‘Magic Casements:’ Fantasy in Victorian Art

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Abstract

The contributions of nineteenth-century writers to the modern fantasy genre are well-established, but parallel developments in the visual arts are understudied. This interdisciplinary thesis introduces 'fantasy' as a descriptive term that can be applied to the history of Victorian art, enabling a synthetic understanding of fantasy as a multi-media genre.

Rather than identify works as fantasies exclusively on the basis of their content, fantasy is here defined as a *sensation* – the profound sense of wonder and yearning inspired by an imaginary otherworld – one that may be provoked by literature or by art. Fantasy, thus defined, is associated with certain kinds of stories and imagery, but arises equally from cultural context and the imaginative investment of its audience as from a work's content.

In the Victorian period, mediaeval romances, classical mythology, folklore, allegories, ghost stories and fairy tales all inspired paintings that can be considered as fantasy. Works of Victorian fantasy, in literature and the arts, reflect the most deeply felt desires, aspirations, and ideals of their time, and are part of the cultural reaction to the changes wrought by industrialism and urbanisation. By collectively analysing these works as fantasies, this thesis sheds light on hitherto-overlooked thematic continuities within nineteenth-century painting and literature.

The first chapter justifies the application of the term 'fantasy' to a subset of nineteenth-century artworks by drawing on nineteenth and twentieth-century literary criticism. The second chapter surveys techniques employed by artists to convincingly depict a fantastical subject, and the criteria by which their work was assessed. The final three chapters explore the different forms assumed by fantastic otherworlds in art: paintings inspired by Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, the legend of Galahad's quest for the Holy Grail, and Greek myths of nature.

Table of Contents

Abstract	**2**
Table of Contents	**3**
List of Illustrations	**4**
Acknowledgements	**11**
Declaration	**12**
Chapter One: The Fantasy Genre and the Indefinable	**13**
Chapter Two: Dreams, Visions and Reality	**47**
Chapter Three: Re-Imagining Allegory	**84**
Chapter Four: ‘Follow the Gleam:’ Heroic Idealism	**119**
Chapter Five: Nature Myths and the New Arcadia	**159**
Coda: Looking for Enchantment	**197**
Figures	**205**
Works Referenced	**252**

List of Illustrations

1. Edward Drummond Young, *'Masque of St George and the Dragon' Mr. Walter Crane, Mrs Walter Crane, Miss Cecile Walton, Mrs E.A. Walton*, 1908. Platinum/palladium print, dimensions unknown. Edinburgh, National Galleries of Scotland, Scottish National Portrait Gallery Collection.

2. James Thurber, *Look Out, Here They Come Again!*, 1935. Ink on paper, dimensions unknown. Reproduced in *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism,* ed. Alfred H. Barr, Jr. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1936), 181, plate 581.

3. Thomas Cole, *The Titan's Goblet*, 1833. Oil on canvas, 49.2 x 41cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

4. Herbert Draper, *Calypso's Isle,* 1897. Oil on canvas, 84 x 147.3 cm. Manchester Art Gallery.

5. John Anster Fitzgerald, *The Dream After The Masked Ball; Such Stuff As Dreams Are Made Of,* 1858. Oil on canvas, 35.5 by 44.5 cm. Private collection. Image via Sotheby's.

6. Walter Crane, *Such Sights as Youthful Poets Dream*, 1869. Watercolour, dimensions unknown. Private collection.

7. John Everett Millais, *Speak! Speak!*, 1895. Oil on canvas, 170.2 x 210.8 cm. London, Tate Britain.

8. Frederick James Shields, *Hamlet and the Ghost*, 1901. Oil on canvas, 60 x 41 cm. Manchester Art Gallery.

9. Frederick James Shields, *William Blake's Room*, 1882-1912. Oil on canvas, 30.5 x 39.4 cm. Manchester Art Gallery.

10. Robert William Buss, *Dickens's Dream*, 1875 (unfinished). Oil on canvas, 90.5 x 111.5 cm. London, Charles Dickens Museum.

11. Daniel Maclise, *A Scene from 'Undine,'* 1843. Oil on canvas, 44.5 x 61 cm. Royal Collection Trust.

12. Joseph Wright of Derby, *William and Margaret*, 1785. Oil on canvas, 121.9 x 139.7 cm. Newhaven, Yale Center for British Art.

13. Walter Crane, *The Enchanted Boat*, 1868. Watercolour, 25 x 53.3 cm. Private collection. Image via Christies.

14. Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Jason*, 1806-1807. Etching and mezzotint, 18.5 x 25.4 cm. London, Tate Britain.

15. Frank Bernard Dicksee, *A Reverie*, 1895. Oil on canvas, 106 x 138.5 cm. Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery.

16. Samuel Palmer, *The Towered City*, undated. Watercolour, 193 x 243.8 cm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

17. Walter Crane, *Willows whiten, aspens quiver*, 1859-1859. Watercolour, 18.4 x 14.2 cm. Houghton Library, Harvard. Image via The Victorian Web.

18. John Roddam Spencer Stanhope, *Love and the Maiden*, 1877. Oil and gold leaf on canvas, 141 x 205.7 cm. San Francisco, Legion of Honor.

19. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Mirror of Venus*, 1877. Oil on canvas, 120 x 200 cm. Lisbon, Calouste Gulbenkian Museum.

20. William Shackleton, *The Golden Hour*, 1893. Oil on board, 35 x 31.8 cm. London, Cecil French Bequest.

21. Gustave Doré, *Fairy Land*, 1881. Watercolour, 64.8 × 89 cm. Art Institute of Chicago.

22. Frederick Sandys, *Gentle Spring*, 1865. Oil on canvas, 121 x 64 cm. Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, Oxford.

22. Walter Crane, *Queen Summer; or, The Tourney of the Lily and the Rose* (London: Cassell and Co., 1891), 2.

23. Frederick Pickersgill, *Britomart Unarming*, 1855. Oil on canvas, 127 x 106.7 cm. Private Collection. Image via Christies.

24. Samuel Palmer, *Sir Guyon Tempted by Phaedria to Land Upon the Enchanted Islands*, 1849. Watercolour and body colour, 53.7 × 75.1 cm. Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum.

25. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Masque of Cupid*. Watercolour, 35.3 x 40.6 cm. Private collection. Image via Christies.

26. John Dickson Batten, *The Garden of Adonis*, 1887. Oil on canvas, 104.14 × 127 cm. Pittsburgh, Carnegie Museum of Art.

27. William Etty, *Britomart Redeems Faire Amoret*, 1833. Oil on canvas, 90.8 × 66 cm. London, Tate Britain.

28. G.F. Watts, *The Red Cross Knight Overcoming the Dragon*, 1853. Fresco, 246.4 x 175.3 cm. London, Palace of Westminster, Parliamentary Art Collection.

29. Briton Rivière, *Una and the Lion,* 1880. Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. Private collection.

30. Charles Eastlake, *The Cave of Despair*, 1830. Oil on canvas, 79.4 x W 51.5 cm. London, Sir John Soane’s Museum.

31. William Dyce, *Religion: the Vision of Sir Galahad and His Company*, 1851. Fresco, dimensions unknown. London, Palace of Westminster, Parliamentary Art Collection.

32. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *How Sir Galahad, Sir Bors and Sir Percival Were Fed with the Sanct Grael; but Sir Percival's Sister Died by the Way,* 1864. Watercolour and gouache, 29.2 x 41.9 cm. London, Tate Britain.

33. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Damsel of Sanct Grael,* 1857. Watercolour, 34.9 x 12.7 cm. London, Tate Britain.

34. Joseph Noel Paton, *Sir Galahad and the Angel,* 1845-1860. Oil on panel, 25 x 18 cm. Private collection.

35. Joseph Noel Paton, *Sir Galahad and his Angel*, 1884. Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. Private collection.

36. Joseph Noel Paton, *Beati Mundo Corde*, 1890. Oil on canvas, 177.8 x 245.1 cm. Dundee Art Galleries and Museums Collection.

37. J. N. Paton, *Oskold and the Elle Maids*, 1874-1874. Oil on canvas, 109 x 158 cm. Paisley Museum and Art Galleries.

38. J. N. Paton, *Sir Galahad's Vision*, 1879. Oil on canvas, 44.2 x 30.2 cm. Private collection.

39. Sir John Gilbert, *Sir Galahad,* undated. Oil on canvas, 71 x 91 cm. Private collection.

40. Edward Burne-Jones, *Sir Galahad*, 1857-1858. Ink on vellum, 15.6 x 19.2 cm. Boston, Fogg Museum, Harvard Art Museums.

41. Edward Burne-Jones, *Lancelot at the Chapel of the Holy Grail*, 1896. Oil on canvas, 138.5 x 169.8 cm. Southampton City Art Gallery.

42. Arthur Hughes, *Sir Galahad, the Quest for the Holy Grail*, 1870. Oil on canvas, 113 x 167.6 cm. Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery.

43. George Frederic Watts, *Sir Galahad,* 1862. Oil on canvas, 191.8 x 107 cm. Boston, Fogg Museum, Harvard Art Museums.

44. George Frederic Watts, *Aspiration*, 1866. Oil on canvas, 94 x 68 cm. Birmingham Museums Trust.

45. George Frederic Watts, *Una and the Red Cross Knight*, 1869. Oil on canvas, 134.6 x 152.4 cm. Perth, Art Gallery of Western Australia.

46. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Knight's Farewell*, 1858. Ink on vellum, 17.6 x 24.2 cm. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum.

47. Maud Tindal Atkinson, *Sir Galahad,* 1906-1937. Pencil and watercolour, gilding, 72.4 x 52.8 cm. Private collection.

48. Herbert Gustave Schmalz, *Sir Galahad: 'But she the wan sweet maiden,' etc., Tennyson*, 1881. Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. Private collection.

49. George Frederic Watts, *Sir Perceval*. Oil on panel, 55 x 24.5 cm. Stalybridge, Tameside Museums and Galleries Service: The Astley Cheetham Art Collection.

50. Julia Margaret Cameron, *Sir Galahad and the Pale Nun*, 1874. Albumen silver print, 33.2 x 27.5 cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

51. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Merciful Knight*, 1863. Watercolour, 101.4 x 58.6 cm. Birmingham Art Museum.

52. Edwin Austin Abbey, *III. The Arthurian Round Table and the fable of the Seat Perilous*, 1895. Oil on canvas, 96 x 289 cm. Boston, Boston Public Library, Copley Square.

53. William Blake Richmond, *Venus and Anchises.* Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, 1899. Oil on canvas, 147.2 x 297.2 cm. Image via the Google Arts and Culture Project and Wikimedia Commons.

54. Briton Rivière, *Apollo*, 1874. Oil on canvas, 113 x 184 cm. Bury Art Museum.

55. Briton Rivière, *An Old-World Wanderer*, 1887. Oil on canvas, 108 x 172.7 cm. Nottingham City Museums and Galleries.

56. Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *A Reading from Homer*, 1885. Oil on canvas, 183.5 x 91.7 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art.

57. Frederic Leighton, *Daedalus and Icarus*, 1869. Oil on canvas, 138.2 x 106.2 cm. Oxfordshire, Faringdon Collection Trust, Buscot Park.

58. Frederic Leighton, *Perseus and Andromeda*, 1891. Oil on canvas, 1292 x 2350 cm. Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery.

59. Frederic Leighton, *The Garden of the Hesperides*, 1892. Oil on canvas, 169.5 x 169.5 cm. Liverpool, Lady Lever Art Gallery.

60. John Reinhard Weguelin, *Bacchus and the Choir of Nymphs*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 124.5 x 275.6 cm. Private collection. Image via Christie's.

61. Edward Burne-Jones, *Pan and Psyche*, 1872-1874. Oil on canvas, 65 x 53 cm. Boston, Fogg Museum, Harvard Art Museums.

62. Frederic Leighton, *Crenaia, Nymph of the Dargle*, 1880. Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. Juan Antonio Pérez Simón Collection. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

63. Charles Sims, *The Little Faun*, 1908. Oil on canvas, 101 x 126 cm. Truro, Royal Cornwall Museum.

64. Joseph Noel Paton, *A Dream of Latmos*, 1879. Oil on panel, 62 x 62 cm. Private collection. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

65. Edward Matthew Hale, *Mermaids' Rock*, 1894. Oil on canvas, 121.9 x 198.1 cm. Leeds Art Gallery.

66. Richard Doyle, *The Dragon of Wantley*, undated. Watercolour, 24.9 x 25.2 cm. London, British Museum.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

Chapter One: The Fantasy Genre and the Indefinable

The collection of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery includes a remarkable photograph of an heroic combat (Fig. 1). A knight in armour reels back from the face of a ferocious dragon. Two women look on while the third, chained to a post, has closed her eyes. The scene is, of course, a posed tableau. The knight is no knight, but the painter and illustrator Walter Crane, the women are no princesses, but Crane's wife, Mary, and two fellow artists, Helen and Cecile Walton. The dragon itself is a creature of papier-mâché and fabric scraps. This somewhat comical photograph is a significant artefact in the history of art. It dates from the 1908 Scottish National Pageant, but the fantastical play-acting that it depicts, and its realistic styling, both spring from nineteenth-century precedents. The photograph's existence is the result of a century of artistic engagement with magical, mythical, and legendary subjects. During the nineteenth century, artists depicted innumerable knights and dragons, princesses and enchantresses, as well as mermaids, nymphs, fauns, fairies, and ghosts. These artworks, along with the works of literature, scholarship, and drama that inspired and were inspired by them, comprise a category of Victorian material culture which this thesis identifies as *fantasy*.

The word 'fantasy' has always denoted the activities of the imagination, but which subset of these activities the word encompasses has varied over time. From the eighteenth century through the end of the nineteenth, personal whims and minor idiosyncrasies as well as original ideas were called fantasies. The word also carried pejorative connotations, being associated with idle daydreaming and delusions. In current usage, fantasy denotes that part of the imagination that roves outside of the mundane and familiar, to contemplate impossible things. Today, fantasy also functions as the name of a genre of books, film, or television. Fantasy stories are generally identified by their use of supernatural narrative elements, or their setting – an alternative world where the impossible is not only possible but normal. The genre is associated with magic, folklore, and romance, and is stereotypically marked by pre-industrial settings, heroic protagonists, and supernatural threats which drive a morally unambiguous adventure plot.

The commercial popularity of fantasy media today lends interest to fantasy's origins and past forms. Although fantasy literature, film and television have become subjects for study, many foundational works in the field await scholarly attention, especially those that lie outside of the anglophone canon. In addition, the history of fantasy in theatre, dance, illustration, and the fine arts, remains under-researched. Despite the growing attention to

Victorian fantasy literature in recent decades, British visual fantasy in the nineteenth century is still neglected. The artworks produced by nineteenth-century artists are an overlooked source of insight into the fantastic imagination of the period. It is this era, and this body of work, that the following chapters will investigate.

The range of Victorian visual fantasy is enormous. It includes book illustrations and oil paintings, sculptures in marble and bronze, ephemeral materials such as stage sets and costumes, photographic tableaux such as Crane's dragon battle, stained glass windows, painted cabinets and fanciful ceramics. Out of this vast array, this study will cover only works on paper or canvas, intended primarily for public exhibition and private display. The reasons for this limitation are both practical and methodological. A comprehensive study of Victorian visual fantasy in every medium, even if it were possible, would fill many volumes. Brevity demands the exclusion of most of this material. Narrowing this thesis's scope to two-dimensional artworks allows me to draw more useful, because more specific, conclusions about the qualities of the artworks in question. Two-dimensional fine artworks form a single category, united by shared limitations and potentialities. These images – drawings, prints, oil paintings, or watercolours – were intended to be viewed in isolation, without immediate textual or narrative context beyond their titles or captions. Although their audiences often brought their own knowledge of their subjects' origins to each artwork, functionally, these images were made as independent works, free interpretations of their source material, constrained only by the limitations of two-dimensional pictorial language.

Even within the subcategory of fine art paintings, the range of existing and recorded works is too vast to engage with as a whole. Instead, this thesis explores Victorian fantasy art through a series of studies of selected subject-types. The intention of this thesis is not to provide a true tour of the whole edifice of Victorian fantasy, but to light up a few windows, explore one or two wings, and entice future explorers into its halls to see more.

Does Art History Need Fantasy?

Hitherto, studies of fantasy in art have been rare. A few books and exhibitions have examined artworks dealing with supernatural fictions, fairy tales, or modern depictions of ancient myths, but they have not delved into what characterises the fantasy genre as a whole. Existing research works generally divide fantasy art into categories based upon the origins of their fantastic elements: representations of Greek mythology, of Northern folklore, or of fairy scenes, Shakespearean or otherwise. Alternately, these works are identified as belonging to

one or another art movement, such as Aestheticism or Pre-Raphaelitism. These categorizations have utility, but the process of dividing artworks along stylistic or thematic lines obscures commonalities that bridge both artistic movements and categories of subject matter. Considering these works collectively as fantasies, whose primary trait is the common motivating force of the imagination, provides an alternative approach to the work of late-Victorian artists. The 'fantasy' label opens up productive comparisons between works that would otherwise never be brought into conversation with one another and brings attention to otherwise overlooked works. Often, these neglected paintings proffer fascinating puzzles of their own, or reveal aspects of Victorian culture that works traditionally prized by art historians do not.

'Fantasy' has hitherto often been applied to art as a label more evocative than explanatory, useful precisely because of its imprecision. Throughout the twentieth century, 'fantasy' has functioned in art discourse as a temporary label for groupings of material which are in some undefined way unrealistic and could not be brought together under any more precise label. The earliest modern example of this dates to 1936, in the Museum of Modern Art in New York City's exhibition *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism.* The show brought together an eclectic selection of historic and contemporary art, mingled with bizarre drawings by children, stills from Walt Disney's animation studios, and work by *New Yorker* cartoonist James Thurber (Fig. 2). Rather than articulate what concepts united this diverse array, the curators expressed confidence that their selections from 'the fantastic and the marvellous in European and American art of the past five centuries,' were 'self-explanatory.'[1] More recently, there have been many exhibitions which bring together the works of imaginative nineteenth-century British artists, without identifying them as fantasies. Notable examples include the Delaware Art Museum's *The English Dreamers: A Collection of Pre-Raphaelite Painting* (1975), the Barbican's *The Last Romantics: The Romantic Tradition in British Art* (1989), and Tate Britain's *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones & Watts: Symbolism in Britain: 1860-1910* (1997).[2] These exhibitions reached for different words to describe the artists they

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[1] Alfred H. Barr, Jr., editor, *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1936), 7.

[2] Rowland Elzea and David Larkin, *The English Dreamers: A Collection of Pre-Raphaelite Paintings* (London: Pan Books, 1975); John Christian, editor, *The Last Romantics: The Romantic Tradition in British Art: Burne-Jones to Stanley Spencer* (London: Lund Humphries in association with Barbican Art Gallery, 1989); Andrew Wilton and Robert Upstone, editors, *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones & Watts: Symbolism in Britain 1860-1910* (London: Tate Gallery, 1997).

showcased – Symbolists, Romantics, Dreamers – but none of their catalogues had the necessary scope to delve into the characteristics that linked their selected artworks.

Since the 1930s, many writers on the fantastic in art have shared MoMA's optimism that readers would understand tacitly what they intended by the words fantasy and fantastic. Typical examples of this variety of fantasy book include Howard Daniel's *Devils, Monsters, and Nightmares: An Introduction to The Grotesque and Fantastic in Art* (1964), Brigid Peppin's *Fantasy: Book Illustration 1860-1920* (1975), and David Larkin's *Fantastic Art* (Ballantine, 1973).[3] Neither Daniel nor Peppin proffer their own definitions of fantasy art, while Larkin begins by asserting the fundamental indefinability of fantasy, and ends with the supremely general statement, 'Fantasy is, well, art.'[4]

Regrettably, Stephen Prickett's *Victorian Fantasy* (1979, revised 2005), which remains the most significant study of fantasy in Victorian culture, does not give much room to the visual arts. Nor does he explain what the word fantasy *meant* in the period under discussion, despite his assertion that by the mid nineteenth century, 'fantasy' was 'a recognized genre' of literature.[5] Instead, he leaves the reader to deduce the bounds of the genre from the contents of his book. The examples Prickett chose to represent various facets of fantasy include Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Charles Dickens's ghost stories, Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll's nonsense tales, Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies* (1862), George MacDonald's *Phantastes* (1858), and E. Nesbit's *The Enchanted Castle* (1907). Illustrations of these and other books make up much of the visual side of Prickett's study. Prickett's work is typical of most modern fantasy studies, which make a nodding acknowledgement of the role of the visual arts in fantasy, while keeping literature at the centre of their analysis. Roger Schlobin's *The Aesthetics of Fantasy Literature and Art* (1982) and Kath Filmer's *The Victorian Fantasists* (1991) follow a similar course in their collected essays.

Some sub-categories of art which might be subsumed under the fantasy umbrella are more well-studied than the genre as a whole. For example, a series of exhibitions of Victorian fairy painting at the Maas Gallery and the Royal Academy in the 1970s and 1990s precipitated further study of this peculiar sub-genre of the nineteenth-century imagination,

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[3] Howard Daniel, *Devils, Monsters, and Nightmares: An Introduction to the Grotesque and Fantastic in Art* (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1964); Brigid Peppin, *Fantasy: Book Illustration 1860-1920* (London: Studio Vista, 1975; David Larkin, *Fantastic Art* (London: Pan/Ballantine, 1973).

[4] Larkin, *Fantastic Art*, unpaginated.

[5] Stephen Prickett, *Victorian Fantasy* 2nd ed. (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2005), 43.

elevating it from obscurity after decades of dismissal as kitsch. Carole Silver's *Strange and Secret Peoples: Fairies and Victorian Consciousness* (1999) and Nicola Bown's *Fairies in 19th Century Art and Literature* (2001), have both helped to restore fairy painting to its original prominence in the history of mainstream Victorian art.[6] The Arthurian revival has benefited from thorough research and thoughtful analysis by Christine Poulson, Roger Simpson, Alan and Barbara Lupack, Debra N. Mancoff, and Marc Girouard.[7] The forms of the occult which captivated the Romantics were featured in Tate Britain's exhibition *Gothic Nightmares: Fuseli, Blake and the Romantic Imagination* (2006).[8] Classical mythology in nineteenth-century art has been well treated in studies such as Simon Goldhill's *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity*, J.B. Bullen's *The Sun is God: Painting, Literature, and Mythology in the Nineteenth Century,* and Christopher Wood's *Olympian Dreamers: Victorian Classical Painters, 1860-1914*.[9]

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[6] Carole Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples: Fairies and Victorian Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Nicola Bown, *Fairies in Nineteenth Century Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[7] Christine Poulson is the author of *The Quest for the Grail: Arthurian Legend in British Art, 1840-1920* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), as well as two extensive surveys of Arthurian art, 'Arthurian Legend in Fine and Applied Art of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: A Catalogue of Artists,' in *Arthurian Literature IX,* ed. Richard Barber, 81-142 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1989) and 'Arthurian Legend in Fine and Applied Art of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: A Subject Index,' in *Arthurian Literature X,* ed. Richard Barber, 111-134 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990). Roger Simpson contributed an addition to these art surveys, 'Update: Arthurian Legend in Fine and Applied Art of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,' in *Arthurian Literature XI,* ed. Richard Barber, 81-96 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992), and is the author of numerous articles and reviews on Arthurian visual art, most recently 'George Pinwell's "The Lady of Shalott,"' *Arthuriana* 26, no. 2 (2016): 40–53. Alan Lupack is the author of many books and articles on Arthurian topics, most notably *The Oxford Guide to Arthurian Literature and Legend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). He is the co-author, with his wife, Barbara Lupack, of several additional Arthurian texts, including *Illustrating Camelot* (Martlesham, Suffolk: 2008). The Lupacks are also the co-founders and editors of 'The Camelot Project,' a digital archive of Arthurian texts and images sponsored by the University of Rochester. Debra Mancoff is the author of *The Return of King Arthur: The Legend through Victorian Eyes* (London: Pavilion, 1995), and *The Arthurian Revival in Victorian Art* (New York: Garland, 1990). She was co-editor, with Norris J. Lacy and Geoffrey Ashe, of the second edition of *The Arthurian Handbook* (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 1997). Marc Girouard was primarily an architectural historian, but was also the author of a seminal text on Victorian Arthurianism, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1981).

[8] Martin Myrone, Christopher Frayling, and Marina Warner, *Gothic Nightmares: Fuseli, Blake and the Romantic Imagination* (Tate Publishing, London, 2006).

[9] Simon Goldhill, *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); J. B. Bullen, Editor, *The Sun is God: Painting, Literature, and Mythology in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Christopher Wood, *Olympian Dreamers: Victorian Classical Painters, 1860-1914* (London: Constable, 1983).

The ubiquity of fantasy subjects within nineteenth-century art has sparked inquiry among art historians into whether a term to describe these peculiar and distinctive images exists. In 1998, in his review of two exhibitions, the Royal Academy's *Victorian Fairy Painting* and Tate Britain's *Symbolism in Britain: 1860-1910*, the art historian William Vaughan expressed reservations about the way the artworks were presented, concluding that 'the time is ripe to reconsider Victorian painters of fantasy and the ideal. But I'm still not sure that "symbolist" is the right word to describe their achievement.'[10] The word Vaughan himself used, 'fantasy,' may be a more appropriate term for describing the imaginative quality which marks such a wide swath of British nineteenth-century painting.

That the problem of Victorian fantasy has not enjoyed more attention is surprising, the more so as the absence of an art-historical perspective on the genre is palpable within the field of fantasy studies. In 2011, Brian Attebury, editor of the *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, recognized this as an issue for the field, and issued a challenge to the journal's contributors to cover fantasy in other media.[11] Despite this, no essays have since been published in the *Journal* on fantasy in any medium other than film or literature.

What *is* fantasy art?

It would be helpful to begin by offering some preliminary definitions of fantasy and the fantastic. Unfortunately, even within the better-developed field of literary studies, the fantasy genre has yet to acquire a standard definition, meaning that any definitions offered here will inevitably be contradicted elsewhere. The field of fantasy studies is fractured and contentious. In 1978, science-fiction historian S. C. Fredericks noted the chaotic proliferation of competing fantasy theories, a situation that has only intensified since. Fredericks is undoubtedly correct in his observation that, so long as fantasy and fantastic remain terms in popular culture as well as in academic language, there will always be some degree of inconsistency in their use.[12] Perfect consistency in the demarcation of generic boundaries may not be a reasonable goal for any field of study. This is particularly true for fantasy, which is capable of nigh-infinite variation in its story-worlds. In lieu of strict definitive

[10] William Vaughan, 'Dreams and Symbols. London,' *The Burlington Magazine* 140, no. 1138 (1998): 52.
[11] Brian Attebury, 'Introduction: The Fantastic in (some of) the Arts,' *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 22, no. 1 (2011): 1.
[12] S. C. Fredericks, 'Problems of Fantasy,' *Science Fiction Studies* 5, no. 1 (1978): 33-35.

criteria, a more flexible understanding of fantasy, applicable to a range of media, may be helpful to discussion of fantasy's role as a mass cultural phenomenon, and not only as a literary form.

The most popular definitions of the fantasy genre, whether stated in the literature or implicit in the organisation of bookstores, are all based on the *contents* of the work. Wizards, dragons, fairies, werewolves, vampires, ghosts, mermaids, and goblins are widely recognized fantasy creatures, and their presence or absence in a story determines whether a book belongs on the fantasy shelf. The popular view and common commercial presentation of fantasy as a genre of adventure literature marked by magical or otherworldly content was established by Lin Carter, in *Imaginary Worlds: The Art of Fantasy* (1973), the self-proclaimed first 'book on fantasy.'[13] Carter defines fantasy loosely as 'any kind of fiction that is fantastic, that is, fiction that is not realistic,' tracing its origins back to 'the literature of epic, saga and myth,' and more narrowly in in modern literature, as fiction set in an immersive alternate world with strong magical elements.[14]

Carter's vision of fantasy had a considerable impact on the subsequent development of fantasy studies, thanks to his role in orchestrating the Ballantine Adult Fantasy Series, a late-twentieth-century publishing initiative which revived many works now considered classics of the genre, such as Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1532), William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786), George MacDonald's *Phantastes* (1858), and William Morris's *The Well at the World's End* (1896). An indirect consequence of Ballantine's publishing scheme was the popular acceptance not only of Carter's magical content-based definition of the genre, but also the retroactive absorption of the series' historic texts into the modern fantasy canon. Fantasy was thus re-conceived, not as a genre which had gradually emerged over time, but 'as a sort of timeless Platonic Form, involving magic and invented pre-industrial worlds,' which had manifested itself throughout the history of English literature.[15]

Since the 1960s, a major branch of critical engagement with fantasy has developed around the Ballantine canon and related works. Ursula le Guin's essay *From Elfland to Poughkeepsie* (1973), Colin Manlove's *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies* (1975), Stephen Prickett's *Victorian Fantasy* (1979, revised 2005), Farah Mendlesohn's *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008), and the contributors to Roger Schlobin's *The Aesthetics of Fantasy Literature and Art*

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[13] Carter, *Imaginary Worlds*: *The Art of Fantasy* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973), 3.
[14] Carter, *Imaginary Worlds*, 5.
[15] Jamie Williamson, *The Evolution of Modern Fantasy from Antiquarianism to the Ballantine Adult Fantasy Series* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), ix.

(1982) and Kath Filmer's *The Victorian Fantasists* (1991), all reflect a Carter-like definition of fantasy in their selection of texts, their emphasis on isolatable magical elements within those works, and their conception of fantasy as a timeless, consistent genre.[16] A purely content-based definition oversimplifies our evaluation of the fantasy genre.

Historically, fantasy, fantastic, or fantastical, have been used to denote *aesthetic* characteristics as well as the content of literary and artistic works. Grotesque, arabesque, bizarre, surreal, and absurd art styles, as well as pseudo-realistic depictions of otherworldly beings and places of enchantment, were all equally likely to be described as 'fantastic' in the nineteenth century. Henceforward, I will use 'fantasy' as both a noun and an adjective, as a name for the genre, for the body of works which fall within its cloudy borders, and 'fantastical' to indicate a relationship, direct or indirect, to the genre – I will speak of fantasy paintings, of fantasy artists, fantastical subjects, and in the following chapter I will try to elucidate what a 'fantasy style' could look like in the nineteenth century.

I suggest that 'fantasticism' or 'the fantastic' can describe the peculiar quality which marks the products of the fantastic imagination, regardless of their content or style. Content *is* key to understanding what makes a fantasy, but it is far from the whole picture. Prioritizing content in analysis risks excluding many works from discussion based on arbitrary limits (such as those invoked in debates over the difference between fantasy and science fiction). Thinking of fantasy only in terms of its content discourages consideration of historical context, intermedial phenomena, and, above all, reception. Focusing too heavily on *what* fantasy is distracts us from asking *why.*

There are precedents for a more textured approach to fantasy, among them le Guin's *From Elfland to Poughkeepsie*, which dwells, not on the content of fantasy stories, but on the the distinctive quality of their language, and how reading them affects the reader. 'What is wanted in fantasy is *distancing from the ordinary,*' she states. 'The point about Elfland is that you are not at home there. It's not Poughkeepsie. It's different.'[17] Some years later, George Landow's 'And the World Became Strange: Realms of Literary Fantasy,' translated Le

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[16] Roger C. Schlobin, editor, *The Aesthetics of Fantasy Literature and Art* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame and Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press Ltd., 1982); Kath Filmer, editor, *The Victorian Fantasists: Essays on Culture, Society and Belief in the Mythopoeic Fiction of the Victorian Age* (New York: MacMillan Press List, 1991); Ursula Le Guin, *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction* (New York: Ultramarine Publishing, 1979); Colin Manlove, *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975); Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2008).
[17] Le Guin, Language of the *Night*, 84.

Guin's 'distance from the ordinary' from literary to visual terms. Landow suggests that fantastic art is defined by its capacity 'to stimulate in the reader that sense of wonder at encountering something delightfully or fearfully strange,' a sensation that may be conveyed by fantastical content or encoded in a bizarre artistic style.[18]

Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic* (1973) appropriates the term 'the fantastic' for a new, and very narrow, application which has little to do with fantasy as it is usually understood but does emphasise its reception. Todorov describes the fantastic as 'that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event.'[19] 'Fantastic' works discompose their readers by making them uncertain about what is and is not real within the world of the story. In Todorov's system, if the story confirms the internal reality of the supernatural element, the equivocation ends, and the fantastic is converted into the 'marvellous.' A rational explanation, on the other hand, reduces the fantastic to the merely 'uncanny.'[20] Colin Manlove has pointed out that Todorov's 'marvellous' actually represents far better what most writers mean by the term fantastic, observing that 'while Todorov's definition may be useful in isolating a class of literature, it has very little value in describing fantasy as we know it.'[21] However, Todorov's book, like le Guin and Landow's essays, sets a useful precedent, by defining a genre not only by its contents, but by the *sensations* it produces in readers.

