore, *Sight and Song*, like *Long Ago*, while produced by two women, cannot be seen as primarily addressed to a female or a lesbian audience or as arising directly from Bradley and Cooper's female-female relationship, independently of their relationship with men. We noted earlier the influence of Pater and Morelli on these poems, and the direct intervention of Berenson, who not only suggested which paintings should be viewed by the two women, but also instructed them minutely about how they should be viewed. Bradley and Cooper's first viewing of Giorgione's *Venus* was in photographic form at Berenson's apartment in London, reported by Bradley in *Works and Days*:

But oh - that Venus of Giorgione's, ([insert in Cooper's hand] of wh. he showed us the photograph) the long undulating body repeated in the curves and fluctuations of the landscape.<sup>[456]</sup>

This contextualisation of their viewing of the picture, in which Cooper literally places Berenson within the frame as subject – 'of which he showed us the photograph' – as she places herself as interrupting author into Bradley's text, makes it only too clear that what we have here is neither an independent female-female homoerotic landscape, nor an 'autonomy of vision' that can escape from a 'hierarchical model of desire'.<sup>[457]</sup> Giorgione's 'auto-erotic' Venus is here intimately tied into both the male-female pedagogic relationship and the complex erotic games that are played out between Bradley, Cooper and Berenson, who, Bradley records later in the passage, expresses, in terms reminiscent of the Michael Field account of 'The Sleeping Venus', a desire to 'give himself up to entire self abandonment', suggesting his own potential entry into the Giorgione picture.

The voluptuous Venus of Bradley and Cooper's poem, despite its setting of female homoeroticism, is presented as much for the pleasure of the male viewer as the female. When Bradley and Cooper hint at the Giorgione Venus' 'Gracious secrets', or when Cooper comments in her *Works and Days* notes on the Venus that 'no-one watches her', they are producing a device, like the 'little cave' that in *Long Ago* was 'secluded from men's view', which intensifies rather than undermines the voyeuristic element inherent in the representation of a naked female body.<sup>[458]</sup> As I suggested in Chapter 2, such a voyeuristic presentation, which in modern feminist terms should not be part of a lesbian ideal, presents no problem for Bradley and Cooper, who admire the fact that Berenson's 'ideal of happiness is seeing, seeing, seeing'.<sup>[459]</sup> Not only are they uncritical of Berenson's wish to teach them his own 'male' method of viewing paintings, but they actively seek out, and eventually pay him, for such instruction, expressing only the fear that his desire to be 'making others see', so far restricted to an elite few, including Bradley and



Cooper, will be extended too far – ‘This will be good – if he does not popularise’.[460]

Bradley and Cooper’s presentation of the female body in the poems of *Sight and Song* is a critique neither of male power within heteroerotic relationships nor of male modes of looking. The tendency of the collection is to suggest that imperfections within heteroerotic relationship are the fault of those females who refuse to abandon themselves to love, while the voyeuristic look of the male at the naked female body is given approval both within the collection and in the surrounding material of letters and *Works and Days*. It is also difficult here to distinguish a specifically ‘lesbian’ desire in the sensual descriptions of the female body produced in the collection. The entire project depends upon the adoption of a gaze that is perceived as ‘masculine’, and many of the descriptions also depend on a heteroerotic context. The complex mix of homoerotic and heteroerotic elements evident in the production of ‘The Sleeping Venus’, with its dependence on and exploitation of the place of the female-female idyll within a male culture, arise not from a radical project of critique of male authority and vision, but from the desire to acquire such authority and extend it. Such an enterprise confounds the assumption of a necessary link between physical gender and its literary performance, but does not undermine the basic premises of male-female visual relationship.

#### **4. The male body and the look**

The presence of large numbers of poems within *Sight and Song* focused on a female figure, and the emphasis, in a number of these poems, on the female body on display is unsurprising in any collection that bases itself on Renaissance painting, in which such female figures are numerous. However, *Sight and Song* also contains a significant proportion of representations of men – in the thirty-one poems of the collection, there are twenty-eight significant male figures, compared with thirty-nine significant females – and of these male figures, there are several in which the emphasis, again, is on a body on display. The following section questions how far, if Bradley and Cooper’s ‘masculine’ look at the female body can be seen to reproduce a male voyeurism, their similarly ‘masculine’ look at these male bodies can be understood to interact with male homoerotic representation.

There are a number of different male ‘types’ that can be discerned in *Sight and Song*, some of which occur in several poems: the mature and hairy, animal-like or divine ‘wild man’ that we have already seen in poems such as ‘The Death of Procris’, ‘Venus and Mars’ or ‘A Pen Drawing of Leda’; the adolescent boy in a state of suspended innocence in poems such as ‘L’Indifferent’ or ‘The Shepherd Boy’; and in three poems – ‘Corregio’s Saint Sebastian’, ‘A ‘Sant’ Imagine’, by Fiorenzo di Lorenzo’ and ‘Antonella da Messina’s Saint Sebastian’ – the male as martyr.[461] It is in these latter poems of martyrdom that we find the male body on display, in the form of the beautiful and exposed body of Saint Sebastian.

Images of the suffering yet desirable body of Saint Sebastian had been used since the Renaissance as an opportunity for painting an almost-naked, beautiful young male body. In the twentieth century this figure would become a ‘gay icon’, the story of his suffering a metaphor for a socially-stigmatised homosexual desire, so that, as Richard Kaye suggests, he eventually emerged as ‘the very distillation in art of an emotionally and politically fraught homosexual persona’.[462] However, this overt identification of Saint Sebastian with the male homosexual was the culmination of a process which in the 1890s was not yet complete, though its

entanglement is evident, not only in Wilde's openly sensual admiration for Guido Reni's painting of Sebastian, as 'a lovely brown boy, with crisp, clustering hair and red lips', locked in a 'divine, impassioned gaze', but also in the connection made by Symonds between the potentially troubling 'hermaphroditic' nature of Renaissance painting, mixing pagan sensuousness with Christian spirituality, and a Bartolommeo Sebastian which had to be removed from the church of S. Marco because 'the beautiful body of the young man distracted attention from his spiritual virtues to his physical perfections'. [463]

Both Wilde and Symonds connect Sebastian to the question of the look, whether this is Sebastian's own 'divine impassioned gaze' or the inappropriately erotic look of the viewer at the disturbingly 'hermaphroditic' physically beautiful and yet spiritual figure. In all three of the Sebastian poems produced by Bradley and Cooper in *Sight and Song*, the look both given by and at Sebastian is also central, with the question of the relationship between the observer and the painting here subjected to much more intense scrutiny than in the poems describing the female body.

The first poem is addressed directly to the Sebastian of the Correggio, and begins with the description of Sebastian's own gaze, which, like that of Wilde's Reni Sebastian, is both divine and passionate:

Bound by thy hands, but with respect unto thine eyes how free -  
Fixed on Madonna, seeing all that they were born to see!  
The Child thine upward face hath sighted,  
Still and delighted;  
Oh, bliss when with mute rites two souls are plighted! [464]

From the opening phrase – 'Bound by thy hands' – attention is immediately drawn to the context of captivity and enforced passivity which delivers Sebastian's body up as object of the look in countless Renaissance portraits. However, moving across Sebastian's body from hands to eyes, Bradley and Cooper move the focus of the poem from the look of the spectator of the picture at Sebastian's body, to a look cast by Sebastian himself, directed first at the female Madonna, and then at the male Christ.

Because Sebastian gives this look willingly, he is identified as 'free', but this willing freedom delivers him immediately to a different kind of captivity: it is 'free – / Fixed', as Sebastian is held by the reciprocal look of Madonna/Christ. As object and subject of this look, Sebastian is suspended here in a series of passive/active oppositions: in relation to his body he is both 'bound' and 'free', in relation to the exchange of a look he is both 'sighted' and 'seeing', and in relation to his pleasure both 'still' and 'delighted'. The stanza ends by defining the reciprocal look in erotic terms, indicating a silent betrothal between Sebastian and Christ – 'Oh, bliss when with mute rites two souls are plighted!'

We saw in the previous section how several female figures in the collection are seen to achieve freedom through submission to love, and how this submission is registered in the look at the lover, whether it is Leda, 'wild and free', with her 'meek, smitten gaze', or the submissive female of 'The Rescue' who 'has very truth / Of freedom who within her lover's face can seek / For answer to her eyes'. Here Sebastian, as a male obtaining freedom through the look at a lover, becomes caught up not only in a series of captive/free oppositions similar to those presented in 'The Rescue', but also in an ambiguous state of active/passive modulation. This is continued into the second stanza, in which Sebastian's body, compared to aspen leaves, is held 'tight' to the stem

of a tree, but still made to tremble, or 'rejoice' in the divine look.

The captive/free paradox is also continued in this second stanza, as Sebastian's captivity makes him dangerously available: he has 'the peril of a captive's chances', but in response to this he finds a freedom in which his spirit becomes like an active pleasure-seeking body – 'Thy spirit dances'. In the final line of the stanza, the Madonna/Christ's look is again eroticised in a form which makes the erotic look the instrument of captivity, this time operating through play, as Sebastian is 'Caught in the play of Heaven's divine advances'. The poem here mingles the physical and the spiritual, as Symonds suggested was the disturbing and 'distracting' characteristic of Renaissance art in general, and of the figure of Sebastian in particular, hinting at the erotic possibilities of the religious exchange.

In these first two stanzas, the poem focuses directly on the reciprocal look between Sebastian and the Madonna/Christ. In the third stanza, the attention shifts from this specific look to a more general look:

While cherubs straggle on the clouds of luminous, curled fire,  
The Babe looks through them, far below, on thee with soft desire.  
Most clear of bond must they be reckoned -  
No joy is second  
To theirs whose eyes by other eyes are beckoned.[465]

As the look of 'soft desire' directed at Sebastian by the 'Babe' frees both participants from 'bond', it makes possible a generalised celebration of the pleasure of the erotic gaze – 'No joy is second / To theirs whose eyes by other eyes are beckoned'. The third-person plural which Bradley and Cooper make use of in this stanza both avoids specifying the gender of either of the anonymous pair, and unites them in their experience of the look of 'soft desire' as an active/passive movement of beckoning/ being beckoned.

The movement in this penultimate stanza from the specific gaze between Sebastian and a lover who is now defined solely as Christ, to the general gaze of 'theirs, whose eyes by other eyes are beckoned', opens up for the final stanza a space into which the speaker and their lover can insert themselves:

Oh might my eyes, so without measure,  
Feed on their treasure,  
The world with thong and dart might do its pleasure!

A transformation has been quietly effected in which the 'their' eyes referred to in the third stanza have become 'my' eyes, and the 'other' eyes have become 'their treasure'. The speaker willingly ('O might my eyes'), assumes the place of an exposed male body, pierced by the 'thong and dart' of that 'world' against which much Michael Field poetry is written. But in assuming this vulnerable position, the speaker also paradoxically gains the ability to satisfy his/her own desire, as 'my' eyes 'Feed on their treasure'. In a space opened up by the world's 'pleasure' in inflicting pain, the speaker is able to nourish their own 'joy'.

In the preface to *Sight and Song*, we saw how Bradley and Cooper proposed the adoption, firstly of a 'patient' and restrained 'objective' gaze, and secondly of a movement into the artworks that would transform Flaubert's prescription that the author carry themselves into the 'personnages' of their novels into a requirement that the poet-observers carry themselves into the

'peintures' they contemplate. In relation to the female figures presented in *Sight and Song*, Bradley and Cooper frequently carry out the first requirement, holding themselves aloof, in the position of the masculine restrained observer, as they expose the female body for the pleasure of the reader/viewer, and in the process demonstrate the 'purity' of their own 'refined' gaze. Here, on other hand, in a poem about a male figure whose closeness to the speaker is emphasised by the use of the second person pronoun in each stanza ('thy hands [. . .] thine eyes [. . .] thou hast [. . .] on thee [. . .] thy tenacious face'), we see them clearly following the second proposal. The gazer at the Correggio painting 'transports' him/ herself both into the '*peinture*', the space of the erotic look which Bradley and Cooper identify within the painting, and through that process into the '*personnage*', the character of Saint Sebastian. Pater's formulation – 'What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book, to *me*?' – is turned around in Bradley and Cooper's final stanza – 'What *me* is possible within this song or picture, this engaging personality?', as the poets suggest a potential self-creation as the ideal male homoerotic couple of Sebastian and Christ.[466]

Bradley and Cooper's poem shows Sebastian captive in a place defined by the violence of a hostile world. He is vulnerable in his visibility – 'held tight' in 'the current of the light'; trapped as both subject and object of an erotic look – 'caught in the play of Heaven's divine advances'; trembling between passivity and activity; suffering bondage and pain for the sake of other's pleasure; physically attacked by 'the world', but in spite of this able to experience 'joy'. These characteristics: self definition against public hostility; anxiety about public visibility; confusion between erotic subject and object positions; passivity in pleasure; association between pain and joy; are all characteristics that in the late nineteenth century were in the process of becoming identified with the emerging figure of the male homosexual. Bradley and Cooper's use here of Sebastian as a potential figure for self-definition thus entangles their own construction of identity closely with that of the male homosexual.

The second Saint Sebastian poem in *Sight and Song*, based on a painting by Fiorenzo di Lorenzo, picks up on several of the same themes as the Correggio Sebastian poem, again focusing on the nature of the look given by and at Sebastian; again producing him as a figure existing in relation to an unsympathetic 'world'; and again suggesting a potential alignment of his identity and that of the poet-aesthete. However, there are also several differences between this figure and that of the Correggio Sebastian, reminding us, as Kaye suggests, how many different roles Sebastian was able to play in the late nineteenth century.[467]

In the Correggio poem, the gaze of the speaker as poet-aesthete, or poet-observer, was fixed on the look between Sebastian and Christ, and the many other figures in Correggio's painting were ignored. In the Lorenzo poem, the gaze of the poet-aesthete ranges over the whole breadth of the canvas, in a five stanza structure whose opening and closing stanzas provide a commentary on the overall form and aesthetic qualities of the painting, while the three central stanzas are each dedicated to one of the three central figures in the painting – Madonna, and the two martyrs, St Christopher and St Sebastian. This change in structure and focus reflects a difference in relation to the look within the painting – instead of the single, arresting 'divine gaze' that the Correggio poem fixed on, there are here a series of unsatisfied and unsatisfactory looks between three isolated figures.

St. Christopher turns to look at the Christ-child 'astride his shoulder', but this look has neither the power nor the pleasure of the reciprocal divine gaze described in the Correggio poem – 'Vainly he turns; within the child's eyes is no clue'. [468] Similarly the Madonna, who often figures in Renaissance art as an intermediary between suffering humanity and God, is here

portrayed as offering ‘no comfort’, because of her refusal to look at either the saints or the infant Christ. Although she potentially has the two martyrs ‘full in view’, her look is fixed on a book rather than humanity – ‘wherefore doth Madonna thus look down / So wistful toward the book upon her knees?’

In relation to Sebastian, the absence of the divine gaze is even more heavily marked, as he is introduced as the would-be object of the Madonna’s refusal of a look:

She bows and sheds no comfort on the boy,  
Whose face turns on her full of bleeding tears,  
    Sebastian, with the arrows’ thrill  
    Intolerable to him still,  
Full of an agony that has no measure,  
That cannot rise, grow to the height and wane,  
    Being simple pain  
That to his nature is as bound  
As anguish to the viol’s sound:  
He suffers as the sensitive enjoy;  
    And, as their pleasure,  
His pain is hid from common eyes and ears.  
Wide-gaping as for air, breathing no moan,  
His delicate, exhausted lips are open thrown.[469]

Sebastian, like Christopher, has turned his face ‘full of bleeding tears’ in expectation of a sympathetic look, but the Madonna’s downturned eyes mean that she cannot take on her traditional role of providing ‘comfort’.[470] This Sebastian, unlike the Correggio Sebastian, is denied the ‘bliss’ of a reciprocal gaze.

The two poems also differently present both Sebastian’s suffering and his bondage. The Correggio Sebastian, caught in the gaze of the infant Christ, follows the dominant myth in which Sebastian is miraculously unhurt by the arrows – they ‘have no power to hurt’. The Lorenzo poem departs from that tradition by attributing to Sebastian, in response to ‘the arrow’s thrill’, a suffering of maximum intensity – ‘an agony that has no measure’. The Correggio Sebastian finds an enviable ‘joy’ in the ‘thong and dart’ flung at him by the world’s ‘pleasure’, while the suffering Lorenzo Sebastian is in a state of frustration ‘that cannot rise, grow to the height and wane’. Though this suffering is intimately linked to erotic pleasure by the ambiguity of the word ‘thrill’, it is nevertheless a permanently unbearable state – ‘intolerable to him still’.

The bondage of the Correggio Sebastian was crucial both in delivering him up to the divine look and in providing the possibility of emphasising his spiritual freedom. The physical bonds of the Lorenzo Sebastian are unmentioned, but he is characterised instead as having a ‘nature’ that is ‘bound’ both to the ‘simple pain’ of bodily suffering and to a kind of responsive pleasure – ‘He suffers as the sensitive enjoy’. Furthermore, that relationship between pain and pleasure is characterised as fundamental to his nature in a metaphor that also suggests an intimate relationship with aesthetic production – ‘As anguish to the viol’s sound’.

The look of the ‘refined’ gazer at the exposed male body is here explicitly contrasted with the look of the ‘common’, as Sebastian, throwing himself open to the possibility of a look – ‘Wide-gaping as for air [. . .] His delicate, exhausted lips are open thrown’ – is described as ‘hid from common eyes and ears’. The look of the poet-aesthete, appearing in the final stanza as a look

cast on the 'strange figures' of the martyrs by a double subject – 'And now back to the picture's self we come, / Its subtle, glowing spirit' – is thus defined not only against the unrealised look between Sebastian and Madonna, but also against the unrealised look of the 'common eyes' which are unable to recognise either Sebastian's display of suffering or the pleasures of 'the sensitive'.

The opening and closing stanzas of the poem describe in Morellian detail the rich colouring and elaborate patterns in the background of the painting, and connect this to the 'finer senses' that the martyrs are seen to have developed through their suffering. The opening stanza asks 'Why is their story / Set in such splendour?', a question which is answered in the final stanza, where we find that:

[. . .] they must have all things brave  
About them who are born for martyrdom:  
The fine, stern faces  
Refuse so steadily what they despise;  
The world will never mix them with her own -  
They choose the best, and with the best are left alone.

As Sebastian's 'nature' tied him to the 'viol's sound', so the fact that he is 'born for martyrdom' gives him a necessarily privileged relationship to objects of art and beauty – martyrs 'must have all things brave / About them'.<sup>[471]</sup> His sensitivity to beauty, developed from his sensitivity to pain, is what explains the 'subtle, glowing spirit' which infuses the 'picture's self'. Thus, again, Sebastian can be seen offering Bradley and Cooper the potential for aesthetic self-definition, as the 'finer senses' of the martyrs, like the refined gaze of the poet-aesthete, produce in them a cultural superiority to the Philistine 'world' which excludes them, but which they also 'despise'. The consequent ability of the rejected martyr to 'choose the best' turns him, like Bradley and Cooper, into a refined art-connoisseur surrounded by beautiful objects.

Despite the differences between this unsatisfied and suffering Sebastian and the joyful Sebastian of the Correggio, the *Sight and Song* Lorenzo Sebastian has, like the Correggio Sebastian, several characteristics that can be identified with the late-nineteenth-century figure of the male homosexual. Firstly, he has a particular 'nature' which is bound to both pain and pleasure, seen as intimately entwined; secondly, his body is simultaneously publicly displayed and hidden from common eyes, in a movement that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has identified as characteristic of representations of the male homosexual in this period; and finally, in a connection we have already discussed in relation to *Works and Days*, as a 'strange figure' with an unusual sensitivity to art he reflects the complex interweaving in the nineteenth century of the aesthetic with the homoerotic male persona.<sup>[472]</sup> As with the Correggio Sebastian, despite the Lorenzo Sebastian's strong association with the figure of the male homosexual, the poem suggests the possibility for Bradley and Cooper of aesthetic self-definition through association with this figure, who, defining himself, like them, against a vulgar 'world', sympathetically appreciates the beauty accessible to his 'finer senses'.

In this way, in both poems, Bradley and Cooper produce a self-figuring that comes close to identification with the male homosexual. Several critics have suggested that the sympathetic portrayal of Sebastian here and the possibility of identification offered suggest a radical politics of 'queer-feminist strategies' or support for 'alternative martyrdoms'.<sup>[473]</sup> Once again, it seems to me that close reading and connection with the overall context of the aesthetics of the collection

suggests a more conservative adoption of a contemporary male homoerotic discourse which, like the 'masculine' aesthetics of the objective look, can support a self-identity as exceptional and elevated individual.

Despite their differences, in both of these poems Sebastian is constructed as a receptive and sensitive 'type' who can clearly be related to that late nineteenth-century figure of the homosexual male that drew on an aestheticist discourse combining the aesthetic and homoerotic characteristics of a 'feminine' or hermaphroditic responsiveness and passivity. In the third *Sight and Song* Sebastian poem, based on a painting by Antonella da Messina, although we again find a concentration on the twin themes of visibility and of elevation above the 'common', Sebastian is produced instead as an emphatically masculine and active figure, one who resists a reading as receptive and responsive. Nevertheless, I shall argue, this Sebastian can also be seen to relate both to the production of a male homosexual persona and to the production of identity for Bradley and Cooper.

At the opening of this poem, Sebastian is placed in a setting suggestive of homoeroticism: the sky with its 'Hyacinthine hue' obliquely refers to a classical figure who, like Sebastian, can be seen as a cipher in a series of aesthetic/ mythological figures in relation to which the male homosexual self is being built.[474] This 'Hyacinthine hue' bathes Sebastian in an intense brightness, continually referred to throughout the poem, from the second stanza, where 'a wide horizon still extends as bright / As the lapis lazuli', through the third, with its 'distance blue and great', and 'shafts of sandy-coloured tone', to the 'noonday's brilliant air' of the final stanza.[475]

The brilliant Hyacinthine light which falls on the captive body of Sebastian once again makes an interrogation of his visibility central to the poem. As in the Lorenzo poem, the focus is on a body isolated, 'all alone', amongst a group of people who choose not to look – 'idle women lean [. . .] / Each with an indifferent mien', while a 'brutish churl' has replaced the 'common' people who refused to acknowledge the Lorenzo Sebastian. The indifference of a mother, who slips with her child 'between the shafts of sandy coloured tone', again provokes the suggestion of an expected feminine / maternal comfort which is being denied – 'What soul pities him! / Who shall bring relief / From the darts that pierce each limb?'

Sebastian's bondage and nudity are emphasised, as he is presented 'stript and fastened to the tree'. But whereas the Lorenzo poem offered us as cultured viewers a privileged vantage point from which to witness Sebastian's physical exposure, here Sebastian's body, rather than being 'thrown open' to us as in the Lorenzo poem, presents a surface which, while aesthetic, is also hard and resistant – 'Naked, almost firm as sculpture'. Despite the intensity of the Hyacinthine sky, in which 'his face with noonday shines', Sebastian is here not revealed by the light. His body operates instead as a mirror – it is 'as olive marble that reflects the mere / Radiance it receives upon a surface clear', confounding the ability of the observer not only to see Sebastian's selfhood revealed, but also to see their own, as it reflects only the 'mere / Radiance' of the brilliant light.

As in the Correggio poem, Sebastian is here the subject/object of a divine look, but where the Correggio Sebastian willingly allowed himself to be 'caught' by the divine look, in this poem the look is one of defiance of the divine will, which, in the midst of the surrounding brightness provides a dark focal point: 'his eyes have met / God within the darkening sky / And dispute his will, / Dark, remorselessly'. Furthermore, the resistance this Sebastian offers to the gaze of the invisible God is extended to the poet-observer, as the lack of 'blessedness' has 'set' his mouth in a 'pained, protesting curve', a refusal to reveal the vulnerable interiority promised by the 'wide-gaping' lips of the Lorenzo Sebastian.

Finally, as suggested earlier, the passivity of this Sebastian is presented not as a part of his responsive and sensitive ‘nature’, but as an external restriction on an unwilling figure who should naturally be active and is repeatedly marked as masculine – ‘he who was a soldier late’ and is still ‘armed with power’ and ‘sound in muscle’. Central to this masculinity is Sebastian’s sexuality, preserved at the moment in which boy becomes man, a transition here expressed as a self-penetrating pederastic autoerotism – he is ‘the boy / Whom his manhood fills / With an acrid joy, / Whom its violent pressure thrills’. This masculine sexuality is shown under threat ‘this force [. . .] must be lost / And its natural validity be crossed’, as his ‘sex’, here used with its full ambiguity as sexuality, gender or genital organ, is seen metaphorically represented by the broken pillar in the foreground of da Messina’s painting:

At his feet a mighty pillar lies reversed;  
 So the virtue of his sex is shattered, cursed:  
     Here is martyrdom and not  
     In the arrow’s sting  
     This the bitter lot  
     His soul is questioning.[476]

Sebastian’s enforced chastity is a ‘chill, disabling fate’, and this, the poem insists, rather than any attack by arrows, is the bitter ‘martyrdom’ he endures.

In the Correggio Sebastian Bradley and Cooper constructed a captive/free, active/passive figure into whose body the sympathetic observer-poet could be carried. In the Lorenzo poem, they constructed Sebastian as a sensitive aesthete with whom they could identify. The da Messina Sebastian, lacking the receptivity and feminine sensibility of the previous two martyrs, seems with his rigid body surface and sullenly closed lips to positively resist the attempt by Bradley and Cooper to build an identity in relation to his persona. Furthermore, his strongly masculine and active form seems less readable as connected to the figure of the male homosexual. Indeed, Kaye suggests that there is ‘nothing homoerotic’ about the figure produced by Bradley and Cooper in this poem, which, he suggests, ‘morbidly expresses a female fascination with a voluptuous, semi-nude man in a state of divine paralysis’.[477] Yet as Kaye himself suggests, the figure of Sebastian was in the late nineteenth century multiple and complex, and its crossings with male homoeroticism took many forms. I believe that this Sebastian, different as he is from the Correggio and Lorenzo ‘types’, can also be seen as producing a figure connected to that of the nineteenth-century male homosexual. Moreover, while the poem implies a certain resistance of this Sebastian to aesthetic self-identification, contextual material suggests that Cooper at least was able to create him as another figure through whom to define herself as exceptional individual.

Ana Parejo Vadillo has drawn attention to a reference by Cooper to the da Messina Sebastian in *Works and Days*. [478] Following her illness at Dresden, Cooper was unable to carry out her proposed intention to hear several performances of Wagner operas:

Yes, every day on which portions of the Ring were performed all the force left in me seemed to gather in my throat – & the tears burnt worse than fever – This was the Wagner-weh, a vast, imperishable regret that I was losing my chance for many a year, perhaps for ever, of hearing the Operas in their own land. During all my life till then I never knew what a passion of passions disappointment can be. I only got relief when I thought of Antonello da Messina’s Saint Sebastian in the Gallery – his virile, reproachful face reared against the blue heavens – his eyes asking, ‘Why am I denied what I was made for?’ That



picture was constantly with me.[479]

The journal plays with the relation between Cooper's physical fever, which began with a sore throat, and her aesthetic loss, which 'seemed to gather in the throat' while the tears 'burnt worse than fever'. Ironically, the writer experiences 'Wagner-weh', the emotion of 'imperishable regret' that is associated with Wagner's operas, precisely because of her enforced non-attendance at a Wagner opera. This regret for an aesthetic experience associated with regret makes possible identification with the mourned aesthetic object, as Cooper's fever becomes the 'Wagner-weh' that she is missing.

The malady that makes possible a movement of identification with the lost aesthetic object also makes possible an identification with the figure of the da Messina Sebastian, as he is given a speaking gaze – 'his eyes asking', which can express the regret at the heart of Cooper's 'Wagner-weh' – 'Why am I denied what I was made for?' In this process of identification, in which Cooper sees her own 'Wagner-weh' in the figure of Sebastian, she experiences 'relief' from her regret at the loss of the Wagner operas. Just as not seeing Wagner provokes Wagnerian emotions, so seeing Sebastian quells Sebastian-like emotions.[480]

The assertion in *Works and Days* that 'that picture was constantly with me', and the alignment of Cooper's 'disappointment' with Sebastian's 'reproachful face' marks a greater openness of the painting as described in the journal to self-identification than is at first evident in the poem. This identification is made through the perception of Sebastian as a tragic figure, like the figures in the Wagner operas that Cooper has failed to attend. In Chapter 1, we saw how Cooper, in particular, uses *Works and Days* as a vehicle for self-definition as tragic figure. Here she identifies herself simultaneously as Wagnerian hero, unwillingly impotent in the face of a hostile fate; as Wagnerian producer, producing and enacting an aesthetic personality, as she performs her own cry of 'Wagner-weh'; and, finally, as the unwillingly impotent da Messina Sebastian.

This identification with Sebastian occurs at a moment when, once again, his masculinity is emphasized: Sebastian's face in the journal account is not only reproachful; it is also 'virile'. Integral to the da Messina Sebastian's tragic status in Bradley and Cooper's poem, as we saw, is his thwarted masculinity: his 'manhood' is a 'force implanted in him', with a 'natural validity' which should give an ideal balance to his 'body, fresh for use, for pleasure fit / With its energies and needs together knit / In an able exigence'. Just as the 'pleasure' integral to the 'sex' of the Giorgione Venus was a sign of 'the good / Of delicious womanhood', so the fallen pillar of the da Messina Sebastian's 'sex' represents the tragedy of a denial of the fulfilment of the natural 'virtue' of his masculinity.

In the journals, the da Messina Sebastian's masculine 'force' becomes aligned with a force within Cooper – 'all the force left in me', which 'seemed to gather in my throat'. Together these 'forces' become the motor for Cooper's self-expression, as Sebastian and Cooper together respectively embody and articulate the 'Wagner-Weh'. Cooper here simultaneously identifies herself with a prized, though powerless masculinity, and constructs the da Messina Sebastian as Wagnerian tragic hero, a position that fits with his construction in the poem as a male figure constructed in opposition not only to a god, but also to his 'fate' or 'lot', someone who 'Must endure the strife, / Final and intense, / Of necessity with life'. [481] Once again this is a route through which Sebastian can be aligned with late nineteenth-century representations of the male homosexual, as Wagner's hyper-masculine heroes, as Nietzsche suggests, attract an audience of

‘youths – rigid, pale, breathless! These are the Wagnerians: they understand nothing about music – and yet Wagner becomes master over them’.[482]

As masculine visual spectacle, the da Messina Sebastian offers less opportunity for the entrance of the poet-aesthete than the receptive Sebastians of the Correggio and Lorenzo paintings. But as masculine tragic hero, the da Messina Sebastian finally enables Cooper to fully enter the artwork, and, as Wagner himself suggests, to ‘grasp the inner nature of an alien personality’ in the performance of an aesthetic subjectivity which is not only rebellious, but also defiantly ‘virile’.[483] Witnessing the Wagner-weh in Sebastian not only cathartically relieves Cooper of her regret, but allows an identification with him in which she can construct herself as Wagnerian hero – a hyper-masculine but impotent figure perceived as both virile and homoerotic.

In the preface to *Sight and Song*, Bradley and Cooper claim for themselves the identity of poet-aesthete, both creator and observer. This aesthetic personality, they suggest, can realise itself through a trained sensitive receptivity to art which allows them to immerse themselves in the aesthetic object, blending themselves with both the artist and the work of art. This is also a personality that they see as occupying a privileged masculine position, and in creating for themselves this masculine aesthetic personality, Bradley and Cooper entangle their self-construction with the beautiful but masculine figure of Sebastian.

In the poem about the Correggio Sebastian, he becomes the perfect subject/ object of their perception, whose position as both perceptive and receptive allows the writer as both artist (in writing the poem), and observer (in viewing the painting), who is also therefore subject and object, perceiver and receiver, to re-create themselves in the painting in the image of an exposed male body. In the Lorenzo poem they endow Sebastian with a passivity and self exposure which again allows their entry into the aesthetic field as aesthetes – privileged observers and appreciators both of his sensitive ‘nature’, and of his special relationship to objects of art and beauty. In the poem about the da Messina Sebastian, he is presented as a closed figure, a reflective surface with a strongly figured muscular masculinity, one who resists their entry into the aesthetic object. Nevertheless, in the journals he again becomes an element in Cooper’s self-construction as aesthete, as, in a cathartic identification with him as tragic hero, she self-produces as subject and creator of Wagnerian tragedy.

The late nineteenth century was a historical moment in which several strands of writing about male homoerotic desire begin to run together and cross each other in ways which would eventually lead to the full blown emergence of the figure of ‘the homosexual’. The inter-relationship and productivity of these in the aesthetic realm created a space in which writers of both genders and any sexual preference could choose to operate. While the figure of the male homosexual may have been coming into existence as a reviled and abused figure, he was also within certain circles a figure who had accrued and defended a privileged position, particularly in relation to art and aesthetics. For Bradley and Cooper, aware of how far their reputation had been damaged by the revelation of their dual femaleness, the assumption of Sebastian as a figure who could ‘refuse so steadily what they despise’ once again offered the possibility of self-performance as an artistic persona absolutely elevated above and beyond the everyday. The Michael Field Sebastian poems thus operate, not as an asexual act of sympathy for their male homosexual friends, but as a further development of the possibilities of the homosexual self. Just as Swinburne, Baudelaire and Symonds can be seen as partially constructive of the ‘lesbian topos’ which appears in the poems of *Long Ago*, so Bradley and Cooper can be seen operating through the Sebastian poems of *Sight and Song* as further constructive agents in the figure of the male homosexual.

## Conclusion

Many feminist critics, in looking at the poems of *Sight and Song*, have found here either a critique of male aesthetics or an expression of female or lesbian experience. However, for Bradley and Cooper, aesthetic expression necessarily lies outside the everyday, whether this is outside the everyday context of historically-conditioned social relations or outside the everyday body restricted by its sex. Their aim in *Sight and Song* is to produce an aesthetic space that is ideal and outside time, and an aesthetic identity that is ideal and 'bisexual', combining the 'feminine' qualities of responsiveness and sensitivity with the 'masculine' qualities of objectivity and restraint. Such an approach removes the aesthetic realm from questions of gender-based power and, while it necessarily entangles the aesthetic with the erotic, produces erotic identification that cannot easily be tied to a single expressive sexual identity.

The poems Bradley and Cooper produce in *Sight and Song* that relate to female figures reproduce and enhance the male gaze. In creating themselves as restrained viewers whose purity of gaze allows them to view and present the naked female body, Bradley and Cooper construct themselves neither as sympathetic female observers, nor as lesbian onlookers undermining the power of the male gaze, but as critical, 'objective', masculine voyeurs. Meanwhile the poems that relate to Sebastian suggest a much stronger identification with this male figure than with the female figures shown here. In asserting their ability as elevated personalities to insert themselves into the Sebastian paintings, Bradley and Cooper again confound our ability to read them as lesbian onlookers, becoming enmeshed in the emerging 'personality' of the male homosexual. In doing so, they problematise not only that recent criticism which would restrict their aesthetic activity to the representation of a lesbian sexuality, but also that parallel criticism which suggests that the construction of the androgynous receptive subject/object in Pater's work, or of the self-realising artist/critic in Wilde's, can straightforwardly be explained as reflective of the pre-existing sexual proclivities of these writers, or as consciously political projects of homosexual defence.[484]

In their literary occupation of an inappropriate gender-position in the poems of *Sight and Song*, Bradley and Cooper may not produce any radical criticism of that position, but their ability to operate there should nevertheless continue to be of interest to feminist and lesbian critics. In the first place, this is simply because it makes clear that such positions are assumed rather than naturally given, and illustrates that the power perceived as accruing to the male position is attractive to both sexes and capable of appropriation. Beyond this, precisely because of the disjunction between the biological gender of Bradley and Cooper and the positions they assume, in analysing the poems of *Sight and Song*, it becomes possible to discern the ways in which, in the late nineteenth century, cultural signifiers were being reconfigured and re-arranged. The contours of Bradley and Cooper's appropriation of figures such as the Renaissance and the aesthetic, the artist and the critic, the rural and the simple, the homoerotic and the heteroerotic, and the ways in which they feel able to blend and juxtapose these figures may not reveal much about their personal lives, but they have much to tell us about movements in the wider culture.

## Chapter 4: *Underneath the Bough*

### Introduction

In discussing the Michael Field collections *Long Ago* and *Sight and Song* I have argued that Bradley and Cooper do not simply present or express a pre-existent identity within the poetry, but produce and perform complex characters – Michael Field-as-Sappho, and Michael Field, the ‘masculine’ aesthete. It has been possible to discern within the poetry of both collections a deliberate process of self-creation dependent on a number of cultural and literary traditions that were highly valued within the late nineteenth century. Bradley and Cooper’s self-production within this space allows their poetry to illuminate and develop some of the key features of late nineteenth-century culture, as well as demonstrating some of its strengths and failings.

The current chapter continues this performative approach to the Michael Field poetry, but in relation to the love poems of their 1893 collection, *Underneath the Bough*.<sup>[485]</sup> Here my methodology may appear somewhat perverse. My research is particularly focused on the place and significance of homoeroticism within Bradley and Cooper’s work. The two writers had a love-relationship that was almost certainly sexual. These love poems, as I shall show, were clearly linked by both Bradley and Cooper to the love-relationship. Yet in this chapter I again refuse to read this as a directly self-expressive poetry, the natural outpouring of love, and have again analysed the poems as elements of a self-conscious performance whose aim is self-creation and self-placement within a revered literary tradition.

This is not intended as a denial of the probable sexual component of the relationship between Bradley and Cooper. While nineteenth-century references to sexual matters are notoriously difficult to interpret, I find persuasive Emma Donoghue’s argument that several entries made by Cooper in *Works and Days*, referring to the ‘delight’, ‘joy’ and ‘bodily sweetness’ enjoyed within the couple’s shared bed, seem intended to suggest a shared sexual pleasure.<sup>[486]</sup> However, it is noteworthy that in both prose and poems, love and desire are overwhelmingly presented with an emphasis on their ideal or aesthetic characteristics rather than on their potential for providing physical pleasure. This is not, I believe, the result of coyness, nor of a wish to hide sordid reality behind a façade of spiritual perfection, but springs from Bradley and Cooper’s literary deployment of their relationship to help produce elevated personality above and beyond the nineteenth-century bourgeois everyday, a desire which we have already seen shaping both *Works and Days* and the previous poetry collections.

My insistence on reading the love poems as creating rather than expressing a private sense of identity also helps to avoid any anachronistic reading of the poems as expressions of a pre-textual, sexually-based sense of identity. The late nineteenth century, as I have discussed in previous chapters, was a time in which the notion of fixed sexual identities was still developing. Bradley and Cooper’s entanglement of their personal relationships with the production of love poems, rather than promoting a consistent ‘lesbian’ identity underpinned by sexual practice, depends on and develops numerous, often contradictory, literary models of love relationship, both homoerotic and heteroerotic. These diverse models of love are not only attached to their own female-female relationship, but also at times to the female-male ‘relationship’ between Cooper and Berenson, so that there is no sense of necessary connection between female-female relationship and female homoerotic expression.

Finally, I shall continue to insist that there is no association in this poetry between female-female love and a politics of pro-female or pro-lesbian expression. While an extremely high value is attached to 'love' in general, and to the Bradley-Cooper relationship in particular as a perfect example of such love, this is neither a privileging of the female gender, nor a homosexual defensive strategy. Rather, the production of an ideal female-female love, represented through both homoerotic and heteroerotic narratives, supports the construction of self-identity for the poets, not as members of an oppressed sexual or homosexual minority, but as superior aesthetic agents operating above and beyond a base and limiting late-Victorian materialism.

I begin the chapter by examining the context in which the female-female love poems of *Underneath the Bough* were placed, noting, in the first section, the seventeenth-century and Romantic frames of reference within which the love poetry is set, and in the second, its 'private' contextualisation within the personal love-relationship of Bradley and Cooper. A third section looks at the transformation of private landscape within the poetry from the mundane everyday into an ideal and appropriately literary setting. The final sections all explore whether Bradley and Cooper here produce a love-poetry that, if not expressing a pre-textual lesbian identity, can be seen as building such an identity within the text. The fourth examines the portrayal of the female body in these poems, crucial if we are to read them as presenting lesbian relationship understood as essentially inflected by the gender of lover and beloved. The fifth explores the characteristics of desire presented here, examining the theory that the love poems of 'The Third Book of Songs' construct a female-female desire that is structured differently from male-female desire. The sixth compares this poetry with two poems from a later section of *Underneath the Bough*, connected with the Cooper-Berenson relationship, to ask what continuity and difference there is between these poems of female-male relationship and those of the female-female relationship between Bradley and Cooper. Finally, I discuss whether Bradley's production of a love poetry of reciprocal intimacy is nearer to the 'truth' of female-female relationship than the more 'decadent' lesbian presentations of her male contemporaries.

### **1. The literary context of love**

I have described how *Long Ago* and *Sight and Song* were presented as collections related to a wider context – in the case of the former, nineteenth-century representations of Sappho; and in the case of the latter, nineteenth-century aestheticism – and how both books contained a set of internal clues to direct the reader towards such a contextualised reading. These earlier collections each had a precise remit – expansions of Sappho's poems, and responses to Renaissance paintings – and were the result of highly focused processes of research, production and revision. They had prose prefaces guiding the reader's approach to the collection, and individual titles that both signposted the content of each poem and provided a unifying structure across the collection.

*Underneath the Bough*, on the other hand, is much less carefully defined and edited, being a large and disparate selection of poetry, much of which was composed some time before the idea of the collection was conceived, and some of which had previously been published in different contexts. This lack of focus results in a weaker set of internal references to alert the reader to the wider context. There is no preface to *Underneath the Bough*, and most of the poems appear without titles, so that there is no direct suggestion of any thematic or organisational principle linking them together.[487]

There are, however, some minimal indications as to how these poems should be read. The collection is divided, in the first and third editions, into a number of sections (four in the first edition, and five in third), entitled 'The First Book of Songs', 'The Second Book of Songs', etc. The organising principle behind this division is somewhat opaque: 'The First Book of Songs', for example, mainly contains poems that had previously been published elsewhere, but otherwise has no consistent theme; and while the majority of poems in 'The Second Book of Songs' focus on death and bereavement, a significant minority have lighter topics. However, the fact that the names chosen for the sections echo those used by the Elizabethan poets Dowland and Campion indirectly suggests a context for the collection that is, like the contexts provided for *Long Ago* and *Sight and Song*, distanced from the contemporary – that of the seventeenth-century lyric.[488] The minimal signposting provided by the section titles leads the reader to expect here the rural landscape of Elizabethan pastoral, within which we might expect to find the themes of birth, death and love as timeless, natural processes.[489]

Apart from this seventeenth-century reference, the only context implied internally is that suggested by the title – *Underneath the Bough* – and its extension on the inner title page into a full quatrain from Edward FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*:

A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,  
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread, and thou  
Beside me singing in the Wilderness.  
Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow![490]

The quotation from FitzGerald's poem, itself a loosely translated set of quatrains from the works of an eleventh-century Persian poet, evokes a setting for *Underneath the Bough* that is, like the oblique reference to Dowland and Campion, rural and historical, but which has moved from simple seventeenth-century pastoral into a literary scene that a nineteenth-century reader might perceive as Romantic and/or exotic. The choice of a quatrain in which the sketchiest of landscapes ('Underneath the Bough') is characterised as first 'Wilderness' and then 'Paradise' further suggests, with its basic Christian mythological references, that the rural setting of the poems will be symbolic, rather than descriptive.[491] Finally, the quatrain hints at an ideal reciprocal love underpinning the poetry; if the collection *Underneath the Bough* is the 'Book of Verses' that FitzGerald places 'underneath the Bough', then what is invoked here is a joint lover-beloved performance of Bradley and Cooper's 'Books of Songs' – 'thou / Beside me singing'.

The use of FitzGerald's quatrain to suggest that the poems in this collection enact an aesthetic performance that can transform the landscape from Wilderness to Paradise provides continuity between *Underneath the Bough* and the previous Michael Field collections, which similarly aimed to produce ideal landscapes through a process of performance as 'song'. The linking of this performance to an ideal and reciprocal love ('thou / Beside me') also alerts the reader to the continuing centrality of love, particularly such an idealised mutually responsive love, within this collection.

Love poems occur throughout *Underneath the Bough*, but are mainly concentrated in 'The Third Book of Songs', the most consistent of the divisions of the collection. Like the previous and following sections, 'The Third Book of Songs' has no further title to explain the grouping of these poems together. However, unlike the other sections, whose eclectic mix of poetry ranges from laments at the passing of time to fairy ballads, and from Romantic odes addressed to the elements to 'flower-poems' of symbolist intensity, this section of *Underneath the Bough* is

composed only of love poems. As with the remainder of the collection, there is a somewhat incoherent range of forms and references, moving, as the contextualising clues we have analysed suggest, between seventeenth-century-style blazons or conceits and more Romantically-framed sensuous evocations of desire and fulfilment.

The poems of 'The Third Book of Songs' have, from Sturgeon onwards, been read as direct expressions of the love relationship between Bradley and Cooper.[492] There is no internal indication within *Underneath the Bough* that these poems represent a more personal engagement with love than, say, the love poems reprinted from the tragedies that appear in 'The First Book of Songs'.[493] However, while the public context of *Underneath the Bough* provides little support for such a reading, research by recent Michael Field scholars has discovered these same poems embedded in a range of private and semi-private texts – notebooks, letters and journal entries – in which they are consistently linked to the Bradley-Cooper relationship. Treby's research shows that all the poems in 'The Third Book of Songs' except one can be traced to a single notebook in Bradley's handwriting, entitled *Perpetua, a Songbook of Twenty Years*. [494] The forty-six poems in this notebook are almost all identified, sometimes within the notebook and sometimes in related letters or journal entries, as love poems by Bradley either for or about Cooper.[495] It therefore seems that these poems can indeed be read not only as poems concerning female-female love generally, but as poems with a confirmed connection to the Bradley-Cooper relationship.

In the following section I examine the association between the love poetry of 'The Third Book of Songs' and this private context. My argument is that the connection between the poems and the personal history of the Bradley-Cooper relationship should be read neither as realist description of extra-textual events, nor as the self-expression of underlying emotion, but, as the FitzGerald quote at the opening to *Underneath the Bough* proposes, as the self-conscious performance of an ideal love that can transform the everyday into an aesthetic idyll.

## 2. The 'private' context of love

I have already discussed the way in which, within *Works and Days*, Bradley and Cooper's construction of elevated identity was crucially tied in to their production of their relationship as a narrative of ideal female-female love. We also saw how, in the drawing room scene with Francis in *Works and Days*, they recorded a performance of some of the love poems as part of this narrative, producing a range of effects, including identifying the poems as authentic expressions of love, placing them in a Romantic literary tradition, and emphasising Bradley and Cooper's tragic identity. The connection between poems, prose writing and love narrative can be traced right back to the earliest of the love poems, which can be found, pre-*Works and Days*, in letters and notebooks kept by the writers. Inserted into Bradley and Cooper's prose writing, these love poems, which later appear in *Underneath the Bough*, become key elements in the literary construction of the narrative of their love.

The poems are embedded in a wide range of private and semi-private literary frameworks: personal letters; letters to public figures; exercise books; formally bound notebooks of poems; and, from 1888 onwards, journal entries in *Works and Days*. The same poem may appear in several different contexts and at different moments, both pre- and post-publication. The means by which this insertion connects the poem to the love narrative also varies: the private context may add a date and place of composition through which the poem is fixed to a particular moment of

the love-narrative; it may add a title defining the speaker and addressee of the poem as Bradley and Cooper; it may describe the moment of inspiration of the poem, relating this to a moment in the relationship; it may entangle the poem in a private address between Bradley and Cooper; or it may provide a prose expansion of the sentiment of the poem, relating it to a personally-felt emotion. In this section, I examine a number of these moments of insertion of the poems into the love narrative, analysing the effects produced, and focusing on the use of the love-narrative to produce a range of aesthetically-framed identities for Bradley and Cooper.

For some critics the prose texts are understood as portraying a pre-textual reality that is then represented in the poetry, confirming the poems as authentic expressions of Bradley and Cooper's love. White, for example, pointing out that 'My Love is like a lovely Shepherdess', from the first edition of 'The Third Book of Songs', is described by Bradley in *Works and Days* as a response to a vision of Cooper, argues that the poem can be seen as a direct result of the pre-existent love between the two women: 'The specificity of the poem derives from an identifiable moment in their daily life, which is valued as the proper subject of poetry'.[496]

The passage from *Works and Days* reads as follows:

Edith's peach & green embroidered gown came home this evening. –After seeing her in it I brake into the 1st part of the 1st verse of this song; – then came down &, at my desk, in the evening light, wrote the rest of the verses.

Friday July 19<sup>th</sup>. [497]

Despite Bradley's assignment of a precise location and date for the production of the poem ('home [. . .] at my desk [. . .] Friday, July 19<sup>th</sup>'), tying it in to the Bradley-Cooper love narrative through the creation of the 'identifiable moment' referred to by White, both poem and journal are productive of a deliberate gap between the poets' 'daily life' – the nineteenth-century suburban setting in which the poem was actually written – and the pastoral/historical setting created within it. The image of 'the lovely shepherdess' presented in the poem has little to do with the actual day-to-day persona of Cooper, who appears throughout *Works and Days* as an intellectual and sensitive aesthete, studying art, reading philosophy and writing tragedies, being entirely uninterested in manual labour such as tending sheep. The 'lovely shepherdess' of Bradley's poem has its origins instead in the ancient story of Daphnis and Chloe, in the Amaryllis of Theocritus and Virgil's *Georgics*, in Spenser's *Shepherds Calendar* and Beaumont and Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess*. [498] It may also owe something to an eighteenth-century painting by the French artist Fragonard, popularly supposed to have inspired Marie Antoinette in her performance of the shepherdess role, which depicted an idealised 'shepherdess', sitting 'underneath the bough' in an exceedingly impractical peach and green dress. [499] Cooper's appearance as 'the lovely shepherdess' in the peach and green dress in both *Works and Days* and *Underneath the Bough*, rather than reflecting a moment of everyday life, is another form of idealised performance, heavily dependent on quotation from literary and aesthetic convention.