The *experience* of a fantasy transcends the work which produces it. This experience, whether it is called wonder, escape, renewal, or joy, lies at the heart of the fantasy genre's power. What might be called a sensational definition of fantasy, a definition based as much on the effect of a work as on the contents, could help extend the study of the genre from its literary manifestations to other forms. Tentatively, I offer this 'sensational' definition of fantasy – *fantasy inspires its audience with wonder through the evocation of the imaginary and the extramundane.* Fantasy, in art or in fiction, intrudes upon reality as we know it, to expand our experience beyond the limits of the real. I base my sensational definition of fantasy on ideas first put forward in the nineteenth century, which were more fully articulated by early twentieth-century writers on the genre. These writers' ideas coalesced around an

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[18] George Landow, 'And the World Became Strange: Realms of Literary Fantasy,' *The Georgia Review* 33, no. 1 (1979): 10.
[19] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 25.
[20] Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 25.
[21] Colin Manlove, 'On the Nature of Fantasy,' in Schlobin, *Aesthetics of Fantasy*, 28.

understanding of fantasy stories and art as catalysts for an otherwise inaccessible way of being – an emotional, intellectual, imaginative experience that arose from specific fantastical works and was irreducible to a mere matter of content and technique.

A Useful Anachronism

The paintings that this thesis identifies as fantasies would most likely not have been labelled as such by their creators. However, the notion of a collective genre of imaginary subjects was already extant in the eighteenth century and gained in coherence and popularity across the Victorian period. As in twentieth-century fantasy studies, nineteenth-century writers did not develop a consistent definition of the genre, and they referred to fantastical subjects by many names. Fantasy itself was perhaps the *least* popular of the many names given to the kinds of art with which this thesis is concerned. My choice of fantasy as a descriptor is intentionally anachronistic, reflecting my retrospective understanding of the artform then in development. Artists of the period did not, of course, see themselves as progenitors of an emergent genre, but neither were they ignorant of their position as contributors to an evolving school of art.

Thus used, 'fantasy' is comparable to 'Romanticism,' a term that denotes not only an art movement from the turn of the nineteenth century, but also an attitude that transcends its historical moment. It is standard practice to refer to certain early nineteenth-century artists as Romantics, despite their never self-identifying as such, or even explicitly rejecting affiliation with the movement, and it is even possible to speak of Romantics *avant la lettre*, or to identify a Romantic spirit in the work of artists and writers working long after the Romantic Period had come to a close.[22] The breadth of possible applications of the term Romanticism enriches, rather than dilutes, its utility, for every additional example that may be brought into association with the word offers another window into its nature. So too with 'fantasy.'

There is a Victorian precedent for an experiential definition of an art form in Edgar Allan Poe's essay 'The Philosophy of Composition,' in which he defined beauty as 'not a quality, as is supposed, but an effect – ... that intense and pure elevation of soul – not of intellect, or of heart – upon which I have commented, and which is experienced in consequence of contemplating the "beautiful."'[23] Poe's possibly slightly tongue-in-cheek

[22] William Vaughan, *Romantic Art*, reprint (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995 (1978)), 10.
[23] Edgar Allan Poe, *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, vol. 5., ed. Richard Henry Stoddard (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1882), 162.

essay continues by explaining that, because poems are meant to be beautiful, because great beauty 'invariably excites the sensitive soul to tears' and because no other subject combines beauty and sadness more effectively, 'the death … of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world.'[24] Poe did not mean by this that poetry should be identified exclusively with works which referenced the demise of attractive ladies, or for beauty itself to be identified with the beautiful corpse. Just so, fantasy cannot be productively identified *exclusively* with its content, but is also associated with the feeling which that content provokes. The feeling generated by fantasy is intimately associated with and dependent upon the encounter with marvellous content, but it is more than the sum of all the otherworldly elements of a fantasy work.

What is this feeling that fantasy provokes? Is it unique to works that could also be identified as fantasies by other criteria? How, and why, do fantasies create their effect? No final answer can be offered here to questions which lie at the heart of this study. However, I will begin to explore these questions here in the work of a few key contributors to the conversation, whose ideas helped to shape the fantasy genre.

Modern histories of fantasy literature tend to cite Joseph Addison's 1712 essay 'The Pleasures of the Imagination,' as the original work of modern fantasy analysis.[25] Addison's essay describes what he calls, in a paraphrase of Dryden, '"the fairy way of writing,"' in which 'the poet quite loses sight of nature and entertains his reader's imagination with the characters and actions of such persons as have many of them no existence but what he bestows on them. Such are Fairies, Witches, Magicians, Demons, and departed Spirits.'[26] Addison's essay highlights issues which would recur repeatedly in essays on imaginative literature in subsequent centuries: that unimaginative readers, '[m]en of cold fancies,' cannot appreciate fantastic stories, that fairy writing is a form of original creation, which 'makes new worlds of its own,' and the importance of what Ursula K. Le Guin would call 'distancing from the ordinary,' described by Addison as the expectation that magical beings show a 'discoloured' quality in their speech and manners, in order to convince the reader of their truly being not 'of his own species.'[27]

Unlike later writers, Addison is ambivalent about whether fantastic fictions can be believed in or not. He maintains that the existence of 'many Intellectual Beings in the World

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[24] Poe, *Works*, vol. 5., 163, 166.

[25] Joseph Addison, 'The Pleasures of the Imagination,' *The Spectator* 419, July 1, 1712, 1.

[26] Addison, 'Pleasures of the Imagination,' 1.

[27] Le Guin, *Language of the Night*, 89; Addison, 'Pleasures of the Imagination,' 1.

besides our selves' has not yet been disproven, yet he admits that our ideas of these beings are shaped by 'legends and fables, antiquated romances, and the traditions of nurses and old women,' and that, in truth, the credence he gives to fairy plays and stories is not born of belief so much as the *desire* to believe.[28] As Violet Paget would observe more than a century and a half later, 'it is true in many things, and truest in all matters of the imagination and the heart, that the desire to experience any sentiment will powerfully conduce to its production, and even give it a strength due to the long incubation of the wish.'[29]

In spite of Addison's enthusiasm, fantasy discourse did not significantly advance until the early decades of the nineteenth century. John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley's poems, especially Keats's 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' and Shelley's 'Endymion,' inspired many paintings, as well as imitative works by later poets and writers. Lines from Keats's poem 'Ode to a Nightingale,' appear repeatedly in the writing of artists and critics attempting to describe fantasy art: 'Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam / Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.'[30] Among the Romantics, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Leigh Hunt had the most to say about fantasy. In Coleridge's reflections on the creation of the *Lyrical Ballads*, he singles out 'supernatural, or at least romantic' subjects from other poetic topics.[31] Coleridge found that treating these subjects in narrative poetry demanded special efforts on the part of the writer to render them convincing, 'to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.'[32] Coleridge established the concept of fantasy as a *participatory* genre of literature, in which even a convincingly realistic work of fantasy must be met by a reader sympathetic to the aims of the poet, and possessed of an imagination hungry for wonders.

Coleridge's recollections of his working process address the creation of fantasy but say little about its reception. It fell to a younger member of the Romantic movement, Leigh Hunt, to explore, in many essays, the pleasures of fantasy from the perspective of the audience. Early on, Hunt attempted to *define* fantasy as a special category of 'the

[28] Addison, 'Pleasures of the Imagination,' 1.
[29] Vernon Lee [Violet Paget], *Euphorion: Being Studies of the Antique and the Mediæval in the Renaissance*, 2nd ed. (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1885), 398.
[30] John Keats, *The Complete Poetical Works of John Keats*, ed. Horace E. Scudder (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1899), 145.
[31] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. Adam Roberts (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 208.
[32] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 208.

imagination,' 'that which conjures up things and events not to be found in nature; as Homer's gods, and Shakespeare's witches, enchanted horses and spears, Ariosto's hippogriff, &c.'[33] Hunt did not discriminate between time periods, regions, or cultures. Greek legends, Italian epics, and Elizabethan plays all supplied the same *kind* of material. The aim of the fantasist, according to Hunt, was to make fantastic beings, whatever their derivation, not only convincingly otherworldly, but also beautiful.[34] Failure in either of these criteria meant failure of the whole edifice. Without fantastical realism, '[h]is Jupiter will reduce no females to ashes; his fairies be nothing fantastical; his gnomes not "of the earth, earthy."'[35] On the other hand, fantasticism alone verges on the grotesque:

> [h]e would gain nothing by making his ocean-nymphs mere fishy creatures, upon the plea that such only could live in the water: his wood-nymphs with faces of knotted oak; his angels without breath and song, because no lungs could exist between the earth's atmosphere and the empyrean. … When we go to heaven, we may idealize in a superhuman mode, and have altogether different notions of the beautiful; but till then we must be content with the loveliest capabilities of earth.[36]

Leigh Hunt's ideal fantasy artist creates new ideas and gives life to old stories and myths, but is restrained in his originality by his dual commitments to naturalising the supernatural and to beautifying it, values that persisted throughout the Victorian period.

Hunt's opinions correspond to those held by his contemporary, Henry Fuseli. Fuseli, like Hunt, saw all fantastical beings, regardless of their time and place of origin, as the common property of modern imaginative artists such as himself:

> [the Greeks'] Scylla and the Portress of Hell, their demons and our spectres, the shade of Patroclus and the ghost of Hamlet, their naiads, nymphs, and oreads, and our sylphs, gnomes, and fairies, their furies and our witches, differ less in essence, than in local, temporary, social modifications: their common origin was fancy, operating on the materials of nature, assisted by legendary tradition and the curiosity implanted in

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[33] Leigh Hunt, *Imagination and Fancy: Or, Selections from the English Poets*, new ed. (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1891 (1844)), 7.
[34] Hunt, *Imagination and Fancy*, 14.
[35] Hunt, *Imagination and Fancy,* 17.
[36] Hunt, *Imagination and Fancy*, 26.

> us of diving into the invisible; and they are suffered or invited to mix with or superintend real agency, in proportion of the analogy which we discover between them and ourselves.[37]

Like Hunt, Fuseli also sees fantasy as limited by the audience's need to sympathise with its strange beings. Within the limits of good taste and sentimental appeal, fantasy is free to adopt any wild idea that inspires its audience with delighted wonder: 'that magic which … whirls us along as readers or spectators.[38] Fuseli's art is often associated with Edmund Burke's 'sublime,' a sense of overwhelming power or scale which carries away the onlooker by the sheer force of its presence. His conception of fantasy shares some characteristics of the sublime, in that it involves an intense, involuntary, and emotional, rather than intellectually reasoned, response to art.

Progressing into the middle of the nineteenth century, this dramatic conception of fantasy art persisted alongside an emerging view of fantasy as a gentler enchantment, that nurtures and comforts its audience while it entertains it. Sir Walter Scott, when reviewing the works of the German writer E. T. A. Hoffmann, began with a disquisition on the many varieties of 'supernatural' fiction, including traditional fairy tales, *The Arabian Nights*, and modern works such as de la Motte Fouqué's novel *Undine.*[39] In a striking development, unlike Addison, Scott firmly places supernatural creatures outside the bounds of the possible: 'At this period of human knowledge, the marvellous is so much identified with the fabulous, as to be considered generally as belonging to the same class.'[40] His essay is of special interest for his assertion that fantasy art and fantasy literature can be appraised on the same terms: aesthetic appeal, originality, emotional depth, and intellectual value. He unfavourably compares Hoffmann's writing to 'the arabesque in painting, in which is introduced the most strange and complicated monsters… while there is in reality nothing to satisfy the understanding or inform the judgement.'[41] By contrast, Scott praises de la Motte Fouqué's *Undine*, 'a tale in which the wonderful is, in our opinion, happily introduced, because it is connected with and applied to human interest and human feeling,' and asserts that English

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[37] Henry Fuseli, *The Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli*, ed. John Knowles, vol. 2 (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1831), 140.
[38] Fuseli, *Life and Writings*, vol. 2, 200.
[39] Walter Scott, 'Art II – On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition; and Particularly on the Works of Ernest Theodore William Hoffman,' *The Foreign Quarterly Review* 1, no. 1, July 1827, 71.
[40] Scott, 'On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition,' 61.
[41] Scott, 'On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition,' 82.

readers are naturally more inclined to enjoy fantasies that convey a higher message, beyond the mere excitement of their plots, a theme that will be further explored in the following chapters.[42]

As Scott's commentary suggests, fantasy art, and fantasy stories, had a significant – and growing – presence in British culture in the 1820s. By the late 1830s, Charles Lamb was already complaining of clichéd fantasy art, and 'the Total Defect of the Quality of Imagination' in modern British painting.[43] Like Hunt, Lamb expected to be *convinced* of the supernaturalism of fantastic figures. Disappointed with the works of modern artists, Lamb reserves his praise for a dryad drawn by the Mannerist Giulio Romano,

> [l]ong, grotesque, fantastic, yet with a grace of her own, beautiful in convolution and distortion, linked to her connatural tree, co-twisting with its limbs her own, till both seemed either – … *his* Dryad lay – an approximation of two natures, which to conceive, it must be seen; analogous to, not the same with, the delicacies of Ovidian transformations.[44]

In this and other examples, Lamb compares fantasy artists' work to poetic precedents that, to him, set the standard for representations of fantastical subjects. Thus, in early nineteenth-century criticism, a set of criteria for assessing fantasy art was already in development. Fantasy art was expected to be beautiful, to convincingly portray otherworldly beings, to express an idea or an affecting sentiment, and to hew to expectations established by pre-existing literature. These concepts eventually penetrated to the popular art journals, which will be discussed further in the following chapter.

While other critics were learning to appraise fantasy, John Ruskin was equivocating over it. In *Modern Painters II* he applauds Turner for his skilful rendering of a fearsome dragon, and in the next volume, accuses painters of fantasies of corrupting their audiences through 'the excitement of the feelings by labored imagination of spirits, fairies, monsters, and demons.'[45] As a young man, Ruskin was torn between condemning fantasy as a 'base

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[42] Scott, 'On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition,' 94.

[43] Charles Lamb, 'On the Total Defect of the Quality of Imagination, Observable in the Works of Modern British Artists,' *The Athenaeum* no. 272, January 12, 1833, 26-27.

[44] Charles Lamb, 'On the Total Defect of the Quality of Imagination, Observable in the Works of Modern British Artists,' *The Athenaeum,* no. 274, January 26, 1833, 57.

[45] Ruskin, *Complete Works,* vol. 4, *Modern Painters II,* 259-260, vol. 5, *Modern Painters III*, 101.

habit – the abuse of the imagination' and celebrating it as a balm for the exhausted mind.[46] Even so, he eventually came around to an unmodified appreciation of fantastical painting, bestowing on it his highest praise: '[t]ruth is the vital power of the entire school, – Truth its armor – Truth its war-word; and the grotesque and wild form of imagination which, at first sight, seem to be the reaction of a desperate fancy, and a terrified faith, against the incisive scepticism of recent science, so far from being so, are a part of that science itself.'[47] Ruskin embraced fantasy for what he saw as its potential to transcend the materialism of the modern age, for by abandoning the real world, 'it touches the border of that higher world which is not fictitious.'[48]

Unlike Ruskin, John Addington Symonds was consistently positively interested in fantasy art throughout his career. He provides the most explicit and useful Victorian definition of the genre. In an essay from 1888, Symonds identifies three major categories of unreal art. He distinguishes between the exaggerations of caricature, decorative grotesques, and a higher form, true fantasy, which uses supernatural beings to allegorize the fundamental forces of the universe and human psychology:

> The artist, while giving birth to such fantastic creatures of imagination, resembles a deeply-stirred and dreaming man, whose brain projects impossible shapes to symbolise the perturbations of his spirit. Myth and allegory, the metamorphosis of mortals into plants, fairies, satyrs, nymphs, and tutelary deities of sea or forest, are examples of the fantastic in this sphere of highest poetry.[49]

To Symonds, fantastic subject matter is not only an outlet for emotional expression, but the only viable material remaining to modern artists who aim to infuse their art with visual intimations of a higher significance. He argues that the diversified personalities of the Greek pantheon and, to a much lesser extent, the angels and martyrs of the Catholic faith, once furnished artists with characters suited to the representation of ideals and spiritual truths.[50] Since the decline of both pagan faith and Catholicism, Western art has been deprived of any

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[46] Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 5, *Modern Painters III*, 71.
[47] Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 33, *Art of England*, 294.
[48] Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 33, *Art of England*, 332.
[49] John Addington Symonds, *Essays Speculative and Suggestive*, vol. 1 (London: Chapman & Hall Ltd., 1890), 243.
[50] Symonds, *Essays,* vol. 2, 104-106.

subjects suitable for representing spiritual matters in physical form. Thus, modern artists are compelled to turn back to classical mythology, alongside folklore, allegory, and mediaeval romance, for subjects suited to their free-wheeling imaginations and high ideals.[51]

Idealism – both in the sense of abstraction from concrete reality, and of aspiration towards the best version of the self, and the world – are the primary drivers of the fantastic imagination, to Symonds. Yet it is an idealism that is manifested in visual art, and as such, its success is contingent on the skill of the artist. A fantastic image must be 'well constructed, powerfully conceived, vigorously projected, with sufficiency of verisimilitude to give them rank among extraordinary phenomena, and with sufficient correspondence to the natural moods of human thought,' in order to 'acquire a reality of their own, and impose upon the credulity of mankind.'[52]

Symonds is vigorous in his defence of fantasy as a serious genre of art. Fantasy, according to him, is among the last remaining outlets for profound internal feelings of reverence and joy in a materialist era. Across the nineteenth century, this theme persists – that fantasy, for all its unrealism, and the easy pleasure it offers, is neither frivolous nor intellectually vacuous. True, fantasy was escapist, in the sense that it took people out of their own world, and into another – but it also taught valuable lessons, and enriched real life with lingering feelings of delight, wonder, and idealism. A contributor to *The Gentleman's Magazine* even suggested that '[t]he study of no department of poesie, … is so apt to lease the mind in that pondering state which ever in the end becomes one all-engrossing wonderment about the nature of things divine, as that of the fantastic, the fairy-like, the monstrous.'[53]

The solemnity with which Victorian artists, writers, and critics regarded fantasy is a powerful argument for the study of the genre. Regardless of the status of fantasy today, for the Victorians, fantasy was no light matter, particularly for those engaged in its production. In 1853, Charles Dickens composed a protest against what he saw as a real threat to the integrity of the fairy kingdoms of the imagination: excessive moralising. Fairy tales, he wrote, were not just a historic curiosity, or a pastime for children, but essential reading for dreamers of all ages. 'It has greatly helped to keep us, in some sense, ever young... In an utilitarian age, of all

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[51] Symonds, *Essays,* vol. 2, 104-107, 226.
[52] Symonds, *Essays,* vol. 2, 244.
[53] B. D. R., 'Remarks on Historical Painting,' *The Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Review,* June 1837, 596.

other times, it is a matter of grave importance that Fairy tales should be respected.'[54] Dickens defended fairy tales as beneficial, purely because of the salutary spiritual influence of the stories themselves, for 'it would be hard to estimate the amount of gentleness and mercy that has made its way among us through these slight channels.'[55] Respecting fairy tales meant, to Dickens, not adapting them as vehicles for moral messages, but letting them serve their true purpose – opening a window into fairyland, and letting its breezes stir up the stale atmosphere of prosaic reality. 'The world is too much with us, early and late. Leave this precious old escape from it, alone.'[56]

The novelist George MacDonald did not publish his own theory of fantasy composition until late in his life. In 'The Fantastic Imagination' (1893), MacDonald expresses frustration with the lack of any term for the kinds of stories he tells. '[T]hat we have in English no word corresponding to the German Mährchen [sic], drives us to use the word Fairytale, regardless of the fact that the tale may have nothing to do with any sort of fairy.'[57] So-called fairy tales are the more in need of an accurate name, because McDonald finds their nature difficult to describe in abstract terms. 'Were I asked, what is a fairytale? I should reply, Read *Undine*: that is a fairytale; then read this and that as well, and you will see what is a fairytale.'[58] MacDonald is confronting the same problem often encountered by modern fantasy theorists, that the function of fantasy is almost impossible to describe without reference to fantasy materials. The best that MacDonald can do is to define a fairy tale in terms of the process by which one is made: 'man may, if he pleases, invent a little world of his own, with its own laws; for there is that in him which delights in calling up new forms – which is the nearest, perhaps, he can come to creation.'[59] That world takes on a life and a power of its own, evident in the emotional impact it has on the reader. In this way, fairy tales have more in common with natural phenomena, and with music, than with other forms of literature: '[a] fairytale, a sonata, a gathering storm, a limitless night, seizes you and sweeps you away.'[60]

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[54] Charles Dickens, 'Frauds on the Fairies,' *Household Words* 8, no. 184, October 1, 1853, 97.
[55] Dickens, 'Frauds on the Fairies,' 93.
[56] Dickens, 'Frauds on the Fairies,' 100.
[57] George MacDonald, *The Light Princess, and Other Fairy Tales* (London, New York: G. P. Putnam, 1893), iv.
[58] MacDonald, *Light Princess,* iii.
[59] MacDonald, *Light Princess,* iv.
[60] MacDonald, *Light Princess*, ix.

MacDonald's fellow fantasy author, Arthur Machen, composed numerous stories of supernatural horrors and ghosts, as well as uplifting fantasies, such as 'The Great Return,' a story of the Holy Grail in modern life, and 'A Fragment of Life,' in which a suburban couple find themselves under an enchantment of their own making. He also wrote a book on literature, *Hieroglyphics* (1902), which divides great books into the 'natural' and the 'supernatural,' in accordance with their content, their atmosphere, and the imaginative inclinations of their audience. Fantasy stories such as *The Odyssey* attract readers who 'are supernatural, because we hear in it the echoes of the eternal song, because it symbolises for us certain amazing and beautiful things, because it is music.'[61] Supernatural books are distinguished less by the magical events they describe than by the emotions they provoke:

> that enthralling impression of the unknown, which is, at once, a whole philosophy of life, and the most exquisite of emotions … you will find it in Celtic voyages, in the Eastern Tale, where a door in a dull street suddenly opens into dreamland, in the mediæval stories of the wandering knights, in *Don Quixote*, and at last in our *Pickwick* where Ulysses has become a retired city man, whimsically journeying up and down the England of sixty years ago.[62]

Here, fantasy is understood as at once an emotional effect on the reader and a function of a book's ambiance: a fantasy is an adventure story, in which anything *might* happen (would readers have been shocked to see Pickwick conversing with a ghost?), and which conduces to a specific feeling, an 'enthralling impression of the unknown,' or even 'ecstasy,' as Machen elsewhere terms it.[63]

Most of the famous nineteenth-century writers cited above were more interested in fantasy literature than art, apart from Ruskin and Symonds. To guide my application of their thoughts to the visual arts, I will also draw on some of the innumerable exhibition reviews, art editorials, and interviews with living artists published by more obscure and sometimes unknown authors in the massive Victorian popular press. Magazine and newspaper articles are more ephemeral and often less thorough or articulate than the works of the period's leading intellectuals, but they are just as revealing of the evolution of culture. Through a

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[61] Arthur Machen, *Hieroglyphics: A Note Upon Ecstasy in Literature* (New York: Mitchell and Kennerley, 1913 (1902)), 60.
[62] Machen, *Hieroglyphics,* 63.
[63] Machen, *Hieroglyphics,* 63.

combination of academic and journalistic publications, memoirs, and letters, I hope to bring the Victorian fantasy art world into clearer view, making as much use as possible of their own words, with the assistance, as needed, of the insights of twentieth-century scholars of fantasy and the arts.

Realism, Reality, and Visual Fantasy

Fantasy is defined against reality, as it is understood by its creators – '[t]he unicorn is no mythical beast to the man who sees one in his garden.'[64] Thus the experience of fantasy differs from era to era, place to place, and even person to person. The distinctive forms assumed by fantasy imagery in the Victorian period are worthy of analysis for what they can reveal about the creative imagination in Britain, and about Victorians' attitudes toward their own reality. What stories, characters, and worlds attracted nineteenth-century artists? What aspects of real life found expression in fantasy, and which aspects were elided? What emotions did their fantasies play upon? What ideals did they use fantastical subjects to express? The subjects artists chose, the ways in which they portrayed them, and the responses of their critics, may be usefully studied as evidence of the anxieties, yearnings, hopes, and enthusiasms, of the artists and their audience. The pervasiveness and popularity of fantasy and the fantastical in the nineteenth century indicates that this study's results may touch on and enhance work in other areas of British culture of the time as well.

The possible worlds which fantasy can conjure up are, in theory, as unbounded as the imaginative capacities of the artist. In practice, Victorian fantasy was strikingly conservative, returning to and reshaping familiar themes, settings, and archetypes. Many, though not all, of the subjects which were represented in the work of nineteenth-century creators had much older roots. Tropes still prevalent in contemporary fantasy – medievalist aesthetics and settings, the preoccupation with gifted or chosen heroes, the tangled correlations between youth, beauty, goodness, and power, and the irresistible but sometimes dangerous attractions of the fairy, the mermaid, the nymph, and the ghost – all trace back to nineteenth-century precedents in the visual arts and in literature.

Because of the continuity of archetypes, ideals, and enthusiasms across the nineteenth century, this thesis, though focused on Victorian culture, will draw frequently on literature and art from the Romantic period. Although innovation and re-interpretation *are* a part of the

[64] Rudolf Schmerl, 'Fantasy as Technique,' *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 43, no. 4 (Fall 1967): 647.

history of nineteenth-century fantasy, the core of the genre remained remarkably consistent from the 1830s to the 1900s. Subject matter was more likely to be recycled and re-interpreted than invented from scratch. The same consistency is evident in the artistic and literary principles which determined how that subject matter was employed. Modern fantasy still owes much to the Romantic poets, whose creative philosophies shaped the development of fantasy from their own day to the lives of the last Victorians. Because of this overarching consistency from the early decades of the century to its close, a chronological history of fantasy through the period would quickly become monotonous. Rather than search for a non-existent trajectory of gradual change, this thesis instead gathers artworks from across the nineteenth century, the better to explain key themes that persisted from one generation to the next, and that still endure in some form today.

Although in large part fantasy remains a subject for literary scholarship, it rightfully pertains at least as much to art history. Fantasies are not abstract concepts, articulable only in equally abstract terms, but imaginary things seen with the mind's eye. Early definitions of fantasy in English included '[a] spectral apparition, phantom; an illusory appearance' and '[t]he image impressed on the mind by an object of sense.'[65] In colloquial use, the association of fantasy with hallucinations was largely obsolete by the nineteenth century, but the word retained its '*traditional* sense, as the power by which the unseen is made visible.'[66] Fantasy, as a mental activity, bridges the physical world and the world of the imagination, drawing on previously accumulated sensory information to build up an image in the mind, which may then be recreated in art for the amusement of the senses.

The visibility of fantasy is part of what distinguishes it from other imaginative mental operations and is the sole limitation to its creative powers. The mind can entertain a logically contradictory concept, such as an apple which is at one and the same time red and gold, but does not *visualize* the paradoxical fruit as real and concrete, comparable to an object presented to the senses. On the other hand, the golden apples of the Hesperides, growing on a single tree in the westernmost garden of the world, though entirely non-existent, are accessible objects for the imaginative fantasist to visualize, describe, or depict. Mere non-resemblance of everyday reality is not a sufficient condition for art to qualify as fantasy. To identify a work as a fantasy, it is necessary to understand not only the beliefs about the nature of reality which reigned at the time it was made, but also the visual codes and

[65] OED Online (Oxford: Oxford University Press, September 2019), s.v. 'fantasy | phantasy, n.'.
[66] Prickett, *Victorian Fantasy,* 8. Emphasis his.

representational conventions which the creator applied to their work.[67] A hierarchically scaled grouping of figures in a medieval altarpiece is not fantastical, while a scene with both properly proportioned humans and diminutive fairies, such as Edward Robert Hughes's *Midsummer Eve* (1908), is. The wild colours of a Fauvist landscape do not make it a fantasy, while Thomas Cole's *The Titan's Goblet* (1833, Fig. 3), which depicts a lake contained within a stone vessel as high as a mountain, is decidedly fantastical, yet painted with an arresting naturalism. It is often the combination of unreal contents and a realistic treatment that marks a fantasy work as such:

> The persuasive fantasy image … depends in a complex manner upon the artistic conventions and semiotic codes associated with realism. The fantasy illustrator takes the pictorial conventions of realistic portrayal and then manipulates or inverts them to create marvellous worlds for which there can be no earthly analogy.[68]

A fantasy artwork makes an assertion which it wishes its audience to deny. It presents as real – to the same degree that a figurative artwork is presumed to represent a real or at least plausible subject – a subject that artist and audience alike know to be neither real nor plausible. Much depends upon the stylistic and conventional expectations for representational art brought to the artwork by the spectator. This relationship makes the nineteenth century in Britain a particularly notable period for fantasy art studies, a time when realism and fantasticism both developed and evolved side-by-side – the fantasy romance and the psychological novel, Pre-Raphaelite scenes of modern life and fairy paintings. Art historical studies of fantasy are necessary to our understanding of fantasy in general, by placing the appropriate emphasis on the inherent visual quality of all fantasy works, regardless of their medium.

Nonetheless, the limited recent scholarship on fantasy art makes it necessary to draw on existing work in literary fantasy studies for theoretical and methodological guidance. Even if that were not the case, it would still be difficult to justify an approach to fantasy art that excluded literature, particularly in a nineteenth-century context. Many historical fantasy images have direct textual counterparts or are identified as illustrations of a specific text.

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[67] Landow, 'And the World Became Strange,' 10.

[68] Terry Reese Hackford, 'Fantastic Visions: British Illustration of the *Arabian Nights*' in Schlobin, *Aesthetics of Fantasy,* 144.

Even where its derivation is not obvious, a fantasy painting must be understood as referencing some cultural artefact outside itself, such as a story, a myth, a folk belief, or simply the convention of creative liberty allowed to fantasists. No matter how original the invention, some association with the pre-existing world of story is unavoidable. Creation in any medium of an impossible person, place, or thing always relies on a foundational act of imagination – a leap from this world to another. By whatever name that place is known – Fairyland, Arcadia, or the wood beyond the world – the realm of the imagination is the common ground where all fantastic inventions take root.

It is the artist and their audience's shared understanding of the fantasy tradition that makes a fantasy work comprehensible. The experience of a fantasy image is as much or more a feeling of recognition as of surprise. We know these stories, these heroes, these monsters, these fabulous lands, though we wonder at seeing them in each new form they assume. Every artist or author differs in their manner of presentation, but the conventions are familiar. It is striking how consistently Victorian criticism of fantastic paintings dwells on their success or failure in adhering to the expectations of the critic, whose opinions on the correct manner of depicting a fairy or a dragon are often remarkably firm, though they can never have seen one in reality. Derivative art was far more likely to win critical approval than novel concepts. Respect for a deceased artist did not deter the *Art Journal* from criticising Thomas Stothard's painting *A Mythological Battle* for its too-daring originality, in depicting a battle-subject that 'appertains to no mythology with which we are acquainted.'[69]

Sometimes a relationship with a fantasy text is a work of art's only qualification as a fantasy, a situation with impels the participation of the viewer's imagination in the interpretation of the picture. For example, Herbert Draper's *Calypso's Isle* (1897, Fig. 4) would be only a study of a female nude on a beach, without the title to give to the lady a name and, with it, an aura of supernatural power, and to cast over the scene a veneer of enchantment borrowed from the *Odyssey*. Through association, fantasy texts and images explain and enhance one another's fantasticism. A picture of a beautiful woman by the sea becomes Calypso, enriching the readers' experience of the painting and the poem alike. Because of their complementary nature, and their close entanglement in the Victorian period in particular, any study of fantasy in art must also consider fantasy literature.

The vast and interrelated compendium of materials that make up Victorian fantasy may best be conceived of as, to borrow a term from Northrup Frye, an 'imaginative

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[69] 'The Vernon Gallery,' *Art Journal,* September 1853, 224.

universe,' 'an interpenetrating world, where every unit of verbal experience is a monad reflecting all the others.'[70] Frye coined the term for his own analysis of Romance literature, as a variation on his concept of a 'mythological universe.' The mythological universe provides all natural phenomena and all cultural activities with a presiding deity or an explanatory myth, all of which are connected in their body of legends. Just so, the imaginative universe of Victorian fantasy was a tangled web of narrative and imagery, capable of being imitated, adapted, or combined.