Furthermore, Bradley's use of this passage in *Works and Days* to produce an image of herself as writer can also be seen as a performance dependent on literary convention, again carefully imbued with a sense of distance from its nineteenth-century setting. Using the archaic past form 'brake' to describe her response to Cooper's dress – 'after seeing her in it I brake into the 1<sup>st</sup> verse' – Bradley introduces a deliberate gap between the process of writing and the contemporary. [500] To 'break into verse' may suggest involuntary spontaneity, but to use the archaic form to describe this spontaneous reaction transforms it into a quotation of spontaneous



responses that belong to a previous era, suggesting that this moment of writing is not a simple response to the beloved, but an archaic performance of response.

The performance of the female-female love-relationship within an archaic tradition makes it difficult to read Bradley's poetry as directly expressive of modern 'lesbian' relationship and identity. Instead, the relationship is used to support self-consciously 'unreal' identities for both partners, in this instance, that of the simple and beautiful young female aesthetic object for Cooper, and of the inspired poet-lover (implicitly male) for Bradley. The adoption of pastoral, particularly seventeenth-century pastoral, may at this period indirectly hint at a poetry in which homoerotic narrative is at play, but Bradley's performance is here strongly marked by its assumption of an aesthetically rather than sexually defined identity, and one, moreover, that adopts the position of an admiring but restrained male-female heteroerotic address.[501]

The adoption by Bradley and Cooper of non-everyday personae through whom to perform their love relationship is not confined to *Works and Days*, extending even into the most 'private' of prose contexts, that of their love letters. Like *Works and Days*, the letters are carefully composed in a 'literary' style, and were preserved as part of that 'sacred' memory that in Chapter 1 we saw Bradley invoke as a necessary support for the construction of an elevated self.[502] One such love letter contains within it the poem 'I sing thee with the stock-dove's throat', later appearing in both *Perpetua*, where it is assigned, like the 'Lovely Shepherdess' poem, a very precise 'real' date and location: 'Sidmouth, spring 1885, April 13<sup>th</sup>', and in 'The Third Book of Songs'.[503] The poem opens:

I sing thee with the stock-dove's throat  
Warm, crooning, superstitious note  
That on its dearie so doth dote  
It falls to sorrow.[504]

In the love-letter, Bradley adds a commentary:

What is it to me to be in the woods without my Pretty swinging on the boughs? It was sweet to watch the boy's pleasure [. . .]. Coo. Coooooo says the old Fowl – till His throat vibrates. Coo. Cooooooo'.[505]

Bradley here identifies herself as the 'I' of the poem, and Cooper as the beloved addressee, the 'dearie', through a process of direct performance, adopting the cooing of a dove in imitation of the 'singing' of the poem's stock-dove. As with the 'Lovely Shepherdess' poem, this is not a performance of the everyday. The landscape of 'Sidmouth' is here transformed into abstract pastoral 'woods' and 'boughs' that presage the future inclusion of this poem in the symbolic landscapes of *Underneath the Bough*. Bradley again gives herself an 'unreal' identity, referring to herself in the third person, as if for a public audience, in the persona of the 'old Fowl', Simiorg, a mythical figure she frequently portrays herself as in letters, journals and notebooks. A further distancing effect is produced by Bradley's transformation of gender. While drawing attention to her own body as origin of the love-call, she characterises it as male – 'till His throat vibrates' – while the 'Pretty' Cooper becomes 'the boy', so that in this most private of contexts, the love relationship is represented as a form of elder-younger, male-male homoeroticism.

The poem is further embedded in the Bradley-Cooper love narrative through Cooper's response, also preserved – 'my own deare, my stock-dove, Sweet, very sweet is your call to me, I love it dearly and it does not coo in vain for me'. [506] Here Cooper not only confirms the poem as a personal address constructing herself as beloved – 'your call to me' – but also, through her reverse usage of Bradley's terms of endearment from the poem and the letter – 'my own deare [. . .] sweet, very sweet' – further winds herself into a narrative more usually associated with female-female relationship, of homoerotic love as perfect reciprocity.

The production of a narrative of female-female love to support the self-performance of Bradley and Cooper as aesthetic individuals relied on their ability to move seamlessly between 'private' and 'public' contexts, interpreting the poems in a variety of ways, as they positioned them in notebooks, publications, letters and journals. Such movement also made possible a re-positioning of the actors in the narrative, so the same poem could produce a range of roles and positions for Bradley and Cooper, with shades of both homoeroticism and heteroeroticism, as they adopted male or female positions. 'When high Zeus first peopled earth', the opening poem of the 'Third Book of Songs', had a long history of appearances in a range of private and semi-private contexts, where it was used to support a variety of models of idyllic love and aesthetic identity.[507]

This poem, one of the earliest of the Bradley-Cooper love poems, first appeared in *Perpetua* inscribed 'To His Deare: on her Birthday', with a footnote, 'A.W.F for January 12<sup>th</sup> 1883'. [508] In this first appearance, ten years before the publication of *Underneath the Bough*, the poem, through the addition of title and date, is not only assigned an 'identifiable moment' in the Bradley-Cooper love-narrative, but is given agency within it, as a twenty-first birthday present for Cooper. As with the love-letter containing the 'stock-dove' poem, Bradley constructs an imaginary public audience for the Bradley-Cooper love relationship through her use of the third person in the title, and in appending the initials A.W.F. – the All Wise Fowl – as signature, she again assumes the identity of the fabulous Simiorg, who we have already met in the 'stock-dove' letter. However, the spelling, style and pronouns of the title suggest that Bradley performs here in a role closer to that adopted in relation to the 'Lovely Shepherdess' poem – as a male seventeenth-century poet-lover, with Cooper as his female beloved ('His Deare').

In 1885, 'When high Zeus' was successfully submitted to *The Contemporary Review*, as the product of 'Michael Field', with the 'Elizabethan' title from *Perpetua*, indicative of a personal context and female addressee, removed and replaced by the rather bland 'Youth and Age'. [509] The theme of the poem – love between elder and younger, blessed by Zeus in a story reminiscent of the myth recounted by Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium* – coupled with its second-person (and therefore ungendered) address and presentation as the output of a male writer meant that in this context it invited interpretation as a tribute to elder-younger male homoerotic love.

A year later, the last twelve lines were re-inserted by Bradley into a semi-private context, in a letter to Browning, with the following request: 'Don't think of us as aunt and niece: all that we are to each other is expressed in some lines I wrote to her.' [510] Like the notebook title, the letter identifies the poem as both personal utterance – 'some lines I wrote to her' – and as the assertion of a relationship and identity beyond the everyday – 'don't think of us as aunt and niece'. [511] However, where the notebook produced the poem as an essentially seventeenth-century poem of restrained affection, the letter ties it in to a Romantic perception of poetic practice in which the poem expresses the poet – 'all that we are [. . .] is expressed in some lines I wrote'.

The lines extracted for Browning remove the Zeus story, retaining only the more directly

personal ending, which includes the following lines:

None can tell of either breast  
The native sigh  
Who try  
To learn with whom the Muse is guest.  
How sovereignly I'm blest  
To see and smell the rose of my own youth  
In thee [. . .].[512]

Here, the interaction between letter and selected lines again changes the effect of the poem, which now appears as a poem of specifically female-female love, transforming the familial aunt-niece relationship into a relationship of female homoerotic closeness entangled with poetic inspiration, expressed as the residence of a common Muse within the indistinguishably similar female body, or 'breast' of each – 'None can tell of either breast / The native sigh'. In a supposedly direct address to the beloved 'thee', the poem already imagines a curious potential audience that will be realised when the poem is presented to Browning – 'None can tell [. . .] / Who try / To learn with whom the Muse is guest.'

In this way, 'When high Zeus', twice published and twice privately embedded within the Bradley-Cooper love-narrative, can in turn be read as a poem of seventeenth-century heteroerotic admiration, of Platonic elder-younger male homoeroticism, or of a particularly female homoeroticism of sympathetic similarity. The instruction to Browning makes clear that what is involved here is a recognition of Bradley and Cooper not simply as female partners in a non-familial homoerotic relationship, but also as jointly inspired aesthetic producers. By the time 'When high Zeus' appeared as the opening poem to 'The Third Book of Songs' in the first edition of *Underneath the Bough*, in 1893, it already had a long history of support for the construction of Bradley and Cooper as elevated individuals, crucially in insisting on that 'recognition' from Browning that was so important in guaranteeing them a place in the 'race of poets'.

Bradley and Cooper thus produced the literary account of their love relationship in a steady continuum from notebooks to letters to published lyrics to journals. In the process, they produced identities for themselves, not only as characters in the narrative, but also as aesthetic creators. This aesthetic self-production through love-relationship is depicted through a number of different models: as seventeenth-century male poet-lover and the beautiful female beloved who is his inspiration; as the speaker and listener of the Platonic elder-younger male-male duo; and as a Romantic and remarkably similar female-female couple conjoined through mutual aesthetic inspiration and combined performance.

Even in the most apparently private of contexts – the notebooks and love-letters – a potential public audience, for whom the relationship and the elevated identities are performed, is also imagined. The motivation behind these rather self-conscious stylised performances was, rather than to express an underlying pre-existent identity, to produce deliberately 'unreal' or archaic identities that could suggest the transformation of the self into an elevated figure capable of bearing the weight of intense respect attached by Bradley and Cooper to the persona of 'poet'. Such personal metamorphoses also require, as we have seen, the transformation of the surrounding environment into a suitably 'unreal' and stylised landscape, whether this is the cultivated rural landscape of seventeenth-century pastoral or the more symbolic landscape of Romanticism. The following section examines in more detail how these landscapes are produced.

### 3. Building the ideal landscape of love

As I noted in Chapter 1, Bradley and Cooper perceived the nineteenth-century environment to be ugly, degenerate, and unsuitable for representation in poetry, turning instead, in their previous collections, to the distant landscapes of Ancient Greece and Renaissance painting to provide alternative spaces. In connecting the love poetry of *Underneath the Bough* to their own relationship, they therefore not only had to create identities for themselves elevated above everyday personality, but also to transform the world they inhabited into a space remote from the material failings of the contemporary. In 'The Third Book of Songs', Bradley produces a vision of a love relationship in a distant landscape, which, like the landscapes of *Long Ago* and *Sight and Song*, is ideal, pastoral and set far in the past. At the same time, the prose contexts in which the poems are embedded make links between this ideal landscape and the environment in which Bradley and Cooper lived.

The adoption of FitzGerald's formulation at the start of *Underneath the Bough* – 'and thou / Beside me singing in the Wilderness. / Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!' – implies that transformation of the environment is a natural corollary to the performance of ideal love, yet study of the processes by which the urban bourgeois environment inhabited by Bradley and Cooper was converted into the ideal landscapes of the love poetry suggests that this transmutation was rather the result of complex labour. I shall now look at two poems in which the construction of the ideal landscape is foregrounded, revealing the care with which Bradley and Cooper created landscapes that could simultaneously be linked to the present-day narrative of their love, and distanced from the prosaic reality of nineteenth-century Reigate, the unglamorous town in which they lived during the production of the love poems of *Underneath the Bough*.

'An Invitation', from the first edition of *Underneath the Bough*, is a poem in which interaction between the performance of an idealised love and the production of an ideal and aestheticised setting is crucial.[513] This is one of the few poems in *Underneath the Bough* to be given a title, and the extension of this title in the version written into *Works and Days* – 'The poet's invitation to his lady to visit him' – creates the roles to be enacted here as the seventeenth-century male poet-lover and his respected 'lady' whom we have already met in previous poems.[514] The story mapped out in the initial stanzas carries out this seventeenth-century promise, imitating those Elizabethan 'invitations' in which the beloved is enticed into a private space, withdrawn from the world; for example, Champion's 'O deare that I with thee might lue, / From humane trace remoued'.[515] However, for the poem to work as part of the Bradley-Cooper love-narrative, the 'private' space here presented must be readable not only as potentially Elizabethan, but also as habitable by Bradley and Cooper.

Seventeenth-century 'invitations' into interior spaces often include the possibility of seduction, and the first four stanzas of Bradley's poem continue this tradition, in part through the alternation between a second-person imperative address to the beloved – 'Come and sing [. . .] / Lady, [. . .] / Think, what lovely dreams will grow!' – and a suggestive address to the reader, in which the 'lady' is referred to in the third person as the object of future conquest: 'Ah, what secrets there will be / For love-telling, / When her head leans on my knee!' An important element in the seduction is the production of the speaker's room as a private, yet exotic interior – 'my chamber of the south.' This supposedly seventeenth-century space is, as Prins suggests, 'unnaturally lush and vivid' – an interior filled with flora that 'naturally' belong in an exterior landscape: 'honey-smelling / Trumpets' of woodbine, located, strangely, 'on the wall'; myrtles arranged 'in a row'; and finally, a 'lavender settee, / Cushioned for my love and me'.[516] These unnaturally placed flowers produce an overpowering scent that becomes a key element in the

seduction:

Lady, when the flower's in blow,  
Kisses passing to and fro,  
From our smelling,  
Think, what lovely dreams will grow![517]

In several references in *Works and Days* and letters to friends and relatives, Bradley suggests that the seventeenth-century 'chamber' of 'An Invitation' can also be found within her own, nineteenth-century home. 'The South room is the Study at Durdans', she writes in one letter, defining the location of the poem as a real room within one of the poets' Reigate residences.[518] Treby notes a proposal by Cooper to acquire some William Morris honeysuckle wallpaper for the Durdans study, matching this with the 'woodbine' described in the poem as 'on the wall'. He further identifies the 'lavender settee' as a 'settle designed by Herbert Horne', whose purchase is also recorded in a letter.[519] However, the move to Durdans happened three months after the completion of 'An Invitation' and the purchase of wallpaper and settee later still. This chronology suggests a complex interaction between poem, relationship and setting, in which the seductive 'private' room is first constructed within the poem, and then, with the aid of that 'discriminating consumption' of aesthetic objects discussed in Chapter 3, reconstructed within the home, so that the lived relationship becomes an imitative performance of an imaginary poetic performance which is already imitative of seventeenth-century performances. Such intricate manoeuvrings illustrate the difficulty of finding a realistic 'outside' to the ideal landscapes Bradley and Cooper offer us.

To add to the complexity, later stanzas of 'An Invitation' draw attention to the element of imitative performance in the lover-beloved relationship depicted here, transforming the 'private' setting into a performance space. The poem began by inviting the beloved to perform – 'Come and Sing' – and in the final five stanzas, the proposed seduction of the opening has been replaced by a proposed performance of lover and beloved, with the reading aloud of loved texts its climax:

Books I have of long ago  
And today I shall not know  
Some, unless thou read them, so  
Their excelling  
Music needs thy voice's flow.[520]

This joint pleasure-taking in intellectual endeavour is not entirely foreign to the schema of Campion's invitation poem – 'Why should our mindes not mingle so, / When love and faith is plighted, / That eyther might the other's know, / Alike in all delighted?' – but the reader of 'An Invitation' can no longer imagine themselves to be entering a genuinely Elizabethan interior, since Campion is now explicitly referred to as one of the 'long ago' texts to be performed:

Campion with a noble ring  
Of choice spirits, count this wing  
Sacred: all the songs I sing  
Welling, welling  
From Elizabethan spring.[521]

Where 'My Love is like a Lovely Shepherdess' simply carried out a performance of heteroerotic appreciation in the personae available from seventeenth-century tradition, 'An Invitation', by producing within itself a representation of its own performance, moves into a latter-day world in which the seventeenth-century *Campion* is not only named as one of the texts to be musically performed by the beloved ('Come and sing [. . .] Their excelling / Music needs thy voice's flow') but, as 'Elizabethan spring', is also an acknowledged predecessor providing inspiration for Bradley's present-day musically-defined composition ('All the songs I sing').

The joint musical performances proposed here transform the Bradley/Cooper identities from those of seventeenth-century poet-lover and silent beloved into those of belated collaborative 'singers' of seventeenth-century texts, re-defining them as the more homologous combined lover-singers of the FitzGerald quotation that opens *Underneath the Bough* – 'and thou / Beside me, singing'. At the same time, the poem reconstructs the setting for the relationship as a literary rather than floral/sensuous space, placing the performance of love in an aesthetic tradition that stretches from antiquity through to the nineteenth century – later stanzas include Flaubert and Verlaine as well as Sappho and Catullus amongst the litany of 'precious' and 'bliss-compelling' love-texts to be 'sung' together by the lovers.

The room has become no more 'real' – it is now explicitly a literary space, with the 'unnatural' flowers replaced by books, neither seventeenth-century nor nineteenth-century, but timeless, inclusive of an entire aesthetic tradition of love that includes heteroerotic and homoerotic, male and female. Nor can the performers, with their Romantic perfect reciprocity and harmonious singing, be read as a more 'realistic' representation of Bradley and Cooper than the poet-lover and his 'lady' introduced at the start of the poem. Their image is seductive for present-day critics looking for a vision of ideal lesbian harmony. Prins, for example, describes this moment as 'a complementary relation of two rather than the solitary utterance of one [. . .] an erotic context that allows 'you' and 'I' to come together', while Vanita suggests that the poem 'eroticises their intellectual pursuits and invokes a literary ancestry culminating in two writers of homoerotic verse'.<sup>[522]</sup> However, central to this performance of Romantic lover-beloved perfect reciprocity, carefully aimed at a future audience, is the creation not of erotic, but of aesthetic identity for both women as joint performers in art, and as we have seen, its ideal landscape is not that of everyday life, but of literature.<sup>[523]</sup>

'It was deep April', written in 1892, with *Underneath the Bough* already in preparation, also presents Bradley and Cooper as more equally conceived joint performers in art, again positioning both their love and their performances in a symbolic landscape that provides an impeccable literary pedigree.<sup>[524]</sup> Like 'An Invitation', when read in conjunction with the contextualisation provided in *Works and Days*, the poem reveals a careful negotiation between the aesthetic landscape produced within it and the nineteenth-century landscape within which it is produced, but unlike the earlier poem, close reading points to deep anxieties at work in producing that landscape.

'It was deep April' links poetic creation directly to the love relationship, and both to a joint performance of poetry as song:

My Love and I took hands and swore,  
Against the world, to be  
Poets and lovers evermore,  
To laugh and dream on Lethe's shore,  
To sing to Charon in his boat.<sup>[525]</sup>

The pact between lover and beloved to transform themselves concurrently into poets and lovers is presented as a moment of equal partnership quite unlike the restrained distance of the seventeenth-century heteroerotic lover and his silent mistress, with the emphasis not only on the physical closeness of the two actors, but also on their joint and simultaneous production of identical speech – ‘My Love and I took hands and swore’. Cooper uses *Works and Days* to confirm the mutuality of this act of self-definition:

A lovely morning – the leaves more like dewdrops than leaves in their lucid joyousness, the sky pale and happy. My Love and I go to the Station that I may see her off to Dover. We swear, with the bright World round us, that we will remain Poets and Lovers whatever may happen to hinder or deflect our lives.

Sim [Bradley] wrote on the train:

*It was deep April [etc.]*[526]

Cooper provides a context in which prose and poem interact intimately, as the key defining phrases of the poem (‘My Love and I’, ‘Poets and Lovers’) are re-figured in the prose in a move which inverts the subject/object positions of lover and beloved, so that the ‘I’ of the prose (Cooper) becomes the ‘My Love’ of the poem, while the ‘I’ of the poem (Bradley) becomes the ‘My Love’ of the prose. Furthermore, it is Cooper, who, while assigning authorship of the poem to Bradley, transcribes it into *Works and Days*, contributing to a narrative more usually attributable to Bradley that in their writing the two women ‘cross and interlace like a company of summer dancing flies’, and confirming the relationship as a sympathetic bond between indistinguishable and equal figures.[527]

For Leighton, this model of a close bonding of similar lovers who speak together without conflict represents the truth of the Bradley-Cooper relationship, which she understands as operating ‘outside’ society and heteronormativity, and therefore in a space which is ‘natural’ and ‘free’ – ‘Perhaps because of the essential freedom of their lives – a freedom particularly from the conventions and conclusions of heterosexual love – their poetry seems to belong indeed “out in the open air of nature.”’[528] ‘It was deep April’ is understood by Leighton as a moment of ‘pagan *jouissance*’, with the musical performance of the lovers a natural emanation of a sexual freedom operating beyond the bounds of social and religious constraint – ‘Casual and pleasure-loving, their music grows out of the free sensuousness of the pagan gods.’[529]

However, for Bradley and Cooper, art never springs ‘naturally’ from the context of their lives, but rather creates a context in which it can represent itself as natural production. The internal workings of ‘It was deep April’ suggest the careful construction of a non-urban landscape that is as unnatural as the flowery interior of ‘An Invitation’, and as schematic as FitzGerald’s ‘Underneath the Bough’. Even Cooper’s prose setting, while containing an unusually prosaic ‘Station’, ‘train’ and ‘Dover’ as evidence of its nineteenth-century context, dissolves the definite lines of landscape (‘leaves more like dewdrops than leaves’) into an abstract context of optimism: a ‘lovely morning’ with a ‘pale and happy’ sky.

In the poem, all traces of station and train are erased, creating a landscape which is overwhelmingly symbolic rather than natural:

It was deep April, and the morn  
Shakspeare was born;  
The world was on us pressing sore;

[. . .].[530]

These opening lines create a pastoral scene with a minimum of signposts ('deep April', 'the morn') and a negative context ('the world') against which it defines itself. Although this optimistic spring setting corresponds to the 'lovely morning' of Cooper's prose, its indication of the date as 'the morn / Shakspeare was born' (April 23<sup>rd</sup> – Shakespeare's putative birthday) removes us to a symbolic moment and scene, a timeless space for aesthetic re-birth, in which the commitment to 'be / Poets and Lovers' is a guarantee of eternal persistence – 'evermore'.

In the poem's second half, this symbolic landscape shifts further from urban England and physical reality, not only into Greek mythology, but within that to the shadowy fluid spaces on the border between life and death: the river Lethe and the river Styx:

To laugh and dream on Lethe's shore,  
To sing to Charon in his boat,  
Heartening the timid souls afloat;  
Of judgment never to take heed,  
But to those fast-locked souls to speed,  
Who never from Apollo fled,  
Who spent no hour among the dead;  
Continually  
With them to dwell,  
Indifferent to Heaven and Hell.[531]

It is in this distant and gloomy imaginary landscape that the poem proposes its joint musical performance of lover and beloved ('To laugh and dream on Lethe's shore / To sing to Charon in his boat'). The poem thus repeats a movement familiar to readers of Michael Field poems. An apparently optimistic setting quickly becomes one moving towards death, as the desire to forget daily life and enter a timeless world creates a scene in which the poets urge the 'timid souls' of their listeners on to the underworld.

In another familiar move, Bradley, while producing an apparently optimistic setting, fills it with echoes of the places it seeks to leave behind, defining herself and Cooper not only 'against the world' of the vulgar contemporary, but also, in the later stages of the poem, with a series of negatives: while the lovers make the positive vows to 'laugh' 'dream' and 'sing', they also make the negative vows that they will 'never' heed judgement, and that they will live with those 'fast-locked souls' (presumably poets) who are also defined negatively as the souls who 'never from Apollo fled, / Who spent no hour among the dead'.[532]

The final line of the poem – 'Indifferent to heaven and hell' – has been much-commented on, not only for its suggestion of antagonism towards Christianity, unusual in Bradley's poetry, but also because of its affinity to the line 'Et l'amour se rira de L'Enfer et du Ciel!' in Baudelaire's poem, 'Lesbos', where Sappho is also described as 'l'amante et le poète' (lover and poet).[533] This indirect reference to Sappho completes the ambitious literary framing of the production of joint aesthetic identity for the lovers of the poem, between the ideal tragedian, Shakespeare, and the ideal poet, Sappho. In both cases there is also, potentially, a hint at a homoerotic love, as both writers were associated in the late nineteenth century with homoerotic narratives.[534]



The landscapes produced in this poem are thus far from 'casual'. Rather, the production of aesthetic identity is here carefully placed in relation both to a timeless space set 'against' the nineteenth century 'world', and to a set of highly-valued aesthetic traditions. The association with death and the production of negatives also suggests that the poem is not simply a 'pleasure-loving' efflorescence of the 'pagan jouissance' of Bradley and Cooper's relationship. I would argue instead that the production not only of the timeless world of 'It was deep April', but even of Cooper's 'bright World' in her *Works and Days* contextualisation is one of almost painful endeavour, a studied exercise in writing which deliberately creates, rather than springing from, a 'lucid joyousness'.

Cooper's 'pale and happy' abstract landscape can be read against her journal entry from the previous week:

In the afternoon I simply give way as an ill-built house – I fall in. With horror I recognise that outside of our art we are not living at all. We do not walk with any of the great souls of the past; we live under the blessing neither of the living or the dead. We are not thinking: we cannot act. And we care for fewer things day by day. We believe less, we hope less, and – God forgive us – I fear we love less [. . .]. We must study: the mind must labour with its hands daily, or perish.[535]

This piece is again a declaration of mutuality in experience: while the entry opens with a singular personal pronoun, it quickly moves to the plural. However, instead of the happy mutual experience of 'It was deep April' and its context-piece, the writing produces here a description of joint despair, in a long series of negatives – 'we are not living [. . .] we do not walk [. . .] we are not thinking [. . .] we cannot act'. The final vow here – 'We must study' – fails to prevent the last word being one of decadence and doom – 'or perish'. Here are all the anxieties which require the writing of 'It was deep April'. The body as contemporary and degenerating building ('an ill-built house') collapses, and from that collapse comes a despair which 'It was deep April' is designed to answer.

Read against this context, the trailing negatives that surround the desire to cling to the 'fast-locked souls' that reside with Apollo are unsurprising. Living 'under the blessing neither of the living or the dead', Bradley and Cooper find themselves in a gloomy underworld, with poetic production a grim and arduous 'labour' offering the only hope of escape, since 'outside of art we are not living at all'. As love itself slips away ('God forgive us'), one response is to re-affirm that love even more strongly within the place of art, while turning one's back on God ('Of judgement never to take heed').

This is not to suggest that the earlier passage from *Works and Days* provides an accurate context and the later passage a false optimism. The negative narrative which Cooper regularly produces in *Works and Days* has always, as here, a carefully crafted rhetoric and exaggerated gloom. It is rather to propose that we understand the presentation of ideal optimistic spaces and happy female homoerotic love that supports Bradley and Cooper's performances as they 'laugh and sing' to their posthumous listeners, not as an accurate reflection of nineteenth-century harmonious lesbian love, but as a deliberately constructed figure operating within a faithfully maintained geometry in which a despised and degenerate contemporary world bemired in materialism can only be transcended by a repositioning of the self within an ideal aesthetic.

There is also a more personal motivation behind Bradley and Cooper's self-presentation within a Romantic tradition of love as mutually sympathetic idyll. The taking of hands 'against

the world' is a defensive manoeuvre against the 'judgement' of those critics whose negative response to Bradley and Cooper's dramatic and poetic output threatened the very basis of the identities they had built for themselves. This is in part a partnership that both compensated for and refused to accept critical failure. White's argument that Bradley and Cooper's 'rejection of the judgment of "the world"' is not a 'private and personal retreat', but an 'implicitly political' refusal of 'large-scale social rules and norms', is wishful thinking.[536] There is a larger project here, though I would argue that it is to transcend nineteenth-century materialism rather than to attack 'social norms'. However, there is also clearly some 'private and personal' motivation in this rejection of the world, which, while combative and productive – there is, after all, a successful poem as outcome of the struggle – can also be seen as a form of 'retreat'.

The FitzGerald quotation at the start of *Underneath the Bough* indicated Bradley and Cooper's belief that performing together as ideal lovers could transform the nineteenth-century landscape, turning urban wilderness into natural paradise. These two poems and their surrounding prose texts suggest an exceedingly self-conscious engagement with that process of performance and transformation. 'An Invitation' simultaneously enacts the performance of the love relationship and positions that performance within a literary tradition, producing an imaginary interior that was the basis for the aesthetic transformation of a real room in which to enact the love-performance. 'It was deep April' also both describes and enacts the performance of a vow of love and aesthetic commitment that can move Bradley and Cooper beyond contemporary critical failure into an imaginary timeless landscape where they can co-exist with the supreme practitioners of their trade – Shakespeare and Sappho.

I have so far argued that we cannot find in the love poems of *Underneath the Bough* an autobiographical portrayal of the relationship between Bradley and Cooper, but on the contrary, that there is a constant effort here to produce and maintain a performance of unreal identity in idealised spaces. Nevertheless, as we have seen, these unreal identities are consistently connected with a female-female love, and are sometimes presented in settings that can be read as homoerotic. The remainder of this chapter considers whether, if we cannot read the poems of 'The Third Book of Songs' as the expression of pre-textual lesbian identity, we can understand them as the textual production of such identity.

#### **4. The female body in 'The Third Book of Songs'**

Underpinning the move from nineteenth-century discourses of homoerotic love to the twentieth-century understanding of 'the homosexual' as type is an increasing emphasis on the body as an essential determinant of the nature of love. The homosexual who emerges at the end of the nineteenth century is a gendered body marked by difference, so that to produce a representation of a specifically 'lesbian' love depends particularly upon the production of the female body as both subject and object of desire. In this section I examine the representation of the female body of both lover and beloved in 'The Third Book of Songs', asking whether we can find here a depiction of female-female love in which the female bodies of the protagonists are both fundamental and stamped by difference.

Several critics reading the love poems of *Underneath the Bough* have queried how far they give any direct indication of the physical aspects of female-female love. Indeed, for those critics who question whether Bradley and Cooper had a sexual relationship, a lack of specific reference,

or ‘vagueness’ in their poetry in relation to the physical manifestation of love is sometimes cited as evidence that this was a celibate relationship.[537] Nevertheless, there are a number of critics who describe these poems as ‘shockingly sensual’, ‘frankly sexual’, ‘strikingly erotic’ or ‘celebrating their love as a sensual and sexual end in itself’.[538] My own readings suggest that, rather than either a ‘vagueness’ that would suggest ignorance of physical sexuality, or a celebration of bodily pleasures that we could truly call ‘sensual’ or ‘sexual’, the love poems, in a number of different movements, consistently deflect attention away from the body and from physical manifestations of love.

In the poems of ‘seventeenth-century’ restrained heteroeroticism, Bradley herself performs as male, and the body of the lover/speaker is rarely referred to. The body of the beloved, however, is frequently central to the poem, with Bradley producing several ‘blazons’, the traditional ‘listing of parts’ of the beloved. Despite this direct reference to the beloved body, the effect of Bradley’s use of the blazon is not to produce an erotic physical evocation of the female body, but to divert the reader towards a consideration of the spiritual or aesthetic aspect of the beloved. Unlike the poems of *Sight and Song*, in which, in the context of Renaissance painting and a ‘masculine’ aesthetic, Bradley and Cooper awarded themselves a ‘license’ to dwell on the physical beauty of the naked female body, the poems of *Underneath the Bough* consistently refuse to present the female body for the visual delight of their audience.

The poem ‘No beauty born of pride’, ostensibly about the physical attributes of the beloved, repeatedly moves from the physical to the abstract, first by deflection into metaphor, and then by spiritual interpretation of the metaphor, creating a symbolic rather than material body:

Her voice is as the path  
Of a sweet stream, and where it flows must be  
Peace and fertility.  
[. . .]  
Her cloudy eyes are full of blessed rain,  
A sky that cherisheth; her breast  
Is a soft nook for rest.  
She hath no varying pleasure  
For passion’s fitful mood.  
Her firm small kisses are my constant food,  
As rowan-berries yield their treasure  
To starving birds [. . .].[539]

Although with each attribute we move closer to the beloved, from hearing her voice, to seeing her eyes, to resting on her bosom, to being kissed, and although each move could potentially offer us a different sensuous experience (hearing, sight, touch and taste), within each move we are led from the physical to the non-physical. The voice, for example, is a stream, but rather than lingering on the physical analogy suggested by the sound of water, we move into its abstract qualities: peace and fertility. Similarly, the eyes as sky promise not a colour, but the quality of nurturing. Even the bosom as nook only momentarily suggests the possibility of resting in its softness before being transformed into a symbol of a quiet disposition, while the rowan-berry kisses indicate charitable generosity rather than suggesting a taste.

The overall reason for celebrating the beauty of the beloved, as suggested in the opening line –‘No beauty born of pride my lady hath’ – is not because such beauty promises physical

pleasure, but because it encompasses a spiritual state – humility – and in the final lines this spiritual aspect of the beloved's beauty promises the ultimate physical-spiritual transformation for the lover, whose bodily death is translated into immortality:

[ . . . ] her smile  
Gives life so sweet a style,  
To die beneath its beams would be  
To practise immortality.[540]

The suggestion that death in the beloved's arms is a form of resurrection draws on seventeenth-century tradition – Dowland, for example, has death in the beloved embrace as a prelude to re-birth: 'Deare let me dye in this faire breast / Farre sweeter then the Phoenix nest'. However, he never lets us forget the sexual context in which death and resurrection can be used as metaphors for physical pleasure – 'Loue raise desire by his sweete charmes / Within this circle of thine armes' – where for Bradley the physical is determinedly subordinated to the spiritual.[541] 'No beauty born of pride' appears overall as a pious rather than an erotic poem, with the beloved body exemplifying a set of predominantly Christian virtues, allowing the lover to prepare for Heaven – 'to practice immortality' – rather than to remember or anticipate an earthly physical pleasure.

The blazons that appear in 'The Third Book of Songs' gesture towards the beloved female body, but avoid its direct representation. Just as in 'An Invitation' and 'It was deep April' the physical everyday environment is transformed into an aesthetic landscape, so, in these blazon poems, the physical female body is turned, through symbolic transaction, into a spiritual or aesthetic ideal. 'Love's Sour Leisure' painstakingly converts the beloved body, piece by piece, into a highly stylised aesthetic landscape of 'poetry':

But the temple's veined mound  
Is the Muses' sacred ground;  
While the tresses pale are groves  
That the laurelled godhead loves.[542]

As in 'No beauty born of pride', the correspondences here are persistently non-visual – forehead and hair have little visual resemblance to earth or trees – but are devices for transforming the body into the 'sacred' space of poetry. In the final lines of the poem, the speaker acknowledges that the poem's fragmentation and aestheticisation of the body has brought about its absence – 'I have all the charact'ry / Of thy features, yet lack thee'. The female body is removed at the very moment at which it might be presented, denying any visual pleasure to the 'long-famished sight' of the speaker.

The restrained 'seventeenth-century' love poems of *Underneath the Bough* refuse to elaborate or enjoy the physical pleasures of the body of the female beloved, consistently presenting 'my lady' in spiritual or aesthetic terms. Meanwhile the sexually ambiguous body of the lover, occupying and performing from a male position, yet continually associated in the 'private' context with Bradley, remains in most of these poems entirely unrepresented. The one poem to focus on the body of the lover is titled 'Unbosoming', as if to suggest from the start an intimate connection between poetic self-revelation and the unsexing of the female body.

As in the blazon poems, the body is here represented through metaphor, with the lover

represented by a flower – the iris:

The love that breeds  
In my heart for thee!  
As the iris is full, brimful of seeds.[543]

The poem continues by extending the metaphor, but this is again not a mechanism for representing the physical beauty of the lover's body, but a means of symbolically indicating its spiritual potential. The flower, as the poem makes clear from the word 'breeds' in the opening line, has a reproductive function – 'And all that it flowered for [. . .] / is packed in a thousand vermilion-beads' – and the association between the lover's body and the iris gives rise to an imagery of pregnancy and child-birth, as the hidden seeds 'push, and riot, and squeeze, and clip, / Till they burst the sides of the silver scrip'. Despite this insistently physical imagery, the birth that is represented as a consequence of the speaker's 'love [. . .] /for thee' is not that of a baby, but of poetry, revealed in the final line of the poem as 'the final issues of heart and mind'.

The idea of poetry as the reproductive offspring of homoerotic love links the poem to those nineteenth-century ideas of 'spiritual procreancy' that, in Chapter 1, we saw promoted in the writing of Pater, Wilde and Symonds, and influencing Bradley and Cooper's portrayal of their relationship to Browning.[544] The production of the poet-lover's body as a site for homoerotically-inspired aesthetic procreation embroils Bradley in a late nineteenth-century discourse that, increasingly assuming a fundamental opposition between homoerotic and heteroerotic relationship, would eventually lead to the production of separable homosexual and heterosexual identities, fixed in gendered bodies marked by difference. An emphasis on difference can likewise be seen in Bradley's poem, as the body of the poet-lover gives birth from the heart rather than the womb, in a process of painful self-exposure, the 'unbosoming' of the title, as 'my breast is rent' to reveal the 'harvest-secret' hidden at the heart of the iris/body. In the final couplet, the exposed 'secret' is not only the poetic progeny that the poet-lover offers as a gift to the beloved, but also a self-definition infused with a sense of essential personal difference – 'And I would give thee, after my kind, / The final issues of heart and mind'.

Bradley's use of the words 'my kind' defines the speaker as fundamentally distinct from those women who might present a baby as the 'issue' of love, and insofar as she has entangled herself with that speaker, through the persistent contextualisation of this love poetry within the Bradley-Cooper love narrative, she constructs for herself here an identity dependent on a binary split that suggests, in a similar way to Symonds' 'peculiar individual' or Havelock Ellis' 'invert', a physiological difference from the female majority.[545]

However, the binary division that the poet here indicates is still not clearly that of homosexual/heterosexual, which depends on an assumption of fixed gender (same sex/different sex). While Bradley's use of the metaphor of pregnancy appears to produce a specifically female 'different' (non-maternal) body with which to associate herself, we can also trace this poetry-producing pregnancy back to a text that links it to a male body. The dissemination of the idea of 'spiritual procreancy' in the late nineteenth century was extended beyond the limits of the Oxford colleges in part through Jowett's translation of the *Symposium*, which Symonds had recommended to Bradley and Cooper in 1881:

Those who are pregnant in the body only, betake themselves to women and beget children [. . .]. But souls which are pregnant – for there certainly are men who are more creative in

their souls than in their bodies – conceive that which is proper for the soul to conceive or contain. And what are these conceptions? – wisdom and virtue in general. And such creators are poets and all artists who are deserving of the name inventor. [546]

In Jowett's translation of Plato's text, the fundamental distinction imagined is not quite between homoerotic and heteroerotic, but between physical and spiritual relationship – those who conceive in 'the body' and those who conceive in 'the soul' – and figured through an image of male pregnancy. Over the course of the nineteenth century, this physical/spiritual division was becoming overlaid by a division between two kinds of love determined by the gendered body – heterosexuality and homosexuality. The pregnant male produced by Jowett, like the 'Unbosoming' iris of Bradley's title, suggests a pre-hetero/homosexual vision of a spiritual body that has transcended sex rather than being defined by its gendered body. Insistently representing her relationship with Cooper as spiritual rather than physical, and asserting the production of poetry as the end-purpose of their love, Bradley retains Plato's sense of the aesthetic rather than the physical as the fundamental defining element of the relationship, holding her love-poetry in the moment before the hetero/homosexual split.[547]

Insofar as the 'seventeenth-century' poems of 'The Third Book of Songs' offer us the female body, it is the body transfigured into a non-physical ideal, whether as an embodiment of spiritual virtue, as a symbol of aesthetic perfection, or as the site for poetic production. Drawing on heteroerotic tradition, these poems often adopt a male-female mode of address, or, as in 'Unbosoming', present a body that transcends gender, making it difficult to read them as constructive of a specifically lesbian identity. However, as suggested earlier, *Underneath the Bough* also places itself in relation to a more Romantic tradition of mutually sympathetic love, manifested in the opening FitzGerald quote – 'and thou / Beside me singing'. Those poems that express love-relationship in these more reciprocal, and occasionally overtly female-female, terms have a somewhat different approach to representing the female body. There is still, here, a spiritualisation of both lover and beloved bodies, but it is a spiritualisation expressed through sensuous rather than abstract metaphor.

The early poem 'Cowslip-gathering', composed in 1883, is typical of these poems of a reciprocal love that combines the sensuous and the spiritual. The poem describes a female-female couple – 'twin maiden spirits' – who are the speakers of the poem – 'we' – wandering through a peaceful and fertile landscape:

Twain cannot mingle: we went hand in hand,  
Yearning, divided, through the fair spring land.[548]

This 'simple' Romantic story, in which the Blakean child-like protagonists are unofficially betrothed by a benign 'Nature' – 'dear Nature spied us / [. . .] And smiled: "These children I will straight espouse"' – is also connected by both Bradley and Cooper to a moment in their joint personal story. In *Perpetua*, the poem is titled 'A memory of West Malvern', and in later letters to Cooper's sister, Bradley writes that 'the cowslip fields will always be connected with West Malvern', while Cooper suggests that 'Cowslips always bind my love & me close, for their fresh clusters at Malvern memorably invited us years ago'. [549] In her contribution, Cooper here, as in her contextualisation pieces for 'I sing thee with the stock-dove's throat', and 'It was deep April', emphasises the production of herself and Bradley as the equally-conceived lover and beloved of

the poem – ‘my love and me [. . .] us’ – at the same time repeating its underlying theme of a mutual blending in a relinquishing of the self to natural forces – ‘cowslips always bind my love and me’.

In the poem, Bradley produces the Bradley-Cooper relationship as a female homoeroticism of identical figures – ‘twin maiden spirits’. The notion of female-female love as a relationship of remarkable likeness was not new: in the seventeenth century, Donne’s ‘Sapho to Philaenis’ had expressed fascination with this idea: ‘My two lips, eyes, thighs, differ from thy two / But so, as thine from one another doe’.[550] However, Donne constructs his two female lovers, despite their physical similarity, across an active/passive lover/beloved split, resulting in a poem of failing persuasion, as his Sapho pleads for an overtly sexual consummation with a resistant Philaenis, whereas Bradley places her ‘twin maiden spirits’ in a Romantic idyll of innocent sensuousness in which the two indistinguishable lovers, already ‘hand in hand’, move together towards a consummation of gentle but complete diffusive synthesis reminiscent of Keats – ‘in one our very being blent’.[551]

The sensuous component of this Romantic presentation of female-female love is evident throughout the poem, metaphorically represented by the call of the cuckoo as it ‘thrills the alder-boughs’, and the ‘rich content’ of the bees humming in the cherry trees, as well as by the lush ‘meadow-verdure’ into which Nature leads the lovers. However, after the ‘hand-in-hand’ of the opening line, the poem avoids any direct reference to the body, with the physical characteristics of the female body displaced onto the surroundings – the ‘tender, marshy nook’ and the ‘moist quiet’ by a ‘brook’ – producing an idyllic, feminine, and fluid landscape similar to those we encountered in *Long Ago*. This refusal to represent the female bodies of the ‘twin maiden spirits’ is very marked if we compare this poem to Donne’s, in which the joining of hands is only the beginning of an imagined physical conjoining of all parts of the similar female bodies – ‘Hand to strange hand, lippe to lippe none denies; / Why should they brest to brest, or thighs to thighs?’

Where Bradley’s ‘seventeenth-century’ poems use metaphor to transform the body into an abstract ideal, her ‘Romantic’ poetry uses metaphor to suffuse a still spiritually-defined relationship – ‘twin maiden spirits’ – with sensuous suggestion. Bradley introduces here a spiritual/sensuous image which was to become a constant in both Bradley and Cooper’s depiction of the love relationship – the trinity, insisting on the necessity of a third figure to bring about the idyllic synthesis of the lovers: ‘there must be / In all true marriage perfect trinity’. After their conversion to Catholicism, the image of the trinity was imbued directly with Christian significance, as the third figure became the Holy Spirit. In this pre-conversion poem, the third figure hovers between the physical and the spiritual, firstly as ‘Dear Nature’, the spirit of the natural landscape, and secondly as the sound of the bees in the blossom overhead:

till the rich content  
Of the bee humming in the cherry-trees  
Filled us; in one our very being blent.[552]

The humming of the bee is here used to produce an image of consummation as a kind of sensuous joint penetration by a third element, as, ‘filling’ both lovers, it ‘blends’ the ‘twain’ of the opening of the poem into ‘one’.

While the poem thus hints at physical consummation, the suggestion that this is a union of ‘our very being’, given the absence of direct reference to the body noted above, keeps us, paradoxically, in an ambiguous realm between physical and spiritual: in Chapter 1 we saw

Bradley define the 'very selves' of herself and Cooper as 'the ideal in us'. Furthermore, the use of the sound of the bee, invisible and intangible, simultaneously entering the bodies of the two lovers, suggests a process of sensuous combination on the very edge of physicality, drawing back from the 'frankly sexual', or 'shockingly sensual' into a Paterian realm of liminal diffusion and suggestive homoeroticism that employs and develops the literary possibilities of female-female relationship, but, like the 'seventeenth-century' poetry, evades the production of any categorically sexual identity.

While both the 'seventeenth-century' poetry of heteroerotic restraint, with its gender-ambiguous lover and its spiritually-defined female beloved, and the 'Romantic' poetry of diffuse female homoeroticism, with its indeterminate bodiless sensuousness, play with themes and conventions that are part of a contemporary shifting of literary and cultural possibility that will lead to the production of the hetero/homosexual split, neither seems quite to cross the threshold into a 'lesbian' poetry. Indeed, each of them in different ways – the blazon poems through their representation of the beloved body as symbolic of spiritual virtue or aesthetic effect; 'Unbosoming' through its insistence on the purpose of love as the production of aesthetic 'issue'; and 'Twain cannot mingle' through its evocation of a spiritual union brought about by a dissolving of physical boundary – seems marked by a determination to lead us away from a reading of the Bradley-Cooper relationship as based on physical love.

Bradley's insistence on a spiritual and aesthetic representation of the Bradley-Cooper relationship is not, it seems to me, either evidence of her celibacy, nor a defensive strategy of concealment of unacceptable sexual behaviour. Nobody argues that Barrett Browning's presentation of an ideal love in 'Sonnets from the Portuguese' signifies that her relationship with Browning was unconsummated. For Bradley, as for Barrett Browning, the overwhelming impetus in producing a literary presentation of the love relationship is not to express its sexual truth, but to represent its spiritual enrichment.[553] At the same time, as we have seen, there is a sensuous dimension to some of Bradley's love-poems that seems to hint at the physical desire it also circumvents.

From a modern perspective, the ambiguities of the love poetry of *Underneath the Bough* can appear to be a deliberate defence against the sexological categorisation of sexual possibility that was emerging even as Bradley and Cooper wrote. Fletcher, for example, considers these love poems as evidence of an 'evasive strategy' in which Bradley and Cooper 'both resist and play with' the contemporary ever-increasing requirement for sexual confession, producing narratives that 'control by obfuscating' their own love-story.[554] Thain similarly suggests that this poetry is historically marked by Bradley and Cooper's position immediately before the Foucauldian moment of sexual self-definition, seeing them as 'resisting the new scientific discourses of sex' by producing a 'vague, but inviting' eroticism that positions itself within the tradition of the *ars erotica*, in which the power of sex is dependent on a withholding of its promised secrets.[555]

Like Fletcher and Thain, I see Bradley's love-poetry as strongly determined by its historical moment. Their commentaries are better able to account for the love poems of 'The Third Book of Songs' than those which describe them as the expression of a trans-historical 'female sexuality from the inside' or 'bodily sensuality in verse'.[556] What I think is missing here, is a sense of Bradley and Cooper's motivation in refusing the discourses of the *scientia sexualis*. Their resistance to the limitations of sexological categorisation is inspired not, I believe, by a wish to produce radical 'sexual dissidence', as suggested by Fletcher, nor by a desire to invoke the 'eroticism of mystery', as argued by Thain, but primarily by their faithful adherence to



a vision of poetry and the poet as above and beyond the limitations of any nineteenth-century materialist science.[557] Bradley and Cooper's belief in the homoerotic as the space of that non-material love that could inspire poetry made it necessary to both indicate and remove the female body from the literary representation of their relationship. It is from this predicament that many of the incoherencies and ambiguities of 'The Third Book of Songs' arise.

### 5. Female-female desire in 'The Third Book of Songs'

The promotion of an ideal of sympathetic female-female love within the more Romantic love poems of *Underneath the Bough* has led several writers to argue that these poems demonstrate a fundamental and positive difference between the operation of female-female and male-female desire. The current section looks at the characteristics of female-female desire as presented in the love-poems of *Underneath the Bough*, asking whether these are structurally different from and radically subversive of those offered by male-female tradition.