The universe of the Victorian imagination contained all their fantastical art, poetry, novels, stories, plays, operas, and ballets, as well as their inheritance from the past and their borrowings from other cultures – the works of the Romantics, Elizabethan drama and verse, mediaeval romance and hagiography, French *romaunts*, the *Arabian Nights*, *Grimms' Fairy Tales*, Norse myth, Greek mythology, the works of Apuleius, Virgil, Euripides, and Homer, and much more. Charles Dickens best captured the full range of the worlds available to the Victorian fantasist in his description of the dominion of 'Queen Mab,' which encompasses all fairy lore, allegory, and mythologies of the world,

> She peopled the heavens, the air, the earth, the waters, with innumerable tribes of imaginary beings, arrayed in tints borrowed from the flowers, the rainbow, and the sun. She converted every virtue into a divinity, every vice into a demon. Far, far superior to mythology, her sovereignty was tributary only to religion… Wherever there was mythology, wherever there was poetry, wherever there was fancy, there was Queen Mab: multi-named and multi-formed, but still queen of the beautiful, the poetical, the fanciful.[71]

Dickens jokingly described Mab's situation as 'a Case of Real Distress,' due to the pernicious effects of 'Boards, Commissions, and Societies, grimly educating the reason,' but his own ecstatic invocation of her vast realm and incredible powers speaks to her thriving condition in Dickens's time. The eccentricity and diversity of Mab's realm, the Victorian imaginative universe, was an acknowledged characteristic of the Victorian imagination. In the words of Edward Bulwer-Lytton, in the preface to his epic poem, *King Arthur* (1849), 'it instinctively APPROPRIATES [sic] all that Saracenic invention can suggest to the more sombre

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[70] Frye, *The Secular Scripture*, 15, 187.
[71] Charles Dickens, 'Case of Real Distress,' *Household Words* 8, no. 199, January 14, 1854, 457-458.

imagination of the North – it unites to the Serpent of the Edda, the flying Griffin of Arabia, the Persian Genius to the Scandinavian Trold [sic], – and wherever it accepts a marvel, it seeks to insinuate a type.'[72] The Victorians' eclectic imaginative universe provided fantastical analogues to every part of reality, replacing terrace houses with castles, tame countryside with enchanted forests, the parish church with the chapel of the Holy Grail, and transforming ordinary men and women into knights, fairies, and nature gods. The common thread that links all these fantasies is the *sensation* of fantasy itself.

Four Voices

The sensational approach to fantasy employed in this thesis is not wholly novel. Critical fantasy studies of the *early* twentieth century tended to emphasise the emotions that such stories provoked in their readers over their content. This aspect was not wholly lost in later decades; Lin Carter himself began *Imaginary Worlds* with the admission that 'something within me wakes and thrills and responds' to fantasy, and that 'whatever it is that sings within me to such imagery, I am glad that it is there.'[73] In a few earlier studies, a form of fantasy analysis was employed which, by virtue of its interest in readers' experience of a text, rather than specific textual elements, is more readily applicable to multiple media. Four twentieth century writers: E. M. Forster, G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, and J. R. R. Tolkien, evaluated fantasy primarily in terms of its abstract qualities and emotional effects. Their work offers a starting point for a study of the effects of nineteenth-century fantasy works. Their own ideas also recall the arguments of many writers on fantastical art and literature in the previous century, making these early twentieth-century authors apt guides to the effects of fantasy in an earlier era. The enduring applicability of their analyses to the study of both early modern and contemporary fantasy is also a confirmation of the continuity of tropes, themes, and archetypes within the genre. They show that the sensations that fantasy provokes transcend chronological boundaries, explaining the endurance within fantasy of mediaeval, classical and Romantic narratives and philosophies, from the nineteenth century to today.

These four writers had much in common, in addition to their sensational approach to fantasy. All four were White British men, born in the final decades of the Victorian period. All four were also fantasy writers. This commonality is pertinent because fantasy, as has

[72] Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *King Arthur*, ix.
[73] Carter, *Imaginary Worlds*, 2, 3.

already been stated, is a genre that relies for its effect on its audience's enthusiasm and sympathy. Thus, in the criticism of these four writers, we hear the opinions of four fantasists living just after the end of the Victorian period, reflecting on the fantasy art and literature the previous century has left for them to enjoy and to build upon. All four concur that fantasy is, at its core, essentially an intangible, emotional, even spiritual experience.

The earliest of the four essays from which I draw my sensational definition of fantasy is G. K. Chesterton's 'The Ethics of Elfland.' This essay forms one chapter of Chesterton's Catholic apologia, *Orthodoxy* (1908), but deals almost exclusively with the world of Elfland, also called Faerie, evoked in fairy tales. It explores Chesterton's evolving understanding of that world and its rules, as a child and as an adult. Through stories of Elfland, a world in which magical and inexplicable powers operated directly in the lives of their heroes, the young Chesterton discovered intimations of ideas and concepts otherwise inexpressible, because the mechanics and language of everyday life were too concrete, too familiar, to be associated with the intangible, mysterious forces of the divine. Looking back, he observes how fairy tales encompassed the entirety of his own mature Christian faith in miniature, describing a world of wonders governed by a strict moral framework also applicable to real life.

Chesterton associated the rule-and-prohibition based morality of fairy tales, what he called 'the Doctrine of Conditional Joy,' with his own Christian faith, but more broadly with the kind of moral bargain he saw as necessary to human happiness in the real world – that right behaviour and self-restraint in indulgence, are necessary to the continued enjoyment of the good things in life.[74] The fantastical element in fairy stories was essential to their function as sources of moral guidance, by providing every choice with an appropriate supernatural reward or punishment. Even more important, however, was the fact that fairy stories were stories of *fairyland* – that they took the reader out of the real world, to inspire them to look at it through fresh eyes. To Chesterton, reading fantasy was a spiritual experience, rewarded with consolation and joy in the moment of reading and afterward, in daily life. Seen the in light of fairy tales, in which the world operates according to magical rules, the rules and patterns that govern ordinary life become wonderful in their own right: 'The grass seemed signalling to me with all its fingers at once; the crowded stars seemed bent on being

[74] Chesterton, *Orthodoxy,* 47.

understood. The recurrences of the universe rose to the maddening rhythm of an incantation, and I began to see an idea.'[75]

'The Ethics of Elfland' celebrates traditional fairy tales, the kinds of stories collected by Andrew Lang in his rainbow of *Fairy Books*, and by Joseph Jacobs in his compilations of English folklore. However, Chesterton was also a devotee of George MacDonald's works. He singled out for special appreciation MacDonald's capacity to instil the objects and characters within his fairy tales with a 'sense of indescribable things,' an aura of hidden significance in addition to the special interest which they held as fairies, princesses, or goblins.[76] Like MacDonald, Chesterton saw fantasies' magical impossibilities not as a divergence from reality but the nearest approach literature could make to a higher truth.

Chesterton's experience of fairy tales as revelations, not of a new world, but of the old world made new, was not unique to him. He shared that attitude with, among others, C. S. Lewis, with whom he also shared a deep devotion to the works of George MacDonald. Lewis was, of course, the author of many fantasy novels. He was also the author of numerous essays and books on literary criticism, in which Lewis approaches fantasy from two directions: as storytelling, and as 'myth.'[77] As Lewis uses the word, myth is a story-form untethered to any medium, though in practice it may resemble the creation of a work of visual art more than traditional storytelling. A myth, in this sense, is a fantastical story that exists independently of all media that narrate it. It is more akin an image or symbol that lingers in the mind than a narrative, 'like shapes moving in another world.'[78] Thus the Isles of the Hesperides are a myth in themselves, distinct from the story of Hercules' journey there. Myths may be ancient, like the tale of Orpheus, or modern, as is the case for Tolkien's 'Lothlorien.'[79]

For Lewis, myths are defined in experiential terms. We recognize myths 'by their effect on us,' and hence what is a myth to one reader may not be so for another.[80] For those sensitive to the mythic quality, they resonate with unutterable significance. 'We feel it to be numinous. It is as if something of great moment had been communicated to us,' and for that reason, Lewis reasons, many readers try to explain myths as allegories, yet, 'after all

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[75] Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 51.
[76] G. K. Chesterton, 'Introduction,' in Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife* (New York: L. MacVeagh, 1924), 10.
[77] C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 41-42.
[78] Lewis, *Experiment in Criticism*, 44.
[79] Lewis, *Experiment in Criticism*, 42-43.
[80] Lewis, *Experiment in Criticism*, 45.

allegories have been tried, the myth itself continues to feel more important than they.'[81] Lewis's concept of the myth, and of modern mythopoesis, will return in Chapter Five, but it also underlies much of what this thesis will discuss in all of its chapters. The subjects of most Victorian fantasy art might be identified as myths, in Lewis's sense, as free-floating, 'always… fantastic' ideas, capable of being represented just as well in words or in images.[82] Lewis writes that myths are always fantastic. What does 'fantastic' mean to Lewis? Considered as literature, 'a fantasy means any narrative that deals with impossibles and preternaturals.'[83] Lewis theorises that it is this total otherness that makes fantasy unpalatable to some readers.

> A story which introduces the marvellous, the fantastic, says to him by implication 'I am merely a work of art. You must take me as such – must enjoy me for my suggestions, my beauty, my irony, my construction, and so forth. There is no question of anything like this happening to you in the real world.'[84]

For those who are willing to set their own egos aside, the rewards of 'The Fantastic or Mythical … Mode,' lie in its capacity to take the reader away from their real world, and to return them to it enriched by the knowledge gained from contact with the fantastic, and with the world of pure ideas that lies beyond fantasy.[85]

> [I]f it is well used by the author and meets the right reader, it has the same power: to generalize while remaining concrete, to present in palpable form not concepts or even experiences but whole classes of experience, and to throw off irrelevancies. But at its best it can do more; it can give us experiences we have never had and thus, instead of "commenting on life", can add to it.[86]

A fantastical story simulates an encounter with the otherworldly that 'stirs and troubles [the reader] (to his life-long enrichment) with the dim sense of something beyond his reach and,

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[81] Lewis, *Experiment in Criticism*, 44.
[82] Lewis, *Experiment in Criticism*, 44.
[83] Lewis, *Experiment in Criticism*, 50.
[84] Lewis, *Experiment in Criticism*, 56.
[85] C.S. Lewis, *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1966), 38.
[86] Lewis, *Of Other Worlds,* 38

far from dulling or emptying the actual world, gives it a new dimension of depth.'[87] In Lewis's view of fantasy, its defining characteristic and highest purpose is to inspire a particular emotional response, comprising a temporary sense of enchantment, an immersive escape, and a lasting sense of delight.

The next fantasy theory was presented by E. M. Forster, as part of a series of lectures on the novel delivered at Cambridge in 1927. Forster is remembered today for his novels of modern life, but he also wrote fantastical short stories, including *The Celestial Omnibus* (1911). In his published lectures, Forster describes certain novels – such as Max Beerbohm's *Zuleika Dobson* (1911) – that are illuminated by an extra element, not locatable in any single part of the content or prose, but an emergent aspect of the experience. This something is the 'fantastic-prophetical axis,' which passes through some novels, 'like a bar of light,' illuminating the whole with a numinous radiance, which at once elevates the text and transcends it.[88] In return for the reader's acceptance of an element of supernaturalism or otherworldly powers, a fantasy novel 'merge[s] the kingdoms of magic and common sense,' and provides 'a beauty unattainable by serious literature.'[89]

When it comes to providing *examples* of fantasy and prophecy, Forster is forced to resort to listing concrete story elements. The fantastic is associated in Forster's mind with minor deities and literary contrivances, with 'all beings who inhabit the lower air, the shallow water and the smaller hills, all Fauns and Dryads and slips of the memory, all verbal coincidences, Pans and puns, all that is medieval this side of the grave,' while prophecy, the more weighty power, looks to 'whatever transcends our abilities even when it is human passion that transcends them, to the deities of India, Greece, Scandinavia and Judaea, to all that is medieval beyond the grave and to Lucifer son of the morning.'[90] Forster's recourse to a stream of romantic associations indicates one of the difficulties with an emotional approach to the fantastic, which is that the sensations which it provokes are difficult to explain without the invocation of that which provokes them. Forster explicitly sought an explanation for the 'special effect' of fantasies which eschewed specifics about their content, writing that 'any statement as to their subject-matter brings these novels into the claws of critical apparatus, from which it is important that they should be saved. It is truer of them than of most books that we can only know what is in them by reading them, and their appeal is specially

[87] Lewis, *Of Other Worlds,* 29.
[88] E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1980 (1927)): 102.
[89] Forster, *Aspects,* 109, 111.
[90] Forster, *Aspects,* 104.

personal.'[91] The same must be said for fantasy art – we can only know what is in a fantasy painting by looking at it, and its effects vary from one person's perspective to another.

Few perspectives are as likely to be illuminating as that of J. R. R. Tolkien. As the author of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, and as an artist-illustrator, Tolkien has shaped modern fantasy to an immeasurable degree. In his essay 'On Fairy-Stories,' first given as the Andrew Lang Lecture of 1939, Tolkien elaborated his own vision of the purpose of fantasy. Two qualities take pre-eminence in his experience-based analysis of traditional fantasy stories: recovery, and joy. Recovery is that feeling of a fresh appreciation for reality, almost a second first-impression, induced by the return from temporary immersion in an alternative world, closely akin to the re-enchantment of real life effected by fantasy stories that Chesterton and Lewis celebrated. Fantasy gives us the world anew, by taking the world we know and transforming it into fairy land, for 'Faerie contains many things besides elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants, or dragons: it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted.'[92] Fantasy also offers a much-needed respite from the passing unpleasantness of modern life, in order to focus the mind on more permanent delights. 'The electric street-lamp may indeed be ignored,' Tolkien says, 'simply because it is so insignificant and transient. Fairy-stories, at any rate, have many more permanent and fundamental things to talk about. Lightning, for example.'[93]

Joy, the other emotion that fantasy instils in its reader, is more complex. It is not an after-effect of the story but woven into its fabric, felt instantaneously and remembered long after. Joy emerges most powerfully at the moment of 'eucatastrophe,' the 'turn' or moment of crisis when suddenly, by the power of the magic that only fantasy can command, a happy ending dawns out of imminent disaster.[94]

> In its fairy-tale – or otherworld – setting, it is a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence of *dyscatastrophe*, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is

[91] Forster, *Aspects,* 106.
[92] J. R. R. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), 9.
[93] Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 61.
[94] Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 68-69.

> *evangelium*, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief.[95]

Tolkien's 'joy' – the euphoric realisation that everything after all will be well – is in a way the guiding spirit of this study. It is present in the intense, instantaneously felt and long-remembered response to the fantastic, recorded by artists and writers of the nineteenth century. The fantasy situations, dreams, stories, scenes, and images created in this period can all be considered as evocations of that joy, as artefacts of all that is beautiful, heroic, astonishing, and strange, just out of reach, but not unimaginable.

Forster, Chesterton, Lewis, and Tolkien were original thinkers, and yet their essays are in many ways only eloquent re-articulations of ideas that were stated, refined and developed across the long nineteenth century. The experience of fantasy, though always conditioned by place, time, and individual characteristics, is less variable than the range of subjects which inspire it. This study will traverse the works of Victorian fantasy artists in pursuit of the feelings these authors and their predecessors described: a supernatural guiding presence, re-enchantment and recovery, and above all joy.

'Thus ends, in unavoidable inadequacy, the attempt to utter the unutterable things,' Chesterton concluded, in 'The Ethics of Elfland.'[96] The following chapters will endeavour to follow through what 'unutterable things' found representation in the fantastic art of the nineteenth century. Like Forster's analysis, and the writings of Chesterton, Lewis, and Tolkien, this thesis's exploration of fantasy in Victorian culture is structured, perhaps inevitably, around the *content* of the fantasy works under discussion. Each chapter is focused on a different sub-genre of fantasy content, but it uses that content to shed light on a different aspect of the emotional effects and intellectual concepts conveyed by those fantasies. Fantasy, like a sculpture, has a form, a presence in the world, which is distinct from the material that it is made from, but that form can only exist, and be appreciated, when that form is manifested in fantasy content. It can also only be appreciated in its totality by examining each side of it individually.

The potential examples of fantasy paintings in this period are far too numerous to be listed, let alone adequately considered by a study of this scope. Consequently, I will pursue a more limited course, focusing on only a small assortment of exemplary works in a few sub-

[95] Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 71.
[96] Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 57.

genres of fantasy, each of which embody one or more aspects of nineteenth-century fantasy. This strategy is pursued with the hope that conclusions reached through an in-depth study of a smaller number of individual artworks will be more useful than the more superficial observations based on broader surveys have hitherto proven to be. The selected case-studies will be supported by primary texts from the early nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, including criticism both journalistic and scholarly, as well as philosophy, history, poetry, and prose fiction. The inextricability of fantasy art from narrative, and the entanglement of many artworks with specific texts, renders an interdisciplinary approach to the subject essential. Even so, this is a history of fantasy art, and not of literature, and hence many notable fantasy texts that did not inspire fine artworks will be passed over. Each chapter considers artworks created decades apart, that may be stylistically related to the art movements of their moment, but it is their shared characteristics, not their differences, that will prove to be of most note. Rather than trace out minute shifts in the genre from one generation to the next, this thesis instead examines nineteenth-century fantasy art as a single phenomenon, with variations on its themes, but no radical re-invention of the form.

Because fantasy is defined against and in terms of reality, its contents vary depending on the understanding of the real dominant in each time and place. In the nineteenth century, debates over the existence of ghosts, fairies, miracles, and the divine, complicated this criterion. Against this background of agitated debate, fantasy distinguished itself by its embrace of its own unreality. Fantasy asked neither for acceptance as proven fact nor for unquestioning faith, but only for its audience's *temporary suspension of disbelief*. Through a study of artworks whose subjects hovered on the contested margins of fantasy and reality in the nineteenth century, the following chapter will explore how those artworks made use of uncertainty to engage their audience's imaginations. Even in these liminal cases, precedents in literature and theatre shaped expectations for the visual arts, both in terms of the concrete details of their representation, and the emotional impact critics hoped to experience. This chapter aims to demonstrate how depictions of fantastical dreams and visions could draw power from their audience's imaginative investment, fuelled by their desire to keep their disbelief in suspension.

Chapter Three explores a subject which drew both the ire and the enthusiasm of commentators in the period: allegory. Ever since Joseph Addison's 1712 essay on the fantastic and the imagination, allegory and fantasy have been closely related subjects in English letters. Allegory has been incorporated into fantastical stories, or read into them, for centuries. The Victorian period saw a resurgence of fantasy allegories, in the form of new

works, such as George MacDonald's fantasy novels, *Phantastes* (1858) and *Lilith* (1895), and in the revival of works such as Milton's *Comus* and Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. Spenser's epic poem inspired more than a hundred paintings from the 1830s to the end of the century – an artistic revival that has hitherto gone almost entirely undiscussed in the literature. Artists such as Walter Crane, Samuel Palmer, and G. F. Watts, all portrayed subjects from Spenser, in paintings that blurred the already uncertain line between fantastical characters and allegorical personifications. Chapter Three asks whether all fantasy is (in part) allegorical, or all allegory is (in part) fantasy, and what relation the two modes have to one another. It does so through a study of artworks inspired by Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, assessing them in terms of their relation to their source text, as well as to contemporary discourse about the relationship between fantasy and allegory.

Ideals, abstract or personified, are the theme of Chapter Four, which delves into a subset of Arthurian artworks. Camelot's special importance to Victorian culture is a vast topic, ably explored by Mark Girouard, Barbara and Alan Lupack, and Christine Poulson, among others.[97] Its particular appeal as a fantasy, a legend distinguished from historic mediaeval narratives by its supernatural and magical qualities, has not yet been so well examined. As symbols of an abstract and inarticulable ideal, Galahad and the object of his quest, the Grail, served as an imaginative conduit for connection to a transcendent divine that seemed increasingly out of reach for modern would-be believers. Galahad held significance for Victorian artists and their audiences on multiple fronts, as an embodiment, variously, of chastity, resilience, faith, ambition, and youthful naivete, and as an aesthetic object, a beautiful fictional youth artists could deck out in armour and depict in any number of picturesque surroundings. Chapter Four examines a selection of images of Galahad from mid-century to the end of the Victorian period, alongside major poetic treatments of the subject by Alfred Tennyson and William Morris, among others. The many depictions of the Grail legend in Victorian art reflect fantasy's importance in this period as a catalyst for otherwise inaccessible feelings of reverence, adoration, and joy.

The final chapter turns from Victorian medievalism to Victorian classicism, and to the emergence of a particular form of escapist fantasy in nineteenth-century art: the Arcadian

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[97] Notable texts on this subject include Marc Girouard's *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1981), Christine Poulson's *The Quest for the Grail: Arthurian Legend in British Art, 1840-1920* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), Alan and Barbara Lupack's *Illustrating Camelot* (Martlesham, Suffolk: 2008), and Debra Mancoff's *The Return of King Arthur: The Legend through Victorian Eyes* (London: Pavilion, 1995). See also footnote 7.

idyll. In the face of rapid industrialisation, expanding urban areas and the degradation of the countryside by pollution, Victorians sought escape into an imaginary landscape, unsullied by modernity, and made sacred by the presence of nature gods. Pan, nymphs, naiads and dryads, even Dionysus and his followers were re-imagined as benevolent guardians of untamed nature. In an imaginary Greece, halfway between the historical world of preindustrial civilisation and the mythical world of Cupid and Psyche, Apollo and Daphne, and Dionysus and Ariadne, Victorians found an imaginative refuge. The fantasy artworks considered in this chapter were motivated not only by broader cultural trends, but also by the personal enthusiasms and anxieties of their individual artists. The power of fantasy art, to suggest an impossible encounter with a magical otherworld, is here brought to bear to address private yearnings for reconciliation, for connection with nature, and for the transcendence of human limitations.

In closing, the coda will return to ideas raised in this introduction about fantasy's dual role as both a respite from reality, and a tool for reviving our interest and joy in the mundane world. Through several key texts and artworks from the Victorian period, the coda presents the final argument of this thesis: that nineteenth-century fantasy's highest purpose was the re-enchantment of the world. Art holds a mirror up to nature, according to Shakespeare's well-known phrase, and in the case of fantasy art, we should also remember MacDonald's dictum: 'All mirrors are magic mirrors.'[98] Fantasy transforms the world and makes it new again, so that, from the contemplation of the unfamiliar, the strange, and the wondrous, we are reminded of the beauty of the familiar, the ordinary, and the mundane. My conclusion will return one last time to fantasy's role as a source of consolation and renewal of the spirit.

[98] George MacDonald, *Phantastes,* Reprint (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1982), 58.

Chapter Two: Dreams, Visions and Reality

'Whatever touches us, whatever moves us, does touch and does move us. We recognize the reality of it as we do that of a hand in the dark.'[99]

Fantasy lies on the far side of the line drawn between what is known to be real and what is known to be unreal but remains imaginable. In the rapidly modernising nineteenth century, the range of things, places, and possibilities on the 'real' side of that line narrowed, and obstacles to belief in that which could be neither seen nor measured multiplied.[100] Yet, as Leigh Hunt asserts above, the imaginary can *feel* as present and as impactful as those things we know to be real. Hunt suggests that our internal experience has a reality of its own, and that our emotional, spiritual, and mental actions and reactions can be as consequential as any material fact. Hunt composed 'On the Realities of the Imagination,' the essay from which the above quotation is drawn, in the opening years of a century of scientific discoveries which rationalised many hitherto mysterious mundane phenomena, and even attempted rigorous investigations of fairies and the afterlife. His words form a fair preface to the ontological controversies that consumed the nineteenth century, and to the rise of an apologetic fantasy genre.

Victorian fantasy offered, as an alternative to disturbing new realities, a world governed by the immutable laws of fairy tales, in which beauty and goodness triumph over ugliness and evil. Artists and writers created alternative spaces where their audiences could set down the burden of scepticism, or relax their grip on a faith under assault, and play at belief in something magical. These fantasy works' capacity to offer relief necessarily relied upon their audience's willingness to admit, with Hunt, the 'realities of the imagination,' and to relish the excitement of the fantastic for the sake of the experience alone. 'We begin to feel,' an enthusiastic reader of Hunt's writings noted, in 1845,

> that it is the great and peculiar privilege of the Imagination, to sympathise with forms of beauty, which, unreal as they may be for the understanding, are eternal truths for all who can feel the "lovely and immortal power of genius, that can stretch its hand to us

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[99] Leigh Hunt, *Essays,* ed. Arthur Symons (London: Walter Scott, Ltd., 1903), 67.

[100] Harriet Ritvo, *The Platypus and the Mermaid and Other Figments of the Classifying Imagination* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), 175.

> out of the wastes of time, thousands of years back." The Imagination demands not the reality of these beings, but simply that they should be such as to win upon our sympathy.[101]

The combined emotional appeal of a fairy story or a romantic adventure, paired with the escapist allure of the otherworldly, drew many Victorians to the fantastical novels, poems, and pictures of their time.

Yet even an audience ready to suspend their disbelief needed a convincing reason to do so. To that end, in the theatre, the innovations of Lucia Elizabeth Vestris and Charles Kean inaugurated the fairy spectacular. Writers such as Sir Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, George MacDonald, and Arthur Machen expounded their own views on what made for absorbing, affecting, fantasy narratives. Artists in the Victorian period likewise sought a visual language capable of infusing their fantastic images with an illusory reality. Fantasy artworks, like the products of other genres, were judged by the standards of their time, on the basis of shifting and subjective critical expectation. Innovations and emerging conventions in fantasy art responded to simultaneous developments in the wider art scene, such as the rise of Pre-Raphaelitism, and to trends in literature and theatre. The works of contemporary writers, as well as the revival of pre-Victorian works by Shakespeare, Milton, Spenser, Dante, and Malory, all helped to shape the popular imagination. These works supplied artists with innumerable fantastic subjects. In turn, the expectations set by fantasy literature impacted the reception of new artworks. This chapter considers how the combined influences of literary, theatrical, and artistic trends shaped fantasy art and its critical reception. Fantasy artworks were judged not only for their aesthetic quality, but also for their narratives, their emotionality, and their moral value.

This chapter will consider three Victorian artworks which illustrate, literally and figuratively, the special challenges confronted by visual artists working on fantasy subjects in this period, and the resources they drew on. These artworks: John Anster Fitzgerald's *The Dream After the Masked Ball; Such Stuff as Dreams Are Made Of* (1857-1858), Walter Crane's *Such Sights as Youthful Poets Dream* (1869), and John Everett Millais's *Speak! Speak!* (1895) take inspiration from a diverse range of literature and artistic precedents, showcasing the complexity and multi-referential nature of Victorian fantasy (Fig. 5, 6, and 7).

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[101] 'Hunt's Imagination and Fancy,' *Dublin University Magazine* 25, no. 150, June 1845, 651.

These three works are in many ways outliers from the main body of Victorian fantasy art, but their peculiarities demonstrate the breadth of the genre and the wide range of artistic devices in use at the time. Although they differ in their subject matter, scale, and decade of origin, they are united by a shared theme. In their own ways, each painting depicts a visual encounter with the supernatural that seems to constitute a real meeting of two worlds. Each dramatises the experience of visualising a fantastic subject, by endowing the imagination with a magical power of its own, to summon that which it envisions into being. In addition, these artworks were chosen because they make explicit the usually implicit imaginative bargain struck between a fantasy artwork and its audience. This bargain, that an artist or writer will create something wondrous yet convincingly realistic, in return for the audience's suspension of disbelief, is key to the function of fantasy art. Fantasy texts gradually win readers over by building up their emotional and intellectual investment in a story but leave the burden of visual invention to their readers' imaginations.

A fantasy artwork, on the other hand, is limited to a single scene or moment, and relies on its audience's willingness to complete the visual experience by imagining the story that accompanies it. The mixed critical reception of the three paintings discussed below demonstrates how important a sympathetic and participatory audience is to the enjoyment of a fantasy scene. A critic whose emotions were touched by an image would overlook technical errors, as well as the impossibility of the content, in order to immerse themselves in the scene; an uninterested critic saw only the absurdity of the unreal. The value of a fantasy artwork to its audience depended on the validity for the individual onlooker of Hunt's cheerfully anti-rational position that the fantastic imagination had real value in its own right, that '[i]t is not mere words to say that he who goes through a rich man's park, and sees things in it which never bless the mental eyesight of the possessor, is richer than he. He is richer. ... The ground is actually more fertile to him: the place haunted with finer shapes.'[102]

That act of will, the determination to enjoy the fantastical despite all knowledge of its inherent irrationality, has been an acknowledged element of the genre since the turn of the nineteenth century. Coleridge recalled, in his *Biographia Literaria*, his self-assigned task in the *Lyrical Ballads*: to treat 'persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic … so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to

[102] Hunt, *Essays,* 70.

procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.'[103]

It soon became an accepted principle that being unable, or unwilling, to practise 'poetic faith' meant cutting oneself off from the world of fantasy entirely. A mid-nineteenth-century *Blackwood's* article, featuring an imaginary dialogue between an 'Idealist' and a 'Naturalist,' presented the choice between fantasy and realism as a choice between a cynical rationalism and a more flexible, and more joyful, approach to life. The idealist warns the realist, 'You are disenchanted by your knowledge, it has deadened your imagination. You would be incredulous of any fruit but pippins, in the fabulous Hesperides. … The waking dream of poetry must not be for you. You must always pass condemnation on our best poets and painters, if you cannot so master your mind so as to throw it into a belief.'[104] On the other hand, a sympathetic and imaginatively involved reader could find in fairy tales and fantastic legends a pleasure unlike that offered by any other text. Walter Scott himself explained the bargain between readers and composers of fantasy straightforwardly:

> a reader of imagination, who has the power to emancipate himself from the chains of reality, and to produce in his own mind the accompaniments with which the simple if rude popular legend ought to be attended, will often find that it possesses points of interest, of nature, and of effect, which, though irreconcilable to sober truth, carry with them something that the mind is not averse to believe, something in short of plausibility, which, let poet or romancer do their very best, they find it impossible to attain to.[105]

Although Scott initially limited his praise to works of old folklore, as his review progressed, he expanded his range of admirable fantasies to include the works of Edmund Spenser, Hoffmann, and de la Motte Fouqué, whose works, at their best, distinguished themselves not only by the beauty and fascination of their fantastical elements, but also by their ability to play upon the emotions, and to convey, through their magical elements, some truth or moral about the nature of real life. These latter factors also played a role in maintaining the reader's suspension of disbelief – as Coleridge had argued, 'human interest' was essential to

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[103] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 207.
[104] John Eagles, 'The Natural in Art,' *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 51, no. 318, April 1842, 440.
[105] Scott, 'Art II: On the Supernatural,' 68.

fantasy.[106] In the following chapter, the importance of a higher meaning to fantasy, and its relation to the revival of Spenser and fantasy allegory, will be explored in more depth.

Often, in Victorian texts on the subject, fantasy is presented as an opportunity to experience wonder uncritically, as the *Blackwood's* contributor cited above describes the experience, to 'believe even against knowledge; a belief that borrows more from our feelings, and perhaps our better ones, than from our understandings.'[107] Without this capacity, he writes, it is impossible to appreciate imaginative artworks such as Rubens' *Abduction of Dejanira* (1636), the Carracci brothers' paintings of 'tritons, and sea gods, and wood nymphs, dryads and hama-dryads,' or even the grotesques that feature in works of decorative art.[108] Through engagement with fantastic images, the imagination temporarily circumvents the limitations imposed on it by rationality, and instantaneously transports a daydreamer from the 'mire of what we choose to term realities, … to go off with fancy to the woods and wilds, to the sea and to the rivers, that are not within geographical limit, to see the pastimes of Silenus and his satyrs, wood nymphs and water nymphs.'[109]

To those unwilling or unable to fall under the spell of a fantasy, such art failed to interest or amuse. Contemporary critics were themselves aware of this prerequisite. This is evident in, for example, the *Art Journal*'s unsympathetic response to Burne-Jones's *Circe*: 'it belongs to the realm of dreams, myths, nightmares, and other phantasms of diseased imagination. That it makes strong appeal to fancies similarly possessed, is, of course, nothing more than might reasonably be anticipated.'[110] Andrew Lang and Edmund Gosse would both later extoll fantasy's exclusive appeal to a select group, to which they were both proud to belong.[111] For a sympathetic audience, and only a sympathetic audience, fantastical artworks could be portals to an alternative world where all that they represented was real, 'as if indeed one had gazed through the glass of "Magic casements."'[112]

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[106] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 207.
[107] Eagles, 'The Natural in Art,' 440.
[108] Eagles, 'The Natural in Art,' 437-439.
[109] Eagles, 'The Natural in Art,' 444.
[110] 'Society of Painters in Water-Colours,' *Art Journal* no. 90, June 1869, 173.
[111] Andrew Lang, 'Haggard's (H.R.) She (Book Review),' *The Academy* 31, Issue 765, January 15, 1887, 36; Edmund Gosse, *Aspects and Impressions* (London, New York: Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1922), 262.
[112] Walter Crane, *An Artist's Reminiscences*, Reprint (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2007 (1907)), 84.