The association in Bradley and Cooper's writing of their own love relationship with the production of poetry has suggested to some critics a direct link between lesbian desire and collaborative creativity. Laird, for example, argues, using Irigaray's notion of female-female writing as the writing of 'two lips' that 'speak together', that Bradley and Cooper produce an 'alternative model of desire', connected with a particularly female-female collaborative writing practice in which women can 'reinvoke the genitally female sense of contiguity against the lonely phallic "I"'. [558] This formulation suggests that Bradley and Cooper's combination of sympathetic female homoerotic blending and double writing, seen here as intimately connected to the physiological detail of the female body, can be read as a challenge not only to the subject/object split traditionally associated with the operation of male-female desire, but also to the idea of writing as the product of a single, controlling male author. [559]

Laird centres her argument on the *Underneath the Bough* poem 'A girl', which she maintains combines male and female lyric forms to produce a 'doubly indeterminate utterance' that dissolves the boundaries of self and other. [560] The poem begins, like 'No beauty born of pride' and 'Love's Sour Leisure', with a seventeenth-century-style blazon, the 'male lyric form' identified by Laird:

A girl,  
Her soul a deep-wave pearl  
Dim, lucent of all lovely mysteries;  
A face flowered for heart's ease,  
A brow's grace soft as seas  
Seen through faint forest-trees:  
A mouth, the lips apart,  
Like aspen-leaflets trembling in the breeze  
From her tempestuous heart. [561]

This section of the poem is typical of Bradley's 'listing of parts' – there is no attempt at naturalistic description of the beloved body, but instead a metaphorical assignation of each part to a natural element, not chosen to suggest visual correspondence – the girl's soul is 'a deep-wave pearl', her face is 'flowered for heart's ease', her brow 'soft as seas', her mouth, 'like aspen

leaflets'. The poem further suggests that the beloved body can be read as a place which is symbolically suggestive of any possible abstraction – 'Dim, lucent of all lovely mysteries'.

The opening also produces the 'girl' as the junior and silent but inviting partner of the seventeenth-century lover-beloved couple – young, vulnerable, 'the lips apart' and 'trembling', but producing no sound. However, as in 'An Invitation', the poem moves from this seventeenth-century opening into a second section of Romantic ideal sympathy and joint creation, which, for Laird, suggests a movement from a 'male' to a 'female' form.

Such: and our souls so knit,  
I leave a page half-writ –  
    The work begun  
Will be to heaven's conception done,  
    If she come to it.[562]

The single-word summary opening the tenth line – 'such' – both contains and effectively dismisses the previous nine lines, and is followed by a colon, operating as a barrier between the distanced presentation of the beloved as blazon, and the ensuing construction of the lover-beloved relationship as ideal spiritually conjoined couple ('our souls so knit'). This second form of relationship gives both lover and beloved a role in the creative process, with Bradley presenting the poem as a product of that 'spiritual procreancy' that we saw at work in 'Unbosoming' – a 'heaven's conception' – here represented not as the impregnation of one lover by another, but as a collaborative form of writing in which the 'work begun' by the speaker is left for completion by the beloved.

For Laird, 'A girl' not only describes, but also enacts the collaborative female-female process, with the turn on the word 'such' suggesting a 'reshaping' of the 'structure of desire' from a 'unidirectional movement between the power-seeking (male) gaze and voice and the passively recipient, silent female object' to 'an invitation to gaze together at each other'. She sees this movement as opening the poem up to its female readers – 'the poem invites us to be each other's objects'. [563] Laird's formulation implies that Bradley and Cooper here follow a deliberate strategy for producing a new female-female model of desire and poetic production, implicitly critical of the male-female model whose replacement it performs. It also suggests that the poem has a radicalising effect on its readers, who are encouraged to respond to the poem as homoerotic subject/objects that give and receive an egalitarian female-female gaze.

However, this account neither addresses the context within which this poem was produced, nor examines the poem's internal logic. There is no general sense in Bradley's writing that the 'female' Romantic blending of equal lovers is preferred to the 'male' seventeenth-century lover-and-silent-mistress tradition. Many of her poems are presented entirely in the style of seventeenth-century 'male lyrics', with no sense of criticism of the male-female power structure inherent in this form. Her production of 'female' poems of Romantic lover-beloved blending was concurrent with, rather than subsequent to, these 'seventeenth-century' poems, and sometimes both forms are combined, as we saw in 'An Invitation', where the relationship is portrayed as a collaborative performance of Elizabethan and Elizabethan-inspired texts. Furthermore, Bradley frequently produced prose contexts for both 'seventeenth-century' and 'Romantic' poems in which she presented herself as an Elizabethan male poet-lover, again with no sense of critique of this 'power-seeking' position. It was the male Berenson, rather than the female Bradley and Cooper, who was critical of the 'Elizabethan conceits' of *Underneath the Bough*, and while his criticism led the

poets to remove many from the second edition, they retained a number through to the third ('Methinks my love to thee doth grow', 'I love her with the seasons'), suggesting that they never entirely rejected the possibility of performing in this mode.[564]

Second, the suggestion that the Michael Field poetry is the direct result of a total blending of lover and beloved, part of a larger story that Bradley promoted vigorously throughout her and Cooper's writing partnership, is in large part a fiction, particularly in relation to the love poems of 'The Third Book of Songs', which were all, including the Romantic poems of reciprocal intermingling, separately composed by her alone. The very context in which we are encouraged to read 'A girl' as a commentary on the Bradley-Cooper relationship, the scene with Francis in *Works and Days* that we examined in Chapter 1, is a place where this poem is assigned singular rather than collaborative authorship, as one of 'Michael's poems to me'.[565]

As critics such as Blain and London have pointed out, Bradley's presentation of the Michael Field writing as the product of perfect lover-beloved blending was at least partly motivated by the necessity of insisting that there was here a 'unity of voice', in the face of hostility to collaboration.[566] Bradley's formulation of the Bradley-Cooper writing bond – 'together, we form a perfect Michael' – promotes the collaboration as the achievement of singular male voice, rather than as a fundamental challenge to the idea of the lone male as the apotheosis of creative genius.[567] We have also seen how the connection of the writing to Bradley and Cooper's homoerotic relationship through the metaphor of procreation – the 'heaven's conception' of this poem – is persistently used by Bradley and Cooper as a means of self-positioning in relation to a contemporary male-male tradition of Platonic inspiration, rather than being determined by a 'labial' female-female collaborative practice.

Finally, Laird is wrong to suggest that 'A girl' invites us either to gaze at each other or to be each other's objects. The second half of the poem refuses any sense of visual and bodily presence either for us or for lover and beloved. If it begins by offering the reader a symbolically rendered vision of the 'girl' across a distance, after the turn the physical attributes of the beloved are simply closed away – 'Such: and our souls so knit' – and the poem never returns to any descriptive or symbolic presentation of the body that could be read as an invitation to gaze. In effect, the reader is locked out rather than invited in, as lover and beloved are presented as already one, not only 'knit', but 'so knit', united by an emphasised adjectival fastness, beyond any verb-based process of conjoining in which the reader could participate. This moment of absolute mutual possession is followed not only by a complete absence of descriptive reference, but by the figurative removal of both lover and beloved, as the speaker of the poem leaves the scene of writing in a caesura – 'I leave a page half-writ –' – to which the beloved has not yet arrived – 'if she come to it'.

Despite its 'open' ending, the second half of 'A girl' thus operates a foreclosure that refuses any structure of desire, whether male-female, female-female, or male-male. The melding together of lover and beloved produces a complete unity in which there is no gap between lover and beloved, and no lack within the love. Since fulfilment has already been achieved, there is no basis for that longing that we associate with desire. Rather than producing an Irigarayan 'contiguous' moment of desire, the second half of the poem struggles to create any sense of desire at all.

The representation in this poem of the Bradley-Cooper love relationship as a close lover-beloved interconnection – 'our souls so knit' – is echoed in several other poems in 'The Third Book of Songs': 'we are bound by such close ties'; 'in one our very being blent'.[568] For some critics, this close blending is both indicative of a specifically female-female bonding and a

positive feature of the poetry. Laird, again, argues that the closeness between lover and beloved here is a positive sign of the difference between female homoerotic desire and male-female heteroerotic love – replacing the traditional unequal male-female, subject-object relationship with two equal ‘desiring subjects’ undermines the Freudian/Lacanian sense of desire as a movement between presence and absence.[569] Thain also, while preferring a model of desire that acknowledges Bradley and Cooper’s ability to ‘take turns’ at playing the roles of subject and object, suggests that their ‘dual authorship’ enables them to transcend the ‘dialectic of absence and presence’ through the production of what she calls a ‘certainty of presence’.[570]

While I agree that the love poetry of *Underneath the Bough* depends on a ‘certainty of presence’, underwritten by the production of the Bradley-Cooper relationship, I consider this representation of the lover-beloved relationship as perfect union to be dependent on exactly that play between absence and presence that for Laird implies a Freudian/Lacanian model of desire, and for Thain a Tennysonian elegiac displacement. Just as the perfect timeless homoerotic space of Lesbos in the poems of *Long Ago* depended on the irruptions of time and the heteroerotic against which it defined itself, so, in the Romantic poems of idyllic female-female intermingling in *Underneath the Bough*, we see a constant need to produce imaginary absence against which to invoke the plenitude of the Bradley-Cooper relationship.

Again and again in ‘The Third Book of Songs’, we find that the love poems of homoerotic closeness and lover-beloved blending are infused with loss and absence – moved back, like ‘Cowslip-gathering’ or ‘An Invitation’ to a moment before the relationship is established, or dwelling, like poems such as ‘Acheron’ or ‘A gray mob-cap’, on the future loss of the lover or beloved to death. This consistent manoeuvre ensures that these poems work on exactly that play between absence and presence that both underlies the Freudian/Lacanian understanding of desire and produces elegiac mourning.

Typical of these poems of imaginary loss is ‘If I but dream that thou art gone’, which, like ‘Cowslip-gathering’, is a poem of sensuous/spiritual melding. Where ‘Cowslip-gathering’ divided lover and beloved by beginning in a past where they were ‘Twain’, ‘If I but dream that thou art gone’ opens up the separation between lover and beloved through the device of a dream of loss which immediately allows the expression of desire as a longing for the absent beloved:

If I but dream that thou art gone  
My heart aches to o’ertake thee.[571]

As in ‘Cowslip-gathering’, the boundaries between body and soul are dissolved, as, in the implicit context of a shared bed, the fear of lover and beloved becoming ‘untwined’ leaves the lover bodiless – ‘a disembodied sprite’ – but with an aching ‘heart’.

In the final tercet, Bradley combines this mingling of body and soul with that of lover and beloved, while holding open a temporal gap that allows a permanent movement of desire:

Until thou wake me  
With thy kiss-warmèd breath, and take me  
Where we are one.[572]

We return, supported by the almost mirroring rhyme scheme of the poem, to the implied physical context of the bed – ‘Until thou wake me’ – where the beloved’s ‘kiss-warmèd breath’ suggests a spiritual emanation of the body marked by the trace of previous physical contact. Here we are in a

suspended future – ‘until [. . .]’ – as the lover simultaneously demands from and surrenders to the beloved (‘take me’), in a movement towards a union which is also already present – ‘where we are one’. The expression ‘take me / where we are one’ again hints at a resolution both bodily and spiritual, couched in terms familiar from representations of male-female desire and sexual consummation as a process of possession of the beloved body, while returning the lovers to the perfect unity of the Bradley-Cooper relationship.

This poem of perfect Romantic female-female blending neither moves beyond the terms of Freudian/Lacanian desire nor transcends the elegiac dialectic of presence and absence. It is in no sense a collaborative poem – written by Bradley alone, like any traditional love poem it assumes the voice of the lover and addresses a silent beloved, and its play between absence and presence (I might lose the beloved object / I will regain the beloved object) depends on a division between subject and object.[573] While Bradley engages with the possible movement of subject/object position possible in a reciprocal relationship, producing the speaker as object in the final tercet – ‘thou wake me / [. . .] and take me’ – the speaker established as ‘I’ in the opening line is never supplanted. The whole poem works as the imaginary utterance of this singular speaker, so that although, in the final line, ‘we are one’, it is still ‘I’ who asserts that unity.[574] The poem successfully manipulates, rather than undermines, the dialectic of subject/object and presence/absence.

Implicit in many critics’ suggestions that Bradley and Cooper’s self-performance as idyllically reciprocal intermingling couple undermines subject/object division or refuses the opposition between absence and presence is a belief that these representations of the relationship provide a positive alternative model of female-female desire. This idea is questioned by Vicinus, who argues that the tendency for a ‘denial of difference’ between female lover and female beloved evident in some of Bradley and Cooper’s writing can lead to an ‘excessive merging’ that is a potential weakness, rather than a strength of female-female relationship.[575]

It would be possible to produce a ‘psychological’ reading of the poems of *Underneath the Bough* that saw their assertions of total commingling of lover and beloved not as proof of the superiority of female-female desire, but as evidence of the inadequacy of Bradley and Cooper’s frequently expressed wish to be ‘growing into one’, negatively shadowed by an apparent desperate anxiety that cries out in several of these poems: ‘I dare not let thee leave me, sweet, / Lest it should be for ever’, ‘Thou must not leave me!’, ‘Leave me not, thou!’[576] As I argued in relation to the ideal female homoerotic poems of *Long Ago*, there is a logic here that, in projecting female-female relationship into an impossible timeless idyll beyond the degeneration of the real, condemns itself to repetition: the obsessive circling of a perfect love around the separation that it cannot bear and that it constantly imagines.

We should also not forget that idyllic blending is not the only model of relationship that Bradley produces in ‘The Third Book of Songs’. If we see this model as particularly typical of female-female desire, then we are forced to ignore the seventeenth-century poems of restrained admiration, or the several poems here in which the emphasis is on the elder-younger split.[577] We also cannot overlook the fact that *Underneath the Bough*, like *Long Ago* and *Sight and Song*, does not focus solely on narratives of female-female love. While ‘The Third Book of Songs’ restricts itself to poems connected to the Bradley-Cooper relationship, it exists within a context in which representations of female-male desire can also be found. The following section looks at two poems from the later sections of *Underneath the Bough* connected to Cooper’s unrequited passion for Berenson, asking how far the models of desire set up in these later, female-male poems can illuminate by contrast the specific ‘difference’ of the female-female love poems of

*Underneath the Bough.*

**6. Female-male desire in *Underneath the Bough***

As I argued in Chapter 1, the relationship with Berenson, like the Bradley-Cooper relationship, was fundamental to both Bradley and Cooper's building of an elevated identity. Just as Bradley and Cooper produced a 'private' literary love-narrative around their female-female relationship, so too they wrote countless letters and journal entries documenting and commenting on the significance of their female-female-male interaction with Berenson. While Berenson ensured that any reference to him was expunged from the published version of *Works and Days*, there is no doubt that Bradley and Cooper intended this relationship to be understood as of major significance in the literary version of their life story.[578] As with the Bradley-Cooper relationship, they developed a range of identities through which this relationship was played out.

In her detailed study of the unpublished texts, Vicinus describes how all three players constructed narratives around their interaction that not only exploited the heteroerotic potential of the highly-charged emotional involvement of both women with Berenson, but also drew on a number of male and female homoerotic possibilities opened up by it.[579] Initially both Bradley and Cooper used Berenson, as they had used Browning, as a male figure they could worship together, the third element in a trinity, through whom they could produce the perfect homoerotic blend proposed in 'Cowslip-gathering'. However, as we saw in Chapter 1, Cooper soon began to recreate Berenson as a figure in relation to whom she could express an unrequited and unfulfilled passion, allowing her to develop a separate identity as tragic lover.

This passion was at times represented in heteroerotic terms, with its most extreme expression in the tragedy *Attila, my Attila*, where Berenson, transmuted into the unlikely character of Attila the Hun, is represented, Vicinus suggests, as a figure of 'unavailable, cruel masculinity'.[580] In less angry moments, the relationship appears as an expression of the strength and 'obvious' status of heteroerotic desire:

At last we were together, I and you,  
Alone with our great power – that you are man,  
That I am woman: every second knew  
Why we were left like this [. . .].[581]

Meanwhile both Berenson and Cooper perceived themselves, and were perceived by others, as androgynous figures, allowing a representation of the Cooper-Berenson relationship as either female or male homoeroticism.[582] Berenson at one point described Cooper as his 'sister-soul', suggesting the potential for himself and Cooper of the fantasy of ideally similar 'twin-maiden spirits' that Bradley had explored for herself and Cooper in 'Twain cannot mingle'.[583] Cooper also refers to herself and Berenson as similar figures, or 'twin-souls', creating the relationship as a kind of narcissistic self-love:

In him all that fascinates me about myself parts me in another [. . .]. It is a kind of self-joy, a kind of recognition of the dearness of one's identity.[584]

Vicinus suggests that while Berenson may have emphasised their mutual femininity in his use of the term 'sister-soul', there is a strong sense that for Cooper, the 'fascinating' aspect of her self that she sees embodied in her 'twin-soul' Berenson is the highly-valued 'masculine' side of her own nature, producing a reading of the relationship as one of male rather than female homoeroticism.[585]

This production of the Cooper-Berenson relationship across a range of homoerotic and heteroerotic possibilities is transferred to the love poetry relating to Berenson, mostly written by Cooper. As with the Bradley-Cooper poems, the use of a second-person address frequently masks the gender of the beloved, while the speaker is imbued with the gender-complexity connected with the name Michael Field. Furthermore, there is again a lack of description of the body and a corresponding emphasis on the spiritual, contributing to a gender ambiguity that, in the 1980s, led some critics to read several of these poems as related to the Bradley-Cooper relationship. Leighton, for example, assuming that the poem 'I love you with my life', now known for certain to be a poem by Cooper about Berenson, is a Bradley-Cooper homage, reads it as another example of the use of 'natural', elemental features to depict a female homoerotic relationship operating outside social convention.[586]

Following Treby's research, it is now possible to trace within *Works and Days* a process by which several poems from 'The Fourth Book of Songs' are connected to the Cooper-Berenson relationship, in a similar manner to the way in which the Bradley-Cooper relationship is linked to 'The Third Book of Songs'. I now look in detail at two of these poems, to discover how far Bradley and Cooper's literary representation of what, through contextualising references, we know to be a female-male desire can be seen as similar to or different from their representation of desire in the female-female poems connected to the Bradley-Cooper relationship.

One of the most striking features of these female-male poems is the production of the relationship across distance, the lack of which, as we have seen, is often emphasised in Bradley's presentation of the Bradley-Cooper relationship as a close 'mingling' of lover and beloved. 'Across a gaudy room', which appears in the first edition of *Underneath the Bough* among a number of Berenson-associated poems at the beginning of 'The Fourth Book of Songs', sets up this distance in its opening lines:

Across a gaudy room  
I looked and saw his face.[587]

These first lines also set up two further differences between this poem and the Bradley-Cooper love poems. First, and dependent on the production of distance between lover and beloved, there is an emphasis on the visual – 'I looked and saw' – very different from Bradley's tendency to produce sound and smell as the primary senses through which to interact with the closely-held beloved; and secondly, there is the production of an artificial, over-decorated or 'gaudy' interior, crucially different from the simple, natural settings in which Bradley's love poems take place.

This latter element is developed as the poem continues:

Beneath the sapless palm-trees, in the gloom  
Of the distressing place,  
Where everyone sat tired,  
Where talk itself grew stale,  
Where, as the day began to fail,  
No guest had just the power required

To rise and go: I strove with my disgust.[588]

The 'sapless palm trees', artificial and lifeless, contrast with the 'cherry-trees' and 'faint forest-trees' of 'Twain cannot mingle' or 'A girl', while the 'stale' room filled with tired guests is the antithesis of the private flower-filled 'chamber' of 'An Invitation'. The landscape and social context offered here – the 'at home' of the nineteenth-century middle classes – seems much closer to the contemporary suburb than the bowers and groves of 'The Third Book of Songs', but it would be as misleading to read this poem as an exercise in realism, as to interpret the flowers of 'An Invitation' as 'natural'. [589] The barren palm trees and bored guests are as emblematic as the irises, myrtles and 'dear Nature' which appear in 'The Third Book of Songs', creating a symbolic backdrop against which the relationship with the beloved can be read:

But at the sight of him my eyes were fired  
To give one glance, as though they must  
Be sociable with what they found of fair  
And free and simple in a chamber where  
Life was so base.[590]

The 'fair' and 'simple' character of the beloved is set against the 'stale' and 'dull' interior landscape of a room where all other forms of life are 'base', suggesting a rejection of the material world and a longing for elevated, eternal spaces and identities similar to that I have noted in poems such as 'It was deep April'.

Meanwhile, Cooper develops her concern with the visual relationship in the figure of the 'glance', which in the following lines is used as a device for 'leaping' across, while maintaining, the distance between lover and beloved:

As when a star is lit  
In the dull, evening sky,  
Another soon leaps out to answer it,  
Even so the bright reply  
Came sudden from his eyes,  
By all but me unseen.[591]

Vicinus suggests that Cooper consistently produces herself as object of both Berenson and Bradley's gaze.[592] It is true that for Cooper a self-conscious self-presentation is vital, the first audience for which is Bradley; it is also true that the 'look' plays an essential role in her relationship with Berenson. However, in neither case is Cooper producing herself primarily as object of a gaze. Cooper's self-presentation for Bradley and her wider audience is fundamentally non-visual: it is a display of the emotional and psychological traces of genius. Meanwhile, although she endows her relationship with Berenson with the language of 'fiery glances' and 'burning stares', she constructs herself as subject, as well as object of his gaze, a position that matches her perception of herself as Berenson's 'twin-soul'. So, in 'Across a gaudy room', the initial look is her own – I looked and saw' – and the look of the beloved is constructed as a 'bright reply': responsive and also visible. It is here, rather than in 'A girl', that we find a representation of a mutual gaze in which an equally conceived lover and beloved are invited to be each other's



objects. The focus is not on the speaker's own image as object of the gaze, but on the distance that makes this mutual looking possible:

Since then the distance that between  
Our lives unalterably lies  
Is but a darkness, intimate and still,  
Which messages may traverse, where replies  
May sparkle from afar, until  
The night becomes a mystery made clear  
Between two souls forbidden to draw near:  
Creator, why?[593]

The 'unalterable' distance produced here provides endless opportunity for visual 'messages' and 'replies', as Cooper produces her relationship with Berenson as a 'forbidden' love between similar partners – 'two souls' – as if it was indeed a legally-outlawed male homoeroticism, condemned to 'sparkle from afar'.

Where, in her 'Romantic' love poems, Bradley constructs the Bradley-Cooper relationship as a female-female idyll in which distance between the lovers is produced only within imaginary or conditional contexts – 'if I but dream that thou art gone' – Cooper here produces the Cooper-Berenson relationship as a dissevered ideal, depending on a distance whose physical traversal will never be effected. The answer to Cooper's somewhat melodramatic questioning of this distance at the end of the poem – 'Creator, why?' – which at a mundane level could be read as the lack of interest by the beloved, is that the separation of lover and beloved assists creation itself; it is in this 'unalterable' gap that the poem produces the miracle of a natural exterior of bright stars within a 'dull' and 'sapless' interior, transforming the mere 'darkness' as 'the day began to fail' into an eternal sparkling 'mystery'. [594]

While there are clearly important differences between this poem and the Bradley-Cooper love poems, there are also striking similarities. Despite the physical distance between the lovers, this is still a relationship between figures who are spiritually akin – 'two souls' – with lover and beloved represented as equally bright stars whose communicative look crosses the immeasurable distance between them. This is also a relationship that, like the Bradley-Cooper love relationship, can be used to transform a contemporary urban space into an ideal elemental landscape. Finally, the relationship, like the Bradley-Cooper relationship, is used as a support for the production of aesthetic identity, allowing Cooper to take on the role of Wagnerian impotent tragic hero that in Chapter 3 we saw her assume in relation to Saint Sebastian, with the divinely-directed question 'why am I denied what I am made for?' that she both ascribed to Sebastian and owned as an expression of her own disappointed 'passion', here abridged to 'Creator, Why?' [595]

Another similarity between the Bradley-Cooper love-poems and the Cooper-Berenson poems is the emphasis on performance, reminding us that we cannot read these poems as a 'realistic' account of a relationship that preceded its literary manifestation. We saw how Bradley presented the Bradley-Cooper relationship as a kind of harmonious aesthetic performance, the joint 'singing' of 'An Invitation' or 'It was deep April'. Cooper, too, produces her relationship with Berenson as performance, but here the emphasis is on the acting out of tragedy rather than the production of song. 'Marionettes', written two years later than 'Across a gaudy room', and replacing it in the third edition, presents the Cooper-Berenson relationship as joint performance, but where 'An Invitation' and 'It was deep April' project their happy performances forward to a

future audience, 'Marionettes' places its tragic performance in a lost past.[596]

'Marionettes' is more collaborative than any of the poems from the 'Third Book of Songs' connected with the Bradley-Cooper relationship. It appears in *Works and Days* in Bradley's handwriting, with the following note – 'We went to Bernhard's lecture on Friday. I make up this material of P's.'[597] 'P' is short for 'Puss', another nickname for Cooper, reminding us that the production of the tragedy of the Berenson-Cooper relationship, in particular its poetic form, is also in part a collaboration between Bradley and Cooper, something which Bradley, as well as Cooper, can 'make up' into a poem, even if the initial 'material' is Cooper's.

The poem opens, like 'Across a gaudy room', with a reminder of the distance between lover and beloved, and with a similar traversal of space through the device of the 'glance':

We met  
After a year. I shall never forget  
How odd it was for our eyes to meet,  
For we had to repeat  
In our glances the words that we had said  
In days when, as our lashes lifted  
Or drooped, the universe was shifted.  
We had not closed with the past, then why  
Did the sense come over us as a fetter  
That all we did speaking eye-to-eye  
Has all been done before and so much better?[598]

The short opening line produces a visual and aural gap between 'met' and 'After a year', emphasising the length of separation, while the following lines return to the repeated mutual looks – 'our glances' – which, as in 'Across a gaudy room', have the power to cross the vast distance between lover and beloved – 'as our lashes lifted / Or drooped, the universe was shifted'. Again, the lover-beloved gaze is represented as a meeting of equal subjects rather than a moment of subject/object division, a 'speaking eye-to-eye' that is an aural reminder ('I-to-I') of Cooper's assertion that her relationship with Berenson is 'a kind of self-joy'.

Like many of the additions to the American version of *Underneath the Bough*, 'Marionettes' has a more relaxed and conversational style than the seventeenth-century-influenced poems that were predominant in the early editions:

I think – but there's no saying –  
What made us so hateful was the rage  
Of our souls at finding ourselves a stage  
Where marionettes were playing:  
For a great actor once had trod  
Those boards, and played the god.[599]

The freer metre and occasional 'feminine' rhyme, the use of speech characteristics such as direct questions or colloquial phrases and asides ('but there's no saying') give the poem a more casual feel than 'Across a gaudy room'. Nevertheless, there is still within this poem a careful construction of the Cooper-Berenson relationship as serious and related to the ideal, although this ideal is now banished to the past.

'An Invitation' set up the Bradley-Cooper love-performance as a repetition of seventeenth-century optimistic love-texts that conferred elevated identity on both partners. Here, the Cooper-Berenson relationship is presented as a compulsive repetition of its own past performances, a repetition that constructs an elevated past identity for both performers, defined as 'great' actors that could 'play the god', but produces a debased performance in the present.[600] This debased performance is represented as the performance of puppets, functioning, like the 'horrible Marionettes' of Wilde's 'The Harlot's House', as indicators of a modern-day falling off from an ideal state.[601] The loss of a past ideal is registered in that more casual metre and less elevated vocabulary which functions to make the poem appear more 'modern', and therefore more distant from the timeless moment of the ideal. 'Marionettes' thus sets itself up in the space familiar from other Michael Field poetry, including poems such as 'It was deep April', of a longing for a lost past in which the ideal is situated.

Like 'Across a crowded room', 'Marionettes' can be seen as in some respects distinct from the Bradley-Cooper love poems, with its emphasis on distance, on visual sensation rather than olfactory or aural, and in its failing modern setting. However, like 'Across a crowded room', it also shares several characteristics with the Bradley-Cooper poems: the interest in lover-beloved performance as potentially elevating; the representation of lover and beloved as equal and similar; the emphasis on 'soul' rather than body; and the world-view that poses the failing modern against an ideal past.

What we cannot find in either poem is any sense of a 'structure of desire' that is definitively marked by the gender of the participants. As in the Bradley-Cooper love poems, desire is set up in a play between presence and absence – though rather than the fantasy of loss and recovery employed by Bradley, Cooper sets up the movement of desire in a look that crosses and re-crosses the distance between lover and beloved. As we noted in relation to 'Across a crowded room', this look could as easily be read as the marker of a male-male forbidden desire permanently held in check as a look of female-male longing.

What more clearly defines the difference between the Bradley-Cooper and the Cooper-Berenson poems are the figures of sensuous and spiritual diffusive blending that sometimes occur in the former and the consistent emphasis on chaste separation in the latter. While both relationships are represented in ideal and spiritually-framed terms, some of the poems connected to the Bradley-Cooper relationship move away from the reserved admiration of 'seventeenth-century' poetry into Romantic evocations of intimate intermingling that hint at, while withdrawing from, images of physical consummation, whereas those connected with the Cooper-Berenson relationship promote a love that is continually held in a distanced framework of permanently unfulfilled desire. Although such a difference can be linked to differences between the actual status of the Bradley-Cooper and Cooper-Berenson relationships, it is difficult to see them as conditioned by an essential difference either between homoerotic and heteroerotic love, or between the gender of the protagonists.

## **Conclusion**

In *Underneath the Bough*, as we have seen, Bradley and Cooper present a vision of love that in sources outside the collection they consistently link to their own female-female relationship. Although this poetry of female-female love may be linked to a real relationship between two

women, it is unclear how far it can be read as a movement within or towards a definitively 'lesbian' identity. While at moments the love-poems of *Underneath the Bough* seem connected with late nineteenth-century trends that are specifically homoerotic – the assumption of 'spiritual procreancy', or Paterian diffusive sensuousness, or even self-placement within seventeenth-century pastoral – they avoid that self-definition in necessary opposition to heterosexuality that is an essential element in the building of homosexual identity. This lack of self-perception as defined by sexuality can partly be seen in the deflection of attention from the female body in the poetry, arising from the desire to produce a spiritual or aesthetic reading of the relationship. It is also clear in the similarity between key elements in the representation of Bradley and Cooper's relationship and in the poetry connected to the Cooper-Benson narrative, both of which access features associated with both heteroerotic and homoerotic traditions.

Even if they cannot be read as examples of 'lesbian' poetry, the love poems of *Underneath the Bough*, linked as they are to a female-female love-narrative, have much to tell us about the possibilities for imagining female-female love in the late nineteenth century. What we find in this collection are a limited range of traditions and conventions on which Bradley and Cooper consistently draw. Unsurprisingly, in the light of our findings in relation to *Long Ago* and *Sight and Song*, this is a female-female bond that constantly figures itself in relation to highly-respected literary traditions of the ideal, allowing Bradley and Cooper to perform either in the seventeenth-century heteroerotic convention of a restrained and respectful poet-lover writing in appreciation of his virtuous 'lady' or as remarkably similar partners in a Romantic idyll of physical/spiritual melding.

Not only is the love-relationship thus placed within a set of literary traditions, it is also represented as the source of literary creation, either in assertions that the love itself inspires poetry, or through a representation of the two women jointly employed in 'musical' performances that are clearly metaphors for the joint writing of poetry. Through these performances, always set in idyllic locations far from the mundane everyday, Bradley and Cooper represent their female-female desire as spiritual, loving, certain, close and reciprocal, a perfect sympathy that owes a clear debt to that notion of female-female love as ideal faithfulness, mutuality and spirituality which had made the Ladies of Llangollen so universally celebrated at the start of the nineteenth century.[602]

There is some temptation for feminist critics, as we have seen, to use the apparent perfect sympathy of the Bradley-Cooper relationship to confirm their belief that female-female love relationships are necessarily the living-out of a proto-feminist female-female idyll, free of sexual exploitation. The ideal presentation of the Bradley-Cooper relationship is read as reflecting the 'truth' of lesbian relationship, to be contrasted not only with the unequal subject/object division of heteroerotic tradition, but also with 'unrealistic' and 'unnatural' contemporary male portrayals of lesbian relationship, whose 'steamy sensationalism' and 'prurience' are seen to be primarily aimed at arousing other men.[603] However, as Castle argues when discussing the 'complexly various' range of fantasies of female-female love that have been produced in European literature over the centuries, the distinction that is often drawn by feminists between female and male, or between non-erotic ('polite') and erotic ('pornographic') presentations of female-female love is not only artificial. It also fails to acknowledge the positive cumulative effect of all of these fantasies in bringing 'the lesbian idea' into visibility.[604] I would like to end this chapter by examining a poem from *Underneath the Bough* that moves beyond the boundaries of Bradley and Cooper's more 'acceptable' poems of female-female love as restrained admiration or supportive closeness, and shows them interacting, instead, with a more erotic and 'decadent' vision of female

homoeroticism as sterile excess.

Bradley and Cooper, while drawing back from complete self-association with the more extreme elements of nineteenth-century 'decadence', had great respect for both Swinburne and Baudelaire, the two nineteenth-century poets most strongly associated with erotic or decadent portrayals of female-female love.[605] Though their literary performances of their own relationship usually tended towards the spiritual, they were not uninfluenced by these more overtly physical representations of female homoeroticism, and Cooper was later to turn to Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* to define the difficulty she had in confessing her 'secret sins' to a priest who 'thinks I have to confess forbidden relations to men' rather than 'the anguish of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> verses of "Femmes Damnées"'. [606] In the American edition of *Underneath the Bough*, Bradley and Cooper moved a poem of female homoeroticism imbued with the voyeurism and sterile sensuous pleasures associated with Swinburne and Baudelaire, which had in previous editions been kept separate from the poems of restraint and reciprocity that are more usually associated with their own relationship, into 'The Third Book of Songs', where it appears immediately following 'A girl'. [607]

'Our myrtle is in flower', like 'Unbosoming', uses the flower as a symbol of the female body, but where in the former poem the iris was used as a metaphor for the poet-lover's body, in the latter, 'our myrtle' represents a combination of lover and beloved whose inner secrets are laid bare in a process of visual undressing:

The glorious stamens' crowded force unfurled,  
Cirque beyond cirque  
At breathing, bee-like, and harmonious work;  
The rose-patched petals backward curled,  
Falling away  
To let fecundity have perfect play. [608]

This stripping of the myrtle 'cirque beyond cirque', revealing or 'unfurling' its 'stamens' as the 'rose-patched petals' are 'curled' back, suggests a voyeuristic relationship to the body that is confirmed in the second half of the poem, which combines visual pleasure with a heady voluptuousness rather different from the 'spiritual' representations of the body we have seen in previous poems:

O flower, dear to the eyes  
Of Aphrodite, rise  
As she at once to bare, audacious bliss;  
And bid us near  
Your prodigal, delicious hemisphere,  
Where thousand kisses breed the kiss  
That fills the room  
With languor of an acid, dark perfume! [609]

The female-female lover-beloved body is left exposed and naked, with its 'bare, audacious bliss' inviting the gaze of a female deity - 'dear to the eyes of Aphrodite' - suggesting a female homoeroticism of shameless ecstasy.

As in 'Unbosoming', at the core of the flower here is reproduction, or 'fecundity', but where the sensuous pleasures of the iris in 'Unbosoming' were used to 'breed' poetry, the myrtle's fertility is not subordinated to any

serious generative aim, but is allowed instead a 'perfect play', leading to 'a thousand kisses' that only 'breed' more kisses in an excess of prolific – 'prodigal' – and sensuous – 'delicious' – non-productive pleasure. This decadent excess places the myrtle in a setting which, in contrast with the sweet fragrances and light-filled 'innocent' exteriors that are the more usual backdrop for Bradley's presentation of the Bradley-Cooper love-narrative, is a 'dark' and 'languid' interior filled with an 'acid' scent. Here the poem is also reminiscent of Baudelaire's 'Lesbos', with its 'thousand kisses' and 'languor' in a 'dark' interior echoing his 'excess of your kisses' and 'languid nights'. [610]

'Our myrtle is in flower', as a poem of decadent excess, is unusual in the Michael Field oeuvre, particularly in its indirect association here with the Bradley-Cooper relationship. [611] However, its presence in 'The Third Book of Songs', as well as Cooper's use of Baudelaire's poem as a mechanism in *Works and Days* for personal homoerotic confession, make it clear that it is wholly wrong to suggest that Bradley's preference for spiritual and romantic models of female homoeroticism arises from a determination to tell the more wholesome 'truth' of female-female love. In choosing, on the whole, not to represent her relationship with Cooper as decadent excess, Bradley was neither ignorant of nor necessarily hostile to that possibility. Her choice of literary models that are predominantly restrained, idyllic and spiritualised was dictated by a set of aesthetic and cultural choices that helped to produce that remarkably consistent self-presentation that I commented on in Chapter 1. The love poems of *Underneath the Bough*, like the journal entries of *Works and Days* or the poetry of *Long Ago* and *Sight and Song*, can all be understood as contributory elements in the literary self-production of Bradley and Cooper as the ideal and elevated poet Michael Field.

## Conclusion

### Homogeneity/heterogeneity

At the start of *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick reminds us of the obvious – the extraordinary range of ways in which we understand and experience sexual relations, and the diminution of understanding that is brought about by the reduction of this variety of possibility to only the gender of object choice. She also points out that, in focusing on the idea of sameness implied by the Greek root-word ‘homo’ in the term ‘homosexuality’, we tend to forget the immense variation between people of the same gender.[612] In this study, I have tried to retain an awareness of human heterogeneity, and in particular to be open to the possibility of changes that occur over time – to engage with the writings of ‘Michael Field’, now more than a century old, not in order to discover there an idea of ‘the lesbian’ or ‘the woman’ that is congruent with our own, whatever we imagine that to be, but to explore their interesting difference.

My study has focused on the same period as Sedgwick’s, the early 1890s, a time when the crystallisation of male sexual possibility into homosexual and heterosexual was at its most intense, and before Wilde’s trial of 1895 made its definitive and negative mark. My interest has been with Bradley and Cooper’s manipulation of, and self-definition through, the shifting and settling of traditions and conventions that also bore upon the writing of Wilde, as well as on his slightly older contemporaries Pater and Symonds. The work of these three more familiar male writers, which at times provided essential raw material from which Bradley and Cooper drew, has been the background against which I have tried to understand the Michael Field writings.

As I noted in my introduction, the interaction in the three male writers between an intense interest in homoerotic literary and artistic tradition, and the construction of personal identities drawing on an aesthetically-framed sense of ‘peculiar’ or ‘strange’ personality, is now often read, in the light of the Wilde trial, and of Symonds’ confessional contributions to *Sexual Inversion*, published the following year, as an important element in the pre-history of the construction of the figure of the male homosexual.[613] My aim in reading the poetry of Bradley and Cooper has been to interrogate the way in which these two female writers built on the same homoerotic traditions, and produced identities for themselves that were also presented as ‘different’ from the everyday. I have been interested to discover whether, though female homosexuality never had a highly visible defining moment like the trial of Wilde, this poetry could also be read as a movement towards the construction of a lesbian self.

My approach has been to read the Michael Field writing, not as expressive of extra-textual identity, but as productive of identity in literary form. I have examined its interaction with those literary traditions that are also promoted in the writing of Pater, Symonds and Wilde, and analysed its debt to, and development of, a number of themes and narratives associated with homoeroticism. I have highlighted Bradley and Cooper’s intense interest in the production of aesthetic identities for themselves, and questioned whether the key features of these identities show any signs of settling into an identity in which lesbianism – the female gender of both the subject and object of desire – is felt, as Foucault puts it, to be ‘everywhere present’, the fundamental defining feature within the personality.[614]

## 1. Summary of the main findings of the thesis

My first chapter focused on the Michael Field prose writing: the journal *Works and Days* and the letters. Here, if one were interested in finding evidence of underlying extra-textual personality in writing, one might expect the uninhibited revelation of personal truths. I drew attention, instead, to how carefully Bradley and Cooper developed and controlled the identities they presented, making a clear division between these unusual personalities and the mundane everyday, confirming my sense that their writing in particular could not be read as evidence of an underlying pre-textual 'truth' of personality.

I noted how important the self-presentation as exceptional individual was to both Bradley and Cooper, and described the way in which their literary production of personality took the form of exaggerated performance. I showed how these performances were used both to transform the urban bourgeois environment into an aesthetic idyll, and to confirm the self as elevated individual placed in a respected tradition of poets, playwrights and artists. Rather than giving us a glimpse of the private lives behind the public figure of Michael Field, the journals reconstructed the private spaces Bradley and Cooper inhabited as aesthetic spaces, and built, I argued, a private identity for both writers – sensitive, responsive and tragic – that confirmed their public position as inspired poet. Finally, I showed how love-narratives, including Bradley and Cooper's own idealised love-story, were central to their production of identity.

Assessing the importance of homoerotic narrative to these self-presentations, I suggested the importance here of ideas taken from Plato's *Symposium*, in which ideal relationships with no connection to the mundane routine of physical procreative coupling are seen as productive of poetry and art. Such narratives, I pointed out, were also significant for writers such as Pater, Symonds and Wilde. However, in analysing whether, internal to Bradley and Cooper's writing, there was a sense of a specifically lesbian identity, I argued that, if we consider the central element of such definition to be the sameness of gender of the subject and object of love, then the presence here of significant female-male love narratives also supporting the identities being constructed renders this problematic. Furthermore, where Pater, Symonds and Wilde's self-placement in a predominantly male literary tradition inflected by homoeroticism supported the movement from 'strange', aesthetically-permeated personality towards identity perceived as defined by male-male relationship, a similar self-positioning in relation to male aesthetic tradition by the female Bradley and Cooper meant that there could be no corresponding seamless transition from their own eccentric, poetic selves to a self-perception as lesbian.

In my second chapter, I focused on the poems of *Long Ago*. Here, I found that the production of identity was also important, in the construction of Sappho as a figure with a distinctive personality who 'sings' the poetry of the collection, and in the connection of that personality with both the public persona of 'Michael Field', and the private personalities of Bradley and Cooper. I drew attention to the complexity of the figure being produced here, as it drew on four different literary traditions of Sapphic identity, some associated with homoerotic themes and narratives, and others with heteroerotic.

Discussing the range of effects arising from the *Long Ago* Sappho's multiple identity, I showed how in part Bradley and Cooper used Sappho's performances to develop the notion of an ideal innocent homoerotic space, existing in opposition to the worldly everyday. Through the figure of Sappho as original 'singer' in a rural idyll, they associated that ideal homoerotic space with the production of poetry as a 'pure' lyric operating outside and against the modern urban environment. I examined how, while publicising and extending Sappho's growing nineteenth-century association with homoerotic narratives, the collection also reproduced and developed



contemporary ideas about the relation between the homoerotic and the heteroerotic, in which the homoerotic was consistently subordinated to the heteroerotic, either as the memory of a pre-heteroerotic period in an eternally lost past, or as an idyllic space of respite from the pain of heteroerotic passion.

In considering whether the production of Sappho as a figure with whom Bradley and Cooper could themselves be identified was a self-figuring as lesbian, I again questioned whether the internal logic of the collection and its interaction with *Works and Days* was sufficient to support such a reading. Sappho's body, I argued, was here produced as a site within which both homoerotic and heteroerotic desire was at play: homosexuality was not 'everywhere present' as the underlying truth of her personality. Furthermore, as in *Works and Days*, of central importance to Bradley and Cooper's self-figuring as Sappho was not the sameness of gender between lover and beloved implied by her homoeroticism, but the concomitant production of a non-productive, non-utilitarian space, seen as the essential prerequisite for the production of art and poetry.

In my third chapter I examined the poetry of *Sight and Song*. Here, while the production of identity could again be seen as central to the collection, I suggested that the identity chosen was that of the male aesthete, produced as a restrained and objective figure re-presenting in poetic form the aestheticised body found in Renaissance painting. I argued that the adoption by Bradley and Cooper of an implicitly male persona must complicate our understanding of the homoerotic and the heteroerotic in this collection. The narratives produced in relation to the paintings mainly focused on male-female love, being overwhelmingly unsympathetic to the female protagonists. Furthermore, I showed that those poems which focused on the gaze of the poet-aesthete at the female body in the painting tended to produce a voyeuristic gaze more readily associated with male-female heteroerotic desire than with female homoeroticism. On the other hand, I noted that those poems focusing on the poet-aesthete's look at the male body, in particular those concerned with the body of Saint Sebastian, were correspondingly entangled with male homoerotic themes.

I suggested that in this collection there was little development of female homoerotic narratives; the occasional poem replayed the innocent-happy/experienced-sad relationship between female homoerotic and female-male heteroerotic love that we first saw in *Long Ago*, while 'The Sleeping Venus' poem elaborated an old tradition in which the female pleasure-loving homoerotic body is presented for an implicitly male audience. I argued that in the Sebastian poems, by contrast, Bradley and Cooper could be seen drawing on and extending a whole range of images and ideas that were in the late nineteenth century clustered around the male homoerotic body, and that were soon to be subsumed in the figure of the male homosexual.

In discussing the possibility of whether this collection could be seen to produce internally a specifically lesbian identity for Bradley and Cooper, I argued that the image of the self as male produced here was inevitably a barrier to such a self-figuring. While the construction of homosexual identity in process at this time depended on an idea of androgyny, a 'certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself', I suggested that the presentation of the inverted self here is closer to that of the male homosexual as a male body infused with feminine sensibility than to contemporary sexological images of the 'mannish lesbian'. [615]

In Chapter 4, I studied the love-poems of *Underneath the Bough*, establishing a consistent connection between these poems and the personal narrative of the Bradley-Cooper love relationship produced in *Works and Days* and other prose writing. I drew attention to the interaction of these poems with two distinct traditions of love-poetry: I noted, on the one hand, the many poems that imitated male-female heteroerotic modes of address taken from seventeenth-century pastoral; and on the other, a more Romantic style of poetry that produced a specifically

female homoerotic scene characterised by mutual harmony and joint sensuous experience.

In discussing the relationship of the collection to homoerotic traditions, I noted that the seventeenth-century pastoral was, particularly at this time, associated with the introduction of homoerotic narrative into British poetry. However, this homoerotic possibility was not overtly played out here. I also noted how the poetry of *Underneath the Bough* developed the homoerotic possibilities of a Romantic love-poetry of sensuous commingling. I suggested that the female homoerotic idyll produced here developed similar ideas of a sympathetic and reciprocal female-female love to those seen in *Long Ago*. I noted that this love was again connected to aesthetic production, through images either of joint lover-beloved harmonious performance, or of Platonic spiritual relationship giving birth to poetry.

I again disputed whether the poetry of this collection could be seen as conferring lesbian identity on Bradley and Cooper, despite its focus on their female-female love relationship. I suggested that the persistent spiritualisation of the female bodies of lover and beloved marked a lack of interest in gender as a determining element of the relationship. I also argued that there was little sense in the collection of essential difference between homoerotic and heteroerotic love – both were presented non-physically, in terms of their Platonic possibility rather than their sexual pleasure.

The sense of self produced by Bradley and Cooper in *Works and Days* and these early poetry collections can nowhere be seen as a directly ‘lesbian self’, in Foucault’s sense of a personality entirely subsumed by its sexuality understood as defined through the gender of lover and beloved. Nevertheless the Michael Field writing can be seen to contribute to the future development of such a self. Bradley and Cooper’s persistent foregrounding of their own love-relationship in *Works and Days* and the love-poetry they connected with it, their employment and development of late nineteenth-century traditions of Sapphic homoeroticism, and their interest in and expansion of ideas of idyllic female-female blending can be understood in relation to the rapidly-increasing literary visibility in the nineteenth century of female homoerotic relationship. As Castle has argued, whatever the motivations, gender or sexual proclivities of those who produced this material, they all helped to establish ‘the lesbian idea’, the imaginary representation of love and desire between women that gave ‘political and social visibility’ to later generations of women who did identify themselves as lesbians.[616]

## **2. Political assessment**

A further aim of this research has been to demonstrate that the adoption of homoerotic discourses and even the development of female-female love relationships do not in themselves necessarily promote or produce radical thought. Some of the themes elaborated in Bradley and Cooper’s poems are drawn from traditions that also fed into feminist and gay rights movements from the nineteen-seventies onwards. The question of self-definition, for example, central in Bradley and Cooper’s work as it was in much late nineteenth-century writing, eventually gave rise to the identity politics of the late twentieth century. Similarly, the old ideal of female-female mutual supportiveness which was extensively developed both in the Michael Field poetry and in Bradley and Cooper’s ‘private’ prose representations of their love relationship, was to become an important concept supporting the construction of a late twentieth-century feminist movement with

the strength to challenge institutions dominated by men. Finally, the Romantic idea of reciprocal love-relationships that promised diffusive mingling rather than dominance and submission, explored in several of the poems I have studied here, was also taken up in a different context as part of a radical agenda that criticised the power imbalance seen as structurally inherent in heterosexual relations.

Because of this shared cultural history, it is possible to experience a sense of recognition when reading some of these poems, and to produce an appreciation of them in which they appear to support a radical lesbian or feminist politics. As we have seen, many Michael Field critics suggest that Bradley and Cooper's production of homoerotic scenes and narratives or the accounts they produce of their own love relationship are, either deliberately or unintentionally, an attack on the heterosexual norm, or an implicitly feminist critique of male power.

However, the production of homoerotic scenes does not of itself automatically imply either awareness or critique of a heteronormative or patriarchal society. The terms 'heteronormative' and 'patriarchal' themselves, useful tools for analysing structures of power and control, can become too bluntly normalising when applied in a blanket way to a variety of writers whose motivations and effects may differ widely. Too often in looking at interpretations of Michael Field poems as radical or feminist, I have found a critical suppression of what is actually present in the poetry, in the interests of producing a reading that supports the writer's belief in a trans-historical, all-embracing narrative of female solidarity and rebellion.

Bradley and Cooper never placed their self-association with literary homoerotic themes and narratives in a feminist or lesbian context. Furthermore, their use of such homoerotic discourse had some deeply conservative features. Their production of a self inflected by homoerotic difference was the production of an elitist persona that they considered elevated above the 'common'.<sup>[617]</sup> The persistent projection of that self into ideal timeless spaces refused connection with the historical present, preventing a meaningful critique of modern social relations, and miring them in the repetition of conventions whose moment for fruitful development was over. Moreover, their perception of and continuous performance of the ideal in female homoerotic love relationship, with its figuration of love between women as inevitably sympathetic and without conflict, fits easily into a world-view in which women are seen as self-effacing and undifferentiated.

The elitism that runs through Bradley and Cooper's writing can be compared to that found in the writing of Pater, Symonds and Wilde, whether it is Pater's affinity for 'men of a finer thread', Wilde's argument that the perfection to be sought in 'the true culture that is our aim' consists in a transformation of 'thoughts, actions or passions that with the common would be common, or with the uneducated ignoble', or Symonds' validation of Greek *paiderastia* through its association with 'one of the most brilliant periods of human culture, in one of the most highly organised and nobly active races'.<sup>[618]</sup>

Such interest in and self-connection with 'the noble' is at least partly due to the strong influence on all these writers of Plato, whose division of love into the physical and spiritual was also a division between the 'vulgar' and the 'noble'. At the end of the nineteenth century, those who promoted this distinction saw it slide, imperceptibly, into a division between the heteroerotic and the homoerotic that, as Dowling suggests, reached its conclusion in Alfred Douglas' poem 'Two Loves', a poem which explicitly divided love into physical appreciation of the female or the male body, and which Wilde was forced to defend in the witness box.<sup>[619]</sup> In the writing of Pater, Wilde and Symonds – caught up, like Bradley and Cooper, in these ambiguous readings of the Platonic binary division of love – the patrician element in Plato lingered on, supporting a

sense that the homoerotic itself was defined by its elevation above 'the common'.

Similarly, Pater, Wilde and Symonds can all be seen producing accounts of Ancient Greece and the Renaissance, that, like Bradley and Cooper's, have more than an element of idealist projection. In reading the three male writers as precursors of the modern homosexual, there is sometimes, as in the criticism of Bradley and Cooper, a tendency to overlook the conservatism that is also present in this constant reference to an idealised past. There is also at times a teleological urge to read all of their writing through the prism of a homosexual identity that they did not necessarily perceive as the defining feature of their personality.

My reading of Bradley and Cooper has tended to view them as predominantly conservative writers who cannot be identified 'as lesbian'. However, I do not wish to rescue them, as Treby proposes, from feminist and lesbian criticism. On the contrary, I feel that by paying attention to the less radical features in their writing, we can not only understand the difference that feminist and gay rights politics have made to the ways in which it is possible to understand same-sex love, but also become aware of some of the limitations of thought that we may also have inherited from the coalescing of older cultural traditions that produced both their and our understanding of the self. Similarly, by understanding Bradley and Cooper's difference from those women who, soon afterwards, would begin to embrace lesbian identity, we can both appreciate what possibilities of self-realisation were made possible for modern women by this new form of subjectivity, and comprehend how the imposition of an absolute binary opposition between 'the heterosexual' and 'the lesbian' produced restrictions in a previously more flexible system of figuring the possibilities of desire.

### **3. Literary assessment**

The rescue of Bradley and Cooper's writing in the last twenty years, under the impetus of a feminist and lesbian programme of exhumation of women's literature, has also led at times to an overrating of their poetic talents, in an equation between Michael Field, female homoeroticism, radicalism and great writing. Bradley and Cooper's poetry is not, in general, incompetent (though there are some embarrassingly bad poems in these collections, which a good editor would certainly have removed), but theirs is, finally, a minor talent.

On the positive side, both writers have an undoubted facility with words. Bradley, in particular, produces some memorable turns of phrase. The richness of cultural reference in their poetry can also provide a great density of ideas in apparently simple frameworks. Frequently when analysing these poems, I have been surprised how far it is possible to go in finding significance and making connections with literary and philosophical traditions, often articulated through the use of simple symbols.

Furthermore, Bradley and Cooper's explorations of a free-floating desire not limited by the constraints of the body takes them into some fascinating areas, producing at times a poetry that is simultaneously sensuous and moving beyond the bounds of the physical. Bradley's use of the sound of the bee to penetrate the two lovers in 'Cowslip-gathering' is typical of such mingling of the sensuous and spiritual, which in the later poetry would be expressed in a range of further unpredictable permutations, for example in the passionate Whym Chow poetry, or in numerous tender and sensitive sonnets from Bradley to Ricketts, which defy categorisation.

However, on the negative side, this is a poetry that can at times seem

turned in on itself, even solipsistic. Moriarty's comment, in 1986, that Bradley and Cooper 'never succeeded in breaking through the confines of their passionate devotion to each other', still stands.[620] The production of mutually protective female homoerotic closeness, the 'secure', and 'twined' bond of *Underneath the Bough*, or the anxious clutch of 'Atthis, my darling', can feel like a kind of self-fettering that, as we saw in 'A girl', can exclude the reader, rather than inviting understanding. Some of the poetry requires a familiarity with the life-story; without any knowledge of *Works and Days*, many of the best of the Michael Field poems would be difficult to read.

Bradley and Cooper also appear backward looking, if often clever, exponents of the themes of aestheticism – tending to reveal its weaknesses at least as often as its strengths: the inability to deal with the present day, the clinging to a sense of abstract ideal that resides elsewhere. Bradley's early assertion to Browning that 'we have many things to say', is little in evidence in these three poetry collections, where residence in a timeless idyll produces a repetition of eternal truths that can often feel like generalised platitude – 'time passes by', 'Love, / Blind and tyrannous', 'passion's fitful mood'.[621] Comparison of the poems of *Sight and Song* with Browning's own poems about Renaissance painting soon reveals how many more things he had to say about the larger themes of art, identity and history than are present in the Michael Field oeuvre, and how much more subtlety, complexity and development is available to him because of his adherence to a relativism and contemporaneity that they eschewed.

Some of the harsh reality with which Bradley and Cooper refused to deal was that of their own failure. By constructing a fictional male persona – 'Michael Field' – and a carefully crafted narrative of idyllic personal relationship and joint aesthetic creation they managed to evade some of the more common crises of nineteenth-century female literary identity, but there is a cost here – that of a lack of engagement with weakness and imperfection, as well as with real social truths. Some echo of this creeps into much of their poetry, with its wistful tone and mournful decaying endings. While the constant oscillation in their poetry between perfect moment and fleeting time can be connected, as Thain argues, with Paterian aestheticism, its effect is to produce a repetitive movement, continually replaying the construction of a lost perfection that is always irrevocably marked by its origination in a failing present that is never directly interrogated.[622]

Bradley and Cooper's constant focus on constructing and controlling their personal identities in a consistent narrative also entails a kind of impoverishment. They were continually retelling the same story – the same metaphors, figures, themes recur throughout their writing in ways which can sometimes cause interesting juxtapositions, and reminders of cultural affinity, as the gem or the bee or the trinity recur in settings that allow paganism and a classical account of homoerotic desire to bleed through, in the late poetry, into a passionate Catholicism. However, this necessity for absolute consistency ensures that their literary narrative, which was so strongly built upon their love-story, is a static one – an intra-familial relationship that looks backward as it continually re-tells itself and makes of all engagement with the outside world another re-configuring of the terms of its internal dynamic.

Once again, this is not to suggest that this writing is not worthy of literary study. Browning's early judgment – that there is here 'poetic genius' but also 'crudeness and incompleteness' remains true.[623] Though there is rarely a whole poem that satisfies, there are many lines or stanzas here that are in some way interesting, unusual, aesthetically pleasing or touching. The poetry is in many ways derivative both of previous tradition and of contemporary thought, but at the same time there are strange combinations here that have the ability to provoke thought. While I have been, in this study, critical of some of those who have brought this poetry

back to light, I am also aware that, as Castle suggests, the 'noise of academic folly' has important positive effects, one of which has been to resurrect not only Bradley and Cooper's intriguing life-story, but also their poetry as an object of study.[624]

#### **4. Future study**

The scope of this research, as I suggested in my introduction, has been limited to Bradley and Cooper's early poetry, mainly for practical reasons of space and time. These have also proved useful limits, in focusing attention on the early 1890s, a key moment in the movement towards sexual self-definition. However, my general field of enquiry – exploring Bradley and Cooper's production of identity and its relationship with both male and female homoerotic conventions, could usefully be extended into the later poetry. The way in which they used their dog, Whym Chow, for example, as a device that could combine the discourses of aestheticism and Catholicism through a mingling of their own aesthetically and spiritually realised selves, again involves them in the production of gender-transcendent bodies in non-procreative relationship, re-working narratives and positions I have already explored in *Sight and Song* and *Underneath the Bough*. Similarly, the late religious poetry, with its promotion of an identification between Cooper and Christ as sensitive and suffering male, allows them to continue producing identity closely aligned with a male homoerotic/aesthetic elevated persona. Meanwhile Bradley's love-poems to Ricketts propose a relationship that is entirely non-sexual and yet constantly figured as movement across the limits of the body, supporting my suggestion that central to the relationships they perform in support of their self-production as poets is not the gender of the protagonists but an impossibility of physical productivity that allows spiritual blending to be represented in sensuous imagery.

There would also be value in a comparative study with other female writers who were drawing on homoerotic tradition, both in the nineteenth century and later. It would be interesting to relate Bradley and Cooper's work to that of women who continued to refuse to be subsumed under a 'lesbian' identity, and to those who began to use homoerotic narratives as a deliberate tactic for sexually-based self-expression. Such an enquiry, undertaken with real openness to the different positions adopted, could produce a significant new understanding of the variety of ways in which past identity choices have influenced present possibilities. In retaining respect for and sensitivity to the difference between our current selves and the range of selves that were possible in a previous era, we can also encourage a more diverse and variegated understanding of contemporary identities.

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**Interpreting Female-Female Love in the Early Poetry of Michael  
Field**

**Volume 2**

**Appendices**

**Dinah Ward**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)  
in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Sheffield

**School of English Literature, Language and Linguistics**

July 2008

## Appendix 1: Poems and paintings cited in Chapter 2

For copyright reasons, all paintings have been removed from the online version of this thesis. Links are given for reference.

<http://www.1st-art-gallery.com/thumbnail/173972/1/Sappho-And-Erinna-At-Mytelene.jpg>

Simeon Solomon: *Sappho and Erinna in a Garden at Mytilene*

### *Long Ago*

When, more than a year ago, I wrote to a literary friend of my attempt to express in English verse the passionate pleasure Dr Wharton's book had brought to me, he replied: 'That is a delightfully audacious thought – the extension of Sappho's fragments into lyrics. I can scarcely conceive anything more audacious'.

In simple truth all worship that is not idolatry must be audacious; for it involves the blissful apprehension of an ideal; it means in the very phrase of Sappho –

*E?? ?' ???v??  
??v?? ?v????[625]*

Devoutly as the fiery bosomed Greek turned in her anguish to Aphrodite [. . .] I have turned to the one woman who has dared to speak unfalteringly of the fearful mastery of love, and again and again the dumb prayer has risen from my heart –

*?v ?' ????  
?v???? ????*

??v?? ??v?? ??????, ??v???? ????????

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

## I

?v??? ?????? ?????????????v?

They plaited garlands in their time;  
They knew the joy of youth's sweet prime,  
    Quick breath and rapture:  
Theirs was the violet-weaving bliss,  
And theirs the white, wreathed bow to kiss,  
    Kiss, and recapture.

They plaited garlands, even these;  
They learnt Love's golden mysteries  
    Of young Apollo;  
The lyre unloosed their souls; they lay  
Under the trembling leaves at play,  
    Bright dreams to follow.

They plaited garlands – heavenly twine!  
They crowned the cup, they drank the wine  
    Of youth's deep pleasure.  
Now, lingering for the lyreless god –  
Oh yet, once in their time, they trod  
    A choric measure.

## II

????????? ?? ?????? ?v???? ??????

Come, dark-eyed Sleep, thou child of Night,  
    Give me thy dreams, thy lies;  
Lead through the horny portal white  
    The pleasure day denies.

O bring the kiss I could not take  
From lips that would not give;  
Bring me the heart I could not break,  
The bliss for which I live.

I care not if I slumber blest  
By fond delusion; nay,  
Put me on Phaon's lips to rest  
And cheat the cruel day!

### III

??? ???? ???? ???? ???????

Oh, not the honey, nor the bee!  
Yet who can drain the flowers  
As I? Less mad, Persephone  
Spoiled the Sicilian bowers  
Than I for scent and splendour rove  
The rosy oleander grove,  
Or lost in myrtle nook unveil  
Thoughts that make Aphrodite pale.

Honey, nor bee! the tingling quest  
Must that, too be denied?  
Deep in thy bosom I would rest,  
O golden blossom wide!  
O poppy-wreath, O violet-crown,  
I fling your fiery circlets down;  
The joys o'er which bees murmur deep  
Your Sappho's senses may not steep.

Honey! Clear, soothing, nectarous, sweet,  
On which my heart would feed,  
Give me, O Love, the golden meat,  
And stay my life's long greed –  
The food in which the gods delight  
That glistens tempting in my sight!  
Phaon, thy lips withhold from me

The bliss of honey and of bee.

V

???? ???? v???????? ?? ?v???? ????????? ??????  
????? ?????????????, ?????? ?? ?? ?????v??? ??????

As on the hills the shepherds tread  
A hyacinth down, and witherèd  
    The purple flower  
Is pressed to earth, and broken lies,  
Its virgin stem no more to rise  
    In summer hour;  
And death comes stealing with the dew  
That yester evening brought anew  
A fresher growth and fragrant grace,  
Ere footsteps crushed the grassy place:

So underneath thy scorn and pride  
My heart is bowed, and cannot hide  
    How it despairs.  
O Phaon, weary is my pain;  
The tears that from my eyelids rain  
    Ease not my cares;  
My beauty droops and fades away,  
Just as a trampled blossom's may.  
Why must thou tread me into earth –



So dim in death, so bright at birth?

## VI

????????? ??v?????

Erinna, thou art ever fair,  
Not as the young spring flowers,  
We who have laurel in our hair –  
Eternal youth is ours.  
The roses that Piera's dew  
Hath washed washed can ne'er decline;  
On Orpheus' tomb at first they grew,  
And there the Sacred Nine  
'Mid quivering moonlight, seek the groves  
Guarding the minstrel's tomb;  
Each for the poet that she loves  
Plucks and immortal bloom.  
Soon as my girl's sweet voice she caught,  
Thither Euterpe sped,  
And, singing too, a garland wrought  
To crown Erinna's head

## X

?? ?? ?????????? ? ?????? ?????????

Ah, Procne, wherefore dost thou weary me?  
Thus flitting out and flitting in,  
Thou shows the restlessness of one love-slighted:  
And yet, Pandion's daughter, thou did'st win  
Thy Tereus. Though he loved too well  
    Dumb Philomel,  
Tease not the air with this tumultuous wing!  
Hast thou no passion for unbosoming?  
    Such misery  
Befits the breast that love hath ne'er delighted;  
Thou to thy Thracian boy wert once united . . .  
Ah, lovely Procne, wherefore weary me?

## XII

???? ??????? ?????????? ??????

Spring's messenger we hail,  
The sweet-voiced nightingale;  
She sings where ivy weaves  
Blue berries with dark leaves.

Beside each forest-root  
The lilies freshly shoot,  
Narcissi crown the grass,  
Bees hum, and toil, and pass.

The glades are soft with dew,  
The chestnuts bud anew,  
And fishers set their sails  
To undelusive gales.

The shepherd pipe is heard,  
The villages are stirred  
To shout the wine-god's praise,  
And jest in rural ways.

Then breaks the piercing note  
From Philomel's wild throat  
Passion's supremest pain  
That may not hope again.

Zeus sends the gracious Spring,  
And must her herald sing  
In kindly-bowered retreat  
Only of love's defeat?

Ah, woe is me! I learn,  
When light and flowers return,  
Love's anguish, cark and care;  
Its infinite despair

Comes back, and makes me mad,  
Telling how all is glad:  
Then swell the throb, the wail,  
The want, O nightingale!

### XIII

?? ?? ????????? ? ???? , ???????' ??????? ?????????  
???????? ??????? ?v??????' ????????? ???????  
?v????? ?? ? ?????? ?? ? ?????? ???????  
?????? ????????? ?????????????? ?'v???????????

Dica, the Graces oft incline  
To watch thy fingers' skill  
As with light foliage they entwine  
The aromatic dill:  
Then seek the fount where feathery,  
Young shoots and tendrils creep,  
For samphire and for rosemary,  
Climb thou the marble steep.  
Turn to the reed-bed by the stream  
For pansies' dark and yellow gleam  
And midmost of the blossoms set  
Narcissus with white coronet.

To clothe thy life with brilliancy  
And honour is to give  
Joy to the gods; they love to see  
How pleasantly men live;  
They love the crowned and fragrant head,  
But turn their face away  
From those who come ungarlanded,  
For none delight as they  
In piercing, languorous, spicy scent,  
And thousand hues in lustre blent:  
Such sacrifice, O Dica, bring!  
Thy garland is a beauteous thing.

### XIV

?? ??????? ?v???

Atthis, my darling, thou did'st stray  
A few feet to the rushy bed,  
When a great fear and passion shook  
My heart lest haply thou wert dead;  
It grew so still about the brook,  
As if a soul were drawn away.

Anon thy clear eyes, silver-blue,  
Shone through the tamarisk-branches fine;  
To pluck me iris thou had'st sprung  
Through galingale and celandine;  
Away, away, the flowers I flung  
And thee down to my breast I drew.

My darling! Nay, our very breath  
Nor light nor darkness shall divide;  
Queen Dawn shall find us on one bed,  
Nor must thou flutter from my side  
An instant, lest I feel the dread,  
Atthis, the immanence of death.

## XVII

?????? ???? ?????? ? ???????,  
?? ?' ?? ???? ?????? ?????????

? . ?????????, ?????????, ??? ?? ??????' ?????;  
?. ?v???? ???? ???? ??, ?v???? ???

The moon rose full: the women stood  
As though within a sacred wood  
Around an altar – thus with awe  
The perfect, virgin orb they saw  
Supreme above them; and its light  
Fell on their limbs and garments white.  
Then with pale, lifted brows they stirred  
Their fearful steps at Sappho's word,  
And in a circle moved around,  
Responsive to her music's sound,  
That through the silent air stole on,  
Until their breathless dread was gone,  
And they could dance with lightsome feet,  
And lift the song with voices sweet.  
Then once again the silence came:  
Their lips were blanched as if with shame  
That they in maidenhood were bold  
Its sacred worship to unfold;  
And Sappho touched the lyre alone,  
Until she made the bright strings moan.  
She called to Artemis aloud –  
Alas, the moon was wrapt in cloud! –  
'Oh whither art thou gone from me?

Come back again, virginity!  
 For maidenhood still do I long,  
 The freedom and the joyance strong  
 Of that most blessed secret state  
 That makes the tenderest maiden great.  
 O moon, be fair to me as these,  
 And my regretful passion ease;  
 Restore to me my only good,  
 My maidenhood, my maidenhood!  
 She sang: and through the clouded night  
 An answer came of cruel might –  
 ‘To thee I never come again’.  
 O Sappho, bitter was thy pain!  
 Then did thy heavy steps retire,  
 And leave, moon-bathed, the virgin quire.

### XIX

???v?? ??? ? ???????  
 ??? ????????, ????? ??  
 ?v????, ???? ?' ?????' ???,  
 ??? ?? ????? ?????v??

When longing on my couch I lay,  
 The moon shone clear above the bay,  
     And whether Heaven's queen,  
         With her dread power,  
 Did come me and my love between,  
 Whether in Dian's holy air he chilled,  
     I know not: the sweet hour  
         Is unfulfilled

Athwart the grove the Pleiades  
 Beamed clear – a lovely cluster these.  
     I mused how it befell  
         That Sterope  
 Loved her Oenomaus so well  
 She flitted from her shining sisters' side,  
     And in obscurity  
         Became his bride.

O blessed, secret, shamed one!  
 Now e'en the Pleiades are gone;  
     Now is it full midnight:  
         Thus should I be

Hid in the tomb from all men's sight!  
O Hades, take this heart, these limbs that yearn,  
Yea, I will give them thee,  
Ash for thine urn!

Bethink thee, love, time passes by,  
A little while before we die  
Is Aphrodite's own.  
And what were life  
Without the mystery of her zone,  
Her rosy altars, and her heavenly fires.  
Warm, to assuage the strife  
Of vain desires?

The moon is gone, yet he delays,  
The stars are set, yet Sappho stays;  
And can it be that death  
Jealous, hath sped  
To suck from me my Phaon's balmy breath?  
I stifle in my heart the funeral moan:  
I do not weep the dead;  
I lie alone.

## XX

????? (??) ?v????? ??? ??????? ?v???,  
??? ?' ?????? ?? ?????? . . .

I sang to women gathered round;  
Forth from my own heart-springs  
Welled out the passion; of the pain  
I sang if the beloved in vain  
Is sighed for – when  
They stood untouched, as at the sound  
Of unfamiliar things,  
Oh, then my heart turned cold, and then  
I dropt my wings.

Trembling I seek thy holy ground,  
Apollo, lord of kings;  
Thou hast the darts that kill. Oh, free  
The senseless world of apathy,  
Pierce it! – for when

In poet's strain no joy is found,  
His call no answer brings,  
Oh, then my heart turns cold, and then  
I drop my wings.

All flocks are Pan's; the groves resound  
To Orpheus' golden strings;  
As swan that, secret, shrills the note  
Triumphant from Apollo's throat,  
My muse, from men  
Her holy raptures would confound,  
Turns to the woods and springs,  
Whene'er my heart grows cold, and when  
I drop my wings.

Or by the white cliff's cypress mound,  
My music wildly rings;  
I watch the hoar sails on the track  
Of moonlight; they are turning back;  
Night falls; and when  
By maiden-arms to be enwound  
Ashore the fisher flings,  
Oh, then my heart turns cold, and then  
I drop my wings.

## XXII

?? ?? ?????? ??????? ?????  
?? ??? ???????.

They bring me gifts, they honour me  
Now I am growing old;  
And wondering youth crowds round my knee,  
As if I had a mystery  
And worship to unfold.

O gather round me, golden youth,  
For justly ye divine  
I am your prophetess forsooth,  
And ye shall learn love's very truth  
Who to my lyre incline.

To me the tender, blushing bride  
Doth come with lips that fail;  
I feel her heart beat at my side,

And cry – ‘Like Ares in his pride,  
Hail, noble bridegroom, hail!’

And to the doubting boy afraid  
Of too ambitious bliss  
I whisper – ‘None is like thy maid,  
And I her fond heart will persuade  
To feel thou feelest this’.

Or if Persephone should take  
From me some maid full dear,  
While friends their lamentations make,  
I rise, and for the lover’s sake  
I praise her loud and clear.

Ye bring me gifts, ye honour me  
For music and for rhyme;  
And if at last my soul sings free,  
It is that once I stood, as ye,  
Dumb in youth’s golden clime.

### XXIII

????????? ??? ?????

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

Thou mourn’st thy maiden’s faith is gone;  
Stoop for fair-leaved *telephilon*;  
Woe, if the petals cleave!  
But, see! sharp struck thy palms upon,  
They leap, they burst, as shoots a star.  
Alcaeus, lo! thou must believe  
This sign of *Love-afar*.



## XXVI

?????? ???????????????.

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

Subtle Mnasidica in shape  
As firm as the unripened grape,  
Dica with meeting eyebrows sleek,  
And Gorgo of the apple-cheek,  
With that young, dove-eyed creature come  
From Telos, whose soft lips are dumb;  
The golden bees about them hum.

Dica put forth her hand to reach  
The blue sea-holly on the beach  
Last night. I drew the child away;  
She knew not where the love-charm lay,  
And from the fatal fibre let  
Her hand relax; but by his net  
One stood she never can forget.  
Ah me, and Gorgo too is pale!  
Fell Cypris, if thou must prevail,  
Mingle no madness in love's wine;  
That these should e'er as Sappho pine,  
Goddess forbid! The little thing  
From Telos must be taught to sing;  
The rest to Hymen's portals bring!

## XXVII

?v????????? ?????????? ??? ?????? ?v???????

Mnasidica in form and gait  
Eclipses her ill-favoured mate  
Gyrinna; when I call,  
I tremble lest the girl appear

Whose very shadow on the wall  
Repulses me, and when I hear  
Her rude, slow step I shake with fear.

Her gesture has no rhythmic law;  
She knows not how her dress to draw  
    About her ankles thin;  
And let the luckless child take care  
Firmly her chiton-brooch to pin,  
For, oh, she must not ever dare  
To leave her flabby shoulder bare!

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

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

## XXIX

???????????? ?? ????????? ??????  
???v????? ????????? ??v???????

When through thy breast wild wrath doth spread  
And work thy inmost being harm,  
Leave thou the fiery word unsaid,  
    Guard thee; be calm.

Closed be thy lips: where Love perchance  
Lies at the door to be thy guest,  
Shall there be noise and dissonance?  
    Quiet were the best.

Apollo, when they do thee wrong,  
Speechless thou tak'st the golden dart:

I will refrain my barking tongue,  
And strike the heart.

**XXXIII**

???? ?????? ????? (??) ????? ??????  
?v ????????????

Maids, not to you my mind doth change;  
Men I defy, allure, estrange,  
Prostrate, make bond or free:  
Soft as the stream beneath the plane  
To you I sing my love's refrain;  
Between us is no thought of pain,  
Peril, satiety.

Soon doth a lover's patience tire,  
But ye to manifold desire  
Can yield response, ye know  
When for long, museful days I pine,  
The presage at my heart divine;  
To you I never breathe a sign  
Of inward want or woe.

When injuries my spirit bruise,  
Allaying virtue ye infuse  
With unobtrusive skill:  
And if care frets ye come to me  
As fresh as nymph from stream or tree,  
And with your soft vitality  
My weary bosom fill.

**XXXIV**

?v ?? ??? v?????

'Sing to us Sappho!' cried the crowd,  
And to my lyre I sprang;  
Apollo seized me, and aloud  
Tumultuous I sang.

I did not think of who would hear;  
I knew not there were men who jeer;  
Nor dreamed I there were mortals born  
To make the poet's heart forlorn.

There is a gift the crowd can bring,  
    A rapture, a content;  
Pierian roses scarcely fling  
    So ravishing a scent  
As that with which the air is stirred  
When hearts of heavenly things have heard –  
Sigh, and let forth the odour steal  
Of that which in themselves they feel.

But now no subtle incense rose;  
    I heard a hostile sound  
And looked – oh, scornfuller than those  
    'Mong men I ne'er have found.  
I paused: the whistling air was stilled;  
Then through my chords the godhead thrilled,  
And the quelled creatures knew their kind  
Ephemeral through foolish mind.

They saw their ghosts in Hades' grove  
    A dismal, flitting band;  
They felt they were shut out from love  
    And honour in their land;  
For never in the Muses' strain  
Of them memorial would remain;  
And spell-bound they received the curse  
Of the great King's derided verse.

### XXXV

????, ?? ?????v??? ?????v??? ????

Come, Gorgo, put the rug in place,  
    And passionate recline;  
I love to see thee in thy grace,  
    Dark, virulent, divine.  
But wherefore thus thy proud eyes fix  
    Upon a jewelled band?

Art thou so glad the sardonyx  
Becomes thy shapely hand?

Bethink thee! 'Tis for such as thou  
Zeus leaves his lofty seat;  
'Tis at thy beauty's bidding how  
Man's mortal life shall fleet;  
Those fairest hands – dost thou forget  
Their power to thrill and cling?  
O foolish woman, dost thou set  
Thy pride upon a ring?

### XXXIX

?????? ?' ??????? ??????

Me thou forgettest: thou alone of all  
I love the sweet hours fairest to recall;  
My shell grew vocal for thee once – the spot  
Thronged by fond echoes thou rememberest not.

With my dead lovers memory is not dead;  
On me they call from many a violet-bed  
Of the still country; or in cloudy throng  
Fill the wide meads with my remembered song.

Though I should meet them in the shadows, wet  
With Lethe, they would give me welcome yet;  
There would be flicker of a smile beneath  
Their wan, memorial twines of myrtle-wreath.

Regret – it is the lover's, poet's sign;  
Of Zeus and Memory the sacred Nine  
Themselves are offspring; each enduring strain  
Springs from the issues of an ancient pain.

'Tis for his dead girl-love Apollo weaves  
His poet's crown of deathless laurel-leaves;  
By Ladon's river long must slowly bleed  
Pan's heart ere music permeate his reed.

But thou who, walking under evening skies,  
Can'st see the stars, can'st see the clear moon rise,

Unmindful how 'neath her low orb we stood  
As by an altar in the olive-wood –

Oblivion guard thy tomb! Ah, witless sting!  
They cannot be forgotten whom I sing;  
For this thy brief forgetfulness of me  
Thou shalt have everlasting infamy.

## XLII

*X???????? ?v???, ??????? ?' ?????????*

She comes, and youthful voices  
    On Hymen praise confer;  
She comes, and she rejoices,  
    Rejoice with her,  
O bridegroom! Let her see  
Thy brave felicity.

She comes, with shining blushes  
    Of unalloyed delight;  
Her very chaplet flushes,  
    Its buds as bright  
With vermeil glow and grace  
As is her veiled face.

She comes, and brings the treasure  
    Of virgin years apart;  
She comes to do thy pleasure  
    With all her heart;  
She knows what joy divine  
She keeps to make it thine.

Could Hebe at the table  
    Of Heaven, her cup of gold  
Mixed with delights, be able  
    Such bliss to hold  
And pour as she, thy bride,  
Can offer at thy side?

She comes, with leaping torches,  
With song and merriment;  
She sweeps between thy porches,  
On thee intent,  
As gay as Iris when  
She bears glad news to men.

She comes in state, resplendent  
As unshorn field of wheat;  
And like a vine-branch pendent  
With clusters sweet,  
She is endowed to bless  
With bounteous loveliness.

She is to thee the bearer  
Of triumph and of fame;  
Be in her mirth a sharer!  
For it were a shame  
If thou, through fear, wert slow  
Thine ecstasy to show.

She comes, thy hope fulfilling;  
O happy bridegroom, see,  
How gracious and how willing  
She comes to thee.  
Rejoice! Oh, be not dumb!  
Rejoice, for she is come!

### XLIII

???? ?? (v???) ?v???? ??????? ??' v????  
???????, ???v???????? ?? ?v????  
???? ??v?????

Cool water gurgles through  
The apple-boughs, and sleep  
Falls from the flickering leaves,  
Where hoary shadows keep  
Secluded from man's view  
A little cave that cleaves  
The rock with fissure deep.

Worshipped with milk and oil  
There dwell the Nymphs, and there  
They listen to the breeze,  
About their dewy hair  
The clustered garlands coil,  
Or, moving round the trees,  
Cherish the roots with care.

There reign delight and health;  
There freshness yields the palm  
To musical refrain;  
For never was such calm,  
Such sound of murmuring stealth,  
Such solace to the brain,  
To weariness such balm.

Even a lover's pains,  
Though fiercely they have raged,  
Here find at last relief:  
The heart by sorrow aged  
Divinely youth regains;  
Tears steal through parched grief;  
All passion is assuaged.

#### XLIV

?v ?? ??? ?????

Nought to me! So I choose to say:  
We meet, old friends, about the bay;  
The golden pulse grows on the shore –  
Are not all things as heretofore  
Now we have cast our love away?

Men throng us; thou art nought to me,  
Therefore, indifferent, I can see  
Within thine eyes the bright'ning grace  
That once thou gavest face to face;  
'Tis natural they welcome thee!



Nought to me, like the silver ring,  
Thy mislaid, worthless gift. Last spring,  
As any careless girl, I lost  
The pin, yet, by the tears it cost,  
It should have been worth cherishing.

Nought! Nought! And yet if thou dost pass  
I grow as summer-coloured grass,  
And if I wrap my chiton round,  
I know thine ear hath caught the sound,  
Although thou heedest not, alas!

Nought to me! Wherefore dost thou throw  
On me that glittering glance, as though,  
Friend, I had ever done thee wrong,  
When the crowd asks me for the song  
'At this, I loved thee long ago?'

#### XLVI

????? ?? ?????????? ??????

'Fool, faint not thou!' I laughed in blame  
Of Larichus, pale in the flame  
Of Hymen's torches: while, alas,  
I feel my senses swoon,  
Or quicken with delight  
At Nature's simplest boon:  
Unmoved I cannot pass  
The fine bloom of the grass,  
Or watch the dimpling shadows on the white,  
Vibrating poplar with unshaken frame.

'Faint not,' I said – and yet my breath  
Comes sharp as I were nigh to death  
If suddenly across the grove  
The lovely laugh I hear,  
Or catch the lovely speech  
Of one who makes a peer  
Of the blest gods above  
The man she deigns to love.  
O Anactoria, wast thou born to teach  
Sappho how vainly she admonisheth?

'Faint not' – the poet must dare all;  
Me no experience shall appal,  
No pan that can make shrill my song:  
    Though Atthis, hateful, flit  
    From my fond arms, and by  
    Andromeda dare sit,  
    I will not let my strong  
    Heart fail, will bear the wrong,  
With piercing accents for Adonis cry,  
Or thrice on perished Timas vainly call.

'Faint not,' I said. Would'st thou be great,  
Thou must with every shock vibrate  
That life can bring thee; seek and yearn;  
    Feel in thyself the stroke  
    Of love, although it rive  
    As mountain-wind an oak;  
    Let jealous passion burn  
    If Rhodope must turn  
To other love; and laugh that age should strive  
The ardours of thy bosom to abate.

## XLVII

?v ??? ?? ????? ???? ? ??????, ???v??

No other girl – O bridegroom, thou art right –  
    Is like to thine;  
The snowiest swan gives not such keen delight,  
    Sailing in shine  
Of spacious Asian mere, as she  
Moving in her simplicity.

No other girl is like her; is she cold –  
    So sweet and dumb?  
Nay, Aphrodite's handmaid bright as gold  
    Shall she become,  
And thou shalt hear her honeyed voice  
Summon thee softly to rejoice.

She has been kept for thee, I know not how;  
    As, undescried,  
A blushing apple on the topmost bough,  
    Heaven kept they bride  
A fragrant, rare, inviolate thing

For season of thy cherishing.

Clasp the beloved form, a golden flower  
    Pliant and frail;  
Kiss the dropt eyelids till Love's genial power  
    The eyes unveil,  
And Cleis lift to thee the grace,  
Candour, and gladness of her face.

She knows thy wedding comes to thy desire;  
    She will secure  
From winds that buffet thee, from storms that tire,  
    A haven sure;  
And, inexperienced in ill,  
Keep from thy breast the thoughts that kill.

There is none like her, like thy girl, thine own;  
    And, bridegroom, see!  
Honouring Hera of the silver throne,  
    She turns to thee.  
Sappho, with solitary eyes, afar  
Will watch the rising of eve's fairest star.

### XLIX

??? ?????v??? ????? ????????

When my dear maidens lie  
    Each on her bed,  
When all night long sleep holds  
Their eyes, and softly folds  
Their busy hands that ply  
    The wheel, or spread  
The linen on the grass,  
While hours of sunshine pass:

Thus when they lie and dream  
    Of happy things,  
The golden age returns;  
When youth to slumber turns  
Beneath the Cynthian beam  
    Again it brings  
To life such bliss and glow  
As vanished long ago

Ah, once to lie awake  
Seemed sweet to me!  
Now I who even have prayed  
That night might be delayed,  
Yea doubled for my sake,  
Sigh wearily,  
Watching my maids, where they  
Together breathe till day.

## LII

*E??? ?' ???v??  
??v?? ?v?????*

Climbing the hill, a coil of snakes  
Impedes Tiresias' path; he breaks  
His staff across them – idle thrust  
That lays the female in the dust,  
But dooms the prophet to forego  
His manhood, and, as woman, know  
The unfamiliar, sovereign guise  
Of passion he had dared despise.

Ah, not in the Erinnys' ground  
Experience so dire were found  
As that to the enchanter known  
When womanhood was round him thrown:  
He trembled at the quickening change,  
He trembled at his vision's range,  
His finer sense for bliss and dole,  
His receptivity of soul;  
But when love came, and, loving back,  
He learnt the pleasure men must lack,  
It seemed that he had broken free  
Almost from his mortality.

Seven years he lives as woman, then  
Resumes his cruder part 'mong men,  
Till him indignant Hera becks  
To judge between the joys of sex,  
For the great Queen in wrath has heard  
By her presumptuous lord averred  
That, when he sought her in his brave,

Young godhead, higher bliss he gave  
Than the unutterable lure  
Of her veiled glances could procure  
For him, as balmy-limbed and proud  
She drew him to Olympia's cloud.

'In marriage who hath more delight?'  
She asks; then quivers and grows white,  
As sacrilegious lips reveal  
What woman in herself must feel –  
And passes an avenging hand  
Across his subtle eyelids bland.

Deep-bosomed Queen, fain would'st thou hide  
The mystic raptures of the bride!  
When man's strong nature draweth nigh  
'Tis as the lightning to the sky,  
The blast to idle sail, the thrill  
Of springtime when the saplings fill.  
Though fragrant breath the sun receives  
From the young rose's softening leaves,  
Her plaited petals once undone  
The rose herself receives the sun.

Tiresias, ere the goddess smite,  
Look on me with unblinded sight,  
That I may learn if thou hast part  
In womanhood's secluded heart:  
Medea's penetrative charm  
Own'st thou to succour and disarm,  
Hast thou her passion inly great  
Heroes to mould and subjugate?  
Can'st thou divine how sweet to bring  
Apollo to thy blossoming  
As Daphne; or as just a child  
Gathering a bunch of tulips wild,  
To feel the flowery hill-side rent  
Convulsive for thy ravishment?

Thou need'st not to unlock thine eyes,  
Thy slow, ironic smile replies:  
Thou hast been woman, and although  
The twining snakes with second blow  
Of golden staff thou did'st assail,  
And, crushing at a stroke the male,  
Had'st virtue from thy doom to break,

And lost virility re-take –  
 Thou hast been woman, and her deep  
 Magnetic mystery dost keep;  
 Thou hast been woman, and can'st see  
 Therefore into futurity:  
 It is not that Zeus gave thee power  
 To look beyond the transient hour,  
 For thou hast trod the regions dun  
 Where life and death are each begun;  
 Thy spirit from the gods set free  
 Hath communed with Necessity.  
 Tilphusa's fountain thou may'st quaff  
 And die, but still the golden staff  
 Will guide thee with perceptive hand  
 Among the Shades to understand  
 The terrors of remorse and dread  
 And prophesy among the dead.

### LIII

??? ?', ? ??? ???? ???? ???? ????  
 ????? ???? ? ? ???? ????

Dear bridegroom, it is spring; the boughs rejoice,  
 The earth once more has merriment and voice,  
 The bees cling to the fluted columbine  
 Or jonquil, too desirous to be brief;  
 The ground is fertile, and the anise-leaf  
 Is green for garlands where the sunbeams shine.

Dear bridegroom, whereto shall I liken thee?  
 Most like a soft shoot thou seem'st to me,  
 Full of the sap and pressure of the year;  
 Supple thou art and healthful, and the gifts  
 Of life are bright within thee; no-one lifts  
 Like thee the quoit, or steeds like thine can rear.

Thou hast the brows of Peleus' godlike son,  
 Thou hast his yellow hair, and thou art one  
 Who deed for deed could match him in the fray.  
 Heroic is thy strain! O youth, the verse  
 Of Homer, winged and solemn, might rehearse  
 Thine acts, thy beauty. Why wilt thou delay?

For thee thy bride her forehead-shading tress

Shears off and gives to Fate. Around her press  
The kindly Hours that make the meadows bloom  
And set the fostering airs of April free;  
While golden Cypris more to hearten thee  
With her own hand prepares thy marriage-room.

LIV

. . . ??? ?v? ???????  
???? ?????? ?????? ?????? ??????

Adown the Lesbian vales,  
When spring first flashes out,  
I watch the lovely rout  
Of maidens flitting 'mid the honey-bees  
For thyme and heath,  
Cistus, and trails  
Of myrtle-wreath:  
They bring me these  
My passionate, unsated sense to please.

In turn, to please my maids,  
Most deftly will I sing  
Of their soft cherishing  
In apple-orchards with cool waters by,  
Where slumber streams  
From quivering shades,  
And Cypris seems  
To bend and sigh,  
Her golden calyx offering amorously.

What praises would be best  
Wherewith to crown my girls?  
The rose when she unfurls  
Her balmy, lighted buds is not so good,  
So fresh as they  
When on my breast  
They lean, and say  
All that they would,  
Opening their glorious, candid maidenhood.

To that pure band alone  
I sing of marriage-loves;  
As Aphrodite's doves  
Glance in the sun their colour comes and goes:

No girls let fall  
Their maiden zone  
At Hymen's call  
Serene as those  
Taught by a poet why sweet Hesper glows.

## LXI

??????

There is laughter soft and free  
'Neath the pines of Thessaly,  
Thrilling echoes, thrilling cries  
Of pursuit, delight, surprise;  
Dryope beneath the trees  
With the Hamadryades  
Plays upon the mountain-side:  
Now they meet, and now they hide.

On the hot and sandy ground,  
Crumbling still as still they bound,  
Crouches, basks a tortoise; all  
But the mortal maiden fall  
Back in trepidation; she  
Takes the creature on her knee,  
Strokes the ardent shell, and lays  
Even her cheek against its blaze,

Till she calms her playmate's fear;  
Suddenly beside her ear  
Flashes forth a tongue; the beast  
Changes, and with shape released  
Grows into a serpent bright,  
Covetous, subduing, tight  
Round her body backward bent  
In forlorn astonishment.

With their convoluted strain  
His upreaching coils attain  
Full ascendancy – her breast  
By their passion is compressed



Till her breath in terror fails;  
'Mid the flicker of the scales,  
Half she seems to hear, half sees  
How each frightened comrade flees.

And alone beneath the pine,  
With the serpent's heavy twine  
On her form, she almost dies:  
But a magic from his eyes  
Keeps her living, and entranced  
At the wonder that has chanced,  
As she feels a god within  
Fiery looks that thrill and win.

'Tis Apollo in disguise  
Holds possession of his prize.  
Thus he binds in fetters dire  
Those for whom he knows desire;  
Mortal loves or poets – all  
He must dominate, enthrall  
By the rapture of his sway,  
Which shall either bless or slay.

So she shudders with a joy  
Which no childish fears alloy,  
For the spell is on her now  
Which has made old prophets bow  
Tremulous and wild. An hour  
Must she glow beneath his power,  
Then a dryad shy and strange  
Through the firs thereafter range.

For she joins the troop of those  
Dedicate to joys and woes,  
Whom by stricture of his love  
Leto's son has raised above  
Other mortals, who, endowed  
With existence unallowed  
To their fellows, wander free  
Girt with earth's own mystery.

## LXV

???v??????

Prometheus fashioned man,  
Then ruthful, pitying  
His creature when the snowy storms began  
To numb, the frost to harass and to cling,

Toward the sun's golden wheel  
He clomb, and, as the blaze  
Burned past, taught of Athene, sprang to steal  
A scintillating fragment from the rays.

With wisdom-guided torch  
Dipped in the heavenly flame  
Back he returned to each unlighted porch,  
And filled the homes with joy where'er he came.

Zeus marked the flickering brand,  
And earthward bent to urge  
Two countervailing evils through the land;  
One was the fever with its fiery scourge;

One was Pandora's face,  
Her smiles and luring feet –  
'Woman' he said, 'shall scorch man's petty race  
And fill his senses with insidious heat'.

But, Phaon, tremble thou  
Whom beauty cannot fire,  
Who livest with no rage upon thy brow,  
Unstricken by complaint or by desire.

Remember what thou art,  
Think of the wrath above,  
Scathless to stand is not a mortal's part:  
O fool, accept the furious curse of love!

## LXVI

??? ??? ???v??? ????????

We sat and chatted at our ease  
Upon a wayside tomb,  
When from a little grove of trees

Came Gorgo in her bloom:  
Her head against my knee she prest,  
And seemed to listen to the rest,  
Then looking up, said straight to me –  
'Phaon is gone to Sicily'.

Scarcely her insult might I hear,  
For little Atthis spoke –  
'A gourd! The fruit-seller is near,  
O Gorgo'. And they broke  
Away. I looked across the town;  
Ere I could set the cushion down  
At home, and sob out all my woe,  
How very far I had to go!

Gone! Is he gone? Persephone,  
Leave him not lips that kiss!  
Swift! draw him earthward down to thee,  
Where he may mourn and miss  
The fluttering motion of his boat,  
The joy of the free life afloat,  
And stretch ungrasping hands to reach  
Eunica's figure on the beach.

Ah, fool, to think love's pain could leap  
Through bloodless shadows cold!  
I set the pillow down, and deep  
In its striped, wrinkling fold  
Pour out my rage; while he to-night  
Leans, softly-cushioned for delight,  
And, with the wine-cup in his hand,  
Turns some gay singer to command.

Apollo, thou alone can'st bring  
To Phaon's feeble breast  
The fire unquenchable, the sting,  
Love's agony, love's zest.  
Thou need'st not curse him, nor transform;  
Give him the poet's heart of storm  
To suffer as I suffer, thus  
Abandoned, vengeful, covetous.

??? ????? ??? ??????  
... ??? ???? ????????

Dim is the rich-wrought broidery  
Athwart the Golden Throne,  
Cypris no more in dreams I see  
When I am lying lone:  
But Atthis loved of yore  
Returns, and all my hungry, sore,  
Death-stricken senses close round her once more.

Of one, once loved, long dead,  
My plectrum fain would speak;  
But a vague chorus haunts my head,  
Confused, I yearn and seek.  
O lyre, what is thy theme?  
At nightfall I have heard a team  
Of swans so deathward chaunting breast the stream.

They feel in their deep-feathered wings  
Trembling to soar and dive;  
For all the faintness that death brings  
They are so much alive,  
Borne by a mighty gale  
Of verse, triumphantly they sail  
The great choir-master of their race to hail.

I must dare all, yea I can grope  
Through Hades in desire  
To hear thee on thy mountain-slope,  
My King, draw from thy lyre  
My bosom's stricken cry:  
Conjure, tempt, hearten me to die –  
Apollo, give me the great hours gone by!

### LXVIII

?????? ?????

Thou burnest us; thy torches' flashing spires,  
Eros, we hail!

Thou burnest us, Immortal, but the fires  
Thou kindest fail:  
We die,  
And thine effulgent braziers pale.

Ah, Phaon, thou who hast abandoned me,  
Thou who dost smile  
To think deserted Lesbos rings with thee,  
A little while  
Gone by  
There will be muteness in thine isle.

Even as a god who finds his temple-flame  
Sunken, unfed,  
Who, loving not the priestess, loves the fame  
Bright altars spread,  
Wilt sigh  
To find thy lyric glory dead?

Or will Damophyla the lovely-haired,  
My music learn,  
Singing how Sappho of thy love despaired,  
Till thou dost burn,  
While I,  
Eros! Am quenched within my urn?

?????????? ???? ???? ??? v?????? ??????

O free me, for I take the leap,  
Apollo, from thy snowy steep!  
Song didst't thou give me, and there fell  
O'er Hellas an enchanter's spell;  
I heard young lovers catch the strain:  
For me there is the hoary main;  
I would not hear my words again.

Ah, lord of speech, well dost thou know  
The incommunicable woe  
Finds not in lyric cry release,

Finds but in Hades' bosom peace;  
And therefore on thy temple-ground  
Thou pointest lovers to the mound  
Set high above the billows' sound.

Though in unfathomed seas I sink,  
Men will remember me, I think,  
Remember me, my King, as thine;  
And must I take a shape divine  
As thine immortal, let me be  
A dumb sea-bird with breast love-free,  
And feel the waves fall over me.

## Appendix 2: Poems and paintings cited in Chapter 3

For copyright reasons, all paintings have been removed from the online version of this thesis. Links are given for reference.

There are no reproductions of paintings in the published version of *Sight and Song*, but I include them here as useful reference points in understanding the relation between the paintings and the Michael Field poems. The poems are presented in the order in which they occur in the collection, and the paintings are reproduced above each poem. Sodoma's drawing of *Leda and the Swan* is not available.

### *Sight and Song*

#### Preface

The aim of this little volume is, as far as may be, to translate into verse what the lines and colours of certain chosen pictures sing in themselves; to express not so much what these pictures are to the poet, but rather what poetry they objectively incarnate. Such an attempt demands patient, continuous sight as pure as the gazer can refine it of theory, fancies, or his mere subjective enjoyment.

'Il faut, par un effort d'esprit, se transporter dans les personnages et non les attirer à soi'. For *personnages* substitute *peintures*, and this sentence from Gustave Flaubert's 'Correspondance' resumes the method of art-study from which these poems arose.

Not even 'le grand Gustave' could ultimately illude himself as a formative power in his work – not after the pain of a lifetime directed to no other end. Yet the effort to see things from their own centre, by suppressing the habitual centralisation of the visible in ourselves, is a process by which we eliminate our idiosyncrasies and obtain an impression clearer, less passive, more intimate.

When such effort has been made, honestly and with persistence, even then the inevitable force of individuality must still have play and a temperament mould the purified impression: –

'When your eyes have done their part,  
Thought must length it in the heart'.

M.F.

February 15, 1892.

[http://www.art-prints-on-demand.com/kunst/leonardo\\_da\\_vinci/ftb165448.jpg](http://www.art-prints-on-demand.com/kunst/leonardo_da_vinci/ftb165448.jpg)

**DRAWING OF ROSES AND VIOLETS  
LEONARDO DA VINCI**

*The Accademia of Venice*

LEONARDO saw the spring  
Centuries ago,  
Saw the spring and loved it in its flowers –  
Violet, rose:  
One that grows  
Mystic, shining on the tufted bowers,  
And burns its incense to the summer hours;  
And one that hiding low,  
Half-face, half-wing,  
With shaded wiles  
Hides and yet smiles.