On the Borderlands of Fantasy

Not all fantastic artworks from this period invited their viewer to step into another world entirely. In the nineteenth century, as now, certain forms of fantasy thrived in the spaces between faith and knowledge, where superstition and the imagination gave life to fairies, ghosts, and other imaginary denizens of *this* world. These figures on the margins of plausibility appeared far less often in the visual arts than their literary popularity might suggest, perhaps because their very elusiveness was a part of their charm. Violet Paget, herself an author of ghost stories, argued that the best ghosts, the only ones capable of inspiring real belief, must remain unseen, as 'a vague feeling we can scarcely describe, a something pleasing and terrible which invades our whole consciousness, and which, confusedly embodied, we half dread to see behind us, we know not in what shape, if we look round.'[113] Art concretises the ghostly and the dream-like, and by pinning it to the page, or canvas, eliminates the uncertainty that accounts for so much of its charm: 'the supernatural is nothing but ever-renewed impressions, ever-shifting fancies; and … art is the definer, the embodier, the analytic and synthetic force of form.'[114]

Perhaps for this reason, relatively few artworks of the period chose to depict ghosts, dreams, or fairies, all of which are associated with elusiveness, ephemerality, and secrecy. When artists did portray such subjects, they were, as a rule, displaced from the modern world, disassociated from Victorian practices such as Spiritualist seances and the Society for Psychical Research. Images such as Millais's historical melodrama *Speak! Speak!*, or Frederick James Shields's *Hamlet and the Ghost* (1901) treated ghosts as phenomena of centuries past (Fig. 8). This was in keeping with the almost universal bias in fantasy art against the inclusion of recognizably modern elements. Images of woodland nymphs in an Arcadian land, a nameless mermaid at play on an unknown seashore, knights in a mediaeval castle, or fairies in a pristine forest immersed the viewer in a fantasy world which existed wholly outside of their own experience.

As visual representations of the imagination in action, as it were, Fitzgerald's *The Dream After the Masked Ball,* Crane's *Such Sights as Youthful Poets Dream*, and Millais's *Speak! Speak!* each in their own way maintain this division between reality and fantasy, while

[113] Vernon Lee [Violet Paget], 'Faustus and Helena,' *The Cornhill Magazine* 42, no. 248, August 1880, 222.
[114] Lee, 'Faustus and Helena,' 220.

hinting at the possibility of bridging it. Each work depicts or suggests a moment of imaginative revelation, when the mind and heart working together summon a fantastic vision, a fantastic *presence*, out of the imagination and into reality. Like Hunt's poet in a rich man's garden, the figures in these paintings are responsible for inviting new wonders into the world. Such artworks make the tantalising or disturbing suggestion that, for the fantasist, the imagination could be a truly generative force, capable of bringing the otherworldly objects of its contemplation into being.

A Dream of Fairies

The creator of the earliest of these three works, John Anster Fitzgerald (1819-1906), was primarily a fairy painter, known for his woodland scenes populated by tiny fairies and their animal companions. In the late 1850s, however, Fitzgerald produced a series of images which presented his fairy subjects not in their usual setting, flowery tangles empty of human beings and all signs of modern civilization, but in the homes of sleeping Victorian men and women. The fairies who flutter around them may be real beings taking advantage of their obliviousness to take to the air, or they may only be dream-creatures, destined to vanish on waking. The watercolours from this series which survive are *The Artist's Dream*, *The Nightmare*, *Dreaming*, and *The Dream After the Masked Ball*, all of which feature a sleeping figure, surrounded by semi-humanoid insect or animal hybrid figures.[115]

What makes this group of Fitzgerald's works notable, especially *The Dream After the Masked Ball*, subtitled *Such Stuff as Dreams Are Made Of,* is that, unlike most depictions of dreaming figures by other artists, this image endows the beings dreamed of with life and agency of their own, showing them to be capable of stepping out of the intangible world of sleep and into waking life. Around the sleeping woman on her bed, fairy creatures seem to be caught in transition between the vaporous world of dreams and actual life, some grey-white and ghostly, others solidly opaque and brilliantly coloured. Some float weightlessly while others sit comfortably on the carpet. Whether they are only dreams, or whether they have come forth of their own accord to visit from some invisible realm of their own, we cannot tell. The small watercolour was exhibited at the National Institution in 1858, where it was received

[115] *The Dream After the Masked Ball* survives in two versions, but only the version under discussion here was exhibited, at the National Institution in 1858. I would like to thank Rupert Maas of the Maas Gallery for generously sharing with me images of the Fitzgerald works in the gallery's archives, and for an informative discussion of their histories, and of this painting in particular.

with approval tempered by discomfort from *The Art Journal* and *The Observer*, who found its charms undeniable and its oddities largely forgivable.

Reveries, memories, and dreams, all forms of intrusive and involuntary imaginative experience, provided subject matter for many paintings in the latter half of the nineteenth century. These artworks ran the gamut from the meticulous realism of Augustus Egg's depiction of the sleeping sister in *The Travelling Companions* (1863) to the luxuriant theatricality of Daniel Maclise's *Sleeping Beauty* (1842) to the sophisticated aestheticism of Frederick Leighton's *Flaming June* (1895). Depictions of both a dreamer and their dreams were not a Victorian innovation. Michelangelo's *The Dream* (c. 1533) and Francisco Goya's *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* (1797-1799) are among the more famous European examples. Henry Fuseli's *The Nightmare* (1781) and *The Shepherd's Dream* (1793) are two notable British treatments of the subject, the former of which had a direct successor in John Anster Fitzgerald's own, similar *Nightmare* (1857-1858).

Commercial stereoscope pictures from the 1870s-1890s showed images of men and women asleep or lost in thought, the object of their internal contemplation, often their own past selves or a lost loved one, shown in ghostly form or projected on windows or mirrors. These deceptively realistic images depict the restorative powers of thought and imagination, but in symbolic, rather than literal ways. Fitzgerald's *The Dream After the Masked Ball* is a fantastical variant on the familiar subject of the sleeper and the dream. The painting incorporates dreams into the image, not as groupings of conventional (or monstrous) figures, or as stage-plays performed over the sleeper's head, as separate from her as the cherubim-crowded heavens that hover over Renaissance scenes of martyrdom, but as dream-people with lives of their own.

Fitzgerald's successors in this theme adopted his contrasting use of naturalistic and fantastical visual devices to leave the audience in doubt whether what they see is literally or only metaphorically present. Frederick James Shields's *William Blake's Room* (c. 1882-1911, Fig. 9) is a striking variant on the theme, as it shows a dream, without the dreamer. The painting depicts a perfectly solid and ordinary bedroom, in which the geraniums flowering on a sunny windowsill contrast strangely with the three transparent, smoke-grey figures that rise into the air over the covered bed. Their graceful, weightless bodies and crowns of stars recall the figures of angels and spirits Blake himself once drew, as well as the supernatural visitors

he reported seeing throughout his life.[116] The ghost, not of Blake, but of Blake's imagination, haunts the room. Shields's work shares with Fitzgerald's prototype not only a Todorovian sense of fantastic uncertainty, but also a relation to imaginative literature. Fitzgerald's work's subtitle, *Such Stuff as Dreams Are Made Of,* derives from Shakespeare's *The Tempest,* not only a classic work of English literature then enjoying a revival on the London stage, but one which famously foregrounds the power of the artist-as-magician, one who conjures visions that astonish and deceive. Like Prospero, and like Shakespeare himself, Fitzgerald the illusionist produces a truly fantastical scene in which the boundary between the imaginary and the real is blurred, and it is unclear whether what is shown is only a dream, or a dream somehow brought to life.

From Poem to Picture

A literary association likewise adds significance to this chapter's second key image of fantastical invention, Walter Crane's *Such Sights as Youthful Poets Dream* (Fig. 6). It was exhibited with a caption, 'the line – "Such sights as youthful poets dream / On summer eves, by haunted stream."'[117] The quotation, drawn from John Milton's poem 'L'Allegro' (1645), emphasises and helps to explain the image's otherworldly elements. In a superficial sense, it is easy to connect the picture to the title. The figure in a long red gown lying in the foreground, book in hand and lute by his side, is a perfect match for the 'youthful poet.' The long line of quiet water reflecting the procession of strange figures is plainly a stream, and evidently haunted, all under the golden sky and dim purple hills of a 'summer eve.' Yet this picture in fact presents a problem for the interpreter, which distinguishes it as a fascinating fantastical artefact. The problem turns on the simile of the poetic excerpt, above all on the word 'dream,' which creates uncertainty about which parts of the picture are real, and which imaginary. Is the procession of classical figures, including a winged human figure and a Pegasus, all a dream, or is it a real instance of the 'sights' poets dream about? The 'poet' in his original context is only a figure invented for the sake of Milton's evocative comparison. He is an archetype, not a character, and yet in this image he is a character in his own right, and a witness of a still more fictitious object, the procession. That the stream is described as

[116] Allan Cunningham, *The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, vol. 2, 2nd ed. (London: John Murray, 1830), 157-158.
[117] 'General Exhibition of Water Colour Drawings, Dudley Gallery. Egyptian Hall,' *The Observer*, January 31, 1869, 6.

'haunted' may have had a different significance for ghost-story reading Victorians than for Milton, inviting us to think that what the poet sees or seems to see is not a 'dream' but a doubly fantastical vision of the ghosts of legendary beings.

The young poet in Crane's watercolour is clearly awake and aware of the shimmering figures on the far bank of the stream. His head is raised from his book to stare across the water directly at the procession opposite; if they are only figures in a dream, then so must he be, for they and he are equally solid presences in the scene. Yet the book in his hands evokes the responsive imaginative action of the reader who 'sees' the people and places he reads in his mind's eye. The conceit invites comparison to another depiction of a creative mind in action – Robert Williams Buss's unfinished painting, *Dickens's Dream* (1875, Fig. 10). Buss depicted the late author asleep at his desk, surrounded by visions of scenes and characters from his many books, blurring, dreamlike, one into another. This conceit plays out in other areas of art too, especially in religious art. In John William Waterhouse's *Saint Cecilia* (1895), for instance, the saint sleeps, a book of prayer open on her lap, while two angels serenade her. Their visibility to us is a privilege conferred on us by the artist, as 'we can see the angels with our mundane eyes, which she, patron saint of art, sees inwardly.'[118]

However, unlike the saint, or Buss's sleeping Dickens, the direction of this poet's gaze, diverted from book to procession, undermines the easy explanation of the scene as a dramatic representation of an imaginative person's reading experience. Furthermore, the figures do not have the ghostly look of mere projections. Their footsteps follow the line of the grassy bank; the same warm half-light of evening shines evenly on the poet and the procession; and, critically, the river itself reflects their forms exactly. The eye might be fooled by the mind, but here the surface of the river affirms the real presence of the passing figures; the water 'sees' them pass, just as the poet does. Yet at the same time, in an almost punning sense, the doubling of the figures in the water suggests that both processions, on land and in water, are alike only 'reflections' of the poet's thoughts. It falls to the audience to decide whether they are a true apparition, haunting this stream, or whether the poet has summoned them from out of his own imagination to parade, like Prospero's fairies, before him – that is, whether or not to suspend their disbelief.

Crane's decision to literalize the poet's 'sight,' rather than leave his dream as definitely or ambiguously imaginary, may reflect his interest in another poem – Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shalott.' The little fable *Such Sights* presents, of a wonderful vision vouchsafed

[118] Goldhill, *Victorian Culture*, 29.

to a young man by a river bank, looks back to the first river scenes Crane ever made, the *Lady of Shalott* paintings he worked on in 1862 and 1863, and still further back to the watercolour illustrations he had drawn for that same poem as a child (Fig. 17).[119] 'The Lady of Shalott' is, in the broadest sense, a poem about the sight, and about the temptations and dangers of seeing something that belongs to a world not quite our own.

A Ghostly Puzzle

At the exhibition, critics were more concerned with Crane's technique than his fantastical puzzle. (This work was among those branded as examples of the 'poetry-without-grammar school' of art.[120]) By contrast, when John Everett Millais exhibited the similarly ontologically ambiguous *Speak! Speak!* (Fig. 7) at the Royal Academy in 1895, it was his construction of just such a visionary – or delusional – moment that caught the eye of commentators. *Speak! Speak!* is a narrative picture with a puzzle at its heart. The enormous oil painting represents a scene set in some unplaceable bygone era.[121] In the golden glow of an antique lamp, a young man sits up in bed, reaching out to the pale and luminous figure of a woman in white. *Speak! Speak!* is more a caption than a title for the picture, a line of exclamatory dialogue which pairs naturally with his theatrical gesture.

Despite the stagey drama of the scene, it is not actually clear what we are witnessing. Is it an encounter with an actual woman, a ghostly visitation by a departed spirit, or a hypnopompic vision – a form of hallucination which seizes hold of a sleeper at the moment of awakening? According to Marion Harry Spielmann, the obscurity surrounding the woman's nature was intentional: 'When I remarked that I could not tell whether the luminous apparition were a spirit or a woman he was pleased: "That's just what I want," [Millais] said; "I don't know either, nor," he added, pointing to the picture, "does he."'[122] *The Athenaeum*'s critic identified the title as 'the words of Horatio addressing the ghost of Hamlet's father,' and it seems not unlikely that they were correct.[123] Nor is this the only work of literature which the painting invokes, as will be discussed later.

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[119] Crane, *Artist's Reminiscences,* 45.
[120] 'General Exhibition of Water Colour Drawings,' 6.
[121] Art historians and contemporary commentators alike usually tentatively place it in ancient Rome, but the picture itself does not provide a convincing picture of any one period or place.
[122] Marion Harry Spielmann, 'An Artistic Causerie,' *Graphic*, February 5, 1898, 98.
[123] 'Fine Arts,' *The Athenaeum* no. 3523, May 4, 1895, 574.

Though no equally strong textual evidence for the *intentional* ambiguity of Crane or Fitzgerald's works exists, the common visual peculiarities of all three works certainly introduce interpretive problems, ones which compel their audience to make an imaginative choice about what they see. Those sympathetic to the fantastical can bring about their own proxy encounter with the otherworldly, through the action of their own imaginations, identifying themselves with the waking or sleeping witnesses to each scene, while others might choose to interpret them as metaphors, or as ill-advised attempts at representing the unrepresentable workings of the mind. Because of their blurring of the boundary between the fantastical and the real, these paintings make a visual argument for the imaginative accessibility of other worlds.

What were these worlds, to which Fitzgerald, Crane, and Millais pretended to have access? Fitzgerald invokes fairyland, Crane mythic Greece, Millais the world of the dead. All three also, or alternatively, pretend to give their audiences privileged access to the ever-changing, ephemeral worlds of another person's own mind, their waking reveries or sleeping dreams, perhaps the hallucinatory visions induced by drug use or delusive, overwhelming grief. This aspect of their fantasticism may have been inspired, consciously or unconsciously, by the nineteenth-century refinement of the psychological novel into a major art form. Novels, which pretend to give the reader access to the interior experience of their characters (and which pretend that that interiority imitates that of real individuals), demand a suspension of belief different in kind but perhaps not in degree from that required of the reader of fantastic fiction. There is a kind of supernaturalism inherent in texts which narrate the thoughts of their characters, even if all the events of the text are plausibly mundane.[124] A similar kind of pretended, impossible intimacy is suggested by the fantasy artworks here considered. If we choose not to believe that the fantastic figures depicted are truly present, then the staging of each image compels us to accept the equally impossible counter-interpretation, that we have somehow obtained privileged access to an inherently private dream or vision. Either way, our own view of the scene is an impossibility. Thus, each image plays upon the subjectivity of sight, and the creative and deterministic role of the imagination in shaping what we see. They do so through a manifest subject matter anchored in traditional fantasy narratives: the myth, the fairy tale, and the ghost story.

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[124] Pamela Thurschwell, 'George Eliot's prophecies: coercive second sight and everyday thought reading,' in *The Victorian Supernatural*, ed. Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 91.

Fitzgerald's *The Dream After the Masked Ball; Such Stuff as Dreams Are Made Of* depicts a sleeping woman on a low bed, fully dressed in an outfit which the title implies, and its own outlandishness confirms, must have been worn to that night's ball. Her costume is vaguely evocative of Ottoman Turkey; the dark blue jacket trimmed with gold braid and broad scarf wrapped around her waist recall earlier depictions of European women in so-called Ottoman dress.[125] On the other hand, her fashionable white and gold silk skirt, loosened hair and crown of roses speak less to Oriental fantasy than British romance, recalling Undine's appearance in Daniel Maclise's acclaimed 1843 painting *A Scene from Undine* (Fig. 11).[126] Her costumed figure, her own creative self-construction of a fantastical self for an evening's entertainment, reappears multiple times in the dream-scenes that take place all around her in the room. We see her, there, as she imagines and dreams of herself, not as an ordinary woman but as the heroine of her own self-crafted fairy tale. Yet all around her sleeping body and her dream avatars, we see fairy figures that sometimes seem to harass her dream-self. It is half fairy tale, half nightmare, with a wildness which recalls the amorality of Ariel in the play from which it draws its title. By setting his fairy figures free from the romantic narrative played out by the sleeping woman, Fitzgerald adds a disconcerting kind of naturalism to their antics. If this is a dream, it is unclear whether it is her dream, or theirs.

Fitzgerald had a reputation as a naturalist, but one of a very different variety to Pre-Raphaelites or modern life painters. His naturalism was creative, rather than imitative, and amounted to an unusual capacity for convincingly bringing the unnatural and the imaginary to life. After Richard Doyle's death, Fitzgerald was hailed as the only eligible successor in the art of fairy painting to him, 'the man who had been in Elfland.'[127] Like Doyle, his works were described as lifelike, even realistic, depictions of fairy figures. Paradoxical as it seems to describe a fantastical genre such as fairy art as naturalistic, that was the trend which the genre followed throughout the nineteenth century, partly under the influence of Pre-Raphaelitism.[128]

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[125] See, for example, Henry William Pickersgill's *A Syrian Maid*, 1827, or David Wilkie's *Mrs Elizabeth Young in Eastern Costume*, 1841, both in the collection of Tate Britain.

[126] For an in-depth analysis of the costuming in Fitzgerald's painting, see Anne Chassagnol, 'Nuptial Dreams and Toxic Fantasies: Visions of Feminine Desire in John Anster Fitzgerald's Fairy Paintings The Stuff That Dreams Are Made of (1858)' in *Sleeping Beauties in Victorian Britain: Cultural, Literary and Artistic Explorations of a Myth*, ed. Béatrice Laurent (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2015), 185-7.

[127] 'The Pictures of Richard Doyle,' *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 137, no. 834, April 1885, 490, 485.

[128] Bown, *Fairies in Nineteenth Century Art*, 110.

Fitzgerald and Doyle were only two among many artists following in the footsteps of pioneers in fairy art, such as Thomas Stothard, the first British artist to append butterfly wings to the flying sylphs.[129] A story, circulating since the 1850s, maintained that Stothard had gone out to catch real butterflies in order to copy their wings for the purpose, a touch of verisimilitude presaging the shimmering butterfly and dragonfly wings and meticulously detailed meadows and hedgerows of mid and late nineteenth-century fairy art by artists such as Joseph Noel Paton and John Atkinson Grimshaw.[130] Yet while Doyle was treated as a kind of ambassador to Fairyland, his works received as missives from the realm where he had been '"time out of mind the fairies' Court Painter,"' Fitzgerald was described by critics as a kind of natural scientist of fairy lore, whose works' lifelike qualities were 'terribly suggestive that the artist must have a case of such familiars at home.'[131] In this sense he might be seen as the artistic counterpart to Charles Kingsley, who prided himself on the scientific accuracy of many of the underwater denizens of the world of *The Water Babies*.[132]

The distinct receptions of these two artists might be attributable to the very different mood of their works. Doyle's fairies are innocuous beings, often childlike, usually seen at play or at rest in tidy woodlands or flowery meadows – benign figures, in a benign world. Fitzgerald's oeuvre is characterised by densely packed canvases, in which humanoid and insectoid fairies mingle with birds, insects, and small mammals in the midst of tightly knotted and shadowy tangles of briars, tree branches, or water plants. In Fitzgerald's fairy world, the fairies and the animals are foes, as well as friends, and the woods they move through are not entirely natural. For instance, in *Fairy Lovers in a Bird's Nest Watching a White Mouse* (1860), the mouse is about knee-high to the typically diminutive fairies, yet over their shoulder, we see two blue birds in flight, themselves no larger than the fairies' hands. This distortion of natural proportions, and the implication that behind every small secret form of life there hides a still smaller world, evoke the startling discoveries of 'animalcules' and their invisible world as revealed by the microscope.[133]

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[129] The fairies in question appear in his illustrations to a 1797 edition of Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*. Laura Forsberg, 'Nature's Invisibilia: The Victorian Microscope and the Miniature Fairy,' *Victorian Studies* 57, no. 4 (2015): 644.

[130] Forsberg, 'Nature's Invisibilia,' 645-6.

[131] 'The Grosvenor Gallery,' *The Times*, no. 28930, May 1, 1877, 10; 'The British Institution,' *Art Journal,* no. 51, March 1859, 82.

[132] Prickett, *Victorian Fantasy*, 156.

[133] Nicola Bown, 'What is the stuff that dreams are made of?' in *The Victorian Supernatural*, 167.

Fitzgerald brought his pseudo-naturalistic approach to the dream-creatures in *The Dream After the Masked Ball*, giving to these invaders a disturbingly realistic degree of autonomy. It is unclear what, if any, rules govern their movement through space. Some fairies rest firmly on the carpeted ground, but others seem only semi-embodied. Lacking colour or weight, they hover, dance or stride across the empty air. Two of them seem to stand directly on top of the sleeping woman's skirts, without any regard for the impropriety of their position. Their chaotic rambling across the picture plane has something in it of the movement of amoebas across a drop of water on a microscope plate. Their total freedom – from gravity, from artistic convention, and, apparently, from the will of the sleeper – makes it hard to believe that they are only dreams, subordinate to the woman's imagination and sure to vanish if she woke up.

These fairies are almost as incomprehensible as microscopic organisms were to their Victorian observers; their bodies are only vaguely humanoid, with long limbs and whiskery faces suggestive of insects, or the 'hungry thirsty roots' of fairy fruit trees in Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market,' composed in the same year the picture was exhibited.[134] Their alien faces are hard to read, as are their intentions, some seemingly benign, others malevolent, still others exhibiting a kind of astonished fascination with the sleeping woman, reminding us that our world would be as strange to fairies as they are to us. Fitzgerald gives his vision of a fairy invasion a disturbing realism by suggesting the actual disorder that would ensue if the boundaries between reality and fairyland collapsed, if real magic, rather than the romantic fantasies of the costume ball, were set loose. Victorian fantasy offered few examples of this discomfiting view of the otherworldly. Fitzgerald's dark variation on the fairy dream demonstrates that Victorian fantasy could build stories even around troubling new discoveries, such as the hidden world of microscopic life, allowing Victorians to experience scientific revelations as magical encounters.

A Mysterious Visitor

Unlike the sleeping figures in Fitzgerald's dream-pictures, or the hidden face of the poet over whose shoulder we look in Crane's, in Millais's *Speak! Speak!* we see a young man seeing a ghost, and, still more impossibly, see the ghost, apparently, looking back at him. The

[134] Christina Rossetti, *Christina Rossetti: The Complete Poems*, ed. R. W. Crump and Betty S. Flowers (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 6.

directness of the two figures' gazes belies the underlying ambiguity of the encounter. As one of the last works exhibited by a popular painter nearing the end of his long career, *Speak! Speak!* inevitably attracted critical notice but met with a mixed reception. Wanting to praise the work, and yet unable to conceal their dissatisfaction with it, the critics' responses shed light on the multiple priorities which came into play in the assessment of sophisticated works of fantasy art at the end of the century. *Speak! Speak!* demonstrates how the representation of a subject could conflict with the aesthetic qualities critics associated with a particular fantasy subject. By the 1890s ghost stories were well established as a sub-genre of fantasy fiction, and Millais's painting was assessed on the same terms as late-Victorian ghost literature. This was despite the fact that its roots were almost certainly set in the soil of early British Romantic art, and still earlier British literary traditions.

The painting may have been based on a work by Joseph Wright of Derby, which it closely resembles. Wright's painting *William and Margaret* was created in 1785 under the inspiration of a ballad from *Percy's Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, 'Fair Margaret and Sweet William' (Fig. 12).[135] The poem narrates the tragic death of both title characters. Margaret dies 'for pure true love' after learning that William intends to marry another woman, and then William dies 'for sorrow,' after learning of her death. The scene which the painting depicts takes place between the two deaths, when the sleeping William is visited by the ghost of Margaret, who wishes him 'joy of your gay bride-bed, / and me of my winding-sheet.'[136] Like *Speak! Speak!, William and Margaret* depicts a young man in a four-poster bed with dark green hangings, gazing in alarm at a pale woman in white standing at its foot. Wright's version is set in England in the seventeenth or early eighteenth century, as evidenced by the tasselled hangings on the bed, diamond-paned Gothic window, and the church silhouetted against the moonlit sky. The subject, the proportions of the canvas, the use of the bed posts to create a frame around the pair, the positioning of the figures, the colour of the bed hangings, and the shifting tones of the light, from a warmer yellow shade near the head of the bed, to a cold blue where Margaret stands, are all reproduced, with modest adjustments, in Millais's picture. Both even include a bright flash of blue in the upper left corner of the canvas. In Wright's work, the blue radiates from the flame of a lamp, and in Millais's, from a shaft of moonlight.

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135 Thomas Percy, *Percy's Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, vol. 2 (London: J. M Dent, 1916 (1765)), 261-264.
136 Percy, *Percy's Reliques*, 262.

William and Margaret was engraved by John Raphael Smith in 1785, prints of which were still in circulation in the late 1800s.[137] The painting itself remained in the private collection of a Derbyshire collector, but was exhibited as part of a large public show of works by Wright, in Derby in 1866.[138] No visit to Derby in 1866 is noted in Millais's biographies, but it would have been entirely possible for him to have seen either *William and Margaret* or Smith's print after it, prior to embarking on his own, very similar work on the theme. Not one of Millais's contemporaries observed the similarities between the pictures – or if they did, they chose not to point it out. Neither has any art historian noted their resemblance, to my knowledge.

The two compositions are so astonishingly similar that it is hard to believe that the resemblance is pure coincidence. It is impossible to say whether Millais was consciously – and circumspectly – imitating Wright's painting, or whether he drew inspiration from a confused recollection of the earlier work. He was immensely proud of the finished product, according to his son, who recalled that '[n]ever before, I think, had I seen him so well pleased with any work of his own,'[139] yet Millais also seemed a trifle confused about the origins of his idea. Spielmann recalls that '"Speak! Speak!" had germinated in the painter's mind for five-and-twenty years, he told me, before he set about carrying it out,' while in his biography of Millais, the artist's son places the date of inspiration much earlier, in the mid-1850s.[140] The confusion may reflect the artist's reluctance to acknowledge the connection to Wright's work, or genuine forgetfulness. Millais's unacknowledged and quite possibly unconscious, emulation of Wright's work illustrates both Victorian fantasy's debt to the ideological, narrative, and aesthetic precedents set by Romanticism, and its inherent conventionality. Not one critic complained that Millais's work lacked originality, despite its being based on a common story type, while, as will be seen, Frank Dicksee's own ghost painting of the same year, with a much more modern, Spiritualism-inspired narrative, was decried as 'commonplace.'[141] A good ghost story, a gripping fantasy, did not need to be original in

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[137] One such print was given to the British Museum by the artist and collector John Deffett Francis in 1878. British Museum, 'Print: William and Margaret,' *British Museum Collection*. Online Catalogue Entry for "Print: William and Margaret."

[138] Llewellynn Jewitt, 'Wright of Derby,' *Art Journal*, no. 60, December 1866, 378.

[139] John Guille Millais, *The Life and Letters of Sir John Everett Millais, President of the Royal Academy,* vol. 2 (London: Methuen & Co., 1899), 307.

[140] Spielmann, 'An Artistic Causerie,' 6; John Guille Millais, *Life and Letters of Sir John Everett Millais,* vol. 2, 304.

[141] 'Fine Arts,' *The Athenaeum* 3525, May 18, 1895, 647.

concept or execution to satisfy its audience, always provided that 'there be the genius to make them credible.'[142]

Unfortunately, by this last measure, Millais was judged too much the naturalist, an artist whose virtue lay in *not* leaving anything to the imagination, to be a master-painter of ghosts. His skill in convincingly rendering the human form, well-demonstrated in *Speak! Speak!,* proved to be both the painting's great strength, and its besetting weakness. Multiple observers commented on the masterful rendering of the 'heavy, murky atmosphere' in the dramatically lit bedroom.[143] The face and gesture of the male figure were also praised as both realistic and dramatically expressive. As F.G. Stephens, a friend of Millais's, writing for the *Athenaeum*, put it, '[t]he action of the man is marked partly by hope, partly by surprise, and partly by a slight touch of fear; in fact, in every respect it is natural and true.'[144] In him, Millais appears to have achieved what Coleridge had defined as the foundation for a 'willing suspension of disbelief,' that is, 'the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions, as would naturally accompany such [supernatural] situations, supposing them real.'[145]

To other critics, however, Millais's shortfall in the depiction of the supernatural elements of the scene outweighed his other successes. Claude Phillips, writing for *The Academy,* hesitantly interpreted the female figure as a hallucination, 'a visionary form – the luminous shadow of the lost one which the intensity of his longing has evoked,' because she seemed too solid to pass as truly supernatural. For Phillips, the ambiguity seemed to be the result of Millais's talents being ill-suited to the subject,

> by reason of a certain curious literalness and insistence on the material side of his conception, which robs it too much of mystery, because it leaves the imagination with little or nothing to suggest, to complete for itself. We admire the pathos, the beauty of the informing idea, yet are not carried away into the dim borderland between dreaming and waking, whither the painter would fain transport us.[146]

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[142] Eagles, 'The Natural in Art,' 437.
[143] Claude Phillips, 'The Royal Academy,' *The Academy* 1201, May 11, 1895, 408.
[144] 'Fine Arts,' *The Athenaeum* 3523, 574.
[145] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria,* 207-208.
[146] Phillips, 'The Royal Academy,' 408.

The critic for *The Observer*, who shared Phillips's opinion, went so far as to give it a different title, '"Apparition of a Bride"' in place of the less-than explanatory line of dialogue, *Speak! Speak!*.[147] The new title, which sounds suitable for a Christmas ghost-story, might have been an attempt to add a narrative element to compensate for what that critic saw as the shortcomings of Millais's 'solidly painted' picture, 'real enough in its way, only the wife is not a bit ghostly, the eerie, creepy note of supernaturalism is somehow wanting.'[148] A few years later, after Millais's death, Spielmann (perhaps determined to say nothing to the detriment of his late friend), found a way to justify the apparent solidity of the lady, as indicative not of her true nature but only of the intensity of the man's experience. '[H]e raises his eyes and beholds her – so material a spirit to his ardent and excited fancy that he cries to it to speak that he may know the truth – whether it be she indeed, or the creation of his tortured imagination.'[149] The sympathetic Spielmann allied his imagination to that of the artist, composing a story to enhance his experience of the painted fantasy.

Distancing and the Suspension of Disbelief

Millais's painting, in Spielman's generous interpretation, is, like Crane's *Such Sights*, an allegorical rendering of a key mechanism in fantasy: the engagement of the audience's imagination. This mechanism is particularly relevant in stories about liminal fantasies, that waver between asking for our belief, and the suspension of our *disbelief.* The equivocal response to Millais's painting reflects the difficulty of tempting audiences to suspend their disbelief, especially when an artist's talents did not lend themselves to the specific fantastical subject they had chosen, and when the image lacked a (known) textual counterpart to provide a complementary narrative. In the absence of sufficient encouragement, the imagination lies dormant, the emotions unstirred, belief withheld.