Leonardo drew the blooms  
On an April day:  
How his subtle pencil loved its toil,  
Loved to draw!  
For he saw  
In the rose's amorous, open coil  
Women's placid temples that would foil  
Hearts in the luring way  
That checks and dooms  
Men with reserve  
Of limpid curve.

Leonardo loved the still  
    Violet as it blows,  
Plucked it from the darkness of its leaves,  
    Where it shoots  
    From wet roots;  
Found in it the precious smile that weaves  
Sweetness round Madonna's mouth and heaves  
    Her secret lips, then goes,  
    At its fine will,  
    About her face  
    He loved to trace.

Leonardo drew in spring,  
    Restless spring gone by,  
Flowers he chose should never after fade  
    For the wealth  
    Of strange stealth  
In the rose, the violet's half-displayed,  
Mysterious smile within the petals' shade  
    That season did not die,  
    Like everything,  
    Of ruin's blight  
    And April's flight.



[http://www.creativityspot.com/pics/Mona%20Lisa%20\(Gioconda\)%20by%20Leonardo%20Da%20Vinci.jpg](http://www.creativityspot.com/pics/Mona%20Lisa%20(Gioconda)%20by%20Leonardo%20Da%20Vinci.jpg)

**LA GIOCONDA  
LEONARDO DA VINCI**

*The Louvre*

HISTORIC, side-long, implicating eyes;  
A smile of velvet's lustre on the cheek;  
Calm lips the smile leads upward; hand that lies  
Glowing and soft, the patience in its rest  
Of cruelty that waits and doth not seek  
For prey; a dusky forehead and a breast  
Where twilight touches ripeness amorously:  
Behind her, crystal rocks, a sea and skies  
Of evanescent blue on cloud and creek;  
Landscape that shines suppressive of its zest  
For those vicissitudes by which men die.

[http://mini-site.louvre.fr/mantegna/images/section8/zoom/08\\_10.jpg](http://mini-site.louvre.fr/mantegna/images/section8/zoom/08_10.jpg)

**THE FAUN'S PUNISHMENT  
CORREGGIO**

*The Louvre*

WHAT has the tortured, old Faun been doing?  
What was his impious sin,  
That the Maenads have ceased from pursuing  
Cattle, with leaps and din,  
To compass him round,  
On woodland ground,  
With cords and faces dire –  
Cords fastened with strain,  
Faces hate-stretched?  
Why have they fetched  
Snakes from the grass, with swift tongues of fire,  
And a reed from the stream-sodden plain?

Beneath the sun's and the oak-leaves' flicker,  
They settle near – ah, near!  
One blows her reed, as dry as a wicker,  
Into the old Faun's ear;  
The scream of the wind,  
With flood combined,  
Rolls on his simple sense:  
It is anguish heard,  
For quietness splits  
Within; and fits  
Of gale and surge are a fierce offence  
To him who knows but the breeze or bird.

One sits with fanciful eyes beside him;  
Malice and wonder mix  
In her glance at the victim – woe betide him,  
When once her snakes transfix  
His side! Ere they dart,  
With backward start  
She waits their rigid pause;  
And with comely stoop  
One maid, elate  
With horror, hate  
And triumph, up from his ankle draws  
The skin away in a clinging loop.

Before the women a boy-faun dances,  
    Grapes and stem at his chin, –  
Mouth of red the red grape-bunch enhances  
    Ere it is sucked within  
    By the juicy lips,  
    Free as the tips  
    Of tendrils in their curve;  
    And his flaccid cheek,  
    Mid mirthful heaves  
    And ripples, weaves  
A guiltless smile that might almost serve  
For the vines themselves in vintage-week.

What meaning is here, or what mystery,  
    What fate, and for what crime?  
Why so fearful this silvan history  
    Of a far summer-time?  
    There was no ill-will  
    That day until  
    With fun the grey-beard shook  
    At the Maenads' torn,  
    Spread hair, their brave,  
    Tumultuous wave  
Dancing; and women will never brook  
Mirth at their folly, O doomed, old Faun!

<http://beccasfladventure.files.wordpress.com/2008/09/the-birth-of-venus1.jpg>

**THE BIRTH OF VENUS**  
**SANDRO BOTTICELLI**

*The Uffizi*

FRILLS of brimming wavelets lap  
Round a shell that is a boat;  
Roses fly like birds and float  
Down the crisp air; garments flap:  
Midmost of the breeze, with locks  
In possession of the wind,  
Coiling hair in loosened shocks,  
Sways a girl who seeks to bind  
New-born beauty with a tress  
Gold about her nakedness.

And her chilled, wan body sweet  
Greets the ruffled cloak of rose,  
Daisy-stitched, that Flora throws  
Toward her ere she set her feet  
On the green verge of the world:  
Flora, with the corn-flower dressed,  
Round her neck a rose-spray curled  
Flowerless, wild-rose at her breast,  
To her goddess hastes to bring  
The wide chiton of the spring.

While from ocean, breathing hard,  
With sole pressure toward the bay, –  
Olive raiment, pinions grey  
By clipt rose-stems thinly starred,  
Zephyrus and Boreas pass,  
One in wonder, one desire:  
And the cool sea's dawnlit mass  
Boreas' foot has lifted higher,  
As he blows the shell to land,  
Where the reed invades the sand.

She who treads the rocking shell –  
Tearful shadow in her eyes  
Of reluctant sympathies,  
On her mouth a pause, a spell,  
Candour far too lone to speak  
And no knowledge on her brows;  
Virgin stranger, come to seek  
Covert of strong orange-boughs  
By the sea-wind scarcely moved, –  
She is Love that hath not loved.

[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/94/Correggio\\_Jupiter\\_and\\_Antiope.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/94/Correggio_Jupiter_and_Antiope.jpg)

**ANTIOPE  
CORREGGIO**

*The Louvre*

NOONTIDE'S whiteness of full sun  
    Illumes her sleep;  
Its heat is on her limbs and one  
    White arm with sweep  
Of languor falls around her head:  
She cuddles on the lap of earth;  
    While almost dead  
Asleep, forgetful of his mirth,  
A dimpled Cupid at her side  
    Sprawls satisfied.

Conquered, weary with the light,  
    Her eyelids orb:

Summer's plenitude of might  
Her lips absorb, –  
Uplifted to the burning air  
And with repletion fallen apart.  
Her form is bare,  
But her doe-skin binds each dart  
Of her woodland armory,  
Laid idle by.

She is curled beyond the rim  
Of oaks that slide  
Their lowest branches, long and slim,  
Close to her side;  
Their foliage touches her with lobes  
Half-gay, half-shadowed, green and brown:  
Her white throat globes,  
Thrown backward, and her breasts sink down  
With the supineness of her sleep,  
Leaf-fringed and deep.

Where her hand has curved to slip  
Across a bough,  
Fledged Cupid's slumberous fingers grip  
The turf and how  
Close to his chin he hugs her cloak!  
His torch reversed trails on the ground  
With feeble smoke;  
For in noon's chastity profound,  
In the blank glare of mid-day skies,  
Love's flambeau dies.

But the sleepers are not left  
To breathe alone;  
A god is by with hoofs deep-cleft,  
Legs overgrown  
With a rough pelt and body strong:  
Yet must the head and piercing eyes  
In truth belong  
To some Olympian in disguise;  
From lawless shape or mien unkempt  
They are exempt.

Zeus, beneath these oaken boughs,  
As satyr keeps  
His watch above the woman's brows  
And backward sweeps

Her cloak to flood her with the noon;  
Curious and fond, yet by a clear  
    Joy in the boon  
Of beauty franchised – beauty dear  
To him as to a tree's bent mass  
    The sunny grass.

<http://notrombone.files.wordpress.com/2007/06/botticelli-primavera.jpg>

**SPRING**  
**SANDRO BOTTICELLI**

*The Accademia of Florence*

VENUS is sad among the wanton powers,  
That make delicious tempest in the hours  
Of April or are reckless with their flowers:  
    Through umbrageous orange-trees  
    Sweeps, mid azure swirl, the Breeze,  
    That with clipping arms would seize  
    Eôs, wind-inspired and mad,  
    In wind-tightened muslin clad,  
    With one tress for stormy wreath  
    And a bine between her teeth.  
    Flora foots it near in frilled,  
    Vagrant skirt, with roses filled;  
    Pinks and gentians spot her robe

And the curled acanthus-lobe  
Edges intricate her sleeve;  
Rosy briars a girdle weave,  
Blooms are brooches in her hair:  
Though a vision debonair,  
Thriftless, venturesome, a grace  
Disingenuous lights her face;  
Curst she is, uncertain-lipped,  
Riggishly her dress is whipped  
By little gusts fantastic. Will she deign  
To toss her double-roses, or refrain?

These riot by the left side of the queen;  
Before her face another group is seen:  
In ordered and harmonic nobleness,  
Three maidens circle o'er the turf – each dress  
Blown round the tiptoe shape in lovely folds  
Of air-invaded white; one comrade holds  
Her fellow's hand on high, the foremost links  
Their other hands in chain that lifts and sinks.  
Their auburn tresses ripple, coil or sweep;  
Gems, amulets and fine ball-fringes keep  
Their raiment from austereness. With reserve  
The dancers in a garland slowly curve.  
They are the Graces in their virgin youth;  
And does it touch their Deity with ruth  
That they must fade when Eros speeds his dart?  
Is this the grief and forethought of her heart?

For she is sad, although fresh myrtles near  
Her figure chequer with their leaves the drear,  
Grey chinks that through the orange-trees appear:  
Clothed in spring-time's white and red,  
She is tender with some dread,  
As she turns a musing head  
Sideways mid her veil demure;  
Her wide eyes have no allure,  
Dark and heavy with their pain.  
She would bless, and yet in vain  
Is her troubled blessing: Love,  
Blind and tyrannous above,  
Shoots his childish flame to mar  
Those without defect, who are  
Yet unspent and cold with peace;  
While, her sorrow to increase,  
Hermes, leader of her troop –



His short cutlass on the loop  
Of a crimson cloak, his eye  
Clear in its fatality –  
Rather seems the guide of ghosts  
To the dead, Plutonian coasts,  
Than herald of Spring's immature, gay band:  
He plucks a ripened orange with his hand.

The tumult and the mystery of earth,  
When woods are bleak and flowers have sudden birth,  
When love is cruel, follow to their end  
The God that teaches Shadows to descend,  
But pauses now awhile, with solemn lip  
And left hand laid victorious on his hip.  
The triumph of the year without avail  
Is blown to Hades by blue Zephyr's gale.  
Across the seedling herbage coltsfoot grows  
Between the tulip, heartsease, strawberry-rose,  
Fringed pinks and dull grape-hyacinth. Alas,  
At play together, through the speckled grass  
Trip Youth and April: Venus, looking on,  
Beholds the mead with all the dancers gone.

<http://www.italica.rai.it/immagini/arte/rinascimento/veneto.jpg>

**A PORTRAIT  
BARTOLOMMEO VENETO**

*The Stüdel' sche Institut at Frankfurt*

A CRYSTAL, flawless beauty on the brows  
Where neither love nor time has conquered space  
On which to live; her leftward smile endows  
The gazer with no tidings from the face;  
About the clear mounds of the lip it winds with silvery pace  
And in the umber eyes it is a light  
Chill as a glowworm's when the moon embrowns an August night.

She saw her beauty often in the glass,  
Sharp on the dazzling surface, and she knew  
The haughty custom of her grace must pass:  
Though more persistent in all charm it grew  
As with a desperate joy her hair across her throat she drew  
In crinkled locks stiff as dead, yellow snakes . . .  
Until at last within her soul the resolution wakes

She will be painted, she who is so strong  
In loveliness, so fugitive in years:  
Forth to the field she goes and questions long  
Which flowers to choose of those the summer bears;  
She plucks a violet larkspur, – then a columbine appears  
Of perfect yellow, – daisies choicely wide;  
These simple things with finest touch she gathers in her pride.

Next on her head, veiled with well-bleachen white  
And bound across the brow with azure-blue,  
She sets the box-tree leaf and coils it tight  
In spiky wreath of green, immortal hue;

Then, to the prompting of her strange, emphatic insight true,  
She bares one breast, half-freeing it of robe,  
And hangs green-water gem and cord beside the naked globe.

So was she painted and for centuries  
Has held the fading field-flowers in her hand  
Austerely as a sign. O fearful eyes  
And soft lips of the courtesan who planned  
To give her fragile shapeliness to art, whose reason spanned  
Her doom, who bade her beauty in its cold  
And vacant eminence persist for all men to behold!

She had no memories save of herself  
And her slow-fostered graces, naught to say  
Of love in gift or boon; her cruel pelf  
Had left her with no hopes that grow and stay;  
She found default in everything that happened night or day,  
Yet stooped in calm to passion's dizziest strife  
And gave to art a fair, blank form, unverified by life.

Thus has she conquered death: her eyes are fresh,  
Clear as her frontlet jewel, firm in shade  
And definite as on the linen mesh  
Of her white hood the box-tree's sombre braid,  
That glitters leaf by leaf and with the year's waste will not fade.  
The small, close mouth, leaving no room for breath,  
In perfect, still pollution smiles – Lo, she has conquered death!

<http://art.pro.tok2.com/Bible/GSaints/Sebastian/correggio.jpg>

**SAINT SEBASTIAN  
CORREGGIO**

*The Dresden Gallery*

BOUND by thy hands, but with respect unto thine eyes how free –  
Fixed on Madonna, seeing all that they were born to see!  
The Child thine upward face hath sighted,  
Still and delighted;  
Oh, bliss when with mute rites two souls are plighted!

As the young aspen-leaves rejoice, though to the stem held tight  
In the soft visit of the air, the current of the light,  
Thou hast the peril of a captive's chances,  
Thy spirit dances,  
Caught in the play of Heaven's divine advances.

While cherubs straggle on the clouds of luminous, curled fire,  
The Babe looks through them, far below, on thee with soft desire.  
Most clear of bond must they be reckoned –  
No joy is second  
To theirs whose eyes by other eyes are beckoned.

Though arrows rain on breast and throat they have no power to hurt,  
While thy tenacious face they fail an instant to avert.  
Oh might my eyes, so without measure,  
Feed on their treasure,  
The world with thong and dart might do its pleasure!



(Picture reproduced by permission of the Städel'sche Institut)

**A 'SANT' IMAGINE'  
FIORENZO DI LORENZO**

*The Städel'sche Institut at Frankfurt*

A HOLY Picture – variably fair  
In colour and fantastic in device!  
    With what an ecstasy is laid  
    The pattern of this red brocade,  
Blood-red above Madonna's seat for glory;  
    But gold and black behind the victor-two  
    Who, full in view  
    Of the great, central form, in thought  
    Live through the martyrdom they wrought;  
Afresh, with finer senses, suffer and despair.  
    Why is their story  
Set in such splendour one must note the nice  
Edge of the arras and the glancing tone  
Of jacinth floor, pale rose before the Virgin's throne?

A young St. Christopher, with Umbria's blue  
Clear in his eyes, stands nobly to the right  
    And questions how the thing may hap  
    The little, curious, curled-up chap,  
That clings almost astride upon his shoulder  
    And with uncertain baby-fingers lays  
    A pat of praise  
    On the crisp, propping head, should press

Upon him to acute distress.  
Vainly he turns; within the child's eyes is no clue;  
And he with colder  
Heart must give succour to the sad in plight:  
To him no secrets of his doom are known;  
Who suffers fate to load must bear the load alone.

And wherefore doth Madonna thus look down  
So wistful toward the book upon her knees?  
Has she no comfort? Is there need  
Within the Scriptures she should read  
Who to the living Word her bosom presses?  
With bliss of her young Babe so near,  
Is it not drear  
Darkly from books to understand  
What bodes his coming to the land?  
Alas, as any other child he catches at her gown  
And, with caresses,  
Breaks on her still *Magnificat* : to ease  
And give air to her spirit with her own  
Christ she must hold communion in great songs alone.

She bows and sheds no comfort on the boy  
Whose face turns on her full of bleeding tears,  
Sebastian, with the arrows' thrill  
Intolerable to him still,  
Full of an agony that has no measure,  
That cannot rise, grow to the height and wane,  
Being simple pain  
That to his nature is as bound  
As anguish to the viol's sound:  
He suffers as the sensitive enjoy;  
And, as their pleasure,  
His pain is hid from common eyes and ears.  
Wide-gaping as for air, breathing no moan,  
His delicate, exhausted lips are open thrown.

And now back to the picture's self we come,  
Its subtle, glowing spirit; turn our eyes  
From those grave, isolated, strange  
Figures, to feel how sweet the range  
Of colour in the marbles, with what grace is  
Sebastian's porphyry-column reared aloft!  
How waving, soft

And fringed the palm-branch of the stave  
Saint Christopher exalts!--they must have all things brave  
About them who are born for martyrdom:

The fine, stern faces  
Refuse so steadily what they despise;  
The world will never mix them with her own---  
They choose the best, and with the best are left alone.

<http://art-wuchen.com/paintings/artists/images/Tintoretto/Tintoretto004/File1.jpg>

## **THE RESCUE TINTORETTO**

### *The Dresden Gallery*

GREY tower, green sea, dark armour and clear curves  
Of shining flesh; the tower built far into the sea  
And the dark armour that of one coming to set her free  
Who, white against the chamfered base,  
From fetters that her noble limbs enlace  
Bows to confer  
Herself on her deliverer:  
He, dazzled by the splendid gift,  
Stadies himself against his oar, ere he is strong to lift  
And strain her to his breast:  
Her powerful arms lie in such heavy rest  
Across his shoulder, though he swerves  
And staggers with her weight, though the wave buoys,  
Then slants the vessel, she maintains his form in poise.

Her sister-captive, seated on the side  
Of the swayed gondola, her arched, broad back in strain,  
Strikes her right ankle, eager to discumber it of chain,  
Intent upon her work, as though  
It were full liberty ungyved to go.  
She will not halt,  
But spring delighted to the salt,  
When fetterless her ample form

Can beat the reflux of the waves back to their crested storm.  
Has she indeed caught sight  
Of that blithe tossing pinnacle on the white  
Scum of the full, up-bearing tide?  
The rose-frocked rower-boy, in absent fit  
Or modesty, surveys his toe and smiles at it.

*Her* bondage irks not; *she* has very truth  
Of freedom who within her lover's face can seek  
For answer to her eyes, her breath, the blood within her cheek –  
A soul so resolute to bless  
She has forgot her shining nakedness  
And to her peer  
Presents immunity from fear:  
As one half-overcome, half-braced,  
The man's hand searches as he grips her undulating waist:  
So these pure twain espouse  
And without ravishment, mistrust, or vows  
Of constancy fulfil their youth;  
In the rough niches of the wall behind  
Their meeting heads, how close the trails of ivy wind!



<http://www.abm-enterprises.net/venusandmars.jpg>

**VENUS AND MARS**  
**SANDRO BOTTICELLI**

*The National Gallery*

SHE is a fate, although  
She lies upon the grass,  
While satyrs shout *Ho, ho!*  
At what she brings to pass;  
And nature is as free  
Before her strange, young face  
As if it knew that she  
Were in her sovereign place,  
With shading trees above.  
The little powers of earth on woolly hips  
Are gay as children round a nurse they love;  
Nor do they watch her lips.

A cushion, crimson-rose,  
Beneath her elbow heaves;  
Her head, erect in pose  
Against the laurel-leaves,  
Is looped with citron hair  
That cunning plaits adorn.  
Beside her instep bare  
And dress of crimped lawn  
Fine blades of herbage rise;  
The level field that circles her retreat  
Is one grey-lighted green the early sky's  
Fresh blue inclines to meet.

Her swathing robe is bound  
With gold that is not new:  
She rears from off the ground  
As if her body grew  
Triumphant as a stem  
That hath received the rains,  
Hath softly sunk with them,

And in an hour regains  
Its height and settledness.  
Yet are her eyes alert; they search and weigh  
The god, supine, who fell from her caress  
When love had had its sway.

He lies in perfect death  
Of sleep that has no spasm;  
It seems his very breath  
Is lifted from a chasm,  
So sunk he lies. His hair  
In russet heaps is spread;  
Thus couches in its lair  
A creature that is dead:  
But, see, his nostrils scent  
New joy and tighten palpitating nerves,  
Although his naked limbs, their fury spent,  
Are fallen in wearied curves.

Athwart his figure twist  
Some wreathy folds of white,  
Crossed by the languid wrist  
And loose palm of his right,  
Wan hand; the other drops  
Its fingers down beside  
The coat of mail that props  
His shoulder; crimson-dyed,  
His cloak winds under him;  
One leg is stretched, one raised in arching lines:  
Thus, opposite the queen, his body slim  
And muscular reclines.

An impish satyr blows  
The mottled conch in vain  
Beside his ear that knows  
No whine of the sea-strain;  
Another tugs his spear,  
One hides within his casque  
Soft horns and jaunty leer;  
While one presumes to bask  
Within his breastplate void  
And rolls its tongue in open-hearted zest:  
Above the sleeper, their dim wings annoyed,  
The wasps have made a nest.

O tragic forms, the man,

The woman – he asleep,  
She lone and sadder than  
The dawn, too wise to weep  
Illusion that to her  
Is empire, to the earth  
Necessity and stir  
Of sweet, predestined mirth!  
Ironical she sees,  
Without regret, the work her kiss has done  
And lives a cold enchantress doomed to please  
Her victims one by one.

**THE DEATH OF PROCRISS  
PIERO DI COSIMO**

*The National Gallery*

AH foolish Procris! – short and brown  
She lies upon the leafy, littoral plain;  
Her scarlet cloak, her veil have both slipped down  
And rest

Across her loins; the naked feet are bound  
With sandals of dull gold, their thongs being wide  
And interlaced; the body's swelling side  
Crushes the arm; each sterile breast  
Is grey; upon the throat there is a stain  
Of blood and on the hand along the ground.  
She gave no mortal cry,  
But voiceless and consumed by drouth,  
Far from the town she might not gain,  
Beside a river-mouth  
She dragged herself to die.

Her auburn tresses part or coil  
Below a wimple of most sombre blue;  
They fleck the green of the luxuriant soil  
Or drift  
Thinly athwart the outline of her ear.  
Time has been passing since she last drew breath;  
She has the humble, clay-cold look of death  
Within the open world; no rift  
Has come between the eyelids, of a hue  
Monotonous – a paleness drear.  
Her brows attest no thought;  
Her lips, that quick destruction stains,  
Shall never kiss her husband, never sue  
For pardon: she remains  
A quarry none has sought.

And thus she lies half-veiled, half-bare,  
Deep in the midst of nature that abides  
Inapprehensive she is lying there,  
    So wan;  
The flowers, the silver estuary afar –  
These daisies, plantains, all the white and red  
Field-blossoms through the leaves and grasses spread;  
The water with its pelican,  
Its flight of sails and its blue countrysides –  
Unto themselves they are:  
    The dogs sport on the sand,  
The herons curve above the reeds  
Or one by one descend the air,  
    While lifelessly she bleeds  
    From throat and dabbled hand.

Russet and large against the sky,  
Two figures at her head and feet are seen;  
One is a solemn hound, one utterly  
    A faun,  
A creature of wild fashion, with black fell  
On which a fleshy, furred ear loops out;  
Under his chin the boorish bristles sprout  
Distinct; an onyx-banded horn  
Springs from each temple; slender legs between  
The herbage peep and well-  
    Fleeced thighs; his left hand grips  
Her shoulder and the right along  
Her forehead moves: his mellow eye  
    Is indecisive; strong,  
    Coarse pity swells his lips.

The tall dog's vigil and the gaze  
Of the wild man, by eagerness bent low,  
Have each a like expression of amaze  
    And deep,  
Respectful yearning: these two watchers pass  
Out of themselves, though only to attain  
Incomprehensible, half-wakened pain.  
They cannot think nor weep  
Above this perished jealousy and woe,  
This prostrate, human mass;  
    But with vague souls they sit  
And gaze, while tide and bloom and bird  
Live on in their familiar ways,  
    By mortal grief unstirred

And never sad with it.

Yet autumn comes, there is the light  
Born of October's lateness in the sky  
And on the sea-side; leaves have taken flight  
    From yon,  
Slim seedling-birch on the rivage, the flock  
Of herons has the quiet of solitude,  
That comes when chills on sunny air intrude;  
The little ships must soon be gone,  
And soon the pale and ruddy flowers shall die,  
Save the untransient plants that block  
    Their green out, ebon-clear,  
Against the distance, while they drop,  
On hound and satyr settled nigh,  
    Red tassels that shall stop  
    Till windy snows appear.

[http://images.google.co.uk/imgres?imgurl=http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/3f/Antoine\\_Watteau\\_051.jpg&imgrefurl=http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Antoine\\_Watteau\\_051.jpg&usq=\\_\\_KBDKcgh\\_YrwBMVvku8UgNzmjFxs=&h=2058&w=2536&sz=612&hl=en&start=50&um=1&tbnid=DCyvkbKJoYy8M:&tbnh=122&tbnw=150&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dwatteau%26ndsp%3D20%26hl%3Den%26sa%3DN%26start%3D40%26um%3D1](http://images.google.co.uk/imgres?imgurl=http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/3f/Antoine_Watteau_051.jpg&imgrefurl=http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Antoine_Watteau_051.jpg&usq=__KBDKcgh_YrwBMVvku8UgNzmjFxs=&h=2058&w=2536&sz=612&hl=en&start=50&um=1&tbnid=DCyvkbKJoYy8M:&tbnh=122&tbnw=150&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dwatteau%26ndsp%3D20%26hl%3Den%26sa%3DN%26start%3D40%26um%3D1)

**A FÊTE CHAMPÊTRE**  
**ANTOINE WATTEAU**

*The Dresden Gallery*

A LOVELY, animated group  
That picnic on a marble seat,  
Where flaky boughs of beeches droop,  
Where gowns in woodland sunlight glance,  
Where shines each coy, lit countenance;  
While sweetness rules the air, most sweet  
    Because the day  
Is deep within the year that shall decay:

They group themselves around their queen,  
This lady in the yellow dress,  
With bluest knots of ribbon seen  
Upon her breast and yellow hair;  
But the reared face proclaims *Beware!*  
To him who twangs his viol less  
    To speak his joy  
Than her soon-flattered choiceness to annoy.

Beside her knee a damsel sits,  
In petticoat across whose stripes  
Of delicate decision flits  
The wind that shows them blue and white  
And primrose round a bodice tight--  
As grey as is the peach that ripens:  
    Her hair was spun  
For Zephyrus among the threads to run.

She on love's varying theme is launched---  
Ah, youth!--behind her, roses lie,  
The latest, artless roses, blanched  
Around a hectic centre. Two  
Protesting lovers near her sue  
And quarrel, Cupid knows not why:  
    Withdrawn and tart,  
One gallant stands in reverie apart.

Proud of his silk and velvet, each  
Plum-tinted, of his pose that spurns  
The company, his eyes impeach  
A Venus on an ivied bank,  
Who rests her rigorous, chill flank  
Against a water-jet and turns  
    Her face from those  
Who wanton in the coloured autumn's close.

Ironical he views her shape of stone  
And the harsh ivy and grey mound;  
Then sneers to think she treats her own  
Enchanted couples with contempt,  
As though her bosom were exempt  
From any care, while tints profound  
    Touch the full trees  
And there are warning notes in every breeze.

The coldness of mere pleasure when  
Its hours are over cuts his heart:  
That Love should rule the earth and men  
For but a season year by year  
And then must straightway disappear,  
Even as the summer weeks depart,  
    Has thrilled his brain  
With icy anger and censorious pain.

Alas, the arbour-foliage now,  
As cornfields when they lately stood  
Awaiting harvest, bough on bough  
Is saffron. Yonder to the left  
A straggling rose-bush is bereft  
Of the last roses of the wood;  
    For one or two  
Still flicker where the balmy dozens grew.

On the autumnal grass the pairs



Of lovers couch themselves and raise  
A facile merriment that dares  
Surprise the vagueness of the sun  
October to a veil has spun  
About the heads and forest-ways –  
    Delicious light  
Of gold so pure it half-refines to white.

Yet Venus from this world of love,  
Of haze and warmth has turned: as yet  
None feels it save the trees above,  
The roses in their soft decline  
And one ill-humoured libertine.  
Soon shall all hearts forget  
    The vows they swore  
And the leaves strew the glade's untrodden floor.

[http://www.bestpriceart.com/vault/abc\\_messina2.JPG](http://www.bestpriceart.com/vault/abc_messina2.JPG)

**SAINT SEBASTIAN  
ANTONELLO DA MESSINA**

*The Dresden Gallery*

YOUNG Sebastian stands beside a lofty tree,  
Rigid by the rigid trunk that branchlessly  
Lifts its column on the blue  
Of a heaven that takes  
Hyacinthine hue  
From a storm that wellnigh breaks.

Shadiness and thunder dout the zenith's light,  
Yet a wide horizon still extends as bright  
As the lapis-lazuli;  
Poignant sunshine streams  
Over land and sky,  
With tempestuous, sunken beams.

He who was a soldier late is standing now  
Stript and fastened to the tree that has no bough,  
In the centre of a court,  
That is bound by walls  
Fancifully wrought,  
Over which the daylight falls.

Arch and chimney rise aloft into the air:  
On the balconies are hung forth carpets rare

Of an Eastern, vivid red;  
Idle women lean  
Where the rugs are spread,  
Each with an indifferent mien.

On the marble of the courtyard, fast asleep,  
Lies a brutish churl, his body in a heap;  
Two hard-hearted comrades prate  
Where a portal shows  
Distance blue and great,  
Stretching onward in repose.

And between the shafts of sandy-coloured tone  
Slips a mother with her child: but all alone  
Stays Sebastian in his grief.  
What soul pities him!  
Who shall bring relief  
From the darts that pierce each limb?

Naked, almost firm as sculpture, is his form,  
Nobly set below the burthen of the storm;  
Shadow, circling chin and cheek,  
Their ellipse defines,  
Then the shade grows weak  
And his face with noonday shines –

Shines as olive marble that reflects the mere  
Radiance it receives upon a surface clear;  
For we see no blessedness  
On his visage pale,  
Turned in its distress  
Toward the heaven, without avail.

Massive is his mouth; the upper lip is set  
In a pained, protesting curve: his eyes have met  
God within the darkening sky  
And dispute His will,  
Dark, remorselessly  
Fervent to dispute it still.

The whole brow is hidden by the chestnut hair,  
That behind the back flows down in locks and there  
Changes to a deeper grain.  
Though his feet were strong,  
They are swoln with strain,  
For he has been standing long.

Captive, stricken through by darts, yet armed with power  
That resents the coming on of its last hour,  
    Sound in muscle is the boy,  
    Whom his manhood fills  
        With an acrid joy,  
    Whom its violent pressure thrills.

But this force implanted in him must be lost  
And its natural validity be crossed  
    By a chill, disabling fate;  
    He must stand at peace  
        While his hopes abate,  
    While his youth and vigour cease.

At his feet a mighty pillar lies reversed;  
So the virtue of his sex is shattered, cursed:  
    Here is martyrdom and not  
    In the arrows' sting;  
        This the bitter lot  
    His soul is questioning.

He, with body fresh for use, for pleasure fit,  
With its energies and needs together knit  
    In an able exigence,  
    Must endure the strife,  
        Final and intense,  
    Of necessity with life.

Yet throughout this bold rebellion of the saint  
Noonday's brilliant air has carried no complaint.  
    Lo, across the solitude  
    Of the storm two white,  
        Little clouds obtrude  
    Storm-accentuating light!

**A PEN-DRAWING OF LEDA  
SODOMA**

*The Grand Duke's Palace at Weimar*

'Tis Leda lovely, wild and free,  
Drawing her gracious Swan down through the grass to see  
Certain round eggs without a speck:  
One hand plunged in the reeds and one dinting the downy neck,  
Although his hectoring bill  
Gapes toward her tresses,  
She draws the fondled creature to her will.

She joys to bend in the live light  
Her glistening body toward her love, how much more bright!  
Though on her breast the sunshine lies  
And spreads its affluence on the wide curves of her waist and thighs,  
To her meek, smitten gaze  
Where her hand presses  
The Swan's white neck sink Heaven's concentrated rays.[626]

**THE FIGURE OF VENUS IN 'SPRING'  
SANDRO BOTTICELLI**

*The Accademia of Florence*

I

A SIMPLE lady full of heavy thought:  
Behind her neck the myrtle-bowers lie cold;  
Her robe is white, her carmine mantle rolled  
And lifted on her arm that beareth nought:  
A flame-tipped arrow in its arc is brought  
Above by Eros; ornaments of gold  
Are crossed chainwise about her chest to hold  
The unfilled breasts; her right hand as she sought  
To bless is lifted and then stays at pause  
As fearful to cast sorrow for delight  
On her girl-votaries. Must her coming cause  
Their stately freedom quite to disappear?  
Brings Love in truth a bitterness to blight  
The yet unstricken gladness of the year?

II

Or is it Destiny that doth compel  
Her hand to stay its blessing? On her right  
Three virgins, flowerless, slow of step, unite  
In dance, as they were guided by the spell  
Of some Choragus imperceptible:  
Beside them Hermes lifts his wand to smite  
An orange from the bough; they keep in sight  
The severing of the golden fruit for hell.  
What boots it therefore that so light of breath  
Comes Flora, from her lapful tossing flowers,

Come Zephyrus and fleeing nymph, if these  
Are travelling wanton toward the infernal powers;  
If the stern Moirai move beneath the trees  
With eyes fixed on the harbinger of death?

[http://www.shafe.co.uk/crystal/images/lshafe/Giorgione\\_Sleeping\\_Venus.jpg](http://www.shafe.co.uk/crystal/images/lshafe/Giorgione_Sleeping_Venus.jpg)

**THE SLEEPING VENUS**  
**GIORGIONE**

*The Dresden Gallery*

HERE is Venus by our homes  
And resting on the verdant swell  
Of a soft country flanked with mountain domes:  
She has left her arched shell,  
Has left the barren wave that foams,  
Amid earth's fruitful tilths to dwell.  
Nobly lighted while she sleeps  
As sward-lands or the corn-field sweeps,  
Pure as are the things that man  
Needs for life and using can  
Never violate nor spot –  
Thus she slumbers in no grot.  
But on open ground,  
With the great hill-sides around.

And her body has the curves,  
The same extensive smoothness seen  
In yonder breadths of pasture, in the swerves  
Of the grassy mountain-green  
That for her propping pillow serves:  
There is a sympathy between  
Her and Earth of largest reach,  
For the sex that forms them each  
Is a bond, a holiness,  
That unconsciously must bless  
And unite them, as they lie  
Shameless underneath the sky  
A long, opal cloud  
Doth in noontide haze enshroud.

O'er her head her right arm bends;  
And from the elbow raised aloft  
Down to the crossing knees a line descends  
Unimpeachable and soft  
As the adjacent slope that ends  
In chequered plain of hedge and croft.  
Circular as lovely knolls,  
Up to which a landscape rolls  
With desirous sway, each breast  
Rises from the level chest,  
One in contour, one in round –  
Either exquisite, low mound  
Firm in shape and given  
To the August warmth of heaven.



With bold freedom of incline,  
With an uttermost repose,  
From hip to herbage-cushioned foot the line  
Of her left leg stretching shows  
Against the turf direct and fine,  
Dissimilar in grace to those  
    Little bays that in and out  
    By the ankle wind about;  
    Or that shallow bend, the right  
    Curled-up knee has brought to sight  
    Underneath its bossy rise,  
    Where the loveliest shadow lies!  
    Charmed umbrage rests  
    On her neck and by her breasts.

Her left arm remains beside  
The plastic body's lower heaves,  
Controlled by them, as when a river-side  
With its sandy margin weaves  
Deflections in a lenient tide;  
Her hand the thigh's tense surface leaves,  
    Falling inward. Not even sleep  
    Dare invalidate the deep,  
    Universal pleasure sex  
    Must unto itself annex –  
    Even the stillest sleep; at peace,  
    More profound with rest's increase,  
    She enjoys the good  
    Of delicious womanhood.

Cheek and eyebrow touch the fold  
Of the raised arm that frames her hair,  
Her braided hair in colour like to old  
Copper glinting here and there:  
While through her skin of olive-gold  
The scarce carnations mount and share  
    Faultlessly the oval space  
    Of her temperate, grave face.  
    Eyelids underneath the day  
    Wrinkle as full buds that stay,  
    Through the tranquil, summer hours,  
    Closed although they might be flowers;  
    The red lips shut in  
    Gracious secrets that begin.

On white drapery she sleeps,

That fold by fold is stained with shade;  
Her mantle's ruddy pomegranate in heaps  
For a cushion she has laid  
Beneath her; and the glow that steeps  
Its grain of richer depth is made  
By an overswelling bank,  
Tufted with dun grasses rank.  
From this hillock's outer heaves  
One small bush defines its leaves  
Broadly on the sober blue  
The pale cloud-bank rises to,  
Whilst it sinks in bland  
Sunshine on the distant land.

Near her resting-place are spread,  
In deep or greener-lighted brown,  
Wolds, that half-withered by the heat o'erhead,  
Press up to a little town  
Of castle, archway, roof and shed,  
Then slope in grave continuance down:  
On their border, in a group,  
Trees of brooding foliage droop  
Sidelong; and a single tree  
Springs with bright simplicity,  
Central from the sunlit plain.  
Of a blue no flowers attain,  
On the fair, vague sky  
Adamantine summits lie.

And her resting is so strong  
That while we gaze it seems as though  
She had lain thus the solemn glebes among  
In the ages far ago  
And would continue, till the long,  
Last evening of Earth's summer glow  
In communion with the sweet  
Life that ripens at her feet:  
We can never fear that she  
From Italian fields will flee,  
For she does not come from far,  
She is of the things that are;  
And she will not pass  
While the sun strikes on the grass.

<http://teachers.sduhsd.k12.ca.us/ltrupe/art%20history%20web/final/chap19BaroqueRococo/Watteau-The%20Departure%20from%20Cythera.jpg>

**L'EMBARQUEMENT POUR CYTHÈRE  
ANTOINE WATTEAU**

*The Louvre*

WHY starts this company so fair arrayed  
In pomegranate brocade,  
Blue shoulder-cloak and barley-coloured dress  
Of flaunting shepherdess,  
From shelter of the full-leaved, summer trees?  
What vague unease  
Draws them in couples to a burnished boat?  
And wherefore from its prow,  
Borne upward on a spiral, amber swirl  
Of incense-light, themselves half-rose, half-pearl,  
So languorously doth float  
This flock of Loves that in degree  
Fling their own hues as raiment on the sea;  
While one from brandished censer  
Flings wide a flame and smoke  
Diffusive to provoke  
The heavens to consummation and to spread  
Refluence intenser  
Of sun and cool  
And tempting azure on that bed  
Of splendour, that delicious, variant pool?  
I see it now!  
'Tis Venus' rose-veiled barque  
And that great company ere dark  
Must to Cythera, so the Loves prevail,  
Adventurously sail.

O happy youth, that thus by Venus' guile  
Is summoned to her fabulous,  
Her crystal-burnished isle!  
Her virile votaries are not slack  
In ceremonious worship: bravely clad  
In coats of flickering velvet, crimson-greys  
Of corn-field gold, they leap to give her praise,  
They grasp long staves, they joy as they were mad,  
Drawing their dainty Beauties by the waist  
To that warm water-track.  
What terror holds these noble damsels back?  
Alack, what strange distaste  
Works in their hearts that thus  
They sigh estranged? What pressure of what ill  
Turns their vague sweetness chill?  
Why should they in debate,  
Beneath the nodding, summer trees,  
Dissentient dally and defer their fate?  
Methinks none sees  
The statue of a Venus set  
Mid some fair trellis, in a lovely fret  
Of rose; her marble mien,  
Secret, imperial, blank, no joy discovers  
In these uncertain lovers  
That parley and grow pale:  
Not one of them but is afraid to sail,  
Save this firm-tripping dame who chooses  
The voyage as a queen,  
Conscious of what she wins and what she loses.  
Her petticoat of fine-creased white  
And, oh, her barley-coloured gown,  
What miracles of silver-brown  
They work amid the blues and puces!  
As, full of whimsical delight  
To mark a sister's half-abashed surrender,  
Full proudly she doth bend her  
Arched, amorous eyelids to commend her,  
Gripping more tight  
Her slender stave, that she may seem  
Prompt to descend toward that dead, heated stream.

Her lover's face we lack,  
Bent from us; yet we feel  
How fervid his appeal,  
As raised on tip-toe he his lofty dame addresses.

Fine streaks of light across his raiment steal;  
For, though his cap is black,  
When blossoms of japonica are spread  
In sunshine, whiter-smiling red  
Was never seen than glistens on his sleeve.  
And how his furs flash to relieve  
His lady's train of chrome!  
Ah me, how long must these fond gallants blind  
The fears and waive the light distresses  
Of the coy girls who stay behind,  
Nor yet consent to roam  
Toward that soft, vermeil country far, so very far from home!

First of the twain is seen  
A pale-tressed dame, couched on the grass, her bodice lambent green,  
Her frilling skirt of salmon and primrosep  
And green of many a flower before it blows  
Who, pettish in remorse,  
Awhile her lover's urgent hand refuses,  
Then rises buoyant on its welcome force.  
But, see, this third  
Sweet lady is not stirred,  
Though at her side a man  
Half-kneels. Why is he pleading in her ear,  
With eyes so near  
That Paradise of light,  
Where angles of the yellow, open fan  
And gown the sunken pink  
Of dying roses rim her bosom's white?  
Her eyelids are full-drooped, but under  
The lids is wonder;  
And, at her skirt,  
Ah, woe! in pilgrim hood and shirt  
Dressed whimsical, a cunning Cupid-lad:  
Soon shall the naked urchin be  
Plunged in the depths of that cerulean sea  
Where life runs warm, delicious, limpid, free.

So pause the nearer groups: to the land's rim  
Presses a dim  
Confluence of hopes and angry amities:  
'Forth to the fairy water, come; thine hand . . .  
Nay then, by force; it is a god's command  
And I by rape will bring thee to thy bliss.  
What, sweet, so slow!' – 'But ere I leave the land  
Give me more vows; oh, bind thee to me fast;

Speak, speak! I do not crave thy kiss.  
To-morrow. . .' – 'Love, the tide is rising swift;  
Shall we not talk aboard? Your skirts are wet;  
If once I lift  
You in!' – 'Nay, nay, I cannot so forget  
The statue in the shade,  
The fountain-trickle by the leafy grot.  
Might not this mad embarking be delayed  
An instant?' – 'Dearest, would you cast your lot  
In that dull countryside,  
Where men abide  
Who must be buried? Note the swell  
Of colour 'gainst the coast.' – 'Then as you please.  
How strange a story we shall have to tell!'

Two rowers wait; one shoves  
The boat from shore, her cry  
From luscious mouth, her bosom lifted high  
Incite; and one doth wait,  
With lip that hath full time to laugh  
And hand on oar,  
Conclusion of the soft debate.  
Sudden the foremost of the fulgent Loves  
Seizes a staff  
From wanton hand; a thousand flambeaux pour  
Their plummy smoke upon the kindled breeze  
That wafts these silken loiterers to submerging seas.

*Now are they gone: a change is in the light,  
The iridescent ranges wane,  
The waters spread: ere fall of night  
The red-prowed shallop will have passed from sight  
And the stone Venus by herself remain  
Ironical above that wide, embrowning plain.*

### **Appendix 3: Poems and paintings cited in Chapter 4**

For copyright reasons, all paintings have been removed from the online version of this thesis. Links are given for reference.

[http://farm4.static.flickr.com/3258/2395766733\\_4f0aa6fb06.jpg?v=0](http://farm4.static.flickr.com/3258/2395766733_4f0aa6fb06.jpg?v=0)

Jean-Honoré Fragonard: *A Shepherdess*

#### ***Underneath the Bough*** **(first edition)**

“A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,  
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread, and thou  
Beside me singing in the Wilderness.  
Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!”

#### **The Third Book of Songs**

When high Zeus first peopled earth  
As sages say  
All were children of one birth,  
Helpless nurslings. Doves and bees  
Tended their soft infancies:  
Hand to hand they tossed the ball,

And none smiled to see the play,  
Nor stood aside  
In pride  
And pleasure of their youthful day.  
All waxed gray,  
Mourning in companies the winter dearth:  
Whate'er they saw befall  
Their neighbours, they  
Felt in themselves; so lay  
On life a pall.

Zeus at the confusion smiled,  
And said, 'From hence  
Man by change must be beguiled;  
Age with royalties of death,  
Childhood, sweeter than its breath,  
Will be won, if we provide  
Generation's difference'.  
Wisely he planned;  
The tiny hand,  
In eld's weak palm found providence,  
And each through influence  
Of things beholden and not borne grew mild:  
Youths by the old man's side  
Their turbulence  
To crystal sense  
Saw clarified.

Dear, is not the story's truth  
Most manifest?  
Had our lives been twinned, forsooth,  
We had never had one heart:  
By time set a space apart,  
We are bound by such close ties  
None can tell of either breast  
The native sigh  
Who try  
To learn with whom the Muse is guest.  
How sovereignly I'm blest  
To see and smell the rose of my own youth  
In thee: how pleasant lies  
My life, at rest  
From dream, its hope expressed  
Before mine eyes.



Already to mine eyelids' shore  
The gathering waters swell,  
For thinking of the grief in store  
When thou wilt say 'Farewell'.  
I dare not let thee leave me, sweet,  
Lest it should be for ever;  
Tears dew my kisses ere we meet,  
Foreboding we must sever:  
Since we can neither meet nor part,  
Methinks the moral is, sweetheart,  
That we must dwell together.

#### COWSLIP-GATHERING

Twain cannot mingle: we went hand in hand,  
Yearning, divided, through the fair spring land,  
Nor knew, twin maiden spirits, there must be  
In all true marriage perfect trinity.  
But lo! Dear Nature spied us, in a copse  
Filling with chirps of song and hazel-drops,  
And smiled: 'These children I will straight espouse,  
While the blue cuckoo thrills the alder-boughs'.  
So led us to a tender, marshy nook  
Of meadow-verdure, where by twos and threes  
The cowslips grew, down-nodding toward a brook;  
And left us there to pluck them at our ease  
In the moist quiet, till the rich content  
Of the bee humming in the cherry-trees  
Filled us; in one our very being blent.

**A girl,**  
Her soul a deep-wave pearl  
Dim, lucent of all lovely mysteries;  
A face flowered for heart's ease,  
A brow's grace soft as seas

Seen through faint forest-trees:  
A mouth, the lips apart,  
Like aspen-leaflets trembling in the breeze  
From her tempestuous heart.  
Such: and our souls so knit,  
I leave a page half-writ –  
The work begun  
Will be to heaven's conception done,  
If she come to it.

If I but dream that thou art gone,  
My heart aches to o'ertake thee;  
How shall I then forsake thee  
In clear daylight,  
Who art my very joy's nativity –  
Thee whose sweet soul I con  
Secure to find  
Perfect epitome  
Of nature, passion, poesy?  
From thee untwined,  
I shall but wander a disbodied sprite,  
Until thou wake me  
With thy kiss-warmèd breath, and take me  
Where we are one.

#### A SPRING MORNING BY THE SEA

I did not take me to the sea,  
When the winged morning wakened me  
With beamy plumes: I used them right  
To bear me in an Eastern flight  
Of arrowy swiftness to the bed  
Where my beloved still slumberèd,  
Lying half poet and half child,  
The twin divineness reconciled.  
And I, who scarce could breathe to see

Her spirit in its secrecy  
So innocent, drew back in awe  
That I should give such creature law;  
Then looked and found God standing near,  
And to his rule resigned my Dear.

### LOVE'S SOUR LEISURE

As a poem in my mind  
Thy sweet lineaments are shrined:  
From the memory, alas!  
Sweetest, sweetest verse will pass;  
And the fragments I must piece  
Lest the fair tradition cease.  
There is balmy air I trow  
On the uplands of thy brow,  
But the temple's veined mound  
Is the Muses' sacred ground;  
While the tresses pale are groves  
That the laurelled godhead loves.  
There is something in the cheek  
Like a dimple still to seek,  
As my poet timidly  
Love's incarnate kiss would flee.  
But the mouth! That land to own  
Long did Aphrodite moan  
Ere the virgin goddess grave  
From the temptress of the wave  
That most noble clime did win;  
Who, retreating to her chin,  
Took her boy's bow for a line  
The sweet boundary to define,  
And about the beauteous bays  
Still in orbèd queenship plays.  
I have all the charct'ry  
Of thy features, yet lack thee;  
And by couplets to confess  
What I wholly would possess  
Doth but whet the appetite  
Of my too long-famished sight:

Vainly if my eyes entreat  
Tears will be their daily meat.

I sing thee with the stock-dove's throat  
Warm, crooning, superstitious note,  
That on its dearie so doth dote  
    It falls to sorrow,  
And from the fair, white swans afloat  
    A dirge must borrow.

In thee I have such deep content,  
I can but murmur a lament;  
It is as though my heart were rent  
    By thy perfection,  
And all my passion's torrent spent  
    In recollection.

#### ACHERON

Elaia, my soul's bride,  
Thou must not leave me!  
Though 'tis a mournful land  
Through which I travel,  
I will but take thee by the hand,  
    And be thy guide  
To mysteries thou must in art unravel.  
When thou a little way art gone,  
Ere the grove's steep descent  
Darkening can grieve thee  
Thou backward to the sweet stars shall be sent;  
    While I plod on  
    To Acheron.

No beauty born of pride my lady hath;  
Her voice is as the path  
Of a sweet stream, and where it flows must be  
Peace and fertility.  
Who loveth her no tumult hath or pain;  
Her cloudy eyes are full of blessed rain,  
A sky that cherisheth; her breast  
Is a soft nook for rest.  
She hath no varying pleasure  
For passion's fitful mood.  
Her firm, small kisses are my constant food,  
As rowan-berries yield their treasure  
To starving birds; her smile  
Gives life so sweet a style,  
To die beneath its beams would be  
To practise immortality.

My love is like a lovely shepherdess;  
She has a dress  
Of peach and green,  
The prettiest was ever seen:  
All eyes must bless  
The passing of my pretty shepherdess.

My love is like the first day of the spring,  
To everything  
She gives a grace,  
Touching it with her tender face:  
Ye lambkins cling  
To her, and frolic in the sunshining!

My love is like the earliest streak of morn,  
Ere day is born;  
So virgin white,  
The sun with his transfiguring light  
Fears to adorn  
That tremulous, pellucid streak of morn.

O love, O springtime, morning shepherdess,  
Of my distress

I tell my flute;  
To thee I must be ever mute,  
And, weeping, bless  
The footprints of my sacred shepherdess.

### UNBOSOMING

The love that breeds  
In my heart for thee!  
As the iris is full, brimful of seeds,  
And all that it flowered for among the reeds  
Is packed in a thousand vermilion-beads  
That push, and riot, and squeeze, and clip,  
Till they burst the sides of the silver scrip,  
And at last we see  
What the bloom, with its tremulous, bowery fold  
Of zephyr-petal at heart did hold:  
So my breast is rent  
With the burthen and strain of its great content;  
For the summer of fragrance and sighs is dead,  
The harvest-secret is burning red,  
And I would give thee, after my kind,  
The final issues of heart and mind.

A gray mob-cap and a girl's  
Soft circle of sprouting curls,  
That proclaim she has had the fever:  
How dear the days when the child was nurst!  
My God, I pray she may die the first,  
That I may not leave her!

Her head on my knee laid down,  
That duvet so warm, so brown,  
I fondle, I dote on its springing.  
'Thou must never grow lonesome or old,  
Leave me rather to darkness and cold,  
O my Life, my Singing!'

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

#### AN INVITATION

Come and sing, my room is south;  
Come, with thy sun-governed mouth,  
Thou wilt never suffer drouth,  
    Long as dwelling  
In my chamber of the south.

On the wall there is woodbine,  
With its yellow-scarlet shine;  
When my lady's hopes decline,  
    Honey-smelling  
Trumpets will her mood divine.

There are myrtles in a row;  
Lady, when the flower's in blow,  
Kisses passing to and fro,  
    From our smelling,  
Think, what lovely dreams will grow!

There's a lavender settee,  
Cushioned for my sweet and me;  
Ah, what secrets there will be  
    For love-telling,  
When her head leans on my knee!

Books I have of long ago  
And to-day; I shall not know  
Some, unless thou read them, so  
    Their excelling  
Music needs thy voice's flow:

Campion with a noble ring  
Of choice spirits; count this wing  
Sacred! All the songs I sing  
    Welling, welling  
From Elizabethan spring:

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

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

And for Greek! Too sluggishly  
Thou dost toil; but Sappho, see!  
And the dear Anthology  
    For thy spelling.  
Come, it shall be well with thee.

## **The Fourth Book of Songs**

**Our myrtle is in flower;**



Behold Love's power!  
The glorious stamens' crowded force unfurled,  
Cirque beyond cirque  
At breathing, bee-like, and harmonious work;  
The rose-patched petals backward curled,  
Falling away  
To let fecundity have perfect play.

O flower, dear to the eyes  
Of Aphrodite, rise  
As she at once to bare, audacious bliss;  
And bid us near  
Your prodigal, delicious hemisphere,  
Where thousand kisses breed the kiss  
That fills the room  
With languor of an acid, dark perfume![627]

Across a gaudy room  
I looked and saw his face,  
Beneath the sapless palm-trees, in the gloom  
Of the distressing place,  
Where everyone sat tired,  
Where talk itself grew stale,

Where, as the day began to fail,  
No guest had just the power required  
To rise and go: I strove with my disgust;  
But at the sight of him my eyes were fired  
To give one glance, as though they must  
Be sociable with what they found of fair  
And free and simple in a chamber where  
Life was so base.

As when a star is lit  
In the dull, evening sky,  
Another soon leaps out to answer it,  
Even so the bright reply  
Came sudden from his eyes,  
By all but me unseen;  
Since then the distance that between  
Our lives unalterably lies  
Is but a darkness, intimate and still,  
Which messages may traverse, where replies  
May sparkle from afar, until  
The night becomes a mystery made clear  
Between two souls forbidden to draw near:  
Creator, why?

Underneath the Bough  
(third edition)

### **The Third Book of Songs**

#### **FORSAKING**

Have you seen the olives at set of sun,  
How their fiery maze,  
That tossed him his sparkles, snatched his rays,  
Becomes a region of limitless grays,

Dead, bough on bough,  
For lack of the sun?  
Love, this is how  
Living would be if thy life were run:  
Leave me not, thou!

## The Fifth Book of Songs

### MARIONETTES

We met  
After a year. I shall never forget  
How odd it was for our eyes to meet,  
For we had to repeat  
In our glances the words that we had said  
In days when, as our lashes lifted  
Or drooped, the universe was shifted.  
We had not closed with the past, then why  
Did the sense come over us as a fetter  
That all we did speaking eye to eye  
Had been done before and so much better?  
I think – but there's no saying –  
What made us so hateful was the rage  
Of our souls at finding ourselves a stage  
Where marionettes were playing:  
For a great actor once had trod  
Those boards and played the god.

[http://www.prieuresainthilaire.com/images\\_lippi/L\\_15.jpg](http://www.prieuresainthilaire.com/images_lippi/L_15.jpg)

Fra Lippo Lippi: *The Meeting at the Golden Gate*

[1] Katharine Bradley, British Library, *Works and Days Vol. XI*, 1897, Add.MS.46786, f. 156a.

[2] Mary Sturgeon, *Michael Field* (London: Harrap, 1922).

[3] A. J. A. Symons, *An Anthology of 'Nineties' Verse* (London: Elkin Mathews and Marot,

1928), *Oxford Book of Modern Verse, 1892-1935*, ed. by W. B. Yeats, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936). For an account of the meeting with Yeats see Emma Donoghue, *We Are Michael Field* (Bath: Absolute Press, 1998), p. 112. For the original account see Bradley, British Library, *Works and Days Vol. XVI*, 1902, Add.MS.46791, ff. 85a-86a.

[4] Michael Field, *Works and Days: From the Journal of Michael Field*, ed. by Thomas Sturge Moore and D. C. Sturge Moore (London: Murray, 1933).

[5] See, for example, Ian Fletcher, *Decadence and the 1890s* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979), R.K.R. Thornton, *The Decadent Dilemma* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), R. M. Seiler, *Walter Pater: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), John Heath-Stubbs, *The Darkling Plain: A Study of the Later Fortunes of Romanticism in English Poetry from George Darley to W. B. Yeats* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1950), Ifor Evans, *English Poetry in the Later Nineteenth Century* (London: Methuen, 1966), Norman Alford, *The Rhymers' Club: Poets of the Tragic Generation* (London: Macmillan, 1994). For Fletcher, Bradley and Cooper's journals are simply used to represent the public's shocked reaction to decadence (p. 21). Thornton also uses them in this way, though he is aware that 'those two ladies did consider themselves part of the literary world of the day' (p. 59), and even suggests that one of Arthur Symons' poems may have imitated a song from Michael Field's *The Tragic Mary* (p. 157). However, where Symons, Dowson and Johnson each get a chapter analysing their poetry, no Michael Field poems are quoted. The journal passage quoted by Seiler, rather than the usual portrayal of Bradley and Cooper as onlookers horrified by the excesses of decadence, shows them criticising Pater's withdrawal of 'Aesthetic Poetry' from *Appreciations*: 'He is getting hopelessly prudish and defers to the moral weakness of everybody. Deplorable!' (p. 10). Heath-Stubbs, dismissive generally of the aesthetes ('they merely played at being poets', p. 200), seems at first sympathetic, arguing that Bradley and Cooper have 'more strength and depth' than many of their contemporaries. However, failing to provide a single line of poetry, he dismisses them for 'their failure (too common among women poets) completely to subdue their form to their emotions' (p. 202). Evans, also concentrating only on the dramas, gives a negative assessment of the 'voluminous output' of these 'two ladies' (p. 334). Asserting that 'they form possibly the most absolute example of the Victorian inability to distinguish between a blank-verse play and an amorphous work decorated with occasional passages of high-sounding verse' (p. 335), he again provides not a single quote.

[6] Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (London: Junction Books, 1981), pp. 208-213.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 210.

[8] For modern poetry collections including their poetry, see *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology*, ed. by Angela Leighton and Margaret Reynolds, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 487-508. (45 poems); *Nineteenth-Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology* ed. by Isobel Armstrong and Joseph Bristow, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 694-704. (8 poems); *The Victorians: An Anthology of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Valentine Cunningham, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 889-894. (9 poems). The following theses and dissertations relating to Michael Field have all been completed since 1990: Jean Marie Borger, "'The Artist Was a Woman": Art, Writing, and Gender in the Work of Anna Jameson, George Eliot, and Michael Field' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Michigan, 2003); *Karen Mechel Camp*, 'Crossing Over: New Women at the Turn of the Century' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Alabama, 2000); Camille Cauti, 'The Revolt of the Soul: Catholic Conversion among 1890s London Aesthetes' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Columbia, 2003); *Jill Rose Ehnenn*,

'Coming Together: Women's Literary Collaboration in Britain, 1885-1918' (unpublished PhD thesis, **George Washington University**, 2001); *Rajani Preeti Iyer*, "'My soul was singing at a work apart": Female Victorian Poets Achieving Voice' (unpublished PhD thesis, **University of Pennsylvania**, 2004); *Janna Marie Knittel*, 'Convention and Counterpoint: Nineteenth-Century Women's Poetic Language' (unpublished PhD thesis, **University of Oregon**, 1995); Krista Lysack, 'Come Buy, Come Buy: Shopping and the Culture of Consumption in Victorian and Modern Literature by Women' (unpublished PhD thesis, Queen's University at Kingston, 2001); *Katharine A. Pionke*, 'Michael Field: Got God?' (unpublished master's thesis, **Truman State University**, 2003); Elizabeth Primamore, 'The invention of "Michael Field": A Dandy-Androgyne, Modernism and the Aesthetic World of Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper' (unpublished PhD thesis, City University of New York, 2005); Psomiades, Kathy Alexis, "'Subtly of Herself Contemplative": Women, Poets, and British Aestheticism' (unpublished PhD thesis, Yale University, 1990).

[9] 'Oppression works not merely through acts of overt prohibition, but covertly, through the constitution of viable subjects and through the corollary constitution of a domain of unviable (un)subjects – abjects, we might call them – who are neither named nor prohibited within the economy of the law [ . . . ] Lesbianism is not explicitly prohibited in part because it has not even made its way into the thinkable, the imaginable, that grid of cultural intelligibility that regulates the real and the nameable' (Judith Butler, 'Decking Out: Performing Identities', in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. by Diana Fuss (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 13-29 (p. 20)).

[10] Faderman, pp. 16-20.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 211.

[12] Chris White, "'Poets and Lovers Evermore": The Poetry and Journals of Michael Field', in *Sexual Sameness: Textual Differences in Lesbian and Gay Writing*, ed. by Joseph Bristow (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 197-212.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 36.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 40.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 41.

[17] Angela Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester 1992).

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 204.

[20] 'Strikingly free of the morbid penalties and self-denying mischances of much Victorian women's love poetry, they write in a voice which is forthright, requited and relaxed [ . . . ]. The Victorian imagination was, perhaps, singularly free *not* to imagine, at least, until Freud named them or the law incriminated them, areas of experience not 'conventionally' immoralised' (*Ibid.*, pp. 225, 230).

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 226.

[22] The back cover describes the book as part of 'a series that explain the ways in which homosexuality has informed the life and creative work of the influential gay and lesbian artists, writers, singers, dancers, composers and actors of our time'.

[23] 'It is clear from their diaries that Katherine [sic] and Edith were lovers in a highly sexual sense for several decades' (Donoghue, p. 7). The entanglement with Berenson is introduced from the start, and its development documented throughout the book.

[24] *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

[25] *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

- [26] Ivor C. Treby, *The Michael Field Catalogue: A Book of Lists* (London: De Blackland Press, 1998).
- [27] Ivor C. Treby, *A Shorter Sh?raz?d: 101 Poems of Michael Field* (London: De Blackland Press, 1999), Ivor C. Treby, *Music and Silence: The Gamut of Michael Field* (London: De Blackland Press 2000), Ivor C. Treby, *Uncertain Rain: Sundry Spells of Michael Field* (London: De Blackland Press, 2002), Ivor C. Treby, *Binary Star: Leaves from the Journal and Letters of Michael Field, 1846-1914* (London: De Blackland Press, 2006).
- [28] Treby, *The Michael Field Catalogue*, p. 11. He also talks about the 'sweaty-sheet fantasies of certain modern tribades' (p. 65).
- [29] See Cooper's 'I love you with my life', interpreted by both Vanita and Leighton as a poem of woman-to-woman passion and identified by Treby, albeit 'with incredulity', as directed at 'the dreadful "Bernie" [Berenson]'. (Treby, *A Shorter Sh?raz?d*, p. 56). Leighton had listed this, along with 'Embalmmment', a poem directed at Ricketts, as one of the poems that Bradley and Cooper wrote 'throughout their lives [. . .] about and to each other, celebrating their love as a sensual and sexual end in itself' (Leighton, *Writing Against the Heart*, pp. 225, 234). Apart from 'Embalmmment', Treby designates three of the poems he reproduces in *A Shorter Sh?raz?d*, eight of the poems in *Uncertain Rain* and four of the poems in *Music and Silence* as love poems from Bradley to Ricketts (Treby, *A Shorter Sh?raz?d*, pp. 76, 92, 95; Treby, *Uncertain Rain*, pp. 156, 167, 171, 173, 179, 180, 182, 199; Treby, *Music and Silence*, pp. 139, 142, 154, 156).
- [30] Treby, *Uncertain Rain*, pp. 26-28.
- [31] *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.
- [32] *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- [33] *Ibid.*, p. 27.
- [34] Yopie Prins, *Victorian Sappho* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 212.
- [35] Holly Laird, *Women Coauthors* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p. 88. Previously published as Holly Laird, 'Contradictory Legacies: Michael Field and Feminist Restoration', *Victorian Poetry*, 33, no. 1 (1995), 111-128.
- [36] Ruth Vanita, *Sappho and the Virgin Mary: Same-Sex Love and the English Literary Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).
- [37] Frederick S. Roden, *Same-Sex Desire in Victorian Religious Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).
- [38] Robert P. Fletcher, '"I Leave a Page Half-Writ": Narrative Discoherence in Michael Field's *Underneath the Bough*', in *Women's Poetry, Late Romantic to Late Victorian: Gender and Genre 1830-1900*, ed. by Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain (London: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 164-182 (p. 166).
- [39] Martha Vicinus, '"Sister Souls": Bernard Berenson and Michael Field (Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper)', *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 60, no. 3 (2005), 326-354.
- [40] Terry Castle, 'Always the Bridesmaid, Never the Bride', *London Review of Books* 21, no. 19 (1999), 18-21.
- [41] *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- [42] They are described as a 'wealthy lesbian couple' in *The Victorians*, ed. by Cunningham, p. 889. Shires also casually refers to 'the lesbian Michael Field' (Linda Shires, 'Victorian Women's Poetry', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 27, no. 2 (1999), 601-609, (p. 607)). The Blain reference is in *Victorian Women Poets: A New Annotated Anthology*, ed. by Virginia Blain, (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2001), p. 8.
- [43] 'Had the romantic friends of other eras lived today, many of them would have been lesbian-feminists' (Faderman, p. 20).
- [44] *Ibid.*, p. 213.
- [45] White, p. 28.
- [46] *Ibid.*, p. 33.

- [47] Virginia Blain, "'Michael Field, the Two-Headed Nightingale": Lesbian Text as Palimpsest', *Women's History Review*, 5, no. 2 (1996), 239-257, (pp. 252, 243, 241).
- [48] Bette London, *Writing Double: Women's Literary Partnerships* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).
- [49] *Ibid.*, pp. 68, 86.
- [50] White, p. 31, Krista Lysack, 'Aesthetic Consumption and the Cultural Production of Michael Field's *Sight and Song*', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 45, no. 4 (2005), 935-960, (p. 945). See also Ehnenn's conclusion that Bradley and Cooper set out to 'find alternatives to a patriarchal system of representation' (Jill Ehnenn, 'Looking Strategically: Feminist and Queer Aesthetics in Michael Field's *Sight and Song*', *Victorian Poetry* 42, no. 3 (2004), 109-154, (p. 222)).
- [51] Vanita, p. 61. See also Roden: 'Bradley desexualises the heteronormativity of the patriarchal God by feminising Christ and attributing desire to Mary, revising traditional bridal mysticism' (Roden, p. 210).
- [52] Erik Gray, 'A Bounded Field: Situating Victorian Poetry in the Literary Landscape', *Victorian Poetry*, 41, no. 4 (2003), 465-472.
- [53] *Ibid.*, p. 467.
- [54] Virginia Blain, 'Period Pains: the Changing Body of Victorian Poetry', *Victorian Poetry* 42, no. 1 (2004), 71-79, (p. 75).
- [55] Marion Thain and Ana Parejo Vadillo, 'Introduction, Fin-de-Siècle Renaissance: Diversity, History, Modernity', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 34, no. 2 (2006), 389-403, (p. 392).
- [56] *Ibid.*
- [57] *Women and British Aestheticism*, ed. by Kathy Alexis Psomiades and Talia Schaffer, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999).
- [58] *Ibid.*, p. 11.
- [59] Julia F. Saville, 'The Poetic Imaging of Michael Field', in *The Fin-de-Siècle Poem: English Literary Culture and the 1890s*, ed. by Joseph Bristow (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), pp. 178-206. Francis O'Gorman, 'Michael Field and Sapphic Fame: "My Dark-Leaved Laurels Will Endure"', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 34, no. 2 (2006), 649-661. For criticisms of Swinburne's representations of female homoeroticism, see Faderman, p. 276, Chris White, 'The Tiresian Poet: Michael Field', in *Victorian Women Poets: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Angela Leighton (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 148-161, Castle, p. 21, Leighton, *Writing Against the Heart*, pp. 229-230, White, "'Poets and Lovers Evermore"'.  
 [60] Marion Thain, *Michael Field and Poetic Identity, with a Biography* (London: The Eighteen Nineties Society, 2000), pp. 31, 45.
- [61] Marion Thain, *'Michael Field': Poetry, Aestheticism and the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 11. See also Marion Thain, "'Damnable Aestheticism" and the Turn to Rome: John Gray, Michael Field and a Poetics of Conversion', in *The Fin-de-Siècle Poem: English Literary Culture and the 1890s*, ed. by Joseph Bristow (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), pp. 311-336 (p. 312).
- [62] Ana Parejo Vadillo, '*Sight and Song*: Transparent Translations and a Manifesto for the Observer', *Victorian Poetry* 38, no. 1 (2000), 15-32, (p. 25).
- [63] Lysack, p. 936.
- [64] Ehnenn, p. 214. Vickie L. Taft, '*The Tragic Mary*: A Case Study in Michael Field's Understanding of Sexual Politics', *Nineteenth Century Contexts*, 23, no. 2 (2001), 269-295, (p. 266).
- [65] Laird, *Women Coauthors*, p. 22.
- [66] Rachel Morley, 'Constructing the Self, Composing the Other: Auto/Fixation and the Case of Michael Field', *Colloquy: Text Theory Critique* (2004), 8, available <http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/publications/colloquy/archives/issue008/morley.html>, (unpaginated) [Accessed 15/04/07].
- [67] Michelle Lee, 'The Journey to Performing Michael Field: The Infatuation and Revelation of Auto/biography', *thirdspace* (2005), 4, available from [http://www.thirdspace.ca/vol4/4\\_2\\_Lee.htm](http://www.thirdspace.ca/vol4/4_2_Lee.htm), (unpaginated) [Accessed, 12/06/07].

[68] Treby, *The Michael Field Catalogue*, p. 11.

[69] ‘How Michael Field, in celestial constellation, must hanker for a MALE academic [. . .] to afford in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, as Michael once told Browning! – “real criticism – such as man gives man”’ (Treby, *Uncertain Rain*, p. 34). ‘None of it [lesbian imagery] has anything to do with the splendid tropes and metres of Michael Field’ (Ibid., p. 30).

[70] ‘Feminist scholars have occasionally bought into the Michael Field’s own myth that their union as lovers was perfect’ (Donoghue, p. 9).

[71] Donoghue notes, for example, Bradley’s rejection of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a time of ‘lice and scorpions’ in a diatribe against ‘trade unions, godless science, the extension of the vote and the education of the poor’ (Ibid., p. 110). She describes them as ‘Fussy Tory spinsters’ as well as ‘free-thinking suffragist aesthetes’. Thain also draws attention to some of the anti-radical elements in the journals (Thain, *Michael Field*, pp. 12-14). Blain further maintains that Bradley and Cooper ‘never adopted a proselytising position for same-sex relationships’ (*Victorian Women Poets*, ed. by Blain, p. 210).

[72] Saville, p. 198.

[73] London, pp. 83-90.

[74] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol.1: An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 43.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid., p. 18.

[77] A useful overview of criticisms and developments of Foucault’s arguments can be found in Joseph Bristow, *Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 189-218.

[78] Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

[79] Ibid., p. xv. The idea of ‘spiritual procreancy’ is outlined in Plato’s *Symposium*. The translation used by Dowling is Plato, ‘Symposium’, trans. by Michael Joyce, in *The Collected Dialogues including the Letters*, ed. by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 526-574 (p. 560). ‘Those whose procreancy is of the body turn to woman as the object of their love, and raise a family [. . .]. But those whose procreancy is of the spirit rather than of the flesh [. . .] conceive and bear the things of the spirit.’

[80] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

[81] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

[82] See Vadillo, (p. 15). The sonnet is also reproduced in Treby, *Uncertain Rain*, p. 122. The following are some of the many references to Pater in *Works and Days*, Bradley and Cooper’s journal: ‘Logan and I had some good conversation on Pater, on the joy of words’ (Cooper, British Library, *Works and Days Vol. VII*, 1894, Add.MS.46782, f. 104b). ‘Finally I take up Pater and read “Every moment some form grows perfect in hand or face [. . .] for that moment only.” The Renaissance. Conclusion’ (Bradley, *Works and Days VII*, f. 130a). ‘Sat talking Pater and Impressions’ Cooper, (British Library, *Works and Days Vol. VIII*, 1895a Add.MS.46783, f. 13a). ‘Pater speaks of “that higher sort of poetry wh: seems full of the lively impression of delightful things recently seen”’ (Cooper, British Library, *Works and Days Vol. X*, 1896, Add.MS.46785, f. 94b).

[83] This is most obvious, as several critics note, in their interpretation of La Gioconda, but also evident, as Vadillo argues, in their poems based on Watteau paintings (Vadillo, p. 25).

[84] Michael Field, pp. 118-120, 202. Also Donoghue, p. 55.

[85] Vadillo, pp. 24-25.

[86] Billie Andrew Inman, ‘Estrangement and Connection: Walter Pater, Benjamin Jowett, and



William M. Hardinge', in *Pater in the 1990s*, ed. by Laurel Brake and Ian Small (Greensborough: University of North Carolina, 2007). That others might have recognized him 'as homosexual' is suggested by his appearances in contemporary satiric writing, as 'Mr Rose' in William Hurrell Mallock's *New Republic*, and Arthur Wilmot in Compton Mackenzie's *Sinister Street*.

[87] Walter Pater, 'Diapheneitè', in *Miscellaneous Studies: A Series of Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1910), pp. 247-254; Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan, 1873). Walter Pater, 'The Child in the House', in *Miscellaneous Studies: A Series of Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1910), pp. 172-196; Walter Pater, *Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1910).

[88] 'Certainly, for us of the modern world [. . .] the problem of unity with ourselves, in blitheness and repose, is far harder than it was for the Greek within the simple terms of antique life. Yet, not less than ever, the intellect demands completeness, centrality' (Walter Pater, 'Winckelmann', in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan, 1873), pp. 146-206 (p.201-202). See also Lee McKay Johnson, *The Metaphor of Painting: Essays on Baudelaire, Ruskin, Proust and Pater* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1980), pp. 198-199. Several versions of the obituary poem appear in Bradley's handwriting in *Works and Days VII*, ff. 100a, 100b, 102b. One of these is reprinted in Treby, *Uncertain Rain*, p. 122.

Standing, a child, by a red hawthorn-tree,  
Its perishing, small petals' flame had power  
To fill with masses of soft, ruddy flower  
A certain roadside in thy memory.

A version is also reprinted in Vadillo, (p. 15).

[89] 'To see Pater's "Diapheneitè" in the paiderastic tradition of ancient Greece is to recognize that the very occasion of his essay – read aloud to a listener who is its subject within a symposiumlike scene of all-male sociability, refreshment and philosophic discourse – allows Pater not simply to invoke the forgotten culture of the *Symposium* but to enact it as well' (Dowling, p. 83).

[90] Wilde, for example, describes it as the book which has had 'such a strange influence over my life' (Oscar Wilde, 'De Profundis', in *De Profundis and Other Writings* (London: Penguin 1986), pp. 89-211 (p. 158)).

[91] 'This key to the understanding of the Greek spirit, Winckelmann possessed in his own nature [. . .] To the criticism of that consummate Greek modelling he brought not only his culture but his temperament [. . .]. This temperament he nurtured and invigorated by friendships which kept him always in direct contact with the spirit of youth' (Pater, 'Winckelmann', p. 193-194).

[92] June 1906. Ricketts had designed the set. 'It is somewhat too clever; but consistent and engrossing'. (Bradley, qtd. in Michael Field, p. 250).

[93] During Wilde's trial they were in Italy, and met Vernon Lee: 'At night much talk about Oscar' (Cooper, *Works and Days VIII*, f. 56b). Cooper records her response to the verdict at the end of the year: 'the trial and condemnation of Oscar has been the horror [of the year] – a spectre thing through all the seasons' (Cooper, British Library, *Works and Days Vol. IX*, 1895b, Add.MS.46784, f. 55a).

[94] 'The story of Wilde's trials played no small part in crystallizing the concept of "male homosexuality" in the Victorian sexual imagination [. . .] long after his death – and even today – Wilde continues to function as a powerful figure in narratives of sexuality' (Ed Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side: Toward a Genealogy of a Discourse on Male Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 99). This suggestion of Wilde's importance as a figure of modern homosexual identity is underlined by his inclusion in the third edition of *Sexual Inversion* amongst the list of 'Men of Exceptional Intellect and Moral Leaders', a list that includes Michelangelo, Winckelmann and

Marlowe, with Shakespeare and Tennyson mentioned as figures who have experienced 'single episodes' of 'ardent friendship' for young men, rather than being examples of 'true inverts' (Henry Havelock Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*, Studies in the Psychology of Sex, 3rd edn. (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis, 1920), vol. 2, pp. 48-49).

[95] Oscar Wilde, 'The Portrait of Mr W.H.' in *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Richard Ellmann (London: W.H. Allen, 1970), pp. 152-220 (p. 184).

[96] *Ibid.*, pp. 209, 210.

[97] *Ibid.*, p. 210.

[98] *Ibid.*, p. 216.

[99] *The Trials of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by H. Montgomery Hyde, (London: William Hodge, 1948), p. 236.

[100] The correspondence was begun in response to the early *Bellerophôn*. Through a third party, Symonds initially expressed his 'admiration' of Bradley and Cooper's 'language and imagery', but some concern about 'excess and want of taste', feeling that they 'dwell too much on the erotic elements of Gk. mythology, & treat them in a sentimental emotional spirit wh. is really alien to the sensuous simplicity of the Greeks. It is as though a new Keats had gone a-riot in the floweriest places of a classical dictionary' (*The Letters of John Addington Symonds 1869-1884*, ed. by Herbert M. Schueller and Robert L. Peters, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1968), II, pp. 675-676). A later letter recommended them to read 'Plato's Symposium & Phaedrus & Lysis & Charmides [. . .] and if I may venture to mention my "Studies of Greek Poets"' (*Ibid.*, p. 683.) Their relationship seems to have interested Symonds as much as the writing. 'You are in poetry & probably in soul a double star – to eyes of common mortals indivisible' (Letter from Symonds to Bradley, 1882, *ibid.*, p. 783).

[101] He became more positive about the Michael Field writing after the publication of *Callirrhoë* in 1884. 'Indeed I am full of the deepest interest in your art; & you seem to me one of the wonders of the age' (Letter from Symonds to Bradley, 1884, quoted in John Y. LeBourgeois, 'J. A. Symonds to Katherine Bradley: An Unpublished Letter', *Notes and Queries* (1971), available from <http://nq.oxfordjournals.org/content/vol18/issue3/index.dtl>, (p. 437) [Accessed 10/03/08]. Although Symonds helped Bradley and Cooper in the preparation of *Long Ago*, he seems to have retained a sense that the earlier *Callirrhoë* was the best of their writing – 'Miss Cooper's study of the Faun [a short song from *Callirrhoë*] is quite admirable. That seems to me the highest point to which Michael Field has reached'. Letter to Arthur Symons, 1889 (*The Letters of John Addington Symonds 1885-1893*, ed. by Herbert M Schueller and Robert L. Peters, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), III, p. 18).

[102] Symonds published his first edition of translations and commentary on Ancient Greek poetry in 1873. John Addington Symonds, *Studies of the Greek Poets* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1873). The book was well-regarded, and there were two further editions.

[103] John Addington Symonds, *A Problem in Greek Ethics: Studies in Sexual Inversion* (Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, 2002), John Addington Symonds, 'A Problem in Modern Ethics', in *The John Addington Symonds Pages*, ed. by Rictor Norton, available: <http://www.infopt.demon.co.uk/modern.htm>, (unpaginated) [Accessed 1/04/07]. Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*. Only the first, German edition published in 1896 acknowledged **Symonds as co-author**.

[104] Phyllis Grosskurth, *John Addington Symonds: A Biography* (London: Longmans, 1964).

[105] *Ibid.*, pp. 56, 66, 64.

[106] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

[107] *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

[108] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

[109] *Ibid.*, p. 261.

[110] *Ibid.*, p. 239.

[111] References to the published version are cited as Michael Field, *Works and Days*. References to the unpublished manuscripts held by the British Library are cited as Bradley (or Cooper), *Works and Days I* etc. I use Treby's numbering-system for the volumes, and also follow his page-numbering strategy of using the pencilled page numbers on the right hand pages of the manuscript, assigning an *a* to the facing (left hand) page, and a *b* to the numbered page (Treby, *The Michael Field Catalogue*, pp. 129-131).

[112] In the footnotes, I identify the handwriting in any section quoted.

[113] For example, on the visit to Dresden in 1891, several notes on paintings in Cooper's handwriting begin with attributions to Bradley: 'Sim [Bradley] writes of him [the da Messina Sebastian] – He stands forth in the midst [. . .]'. 'Of the Venus [the Giorgione] she writes – She lies pure, bare, in deep unconsciousness [. . .]' (Cooper, British Library, *Works and Days Vol. IV*, 1891, Add.MS.46779, ff. 69a, 69b). Elsewhere, Bradley can be seen copying passages written by Cooper: 'P. [Cooper] on Fiorenzo di Lorenzo – Sebastian expresses the ideal of suffering that those attain who are finely sensitive to suffering [. . .]' (Bradley, *Works and Days IV*, f. 120b).

[114] Bradley, British Library, *Works and Days Vol. II*, 1888-1889, Add.MS.46777, f. 70b. (Volume 1 of *Works and Days*, in Treby's numbering system, is a diary kept separately by Bradley as a young woman.

[115] Bradley, *ibid*.

[116] There is a slippage here of pronouns, in which the generalising 'one' of the opening paragraph – 'the care of one's memory' – moves to what could be a similarly generalising 'we' – 'we should even be careful' – before becoming the specific 'we' of the Michael Field poets – 'when poets have claimed us as their race' – a reference to their friendship with Robert Browning.

[117] 'More specifically, these passages from Newman's work recall the running theme in Arnold's writings little noticed by most critics, his concern for the special role in history of a small elite fraternity who possess a privileged insight into truth' (David Joseph DeLaura, *Hebrew and Hellene in Victorian England: Newman, Arnold, and Pater* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), p. 30). 'If there is a "moment" when the Keatsian artist announces an ultimate severance from the hope of affecting nineteenth-century life, it may be in Pater's first essays of the late sixties, as Matthew Arnold's great "critical effort" is systematically reshaped into the catchwords of the new aestheticism' (*Ibid*, p. 230).

[118] Newman was already an influence on the Michael Field writers years before they converted to Roman Catholicism: 'Here is the supreme Pietà of literature – more universal than any picture, because in association with no individual types – but simply human emotion at its highest power, with its most holy significance and tragedy' (Commentary on Newman's *Meditations and Devotions*, Cooper, *Works and Days X*, f. 77b). Arnold was one of their early favourites: 'Matthew Arnold died [. . .]. On Tuesday afternoon I went alone to Lake Cottage and read some of his poems in the garden, and felt the blessedness of his having entered into the impersonal life' (Bradley, *Works and Days II* f. 1b). Bradley composed an elegy for him – 'The Rest of the Immortals', published in 'The Contemporary Review'. (Treby, *The Michael Field Catalogue*, p. 158).

[119] 'In Love's domain, I walk with Keats and Sappho' (Cooper, British Library, *Works and Days Vol. V*, 1892, Add.MS.46780, f. 163b). 'I am reading Gustave Flaubert's *Correspondance*. He is so like me, he excites by similarity – as two flints make a spark' (Cooper, *Works and Days V*, f. 6b). 'I clasp Coleridge as my poet. I have his need of religion, his sense of Providence – I can tread the magic land that is his' (Bradley, *Works and Days IX*, f. 45a). 'Herbert is eager in our praise . . . "What do they write?" "They write Shakespeare." . . . We must all laugh – nevertheless it was Robert Browning and not a clerk who apprehended and maintained we "wrote Shakespeare"' (Cooper, British Library, *Works and Days Vol. XXI*, 1907a, Add.MS.46796, f. 193ab).

[120] Michael Field, *Works and Days* pp. 2-3.

[121] 'He wrote for us – "I have heard a team / Of swans so deathward chanting breast the

stream” (Ibid., p. 35). This involvement is discussed in detail in Francis O’Gorman, ‘Browning’s Manuscript Revisions to Michael Field’s *Long Ago* (1889)’, *Browning Society Notes* 25 (1998), 38-44.

[122] Extract from letter written 1888, Michael Field, *Works and Days*, p. 21.

[123] Ibid., p. 27. On receiving the first copies of *Long Ago*, Bradley and Cooper immediately sent Browning ‘no. 2’, addressing him as ‘the reverend elder’, and inscribing inside the front cover ‘(((( (‘((( (((((( (((((( (((((( (((((( [a man forever eminent in wise understanding from god] (Bradley, *Works and Days II* f. 68b; translation, Prins, p. 76).

[124] Cooper, *Works and Days II* f. 122b.

[125] See Richard Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), pp. 253-261.

[126] Johnson argues that for the late-nineteenth-century aesthetes, ‘the aristocracy represented an enclave, separate from the mass of society, and gave the artist a sense of distinction from the *bourgeois* or the “normal man” [. . .]. Even the cult of sensation is built upon a sense of refinement which has social as well as spiritual connotations’ (Johnson, p. 210). Hönnighausen also suggests that ‘neither the English nor the French poets of the period tire of emphasising their élite position’, quoting from Michael Field’s ‘A Poet’, in which the poet, ‘set apart . . . / waits the leisure of his god’s free heart’ (Lothar Hönnighausen, *The Symbolist Tradition in English Literature: A Study of Pre-Raphaelitism and the Fin de Siècle*, trans. by Gisela Hönnighausen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 84).

[127] The exchange with Browning about the preface to *Long Ago* is reproduced in Michael Field, *Works and Days*, p. 20. Other comments indicating Bradley and Cooper’s anxiety include: ‘Perhaps he will die and never think of us [. . .] I hope he will think of us’ (Cooper, *Works and Days II* f. 121a, Michael Field, *Works and Days*, p. 34). ‘The new poems are dedicated to Mrs Arthur Bronson – the rest is silence once again. Ah, I remember, she is his old friend at Asolo’ (Cooper, *Works and Days II* f. 121b, Michael Field, p. 35). [The quote is from *Hamlet*, Act V.] ‘I hope he thought of us – but such a hope is only a vital kind of despair’ (Cooper, *Works and Days II* f. 122b, Michael Field, p. 36). Further references in later years suggest that the sense of doubt persisted: ‘I wish I could rest in full & perfect assurance of his affection – Why should all love without the blood-tie torture me? And I gave him my soul so directly – it was received by his eyes’ (Cooper, British Library *Works and Days Vol. III*, 1890, Add. MS. 46778, f. 36b).

[128] ‘An exquisite letter from Walter Pater’ (Cooper, *Works and Days II* f. 82a). ‘We went to call on Walter Pater. He was out. We were staidly received by Hester’ (Cooper, *Works and Days II* f. 119a). ‘Afterward to the Paters. Walter was not at home, wh: was unfortunate [. . .] Sim says well that Hester and Clara [Pater’s sisters] are like Walter in a third or fourth state – borrowing her simile from Rembrandt & his fellow-etchers’ (Cooper *Works and Days III*, f. 24b). ‘Sim sought the Paters – in vain; Walter at Oxford, Clara in bed – Hester out, but met’ (Cooper *Works and Days III*, f. 116a). ‘We end our day at the Paters’ – they have changed their receiving day and have not let us know in offence at our non-appearance during the summer and autumn. They were chill for this reason – a blessed, encouraging chilliness; then delightful: all our talk was of pictures. Walter is hard at work on Gaston – he will be seen on Saturdays if we will come then’ (Cooper *Works and Days IV*, f. 146b). ‘As usual it is the house of Pater with the part of Pater left out – he is not there’ (Cooper, *Works and Days V*, f. 53a). ‘A letter from George Meredith on *Long Ago*, wh. has given us intense pleasure’ (Bradley, *Works and Days II* f. 78a). ‘We are boycotted in the papers, by the men (Pater, Meredith, Hutton) to whom we have sent our book, and by even[?] literary society’ (Cooper, British Library, *Works and Days Vol. VI*, 1893, Add. MS. 46781, f. 7b). For an account of the disastrous last meeting with Meredith, see Cooper, *Works and Days X*, ff. 182a-187a. This material is excerpted in Michael Field, *Works and Days*, pp. 101-108. The story is repeated in Sassoon’s biography of Meredith, with all Sassoon’s sympathy reserved for ‘the unfortunate man’ (Siegfried Sassoon, *Meredith* (London: Constable, 1948), pp. 222-223).

[129] Bradley, *Works and Days V*, f. 163a.

[130] Cooper, *ibid.*, f. 163b.

[131] Cooper, qtd. Donoghue, p. 103. The similarity between the two couples is repeatedly emphasised by both women. In 1894, Bradley described them in a letter as ‘2 men living together

exactly as Henry [Cooper] and I live. Ricketts adores Shannon as I adore Henry' (Letter to Frances and John Brooks, qtd. Thain, *Michael Field*, p. 50). These terms are repeated almost verbatim by Cooper in an entry in *Works and Days*: 'These 2 men live and work together and find rest and joy in each other's love just as we do – two men whose life is complete harmony & two women. No wonder the male and female dual number is sympathetic' (Cooper, *Works and Days VII*, f. 48a). In 1901, after filling out the Census form, Cooper is still making the same comparison – 'And now, like Shannon, I write myself as head of a house, & like him entertain as guest or lodger the choicest of my sex – the Beloved One, Single and F. – even as I am' (Cooper, British Library, *Works and Days Vol. XV*, 1901, Add.MS.46790, f. 47a).

[132] Donoghue, pp. 83-85.

[133] In 1892, Cooper complains about her mother: 'She understood an artist's inspiration – she could not understand an artist's temperament' (Cooper, *Works and Days V*, f. 13b).

[134] Bradley, *Works and Days XI*, f. 154a.

[135] Bradley, in a letter to her sister copied into *Works and Days* by Cooper, *Works and Days II* ff. 101a-101b. The 'still small voice' is from the King James' Bible, I Kings, 19. 12.

[136] Cooper, *Works and Days VI*, f. 27b. Bradley and Cooper had set out for Littlehampton, because it had been praised by Pater, but immediately pronounced it 'vulgarised' – 'this feeble commercialism is intolerable to poets – we fly, with sordidness in our eyes, or our spirits' (Cooper, *Works and Days VI*, f. 26a). They spent the remainder of their holiday on Pevensy Marshes in East Sussex. Later in the year, under Bernhard Berenson's influence, the much-loved Millets and Turners were removed from Bradley and Cooper's living room under a command to 'Be contemporaneous!' that paradoxically involved the replacement of nineteenth-century art with Italian Renaissance reproductions (Bradley, *Works and Days VI*, f. 48b).

[137] Cooper, *Works and Days XI*, f. 30b. This particular landscape had been recommended by Shannon, who also provided the association with Whistler, telling the poets that Lyme Regis 'must be all right, Whistler has been there' (Bradley, *Works and Days XI*, f. 29a).

[138] Cooper's remarks are reminiscent of Oscar Wilde's mischievous assertion in *The Decay of Lying* that nature in the late nineteenth-century has decided to imitate art – 'Where, if not from the Impressionists, do we get those wonderful brown fogs that come creeping down our streets, blurring the gas-lamps and changing the houses into monstrous shadows? To whom, if not to them and their master, do we owe the lovely silver mists that brood over our river, and turn to faint forms of fading grace curved bridge and swaying barge?' (Oscar Wilde, 'The Decay of Lying: An Observation', in *The Artist as Critic*, ed. by Richard Ellmann (London: W. H. Allen, 1970) pp. 290-320 (p. 312)).

[139] The relationship between Berenson's tuition and the spontaneous reaction to art will be examined in more detail in Chapter 3. Berenson himself, as Vicinus notes, considers Cooper to have an especially valuable responsiveness to art. 'There is something so profound, & earnest in the effort you make to seek out the soul of a picture that it really makes me feel as if my own powers of appreciation had received a new set of feelers' (Letter from Berenson to Cooper, 1893, qtd. Vicinus, (p. 342)). See also Cooper's account of a letter from Berenson in 1893. 'He says that for him I act on pictures like a mirror – bringing out qualities and warmth emotionally' (Cooper, *Works and Days VI*, f. 67b).

[140] Cooper, *Works and Days IV*, f. 69b.

[141] Cooper, *Works and Days V*, f. 97a.

[142] Cooper, *Works and Days IV*, f. 63b.

[143] Cooper, *Works and Days V*, f. 63b.

[144] This sense of temperament is also a crucial element in Pater's *Studies in the History of the*

*Renaissance*. As Bullen states, 'For him, the Renaissance itself begins and ends in human personality [. . .]. The external life counts for very little, while psychological disposition and temperamental colouring is all' (J. B Bullen, *The Myth of the Renaissance in Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 274).

[145] Cooper, *Works and Days IV*, ff. 46b-47a. The quote is from Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, Act III Sc ii

[146] 'Received proofs of The Man of Genius from kind Ellis' (Cooper, *ibid.*, f. 101b). Lombroso focuses on Baudelaire as an example of the artist as amoral and outside society's norms, an idea that influenced Max Nordau's later study of degeneracy. Cooper refers to the loan of Lombroso's book in a later letter to Ellis, making clear her approval of Lombroso's theory, and its association with her own illness: 'You were very good to me in the Krankenhaus at Dresden and taught me all about the thrilling insanity of genius' (Letter copied by Cooper into *Works and Days XI*, f. 17b). In 1896, Cooper read Nordau's *Comedy of Sentiment*, but did not record whether she had read *Degeneration* (Cooper, *Works and Days IX*, f. 78b).

[147] Bradley, *Works and Days IV*, f. 97a.

[148] Cooper, *ibid.*, f. 95a. Also in Michael Field, *Works and Days* p. 54.

[149] Cooper, *Works and Days IV*, ff. 99a, 100a. Also in Michael Field, *Works and Days* pp. 58, 59.

[150] 'My nerves are so acute, so fearfully conscious, that I almost scream when Sim [Bradley] touches me in walking, and I feel the unemitted screams incubating' (Cooper, *Works and Days IV*, f. 68a). 'The torment spends me – mind and nerves – as a prodigal spends his capital' (Cooper, *Works and Days V*, f. 163b). 'At Hotel de l'Europe I drink tea with Love and cry from nerve-strain' (Cooper, *Works and Days X*, f. 109a). 'Dilemma is my form of nerve breakdown' (Cooper, British Library, *Works and Days Vol. XXVI*, 1911, Add.MS.46801, f. 63b).

[151] For an account of this process in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries see Andrew Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius: The Prehistory of a Homosexual Role* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). The association between genius and androgyny/homoeroticism continues in the writings of Lombroso and Nordau, where its association with sickness becomes part of the medicalisation of the homoerotic that is fundamental to the development of the male homosexual 'type'.

[152] Thain, 'Michael Field', pp. 44-51. See also Fletcher's argument that the ambiguity produces a form of 'sexual dissidence' (Fletcher, "I Leave a Page Half-Writ", p. 166). For both of these critics there is a greater presumption of sexually radical intent than I read in these self-positionings.

[153] Qtd. in Prins, p. 93. The comment obliquely refers to Swinburne's suggestion that 'great poets are bisexual; male and female at once' (Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Prose Works*, ed. by Sir Edmund Gosse and Thomas James Wise, The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne (London: Heinemann, 1926), IV, p. 305). This itself echoes Coleridge's remark that 'a great mind must be androgynous' (Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Table Talk', in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: With an Introductory Essay upon his Philosophical and Theological Opinions. Vol. VI*, ed. by W. G. T. Shedd (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1884) (p. 415)). See also Cooper's response to Sarah Bernhardt's portrayal of the male Pelléas: 'This being acts Pelléas till sex is forgotten as an accident – and the ideal lover remains. A wonderful reticence, très mâle, tempers her effulgent feminine power – gives a sense of Mars to her passion' (Cooper, British Library, *Works and Days Vol. XIX*, 1905, Add.MS.46794, f. 77a).

[154] Bradley, letter to Browning, November 1884, qtd. in Treby, *Binary Star*, p. 95.

[155] 'Mrs Moulton introduced us as a poet, as Michael Field [. . .] fashionable women lisped their enchantment [. . .]. I laid a master-hand on the hostess, and told her to introduce us by our

Christian names' (Bradley, *Works and Days III*, f. 94b). 'I am asked why I am in such a bad temper, and criticised as "a mixture of mastery and sweetness"' (Bradley, *Works and Days VII*, f. 14a). 'Michael has been complete master in her sonnets' (Cooper, qtd. Treby, *Binary Star*, p. 44).

[156] The Herod comment is made in Bradley, British Library, *Works and Days Vol. XVIII*, 1904, Add.MS.46793, f. 41b. The Bernhard visit is reported in *Works and Days VII*, f. 75b. The holiday at Rottingdean is described in a letter to Robert Ross, also copied into *Works and Days*. Bradley here suggests that Rottingdean is 'a most dramatic and wonderful place, with all the landscapes laid out in 5 Acts'. She and Cooper had been reading Nietzsche (Bradley, *Works and Days XXI*, f. 6a).

[157] Bradley, British Library, *Works and Days Vol. XIV*, 1900, Add.MS.46789, f. 131a.

[158] For Cooper's self-presentation as Sebastian, see Chapter 3. The self-presentation as Christ (which can also be seen in Wilde, in 'Humanitad' and *De Profundis*) became the almost-inevitable consequence of the transformation in 1907 of the 'earthly Trinity' – Bradley, Cooper and their dog, Whym Chow – into a Catholic Trinity. See especially 'Descent from the Cross' for Cooper's self-presentation in the elevated male role of Christ, and 'She is Singing to Thee Domine', for Bradley's confirmation of Cooper's position on the cross. The Cooper poem is in Michael Field, *Poems of Adoration* (London: Sands and Co., 1912). The Bradley poem is in Michael Field, *Mystic Trees* (London: Everleigh Nash, 1913).

[159] Thain, 'Michael Field', p. 47. 'Vernon Lee' was the pen-name of Violet Paget.

[160] Bradley, *Works and Days VIII*, f. 47a.

[161] Cooper, *ibid.*, ff. 56a-56b.

[162] Castle notes how early representations of female-female sexual relationship tended to produce an image of 'the lesbian-as-monster', a curiosity that seems echoed here in Bradley and Cooper's 'freakish' vocabulary (Terry Castle, *The Literature of Lesbianism: A Historical Anthology from Ariosto to Stonewall* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 19).

[163] Bradley, *Works and Days IV*, f. 162a.

[164] Bradley, *Works and Days XI*, f. 17b.

[165] Cooper *Works and Days V*, f. 13b.

[166] Bradley, qtd. Michael Field, *Works and Days*, p. 127. The quote continues: 'I look forth on the stars and kneel down and give God thanks'.

[167] This was generally 'Michael Field', though in later years they occasionally published dramas anonymously, in order to avoid the increasingly negative reviews they received from the 1890s onwards. For an account of Ricketts' influence on this strategy, which was to a limited extent successful, see Treby, *The Michael Field Catalogue*, p. 40.

[168] This letter, which has been extensively quoted, is reproduced in Sturgeon, p. 47. Treby notes that it seems to have disappeared (Treby, *Binary Star*, p. 50).