A similar controversy surrounded Millais's *The Knight Errant* (1870), which both lacked a specific textual basis, and was criticised for a too naturalistic representation of the naked woman being rescued. Her figure was compared unfavourably with Watt's *Fata Morgana*, hung nearby, and with Leighton's *Venus Disrobing for the Bath* of 1867.[150] Watts's and Leighton's nudes, of which *Art Journal* approved, were 'removed far away from actual

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[147] 'The Royal Academy,' *The Observer,* May 5, 1895, 7.
[148] 'The Royal Academy,' *The Observer,* May 5, 1895, 7.
[149] Spielmann, *Millais and His Works*, 119.
[150] 'The Royal Academy,' *Art Journal* 102, June 1870, 164.

nature,' emulating instead the example set by classical and Renaissance nudes, which appear 'clothed in a beauty all sufficing, and live and move as beings endowed by nature with attributes removed from common earth.'[151] The issue with Millais's work was not (or so the *Art Journal* claimed) one of morality, but of 'imagination;' *The Knight Errant,* like Watts and Leighton's paintings, was 'sufficiently high and chaste to take the figures out of the region of sense into the sphere of imagination,' but the 'almost too real' woman counterbalanced the merits of 'much finer … knight, armour clad, who comes to the lady's rescue!'[152]

Naturalism in an imaginatively romantic if not explicitly fantastical work such as *The Knight Errant* had a role, but a limited one. That the element at issue was a nude female body is not irrelevant, but what I want to highlight here is not the all-too obviously gendered aspect of the critic's response, but his disappointment with the undifferentiation of the picture from reality. In *The Knight Errant*, he looked in vain for a female figure as distinctively romantic as the knight in armour by her side. The nudes he admired, the kind he would have preferred in this highly romanticised medievalist scene, were those whose appearance showed them to be 'removed from common earth.'[153] Whether they were posed as damsels in distress or ghosts, it seems, women's bodies needed to be set apart from ordinary, solid, fleshy realities, in order to be integrated into imaginary contexts.

In fact, this kind of dissatisfaction was *not* always directed at women's bodies; in 1890 *The Athenaeum* complained of the Perseus in Charles Napier Kennedy's *Perseus and Andromeda* that 'his legs are girlish,' while H.S. Tuke's version of the same scene in that year's RA exhibition was subjected to criticism very similar to that directed at Millais's *Knight Errant*: 'ruddy faces and pale bodies which betray the model, and belong to persons usually clothed!'[154] Almost ten years later, Briton Rivière's warrior knight in *In Manus Tuas, Domine* was dismissed as 'too trim and dainty for the encounter with the nameless powers which he has before him.'[155] These artists' failure was not as a lack of skill as copyists of nature, but an inability to rise to the level of the legends that inspired them. Their work was degraded by 'a ludicrously feeble execution of a noble subject,' revealing them as members of

[151] 'The Royal Academy,' *Art Journal* 102, June 1870, 164.
[152] 'The Royal Academy,' *Art Journal* 102, June 1870, 164.
[153] 'The Royal Academy,' *Art Journal* 102, June 1870, 164.
[154] 'The New Gallery, Regent Street, II,' *The Athenaeum* 3263, May 10, 1890, 612; 'The Royal Academy,' *The Athenaeum* 3265, May 24, 1890, 678.
[155] 'Exhibition of the Royal Academy,' *The Times* 29558, May 3, 1879, 5.

the class of 'painters who lack imagination' and are unsuited to paint either admirable heroes or horrifying monsters.[156]

Art critics evidently expected a 'correct' representation of subjects for which there was no real-world source of comparison. They looked for a kind of imaginative correctness that balanced realism with fantasy and produced figures that accorded with standards rooted not in reality, but in artistic tradition and the popular imagination. Fantastical subjects, according to this standard, demanded imaginative illustrations which harmonised naturalism, idealism, and the truly bizarre, in proportions suited to the character of the subject chosen.

Representation and Realisation

Fitzgerald, Crane, and Millais's paintings, separated as they are by decades and differing in medium and in scale, illustrate one ever-present challenge for fantasy artists: the expectation that their works convey, not only the outward appearance of an otherworldly place or person, but also the sensations – awe, apprehension, or delight – that readers associated with literary treatments of the same kind of subjects, and which would accompany a real encounter with the fantastic. That expectation could be seen as part of a broader cultural push for what Martin Meisel, using a term already current in the nineteenth century, calls 'realization.' Meisel argues that the movement towards realism in a wide range of Victorian cultural productions: novels, stage plays, book illustrations, and the fine arts, reflected a 'persistent pressure toward uniting a concrete particularity with inward signification, the materiality of things with moral and emotional force, historical fact with figural truth, the mimetic with the ideal.'[157] Realisation, in this sense, demanded not only a truthful replication of the surface appearance of things, places, and people, but also some expression of their symbolic qualities *through* their appearance. Meisel identifies this impulse with many trends in mid and late-Victorian visual culture: the production of panoramas and dioramas, the increasing elaborateness of stage sets and costumes, the revival of *tableaux vivants*, the proliferation of illustrated editions of novels, and the rise of Pre-Raphaelitism and modern life painting.[158] To realise a subject was to concretize that which was merely conceptual, translating ideas from the

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[156] 'The Royal Academy,' *The Athenaeum* 3265, May 24, 1890, 678; 'The New Gallery, Regent Street, II,' *The Athenaeum* 3263, May 10, 1890, 612.
[157] Martin Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 36.
[158] Meisel, *Realizations*, 33-34, 36.

imagination or the page to the canvas: ‘To move from mind’s eye to body’s eye was realization, and to add a third dimension to two was realization, as when words became picture.’[159]

Viewing critical attitudes towards fantasy paintings as a special form of the impulse towards realisation – which demanded both substance and significance – helps to explain their mixed receptions of fantastical artworks. Critical assessment of the quality of a fantasy painting was exceptionally subjective because it hinged on the degree to which it measured up to, not any real object or person, but the critic’s own imagination. Furthermore, they demanded not only a convincing representation of the fantastic, but also some story, with emotional and moral significance, to support the fantasy imagery. For instance, Fitzgerald’s success in realising his dream-fairies as truly alien creatures, inexplicable as to their nature, origins, or intentions, was double-sided. One observer praised his painting of ‘the fibrous roots which the goblin’s hands and feet taper to … not unlike the net-work of a dream,’ but lamented the lack of any comprehensible narrative to sustain his interest in these bizarre beings – ‘there is no story, and the fun is attenuated.’[160] Millais’s ‘naturalism’ as applied to a ghost-story proved both an asset and a weakness, as it enabled him to realise, perfectly, the setting for a manifestation and the reactions of its human observer, while it hampered him in giving to the ghost her due measure of otherworldliness and mystery, through too definite a representation of her form.

An Unreal Vision

Genre-based expectations played less of a role in the harsh reception of Crane’s *Such Sights as Youthful Poets Dream* at the Dudley Gallery in 1869 than the hostility towards Crane and his coterie which his critics had formed the previous year. The 1869 exhibition was hailed as further proof of their want of technical skill to accompany their high-flown imaginations in ‘pictures delightful for sentiment, but ridiculous for drawing.’[161] Affronted commentators at the major art magazines ridiculed Crane for once again failing to rise to the level of his ‘theme.’ Yet *Such Sights* was a turning point in Crane’s career as a rising fantasist. It built on his earlier work in romantic fantasy painting and was itself part of a set of three works with

[159] Meisel, *Realizations*, 30.
[160] ‘The Portland Gallery,’ *The Athenaeum* 1586, March 20, 1858, 376.
[161] ‘Art,’ *Westminster Review* 35, no. 2, April 1869, 594.

similar compositions, all produced in the wake of a pivotal encounter with the works of Edward Burne-Jones. *Such Sights as Youthful Poets Dream* can be interpreted as a fantasy realising, neither fairies or ghosts, but an imaginary space which the artist associated with the elusive sense of wonder which he had first discovered in Burne-Jones's watercolours.

In 1869, Crane had been working as an independent artist for less than ten years, but had spent that time steeped in subjects of a fantastic or romantic nature. Crane's first major commission was to create illustrations for JR Wise's book *The New Forest*.[162] For that commission, he spent weeks travelling in the forest with the author, making sketches of the scenery by day, and amusing himself in the evening by helping Wise in a romantic side-project, 'a mock mediaeval ballad of the Red King ... Wise wrote the ballad and I engrossed the verses and illuminated them.'[163] Soon after, Crane was commissioned to produce a series of paintings, two depicting the Lady of Shalott (in 1862 and 1863), and two subjects from Keats, *The Eve of St Agnes* (1864) and *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* (1865).

The 1865 show at the Old Society of Water-colour Painters decided Crane for a career as a fantasist. In a memoir largely written in tame prose, Crane's recollection of this exhibition climbs up into sudden lyricism, as he tries to convey the impact that Burne-Jones's works had on him:

> The curtain had been lifted, and we had had a glimpse into a magic world of romance and pictured poetry, peopled with ghosts of "ladies dead and lovely knights," – a twilight world of dark mysterious woodlands, haunted streams, meads of deep green starred with burning flowers, veiled in a dim and mystic light, and stained with low-toned crimson and gold, as if indeed one had gazed through the glass of
>
> "Magic casements opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas in faerylands forlorn."
>
> It was, perhaps, not to be wondered at that, fired with such visions, certain young students should desire to explore further for themselves.[164]

[162] Crane, *Artist's Reminiscences*, 69.
[163] Crane, *Artist's Reminiscences*, 69.
[164] Crane, *Artist's Reminiscences*, 84.

Crane's works over the following years suggest an artist striving to re-create that same wonder. His work throughout the latter half of the 1860s demonstrates an ongoing engagement with the challenge of conjuring up a 'magic world' of his own.

Three works from three successive years, all exhibited at the Dudley Gallery, show a continuous effort to refine a single theme, through metamorphosis and reiteration: *The Enchanted Boat* (1868, Fig. 13), *Such Sights as Youthful Poets Dream* (1869), and *Ormuzd and Ahriman* (1870). The first of these depicts a woman in a classically draped gown, with parti-coloured wings, floating in a lotus-prowed boat down a narrow stream which winds through an open landscape backed by blue mountains. Swans paddle through the water at the boat's side, and along the banks are young trees and leafy water-plants. *Such Sights as Youthful Poets Dream* shares with *The Enchanted Boat* its riverine setting, mountainous horizon, slender trees, and pale sky. *Ormuzd and Ahriman* repeats the scene again: a wide, open plain backed by low mountains, through which a pale river runs. To this familiar landscape are added the ruins of Greek and Palaeolithic temples. Two figures on horseback in full armour fight with lances in a foreground scattered with skulls, bones, and crowns, 'emblems' as Crane later described them, 'of fallen or decaying powers.'[165] Each of these artworks presents a visual puzzle, and draws its inspiration from a textual source – a metaphorical passage in Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, a simile from Milton's 'L'Allegro,' or Max Müller's analysis of Persian myth.[166] Their similarities to each other are not more striking than their debt to two of the works Crane cites as an inspiration to him at that time in his career: Edward Burne-Jones's *The Merciful Knight* and *Green Summer*.

All five works could almost be seen as a different scene on the same stage set. All depict clearings in the woods, by pools or streams, backed by dark woods or blue mountains along a high horizon over which glow pale blue or golden skies. The people who populate this green stage come from romance, from myth, or from some serene imaginary world. The excerpt from *Prometheus Unbound* which captioned Crane's *The Enchanted Boat* could pair almost as well with the circle of listeners on the grassy bank in Burne-Jones's *Green Summer* – 'My soul is an enchanted boat, / Which, like a sleeping swan doth float, / Upon the silver waves of thy sweet singing.'[167] The weird, almost grotesque mood of *The Merciful Knight* corresponds to the ominous combat in a ruined landscape of *Ormuzd and Ahriman*. The

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[165] P.G. Konody, *The Art of Walter Crane* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1902), 94; Crane, *Artist's Reminiscences,* 99.
[166] Crane, *Artist's Reminiscences,* 98.
[167] 'The Fourth General Exhibition of Water-colour Drawings,' *Art Journal* 75, March 1868, 45-46.

intensity of Crane's reaction to these particular works by Burne-Jones is evident in the persistent echoes of them in his later designs. The experience made a fantasist of him. Crane himself speaks of this time in his life as a kind of artistic residency in the world of his imagination, when 'my real world was a dream-world, a cloister, or quiet green garden, where one only heard afar and dimly the echoes of the strife of the great world.'[168] In a way, Crane's dream-like watercolours from this period are analogous to his careful sketches of the New Forest of a few years before. Both are attempts to capture views of a landscape through which the artist was journeying, except that in one case the landscape was mundane, and in the other, imaginary.

Crane's work highlights a third element in the Victorian push for realisation in fantasy – how historical modes might find new life as ways of visualising the fantastical. The realisation of a scene in an archaic mode displaces it in time, aesthetically, in a manner analogous to the verbal 'distancing from the ordinary' Ursula le Guin associates with good literary fantasy, akin to the use of archaic language even in fantasies not set in a version of a specific historical time period.[169] Commentators on Crane's watercolours noted an unspecific archaism of manner and of content, in the costume and accoutrements of the figures in each timeless landscape. This element was present in Millais and Fitzgerald's works as well, in the ambiguously historical furnishing in Millais's picture, and the Gothic tracery in the window and the woman's fancy dress in Fitzgerald's. These geographically and chronologically unplaceable scenes, set in some 'once upon a time' world, are highly characteristic of Victorian fantasy.

At the exhibitions in the late 1860s, critics found it difficult to classify Crane's approach, in which they recognised both 'classic' and 'mediaeval' modes in a 'delicious sentimentality of colour and morbid mannerism.'[170] In 1870, Crane's work was again seen as an admixture of 'mediaeval quaintness and hardness with classical forms and treatment.'[171] Though it took some time for them to warm up to his style, this was the year that Crane finally won the *Art Journal* over, as they admitted, 'beset as we are by the meanest naturalism, we hail with delight a manner which, though by many deemed mistaken, carries

[168] Crane, *Artist's Reminiscences*, 102.
[169] Le Guin, *The Language of the Night,* 89.
[170] 'The Fourth General Exhibition of Water-Colour Drawings,' *Art Journal* 75, March 1868, 45.
[171] 'General Exhibition of Water Colour Drawings, Dudley Gallery, Egyptian Hall,' *The Observer*, January 31, 1869, 6.

the mind into the regions of the imagination.'[172] An eclectic blend of classical and mediaeval tropes distinguishes many works of fantasy from this period, in poetry as well as in art. William Morris had recently published *The Life and Death of Jason* and *The Earthly Paradise*, both of which were acclaimed by Walter Pater for their fusion of classical and mediaeval elements, which transcended the individual excellences of either:

> This poetry is neither a mere reproduction of Greek or mediæval life or poetry, nor a disguised reflex of modern sentiment. The atmosphere on which its effect depends belongs to no actual form of life or simple form of poetry. Greek poetry, mediæval or modern poetry, projects above the realities of its time a world in which the forms of things are transfigured. Of that world this new poetry takes possession, and sub-limates beyond it another still fainter and more spectral, which is literally an artificial or "earthly paradise." It is a finer ideal, extracted from what in relation to any actual world is already an ideal.[173]

The creative adaptation of old material to new ends provided Victorian fantasists with potent imagery, redolent of both history and myth, combined to form a convincingly otherworldly blend, familiar, yet strange. That myths, legends, folklore, and fairy tales should all be available for the free use of the creative artist became a central creed of the modern school of fantasy. '[T]he first requisite for the poetic treatment of an old myth is that it should be used as mere material, and handled with perfect freedom.'[174] This freedom to borrow from the past did not, however, exempt artists from judgement by their contemporaries.

The Composition of a Fantasy Painting

Their criticism, as much as the praise, that fantasy paintings merited, reveals what it was that audiences looked to a fantasy work for: a realisation in Coleridgean, as well as Meisel's terms, one capable of 'the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions,

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[172] 'Dudley Gallery,' *Art Journal* 99, March 1870, 87.
[173] Walter Pater, 'Art II: Poems by William Morris,' *Westminster Review* 34, no. 2, October 1868, 300.
[174] Andrew C. Bradley, 'Old Mythology in Modern Poetry,' *Macmillan's Magazine* 44, May 1, 1881, 30.

as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real.'[175] To borrow a more contemporaneous and art-specific term, a fantastical work triumphed over its audience, winning from them a willing belief, only if it possessed what Ruskin called 'imaginative verity.'[176] One of the many powers Ruskin ascribes to imagination in *Modern Painters* is the deliberate distortion of the mere facts of a scene in order to more truthfully represent some abstract quality. Imaginative art in this sense is perfectly true, but not *realistic*. It risks incredulity with regard to its material elements, such as the forms of trees, the lighting, or the movement of bodies in space, in order to convince on an emotional level, showing 'the utter scorn of the imagination for all shackles and fetters of mere external fact that stand in the way of its suggestiveness.'[177] This ideal truth, as distinct from concrete fact, is called by Ruskin 'imaginative verity.'[178]

Ruskin introduces the term to justify Tintoretto's detours into the unrealistic in his religious art. The 'voice supernatural' that these distortions introduce into the images is spiritual, rather than fantastical, but there are echoes of Leigh Hunt's belief in 'the Realities of the Imagination' in Ruskin's praise of the artist's diversion from realism, in the 'daring consciousness of its higher and spiritual verity.'[179] In the same volume of *Modern Painters,* Ruskin praises Turner's *Jason* (1802) for the imaginative verity of his suggestive and convincing rendering of the hero Jason's encounter with the dragon. He singles out for praise Turner's distortion of the natural landscape elements, such as the shape of the trees and the way the shadows fall, the better to convey the horror of the monster. Turner, Ruskin argues, shows his imaginative grasp of 'the heart of the dragon' not only through what he puts into the painting, but in what he leaves out, 'having told the whole pith and power of his subject and disdaining to tell more, … the sign of this being the case is, that the imagination of the beholder is forced to act in a certain mode, and feels itself overpowered and borne away by that of the painter' (Fig. 14).[180]

Imaginative verity is perhaps the best term for the quality of verisimilitude which Victorian audiences and artists looked for in fantastical artworks. It was not Burne-Jones's masterful rendering of the natural landscape which Crane remembered being captivated by,

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[175] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 207-208.
[176] Ruskin, *Complete Works,* vol. 3, *Modern Painters II*, 278.
[177] Ruskin, *Complete Works,* vol. 3, *Modern Painters II*, 278.
[178] Ruskin, *Complete Works,* vol. 3, *Modern Painters II*, 278.
[179] Hunt, *Essays*, 67; Ruskin, *Complete Works,* vol. 3, *Modern Painters II*, 278.
[180] Ruskin, *Complete Works* vol. 3, *Modern Painters II,* 297, 259-260.

but its imaginative verity, the palpable sense of looking through a window into another world, convincingly and entrancingly strange, romantic, and beautiful. To some observers, Millais's *Speak! Speak!* failed to convince them of its imaginative verity, because its haunting atmosphere was undermined by an excess of naturalism. He showed his subject, his ghostly lady, too clearly, lacking Turner's restraint in his portrayal of his dragon. Fitzgerald amused his critics through the perceptible alienness of his fairies, but had 'no story,' no 'higher and spiritual verity' to complete the image.[181]

Recognizing the Fantastical

The kinds of fantastical imagery that critics looked for and the standards they judged paintings by were not, or not wholly, of their own invention. Precedents in the visual, literary, and performing arts necessarily informed popular ideas of what a dragon, a ghost, or a fairy should be, and how they should be presented. Even fantasy artworks that do not explicitly invoke a single textual or pictorial precedent must be understood as referencing one or another element of the vast body of cultural material dealing with the fantastical and the supernatural. One may or may not agree with Ruskin's assertion that the imagination cannot invent, but only recombine what it has already seen, but it is certain that no fantasy artwork can be wholly isolated from the scaffolding of tradition which supports it.[182] Chris Brooks argues in his study of Victorian Realism, *Signs for the Times*, that an observer evaluates the realism or unrealism of an artwork on the basis of the recognizability of its content, which in turn depends upon the content's *resemblance* to analogous objects outside the picture plane. The only way for critics to judge the realism of a fantastic artwork was by measuring its resemblance to artistic precedents in the representation of the subject, or to the images their own imaginations produced, under the inspiration of verbal descriptions of the fantastic subject.[183]

Associating an artwork with a specific text, as the creators of fantasy artworks so often did, narrows the range of possible comparisons the audience can make when judging the artwork's realism, while also narrowing the range of choices the artist can make without

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[181] 'The Portland Gallery,' *The Athenaeum* 1586, March 20, 1858, 376; Ruskin, *Complete Works,* vol. 3, *Modern Painters II*, 278.
[182] Ruskin, *Complete Works* vol. 3, *Modern Painters II*, 228.
[183] Chris Brooks, *Signs for the Times: Symbolic Realism in the Mid-Victorian World* (London: Routledge, 2016 (1984)), 108-109.

violating the expectations that their title or subject raised. Failure to meet those expectations is met with the scorn heaped on Kennedy or Tuke's *Perseus and Andromeda*. It would seem that, at least in the late nineteenth century, fantasy was not a genre which rewarded innovation. Yet artists did innovate, and new subjects, and new ways of representing old ones, did emerge. Associating a novel or uncommon fantasy work with an established text or genre could help its audience to enjoy it, by clueing them in to the mood or spirit in which the work ought to be viewed.

Fitzgerald's invocation of *The Tempest* in the title of his seemingly unrelated dream-fantasy illustrates one way in which literary precedents could be used to justify a largely original conception to its audience. Fitzgerald's sleeping lady is no Miranda, the figures in her dream are not Ferdinand, Caliban, or Ariel, and yet *The Tempest* and the picture share common ground. Both are stories of transmigration, from the familiar, real world of England (or Naples) to dream-land (or Prospero's island), and the illusions, both magical and psychological, which visitors to a strange world confront. The association with *The Tempest* also invoked values which the watercolour was unable, through the limitations of its medium or its artist's skill, to supply – not only the grander illusions involved in a staging of the play, but also a romantic narrative which would elevate the visual fascinations of the scene above mere 'goblin fancy.'[184]

The double titling of *The Dream after the Masked Ball*, or *Such Stuff as Dreams Are Made of* – one title hinting at the story of the scene, the other a quotation from *The Tempest* – reflects its content, its blending of a dreamworld populated by fairies and a realistic, albeit unusually grand, bedroom. Fitzgerald's layering of multiple worlds resembles the events in the same scene in *The Tempest* which his title references, in which Ariel and Prospero bewilder the Milanese castaways with illusions, while simultaneously entertaining Ferdinand and Miranda with a fairy dance. The lines which Fitzgerald quotes form part of Prospero's speech to Ferdinand and Miranda, calming them after the sudden disappearance of fairy figures in the middle of their performance.[185] Fitzgerald's picture is likewise a fairy play-within-a-play, where the audience watches a dream version of the sleeping woman wander through a dream world, in which they themselves watch, and are watched by, fairy folk.

[184] 'Fine Arts: National Institution of Fine Arts, Portland Gallery,' *London Daily News*, March 15, 1858, 2.
[185] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act I, Scene iv.

In fact, *The Dream After the Masked Ball* drew comparison to Charles Kean's popular production of *The Tempest* at the Princess Theatre in the previous year, which had been lavishly praised by the *Art Journal* as representative of the 'realities of dream-land' through its use of extraordinary stage sets and lights to produce a 'maze of enchantments.'[186] The transparency of some of Fitzgerald's figures was cited as an evident borrowing from a stage effect in that earlier performance. Though contemporary commentators did not say so, it seems likely that Fitzgerald's prominent positioning of the fairy musicians in his work also derives from Kean's emphasis on the musical elements of *The Tempest*.[187] Indeed, the entirety of Fitzgerald's picture recalls the theatre. The red-curtained bed on its wide, low platform suggests a stage, with goblin creatures performing in the foreground like an orchestra in the pit. The moon shining in through a window at the back like a limelight on its sleeping lady, at once the heroine and a part of the set.

Of the three works covered in this chapter, *Speak! Speak!* has the most tenuous connection to any single work of literature. Critics associated the title with Horatio's lines in *Hamlet,* perhaps appropriately. Millais' claim to have had the picture in mind for some forty years backdates the time of inspiration to around the same period of his *Ophelia* (1851-1852), though whether the title came to him alongside the image is unknowable. The artwork itself does not have any more direct connection to *Hamlet*. As has hitherto been noted, no contemporary observer appears to have noticed its probable debt to Wright of Derby's *William and Margaret* or connected it to *Percy's Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*. This places the painting in an equivocal position with regard to its cultural context, at once closely intertwined with precedents in art and literature, and yet functionally isolated from any single explanatory text. As a result, the painting was appraised for its fitness as a generic ghost story. The scene portrayed in *Speak! Speak!* reflects trends in both fictional and scientific discussions of ghosts from the last quarter of the century.[188] A book review from the late 1870s observed that '[g]hosts in haunted houses are, for some unexplained reason, more often those of women than of men,' and the notion of the haunted bed-chamber in particular was both a common literary trope and one that Millais himself had personal experience with.[189]

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[186] 'The Portland Gallery,' *The Athenaeum* 1586, March 20, 1858, 376; 'The Tempest, & King Richard II,' *Art Journal* 32, August 1857, 256.
[187] 'The Portland Gallery,' *The Athenaeum* 1586, March 20, 1858, 376.
[188] Nick Freeman, 'The Victorian Ghost Story,' in *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 105.
[189] 'Ghost Stories,' *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 43, no. 1106, January 6, 1877, 12.

One critic actually mistook Millais's *Speak! Speak!* for an illustration of a generic story of that exact kind: 'the "white lady" of an ancient house appearing to the astonished occupant of the haunted room.'[190] Intriguingly, Millais himself had had an encounter with a 'ghost' in the middle of the 1850s. During a visit to Cowdray Hall, Millais and John Leech spent the night in a purportedly haunted set of rooms at that house, 'with grand old-fashioned beds in them,' somewhat recalling the room in *Speak! Speak!*. An earthquake that night convinced Millais that he had been visited and shaken awake by the ghost itself, until the morning newspaper informed him of the true nature of the disturbance.[191] It seems plausible that the experience, combined with what appears to have been a pre-existing personal fascination with romantic ghost stories evidenced in his work in the 1850s, inspired him to imagine a more dramatic version of his own frightening night.[192]

The influence of the by-then well-developed conventions of the romantic ghost plot is clear in critics' responses to the picture, both positive and negative. For a late-Victorian audience well-trained in drawing out the narrative from a picture, the picture told a story so familiar that even the imperfect rendering of its ghostly heroine could not obscure it. *The Observer*, *The Royal Academy*, and Millais's first biographer (Spielmann, writing in 1898), all agreed on the substantial facts: that the picture depicted a husband and wife separated by the latter's early death and that the man's vision had been precipitated by a night spent perusing old letters they had once exchanged. Audiences were perhaps helped along in their reading of the scene by comparing it with another ghostly painting in the exhibition (Fig. 15). Frank Dicksee's *A Reverie* was described as 'another ghost picture. A fair girl sits at the piano, playing and singing by lamplight to a man who, in his reverie, conjures up the image of a lost love.'[193] Dicksee's 'lost love,' unlike Millais's, is obviously insubstantial. The pattern of the carpet and the furnishings behind her can be seen through her smoky form. Her loose hair and shapeless white gown suggest the deathbed, or a world beyond the grave, where

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[190] 'Notes On Royal Academy Exhibition,' 466.
[191] John Guille Millais, *The Life and Letters of Sir John Everett Millais,* vol. 1 (London: Methuen & Co., 1899), 272-273.
[192] Early macabre works by Millais include *The Artist Attending the Mourning of a Young Girl* (1847), *The Disentombment of Queen Matilda* (1849), and an 1853 drawing, *The Ghost*, depicting a bride at the altar, recoiling from a semi-transparent male figure who hovers by the side of her oblivious (living) bridegroom.
[193] 'Notes On Royal Academy Exhibition,' *Bow Bells: A Magazine of General Literature and Art for Family Reading* 30, no. 384, May 10, 1895, 466.

earthly fripperies lose all value, making quite a contrast with Millais's elegantly coiffed and bejewelled bride, who seems ready to pull her fiancé out of bed and straight to the altar.

The reactions of the living figures to the apparitions show the greatest difference between Millais's dramatic fantasy, and Dicksee's melancholy scene. Millais's young man gazes directly at the spectre, and leans forward, stretching his hand toward the lady. In *A Reverie*, the young woman at the piano does not see the second lady at all, while her companion seems more dismayed than astonished by her appearance. The man rests his head on one hand, while the apparition's hands are raised lightly to her own temples, both gestures which seem intended to emphasise the cerebral, rather than supernatural, origins of the vision. Much as the picture's title, *A Reverie,* implies, the man's detachment suggests that to him this is no unexpected apparition, but a spectre out of his own memory, visible to him alone, and present only in a figurative, pictorial sense. She was interpreted as such by all commentators, with no evident confusion as to her status such as attended Millais's 'bride.'

Dicksee's painting was described at the time as 'thoroughly commonplace.'[194] One adjective recurs in contemporary comments on Dicksee's picture: 'modern.' The word is applied both to the setting, an up-to-date living room, and to the execution, 'loose, free handling, an expression of extreme modernity.'[195] This places the picture in opposition to Millais's work, which was, as has already been noted, described by all commentators as strikingly reminiscent of his own Pre-Raphaelite period, in particular his early work, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, and employs furnishings and costumes intended to evoke some far-off era. While Dicksee's picture presents its apparition as a psychological phenomenon, Millais dramatizes his scene as a true supernatural encounter.

Yet, in another way, *Speak! Speak!* was very much a *modern* ghost fantasy. Millais's controversial depiction of a peculiarly solid, albeit luminous, woman in place of a translucent ghost, reflects, not contemporary literary tropes, but trends in Spiritualist practices.[196] In the early years of the 1850s, seances, the popular Spiritualist summoning circles, first began to include '"full form materializations."'[197] These visiting ghosts appeared fully embodied, usually taking the form of young women who, somewhat paradoxically, 'proved' their

[194] 'Fine Arts,' *The Athenaeum* 3525, May 18, 1895, 647.
[195] R. Jope Slade, 'The Royal Academy of Arts, 1895,' *Art Journal,* June 1895, 171.
[196] Spielmann, 'An Artistic Causerie,' 6.
[197] Jennifer Bann, 'Ghostly Hands and Ghostly Agency: The Changing Figure of the Nineteenth-Century Specter,' *Victorian Studies* 51, no. 4, Summer 2009, 681.

genuine ghostly presence by physically interacting with the seance attendees.[198] The most famous of these figures, the medium Florence Cook, would 'manifest' a spirit-woman, a being at once fully incarnate and yet understood to be wholly spiritual, appearing to her audience out of the darkness of a closed room or cabinet, bare armed in a long white dress, looking very like the lady in *Speak! Speak!*.[199]

Unlike these real encounters with solid women in modern drawing rooms, Millais's ghost-woman, for all her objectionable solidity, had one advantage: a historical context, which successfully distanced the story from modern reality. Distancing, as has been discussed, is an integral element of fantasy-making, and in the Victorian period was a virtue applicable generally to fantasy subjects, but which had special weight for ghosts. Violet Paget, herself a notable author of ghost stories, wrote of the importance of a sense of history in a successful ghost story – 'the Past, the more or less remote Past, of which the prose is clean obliterated by distance – that is the place to get our ghosts from.[200] A true ghost story, she wrote, maximised the distance between the reader and the events of the story, separating them by a gap of many years, and by raising a veil between the ghost and their audience: 'tis the mystery that touches us, the vague shroud of moonbeams that hangs about the haunting lady, ... while the figure itself wanders forth, scarcely outlined, scarcely separated from the surrounding trees; or walks, and sucked back, ever and anon, into the flickering shadows.'[201] To Paget, the context in which the ghost manifests matters as much in the evocation of the desired effect as the ghost itself, if not more.[202] In these terms, Dicksee's choice of a modern setting for *A Reverie* was guaranteed to undermine even the slightest sense of wistful eeriness associated with the wispy woman summoned up out of her husband's memory, while Millais's positioning of the story in the past was apt. Millais's choice of a setting for his apparition matches up fairly well to Paget's idea of the right environment for a ghost story. As *The Athenaeum* describes the scene: '[t]he contrasting darkness of the lamp's shadows cast by the curtains, ... to say nothing of the lamp itself and the gloomy local colours of the room, … develop the lustre of the vision, and thus add to the weirdness of the scene. '[203] These parallels, between literature and art criticism, and between ghost stories and ghost pictures,

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[198] Bann, 'Ghostly Hands,' 681-682.
[199] Marlene Tromp, 'Spirited Sexuality: Sex, Marriage, and Victorian Spiritualism,' *Victorian Literature and Culture* 31, no. 1 (2003): 72-3.
[200] Lee, 'Faustus and Helena,' 222.
[201]Vernon Lee [Violet Paget], *Hauntings: Fantastic Stories* (London: William Heinemann, 1890), x.
[202] Lee, 'Faustus and Helena,' 222-223.
[203] 'Fine Arts,' *The Athenaeum* 3523, 574.

exemplify how literary conventions, new and old, shaped both artists' imaginations and the expectations of their audience.

Painting the Imagination

The stories and ideas expressed in fantasy narratives lie under the surface of fantasy art, as deeper significances lie beneath allegorical images. Shakespeare's play and Prospero's enchantments hide behind Fitzgeralds' *Dream After the Masked Ball*, the familiar tropes of traditional ghost stories animate Millais's *Speak! Speak!,* while Milton's pair of poems, 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' provide a philosophical basis for Crane's *Such Sights As Youthful Poets Dream*. Milton's poems convey the idea that 'the speaker's is a mind that, altering, alters all,' much as Crane's painting toys with the real, effective action of the imagination on the outside world.[204] One need not literally believe in the fantastical premise of Crane's picture to appreciate the beauty of the idea, or to extrapolate from it a version of Leigh Hunt's credo, that what we imagine has real power over us, for '[w]e recognize the reality of it as we do that of a hand in the dark.'[205]

One final example illustrates the attraction which Hunt's theory of the 'Realities of the Imagination' had for Victorians – Keats's poem 'The Eve of St Agnes.' The poem inspired many paintings, including a work by Millais in 1863. A number of commentators remembered his earlier work well-enough to favourably compare it with his *Speak! Speak!* some thirty years later. Both are large oil paintings, depicting bedrooms furnished with large beds whose heavy hangings dominate the room and the picture, lit by mingled moonlight and candlelight, occupied by beautiful women. Despite not technically depicting a ghost, Millais's *Eve of St Agnes* once suggested to a sympathetic critic 'the presence less of a maiden than of an apparition,' in a bedroom 'haunted, not indeed by Keats's Madeline, but by a supernatural presence more fearful than holy … an involuntary shudder creeps over us, as if in the presence of an uncanny thing.'[206]

Millais's phantasmal *Eve of St Agnes* enjoyed a much more uniformly positive reception than *Speak! Speak!*, perhaps because his earlier work could be understood in

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[204] Nicholas McDowell, Nigel Smith, and Gordon Teskey, 'Milton's Early English Poems: The Nativity Ode, "L'allegro", "Il Penseroso,"' in *The Oxford Handbook of Milton*, ed. Nicholas McDowell and Nigel Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 83.
[205] Leigh Hunt, *Essays,* ed. Arthur Symons (London: Walter Scott, Ltd., 1903), 67.
[206] 'Art: Royal Academy (First Notice),' *The Reader: A Journal of Literature, Science, and Art*, 461.

context as an illustration of a poem which itself revolves around the supernatural power of the visual imagination. Keats's poem follows Madeleine and Porphyro, each of whom yearns to see the other. While Porphyro takes the practical step of stealthily entering the castle to visit her, Madeleine's focus is directed towards a religious superstition, the 'faery fancy' that she will be rewarded with a vision of her beloved that night, if she wills it.[207] Although nothing magical occurs in the poem, references to fairies, elves, ghosts, mermaids, angels and enchantment abound. The poem invokes the fantastic in every way except the literal, building to a climax in which Madeleine wakes to see Porphyro, and discovers that there is no difference between her dream and reality: 'she still beheld / Now wide awake, the vision of her sleep.'[208] Even if her confusion lasts only for a moment, for that space of time Madeleine lives in a world where her imagination has the power to reshape reality.

Keats's works, rich in fantastical imagery, metaphors, and narratives, resonated throughout Victorian arts and literature. While 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' and 'Endymion' inspired more paintings, 'The Eve of St Agnes' impacted Victorian fantasy primarily by modelling for artists and audiences alike the transformative power of the imagination, and the possibility of losing oneself in an enchanting reverie, so long as they were willing to surrender themselves to the experience, as Madeleine was to the magic of that one night. Fitzgerald's *The Dream After the Masked Ball*, Crane's *Such Sights As Youthful Poets Dream*, and Millais's *Speak! Speak!*, all illustrate this experience of wilful imaginative escapism. Had Fitzgerald wished, he might have taken for an alternative motto for his work a couplet from Keats's poem, instead of Shakespeare: 'While legion'd faeries pac'd the coverlet, / And pale enchantment held her sleepy-ey'd.'[209] Crane and Millais likewise present us with characters who model self-absorption into the imaginary; Crane's poet lies with open book in hand, glancing up to see a procession of figures like

> shadows haunting faerily
> The brain, new stuff'd, in youth, with triumphs gay
> Of old romance.[210]

[207] John Keats, 'The Eve of St. Agnes,' in *The Complete Poetical Works of John Keats*, ed. Horace E. Scudder (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1899), 128.
[208] Keats, 'The Eve of St. Agnes,' in *Complete Poetical Works*, 133.
[209] Keats, 'The Eve of St. Agnes,' in *Complete Poetical Works*, 130.
[210] Keats, 'The Eve of St. Agnes,' in *Complete Poetical Works*, 128.

Similarly, Millais's young man has evidently been indulging in a poignant fantasy, re-reading old letters and imaginatively reliving the past. He might have greeted his ghost-bride not with Horatio's words, but Madeleine's: 'How chang'd thou art! how pallid, chill, and drear! / Give me that voice again, my Porphyro.'[211]

The purpose of these comparisons is not to suggest that these three artists in actuality drew their inspiration directly from Keats, but to demonstrate that, however wide ranging their content, all three artworks shared a common function: to celebrate and to awaken the fantastical imagination, to induce a sense of wonderment and absorption into a magical scene. The Romantic poets, especially Keats, Shelley (who authored a *Poet's Dream* of his own), and Coleridge, laid the creative groundwork for the florescence of Victorian fantasy, in visual art and in literature, by describing for the next generation how the imagination could take them out of this world and into another. Playing upon the playful or serious uncertainty which surrounded the status of fairies, dreams, visions, and ghosts, Crane, Millais and Fitzgerald made that uncertainty an element of their works, which invite the viewer to affirm or deny for themselves the presence of the fantasy figures that appear in each image. The works discussed here sought to persuade their audiences to accept their fantastical realisations on the strength of the appeal of their internal narrative, and the skill with which they depicted their fantasy elements. The challenges they faced were common to all representational fantasy works, but in these paintings, this issue of how to visually represent the fantastical is distilled into its purest form, in images which deal both practically and thematically with that problem.

The nineteenth-century demand for realisation was rooted not just in a wish to see convincing reproductions of the surface of life, but a union of 'the materiality of things with moral and emotional force,' and fantasy was no exception.[212] As early as 1827, Walter Scott asserted that British readers, at least, could take a sincere and sustained interest in fantastical narrative only if their unreal elements were vehicles for 'philosophical reasoning and moral truth.'[213] Much as he enjoyed the stories in *The Arabian Nights*, Scott wrote, 'unconnected as they are with each other, and conveying no result to the understanding, we pass them by as the championess Britomart rode along the rich strand.'[214] Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, alluded to by Scott as an example of serious, meaningful fantasy, proved to be an inspiring source for

[211] Keats, 'The Eve of St. Agnes,' in *Complete Poetical Works*, 133.
[212] Meisel, *Realizations*, 36.
[213] Scott, 'Art II – On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition,' 73.
[214] Scott, 'Art II – On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition,' 64.

fantasy artists throughout the nineteenth century. Following Scott's lead, the next chapter will explore how allegory, and Spenser's epic, influenced nineteenth-century fantasy art.

Chapter Three: Re-Imagining Allegory

'Positive persons, in our rash age, do much profane the allegory, which, nevertheless, is essential to all fairy poetry.'[215]

The opening exhibition at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877 included, alongside controversial works such as James Whistler's *Nocturne in Black and Gold*, a tempera painting by John Roddam Spencer Stanhope, *Love and the Maiden* (Fig. 18). The painting depicts an encounter between a young woman in a fanciful costume and a winged boy with a bow in his hand, in a grove of olive and cypress trees. In the near distance, three women and a man link hands to dance. The antiquated medium, brilliant colours, flawless forms of the figures, and flower-dappled grass all recall the works of Botticelli and other early Italian Renaissance artists to whom Stanhope was indebted, as well as those of his fellow exhibitor Burne-Jones. Despite the superficial legibility of the picture's content and its easily traced derivation from artistic precedents, its subject and intended significance remain obscure.

The primary action of the scene is the encounter between the two central figures, but what, exactly, is the nature of their meeting? Who are they, and where is this seaside grove? Is the woman Psyche and the winged boy Cupid, or are they Mary and Gabriel? What does the woman's troubled expression and upraised hand connote? Are either of these figures individuals, or are they both symbolic types? Are we meant to associate the three dancing women with the Graces? Can we attach any significance to the funereal connotations of the cypress, or the poisonous properties of the oleander? Is this a mythological scene, or an allegorical one, and either way, what does it all mean?

This last unanswerable question is an instance of a larger puzzle – the ambiguous but undeniable undercurrent of *significance* in so many Victorian artworks, and the inadequacy of established terms to categorise these paintings or to describe their effect. Stanhope's *Love and the Maiden* is one example. Edward Burne-Jones's *The Mirror of Venus* (Fig. 19) and William Shackleton's *The Golden Hour* (Fig. 20) are others. In some ways, these ambiguous images resemble the work of the European Symbolists. However, as will be seen, their reliance on narrative and their frequent evocation of a lesson or parable differentiate them from Symbolist art. While the phenomenon of befuddling fantastical images is not limited to British art – Gustave Doré's *Fairy Land* is both complexly multi-referential and

[215] Gosse, *Aspects and Impressions*, 265.

interpretively obscure (Fig. 21) – the nineteenth-century British art market was especially saturated with such images. Their subjects are reflective of trends and enthusiasms peculiar to Britain in the period, forming a loose group of works whose content, often magical or supernatural in appearance, alludes to multiple allegorical, literary, and legendary themes. Though derivative, these images are by no means unoriginal. As Rossetti wrote of his own work as an illustrator, they 'allegorize on [their] own hook,' building up tangled webs of meaning and narrative through unexpected recombinations of fantastical materials.[216]

These works could be as puzzling to their original audiences as they seem today. Much as the ghosts and fairies discussed in the previous chapter relied on the suspension of disbelief to work their charm, these images call for imaginative interpretation by their audiences. In his review of the Grosvenor Exhibition, the young Oscar Wilde resolved the ambiguities of *Love and The Maiden* through an invented narrative. He read an emotional story into the scene, beginning with a 'girl ... fallen asleep in a wood of olive trees,' who 'wakes up, as one wakes from sleep one knows not why, to see the face of the boy Love.'[217] Nor were the mythological connotations of the scene lost on Wilde, who noted that '[t]he olive wood is ever sacred to the Virgin Pallas, the Goddess of Wisdom, and who would have dreamed of finding Erôs hidden there?'[218]

Wilde's vacillation between 'Erôs' and 'Love,' like his combination of a narrative reading and a symbolic analysis, suggests a reluctance to commit to a strictly mythological, allegorical, or narrative interpretation of the image as a whole. It also draws attention to the sexlessness of the scene; by exchanging 'Love' and 'the Maiden' for Erôs or Cupid and Psyche, Stanhope separates his painting from the sensual love story of a god and a beautiful woman, whose child is Pleasure. Instead, we are presented with an aesthetically refined and unerotic scene whose tension is rooted in the mysteriousness of the meeting, and not in the dynamic between the figures. For all that Victorian fantasy subjects provided ample opportunities to depict female nudity and highly charged encounters between men and women, fantasy art of the period was rarely overtly erotic in nature. Indeed, as has been seen, paintings such as Millais's *The Knight Errant* risked approbation when introducing realistic nudity into a fantasy scene. More sexualised imagery did have its appeal – scenes such as the

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[216] Rossetti to William Allingham, January 23, 1855, in *The Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Vol. 1: 1835–1860*, ed. Oswald Doughty, and John Robert Wahl (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 239.

[217] Oscar Wilde, 'The Grosvenor Gallery,' *Dublin University Magazine* 90, no. 535, July 1877, 121.

[218] Wilde, 'The Grosvenor Gallery,' 121.

chaining of Andromeda to await the sea serpent – but Victorian fantasy was motivated by many escapist and counter-cultural impulses, of which sexual libertinism was only one, and far from the most prominent.[219] Fantasists of the period might have said, with Tennyson's Sir Galahad, 'Me mightier transports move and thrill.'[220] In fact, Galahad, a character whose primary trait is his chastity, was an immensely popular fantasy subject, a phenomenon which will be further explored in the following chapter. This chapter examines fantasy paintings such as *Love and the Maiden*, which illustrate how, through narrative and allegory, painted figures could become vessels for abstractions, ideals that they embodied but that transcended their physical forms.

Stanhope's amalgamation of allegory, myth, and a mediaeval aesthetic generated an image that was at once intensely evocative and susceptible to interpretation and provided an attractive fantasy scenario in which a daydreaming onlooker could immerse themselves. Wilde's imaginative response to the picture allows him to enjoy it in this sense, both as an affecting fairy tale in a gorgeous, highly coloured world, and as a parable about emotional maturation. Wilde's double-sided approach validates Sir Walter Scott's belief that English readers favoured fairy tales enriched by a philosophical and emotional message – a belief that was reaffirmed many times in the art and literary criticism of the nineteenth century.[221] Otherworldly content and symbolic iconography blurred together in Victorian art, in a subcategory of Victorian painting where the relationship between fantastical subjects and their deeper meaning is most straightforwardly present – allegorical fantasy.

Anthropomorphic Personification and the Creative Imagination

The allegorical tradition is vast and has taken on many forms in literature and the visual arts from the early classical period to the modern day. In addition to overtly allegorical works such as *The Romance of the Rose*, there is always the possibility of interpreting an image or a text allegorically.[222] The kind of allegory this chapter will explore is deliberate allegory, that is, allegory that is explicit in the text (or image) itself. Anthropomorphic personification, the

[219] Richard Jenkyns, *Dignity and Decadence: Victorian Art and the Classical Inheritance* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 117-119.
[220] Alfred Tennyson, *Tennyson*: *Poems and Plays*, ed. T. Herbert Warren (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1971), 103.
[221] Scott, 'Art II – On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition,' 72-73.
[222] Northrup Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 89.

use of a human figure to stand for an abstract force, overwhelmingly predominated over all other forms of allegory in the Victorian period. Seasons, emotions, vices and virtues, life and death, all achieved personification in art.

As a figure of speech, the attribution of personality to an emotion such as anger or love is already an act of creative imagination. When that figure of speech is translated into a figure in visual art, given limbs and clothing and a ground to stand on, it becomes something more, an impossible combination of the abstract and the concrete as fantastical as the mingling of an eagle and a lion which produces a gryphon. What does it mean, conceptually, for a female figure in an image to be both physically present in an illusionistic landscape, and to represent in her person the idea of Spring? What, on the other hand, does it mean for the figure of a woman to be given wings, set amongst leaves and flowers larger than herself, and called a fairy? In both cases the imagination of the viewer participates in endowing an image with more meaning than its contents can convey on their own. Neither interpretive act can be understood independently of the cultural tradition that inspired the artwork.

Many of the nineteenth-century's nominally allegorical images are visually indistinguishable from similar classical, medievalist, or idyllic subjects born of the fantastical imagination. Their nature is tripartite – they exist as allegories, illustrations of pre-existing narratives, and original images, new-made fantasies open to new interpretations. Frederick Sandys's *Gentle Spring* (1865) exemplifies the flexibility and the enduring strength of the traditional allegory when assimilated to a fantasy narrative (Fig. 22). *Gentle Spring* depicts a young woman crowned with and carrying flowers, standing on a cushion of blossoming plants, apparently freshly sprung about her feet. The green meadow, fruit trees, and flat landscape behind her all suggest an English country setting, but her Grecian dress and marble-like pallor emulate the statues of the goddesses and nymphs in the British Museum. Other elements allude to both Greek and Biblical narratives of redemption and resurrection, such as the butterfly (associated with Psyche) and the double rainbow that crowns the scene (invoking both Iris, messenger of the gods, and the end of the Flood).

When exhibited, the painting was accompanied by a sonnet by Swinburne, an address to the 'virgin mother of gentle days and nights' which celebrates Spring both as a season and as a goddess.[223] Image and poem alike confute the personification of the Spring with Persephone and mingle reverence for the divine with sentiment for the English countryside.

[223] *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy of the Arts: The Ninety-Seventh* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1865), 20.

The lines between the allegorical, the mythic, the legendary, and the fanciful are blurred, to the mutual enrichment of all four elements. Just as *Love and the Maiden* would have been more readily intelligible, but less imaginatively rich, if it were called *Cupid and Psyche*, Sandys's title, *Gentle Spring*, eschews identifying his subject as Persephone, but nonetheless applies the pathetic fallacy to its allegorical subject, the goddess of Spring. Identifying either painting as exclusively allegorical or as mythical eliminates half of their interest. Conversely, describing them as fantasies opens them up to the fullest possible range of imaginative readings.

Like the Persephone myth, many pre-existing narratives proved to be potent sources of inspiration for nineteenth-century artists. Allegory diffused itself throughout Victorian art and art-criticism, infusing potential abstract significance into many fantasy images. At the same time, the narrative elements of these pictures complicated allegorical readings with the fantastical possibility that the figures they depicted might be more than purely conceptual persons. Victorian folklorists and mythographers introduced the public to the possibility that allegorical embodiments of natural forces, virtues, or vices, were not wholly distinct from nature gods of the classical or folkloric type.[224] Symonds's enumeration of the 'higher manifestations [of] fantastic art,' concisely conveys the diversity and entanglement of the genre's amalgamated elements: '[m]yth and allegory, the metamorphosis of mortals into plants, fairies, satyrs, nymphs, and tutelary deities of sea or forest.'[225] Although allegory was rooted in much older art traditions, the form thrived when imbued with the characteristics typical of Victorian fantasy – beauty, narrative interest, and an illusory internal reality.

Such multifaceted artworks resemble the Victorian literary works now identifiable as precursors of the modern fantasy genre. These texts presented readers with an enigmatic blend of affecting, allegorical, and otherworldly content. The works of George MacDonald and William Morris, Pater's creative retellings of the myths of Hippolytus and Demeter, Andrew Lang and H. Rider Haggard's Odyssey sequel, *The World's Desire,* Tennyson's radical reshaping of *Le Morte D'Arthur* for his *Idylls of the King*, and stories by well-beloved European authors, such as de la Motte Fouqué and E.T.A. Hoffmann, are characteristic of the emerging form. Images and texts alike are collages of familiar elements in new conjunctions. Critically, the stories they told were not only fanciful tales of magic and the supernatural but imbued with the deeper symbolic resonances of the materials they appropriated to their

[224] James Kissane, 'Victorian Mythology,' *Victorian Studies* 6, no. 1 (1962): 10-11.
[225] Symonds, *Essays Speculative and Suggestive,* vol. 1, 243.

purpose. Their creators were participants in the invention of a new form of fantasy, founded upon the conventions of classical myth, folklore, fairy tales, and mediaeval romances, and inflected by modern values and anxieties. In a similar manner, appropriating traditional allegorical personifications from the classical period to the late Renaissance supplied Victorian artists with figures associated with fundamental ideals, their fantasticism justified by convention, their beauty appealing to the eye and awakening the imagination. Works such as George Frederic Watts's *Hope* (1886), are as unambiguously allegorical as any image in Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*, but what of Walter Crane's 'Queen Summer' (Fig. 22), a character who seems to owe as much to Shakespeare's Titania as to traditional personifications of the four seasons? Such images are identifiable as fantasy art, as *allegorical fantasies*, because, like ghosts, fairies, knights and ladies, or mythic deities, they conjure up a vision of a world that works according to different rules from mundane reality.

Not all allegories are fantasies, nor are all fantasies allegories. However, there is a fundamental kinship between allegory and fantasy. The problem of fantasy is, as argued in the previous chapter, one of persuading an audience to recognize an imaginary entity in an artist's concrete representation of it. Magical and supernatural phenomena may be imaginatively conceived of in physical terms, but they have no true physical analogues except in art. The problem of allegorical art, conversely, is establishing a connection between a concrete image and the invisible idea associated with it. Allegory itself is an exercise in fantastical imagining because the conflation of the abstract with the concrete requires a mental flexibility comparable to the suspension of disbelief necessary to the appreciation of fantasy. An allegory asks its audience to accept that they are *seeing* an embodied concept, a realised vision of something not of this world, an experience which is the essence of fantasy. During the Victorian period the fantastic impulse became entangled with that era's widespread desire for art which addressed serious, even profound, subjects. In allegorical art, the pedagogical and ideological aspirations of history painting met with the imaginative freedoms of fantasy. The series of competitions to decorate the new Parliament buildings at Westminster with history paintings, scenes from Shakespeare and Malory, and, yes, allegories, is just one instance of this cultural entanglement.

The sources of allegorical-fantastical subjects varied widely. For example, the title Stanhope chose for his painting, *Love and the Maiden,* recalls the mediaeval allegory 'Death and the Maiden,' while the image itself evokes the myth of Cupid and Psyche. As in Wilde's description of the picture, whose identifications slip between Erôs, Amour, and Love, or in Sandys's *Gentle Spring,* which combined Persephone, the personification of Spring, and the

real season, in late-Victorian writing, the lines between allegory, myth, and fairy-story blurred. The spirit of fantastic syncretism is evident in, for example, the writing of Walter Pater. In his essay 'Persephone and Demeter,' he describes Persephone not only as the type of spring and summer, but also of the autumn, the temporary death that presages rebirth, and places her beside Adonis, Hyacinth and 'the English Sleeping Beauty,' as types of the same story.[226] Allegorical readings of the Greek myths were a current, albeit controversial, practice throughout this period. Scholars in the emerging field of mythography rarely argued that the classical gods or other historical deities were *entirely* allegorical, but they allowed that modern allegorical readings of ancient myths touched on an element of their essential character at the time of their making, and could bolster their relevance for present day audiences.[227] As the lines between allegory, fairy-tales, and myth blurred, new syntheses became possible in poetry, prose fiction, and the arts.

Early in the century, Leigh Hunt perceived mythological deities' role in the modern imagination as at once allegorical and fantastical, writing, '[w]e take Apollo, and Mercury, and Venus, as shapes that existed in popular credulity, as the greater fairies of the ancient world: and we regard them, at the same time, as personifications of all that is beautiful and genial in the forms and tendencies of creation.'[228] Ruskin too showed an early interest in the dual natures of the classical gods, as he enjoyed the sensation of being presented at once with a personality and a natural force, such that '[t]here is always some sense of exaltation in the spiritual and immortal body; and of a power proceeding from the visible form through all the infinity of the element ruled by the particular god.'[229] The animation of the world through allegorical personifications of natural forces, and the beautification of deities and personifications by association with the natural world, are recurring themes in Ruskin's writing, and tendencies that were manifest in the wider Victorian arts. Greek deities associated with nature, nymphs and nymph-like figures on riverbanks, ocean shores, in the deep woods or quiet pastures, abounded in British art of the nineteenth century and speak to the powerful allure of personified nature. Such images, and their role as agents of escapist fantasy in late Victorian art, will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

Ancient mythology thus provided one rich seam of allegorical content. Other personifications derived from relatively recent sources. The revival of interest in historical art

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[226] Walter Pater, *Greek Studies*: *A Series of Essays* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1901 (1894)), 109.
[227] Kissane, 'Victorian Mythology,' 9-10.
[228] Leigh Hunt, 'Spirit of the Ancient Mythology,' *The Indicator* 15, January 19, 1820, 115.
[229] Ruskin, *Complete Works,* vol. 4, *Modern Painters III,* 225.

movements brought images such as Albrecht Dürer's *The Knight, Death, and the Devil* and *Melencolia* into prominence, alongside mediaeval tropes such as 'Death and the Maiden' and Renaissance allegories of the virtues. The result was an allegorical resurgence in contemporary art, populating the Victorian visual encyclopaedia with artistic and literary personifications of abstract traits or natural forces, all confounded with classical deities and mediaeval heroes, heroines and monsters. These images, neither allegory, myth, nor legend, not purely dramatic narrative, or reducible to a moral axiom, abound in mid and late-Victorian art, and in many cases elude straightforward description.

The Return of *The Faerie Queene*

The co-dependence of fantasy and allegory is illustrated in the revival of Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* by Victorian artists. *The Faerie Queene* was far from the only textual source for allegorical – and fantastical – artworks in the nineteenth century. Both *The Pilgrim's Progress* and the works of Dante were widely read and respected. Yet *The Faerie Queene* was not only well-known and frequently re-printed but proved extremely popular as a resource for artists. The artworks drawn from Spenser's intensely allegorical *Faerie Queene* are both numerous and diverse, encompassing the full range of allegorical fantasy of this period. *The Faerie Queene* matters to the history of nineteenth-century fantasy as a precursor, a basis for artistic and literary experimentation, and as an example of an allegorical fantasy adventure, a living and evolving element in the developing fantasy genre.

The poem includes almost the full range of character types and scenarios that appealed to the nineteenth-century fantasy imagination. Its cultural prominence made it a touchstone for artists, writers, and critics, and its influence can be seen across the emerging fantasy genre. The six books that make up the poem follow the adventures of a host of fantastical characters, including the Redcrosse Knight, dispatched from the court of the Faerie Queene, Belphoebe and Amoret, the adopted daughters of Artemis and Aphrodite, the warrior-princess Britomart, the seductive Acrasia, the conniving wizard Archimago and the deceitful enchantress Duessa, and a full chorus of nymphs and satyrs, evil dragons and friendly lions. These figures inhabit a world that is at once England, Fairyland, and Arcadia, an unmapped region of thick woods, flowery meadows, and mysterious castles, bathed in an endless summer. Each major character and many of the locations they visit (such as the Cave of Despair) carries some allegorical significance, but Spenser's characters are not one-dimensional tokens in a moral puzzle. Instead, 'it is Spenser's method to have in each book

an allegorical core, surrounded by a margin of what is called "romance of types", and relieved by episodes of pure fantasy.'[230] A hero's particular attribute may endow them with special powers, as Una's purity wins the loyalty of the lion that saves her life, but may also shape the plot of the story, as in the case of the Redcrosse Knight, who represents faith, but does not always personify it, having to grow into his assigned virtue through a series of adventures.[231] The *Faerie Queene*'s heroes are legible both as characters in a narrative and as exemplars of high virtues. The poem is *simultaneously* an adventure story and an allegory of the struggle between virtue and vice.

The Faerie Queene bequeathed to British fantasy its fundamental characteristics: its eclecticism, its high moral tone, and its devotion to the beautiful. In the nineteenth century, Spenser was, in many ways, not only the 'Poet's Poet' but also the painters' poet.[232] A hundred and more known artworks were inspired by *The Faerie Queene* and dozens more are now known only by their titles in exhibition catalogues.[233] The frequency with which artists, writers, and critics drew on Spenser's words to help them argue a point, or to illustrate an argument, shows that *The Faerie Queen*e was not merely a convenient source for picturesque characters and scenarios, but a touchstone for what fantasy storytelling ought to be. In the works of artists inspired by *The Faerie Queene*, the quintessential British fantasy took on its definitive visual form.

The Character of a Victorian Allegory

Frederick Richard Pickersgill's painting *Britomart Unarming* (1855) is as nearly typical an example of the diverse genre of allegorical personification as can be found. Pickersgill's

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[230] C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), 334.

[231] Mindele Anne Treip, 'Spenser as Allegorical Theorist,' in *Allegorical Poetics and the Epic: The Renaissance Tradition to Paradise Lost* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 98-99.

[232] Hunt, *Imagination and Fancy*, 66.

[233] Unfortunately, the shortage of existing research makes it difficult to assess the size of the Spenserian portion of the Victorian art market. *The Spenser Encyclopedia* mentions dozens of paintings based on *The Faerie Queene* or *The Shepheardes Calender*. Examination of the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition catalogues reveals many more artworks identifiable by their titles as Spenserian, as well as artworks with vague or allusive titles, which might or might not be Spenserian-subject works. See N. K. Farmer, 'Illustrators,' in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 388-392; Altick, *Paintings from Books,* 8-9.

present obscurity belies his widespread popularity in the middle decades of the Victorian period. He was distinguished in his career by his appeal to the mainstream art market of his moment, although at the time of his death in 1900 he was already remembered by *The Athenaeum* as a '*once* very popular artist' (emphasis mine).[234] The latest member of a family of respected if not famous artists, he trained at the RA schools, and exhibited three times at the public competitions at Westminster, winning top prizes in 1843 and 1847. The Art Union selected a Spenserian work by him, *Florimel in the Cottage of the Witch*, for engraving in 1843.[235] In 1854 Prince Albert bought his *The Death of Francesco Foscari* for the Royal Collection.[236] *The Art Journal* twice published laudatory articles dedicated to his life and work.[237] He was named an Associate of the RA at twenty-seven, became a full member ten years later, and served as Keeper of the RA from 1873 to 1887. It would be difficult to find an artist whose career was more marked by the approval of all the major art establishments of his day, without his ever rising beyond the middle ranks of working artists. His very ordinariness makes Pickersgill the quintessential Victorian painter.

Pickersgill was also evidently an enthusiastic reader of Spenser. He exhibited at least nine works inspired by *The Faerie Queene* between 1841 and 1855, whose subjects and style may be considered indicative of general attitudes towards the poem at mid-century. Of his Spenserian artworks which have survived to the present day, all feature one or more of the women of the *Faerie Queene*. This was in keeping with the habit of his time – female characters formed an overwhelming majority of the figures in Victorian paintings from Spenser (as was also the case for paintings from Shakespeare and the Arthurian legends). Una, Amoret, Britomart, Florimel, Acrasia, and Phaedria appeared over and over in the galleries, distantly trailed numerically by their male counterparts, the Redcrosse Knight, Guyon, Calepine, Calidore, and Artegall. One such work, Pickersgill's *Britomart Unarming* (1855) can stand as an example of typical High Victorian Spenserian art (Fig. 23). It is a fantasy founded on an allegory, expressed in the visual language of the Renaissance, and steeped in Victorian sentiment, whose central figures are at once characters, divinities, and personifications.

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[234] 'Mr. Frederick Richard Pickersgill, R.A. Retired,' *The Athenaeum* 3818, December 29, 1900, 865.
[235] 'British Artists: Their Style and Character,' *Art Journal,* August 1855, 234.
[236] 'British Artists: Their Style and Character,' 234.
[237] 'F. R. Pickersgill,' *Art Journal,* April 1850, 108; 'British Artists: Their Style and Character,' 233-236.

The large scale and arched top of the canvas recall an altarpiece, as does its content, a scene of revelation which verges on the manifestation of a goddess on earth. *Britomart Unarming* depicts a scene from Book IV of *The Faerie Queene*, in which Britomart, having successfully rescued Amoret from the Castle of Busirane and defended her claim to Amoret as her 'love' from a challenger knight, reveals herself to be a woman. The close embrace of the two women illustrates Amoret's relief at learning that her mysterious rescuer, for all her martial prowess, is no threat to her virgin honour.[238] Amoret's joy at the revelation is contrasted with the astonishment of the other onlookers, who 'all were with amazement smit,' both at Britomart's beauty and at her knightly prowess, such that

> Some thought that some enchantment faygned it;
> Some, that *Bellona* in that warlike wise
> To them appear'd, with shield and armor fit.[239]

Their uncertainty over Britomart's identity is expressed in their awed gaze, and in the putti that hover around her, living analogues for her aura of divinity. In *The Faerie Queene* itself, Venus is described as surrounded by a flock of 'little loves,' which are here transferred to the almost-deified Britomart.[240] Like Britomart's audience within the painting, external onlookers are left to wonder whether the figure before them is a woman, a goddess, or a personification. Amoret, clinging to her, is likewise interpretable as either a fairy princess, the rescued daughter of Aphrodite, or as Innocence supported by Chastity. The painting is both sentimental and fantastical, and perfectly keyed to the tastes of Victorian audiences.