[169] 'Their poems they wrote as individuals, though they acted as editors and advisors for each other' (Donoghue, p. 35). 'It is surprising how very often [. . .] it is revealed that one text was in fact composed by one author, and another by the other' (Blain, 'Two-headed Nightingale', p. 244). 'The poets worked alone, together, even in parallel on different occasions; overall generalisation is not possible' (Treby, *Music and Silence*, p. 51).

[170] Bradley, *Works and Days IV*, f. 162a; Bradley, *Works and Days V*, f. 137a.

[171] Sturgeon, p. 47. The reference is to the Church of England service for the Solemnisation of Matrimony – 'Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder'. *The Annotated Book of Common Prayer*, ed. by Rev. Henry John Blunt, (London: Longman's, Green and Co.,

1898), p. 489.

[172] From Bradley's account of a meeting with Browning, written the year before she and Cooper began to record significant events in *Works and Days*. The paper is entitled 'The gospel according to St Matthew', and has a companion piece – 'The gospel according to St. Mark' – written by Cooper, confirming they perceived Browning as a divine figure (Michael Field, *Works and Days*, pp. 11-16).

[173] Dowling, p. xv, Plato, p. 560. That Bradley and Cooper also saw the two as in some way in opposition is suggested by the fact that they decided not to visit Alice Meynell in 1905 on the basis that she 'has 7 children and is not dwelling in the kingdom of Art' (Cooper, *Works and Days XIX*, f. 133a).

[174] Berenson, conscious of the embarrassment that the publication of *Works and Days* could cause him, having failed to destroy the manuscript himself, insisted that all mention of him be excised from the version published by Sturge Moore (Treby, *Binary Star*, p. 205, Vicinus, p. 327).

[175] Cooper, *Works and Days V*, f. 115b.

[176] Cooper, *ibid.*, f. 128a.

[177] Cooper, *ibid.*, f. 113b.

[178] Cooper, *ibid.*, ff. 126b-127a.

[179] This aspect of their relationship and its part in the antagonism towards Costelloe is well-documented by Vicinus (Vicinus, pp. 332-334). Its continuing association with his Jewish origins can be seen in the following report by Bradley of a conversation with Costelloe. 'And at whiles, as Mary's hard, shallow talk goes on – a light breaks over his brow. Jewish to the core – religious to the last fibre – he is for the time destined to pilgrimage with a woman who stimulates his industry and sterilises his imagination' (Bradley, *Works and Days VI*, f. 53a). The 'materialist' Costelloe responded in kind, rejecting Bradley and Cooper's self-presentation as geniuses: 'They think they are a Great Poet – unappreciated at present, but certain to be famous and adored in the next generation – and they think that their souls are united and that it is good for them to be together. As a matter of fact, the utter mistake of both these theories is "obvious to the meanest intelligence"' (Letter from Costelloe to her mother, 1895, qtd. in Vicinus, p. 346).

[180] Cooper, *Works and Days V*, f. 127a.

[181] Bradley's involvement with Berenson is more complex, as Vicinus documents, including genuine intellectual exchange, admiration and anger. Her response to Cooper's passion for him ranges from self-restraint to indulgence and even encouragement.

[182] Cooper, *Works and Days VI*, ff. 104a-104b. This is again a process well-documented by Vicinus (Vicinus, pp. 340-342).

[183] 'I love in a deathly way – the torment spends me – mind and nerves – as a prodigal devours his capital' (Cooper, *Works and Days V*, f. 163b).

[184] Cooper, British Library, *Works and Days Vol. XXVII*, 1912, Add.MS.46802, f. 99a, Treby, *Uncertain Rain*, p. 20.

[185] See Chapter 4 for a more detailed account of the significance of this relationship.

[186] 'I fall into an attitude of sleep like an Antinous on the ground' (Cooper, *Works and Days IV*, f. 95a. Also in Michael Field, *Works and Days*, p. 54). 'I lie half slumbering with deep, blissful breaths, and with the sense that corn-fields, harvest-meadows, the great, enlightened, fruitful Earth, is all around me' (Cooper, *Works and Days IV*, f. 96a, Michael Field, *Works and Days*, p. 55). This can be compared with Bradley's notes on the Giorgione Venus: 'She lies pure, bare, in deep unconsciousness [. . .] she lies on soft undulating earth [. . .] the Earth is her temple [. . .] everything is of harvest – silent ripening, fulfilment' (Bradley [copied into *Works and Days* by Cooper], *Works and Days IV*, f. 69b). 'I am Mars, and looking across at Sim's little bed, I realise that she is a goddess, hidden in her hair – Venus [. . .] (I had been writing on "Venus and Mars" (Nat. Gal.) just before I left home)'. (Cooper, *Works and Days IV*, f. 98a). 'I never knew what a passion of passions disappointment can be. I only got relief when I thought of Antonella da



Messina's St Sebastian in the gallery [. . .] his eyes asking "Why am I denied what I was made for?" (Cooper, *Works and Days IV*, f. 100a). 'I see that wan creature on the bed (an ocean of gold pouring down)' (Cooper, writing about herself, *Works and Days IV*, f. 95b). Other examples of identification with figures from art include: 'Then we go down to the father's house for lunch, carrying the desert [sic] – as the women do in Rubens' (Cooper *Works and Days IV*, f. 43b). 'We might be in one of Dante's circles of Inferno as we lean on that stone rail' (*Works and Days V*, f. 128b). 'The Danaë photograph came while I was still at work, and was the expression of all the sweetness I felt' (Cooper, *Works and Days VI*, f. 6a).

[187] Sturgeon, p. 36.

[188] Logan Pearsall Smith, *Reperusals and Re-Collections* (London: Constable, 1936), p. 91.

[189] Qtd. in Vicinus, p. 352.

[190] Cooper, *Works and Days IV*, f. 89a.

[191] Cooper, *ibid.*, f. 90a.

[192] Cooper, *ibid.* The reference is to Ophelia's speech in *Hamlet*: 'O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown! / [. . .] / Th'observed of all observers, quite, quite down' (III.i.148).

[193] *Ibid.*, f. 90b.

[194] *Ibid.*, f. 95a.

[195] Pearsall Smith, pp. 87-88.

[196] Jenkyns, p. 30. Throughout *Works and Days*, nineteenth-century life is invoked in order to be rejected for its 'vulgarity' and 'materialism'. 'Do not desert Shakespeare and the Elizabethans. [. . .] Our speech must always be utterly different from ordinary speech: because ordinary speech is not transfigured by emotion, and the ordinary speech of an age like ours is base with the exceeding vulgarity of materialism' (Bradley, letter to Cooper, qtd. Treby, *Binary Star*, p. 98).

[197] Prior to travelling they felt a need to cleanse themselves of the visual ugliness of urban Britain: 'It is Sunday. Heaven speeding us we shall perhaps be looking at the great Madonna this time next week. Our eyes are preparing for a great pilgrimage. What washing from advertisements, vile outlines and all the parodies that life presents they need before they can enter into the Muses' joy' (Bradley *Works and Days IV*, f. 62a). 'I long for freedom [. . .] England's a prison' (Cooper, *Works and Days V*, f. 163b).

[198] Cooper, *Works and Days V*, f. 77b.

[199] Cooper, *ibid.*, f. 108b.

[200] Cooper, *Ibid.*, ff. 120b-121a. Vicinus suggests that *Attila, my Attila* is also in part a dramatisation of the relationship between Cooper and Berenson, portrayed as 'insane infatuation' (Vicinus, p. 348).

[201] Cooper, *Works and Days VI*, f. 71a.

[202] 'Gaily Bernie and I stray off together – for I lose shyness as soon as I am in tête à tête – & trip through the paths amid the abundant leaves – a gay dampness over everything. We have the sense of the rich depth of life at our side and beyond sight – Springtide! He tells me of the beech-woods of Russia – where he was born – I tell him of Mr Pater's love of beeches and of how I have discovered that the beech is the tree most sensitive to the ideal influence of the seasons: for it holds the sunlight of May as no other foliage does till it is 'more gold than gold', & again in autumn the smouldering passion of the year burns through its red branches into extinction' (Cooper, *Works and Days IV*, f. 43a).

[203] Cooper, *ibid.*, f. 21a. 'We go to North Street and Bernie's panelled rooms [. . .] his panels are olive-green, on the window seat a fountain of daffodils; on an obscure high shelf by a mysterious head of a woman by Bartolommeo Veneto [with an] orange mount, a pot of crimson flowering-currant reluctantly contending with its dingy coign. Vellum books about; and photographs of the rarer Italian art that incite one to rave and gaze' (Cooper, *Works and Days IV*, f. 39a). 'In order that I might recognise a Lotto, not so called – he invited us into his bedroom. [.

. .] It is small, the panels are olive-yellow [. . .]. Over the iron head of the bed a carmelian rosary hangs – Mona Lisa is above it in citron-oak frame – beside it the head of an old man – Savolde, and the Lotto. The scant furniture and the many pictures combined into a delightful ensemble’ (Cooper, *Works and Days IV*, ff. 57b-58a). Bradley and Cooper first met Berenson in Paris, at a soirée held by Louise Chandler-Moulton (Cooper *Works and Days III*, f. 134b). They met him again at the Louvre two days later, and arranged for him to meet them on the following day – ‘a long morning with the Italian pictures in the Louvre, instructed by Mr Berenson’ (Cooper, *Works and Days III*, ff. 134b, 135a). This was the beginning of what was to be a lifetime of such ‘instruction’, and apart from his lectures and private classes, they frequently met in the London galleries which they felt to be his natural setting – ‘After lunch we drive to the National Gallery. Ah, there. How great, how simple, how happy he is!’ (Bradley, *Works and Days IV*, f. 20a).

[204] Michael Field, *Works and Days*, p. 6

[205] Michael Field, *Works and Days*, p. 8.

[206] Cooper, *Works and Days VI*, f. 22b.

[207] Cooper, *ibid.*, f. 19b.

[208] Cooper, *ibid.*, f. 20a.

[209] Cooper, *ibid.*, ff. 20, 20b.

[210] Cooper, *ibid.*, f. 21a.

[211] Cooper’s much-quoted response to Amy’s engagement shows how highly they valued the independence when it came – ‘These few days my own Love and I have spent together, since there is a happy promise that the dream of our lives may be fulfilled and we may really live the wedded life, have been of the most tender gold. I have never known such flow of happiness clean up from the source – all sullenness, endurance, patience, good-will, have vanished as mere dams, and love-delight has froliced [sic] and throbbled unencumbered and ceaselessly. How I long for this idyll of a few days to become the [constant?] poem of our beings. God grant this beauty may be on us!’ (Cooper, *British Library, Works and Days Vol. XII*, 1898, Add.MS.46787, f. 122b).

[212] For detailed descriptions of the interior, see Sturge Moore’s introduction to Michael Field, *Works and Days*, pp. xvii-xix. and Donoghue, pp. 105-108.

[213] Cooper, *British Library, Works and Days Vol. XXVIII*, 1913, Add.MS.46803, ff. 90a-90b. Also transcribed into Michael Field, *Works and Days*, pp. 323-325.

[214] Bradley, *Works and Days XXVIII*, f. 91b. Also in Michael Field, *Works and Days*, p. 324.

[215] Shelley, ‘Defence of Poetry’, in *The Four Ages of Poetry: Peacock’s Four Ages of Poetry, Shelley’s Defence of Poetry, Browning’s Essay on Shelley*, ed. by H. F.B. Brett-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972), pp. 23-59 (p. 31).

[216] John Keats, ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, ed. by Elizabeth Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 285-288 (pp. 286, 287).

[217] Symonds’ translation, Henry Thornton Wharton, *Sappho: Memoir, Text, Selected Renderings and a Literal Translation* (London: Stott, 1888), p. 65.

[218] Prins, p. 75. Prins is quoting Mill’s distinction between eloquence and poetry. John Stuart Mill, ‘Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties’ *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* ed. by John M. Robson and Jack Stillinger (University of Toronto Press: Toronto and Buffalo, 1981), pp.341-365.

[219] Pater, ‘The Child in the House’, p. 181. The transformations of the actual into the ideal carried out by Florian are also reminiscent of the operations of *Works and Days*: ‘A sacred ideal, a transcendent version or representation, under intenser and more expressive light and shade, of human life and its familiar or exceptional incidents, [. . .] a mirror, towards which men might turn away their eyes from vanity and dullness, and see themselves therein as angels [. . .]. A place adumbrated itself in his thoughts, wherein those sacred personalities, which are at once the reflex and the pattern of our nobler phases of life, housed themselves’ (Pater, ‘The Child in the House’ pp. 194-195).

[220] 'But is it either logical or prudent to diagnose so marked a specimen of the artistic temperament [i.e. himself] as morbid? I leave that question to psychologists, only remarking that it seems to me dangerous to classify poets, men of letters, painters, almost all of whom exhibit some nervous abnormalities, with the subjects of hereditary disease. Here we approach too near to the paradox that genius is a species of madness.' A later note adds 'Since this paragraph was written, we have had Lombroso's *Man of Genius* and Nesbit's [sic] *Insanity of Genius* upholding the hypothesis I attempted to combat'. Symonds does not then definitively refute this new writing (John Addington Symonds, *The Memoirs of John Addington Symonds*, ed. by Phyllis Grosskurth (London: Hutchinson, 1984), p. 65).

[221] Wilde, 'The Portrait of Mr W.H.', p. 152.

[222] 'When I listen to the overture to Tannhäuser [. . .] it speaks to me of a thousand different things, of myself, it may be, and my own life, or of the lives of others whom one has loved [. . .]. To-night it may fill one with that E??? T?N A??NAT?N, that *Amour de l'Impossible*, which falls like a madness on many [. . .] so that they sicken suddenly with the poison of unlimited desire, and, in the infinite pursuit of what they may not obtain, grow faint and swoon or stumble. Tomorrow, like the music of which Aristotle and Plato tell us, [. . .] it may perform the office of a physician, and give us an anodyne against pain, and heal the spirit that is wounded' (Oscar Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist', in *The Artist as Critic*, ed. by Richard Ellmann (London: W. H. Allen, 1970), pp. 340-408 (p. 368)). Wilde also here may have an unspoken debt – to Baudelaire's essay on Tannhäuser.

[223] Bradley, *Works and Days III*, f. 97b, Michael Field, *Works and Days*, p. 137. The passage in Pater to which she refers argues that 'the literary artist is of necessity a scholar, and [. . .] will have in mind, first of all, the scholar and the scholarly conscience – the male conscience in this matter [. . .] under a system of education which still to so large an extent limits real scholarship to men' (Walter Pater, 'Style', in *Appreciations: With an Essay on Style* (London: Macmillan, 1910), pp. 5-38 (p. 12)).

[224] Pater, 'Style', p. 18.

[225] Cooper *Works and Days V*, f. 54b. Michael Field, *Works and Days*, p. 192.

[226] The entry continues: 'And the best of our brains is given to conjecture of what is passing in these male heads' (Bradley, *Works and Days V*, f. 139b, Michael Field, *Works and Days*, p. 202). 'How sad it is to be making an official visit to the Palace [Ricketts and Shannon's house] on their "At Home Day" where there may be wives. I dread these wives' (Bradley, *Works and Days Vol. XVI*, f. 167b). 'Women weary me – I am thankful when they are gone and forget them' (Cooper, British Library, *Works and Days Vol. XXIII*, 1908, Add.MS.46798, f. 29b).

[227] 'Pater and Symonds are quietly determined to do nothing less than follow Mill's notion of a culturally reinvigorating liberty of opinion and experience to its boldest conclusion: a "liberty of the heart", as Pater was to call it in *The Renaissance*, so free as to encompass even male love' (Dowling, p. 84). The idea of *Bildung* presented by Mill was also influential on late nineteenth-century feminism, and feminist-influenced writers such as George Eliot.

[228] This is from the third edition of *The Renaissance*. Walter Pater, 'Winckelmann', in *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1910), pp. 177-232 (p.229). The wording in the first edition is 'pure culture'. Pater, 'Winckelmann', p. 203.

[229] Symonds, *A Problem in Greek Ethics*, pp. 95-96.

[230] Ellis, p. 254. Bradley and Cooper went on holiday with Louie Ellis and her female 'companion' in 1893 – one of the rare occasions that Bradley and Cooper represent themselves together with another female couple. 'From the Strid we walk up to Bardon Tower with Louie Ellis and Mary Walters. Someday we must stay [. . .]. We all walk back along the river, each with its love. O Henry!' (Bradley, *Works and Days VI*, f. 70a).

[231] Foucault, p. 43.

[232] Isobel Armstrong opens her study of Victorian poetry with a useful account of the process by which 'Victorian' became a derogatory term for early twentieth-century literary critics (Isobel

Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 1-8).

[233] Michael Field, *Works and Days*, p. xxi.

[234] 'While a serious discussion of the stylistic aspects of Decadence was going on, however, the public had got hold of the more sensational and moral aspect of the word and the movement. "For oneself the prayer. From decadence, Good Lord deliver us!" wrote "Michael Field" in a diary for 5<sup>th</sup> April, 1891' (Fletcher, *Decadence and the 1890s*, p. 21). Bradley and Cooper would have been horrified to hear themselves not only categorised as representatives of 'the public', but quoted as 'sensational' onlookers incapable of appreciating the 'serious' discussion of style. Thornton also uses the journal entry as a negative comment on the morality of 90s aestheticism, but noticing that it pre-dates Lionel Johnson's influential article ascribing the term *décadence* to the 'French school' of symbolist poetry, suggests that 'it is probable then that the term was becoming popular a little before Johnson's article' (Thornton, p. 42). The original entry occurs at *Works and Days IV*, f. 29b.

[235] Lionel Stevenson, for example, characterises Bradley and Cooper as 'two spinsters' who were 'the devoutest idolators' of Meredith (Lionel Stevenson, *The Ordeal of George Meredith* (London: Peter Owen, 1953), p. 286). Even more damning is Siegfried Sassoon's biography of Meredith, where they appear as 'egotistical poetesses', who petition for his attention in 'a great flutter of excitement'. Drawing on Sturge-Moore's journal extracts and Pearsall Smith's account of them, Sassoon ridicules the distance between Bradley and Cooper's ambition and their lives – 'Imitations of Euripides, and of Elizabethans such as Webster and Tournier could not succeed when evolved by two maiden ladies, who [. . .] knew nothing of the world beyond their small coteries of artistic and literary acquaintances' (Sassoon, p. 218).

[236] 'Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him' (Foucault, p. 43).

[237] Thain, 'Michael Field', pp. 20-28.

[238] Cooper, *Works and Days V*, ff. 13b, 100a.

[239] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp. 174-180.

[240] Cooper, *Works and Days XXVIII*, ff. 90a-b.

[241] Unfortunately, a fair copy of all the poems was made by Cooper and the originals destroyed, so that apart from 'Atthis, my darling' and two other poems in the collection whose authorship is established by references in *Works and Days*, we cannot be wholly confident in asserting that any of these poems are Bradley's alone (Treby, *Music and Silence*, p. 58).

[242] The former is argued by, for example Castle: 'Given that all truths remain approximate truths, might one not argue, still, that Michael Field's lesbian image of Sappho is closer to the view of her held by present-day classicists – indeed is more accurate – than that of the tedious "English Sapphos"?'', while the latter is closer to White's position – 'The identity of the Poet Michael Field allowed Bradley and Cooper to place themselves on a level with Sappho-as-Poet [. . .]. Identity, as poet and subject, is central to Michael Field's production of Sappho, and of themselves as akin to Sappho' (Castle, 'Always the Bridesmaid', p. 21, Chris White, 'The One Woman (in Virgin Haunts of Poesie): Michael Field's Sapphic Symbolism', in *Volcanoes and Pearl Divers: Essays in Lesbian Feminist Studies*, ed. by Suzanne Raitt (London: Onlywomen, 1995), pp. 74-102 (p. 82)).

[243] See, for example, Reynolds: 'That they lived and wrote at a time when an authentic text for Sappho was being re-discovered and at a time when their own authentic 'Greek' sexuality was being slowly named and recognised, meant that they could make, not another reprise of Sappho's last song, but a new kind of Sappho song which was actually a duet' (Margaret Reynolds, *The*

*Sappho History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 136).

[244] The history of this tradition of Sapphic identity is explored in detail in Prins, pp. 3-22, 28-40.

[245] The collection is, as O’Gorman has suggested ‘attracted to lament’ (O’Gorman, ‘Michael Field and Sapphic Fame: “My Dark-Leaved Laurels Will Endure”’, (p. 650)).

[246] This unattributed quote is from a seventeenth-century John Ford play, *The Lover’s Melancholy*. A new edition of this play, edited by Havelock Ellis, had appeared in 1888 and is no doubt the source of the quote (John Ford, ‘The Lover’s Melancholy’, in *Plays: Selections*, ed. by Havelock Ellis (London: Vizetelly, 1888), pp. 4-92). The quote not only operates as a reminder of the kind of seventeenth-century-style drama that ‘Michael Field’ was better known for; it also provides a teasing reference to the gender of the Michael Field poets, as the full sentence from which this phrase is taken – ‘For he is like to something I remember / A great while since, a long, long time ago’ (IV.iii.28) – refers to an apparently male character, Parthenophil, who is really a woman, Eroclea, in disguise.

[247] Prins, pp. 23-73.

[248] Michael Field, *Long Ago* (Portland, Maine: Mosher, 1897), p. v, Appendix 1, p. 275. The first edition of *Long Ago* was published by George Bell in 1889. In the American edition of 1897, which I have used throughout, the preface and lyrics are unchanged. The full text of the preface and all poems cited in this chapter can be found in Appendix 1.

[249] Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. v, Appendix 1, p. 275.

[250] *Ibid.* All Greek quotations have been reproduced without diacritics as the university word-processing software does not support them.

[251] Fragment 15, Wharton, p. 77. All references to Sappho’s fragments and translations are to Wharton’s text, and I use his numbering system (now superseded) throughout, as it was with his presentation of the fragments and surrounding material that Bradley and Cooper interacted to produce *Long Ago*.

[252] Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. v, Appendix 1, p. 275.

[253] Hönnighausen discusses the persistence throughout late-romantic poetry of the desire to ‘transcend temporality’ through the production of ideal worlds, whether these are Pre-Raphaelite visions or ecstatic moments (Hönnighausen, pp. 136-139).

[254] Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. vii, Appendix 1, p. 276.

[255] Fragment 84, Wharton, p. 122.

[256] For a description of this process, see DeLaura, Jenkyns, Frank M Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), Dowling.

[257] See Jenkyns, pp. 41-44, 146-154.

[258] Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. xi, Appendix 1, p. 276. Fragment 73, Wharton, p. 114.

[259] Fragment 4, Wharton, p. 70.

[260] Arguments for homosexual reform were inextricably entangled with this perception, so that by the end of the century, those hoping to establish rights for male homosexuals had become known as ‘the Greek movement’ (Dowling, p. 28).

[261] Pater wrote a short story re-telling the tragic myth of Apollo and Hyacinthus (Walter Pater, ‘Apollo in Picardy’, in *Miscellaneous Studies: A Series of Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1910), pp. 142-171). Dowling argues that the story is a commentary on pedagogic and homoerotic relations at Oxford (Dowling, pp. 138-140). Wilde also refers to the myth in the letter to Alfred Douglas that was to become notorious at his trial. ‘I know Hyacinthus, whom Apollo loved so madly, was you in Greek days’ (*Trials of Oscar Wilde*, p. 112).

[262] Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. xi, Appendix 1, p. 276.

[263] For an account of these poets, who include Felicia Hemans, Caroline Norton and ‘LEL’, see Leighton, *Writing Against the Heart*, pp. 8-71, Prins, pp. 174-245, Reynolds, pp. 109-139.

[264] Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. xii, Appendix 1, p. 276.

[265] *Ibid.*, p. xii, Appendix 1, p. 277

[266] 'In their own translations and elaborations of the Sapphic fragments in *Long Ago*, Michael Field dares, almost for the first time since Sappho herself, to write love poems addressed by an older woman to younger girls [. . .]. Michael Field rescues Sappho from her cliff-edge of despair, and with her the female imagination itself from all its chronically miserable effusions of the heart' (Leighton, *Writing Against the Heart*, p. 211). 'Not for them any dramatic posing on the cliff top. Here instead is a feminised place of springs and woods and hidden places' (Reynolds, p. 128). '*Long Ago* turns out, disappointingly, to focus on Sappho's love for Phaon. Most of the poems are addressed to a male beloved, the masculine pronoun being used for him. There is only one poem clearly addressed to a female beloved ("Atthis, my darling, thou didst stray")' (Vanita, p. 133).

[267] Prins, p. 107.

[268] 'This seems to be a possessive heterosexual desire [. . .]. Masculinity itself is not valued'. 'Heterosexuality as the form of the relationship between men and women is a form of bondage'. 'The Lesbian community of women [. . .] is also a site of poetic production [. . .]. Both are threatened by men and heterosexuality' (White, "Poets and Lovers Evermore", pp. 30, 31, 32). These ideas are repeated with little variation in 'The Tiresian Poet' – 'This is a possessive heterosexual desire, springing from a manipulative battle to win a male lover' 'Heterosexuality kills friendship between women'. 'The Lesbian community of women [. . .] is also a site of poetic production [. . .]. Both are threatened by men and heterosexuality' (White, 'The Tiresian Poet' pp. 151, 152, 153).

[269] Thain, '*Michael Field*', pp. 42-65.

[270] 'The story of Sappho's love for Phaon, and her leap from the Leucadian rock in consequence of his disdain for her, though it has been so long implicitly believed, does not seem to rest on any firm historical basis' (Wharton, p. 14).

[271] Such poems are not necessarily written by women, but, as Isobel Armstrong observes, the poem always assumes the voice of a woman (Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry*, p. 334). The example she gives is Tennyson's Mariana, whose voice is not unlike that of Sappho in Poem XIX. Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. xxxii, Appendix 1, p. 282.

[272] Prins, p. 185.

[273] *An Anthology*, ed. by Leighton and Reynolds, pp. 8-71, Prins, pp. 74-245, Margaret Reynolds, "'I Lived for Art, I Lived for Love": The Woman Poet Sings Sappho's Last Song', in *Victorian Women Poets, a Critical Reader*, ed. by Angela Leighton (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 277-306.

[274] Michael Field, *Long Ago*, pp. cv, ciii, Appendix 1, p. 303, 302.

[275] *Ibid.*, p. cii, Appendix 1, p. 301.

[276] *Ibid.*, p. cvii, Appendix 1, p. 304.

[277] *Ibid.*, p. xxxii, Appendix 1, p. 283.

[278] *Ibid.*, Appendix 1, p. 283.

[279] *Ibid.*, p. xv, Appendix 1, p. 278.

[280] Chris White argues that in Poem 5 'The crushing of virginity by men is made a specific process in the relationship between Sappho and Phaon' (White, 'The One Woman' p. 81). White's evident approval of the 'female complaint' element in this poem suggests how far twentieth-century feminism also inherited this tradition, and helps explain the appeal of nineteenth-century literature to feminist literary critics.

[281] John Donne, 'Sappho to Philaenis', in *The Complete English Poems of John Donne*, ed. by C.A. Patrides (London: Dent, 1985), pp. 189-191. Algernon Charles Swinburne, 'Anactoria', in *Swinburne: Selected Poems*, ed. by L.M. Findlay (Manchester: Fyfield Books, 1982), pp. 50-57. Solomon's painting is reproduced in Appendix 1, p. 275. The late nineteenth-century aesthetes' interest in French symbolism also contributed to the change in perception of Sappho, since the

'Lesbos' poems of Baudelaire – which Bradley and Cooper were directly familiar with by 1901, when Bradley produced a translation of 'Femmes Damnées' – focused directly on Sappho's sexual relationships with other women.

[282] Michael Field, *Long Ago*, pp. liii, xvi, 1, Appendix 1, pp. 289, 278, 287.

[283] *Ibid.*, pp. xliii, lxxxi, Appendix 1, pp. 286, 298.

[284] *Ibid.*, pp. xliii, lxxxi, xxxiv, Appendix 1, pp. 285, 298, 283.

[285] *Ibid.*, p. xxiv. Appendix 1, p. 280.

[286] Wharton, p. 14.

[287] Michael Field, *Long Ago*, pp. xiii, xxxix, lvii, lxxvii, Appendix 1, pp. 277, 289-290, 296.

[288] *Ibid.*, p. 1, Appendix 1, p. 287, Leighton, *Writing Against the Heart*, p. 230.

[289] Plato, 'Phaedrus', trans. by Benjamin Jowett, in *The Dialogues of Plato: Translated into English with Analyses and Introductions by B. Jowett*, ed. by Benjamin Jowett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), pp. 107-189 (p. 136).

[290] Symonds, *The Memoirs*, pp. 99-102. Symonds was presumably trying to provoke Jowett, who, while requesting Symonds' help in translating the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*, had asserted that the male-male love advocated by Plato was 'mainly a figure of speech'. The texts Symonds had recommended Bradley and Cooper to read in 1881 are exactly those labelled 'sweet poison' in the letter to Jowett – 'Plato's Symposium & Phaedrus & Lysis & Charmides' (*The Letters of John Addington Symonds 1869-1884*, ed. by Schueller and Peters, p. 683). Symonds also defines the Phaedrus as the place where 'I discovered the true liber amoris at last [. . .] as though the voice of my own soul spoke to me through Plato, as though in some antenatal experience I had lived the life of a philosophical Greek lover' (Symonds, *The Memoirs*, p. 98). For more information about the reception of the Phaedrus in the late nineteenth century, see Stefano Evangelista, "'Lovers and Philosophers at Once": Aesthetic Platonism in the Victorian Fin de Siècle', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 36, no. 2 (2006), 230-244.

[291] Wilde also suggests that this is a place to which someone under the influence of 'the child of Leto' (Apollo) might dreamily wander. The full quote reads: 'that nymph-haunted meadow where young Phaedrus bathed his feet, and, lying there on the soft grass, beneath the tall wind-whispering planes and flowering *agnus castus*, began to think of the wonder of beauty' (Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist' pp. 346-347).

[292] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* trans. by Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 135.

[293] 'The little stream is delightfully clear and bright; I can fancy that there might be maidens playing near [. . .] Judging from the ornaments and images, this must be a spot sacred to Achelous and the Nymphs' (Plato, 'Phaedrus' p. 134; Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist' p. 346).

[294] Prins, p. 102

[295] Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. lxii, Appendix 1, p. 291, Wharton, p. 71.

[296] Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. lxii, Appendix 1, p. 292.

[297] Wharton, p. 71.

[298] Prins, p. 101.

[299] *Ibid.*, p. 99.

[300] *Works and Days II* f. 68b. The John Gray mentioned here is John Miller Gray, the Glaswegian art curator, rather than the friend of Wilde, who did not become intimate with the Michael Field poets until after their conversion to Catholicism. Browning was shown the poems of *Long Ago* before publication and even suggested some improvements, though few of these were taken up (O'Gorman, 'Browning's Manuscript Revisions to Michael Field's *Long Ago* (1889)').

[301] I examine the idea of the homoerotic as exclusive vision in more detail in Chapter 3.

[302] Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. lxii, Appendix 1, p. 292.

[303] *Ibid.*, Appendix 1, p. 292.

[304] Wharton, p. 71.

[305] Ibid., p. 190.

[306] Ibid., p. 192.

[307] Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. 1, Appendix 1, p. 287-288.

[308] Prins, p. 106.

[309] The final positive activity attributed to the nymphs in poem XLIII is also a 'musical refrain'. Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. lxii, Appendix 1, p. 292.

[310] Wilde, 'De Profundis'. In middle life, Symonds considered that this physical self-restraint had contributed to his early nervous strain and incapacity (Symonds, *The Memoirs*, pp. 127-128, Grosskurth, p. 266). In the *Phaedrus* such self-restraint is imagined as the control of two horses, the more obedient of which 'refrains from leaping on the beloved' (Plato, 'Phaedrus', p. 161). Pater's 'favourite' poem in *Long Ago* (according to Bradley) is another poem of self-restraint expressed as 'refrain': poem XXIX. The final stanza of this poem reads: 'Apollo, when they do thee wrong, / Speechless thou taks't the golden dart: / I will refrain my barking tongue, / And strike the heart' (Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. xlvi, Appendix 1, p. 287; Reference to Pater, qtd. in Treby, *Music and Silence*, p. 64). Bradley and Cooper's own love is also presented in *Works and Days* as characterised by restraint: 'Oh what perfect joy there is in the way Michael and I love! We appreciate each day each other more. So rarely love has this passionate discretion' (Cooper, British Library, *Works and Days Vol. XVII*, 1903, Add.MS.467932, f. 222b).

[311] As often happens with Bradley and Cooper, the narratives they produce in connection with their own life appear, on the contrary, to follow suggestions that first arise in a literary context. In the year following publication of *Long Ago*, Bradley and Cooper met Berenson and began the construction of a narrative of permanent and painful heteroerotic yearning to be contrasted with the homoerotic sympathy of their own relationship.

[312] Vanita, pp. 41-45, Wharton, p. 61.

[313] Longinus, *On the Sublime: the Greek Text Edited after the Paris Manuscript, with Introduction, Translation, Facsimiles and Appendices*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1879) p. 71.

[314] Chapter X, section 3, *ibid.*

[315] For a description of this process in the nineteenth century, see Prins, pp. 37-40.

[316] Poem XX, Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. xxxiv, Appendix 1, p. 283.

[317] Poem XXXIV, *ibid.*, p. li, Appendix 1, p. 288.

[318] The metaphor of divine rape as sublime and uplifting had a long history: John Dennis, for example, explicating the ideas of Longinus for an English audience, suggests that the sublime 'commits a pleasing Rape upon the very Soul of the Reader'. John Dennis, *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry, Contain'd in Some New Discoveries Never Made Before, Requisite for the Writing and Judging of Poems Surely* (London: Geo. Strahan and Bernard Lintott, 1704), p. 79.

[319] In Poem XII, the nightingale, as poet-like singer and Philomel, is painfully re-violated by the 'piercing note' of her own song – 'passion's supremest pain' (Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. xxii, Appendix 1, p. 279). Poem X, addressed to Philomel's sister Procne, the wife of Philomel's rapist, Tereus, describes the rapist as a man who 'loved too well', and Procne's attack on him as motivated by jealousy rather than sympathy for her sister – 'Thou show'st the restlessness of one love-slighted' (Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. xx, Appendix 1, p. 279). White re-writes both myth and poem to argue that the Michael Field poets condemn rape. 'Heterosexuality has killed Procne's ability to speak meaningfully and truthfully [. . .] heterosexual or non-virginal women no longer possess the [. . .] qualities of passion, desire and identity/truthfulness' (White, 'The One Woman' pp. 78-79).

[320] This is one of the few poems we know for certain to have been written by Bradley (Bradley, *Works and Days II* f. 2b, Cooper, *Works and Days V*, f. 79ab, Treby, *Music and Silence*, p. 70).

[321] Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. lxxix, Appendix 1, p. 297. Bradley's Sappho rhetorically asks Tiresias if he can divine 'how sweet' it would be:



As just a child  
Gathering a bunch of tulips wild,  
To feel the flowery hill-side rent  
Convulsive for thy ravishment?

This question, asked in a suspended moment before the rape of a 'child', is simply grotesque for a modern audience, demonstrating the gulf between the ideology of the Michael Field poets and late twentieth-century feminist sexual politics. White, by careful editing, removes all reference to Persephone in her commentaries on the poem (White, "Poets and Lovers Evermore" pp. 31-32; White, 'The One Woman' pp. 95-97; White, 'The Tiresian Poet' pp. 155-157).

[322] Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. xciv, Appendix 1, p. 299, Cooper, *Works and Days II* f. 9a, Treby, *Uncertain Rain*, p. 90. The journal entry again intertwines the *Long Ago* poems with a relationship with and respect for men: 'I have sung Selene's love and the love of Apollo for Dryope (the memory of the bowl of our carnations under young Browning's Dryope at De Vere Gardens not being absent as I wrote)'. The poem is headlined with a single word of Sappho's: ?????? or 'tortoise' which appears in Wharton as fragment 169 in four different versions of the Greek, none of which are exactly the same as that produced by Michael Field here (Wharton, p. 173).

[323] Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. xcvi, Appendix 1, p. 300.

[324] *Ibid.*, p. lxxv, Appendix 1, p. 293.

[325] The Michael Field poets' rendering mixes elements of Wharton's translation and Ambrose Philips': 'That man seems to me peer of gods, who sits in thy presence, and hears close to him thy sweet speech and lovely laughter' 'Blest as immortal gods is he / [. . .] / My breath was gone, my voice was lost' (Wharton, pp. 61, 63).

[326] Wharton suggests that fragment 2 is sometimes named 'The Ode to Anactoria'. *Ibid.*, p. 67. Swinburne had also established Anactoria as a painful lover: 'My pain / Pains thee, and lips bruise lips, and vein stings vein' (Swinburne, 'Anactoria', p. 50).

[327] Poem XXVI, Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. xlii., Poem LIV Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. lxxxii, Appendix 1, p. 293.

[328] This scene is taken from fragment 41: 'But to thee, Atthis, the thought of me is hateful; thou flittest to Andromeda', (Wharton, p. 94).

[329] This phrase is based on a separate Sapphic fragment: fragment 110, ????? ?? ?????????? ????? (Fool, faint not thou in thy strong heart). *Ibid.*, pp. 157-158.

[330] This is a rendering of fragment 42: 'Now Eros shakes my soul, a wind on the mountain falling on the oaks', translated by Symonds as 'love once more my soul within me rends', a clear influence on the 'rive' of the Michael Field poem (*Ibid.*, p. 95). Wharton connects the fragment to the *Phaedrus* – 'Quoted by Maximus Tyrius about 150BC in speaking of Socrates exciting Phaedrus to Bacchic frenzy when he talked of love' (Wharton, p. 95).

[331] Fragment 25, ??? ???H? ??? ?????? , is translated by Wharton as 'I yearn and seek' (Wharton, p. 81).

[332] Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. lvii, Appendix 1, 289.

[333] Hönnighausen, looking at poets from Rossetti through to Symonds and Yeats, describes how the English late-romantic poets, while withdrawing from contemporary society to produce poems set in remote and ideally conceived spaces, nevertheless produce a poetry infused with decline and regret – 'even in the seclusion of their idyllic refuges, they continue to be haunted by the "lost Days" of their squandered or guilt-ridden past' (Hönnighausen, p. 139).

[334] Wharton, p. 35.

[335] *Ibid.*, p. 32.

- [336] Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. xv, Appendix 1, p. 278.
- [337] *Ibid.*, p. xxxix, Appendix 1, p. 288.
- [338] Appendix 1, p. 282
- [339] *Ibid.*, p. 1, Appendix 1, p. 288.
- [340] Appendix 1, p. 292
- [341] *Ibid.*, p. xxix, Appendix 1, p. 282.
- [342] White, 'The One Woman', p. 77. White also makes the assertions that in this collection, not only is there an 'equation between poetry and virginity', but that virginity is 'conflated with lesbian desire', (pp. 81, 75) thus suggesting that Bradley and Cooper are presenting here an argument for a necessary connection between lesbian desire and the production of poetry.
- [343] Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. xxix, Appendix 1, p. 281-2.
- [344] *Ibid.*, p. xlv, Appendix 1, p. 287.
- [345] *Ibid.*, p. xliii, Appendix 1, p. 286.
- [346] Wharton, p. 128.
- [347] Michael Field, *Long Ago*, pp. lx, lxvii, lxxx, Appendix 1, p. 290, 294, 297.
- [348] *Ibid.*, p. lx, Appendix 1, p. 291.
- [349] *Ibid.*, p. lxvii, Appendix 1, p. 298.
- [350] *Ibid.*, p. lxxx, Appendix 1, p. 294, Wharton, p. 128.
- [351] Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. xxxvii, Appendix 1, p. 284-285.
- [352] *Ibid.*, p. lxxxi, Appendix 1, p. 298.
- [353] Wharton, p. 75, White, "'Poets and Lovers Evermore'", p. 30.
- [354] White, "'Poets and Lovers Evermore'", p. 30.
- [355] *Ibid.*
- [356] Prins, p. 103.
- [357] White, 'The One Woman', p. 80.
- [358] 'The third and fourth stanzas describe the girls who respond to this seductive song by "opening their glorious candid maidenhood" and refusing Hymen's call: in the Sapphic circle they remain "my maids" not to be married' (Prins, p. 103).
- [359] A previous version of this poem, included in the manuscript version of *Works and Days* confirms this reading. The final stanza is written:
- And who lets fall  
Her maiden zone  
At Hymen's call  
No terror knows  
Taught by a poet why sweet Hesper glows.
- Bradley, *Works and Days II* f. 52a.
- [360] Tennyson's 'In Memoriam' arguably follows the same trajectory (Alfred Tennyson, 'In Memoriam A. H. H.' in *Tennyson: A Selected Edition*, ed. by Christopher Ricks (Harlow: Longman, 2007), pp. 341-484). At times, Bradley appears to acquiesce in this schedule, proposing that if necessary she would give Cooper up to marriage: 'If the great Lord Love himself should ever come to you – to him I will freely give you' (Letter from Bradley to Cooper, 1885, qtd. Treby, *A Shorter Shakespeare?*, p. 112). Symonds, as we have seen, was less happy to accept that homoerotic love should simply be remembered wistfully as part of a necessarily lost past.
- [361] Poem XLIX Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. lxxi, Appendix 1, p. 295.
- [362] The movement here is also reminiscent of Tennyson: in *Idylls of the King*, the production of an ideal lost past is eventually overtaken by the discovery of an inner corruption that renders it an impossible dream (Alfred Tennyson, 'Idylls of the King', in *Tennyson: A Selected Edition*, ed. by

Christopher Ricks (Harlow: Longman, 2007), pp. 675-973).

[363] Michael Field, *Long Ago*, pp. ciii, lxxv, Appendix 1, p. 302, 293,

[. . .] Wherefore dost thou throw

On me that glittering glance, as though,

Friend, I had ever done thee wrong,

When the crowd asks me for the song

'Atthis, I loved thee long ago?'

Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. lxxiii, Appendix 1, p. 293.

[364] Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. cv, Appendix 1, p. 303.

[365] *Ibid.*, p. xxv, Appendix 1, p. 281.

[366] Wharton, p. 149.

[367] This idea will be repeated in poem LXVII where the insatiable Sappho's 'hungry' senses become a kind of prison in which to catch the long-dead Atthis: 'and all my hungry, sore / Death-stricken senses close round her once more' (Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. cv, Appendix 1, p. 303).

[368] Cooper, *Works and Days XXVIII*, f. 90a.

[369] Hönnighausen suggests that the frequent association of death with the beloved in late nineteenth-century writing, culminating in Yeats' 'He Wishes his Beloved were Dead', is a direct result of the ideal presentation of the beloved, and a consequent wish to translate that ideal into permanence (Hönnighausen, pp. 185-189). A short poem in *Underneath the Bough* suggests a possibly ironic understanding of this relationship:

**We were lovers together side by side**

The terror that we must part

A nightmare before us, until she died

And I gathered her to my heart.

Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough: A Book of Verses*, 1st edn.

(London: George Bell and Sons, 1893), p. 117.

[370] Thain argues that Bradley and Cooper are here deliberately occupying a territory 'between categories' in order to avoid any commitment to 'issues of gender and sexuality' and to present desire as an aesthetic rather than a political concept. 'In the current critical climate Michael Field's strategy seems to invite questions and assumptions about the thing it avoids. But what must be recognised is the effort Bradley and Cooper went in order to sidestep these issues [. . .]. All too often this strategy is overlooked because of the current trend to read issues of gender, sexuality and the body at the root of Michael Field's poetic' (Thain, 'Michael Field', pp. 61, 63).

[371] 'Women writers were largely responsible for the twentieth century legitimization of the topos – its subjective infusion, after the rhapsodic Sapphic model, with a new moral, psychological, and metaphysical pathos' (Castle, *The Literature of Lesbianism*, p. 28).

[372] Laird, *Women Coauthors*, p. 83.

[373] This difference has also been noted by Saville (Saville, p. 178).

[374] A facsimile edition was published in 1993 (Michael Field, *Sight and Song, 1892, with Underneath the Bough, 1893*, ed. by R.K.R Thornton and Ian Small, *Decadents, Symbolists, Anti-Decadents: Poetry of the 1890s* (Oxford: Woodstock, 1993)).

[375] Pater gave a series of lectures between 1867 and 1871 arguing for a broader definition of the Renaissance than was then current. These were first published in 1873, with the addition of an introduction and the notorious conclusion (Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan, 1873)). Symonds produced a seven volume study of the Italian Renaissance during the years from 1875-1886. The volume that dealt with painting was first published in 1877 (John Addington Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy: the Fine Arts* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1899)).

[376] Walter Pater, 'A Prince of Court Painters', in *Imaginary Portraits* (London: Macmillan,

1910), pp. 3-44.

[377] Charles Baudelaire, 'The Life and World of Eugène Delacroix', trans. by Jonathan Mayne, in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, ed. by Jonathan Mayne (Greenwich, CT: Phaidon, 1955), pp. 41-68 (p. 43).

[378] The idea comes from the third edition of *The Renaissance*. Walter Pater, 'The School of Giorgione', in *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1910), pp. 130-154 (p. 134).

[379] Oscar Wilde, 'Pen, Pencil and Poison', in *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Richard Ellmann (London: W.H. Allen, 1970), pp. 320-324 (p. 330).

[380] See Johnson for an account of this process, and its connection to late nineteenth-century ideas of the artist as separate from and superior to the excluded masses (Johnson, p. 210).

[381] Michael Field, *Sight and Song* (London: Mathews and Lane, 1892), p. v, Appendix 2, p. 305. The full text of the preface and of all poems cited can be found in Appendix 2, alongside reproductions of the relevant paintings.

[382] Saville, 178-184.

[383] 'Bernie praised our choice of Dresden; he began to teach me the right understanding of the pictures. [. . .] Mrs Costelloe began to pour out the tea; I was taking notes for our journey [. . .]. He promised me a list of Italian pictures to be studied at Dresden' (Cooper, *Works and Days IV*, ff. 57b-58a). 'Italian Pictures to be looked in the Dresden Gallery according to Bernhard Maine' [a pseudonym contemplated by Berenson] (Cooper, *Works and Days IV*, f. 120b). 'Then we seek out many of the pictures on Bernhard's list' (Cooper, *Works and Days IV*, f. 69b). 'We [. . .] buy Morelli's *KunstKritische Studien Über Italienische Malerei – Vol 1* dealing with Munich and Dresden. Hugging this treasure, we reach the Gallery with the powers of old Woman and the remnant enthusiasm of Early Youth!' (Cooper, *Works and Days IV*, f. 70a). Berenson had been instructing them in looking at pictures since their first meeting, in Paris in 1890: 'A long morning with the Italian pictures in the Louvre, instructed by Mr Berenson' (Cooper, *Works and Days III*, f. 135a). Since then, apart from this private 'instruction', they had attended several of his public lectures in the National Gallery, and were to attend many more in the future.

[384] Letter to Berenson, Berenson Archive, Villa I Tatti, qtd. Hilary Fraser, 'A Visual Field: Michael Field and the Gaze', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 34, no. 2 (2006), 553-571, (p. 559).

[385] Cooper, *Works and Days V*, f. 90a.

[386] 'It is necessary, by an effort of the mind, to transport oneself into the characters, and not to draw them into oneself' (translation, Danny Karlin). As Saville points out, Pater makes exactly the same point about Flaubert in the Merimée lecture Bradley and Cooper had attended the previous year, even suggesting, as they do here, that he was unable to carry out this project perfectly (Saville, p. 181).

[387] Michael Field, *Sight and Song*, p. vi, Appendix 2, p. 305.

[388] *Ibid.*, Appendix 2, p. 305

[389] This again recalls Wilde's suggestion, already quoted in Chapter 1, that the production of art is a project of aesthetic self-performance – 'an attempt to realise one's own personality on some imaginative plane, out of reach of the trammelling accidents and limitations of real life' (Wilde, 'The Portrait of Mr W.H.', p. 152).

[390] See, especially, Ehnenn, Fraser, Lysack, Vadillo.

[391] Michael Field, *Sight and Song*, pp. 81, 87, 106.

[392] *Ibid.*, p. 105, Appendix 2, p. 343.

[393] *Ibid.*, p. 47, Appendix 2, p. 328

[394] Thain argues that the conflict between the timeless ideal and the transitory fleeting of time within this collection marks a conscious engagement with and development of the Paterian pull between the synchronic and diachronic, evident, especially, in the conclusion to *The*

*Renaissance* (Thain, 'Michael Field', pp. 71-89, Walter Pater, 'Conclusion', in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan, 1872), pp. 207-213).

[395] Michael Field, *Sight and Song*, p. 9, Appendix 2, p. 310.

[396] *Ibid.*, p. 125, Appendix 2, p. 347.

[397] *Ibid.*, p. 104, Appendix 2, p. 343.

[398] *Ibid.*, p. 105, Appendix 2, p. 343.

[399] We can contrast this with Browning's *My Last Duchess*, in which the issue of control over the viewer's perception of the female figure is central to the poem (Robert Browning, 'My Last Duchess', in *The Poems of Browning: 1841-1846*, ed. by John Woolford and Danny Karlin (Harlow: Longman, 1991), pp. 158-160 (p. 157)).

[400] Michael Field, *Sight and Song*, p. 5, Appendix 2, p. 306.

[401] *Ibid.*, p. 6, Appendix 2, p. 307.

[402] Michael Field are here drawing directly on von Hartmann's theory of artistic genius. 'The creation of genius is an unwilling, passive conception; it does not come with the most earnest seeking, but quite unexpectedly, as if fallen from heaven, on journeys, in the theatre, in conversation, everywhere where it is least expected, and always suddenly and instantaneously' (Eduard von Hartmann, *Philosophy of the Unconscious: Speculative Results according to the Inductive Method of Physical Science*, trans. by William Chatterton Coupland, 3 vols (London: Kegan Paul, 1893), 1, p. 278. Qtd. by Cooper, *Works and Days IV*, f. 46b).