Stylistically, Pickersgill's work conforms to the standards of the Royal Academy, and the expectations of most critics. Highly finished, it combines close attention to textures and details with a veneer of idealisation over his figures' round flawless limbs and doll-like faces, and over the forest glade, which is unmarred by a single withered leaf. It is a persuasive realisation of an unreal scene. Its colouring betrays Pickersgill's noted devotion both to Titian and to the Titianesque artist William Etty.[241] Unlike Stanhope's *Love and the Maiden*, which

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[238] Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene,* ed. Thomas P. Roche, Jr., and C. Patrick O'Donnell, Jr. (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 4.1.15.
[239] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 4.1.14.
[240] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 4.11.29.
[241] 'Mr. Frederick Richard Pickersgill, R.A. Retired,' 865. Whether Pickersgill was familiar with Leigh Hunt's commendation of Titian as an ideal artist for realising scenes from *The Faerie Queene* is unknown. See Hunt, *Imagination and Fancy*, 106, 108-110.

suits a range of narratives equally well, Pickersgill's image is of a specific moment, from a specific text. However, Pickersgill's depiction of his chosen scene goes beyond straightforward illustration, appending elements of his own invention that underscore the veiled fantasticism of the scene, the way in which these two women embody something otherworldly, more than human. The costumes mingle plate armour with post-medieval dress, nimbly evoking the poem's dual basis in mediaeval romance and Renaissance epic, while elements such as the putti bring to mind the classical goddesses that form part of the story's background. Britomart is identifiable as at once a warrior, a princess, and a personification, associated with Venus and Athena – and yet also as an object of Amoret's and the audience's affection. This multiplicity of identities, which demands the deliberate engagement of the audience's imagination to either resolve or to enjoy the confutation of the fantastic, the ideal, and the romantic, is at play throughout the Spenserian art of the period.

Allegory and Its Readers

Because Pickersgill's painting presents so satisfying a picture of a chivalric adventure with a touch of myth, it is reasonable to wonder whether the allegorical component mattered to the artist or his audience. How did Victorians read allegorical images and texts? As students of their higher meaning, deciphering the messages concealed beneath their fanciful content? Or were the surfaces of these works the only source of their appeal? In a diverse body of readers, a wide range of reading strategies doubtless existed. A sampling of critical assessments of allegory from across the nineteenth century range from wary tolerance to reasoned defence of the form. The Romantic writer and critic William Hazlitt wrote, apropos of readers of *The Faerie Queene*, '[t]hey are afraid of the allegory as if they thought it would bite them: they look at it as a child looks at a painted dragon, and think it will strangle them in its shining folds. This is very idle. If they do not meddle with the allegory, the allegory will not meddle with them.'[242] The allegorical underpinnings of Spenser's elaborate poem could, he argued, be ignored, without imperilling the reader's enjoyment or their comprehension of the text, which was in all other respects 'plain as a pike-staff.'[243] Freed from its allegorical foundation, *The Faerie Queene*'s beautiful surface alone remained, which he compared to a series of

[242] William Hazlitt, *Lectures on the English Poets*, 3rd ed. (London: John Templeman, 1841 (1817)), 70-71.
[243] Hazlitt, *Lectures*, 71.

pictures that 'nobody but Rubens could have painted,' and that, like Rubens's own allegorical paintings, or Poussin's, did not need to be interpreted to be appreciated aesthetically.[244]

'[I]s there any mystery in what is said of Belphoebe, that her hair was sprinkled with flowers and blossoms which had been en-tangled in it as she fled through the woods?'[245] Hazlitt's answer to his own question was 'no,' or at least, no mystery worth the trouble of decoding it. Nor was Hazlitt alone in this attitude. His near contemporary Leigh Hunt's writings on Spenser likewise revolve around the beauty of the poetry and the appeal of the images it conjures, showing an equal disinterest in exploring the allegorical bases for the characters and scenes he relished. His enjoyment of Spenser's poem is rooted in its fantastical images, through which he could escape into a magical world:

> Around us are the woods; in our distant ear is the sea; the glimmering forms that we behold are those of nymphs and deities; or a hermit makes the loneliness more lonely; or we hear a horn blow, and the ground trembling with the coming of a giant; and our boyhood is again existing, full of belief, though its hair be turning grey; because thou, a man, hast rewritten its books, and proved the surpassing riches of its wisdom.[246]

The self-indulgent example set by Hazlitt and Hunt predominated in readings of allegory well into the nineteenth century, colouring the reception of this Elizabethan text with a lasting Romantic tint.

Unlike *Le Morte d'Arthur*, which sank into genuine obscurity before its revival by the Pre-Raphaelites in the mid-nineteenth century, Spenser's works, including *The Faerie Queene,* were continuously in circulation from their publication at the close of the sixteenth century to the end of the nineteenth. Reprints and new editions of Spenser's writings appeared at regular intervals from the early eighteenth century forward. Spenserian subjects began to appear with some frequency in British art venues in the late eighteenth century but did not regularly feature at exhibitions until the 1830s. The end of the century saw an almost immediate end to the trend, making fine art inspired by *The Faerie Queene* a distinctively if not exclusively Victorian phenomenon.[247]

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[244] Hazlitt, *Lectures*, 71, 76.
[245] Hazlitt, *Lectures*, 71.
[246] Leigh Hunt, 'The Wishing Cap,' *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* 3, no. 18, September 1833, 701.
[247] Farmer, 'Illustrators,' 388–92.

The Spenser that Victorians encountered was likewise distinct from Spenser as he was read by their eighteenth and seventeenth-century predecessors, having been transmitted to Victorian audiences not only directly, in the form of the many reprints of Spenser's works then available, but also indirectly, through commentaries by notable critics such as William Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt, and through palpably Spenserian works by Byron, Keats, and Shelley. The Romantic poets each engaged in their own separate dialogues with Spenser, emulating his distinctive stanza, his chivalrous plots, and his use of allegorical personifications.[248] It was not until the Victorian period that major writers began to re-engage with Spenser directly, however, either by retelling excerpts from *The Faerie Queene* in prose, as Mary MacLeod and Andrew Lang would do, or by interpreting his work for modern readers, as Ruskin does in an appendix to *The Stones of Venice.*[249]

The Victorian view of Spenser was thus filtered through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' treatment of *The Faerie Queene* as mere recreational reading, burdened by what was then seen as an unnecessarily antiquated idiom, and through the Romantic rehabilitation of Spenser both as a stylist and as a storyteller.[250] Hazlitt described Spenser as 'the poet of our waking dreams,' whose verses offered an uncomplicated respite from reality, 'lulling the senses into a deep oblivion of the jarring noises of the world, from which we have no wish to be ever recalled.'[251] Keats imagined the imprisoned Leigh Hunt turning to Spenser for escape from his jail cell, in whose 'halls he strayed, and bowers fair, / Culling enchanted flowers.'[252] Hunt, a lifetime devotee of Spenser, cast him as the originator of 'a fine, lazy, luxurious, far-off, majestic dream;' 'a quarter in which no sin of reality is heard.'[253] The Romantics' positive responses to Spenser helped shape the Victorian view of him as a poet of an idyllic otherworld, and into whose work the religious and moralising aspects are a regrettable intrusion on an otherwise escapist fantasy.[254]

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[248] Paul Alpers, 'Spenser's Influence,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Spenser*, ed. Andrew Hadfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 263-266.
[249] Andrew Lang, *The Red Romance Book* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1906); Mary MacLeod, *Stories from the Faerie Queene* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1905); Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 9, *The Stones of Venice*, 251-254.
[250] Alpers, 'Spenser's Influence,' 254; Suttie, *Self-Interpretation*, 45.
[251] Hazlitt, *Lectures on the English Poets,* 81.
[252] Keats, 'Written on the Day that Mr. Leigh Hunt Left Prison,' *Complete Poetical Works*, 5.
[253] Hunt, 'Wishing-Cap,' 696, 701.
[254] Alpers, 'Spenser's Influence,' 266.

Samuel Palmer's Idyll

Few artworks make for a better illustration of the Romantic Spenser's survival into the Victorian period than Samuel Palmer's *Sir Guyon, with the Palmer Attending, Tempted by Phaedria to Land Upon the Enchanted Islands* (Fig. 24).[255] When exhibited in 1849 at the Society for Painters in Water-Colours, the painting was dismissively described as 'glaring and yellow,' and never sold in the artist's lifetime.[256] The strong golden tone of the work as a whole is indeed striking, but more explicable if the scene is viewed, not as an ordinary landscape, but as a work of fantasy, an image of a world unlike reality, a true Spenserian fairy land. As its long title makes clear, the scene derives from Book II of *The Faerie Queene*, which follows the adventures of Sir Guyon, who represents temperance, as he confronts the temptations of extremes, either of luxury, anger, violence, or laziness. In Palmer's painting, a test of resilience is translated into a Romantic vision of pure beauty, an escape into a world envisioned by a poet for the poetic at heart.

Two boats float by an island's shore. One holds Sir Guyon, now almost at the end of his journey, his companion and advisor, the Palmer, and a boatman, a servant of Alma, lady of the House of Temperance. In the other stands Phaedria, gesturing invitingly towards the island at her back. The magic of the enchanted island is realised in the lush, picturesque landscape, and in the sky, where the stylised sun hangs, an empty circle ringed with radiating lines that cross the whole picture, striating the land and sea in gold. There is no such island, under such a sun, anywhere in the world, but the unreality of the light is balanced by Palmer's attention to naturalism in the crooked trees, the rippling water, and the mottled clouds in the sky – a formation Palmer first observed while on holiday in Margate, and incorporated into many seascapes thereafter.[257] The fantastic idyll is thus possessed of just that degree of plausibility necessary for the suspension of disbelief.

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[255] The watercolour has been on public display only half-a-dozen times since Palmer's death, and only once outside the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, who acquired it in 1994. This history of obscurity helps to explain the fact that, to my knowledge, the watercolour has never been discussed in any scholarly work on the artist. J. Paul Getty Museum, 'Sir Guyon with the Palmer Attending, Tempted by Phaedria to Land Upon the Enchanted Islands,' *Getty Museum Collection*. Online Catalogue Entry for 'Sir Guyon with the Palmer Attending, Tempted by Phaedria to Land upon the Enchanted Islands.'

[256] 'Society of Painters in Water Colours,' *The Literary Gazette: A Weekly Journal of Literature, Science, and the Fine Arts* 1688, May 26, 1849, 399.

[257] William Vaughan, *Samuel Palmer: The Shadows on the Wall* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), 26.

Palmer's long explanatory title suggests a lack of faith in his audience's ability to recognize the scene of their own accord. Without that guidance, it might be easy to misinterpret the scene as a hero's homecoming, rather than a moment of temptation. The visual cues that hint at the perils of the encounter are subtle. The Palmer's upraised warding staff and the perpendicular positioning of the two boats only hint at the suggested diversion from their intended course. The picture's meaning is embedded in these clues, and in the character of the island itself. Palmer omits the floral garlands and flirtatious posturing that distinguish Phaedria in the poem, instead presenting her as a nymph-like figure in loose drapery in a simple wooden boat, transforming her from a coquette to the keeper of an Arcadian sanctuary. The dancing figures behind her evoke a thousand pastoral visions, from Botticelli's *Primavera* to Keats's *Ode on a Grecian Urn* (and that reappear in Stanhope's *Love and the Maiden*). These classical elements contrast subtly with the monk's robe of the Palmer and the plumed helm of the knight.[258]

Both thematically and visually, Phaedria's isle recalls the land of the Lotos Eaters in the *Odyssey*, more recently recreated in Tennyson's *The Lotos-eaters* (1832, written, incidentally, in Spenserian stanzas). It is the quintessential island paradise, where, just as in this unnaturally golden landscape, 'it seemed always afternoon.'[259] The landscape shows Palmer's devotion to pastoral art and poetry, as well as his talent for 'making Earth Arcadian.'[260] The field where animals graze and the grape vines that twine up the trees and cliff face evoke another Odyssean location, Calypso's isle, where 'luxuriant woods grew round the cave,' 'soft meadows spreading round were starred with violets,' and 'round the mouth of the cavern trailed a vine / laden with clusters, bursting with ripe grapes.'[261] Like Odysseus on Calypso's Isle, Guyon has already been trapped once on Phaedria's island against his will, and was then able to depart only when Phaedria chose to let him go.

The meeting of Guyon and Phaedria is presented in Palmer's picture not only as an allegorical confrontation of virtue and vice, but also as a dialogue between two genres of story: chivalric romance and classical myth. The classical and mediaevalist elements of

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[258] We might wonder whether Palmer intended his knight's costume to recall the arms of some Greek warrior, were it not that, apart from the addition of a blue plume on his helmet, Palmer's Guyon exactly resembles his depiction of Christian in his painting from *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *Christian Descending into the Valley of Humiliation* (1848).

[259] Tennyson, *Poems and Plays*, 51.

[260] F. G. Stephens, 'Samuel Palmer,' *The Portfolio: An Artistic Periodical* 3, January 1872, 166.

[261] Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin Books, 1997) 5.71, 80, 76-77. As it happens, Palmer also exhibited a watercolour entitled *The Farewell of Calypso* at this same show.

Spenser's fairyland overlap at many other points in the story, in Una's sojourn among the satyrs, also a popular subject in art, and in the encounter of the comical Bragadocchio and Trompart with Belphoebe in the woods, which was a favourite scene of both Hazlitt and Edmund Gosse. Spenser's syncretic fantasy reflects the late-Renaissance atmosphere of the Elizabethan court, but Victorian treatments of his work like Palmer's painting tease these two entwined elements apart to contrast them against one another. The resulting intersection of the classical and the mediaeval is a trope celebrated by Violet Paget in her essay 'Faustus and Helena,' which describes the powerful allure of impossible collisions between different imaginary worlds. She believes that the fictional meeting of Faust and Helen in his house in Wittemberg, a symbolic encounter between two ages of the world, has a special magic for her and her contemporaries, who suffer from 'this sickness of the prosaic' which characterises modern life and delight in imagining themselves in other eras.[262] Under its inspiration, her thoughts spin off into rapturous extrapolations, transmuting the meeting of Faust and Helen into an encounter between two eras, beholding,

> knights in armour and immense plumes, … and tonsured monks, descended out of panels of Wohlgemuth and the engravings of Dürer, mingling with, changing into processions of naked athletes on foaming short-maned horses, of draped Athenian maidens carrying baskets and sickles … phantoms following in the wake of the spectre woman of Antiquity, beautiful, unimpassioned, ever young, luring to Hell the wizard of the Middle Ages.[263]

In Palmer's picture, this encounter between the knight and his holy guardian with a Calypso-like woman re-enacts that scene, but in a setting in which the Greek world has the upper hand, so to speak, shaping the landscape in which the ambassadors from chivalric romance briefly meet with the representatives of the mythological past. In Palmer's painting, Phaedria, and Phaedria's isle, then, embody a particularly enchanting, and particularly Spenserian fantasy – a fairyland in which knights and nymphs could exist side by side, more or less peacefully.

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[262] Vernon Lee [Violet Paget], *Belcaro: Being Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions* (London: W. Satchell and Co., 1883), 97.
[263] Lee, *Belcaro*, 73.

Phaedria, like Calypso, is an obstacle on the hero's journey, but is not wholly malevolent. Though an avowed servant of Acrasia, the book's chief villain, Phaedria herself presents a more complex character. She represents 'immodest Merth,' but her affiliation to the natural world is almost as prominent in her character as her flirtatious and inconsequential talk.[264] Unlike the wondrous but artificial 'Bowre of Blisse,' home of her liege-lady Acrasia, Phaedria's isle is an untended paradise, where,

> The fields did laugh, the flowres did freshly spring,
> The trees did bud, and earely blossomes bore,
> And all the quire of birds did sweetly sing,
> And told that gardins pleasures in their caroling.[265]

In *The Faerie Queene*, Phaedria expounds to Guyon the wonders of the natural world, which she presents as a realm of endless bounty and beauty, offered freely by the earth for the enjoyment of all. Even Phaedria's boat is a kind of enchanted isle in miniature, 'bedecked trim / With boughes and arbours wouen cunningly, / That like a litle forrest seemed outwardly.'[266] She too is decked out in plants. 'Sometimes her head she fondly would aguize / With gaudie girlonds, or fresh flowrets dight / About her necke, or rings of rushes plight.'[267]

It was this description of Phaedria that inspired many other paintings of the character. At mid-century, she was as popular a subject as any of Spenser's heroines. Samuel Palmer's *Sir Guyon* is a deviation from standard portrayals of Phaedria, which dwell more on the erotic temptations of the lady herself than those of the restful island she inhabits. Typical examples include William Etty's *Phaedria and Cymochles* (1830) and Pickersgill's *A Little Gondelay* (undated). Phaedria appears in each picture as she does in the poem, decked with flowers and semi-nude, seated in an elaborately ornamented little boat, a pretty and flirtatious temptress adrift on calm waters.

As depicted in art, Phaedria is an invitation to escapist daydreaming, literally and figuratively beckoning her audience to join her in her idyll. She represents both sexual inhibition and an idle life, both of which are forbidden to the hero. Unlike the other frequently depicted women of the *Faerie Queene*, she embodies a vice, not a virtue, but the

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[264] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 2.6.1.
[265] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 2.5.27, 2.6.24.
[266] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 2.6.2
[267] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 2.6.7

idleness and sensuality that Phaedria and her isle represent are a milder evil than the duplicity or despair personified elsewhere in the poem, particularly in the de-sexualised, pastoral work of Palmer. Surrounded by the dubious trophies of a century of industrial development, what city-dwelling Victorian could condemn the retreat to a pleasant island where no tree was ever chopped down, no street paved or factory built? Phaedria and her isle are just one iteration of a major theme in Victorian fantasy, to be explored further in Chapter Five – the yearned-for fairyland, where humankind could live at ease in the natural world, in company with the welcoming gods of earth and water. As an allegory of a vice, Phaedria is a temptress to be avoided, but in Victorian art, she is transmuted into a more complex fantasy, by being assimilated to the benignly enchanting nymphs of Arcadia and the fairies in the woods.

Personification and Beauty

Artworks inspired by *The Faerie Queene* tended to depict subjects with positive moral significance, like Britomart and Amoret, or which are at least relatively benign, such as Phaedria. Early in the nineteenth century darker subjects, such as the Cave of Despair where Redcrosse is nearly driven to suicide, were popular, but by mid-century such topics had been displaced by more cheerful scenes, or moments whose peril or darkness were subsumed by a beautiful guise. For instance, in Edward Burne-Jones's never-completed project, a large-scale rendering of the *Masque of Cupid* (after 1872), a parade of sinister personifications is transformed into a line of figures, some nude, some in rags, some grimacing, others sad, or seemingly exhausted, but all graceful, all beautiful (Fig. 25.) In the poem, the procession which Britomart witnesses in the Castle of Busirane is made up of a mixture of beautiful beings, such as Fancy and Hope, and frightening ones, such as Daunger and Fury. In Burne-Jones's preparatory sketches and the unfinished watercolour, the horrifying aspects of some personifications are downplayed into a contorted posture or an exaggerated expression.[268] Of Amoret's bleeding heart 'entrenched deepe with knife accursed keene' there is no sign.[269]

The picture, unfinished as it is, reflects the compromises necessary to accommodate certain allegorical forms to modern tastes and expectations. Burne-Jones's *Masque of Cupid* is unsurprisingly unique in the period, as the subject veers towards emblematic allegory. The *Masque* is the exception which proves the rule that artists favoured narrative and character-

[268] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene,* 3.12.7-8, 11, 13, 17.
[269] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene,* 3.12.20.

driven fantasy subjects, Spenserian or otherwise, in which the allegory is only an undercurrent. Yet the *Masque*'s use of an unearthly and indeed unnerving beauty to depict dangerous or immoral figures from the poem stylistically aligns the design with major trends. The fairy beauty that the Romantics identified as Spenser's poem's primary strength remains ever present in late-Victorian art, even as artists began to choose subjects dealing in death and defeated virtue. These scenes set up a puzzle for their audience, to decipher as they will, who is the hero, and who the vicious deceiver behind a beautiful mask. Examples include Burne-Jones's *Masque of Cupid*, John Melhuish Strudwick's *Acrasia* and Herbert Draper's *The Spirit of the Fountain*. These images are not simply prettier versions of old allegorical concepts, but the outcomes of the evolution of the role of allegory in a work of fantasy art or literature.

Hidden Allegory, Buried Meaning

The mid-century critical reaction to the allegorical elements of *Phantastes* (1858), George MacDonald's fairy-tale novel, demonstrates the ongoing influence of the Romantic attitude to allegory. The book's reviews display a tolerance of allegory contingent on its being concealed beneath a beautiful surface or an adventuresome story, or both. *The New Quarterly Review* delighted in the novel's escapism, 'not an unpleasant change from "social science" speeches, and agricultural show oratory,' and, though their critic was conscious of the 'subtle allegory or sober moral in every line,' they preferred not to decode it, 'finding the obvious beauties of the book sufficient to engage us.'[270] *The Eclectic Review* praised the story's 'enchanted land' and 'beautiful legends' lit by 'the dreamy light of boyhood,' but complained that the allegory 'limps a good deal.'[271] *The Athenaeum* made a telling comparison to *The Faerie Queene*, in which 'the allegory is quite optional,' for 'there is quite enough in the outer life of that marvellous tale of chivalry, – enough in the real men and women with which we are floated down an enchanted stream of poetry.'[272] What emerges from these reviews is a general consensus in favour of romantic plots and magical settings, but a wariness of the

[270] 'Phantastes,' *The New Quarterly Review and Digest of Current Literature, British, American, French, and German* 7, no. 28, November 1858, 295.
[271] 'Phantastes: A Faerie Romance for Men and Women,' *The Eclectic Review* 1, January 1859, 112.
[272] 'Phantastes: A Faerie Romance for Men and Women,' *The Athenaeum* 1619, November 6, 1858, 580.

'hidden meaning' beneath the fantastic surface, which they preferred to leave latent and unanalysed.[273]

Unsurprisingly, MacDonald himself articulated a more nuanced approach to allegory in fantasy tales. He argued against the dismissive attitude of the newspaper critics, maintaining that allegory had an essential role in shaping and giving value to a fantasy tale. MacDonald argued that role of allegory in a fairy tale – a broad category in which MacDonald included both his own works and Spenser's *Faerie Queene* – was to lie buried within the story, not to impose a lesson but to impart a *feeling*, a sensation of being in the presence of an immanent but undefined truth. It remained for the reader to determine what the fairy tale meant *to them*: '[i]t is there not so much to convey a meaning as to wake a meaning.'[274]

Despite his reputation as an allegorist, MacDonald was as wary of pure allegory as many of his critics, writing that in the hands of all but the best writers, an allegory was only 'a weariness to the spirit.'[275] MacDonald's allegory is a long way from the strict one-to-one pairings of meaning and image which William Butler Yeats, in a nearly contemporaneous essay, associates with the form. According to Yeats, allegory is sterile and definite, but a great *symbolic* work may 'awaken the modern imagination' and unfold into infinite potential meanings.[276] The confusion over terminology – two great writers assigning different labels to an almost identical phenomenon in art – reflects the novelty of what both Yeats and MacDonald sought in allegorical (or symbolic) art and literature.

The Victorian allegory is a new thing, entangled with narrative and fantasy, drawing its effect from the emotional response and the imagination of its audience, rather than from convention. What Yeats calls a symbol, of which '[a] hundred generations might write out what seemed the meaning… and they would write different meanings, for no symbol tells all its meaning to any generation,' and what MacDonald calls a fairy tale, have the same effect.[277] A fairy tale, a storm, and a sonata are all alike in this way, MacDonald writes:

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[273] 'Phantastes,' *The New Quarterly Review and Digest of Current Literature, British, American, French, and German*, 295-296.
[274] MacDonald, *The Light Princess,* iii, vii.
[275] MacDonald, *The Light Princess,* viii.
[276] William Butler Yeats, 'Introduction,' in William T. Horton, *The Book of Images* (London: Unicorn Press, 1898), 9.
[277] Yeats, 'Introduction,' 9.

> The law of each is in the mind of its composer; that law makes one man feel this way, another man feel that way. To one the sonata is a world of odour and beauty, to another of soothing only and sweetness. To one, the cloudy rendezvous is a wild dance, with a terror at its heart; to another, a majestic march of heavenly hosts, with Truth in their centre pointing their course, but as yet restraining her voice. The greatest forces lie in the region of the uncomprehended.[278]

Both MacDonald and Yeats are writing, respectively, of the ideal forms of allegory and symbolism, without regard for whether or not the possibilities inherent in the art forms they describe were ever really achieved in art. MacDonald's essay does, however, suggest a means of assessing allegorical fantasy art from his period: weighing their contents, and their effect, against his definition of an allegorical fairy tale: as 'new embodiments of old truths.'[279] These new allegories are only one element among many working within a fantasy, for '[a] fairytale is not an allegory. There may be allegory in it, but it is not an allegory.'[280]

MacDonald's revisioning of allegory as a kind of sublime presence hovering over a fairy tale, provides a helpful guide to interpreting such otherwise overwhelming works as John Dickson Batten's *The Garden of Adonis*, exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1887 (Fig. 26).[281] The painting is a representation of one of the most complex, and deeply magical, locations in Spenser's poem. The Garden of Adonis is one of the homes of the immortal Venus, in her garden of mortal but ever-returning flowers, where '[t]here is continuall Spring, and haruest there / Continuall, both meeting at one time.'[282] As the Garden of Adonis is 'called is by her lost louers name,' it is a place of grief and remembrance, as well as new

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[278] MacDonald, *The Light Princess,* ix.
[279] MacDonald, *The Light Princess*, iv.
[280] MacDonald, *The Light Princess,* viii.
[281] The Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh, which owns the painting, lists it in their online collection catalogue as *The Garden of Adonis – Amoretta and Time*. However, the 1887 *Grosvenor Notes* identifies the female figure as Venus and includes the following quotation from Spenser as a caption: '"And their great mother, Venus, did lament / The losse of her deare brood, her deare delight."' The visual ambiguity surrounding the identity of the female figure, who might, based solely on the content of the picture, be Amoret or Venus, might be deliberate. The uncertainty engages the audience's imagination, inviting us to 'make' the figure either Venus or Amoret, in our own minds. See Henry Blackburn, *Grosvenor Notes* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1887), 53; Carnegie Museum of Art, 'The Garden of Adonis – Amoretta and Time,' *Collection.* Online Catalogue Entry for 'The Garden of Adonis – Amoretta and Time.'
[282] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 3.6.42.

life.[283] In the garden, not only flowers, but also living bodies of humans and animals blossom from the ground. Venus is its keeper, a mother by proxy to all the creatures that are sent forth from the garden to live and die in the world outside. There is no single allegorical 'point' to be drawn out of the painting – instead, in Batten's picture, the meaning is, as MacDonald would have it, buried within the image, not so much an idea as a feeling that it arouses in us.

Batten endows his pictured garden with all the colour, warmth, and comfort of a day in a sunlit park, albeit a park touched with the shadow of death. The flowers are all those of late spring and early summer, cultivated garden varieties such as lilies, lupins, hollyhocks and carnations, alongside the flowers of banks and hedgerows, blue bachelor's buttons, primroses and narcissus. The Garden of Adonis is a fantasy realm, a place where winter never comes, a kind of fantasy peculiarly appealing to the residents of cold European countries, as Paget observed of the mediaeval tradition on which Spenser drew:

> Of all Nature's effects this one alone goes sparkling to the head; and it alone finds a response in mediæval poetry. Spring, spring, endless spring … nothing but spring even in the mysterious countries governed by the Grail King, by the Fairy Morgana, by Queen Proserpine, by Prester John; nay, in the new Jerusalem, in the kingdom of Heaven itself, nothing but spring;[284]

Spring goes sparkling through Batten's picture, too – spring, and its ending. Comparison with another seasonal allegory, Frederick Sandys's *Gentle Spring* (1865), highlights how melancholy, by comparison, Batten's picture is. *Gentle Spring* is a deeply sensuously satisfying image, like Batten's, alive with the flowers and the pleasures of spring, but without the symbols of grief and danger that create a narrative within the *Garden* scene and awaken the imagination, as well as the senses.

Here, as in Spenser's poem, the Garden of Adonis is a place of eternal summer, but not of eternal life. The life and death of all creatures is represented in the cut flowers which lie about the feet of the goddess, who kneels with bowed head, mourning their passing. The breeze that lifts the ends of Venus's hair is the wind of Time's passing. Dragging his scythe, he brings storm clouds with him into the garden. His grey wings fill the sky, showing the all-

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[283] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 2.6.29.

[284] Vernon Lee [Violet Paget], *Euphorion: Being Studies of the Antique and the Mediæval in the Renaissance*, vol. 1 (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1885), 120.

encompassing power of 'wicked Time, who with his scyth addrest, / Does mow the flowring herbes and goodly things.'[285] Venus alone is untouched by Time, though all around her the flowers have fallen beneath his scythe. The picture tells a story about immortality and death, beauty's endurance and its frailty, the simple pleasures of spring and summer, and the way love leads both to joy and to grief. Which of these meanings the painting 'wakes' within its interpreter, as MacDonald would put it, depends on their receptivity to it, and their own 'nature and development.'[286]

The late-Victorian critic Edmund Gosse wrote at length on the correlation between audience attitudes and their reception of fantasy and fairy tales, including *The Faerie Queene*. Gosse believed *The Faerie Queene* was intended for readers like himself – not children, but adults 'who still share the adolescence of the world;' who have retained, despite their maturity 'that ductile *naïveté*, that breathless and delicious credulity, which fairyland demands.'[287] Such stories are meant for audiences willing 'to wander forth beyond the possibilities of experience, to enjoy the impossible, and to invade the inaccessible' by means of 'wonderful tales.'[288] It is the evocation of this experience, not any serious moral lesson, which Gosse identifies as the true purpose of *The Faerie Queene* – yet, like 'all fairy poetry,' *The Faerie Queene* needs its allegories 'much as a picture needs its canvas or a statue its marble.'[289] The allegorical framework supports the story, and gives it shape, without intruding into the tale itself.[290] The audience of an allegorical artwork can enjoy its fantastical surface without thinking about the material that sustains it, but without that material the image would have neither substance nor motivation.

Gosse's approach, like MacDonald's, is founded on Romantic attitudes, but adds to their aesthetic appreciation of Spenser's world a higher appraisal of its narrative element. While Hazlitt admired Spenser as a poet, Gosse valued him chiefly as a fantasist. Hazlitt praised the beauty of the language, both the visions it evoked and its musical rhythms, but spoke not at all of Spenser's adventure plot, or the otherworldly content of the poem, as distinct from its exquisite presentation. This attitude is also evident in Leigh Hunt, whose most prolonged study of Spenser comprised a selection of brief excerpts from the poem,

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[285] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 3.6.39.
[286] MacDonald, *The Light Princess,* vi-vii.
[287] Gosse, *Aspects and Impressions,* 262, 261.
[288] Gosse, *Aspects and Impressions*, 263.
[289] Gosse, *Aspects and Impressions*, 265.
[290] Gosse, *Aspects and Impressions*, 267-268.

praising their isolated beauty and their fitness to be painted by one or another Renaissance master.[291] Despite the element of escapism inherent in Hunt and Hazlitt's love of Spenser's idyllic set-pieces, there is a stark contrast between the Romantics' aesthetically motivated responses, and Gosse's appreciation of *The Faerie Queene* as a fantasy, a narrative gateway to a world of the imagination.

The fantastic impulse, as Gosse described it, the 'desire to escape from the obvious and the commonplace features of life' animates Herbert Draper's Spenserian painting *The Spirit of the Fountain* (1893).[292] The picture is almost certainly drawn from Book II of *The Faerie Queene*. The young knight in mediaeval dress, accompanied by an elderly man, are unmistakably Sir Guyon and the Palmer who supervised his adventures. The scene itself most likely derives from Canto XII, which describes Sir Guyon and the Palmer's exploration of Acrasia's garden-isle, though it amalgamates two episodes within the garden into one. Guyon and the Palmer first pass through an archway in the garden, by which 'a comely dame did rest, / Clad in faire weedes, but fowle disordered, / And garments loose, that seemd vnmeet for womanhed.'[293] The 'comely dame' is '*Excesse*' personified; she offers Guyon a golden cup, brimming with 'sappy liquor' freshly squeezed from the grapes overhead.[294] He dashes the cup to the ground and moves further into the bower, where he encounters the second element of this scene: an ornamental fountain, 'with curious imageree … ouer-wrought.'[295]

Draper modifies this fleeting and entirely hostile sequence into a more intimate and lasting encounter between the elfin knight and a fairy or nymph. Rather than immediately casting down the nymph's cup, and moving on, as he does in the poem, Draper's Guyon hesitates, seemingly seriously contemplating the spirit's offer. The character of the temptation she offers is altered from the source material, as well; while *Excesse* lounges beside an artificial arcade of bejewelled fruit, this woman sits in what appears to be a wild forest glade, offering not wine but the fountain's water, and the cup she has given to Guyon to drink from is no golden goblet, but appears to be a simple shell or carved saucer. Draper's painting is a fantasy as much born of the artist's imagination as Spenser's verse, for the temptation that Draper's Spirit holds out is not the artifice the poet warned against, but the

[291] Hunt, *Imagination and Fancy,* 1844.
[292] Gosse, *Aspects and Impressions*, 267.
[293] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 2.12.55.
[294] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 2.12.56-57.
[295] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 2.12.60.

dream of abandoning civilisation and the learning represented by the Palmer's book, in favour of the wild life represented by the half-clothed nymph with ivy in her hair.