[403] This is another example of the frequent tendency within *Sight and Song*, as in *Long Ago*, to decline from the perfect timeless world of art into a series of contemporary negatives and wistful longings against which perfection is defined.

[404] For an account of this development, see Bullen, pp. 174-182.

[405] Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, p. 242. Other passages also suggest some familiarity with Symonds' ideas: 'Leonardo, more than any other artist who has ever lived [. . .] felt the primal sympathies that bind men to the earth, their mother, and to living things, their brethren [. . .] Therefore the borderland between humanity and nature allured him. Love, which is the soul of art – Love, the bondslave of Beauty and the son of Poverty by Craft – led him to these triumphs' (p. 241).

[406] Walter Pater, 'Leonardo da Vinci', in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan, 1873), pp. 90-122 (p. 96). Again, several of Pater's ideas are echoed in this poem: 'Raphael represents the return to antiquity, and Leonardo the return to nature [. . .]. And not into nature only; but he plunged also into human personality, and became above all a painter of portraits; faces of a modelling more skilful than has been seen before or since' (pp. 109, 111).

[407] Kenneth R Ireland, 'Sight and Song: A Study of the Interrelations between Painting and Poetry', *Victorian Poetry*, 15, no. 1 (1977), 9-20, (p. 13).

[408] Michael Field, *Sight and Song*, p. 27, Appendix 2, p. 318.

[409] *Ibid.*, p. 28, Appendix 2, p. 318-319.

[410] White, for example, talks about the poem as a presentation of the courtesan's 'internal self-knowledge and self-desire' and her 'self-referential sensuality', as if these were positively valued in the poem (White, 'The One Woman', p. 86). Fraser suggests that the courtesan has 'taken control of her own representation', and Saville that the poem is an 'assertion of female aesthetic agency', again, as if Bradley and Cooper were aligning themselves and their own aesthetic ambitions with those of the courtesan (Fraser, p. 568, Saville, p. 195). Lysack and Ehneen make more wide-ranging claims; the former suggests that the poem is a 'critique of masculine representations of women', the latter that it 'makes observable and denaturalises the disturbing history of female voices silenced and female beauty appropriated by the power of a patriarchal gaze' (Lysack, p. 949, Ehneen, p. 220).

[411] See, for example, 'Fra Lippo Lippi', 'Andrea del Sarto', 'Old Pictures in Florence' (Robert Browning, *Men and Women and Other Poems*, ed. by J. W. Harper (London: J. M. Dent, 1975), pp. 13-22, 105-111, 116-123).

[412] For an account of this process in relation to Wilde, see Regenia Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1986).

[413] **Lysack, pp. 939-942. Lysack's information about consumerism and Bradley and Cooper is useful, though her overall argument: that as women and as lesbians they 'rewrite consumption differently' is one with which I do not agree.**

[414] Michael Field, *Works and Days*, pp. xvii-xviii. 'Today's dreams and desires – the tongs with which the angel makes living coals of our lips today – these are the things to be expressed on our walls, in our furniture, in our dress' (Bradley, *Works and Days VI*, f. 48b). 'If, ten years ago I cd. have seen my lovely old room, my glowing bits of satin-wood, my darling & lustrous river, my long-bodied hound, & cd. have known I had all these things, with the complete fellowship, day and night of my Beloved, a joy almost too terrible in bliss would have been over me – & now it is within, it is of my heart, it is my very life' (Cooper, *Works and Days XV*, f. 47b).

[415] Sturgeon, pp. 45-46.

[416] Conversation reported by Cooper, *Works and Days VII*, f. 93b. Also qtd. Vicinus, p. 336.

[417] **'Berenson soon came to symbolise both the cultural cachet of art and its commodification' (Vicinus, p. 333).**

[418] We saw this conflict surface in Chapter 1 in the perception by both Bradley and Cooper of a Hebraic materialism within Berenson that was seen to be encouraged by Costelloe's 'hard' nature.

[419] The idea of a masculine 'economy of vision', and the suggestion that the poems of *Sight and Song* operate in opposition to it was originally made by Vadillo (p. 25), but is taken up by both Lysack and Ehnenn.

[420] Michael Field, *Sight and Song*, p. 22, Appendix 2, p. 315.

[421] *Ibid.*, p. 24, Appendix 2, p. 316.

[422] *Ibid.*, p. 25, Appendix 2, p. 316. This interpretation is also consonant with Pater's well-known assessment of Botticelli's Venus in 'The Birth of Venus' – 'you might think that the sorrow in her face was at the thought of the whole long day of love yet to come' (Walter Pater, 'Sandro Botticelli', in *Studies in the History of The Renaissance* (London: Macmillan, 1873), pp. 39-51 (p. 49)).

[423] Michael Field, *Sight and Song*, p. 85, Appendix 2, p. 338.

[424] *Ibid.*, p. 86, Appendix 2, p. 339.

[425] As, for example, Ehnenn does: 'Ultimately, the effect of these sentiments in these re-readings of Botticelli is to acknowledge how heterosexual desire disrupts bonds between women, especially in a heteronormative cultural context' (Ehnenn, p. 225).

[426] Bradley, copied by Cooper, *Works and Days III*, f. 65a.

[427] Cooper, *ibid.*, f. 83a.

[428] Michael Field, *Sight and Song*, p. 15, Appendix 2, p. 311.

[429] 'She [. . .] stooped in calm to passion's dizziest strife' (*Ibid.*, p. 29, Appendix 2, p. 319).

[430] *Ibid.*, p. 81, Appendix 2, p. 337.

[431] This relationship is usually thought of as beginning with a rape, suggesting, as with the 'rape' poems of *Long Ago* discussed in Chapter 2, the distance of Bradley and Cooper from a modern feminist sexual politics.

[432] Michael Field, *Sight and Song*, p. 39, Appendix 2, p. 323.

[433] *Ibid.*, p. 40, Appendix 2, p. 323.

[434] *Ibid.*, Appendix 2, p. 324.

[435] *Ibid.*, p. 41, Appendix 2, p. 324.

[436] *Ibid.*, p. 8, Appendix 2, p. 308

- [437] Ibid., p. 42, Appendix 2, p. 325.
- [438] Ibid., p. 59, Appendix 2, p. 333.
- [439] Ibid., p. 123, Appendix 2, p. 346-347.
- [440] Ibid., p. 121, Appendix 2, p. 346.
- [441] Ibid., pp. 47, 49, Appendix 2, p. 328, 329.
- [442] Ibid., p. 16, Appendix 2, p. 313.
- [443] Ibid., p. 17, Appendix 2, p. 314.
- [444] This is also, implicitly, a license for the rape of Antiope, which, in the myth, is about to follow.
- [445] Saville, pp. 183-184.
- [446] Pater, 'Winckelmann', p. 196. Jenkyns gives an unsympathetic overview of the way in which austerity licenses sensuality in the writing of Pater and Symonds (Jenkyns, pp. 146-154).
- [447] Cooper, *Works and Days III*, f. 78a.
- [448] The picture inspired many imitations, including Manet's 'Olympia', which Berenson took Bradley and Cooper to see on a later visit to Paris. 'He takes us straight to the much-discussed Manet – "Olympe". "It is Cleopatra, who has just unrolled herself from mummy clothes, and the cat knows it." He pauses – "C'est la prostituée éternelle". [. . .] We sit down for an hour before Manet's Venus as Bernhard will call it (Cooper, *Works and Days V*, f. 118b).
- [449] Gray, p. 468.
- [450] Michael Field, *Sight and Song*, p. 100, Appendix 2, p. 341.
- [451] Ibid., pp. 101-102, Appendix 2, p. 342.
- [452] Ibid., p. 98, Appendix 2, p. 340.
- [453] Ibid., p. 99, Appendix 2, p. 340.
- [454] 'The object seems to have completely overtaken the traditional phallogocentric economy of vision (male observer, female object of the gaze). Venus, as "object of the gaze" is completely oblivious of the gaze of the observer; she is only conscious of herself [. . .]. Field thus describes Venus in her full "womanhood", and the poem describes Venus in an act of masturbation' (Vadillo, p. 30). 'Here Michael Field daringly creates for their readers what is perhaps the only positive contemporary description of female masturbation [. . .]. Read alongside the end of the poem, their diary entry [a comment by Cooper in *Works and Days*] compellingly suggests that "No one watches her" actually means no man watches her, since the poet-lovers (and woman spectators with similar sensibilities) are present in the poem but their female gaze is not intrusive', (Ehenn, p. 229, Cooper, *Works and Days IV*, f. 88b). 'Venus is appropriated by the desiring lesbian gaze, in a way that seems parodic of the phallogocentric observer/observed power dynamic, as a deity for same-sex love. Subverting the conventionally gendered economy of vision, this poem celebrates the scopophilic pleasure of women gazing upon the beauty of a woman's body in a paean to female sexuality. Lesbian sexuality is inscribed in the field of vision' (Fraser, p. 556). 'This Venus enjoys the autoerotic pleasures of "delicious womanhood" and remains unavailable to the collecting and commodifying enterprise of masculine aestheticism' (Lysack, p. 952).
- [455] Cooper, *Works and Days III*, f. 68b. More specifically the sense of intimate relationship between body and landscape in this painting is a commonplace of Giorgione art criticism. Berenson goes further, arguing that for Giorgione, landscapes generally tend to be 'fine harmonising accompaniments to the religious or human elements of the picture' (Bernard Berenson, *The Italian Painters of the Renaissance* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 32).
- [456] Bradley (Cooper), *Works and Days III*, f. 20a.
- [457] 'Sex in this passage has moved from within the voyeuristic frame of Giorgione's painting [. . .] to permit a lesbian relationship between two samenesses [. . .]. That inviolate sphere of interactive pleasure offers an alternative

model of desire, one that preempts and supplants standard hierarchical models of desire focused on a pathologically conceived female object' (Laird, *Women Coauthors*, p. 27).

[458] Cooper, *Works and Days IV*, f. 88b.

[459] Bradley, *Ibid.*, f. 20a. In the following year, Cooper was to personally enact the teasing presentation of female homoeroticism for Berenson. During Bradley and Cooper's visit to Mary Costelloe's flat in Paris, Cooper invited Berenson into their bedroom, where she was ill in bed. When Costelloe followed and lay on the bed next to her, 'I stoop to kiss her – half to tease him! With a flash of envy that ends in a smile he says "For once in his life he would like to be a girl"' (Cooper, *Works and Days V*, f. 158a).

[460] Bradley, *Works and Days IV*, f. 20b.

[461] 'L'Indifferent', Michael Field, *Sight and Song*, p. 1, 'The Shepherd Boy', Michael Field, *Sight and Song*, p. 65. I have not included these poems in Appendix 2.

[462] Richard A. Kaye, 'Losing His Religion: Saint Sebastian as Contemporary Gay Martyr', in *Outlooks: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities and Visual Cultures*, ed. by Peter Horne and Reisha Lewis (London Routledge, 1996), pp. 86-105 (p. 86). Kaye extends this discussion in Richard A. Kaye, "'Determined Raptures": St. Sebastian and the Victorian Discourse of Decadence', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 27, no. 1 (1999), 269-303.

[463] Wilde qtd. in Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 71, Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, p. 21. The danger noted by Symonds is ostensibly for female worshippers. Symonds' comments on the 'hermaphrodite' nature of the Renaissance, crucially bound up with its introduction of sensuality into a sophisticated religious civilisation – 'Spirit, indeed, spake to spirit, so far as the religious content was concerned; but flesh spake also to flesh in the aesthetic form' – clearly betray his own sympathies – 'What exquisite and evanescent fragrance was educed from these apparently diverse blossoms by their interminglement and fusion – how the high-wrought sensibilities of the Christian were added to the clear and radiant fancies of the Greek, and how the frank sensuousness of the Pagan gave body and fulness to the floating wraiths of an ascetic faith – remains a miracle for those who, like our master Lionardo, love to scrutinise the secrets of twin natures and of double graces. There are not a few for whom the mystery is repellent, who shrink from it as from Hermaphroditus. These will always find something to pain them in the art of the Renaissance' (pp. 8-9, 25).

[464] Michael Field, *Sight and Song*, p. 32, Appendix 2, p. 320.

[465] *Ibid.*, p. 33, Appendix 2, p. 320.

[466] Walter Pater, 'Preface', in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan, 1873), pp. vii-xiv (p. viii). As I suggested in my introduction, Cooper's self-figuring as a Christ-figure was to intensify in later years.

[467] Kaye, "'Determined Raptures"', pp. 271-272.

[468] Michael Field, *Sight and Song*, p. 35, Appendix 2, p. 322.

[469] *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37, Appendix 2, p. 322.

[470] Unusually, the poem is inaccurate here in its description of the figure of Sebastian, who in the painting looks forward at the viewer.

[471] Apart from the more usual meaning of 'brave' that is clearly connoted here, the *OED* suggests that in the nineteenth-century there was a 'literary revival' of the word as 'finely-dressed: splendid, showy, grand, fine, handsome'.

[472] Sedgwick, p. 181.

[473] Vanita, who opposes the idea of a separate development of male and female aesthetics, suggests that 'Michael Field also participated in the development of a language to celebrate love between men, using the same myths that male poets and painters used at this time, for instance St



Sebastian, Jesus and St. John' (Vanita, p. 130). Her interest in the poems, however is restricted to 'an identification of St. Sebastian's persecution with the persecution of those who love against convention', rather than a study of the male figure itself (p. 131). Similar arguments can be found in Ehnenn, p. 233, and Saville, p. 189.

[474] Symonds makes a direct link between Sebastian and Hyacinth: 'Sodoma's Sebastian is but Hyacinth or Hylas, transpierced with arrows' (Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, p. 25). The letter to Bosie which was to incriminate Wilde at his trial, famously contains the sentence: 'I know Hyacinthus, whom Apollo loved so madly, was you in Greek days' (*Trials of Oscar Wilde*, p. 112). Pater's 'Apollo in Picardy' is a transposition of the Apollo/Hyacinth story of a fatal male-male love into a Christian setting (Pater, 'Apollo in Picardy', 1910).

[475] Michael Field, *Sight and Song*, pp. 69-74, Appendix 2, p. 334-336.

[476] Ibid., pp. 73-74, Appendix 2, p. 336.

[477] Kaye, "'Determined Raptures'", p. 275.

[478] Vadillo, pp. 29-30. Vadillo, quoting only part of the extract, mistakenly assumes that the disappointment here referred to is Bradley's disappointment at being unable to touch Cooper.

[479] Cooper, *Works and Days IV*, f. 100a. A slightly amended version occurs in Michael Field, *Works and Days*, p. 59.

[480] This is also a reversal of the position in the poem, where those who refuse to see Sebastian, in particular the mother who avoids him by slipping between the shafts of sandy-coloured tone, leave him with no-one to 'bring relief' from his suffering.

[481] Wagner himself defines tragedy in exactly these terms: 'Life follows in its totality the instinctive evolution of Necessity. [. . .] The first and truest fount of Art reveals itself in the impulse that urges from *Life* into the work of art; for it is the impulse to bring the unconscious, instinctive principle of Life to understanding and acknowledgment as Necessity' (Richard Wagner, 'The Art-Work of the Future', trans. William Ashton Ellis, in ed. by Patrick Swinkels, at *The Wagner Library*, available: <http://users.belgacom.net/wagnerlibrary/prose/wagartfut.htm> pp. 73, 198 [Accessed 1/07/08]).

[482] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, 'The Case of Wagner', trans. by Walter Kaufmann, in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, ed. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967) pp.68-395 (p. 172). Nietzsche's comments are quoted in support of Koestenbaum's argument that Wagner's heroes were widely perceived in the nineteenth century as objects of homoerotic desire (Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality and the Mystery of Desire* (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 191). Cooper made notes on the *Birth of Tragedy* in 1895 (Cooper, *Works and Days IX*, f. 24b). Sedgwick also suggests that Wagner's heroes were perceived as homoerotic figures, as they 'crystallized a hypersaturated solution of what were and were about to become homosexual signifiers', so that his operas came to represent 'a cultural lodestar for what Max Nordau, in *Degeneration*, refers to as "the abnormals"' (Sedgwick, p. 168).

[483] Wagner, p. 194.

[484] This is Dellamora's argument in *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism*, whose chapter about Pater, for example, is entitled 'Theorising Homophobia: Analysis of Myth in Pater'. In it, he suggests that writers like Hopkins, Swinburne and others used poetry to create 'an aesthetic-cultural space in which men could contest conventional gender coding while expressing the worth of male-male desire' (Richard Dellamora, *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), p. 167).

[485] Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough: A Book of Verses*, (London: George Bell and Sons, 1893).

[486] A further reference not cited by Donoghue seems to confirm this impression: 'At Hotel Belle Vue a noble velvet-pile bedroom that reminds us of Dresden – we have a most dear love in its princely shelter' (Cooper, *Works and Days X*, f. 109b). Even more convincing, however, are the entries made after conversion to Catholicism, which,

with its strong incitement to discourse on sexual matters, leads Cooper both to announce that she has given up ‘fleshly sin’, and to associate the sins she must now confess with one of Baudelaire’s ‘Femmes Damnées’ poems, each of which are unmistakably associated with female-female sexual love (Donoghue, p. 30). Treby makes a heroic, but ultimately, in my opinion, unsuccessful effort to explain away these references (Treby, *Uncertain Rain*, pp. 26-28).

[487] Uncertainty as to the purpose and scope of *Underneath the Bough* is reflected in the fact that the writers themselves proposed a drastically ‘revised and decreased’ version within six months of publication, producing a second edition which, whilst adding a handful of poems, removed almost half the poems that had appeared in the first edition (Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough: A Book of Verses*, 2nd edn. (London: George Bell and Sons, 1894). An American edition brought out five years later re-instated some of the original poems, removed some of those composed for the second edition, and again added several poems of later composition, so that *Underneath the Bough* comprises three quite different collections (Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough: A Book of Verses*, 3rd edn. (Portland, Maine: Mosher, 1898). Unless otherwise stated, poems analysed here are from the first collection.

[488] This impression is confirmed in a pre-publication letter to John Miller Gray, where Bradley describes the collection as a ‘new and beautiful Elizabethan song-book – wh. aspires to treat of Victorian themes in Elizabethan temper’ (Qtd. in Joseph Bristow, ‘Michael Field’s Lyrical Aestheticism: *Underneath the Bough*’, in *Michael Field and Their World*, ed. by Margaret D. Stetz and Cheryl A. Wilson (High Wycombe: The Rivendale Press, 2007) pp.49-59 (p. 50). Bristow argues that the dropping of the ‘Song-book’ sections in the second edition may reflect a temporary disillusion with the idea of producing ‘Elizabethan’ lyrics (Bristow, ‘Michael Field’s Lyrical Aestheticism’ p. 56).

[489] Treby suggests that the inspiration behind the collection may have been the publication of Bullen’s *Lyrics from Elizabethan Song Books* in 1891, based on his two previous collections, first published in 1887 and 1888. However, many of the poems published in *Underneath the Bough* were composed before 1887 – Bradley and Cooper were participating in a wider revival of interest in seventeenth-century literature evident both in their own seventeenth-century-style drama, and in the publication of *The Mermaid Series*, a set of reprints of seventeenth-century plays under the editorship of Havelock Ellis, begun in 1886 (Treby, *The Michael Field Catalogue*, p. 31, *Lyrics from the Song-Books of the Elizabethan Age*, ed. by Arthur Henry Bullen, (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1891).

[490] Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough*, Appendix 3, p. 348. All Michael Field poems cited in this chapter can be found in full in Appendix 3. The *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, first published in 1859, was admired by Rossetti, Ruskin, Swinburne and Browning. The quote used here is from the 1872 edition (Edward FitzGerald, ‘Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám’, in *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám: English, French, German, Italian and Danish Translations Comparatively Arranged in Accordance with the Text of Edward FitzGerald’s Version*, ed. by Nathan Haskell Dole (Boston: L. C. Page), vol I p. 22.

[491] Despite their allegiance to Paganism, Bradley and Cooper retained a basic affinity for Christianity, which extended from regular church attendance to the regular production of poems drawing on Biblical scenes and figures. This helped to produce an extraordinary consistency of themes and metaphors between the early collections and the late, post conversion poetry.

[492] ‘Those poems are a record of her [Bradley’s] devotion to Edith Cooper, and it is doubtful whether Laura or Beatrice or the Dark Lady had a tenderer wooing’ (Sturgeon, p. 74).

[493] For love poems related to fictional characters, see, for example, ‘Ah Eros does not always smite’, originally from *Callirrhoë*, and ‘Ah me, if I grew sweet to man’, from *The Tragic Mary* (Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough*, pp. 6, 27).

[494] Treby, *The Michael Field Catalogue*, pp. 29, 119.

[495] Many of the poems were read as personal testaments to the Bradley-Cooper relationship from Sturgeon onwards, but it is only since Treby’s research that we can with certainty make the connection between the personal relationship and ‘The Third Book of Songs’. As Treby is quick

to point out, there are a number of love poems not from this section, previously analysed as poems of lesbian love, that he can demonstrate to be inspired by male friends. See especially, 'Penetration', written by Bradley for Ricketts, 'I love thee with my life', written by Cooper for Berenson, and 'Palimpsest', written by Bradley about Whym Chow (Treby, *A Shorter Sh?raz?d*, p. 56, Treby, *Uncertain Rain*, p. 156, Treby, *Music and Silence*, p. 175).

[496] Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough*, p. 76, Appendix 3, p. 353, White, "'Poets and Lovers Evermore"' p. 41.

[497] Bradley, *Works and Days II* f. 87b.

[498] These writers were also producing idyllic rural scenes for a predominantly urban, sophisticated audience. Ricketts and Shannon had brought out an illustrated version of Daphnis and Chloe in 1893 (Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe*, trans. by George Thornley (London: Vale Press, 1893)). Another poem in *Underneath the Bough* denominates the beloved as Chloe. (Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough*, p. 47.) Beaumont and Fletcher are two of the writers to whom Bradley compared herself and Cooper. 'My Aunt and I work after the fashion of Beaumont and Fletcher' (Letter to Browning, May 29<sup>th</sup> 1884. Qtd. in Michael Field, *Works and Days*, p. 3).

[499] See Appendix 3, p. 348 for a reproduction of this painting.

[500] 'Early in the 16th c., if not before, *brake* began to be displaced by the modern *broke*, formed after the pa. pple'. *OED*. The King James' Bible still used the old form – '[And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it](#)' – so it would be familiar to Bradley. Luke 22. 19.

[501] Alan Bray, discussing how seventeenth-century pastoral, influenced by its classical forebears, introduced homoerotic narratives into British poetry, suggests that late nineteenth-century aesthetes were mistakenly led to assume that the seventeenth century was a period more lenient towards same-sex relationships than their own: 'The Renaissance concern for classical ideals was taken by the homosexual reformers of the late nineteenth century and their successors as implying a tolerant attitude to homosexuality [. . .]. It was a persuasive myth, but it was not sound history' (Alan Bray, *Homosexuality and Renaissance England* (London: Gay Men's Press, 1982), pp. 59-60).

[502] As admirers of Keats, Bradley and Cooper may have considered their letters to be in the tradition of his love letters, which were first published in 1878. They certainly read the letters in later years: 'We are reading Keats' letters to Fanny Brawne' (Bradley, *Works and Days VI*, f. 53b).

[503] Qtd. in Treby, *Uncertain Rain*, p. 76. As throughout this account of the inter-relationship of poems and private letters, notebooks and journals, I am indebted to Treby's research.

[504] This poem, like the 'Lovely Shepherdess' poem, appears only in the first edition of *Underneath the Bough* (Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough*, p. 74, Appendix 3, p. 352).

[505] Qtd. in Treby, *Uncertain Rain*, p. 76.

[506] Qtd. in *ibid*.

[507] Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough*, p. 65, Appendix 3, p. 348. This poem, though dropped from the second edition, was re-instated for the American edition (Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough* 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., p. 47).

[508] Treby, *Music and Silence*, p. 49.

[509] *Ibid*.

[510] Qtd. in *ibid*. Like Treby, I cannot find the origin of the myth recounted in this poem.

[511] This demand was still being made to Mary Costelloe Berenson nearly thirty years later, as we saw in Chapter 1 – 'We are not Aunt and Niece [. . .] neither are we Cooper and Bradley' (Qtd. in Vicinus, p. 352).

[512] Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough*, pp. 66-67, Appendix 3, p. 349.

[513] This poem only appears in the first edition. *Ibid*., p. 80, Appendix 3, p. 355.

[514] Treby, *A Shorter Sh?raz?d*, p. 43.

[515] Thomas Campion, 'The Second Booke of Ayres. Containing Light Conceits of Lovers', in *The Works of Thomas Campion: Complete Songs, Masques, and Treatises with a Selection of the Latin Verse*, ed. by Walter R. Davis (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), pp. 84-112 (p. 94).

[516] Prins, p. 109.

[517] Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough*, p. 80, Appendix 3, p. 355.

[518] Treby, *A Shorter Sh?raz?d*, p. 43.

[519] Ibid.

[520] Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough*, p. 81, Appendix 3, p. 355.

[521] Ibid., Appendix 3, p. 355. Campion, p. 94.

[522] Prins, p. 110, Vanita, p. 122.

[523] The later stanzas of the poem and various context pieces that relate to them also support a reading of the relationship as Platonic pedagogy, with Bradley as the kind teacher introducing Cooper to classical texts and reprimanding her for her poor Greek spelling.

[524] Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough*, p. 79, Appendix 3, p. 354. The poem appears in all three editions of *Underneath the Bough*, suggesting its centrality to Bradley and Cooper's aesthetic self-definition. 'It was deep April' was also chosen by Sturge Moore to open his 1923 selection of their poems, where he gave it the title 'Prologue'. *A Selection from the Poems of Michael Field* ed. by Thomas Sturge Moore, (London: The Poetry Bookshop, 1923), p. 18.

[525] Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough*, p. 79, Appendix 3, p. 354.

[526] Cooper, *Works and Days V*, f. 78a. The poem appears, unchanged, in *Underneath the Bough*.

[527] Sturgeon, p. 47, Blain, 'Two-headed Nightingale', p. 243.

[528] Leighton, *Writing Against the Heart*, p. 204.

[529] Ibid., p. 209.

[530] Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough*, p. 79, Appendix 3, p. 354-355.

[531] Ibid.

[532] 'Fast-locked' is a little obscure. It could suggest that the poetic souls are asleep and dreaming ('fast-locked in the arms of Morpheus') – Swinburne uses the adjective in this way:

Well were it if vision could keep  
The lids of desire as in sleep  
Fast locked, and over his eyes  
A dream with the dark soft key  
In her hand might hover [ . . . ]

'A dark month', Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Poetical Works*, ed. by Sir Edmund Gosse and Thomas James Wise, *The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne* (London: Heinemann 1925), V, p. 203.

Equally it could imply the tenacity of the poets' attachment to Apollo, or to each other.

[533] 'And love will laugh at Heaven and Hell' (Charles Baudelaire, 'Lesbos', trans. by James McGowan, in *The Flowers of Evil*, ed. by Jonathan Culler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 232-239 (p. 237)) See also Leighton, *Writing Against the Heart*, p. 210, *Victorian Women Poets*, ed. by Blain.

[534] This is most clearly evident in Wilde's 'The Portrait of Mr W.H.', as discussed in my introduction, and Wharton's edition of Sappho, as discussed in Chapter 2 (Wilde, 'The Portrait of Mr W.H.', Wharton).

[535] Cooper, *Works and Days V*, f. 71b.

[536] White, "'Poets and Lovers Evermore", p. 42.

[537] Faderman argues that *Long Ago* gives 'little hint of any consciousness about the possibility of sexual expression', suggesting that Bradley and Cooper 'treated Sappho's "lesbianism" in a

vague manner because they saw it in terms of their own love for each other, which is not as clear-cut as we would see it today' (Faderman, p. 212). This suggestion of 'vagueness' is quoted approvingly by Laird, who considers that White 'overstates her case' for Bradley and Cooper's sexual relationship (Laird, *Women Coauthors*, p. 88).

[538] Donoghue, p. 79, Chris White, *Nineteenth-Century Writings on Homosexuality: a Sourcebook* (London: Routledge 1999), p. 237, Castle, *The Literature of Lesbianism*, p. 562, Leighton, *Writing Against the Heart*, p. 225.

[539] Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough*, p. 75, Appendix 3, p. 353.

[540] *Ibid.*, p. 76, Appendix 3, p. 353.

[541] John Dowland, 'A Pilgrim's Solace', in *English Madrigal Verse: 1588-1632*, ed. by E. H. Fellowes (Oxford: Clarendon, 1920), pp. 442-452 (p. 443).

[542] Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough*, p. 73, Appendix 3, p. 351.

[543] *Ibid.*, p. 77, Appendix 3, p. 354.

[544] Dowling, pp. 67-103.

[545] The *OED* definition of 'kind' begins with the idea of biological/natural distinction. Despite occasionally describing her love for Cooper as 'maternal', Bradley had a sense of a different 'nature', defined by her unwillingness to bear children, from early on; in a diary from 1867 she wrote 'Mine is not the sort of nature for that [marriage and childbearing]; I am not fond of children as many women are' (Qtd. in Treby, *Uncertain Rain*, p. 30). Cooper also suggests a fundamental distinction between women who become mothers and women who write poetry – 'To be happy women must be serving by creation [. . .] they must be mothers in body or brain. Corn & grape: – the child or the Poem!' (Cooper, *Works and Days III*, f. 107b).

[546] The passage continues in terms which also seem pertinent to Bradley and Cooper's presentation of their love relationship: 'And at the touch of the beautiful which is ever present to his memory, even when absent, he brings forth that which he had conceived long before, and in company with him tends that which he brings forth; and they are married by a far nearer tie and have a closer friendship than those who beget mortal children, for the children who are their common offspring are fairer and more immortal' (Plato, 'Symposium', in *The Dialogues of Plato: Translated into English with Analyses and Introductions by B. Jowett*, ed. by Benjamin Jowett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), pp. 479-555 pp. 540-541)). This text may be behind Bradley's assertion that 'we are closer married' than the Brownings (Michael Field, *Works and Days*, pp. 11-16). For Symonds' recommendation, see *The Letters of John Addington Symonds 1869-1884*, ed. by Schueller and Peters, p. 683.

[547] Bradley's habitation of this border can be seen in her reference to another ideal pregnancy, typically, in relating herself and Cooper to two elevated figures in a painting – Joachim and Anne as they meet to celebrate the miraculous conception of the Virgin Mary: 'At the Ashmolean: the little Lippi is Michaellean – union in a kiss of two spirits [. . .] and there are two wild [deer?]. And two contemplative storks, as we are always couples in action and peace. Yes, a lovely flushed espousal of our sort – we must get a photograph' (Bradley, *Works and Days XI*, f. 124b). The painting is reproduced in Appendix 3, p. 358.

[548] Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough*, p. 67, Appendix 3, p. 350. Although not an 'Elizabethan conceit', this poem was dropped in the Berenson cull.

[549] Qtd. in Treby, *Uncertain Rain*, p. 69.

[550] Donne, p. 191. Swinburne also played with the image of female homoerotic similarity:

I feel thy blood against my blood: my pain  
Pains thee, and lips bruise lips, and vein stings vein.  
Let fruit be crushed on fruit, let flower on flower,  
Breast kindle breast, and either burn one hour.

Swinburne, 'Anactoria', p. 50.

[551] 'Into her dream he melted as the rose / Blendeth its odour with the violet,— / Solution sweet' (John Keats, 'The Eve of St. Agnes', in *John Keats*, ed. by Elizabeth Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 252-264 (p. 263)). The poem's title is also a direct Romantic reference, echoing a phrase of Wordsworth's – 'The cowslip-gathering at May's dewy prime' – in a landscape in which bees also hum in the tree overhead – 'His seat beneath the

honeyed sycamore / When the bees hummed . . .'. William Wordsworth, 'The Female Vagrant', in *Wordsworth and Coleridge: Lyrical Ballads, 1798* ed. by W. J. B. Owen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967) pp.41-49 (p. 42).

For a discussion of Donne's poem as a poem of 'failing persuasion' see Barbara Correll, 'Symbolic Economies and Zero-Sum Erotics: Donne's "Sapho to Philaenis"', *ELH*, 62, no. 3 (1995), 487-507.

[552] Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough*, p. 68, Appendix 3, p. 350.

[553] How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.

I love thee to the depth and breadth and height

My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight

For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.

XLIII, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 'Sonnets from the Portuguese', in *Selected*

*Poems*

*of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. by Margaret Foster (London: Dent, 1988),

pp. 216-237 (p. 237).

[554] Fletcher, "'I Leave a Page Half-Writ'", pp. 164-165.

[555] Thain, 'Michael Field', p. 95.

[556] *Victorian Women Poets*, ed. by Blain, p. 210, *The Victorians*, ed. by Cunningham, p. 889.

[557] Fletcher, "'I Leave a Page Half-Writ'", p. 166, Thain, 'Michael Field', p. 96.

[558] Laird, *Women Coauthors*, p. 5.

[559] *Ibid.*, pp. 27, 25, 25. See also Karen Alkalay-Gut, who uses the example of 'A girl' (analysed below) to suggest that 'lesbian desire can transcend the conventional antithesis between subject and object', and Leighton, who argues that 'It was deep April' 'sets its implicitly collaborative authorship against the traditional subject-object poet-muse dichotomies of the romantic tradition' (Karen Alkalay-Gut, 'Aesthetic and Decadent Poetry', in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. by Joseph Bristow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 228-254 (p. 245), *An Anthology*, ed. by Leighton and Reynolds, p. 487).

[560] Laird, *Women Coauthors*, p. 25.

[561] Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough*, p. 68, Appendix 3, p. 350. This poem is in all three editions of *Underneath the Bough*.

[562] *Ibid.*, p. 69, Appendix 3, p. 350.

[563] Laird, *Women Coauthors*, p. 25.

[564] Treby, *The Michael Field Catalogue*, p. 32. Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough*, p. 69, Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough* 3rd edn., pp. 49, 55.

[565] Cooper singles out 'A girl' as a poem she can 'say by heart', including the opening lines in her account of the performance (Cooper, *Works and Days XXVIII*, f. 90a. Michael Field, *Works and Days*, p. 323).

[566] Blain, 'Two-headed Nightingale', p. 244, London, p. 72.

[567] Qtd. in Treby, *Binary Star*, p. 95.

[568] 'When high Zeus', 'Cowslip-gathering'. Michael Field, *Sight and Song*, pp. 65, 67, Appendix 3, p. 349, 350.

[569] 'One might consider the relationship between co-authors and (co)subjects in accordance not exclusively with a Freudian/Lacanian model of gaps and hierarchical power-differentials between the desiring and the desired, but with a collaborative model of reciprocally operating power exchanges between two desiring subjects' (Laird, *Women Coauthors*, p. 6).

[570] Thain, 'Michael Field', pp. 109-118.

[571] Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough*, p. 71, Appendix 3, p. 350.

[572] *Ibid.*, Appendix 3, p. 351.

[573] Freud and Lacan place at the centre of their discussions about the establishment of the twin terms of presence and absence a ‘fort/da’ game of loss and re-possession that is very similar to the imaginary play of this poem.

[574] In ‘The Third Book of Songs’, only ‘Cowslip-gathering’ produces the lyric subject as ‘we’, though Cooper’s reversal of ‘My Love and I’ in her contextualisation piece for ‘It was deep April’ comes close to producing a double speaker.

[575] Vicinus, p. 352.

[576] Bradley, *Works and Days V*, f. 137a. ‘Acheron’, ‘Already to mine eyelids shore’ (Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough*, pp. 74, 67, Appendix 3, p. 352, 349). ‘Forsaking’ (Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough* 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., p. 52, Appendix 3, p. 357).

[577] See, for example, ‘A Spring morning by the sea’

Where my beloved still slumbered,  
Lying half poet and half child  
The twin divineness reconciled’

Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough*, p71, Appendix 3, p. 351.

Another poem, ‘A gray mob-cap’, refers back to Cooper’s illness at Dresden: ‘How dear the days when the child was nurst! / [. . .] “Thou must never grow lonesome or old”’ (Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough*, p. 78, Appendix 3, p. 354).

[578] Berenson tried to persuade, first Bradley, and after her death, Sturge Moore, to give him the manuscripts of *Works and Days*. ‘Bernhard has been writing mad letters, full of rage that Tommy is chosen literary executor [. . .], asking [. . .] for the part relating to him to be given up to him’ (Qtd. in Treby, *Binary Star*, p. 205). After Bradley’s death Berenson applied considerable pressure on Sturge Moore to ensure he was not referred to in the published edition. (See Vicinus, p. 327).

[579] Vicinus, pp. 328-332, 337-340, 348-351.

[580] *Ibid.*, (p. 347). Unfortunately Berenson’s response to the play was less than complimentary. ‘On Wednesday morning a letter from Mary [Costelloe] full of jeers. I reply: Dear Mary, And so your Attila time is spent in jeers and “uncontrollable laughter” [. . .] you jeer, in the journalistic manner. I must flee from journalism; I flee’ (Bradley, *Works and Days X*, f. 27a). The play was ridiculed more generally, with one reviewer exploiting the gap between the overt sensuality of the play and Bradley and Cooper’s ‘maiden-lady’ status: ‘This is an excursus against chastity, obviously written by the most harmless and well-behaved of ladies’. The review is quoted in *Works and Days* by Bradley (*Works and Days IX*, f. 21a).

[581] Unpublished poem, Cooper, *Works and Days VIII*, f. 81b (Qtd. in Vicinus, p. 345)

[582] Vicinus, p. 330. Both Bradley and Cooper create of Berenson a beautiful, gender-ambiguous love object. ‘He looks supremely beautiful. The English climate has brought back lambency to his skin, colour to his veins, sheen to his glance – fullness of the impression his face makes on one. His forehead distributes light over a surface modelled as though by a silversmith and yet damp as if with bloom – his eyebrows are ridges on the top of which the light is brooding and subtle as a sea-vine; it flickers from the profile of his nose – as if sentience had become a white fire; it blots his mouth in the same way as it splashes a laurel-leaf – just because his lips are rounded with the same energy as the leaf. His eyes change light into smile. Then for colour, the crisp knot of hair darkly auburn; the darkened blue of the eyes, the salient rose of the lips among the ambers of the beard! – the fearful entrapping mystic Jewish charm – a thing to be forbidden as a joy to poor honest Europeans – crossed by the insouciance and alertness of a Faun – what a danger Bernhard is to women and even men!’ (Bradley, copied out by Cooper, *Works and Days VII*, f. 95b).

[583] Letter written to Cooper in 1909, qtd. in Vicinus, (p. 344).

[584] Cooper, *Works and Days IX*, f. 55a. (Qtd. in Vicinus, p. 348).

[585] ‘I told Sidney that I had met my twin soul 3 years ago’ (Cooper, *Works and Days VI*, f. 67a). She continues, emphasising the inevitability of tragedy in the relationship – ‘but lovers should not be twins [. . .] they should be opposites, or woe to their happiness’. Strangely, the conversation is recorded twice: ‘Sidney asks me if I have ever met my twin-soul. I answer

yes – Three years ago. Twins are generally alike. Your lover-souls should not be twins – they should be opposites, or woe betide their happiness’ (Cooper, *Works and Days VI*, f. 67b).

[586] ‘The superstructures of desire are thus reduced to a basic life force [. . .]. By taking human love outside the context of courtship and marriage, as they naturally do [. . .] they strip it of all but its own inner rationale of ‘sense’ and ‘need’ (Leighton, *Writing Against the Heart*, p. 232). Treby, as always, finds the evidence (Treby, *A Shorter Sh?raz?d*, p. 56).

[587] Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough*, p. 88, Appendix 3, p. 356.

[588] *Ibid*, Appendix 3, p. 356-357.

[589] Treby relates the poem to the literary soir?e at Chandler Moulton’s where Bradley and Cooper probably first met Berenson (Treby, *A Shorter Sh?raz?d*, p. 51).

[590] Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough*, pp. 88-89, Appendix 3, p. 357.

[591] Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough*, pp. 88-89, Appendix 3, p. 357

[592] Vicinus, p. 334.

[593] Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough*, p. 89, Appendix 3, p. 357

[594] As we saw in Chapter 1, what Cooper desired from her relationship with Berenson was not consummation, but a chaste ‘marriage’ (Cooper, *Works and Days XXVII*, f. 99a. Qtd. in Treby, *Uncertain Rain*, p. 20). Vicinus quotes a journal entry confirming Cooper’s desire for Berenson as absence saturated with longing. ‘I am closer to him now I can never see him, & a joy with the flush of the rack in it takes the place of dull misery or utter night’ (Cooper, *Works and Days IX*, ff. 55b-56a. Qtd. in Vicinus, (p. 348)). In another journal entry, commenting on the experience of staying in Berenson’s villa while he is away, Cooper writes: ‘Our lives have passed into verse for 14 days – we have lived a poem we shall never live again. Imagine inhabiting Bacchus’ ivy-tent while he was not there – all the delicate poetry is in that, that he is not there [. . .]. The dew of absence – yes, rare, inciting natures can leave behind them what they cannot give when they are present – dew, a holy Spirit’ (Cooper, *Works and Days VIII*, f. 60a). As Vicinus suggests, the opening of this passage shows how intimately Cooper relates the experience of desire in absence to the production of aesthetic selves – ‘we have lived a poem’ (Vicinus, p. 344).

[595] Vicinus notes how after an evening with Berenson, Cooper asserts that ‘I slept as one does after a night at a Wagner Opera [. . .] as spent as if music or drama had sapped me’ (Cooper, *Works and Days VIII*, f. 82b. Qtd. in Vicinus, p. 346).

[596] Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough* 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., p. 81, Appendix 3, p. 358. The replacement probably reflects the deterioration of Bradley and Cooper’s relationship with Berenson.

[597] Bradley, *Works and Days VII*, f. 85b. Qtd. in Treby, *Music and Silence*, p. 99. The lengthy ‘material’ follows, in Cooper’s handwriting, including the elements of ignoble drama and debased repetition that we find in the poem – ‘I have laughed with the wildest laughter of farce [. . .]. We now and then looked at each other, but it had all been done better before’ (Cooper, *Works and Days VII*, ff. 88a-b). Bradley and Cooper were attending another of Berenson’s London lecture series.

[598] Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough* 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., p. 81, Appendix 3, p. 358.

[599] *Ibid*, Appendix 3, p. 358.

[600] Berenson evidently enjoyed this elevation, commenting, when the poem was re-published in *Wild Honey*, that the final two lines were ‘the only 2 lines of great poetry’ in the collection (*Works and Days VIII*, f. 89b, Treby, *Music and Silence*, p. 99).

[601] Oscar Wilde, ‘The Harlot’s House’, in *Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Isobel Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 539-540. Yeats, in his *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, was to draw



attention to the fact that despite their reputation for 'modern' cynicism, many poets of the 1890s – including Wilde – held onto the longing for lost certainties – 'there are "stars" in poem after poem of certain writers of the '90s as though to symbolize an aspiration to what is inviolate and fixed' (*Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, ed. by Yeats, p. xix).

[602] Shelley and Byron expressed admiration, while Wordsworth visited and wrote a poem dedicated to them (Castle, *The Literature of Lesbianism*, pp. 334-335). Wordsworth's poem is discussed in Susan S. Lanser, "'Put to the Blush": Romantic Irregularities and Sapphic Tropes', in *Historicising Romantic Sexuality*, ed. by Richard C. Sha, Praxis Series, (Romantic Circles, 2006), available from <http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/sexuality/lanser/lanser.html>. [accessed 01/06/08]

[603] 'Swinburne's steamy sensationalism in his lesbian poems seems oddly artificial'. 'Unlike Swinburne's swampy declarations of sadistic passion, the naturalness of Michael Field disarms censorship from the start' (Leighton, *Writing Against the Heart*, pp. 229, 230). 'In the novels of Alphonse Daudet, Theophile Gautier and Algernon Charles Swinburne, Sappho and Sapphic women were constructed as sadistic, predatory corruptors of innocent women. This emerged from male fantasies about masculine women with phallic sexualities' (White, "'Poets and Lovers Evermore"', p. 28). 'Had they [Bradley and Cooper] read the works of the nineteenth-century aesthete-decadents which purported to describe love between women, they would have thought those females as strange and terrifying as they were to their creators and heterosexual readers' (Faderman, p. 276).

[604] Castle, *The Literature of Lesbianism*, pp. 6, 26, 48.

[605] Bradley translated several of Baudelaire's poems (Treby, *Uncertain Rain*, p. 24, Treby, *Music and Silence*, pp. 134, 135). Swinburne, to whom they sent complimentary copies of their work, was their preferred candidate for poet laureate after the death of Tennyson. There is at least one reference in *Works and Days* to Swinburne's 'Anactoria' (Bradley *Works and Days V*, ff. 139b, 140b. Cooper, *Works and Days IX*, f. 30a). The limits of Bradley and Cooper's involvement with decadence can be seen in 1894, when they submitted some material to the newly launched *Yellow Book*, only to withdraw it on reading the first issue and seeing the promotional display in the window of the Bodley Head. Cooper's entry in *Works and Days* makes it clear that it is the sexual explicitness that they dislike: 'One felt as one does when now and then a wholly lost woman stands flaring [?] on the pavement with the ghastly laugh of the ribald crowd in the air round her. [. . .] Faugh! One must go to one's Wordsworth and Shelley to be fumigated' (Cooper, *Works and Days VII*, f. 38b).

[606] Cooper, *Works and Days XXI*, f. 69a. (Qtd. in Donoghue, p. 126). The poem Donoghue suggests Cooper is referring to is Charles Baudelaire, 'Femmes Damnées: Delphine et Hyppolyte', trans. by James McGowan, in *The Flowers of Evil*, ed. by Jonathan Culler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 238-244. Treby argues that the verses referred to are from a different poem of the same name, in which the 'sins' are those of pride and self-flagellation (Treby, *Uncertain Rain*, p. 24, Charles Baudelaire, 'Femmes Damnées', trans. by James McGowan, in *The Flowers of Evil*, ed. by Jonathan Culler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 244-246). However, the women of this second poem (translated by Bradley in 1901) are also generally read as 'lesbian'. The position of the poem in the collection (immediately following the first 'Femmes Damnées', which itself follows immediately after 'Lesbos'), tends to support this interpretation.

[607] The connection between this poem and the Bradley-Cooper relationship is rather more ambiguous than the poems I have previously discussed. It was never copied into *Perpetua*, and is never identified as a love poem from Bradley to Cooper. Its initial appearance in *Works and Days* is in Bradley's handwriting, but follows and draws on a prose passage written by Cooper, making this a more 'collaborative' product than the rest of the poems associated with the Bradley-Cooper relationship. 'The first bloom on our myrtles – a perfect little hemisphere of stamens, close, white, with an acid fragrance that stimulates sense. And the tiny curled petals, blotted with

crimson beneath, fall away before the expansive freedom of love' (Cooper, *Works and Days IV*, f. 61b). Treby tentatively attributes the poem to Bradley alone (Treby, *The Michael Field Catalogue*, p. 163).

[608] Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough*, p. 87, Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough* 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., p. 52, Appendix 3, p. 356

[609] *Ibid.*, Appendix 3, p. 356.

[610] In keeping with the limits of their enthusiasm for decadence and explicit sexual reference, Bradley and Cooper draw short of Baudelaire's descriptions of the 'avid bodies' of his Lesbian women who, in front of 'sterile mirrors', fondle the 'mellow fruit' of their breasts (Baudelaire, 'Lesbos' p. 235).

[611] It is not completely unique; 'Your Rose is Dead', a poem from 'The Fifth Book of Songs' in the 1898 edition hints at a decadent female homoeroticism of 'prodigious pleasure' and mutual decay.

Corrupt, grow old

Drop inwardly to ashes, smother  
Your burning spices, and entoil  
My senses till you sink a clod of fragrant soil!

Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough* 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., p. 85

[612] Sedgwick, pp. 22-27.

[613] See, for example Dellamora.

[614] Foucault, p. 43.

[615] *Ibid.*

[616] Castle, *The Literature of Lesbianism*, pp. 1, 26.

[617] Bradley's clearest statement of social elitism was in 1901: 'Growth of suburbs, growth of education among the poor, an unmitigated evil – extension of franchise and growth of free trade, unmitigated disasters – the growth of Trade Unions, the damnation of the future' (Qtd. in Michael Field, *Works and Days*, p. 237).

[618] Pater, 'Style', p. 18, Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist', p. 406, Symonds, *A Problem in Greek Ethics*, p. 1.

[619] Dowling, pp. 142-143.

[620] David J. Moriarty, "'Michael Field' (Edith Cooper and Katherine Bradley) and Their Male Critics', in *Nineteenth-Century Women Writers of the English-Speaking World*, ed. by Rhoda B. Nathan (Westwood, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp. 121-142 (p. 133).

[621] Michael Field, *Works and Days*, p. 6. Michael Field, *Long Ago*, p. xxxiii, Appendix 1, p. 284; Michael Field, *Sight and Song*, p. 25, Appendix 2, p. 317; Michael Field, *Underneath the Bough*, p. 75, Appendix 3, p. 354.

[622] Thain, 'Michael Field', p. 16.

[623] Michael Field, *Works and Days*, pp. 2-3.

[624] Terry Castle, 'Pipe Down Back There!' *London Review of Books*, 22, no. 24 (2000), 15-20.

[625] This word-processing software does not support diacritics for the Greek characters.

[626] This drawing is not available as a reproduction.

[627] In the third edition of *Underneath the Bough*, this poem appears in 'The Third Book of Songs'.