What Draper painted was a nature myth, constructed out of the mediaevalist allegory of Spenser and the classical guardian deities of wood and water. As such, the ambiguity of the title, *The Spirit of the Fountain*, seems deliberate. Rather than explicitly locate the scene in Acrasia's bower of vicious bliss, Draper leaves it open to association with a very different passage from the same book. Near the beginning of Guyon's adventure, the knight encounters a river that refuses to wash clean a pair of bloody hands immersed in it, for the water rejects defilement. In this passage, the reader is informed that 'secret vertues are infusd / In euery fountaine, and in euery lake,' and it is implied that many such springs are associated with a nymph of their own, from whose virtue they derive their powers.[296] This scene is only one instance of many episodes involving magic fountains which appear in the story – perhaps the most prominent way in which Spenser's *Faerie Queene* feeds that sensibility of a divine power in the natural world, to which Symonds and Ruskin both point as a survival of Greek faith into the modern day.[297]

Draper's picture is absurd, seen superficially – a nonsense scene of cartoonish sensuality, obviously staged in some private park, where flourishing rhododendrons encircle a picnic lawn. Yet the allegory within the picture enriches it with a story that transcends the simple indulgence of the content. The real temptation it depicts is not sexual, but spiritual – the nymph's offered drink is a taste of fairyland, of escape from the real and into the imaginary. It is a painting that might have delighted an escapist such as Edmund Gosse, who felt that what was essential in Spenser lay not in the deeper significance of the poem but in the pictures and the stories it engendered in the mind, 'a vision created for the deep contentment of those in whom the longing for noble images and uplifted desires and generous, childlike dreams is perennial.'[298]

The attitudinal shifts from Romantic to Victorian critics do not necessarily mirror a broader cultural value adjustment with regard to allegory. However, these authors' essays reflect the range of attitudes available to their readers and by extension to the audience for artworks. It is striking that the chief defenders of allegory late in the century, MacDonald, Gosse, and Yeats by extension, were also defenders of fantasy. Fantasy could use allegory in

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[296] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 2.2.5-9.
[297] Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, *Modern Painters III*, 223-224; Symonds, *Essays Speculative and Suggestive*, vol. 1, 129-131.
[298] Gosse, *Aspects and Impressions*, 268.

ways that no other modern genre could, by adapting its heroic figures and vicious monsters for modern tastes, and by using the psychomachia they symbolised to drive their plots. Nineteenth-century fantasy and nineteenth-century allegory were but distantly associated at the start of the century, but wholly entwined and interdependent by its end.

Survey of Allegorical Art

How much importance should be attached to the forms assumed by Spenserian art in this period? Was allegory, and Spenserian allegory in particular, only a niche interest for a few dedicated artists and writers? The material evidence suggests that allegory had a significant presence within Victorian visual culture. Many forms of allegory, not always Spenserian, though often visually resembling subjects from *The Faerie Queene*, appeared in Victorian art. The most common forms were personifications of Love and the seasons, nymph-like personifications of rivers, and flowers embodied as fairies. Too many examples of 'Love' were painted to list here, but notable instances include Simeon Solomon's *Love in Autumn* (1860), Burne-Jones's *Chant de l'Amour* (1868-1877), Watts's *Love and Death* (1885-87), Anna Lea Merrit's *Love Locked Out* (1890), Sidney Meteyard's *Hope Comforting Love in Bondage* (1901), and Eleanor Fortescue Brickdale's *Love and his counterfeits* (1904). Some artists built their careers largely on allegorical work, such as G. F. Watts, Julia Margaret Cameron, Evelyn de Morgan, and Eleanor Fortescue Brickdale.

How conscious Victorians were of the ubiquity of allegory in their art market is unclear. In his study of George Frederic Watts, written in 1904, Chesterton reflects on 'the great general reaction against allegorical art which has arisen in the last artistic period.'[299] He argues that allegory is and has been ubiquitous in London's galleries for decades, yet also widely resented by a general audiences, including 'cultivated people' who rightly dislike the obsolete codes employed in most of these images, both historical and modern.[300] Yet the artist Walter Crane disagreed with this assessment of the condition of allegory in the modern market. While not disputing Chesterton's claim that most audiences disliked allegory, he took issue with the assertion that '"millions"' of allegorical artworks had been produced in the last century, writing that, 'I had supposed that allegorical design was almost a lost art, as well as a

[299] G.K. Chesterton, *G.F. Watts* (London, New York: Duckworth & Co., 1904), 83.
[300] G.K. Chesterton, *G.F. Watts*, 83, 84-85.

dead language, in the estimation of our people except perhaps the species which goes to the making of political cartoons.'[301]

It is remarkable that two men writing almost simultaneously could disagree so totally about the trajectory of allegorical art over the previous decades. That they did so is suggestive of a contemporary difficulty in determining just what qualified as an allegorical artwork, and what did not. Both men held elevated views of what allegory could and should be, and it is unclear how many works of the period met their high standards. Crane's description of allegory as a 'lost art' makes more sense in light of his own remarkable enthusiasm for allegory. He was the creator of many allegorical artworks, including *Spring* (1870), *The Chariots of the Hours* (1887) and his Spenserian *Britomart* (1890). He was also the author and illustrator of several fancifully allegorical children's books, *Queen Summer; or, The Tourney of the Lily and the Rose* (1891), and *A Floral Fantasy in an Old English Garden* (1899). Masques of anthropomorphised flowers, personified seasons, the looming threat of the old man Time, and playful references to Venus, Eros and Psyche, Narcissus and Echo, and other standard figures of Greek myth and mediaeval romance mingle in these books, showing the influence of Crane's exposure to Spenser. He also produced an illustrated edition of the poem for George Allen from 1894-1897.

Crane may have felt alone as an allegorist, and allegory certainly remained a minority category in major art exhibitions, but *The Faerie Queene* gradually worked itself into the fabric of Victorian material culture. Crane's edition is the most lavish of the period, but many other illustrated and decorative versions of the *Faerie Queene* appeared during the latter half of the century. Spenserian subjects cropped up in many other media as well. A five-pound coin minted in 1839 shows Una and the Lion on its obverse; the Ascot Cup for 1852 featured Una, Redcrosse, and the Lion, while the winner's cup for Goodwood in 1864 depicted the Redcrosse Knight, in a relief design by H. H. Armstead. As late as 1902, the Royal Academy named the Masque of Cupid as the subject for their annual prize competition, reflecting how effectively *The Faerie Queene* had re-established its own realm within the imaginative universe of the period.

Springtime in the Perilous World

[301] Crane, *Ideals in Art,* 279-280.

Artists such as Pickersgill, Watts, and Crane devoted themselves to the mediaeval, chivalrous, and positively moral side of Spenser. Other artists drew out the more sensual elements of the story, aspects which often overlapped with its borrowings from the classical world, as in Draper's depiction of *Spirit of the Fountain*. In neither case, however, did the many monsters and horrifying villains of the story frequently appear. Even though the heroes of *The Faerie Queene* are more often in danger than not – in flight, in combat, under a sickening spell or enthralled by a deceitful magic-user – those moments of peril are hardly depicted in paintings from the *Faerie Queene*. As a rule, evil appears in the moment of defeat, as in Etty's *Britomart Redeems Faire Amoret* (1833) or Watts's *The Red Cross Knight Overcoming the Dragon* (1853) (Figs. 27 and 28). The terrifying Orgoglio, Oliphant, Fury and Occasion, the abhorrent true form of Duessa, are all absent from the visual record, as they almost are from the nineteenth-century reception of Spenser himself, of whom Hunt misleadingly claimed, '[h]e had twenty visions of nymphs and bowers, to one of the mud of Tartarus.'[302] By and large, the only enemies that ever appeared in Victorian fine art were prepossessing, or at least not repugnant. Phaedria is one prominent example, her mistress Acrasia, discussed below, is another.

Spenser's Faerie land presented itself to the Romantics as a sequence of beautiful pictures, of 'halls … and bowers fair,' but in Victorian art, particularly that of the last decades of the century, beauty is often mixed with sad, strange dangers.[303] Even in so outwardly calm a work as Briton Rivière's majestic *Una and the Lion* (1880), Una's expression shows her fear at finding herself alone in the dark and ominous wood (Fig. 29). When, as was often the case, those dangers are embodied in classicised forms, these paintings also become encounters between two dominant sides of Victorian fantasy: the classical and the mediaeval. Two of the paintings discussed above, Palmer's *Sir Guyon with the Palmer Attending, Tempted by Phaedria to Land upon the Enchanted Islands*, and Draper's *The Spirit of the Fountain*, depict this theme. The final example of this chapter, John Melhuish Strudwick's *Acrasia*, likewise plays upon the tension between the classical and the mediaeval, while also invoking a third genre beloved of Victorian fantasists: the fairy tale.

Strudwick's *Acrasia*, exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1888, amalgamates a century's worth of fantastical experimentation with allegory in an image that draws together late nineteenth century aesthetics, Victorian horror, and the Romantic prioritisation of

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[302] Hunt, *Imagination and Fancy,* 14.

[303] Keats, 'Written on the Day that Mr. Leigh Hunt Left Prison,' *Complete Poetical Works*, 5.

Spenser's striking settings over his moral message. Strudwick was Burne-Jones's studio assistant, as well as an artist in his own right. His painting depicts Acrasia, the chief antagonist of Book II of *The Faerie Queene*. She is a Circe-like figure, who lures knights to her 'Bowre of Blisse,' where she transforms them 'to mo[n]strous hewes, / And horribly misshapes with vgly sightes,' before imprisoning them in 'yron mewes.'[304] Acrasia represents 'vicious pleasure in general,' her bower the deceits of artifice and the corrupting effects of unrestrained indulgence.[305]

Acrasia's baleful influence looms like a dark cloud over much of the second book of the *Faerie Queene*, though she does not appear in person until the final confrontation with Sir Guyon, her sworn enemy. Here she appears as Guyon first finds here, seated in the heart of her bower with the young knight Verdant asleep in her lap, while a hidden troupe of musicians serenades them. Her bower is a garden where artifice mingles with and taints all natural beauty, in the form of gilded plants and jewelled flowers, and birds, winds and waters that mimic the songs performed by her musicians.[306] There, Guyon is tempted with luxurious food and drink, entrancing music, and promises of endless rest, as well as more lascivious pleasures. Acrasia herself appears, in the text, seated on a 'bed of Roses,' dripping with sweat and dressed in a translucent gown.[307] The sensuality of the subject is toned down in Strudwick's painting from the explicitly post-coital scenario described in the text, transformed into a more modest, but no less threatening, scene, reminiscent of the meeting of Diana and Endymion, or perhaps a vampire and her prey. The scattered roses and sleeping knight in her lap bring to mind the knight-victims in Burne-Jones's *Briar Rose* paintings, as well as Sleeping Beauty herself.

Strudwick's rendering reproduces the scene recognizably but infuses the scene with an uncanniness out of his imagination. The yellow cast of the light, grey-green leaves and grass, and apples purple-black as plums add to the sickly atmosphere. The pink and white roses scattered over the ground are healthily coloured, but already plucked from their stems, and likely to wilt within the hour. Their condition alludes to the song being sung at Guyon and the Palmer's approach, 'Ah see the Virgin Rose, how sweetly shee / Doth first peepe forth with bashfull modestee … Loe see soone after, how she fades, and falles away.'[308] The

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[304] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 2.5.27.
[305] Lewis, *Allegory of Love*, 333.
[306] Lewis, *Allegory of Love*, 325-6.
[307] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 2.12.77-78.
[308] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 2.12.74.

knowing observer would understand that this whole scene, and all the figures in it, are doomed to destruction, soon to be 'broke down, with rigour pittilesse' by the avenging knight.[309]

Acrasia is technically a villain, and her Bower deserves destruction according to Spenser's mores, but here, for all its strangeness, it also appears as a place of refuge and of beauty. The bizarre colouring of the foliage, pale and homogenous beauty of the hidden musicians, add to the uncanniness of the scene, but also to its attractions; rather than convey a moral truth, the picture presents a fully realised escapist fantasy. Acrasia is dangerous, and therefore forbidden, but her sinister attractions are harmless because she is beyond reach, fictional, magical, and lost in the depths of a fantastical chivalrous past that never was. Like her mythological counterpart Circe, who also enjoyed a vogue in the arts at this time, she represents a powerfully appealing fantasy of the *femme fatale*.

Strudwick's *Acrasia*, like Palmer's *Phaedria*, endow their subjects with new identities, rooted in the fantastical yet natural environments in which we encounter them. These figures appear in settings that evoke both the story they came from and an older ideal, of gardens and forests, shorelines, and mountain slopes alive with embodied spirits of their own. They fuse the allegorical myths of Spenser with a nature mythology which imagines the wilderness as a pleasant green refuge from the modern world and populates that refuge with beings that are personifications of nature itself – a mythology dear to many eras, but especially appealing to the inhabitants of the industrialised world.

The entanglement of allegory and Greek myth enacted in Strudwick's *Acrasia* or Draper's *Spirit of the Fountain* arises from the syncretism of their source material. Yet their decision to draw out the classical aspect of the text reflects a rising tide of new discourse surrounding the co-dependence of allegory and myth. Essays by Symonds, Ruskin, and Pater from the 1880s and 1890s all converge around this theme. For instance, Pater's study of Dionysus, 'The Spiritual Form of Fire and Dew,' explores the basis of the deity as a kind of universal allegory, encapsulating, in his many aspects, the entirety of the Greek pastoral way of life, as,

> the projected expression of the ways and dreams of this primitive people, brooded over and harmonised by the energetic Greek imagination; the religious imagination of

[309] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 3.7.83. Acrasia's lover is exempt from this treatment and suffers no worse punishment than a lecture on chastity from the Palmer.

> the Greeks being, precisely, a unifying or identifying power, bringing together things naturally asunder, making, as it were, for the human body a soul of waters, for the human soul a body of flowers.[310]

Pater believed that the cultural atmosphere of his own time was not so suited to anthropomorphic imaginings, or allegorical art, as either the Hellenic period or the Renaissance, but he still saw 'traces of the old temper in the man of to-day also; and through these we can understand that earlier time … in which every impression men received of the action of powers without or within them suggested to them the presence of a soul or will, like their own.'[311]

Likewise, Symonds traces the impulse to allegorise to humanity's deepest spiritual feelings, which were most strongly manifested in the ancient Greek period, though they endured to his present day. Allegories might take the form of the 'nature myths' created by the ancient Greeks – the Olympian gods, naiads, and dryads, – or of 'Allegory myths [which] attribute independent existence to the moral and intellectual qualities of human beings.'[312] Either way, these personifications arise from the feeling (common, he says, to all people, of any era, who are sensitive to the real life of nature), that 'all things in the world are full of soul.'[313] Symonds suggests that there is a truth about the universe hidden in this impulse to allegorise, which the Greeks were aware of, but 'to the significance of which we have been blinded by theological exclusiveness, and by the positive pre-occupations of the scientific genius.'[314]

Gosse, MacDonald, Pater, and Symonds all treated allegory as an impulse of the emotions and the imagination, not as a didactic exercise. They built on the foundations laid by their Romantic predecessors, carrying on the transmutation of the mediaeval allegory and the classical deity into a new chimaera, a metamorphosing and elusive form capable of expressing many things at once. Like Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Victorian allegorical art is an amalgamation of many traditions. While many artists favoured the classical elements of Spenser's story-world, the mediaeval element never faded wholly out of their ken,

[310] Pater, *Greek Studies,* 29.
[311] Pater, *Greek Studies,* 100.
[312] Symonds, *Essays,* vol. 2, 130.
[313] Symonds, *Essays,* vol. 2, 130.
[314] Symonds, *Essays,* vol 2, 130-131.

manifesting itself in the bodies and armour of the knights who stand in awe, fear, or enchanted wonder, before the goddesses in the woods.

Spenser and Chivalric Romance

Artists such as Pickersgill, Watts, and Crane favoured the mediaevalist elements of Spenser's poem – the armed knights and questing ladies. These paintings, such as Watts's *The Red Cross Knight Overcoming the Dragon* (1853) or Crane's *Britomart* (1900), are, as a rule, recognizable as both mediaevalist fantasies and allegories of virtues, visual narratives that excite and inspire. But, like Stanhope's *Love and the Maiden*, ambiguity haunts an art form that draws its power from blurred boundaries between human, god, and idea. A particularly befuddling image, a watercolour by Walter Crane, dating to 1870 or 1871, has been identified both as *The White Knight* and as *The Red Cross Knight in search of Una.* As such, it might be read as a mediaevalist fantasy rooted in either Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* or Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, or both, or neither. The painting depicts a knight on horseback, in white armour, with wings on his helm, alone in a green wooded dale. If he is the Redcrosse Knight, the painting represents the hero at a low point in his story, having been deceived into abandoning Una by Archimago, who tricks him into believing her unvirtuous. In that reading, this image becomes a melancholy scene, of the loneliness of the knight's questing life, and the bewilderment of a pious man literally separated from his faith by his own doubt. It is a poignant image, reflective – as good British fantasy must be – of real human experience, especially in this period, when traditional beliefs were tested by science and new ways of thought.

The picture takes on an entirely different significance if read as either a depiction of the 'White Knight,' an obscure figure who briefly appears in *Le Morte d'Arthur* to advise Galahad, or, more plausibly, as an image of Galahad himself. In Tennyson's *The Holy Grail*, published the year before this painting appeared, Galahad wears 'white armour' (this differs from *Le Morte d'Arthur*, in which his armour is red). Other depictions of Galahad from around this time also give his helm wings, an allusion to his angelic companions as well as his own semi-divine character. The chapters covering the quest for the Holy Grail in *Le Morte d'Arthur* are, unlike any other section of the book, steeped in allegorical persons, places, and creatures, many of which are explicitly explained to the knights who encounter them by peculiarly well-informed hermits. Thus, whether regarded as an Arthurian or a

Spenserian subject, Crane's *White Knight* embodies two strands of Victorian fantasy: the mediaevalist romance and the allegorical fairy tale.

The mediaevalism of the *Morte* and the *Faerie Queene* were conflated in the Victorian reception of these texts. Although the *Morte* predates the *Faerie Queene* by more than a hundred years and was itself a very late retread of romances whose narratives where first laid down hundreds of years before, Victorians received both the *Morte* and the *Faerie Queene* as though they were direct transmissions from their own mediaeval past. Their double distance from the historical Spenser, viewing his works both across a long gulf of time and through the variously tinted lenses of both Romanticism and the Enlightenment, may help to explain the Victorian tendency to discuss and illustrate the *Faerie Queene*, not as a Renaissance text, but as a relic of the mediaeval period. In Victorian eyes, Spenser was transformed from 'a poet who wrote about the middle ages – in the time of Elizabeth,' to 'a poet belonging to the middle ages as part from whole, though postdating them.'[315] For instance, in *The Stones of Venice,* Ruskin drew on *The Faerie Queene* to decode the mediaeval capitals of the columns at the Ducal Palace, while disparaging the Renaissance capitals on that same building as indicators of the depravity of the later period – the period from which Spenser actually hailed.[316]

The wilful recasting of Spenser as a mediaeval, rather than a Renaissance, poet, is indicative of the power of the Victorian love of the mediaeval. Charles Eastlake's *Una Delivering the Red Crosse Knight from the Cave of Despai*r of 1829 inaugurated thirty years of Spenserian art in which diligently researched (though not always accurate) plate armour and mediaeval costume featured prominently (Fig. 30). As a 'mediaeval' romance, *The Faerie Queene*'s appeal to Victorian artists peaked during the high tide of medievalism in art, from the 1840s to the 1860s. Yet, as is evident in works such as Pickersgill's *Britomart Unarming*, Spenser's romance story could never be fully disentangled from its mythic elements. A different text therefore came to the fore, as a resource for those enchanted by the drama and mystery of mediaeval romance: Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur.* The following chapter makes use of the art and poetry inspired by first Malory and then Tennyson's versions of the Grail quest to explore another aspect of Victorian fantasy, related to, but distinct from, allegorical fantasy art: its devotion to the heroic ideal.

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[315] William West, 'Spenser, Ruskin, and the Victorian Culture of Medieval England,' *Spenser Studies: A Renaissance Poetry Annual* 33 (2019): 247.

[316] West, 'Spenser, Ruskin, and the Victorian Culture of Medieval England,' 261.

Through the story of the Grail Quest, among blundering knights and the obscure symbolic figures who guide or distract them, moves the mysterious Sir Galahad, an Arthurian knight whose whole character and story is consumed by the quest. Galahad proved to be an immensely popular figure for Victorian audiences – his youth, beauty, goodness, and supernatural aura all contributing to his elevation as an icon of superhuman goodness. In the history of Victorian fantasy, Galahad exemplifies its capacity to provide a venue for experiencing high-keyed emotions, such as reverence, awe, delight, passion, and grief.

Chapter Four: 'Follow the Gleam:' Heroic Idealism

'Nothing was ever like Morte d'Arthur – I don't mean any one book or any one poem, something that never can be written I mean, and can never go out of the heart.'[317]

A strain of idealism permeates Victorian fantasy, distinct from any concrete political, philosophical, or religious belief, and nowhere more present than in their representations of the legend of the Holy Grail. In Victorian art, poetry, and prose, Galahad and the Grail both stood for an abstract and almost indescribable higher good, framed by a narrative of knightly achievement and a strange journey that lent colour and complexity to their supernatural qualities. The Grail quest, as re-imagined by Victorians, includes both aspects of a two-fold idealism. It looks outwards toward a highest good that transcends tangible reality, and inwards in search of a faultless hero-self. Representations of the quest for the Grail employed its otherworldly story to express a yearning for something better and brighter than anything reality could offer – a yearning shared by the hero of that story, Sir Galahad. In the many artworks depicting the legend, Galahad is the human counterpart to the Grail, the embodiment of human perfection, just as the Grail was the embodiment of perfection itself – both are otherworldly, wonder-inspiring, and, for ordinary people, forever out of reach.[318] Galahad is both an object of fascination, and an avatar for the fantasist themselves.

Despite having dedication, self-denial, and death as its central themes, the Grail quest offered an escapist fantasy for its many enthusiasts. Galahad may not be the only fantastical figure in Arthurian literature, but he is one of only a few characters who are inextricable from a fantasy context – a trait exaggerated in nineteenth-century treatments of the legend. Galahad exists within Malory's story only to embark on the Grail quest, during which he encounters angels, demons, magic boats, and, of course, the supernaturally powerful Grail itself. The story allowed modern readers to temporarily exchange their religious uncertainties and personal failings for the perfect faith, indomitable strength, and pure heart of Galahad. Painting was key to realising this fantasy story, as it revolves around the pursuit of an elusive

[317] Edward Burne-Jones, quoted in Georgiana Burne Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 168.

[318] Although older versions of the quest cast Percival as the knight of the Grail, Victorian artists and writers overwhelmingly identified Galahad with the Grail Quest, due to the pre-eminence of Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* and Tennyson's treatments of the story over all other versions of the Arthurian legends.

vision. Art gave material form to the Grail itself and allowed audiences to vicariously triumph alongside Galahad and the Grail knights who pursued it. Much like the Spenserian allegories discussed in the previous chapter, representations of Galahad and the Grail on canvas presented intangible ideals in tangible forms, animated by a heroic narrative. This chapter deals with Galahad and the Grail as highly ambiguous allegorical fantasies, embodying not a singular virtue but the idea of goodness itself.

Much as Hazlitt, Hunt and Gosse sought to shield Spenser's *Faerie Queene* from dismissal as a dull sequence of encoded moral lessons by insisting on the primacy of the fantasy story over its buried meaning, later poets, artists, critics, and journalists contrived to rule out the interpretation of Galahad and the Grail as strictly religious symbols in a mediaeval, Catholic allegory. Instead, artists and poets lifted them out of their historic and religious context, to live again as symbols of something more nebulous and more touching than old-fashioned piety. Like the nameless hero of Henry Longfellow's 'Excelsior,' Galahad served Victorians as a symbol of selfless courage and dedication to an ideal without a name or an affiliation, defined only as an aim of great merit and value. It is this undefined ideal which Watts invokes in his motto, 'the utmost for the highest,' and which is embodied in the elusive, fantastic 'Gleam' that Merlin pursues, endlessly, in Tennyson's last Arthurian poem, 'Merlin and the Gleam.'[319] This ideal is the ultimate object of Symonds's '*l'amour de l'impossible*,' 'a dream of the ecstatic fancy,' and it is the source of the feeling that prompts Andrew Lang to pronounce himself 'attached to impossible romance, … one who confesses himself *incredibilium cupitor.*'[320]

Galahad became the living avatar of this entirely abstract ideal, which he embodied by living a life of pure dedication to a singular aim, without failure and without doubt. His supernatural powers complemented his symbolic value, cementing his fantastical status as a legendary figure from an imaginary world that only partly resembled the real mediaeval past. The Grail, Galahad's inanimate counterpart, became a fluid symbol of every inaccessible, unknowable good that reality could not afford. Its mythic history as a relic of, variously, the Last Supper, the Crucifixion, and Joseph of Arimathea, was enfolded into the modern Grail quest, as were its legendary powers, but its religious significance was obscured, until it, like

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[319] Mary Seton Watts, *Annals of an Artist's Life*, vol. 2 (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912), 137.
[320] John Addington Symonds, *Studies of the Greek Poets*, New ed. (London: A. and C. Black, Ltd., 1920), 406; Lang, 'Haggard's (H.R.) She,' 36.

William Morris's 'Well at the World's End,' or Browning's 'Dark Tower,' became a goal whose specific qualities mattered less than the hero's desire for it.

The Return of the Grail

The Arthurian legends had been waiting in the wings of English literature for centuries, since Arthur's last significant appearances in Dryden's *King Arthur* and Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*.[321] As a result of this long neglect, England's mythic king became the special property of nineteenth-century creators, who were free to cultivate their own version of him out of the fallow ground of the mediaeval romances. Two new editions of Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* were published in 1816, a third in 1817, and others followed as the century progressed, catalysing new Arthurian productions in literature, the visual arts, and the theatre.

The artistic revival of the Grail quest began quietly. In 1850, the Royal Academician William Dyce began work on a series of allegorical Arthurian frescoes for the Robing Room at Westminster, which included *Religion: The Vision of Sir Galahad and His Company* (Fig. 31). The addition of the Arthurian legends completed the eclectic blend of history, allegory (including subjects from *The Faerie Queene*), and Gothic architecture in play at the new Palace of Westminster. Their inclusion in Pugin and Barry's medievalist fantasy of a building speaks to the legends' enduring centrality to the nation's self-conception. Dyce's project inaugurated a half-century of Grail-quest themed works, while also prefiguring the challenges in re-working the legends which his artistic successors would face.

He was confounded in his selection of appropriately virtuous anecdotes by the inescapable fact that the central figures of the legends, Arthur, Guinevere, Lancelot, Tristan, and Isolde, were involved in adulterous relationships ill-suited for the Queen's own Robing Room.[322] His solution was to transmute the actors in his scene into allegories, 'to consider the Companions of the Round table as personifications of certain moral qualities … which make up the ancient idea of Chivalric greatness.'[323] Thus Tristan harping to Isolde was transformed from a scene of extramarital flirtation to an allegory of knightly courtesy, isolated from its adulterous context. Dyce's additional anxieties about the Eucharistic implications of the Holy

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[321] In Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Prince Arthur plays only an intermittent and peripheral role, without the context – Camelot, Guinevere, the Round Table – that defined him.
[322] Poulson, *Quest for the Grail,* 26.
[323] William Dyce to Charles Eastlake, July 20, 1849, quoted in Poulson, *Quest for the Grail*, 26.

Grail – what he delicately referred to as 'matters of religious and antiquarian controversy, which had better be avoided,' led him to more radical experimentation in his *Religion: The Vision of Sir Galahad and His Company*.[324] In a composition modelled on Raphael's *Disputation of the Sacrament*, Dyce depicts a scene from Malory, in which Galahad, Percival and his sister, and Bors, witness a manifestation of Christ and the four Evangelists in a chapel in the woods.[325] By rendering the scene in the distinctively Italianate manner of the High Renaissance, Dyce perhaps hoped to distance this story, deeply rooted in mediaeval British Catholicism, from its origins.

Despite his own reservations and the difficulties inherent in adapting fresco to the British climate, he completed five of his planned pictures before he died, leaving the series incomplete, in 1864.[326] On its unveiling, the series was hailed as a triumph of British art, and *Religion: The Vision of Sir Galahad and his Company*, in particular, was praised as an allegorical work, 'conceived and executed in the purest spirit of Christian and early Italian art.'[327] The subjects did not offend on religious grounds, by virtue of their historical distance and the vagueness of their actual significance: 'This strange legendary fiction is of great antiquity, and was doubtless originally employed as a vehicle for bardic mysteries. We have, however, only to do with its later meaning in the "Mort d'Arthure," [sic] where it appears as a tolerably intelligent religious allegory, intended to show the importance of pursuing spiritual objects instead of mere chivalric renown.'[328] By not insisting upon the literal truth of the legend, and instead staging the scene with maximum theatricality alongside scenes of courtly chivalry, Dyce defanged the riskily Catholic elements, transmuting the Grail quest from a solemn religious pilgrimage to a supernatural drama.

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[324] Dyce's avoidance of mentioning the pre-Anglican Catholicism of the text is striking, and indicative of how high tensions surrounding the English church were. Tennyson would later share Dyce's anxiety over the topic while composing 'The Holy Grail,' but, in the event, neither met with a hostile response. William Dyce, letter to Charles Eastlake, November 23, 1848, quoted in Poulson, *Quest for the Grail*, 36; Roger Simpson, 'Sacred Relics: Travelers and the Holy Grail,' *Arthuriana* 21, no. 2 (2011): 52; Alfred Tennyson, Letter to George Campbell, Duke of Argyll, October 1859, in *The Letters of Alfred Lord Tennyson, Volume II: 1851-1870*, ed. Cecil Y. Lang, and Edgar F. Shannon (Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corporation, 2002), 244.

[325] Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, vol. 2. (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1906), 249.

[326] Poulson, *Quest for the Grail*, 24.

[327] The author's not mentioning the *specific* religious context of 'early Italian art' is an echo of the artist's own delicate avoidance of the issue. 'Frescoes in the Queen's Robing-Room of the Palace, Westminster: Part I,' *Illustrated London News*, October 22, 1864, 413.

[328] 'Frescoes in the Queen's Robing-Room,' 413.

In the years that followed, mainstream Victorian interpretation of the Arthurian legends was marked by a blend of scepticism of their historical basis, suspicion of lingering Catholicity in the religious elements, and a growing delight in their romance and mediaeval atmosphere. A passage in Charles Dickens's mid-century travel book, *Pictures from Italy*, provides an example of the Grail quest's recasting as a romantic fantasy without real religious significance. He recalls a visit to a chapel in Mantua, where he was shown '"an inclosed portion of the pavement, … under which is said to be preserved the San-greal of the old Romances."'[329] In fact, the relic then said to be kept at Mantua was not the Grail, but a quantity of 'Holy Blood.' Dickens's translation of the disconcertingly old-world Catholic 'Holy Blood' into the Grail 'of the old Romances,' a fictive relic, allowed him to imaginatively engage with it *sans* the discomfort that a legitimate object of reverence, Catholic or not, could provoke.[330]

The Grail could be seen as a remnant of an antique mythology, to be classed alongside King Bran's magic cauldron or the cap of invisibility lent to Perseus. In fact, comparisons between classical mythology and the Arthurian legends were not uncommon. As early as 1762, in his *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, Richard Hurd compared the heroes and monsters of the Arthurian romances to their classical counterparts, asking, 'what are the Grecian Bacchus, Hercules, and Theseus but Knights errant, the exact counter-parts of Sir Launcelot and Amadis de Gaule?'[331] William Lucas Collins, who contributed an article to *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* on the legends of King Arthur, almost certainly had Hurd's book in mind when he wrote that '[t]he knights errant have their classic prototype in Hercules, Bacchus, and Theseus; the sorceress is Circe or Calypso; the giant is Polyphemus; the rescued maiden, Andromeda; monsters like the "Twrch Trwyth" and the "questing beast" are cognate genera to Scylla and the Minotaur.'[332]

An article in *The Nineteenth Century* argued that the religion of the Arthurian romances bore more of a resemblance to that of the Ancient Greeks than of modern Christians, for '[c]lassical antiquity and medieval Christianity were both instinct with the

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[329] Charles Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*, quoted in Simpson, 'Sacred Relics,' 47.
[330] Simpson, 'Sacred Relics,' 48.
[331] Richard Hurd, *Letters on Chivalry and Romance,* quoted in Alan Lupack and Barbara Tepa Lupack, 'The 2016 Loomis Lecture: Moral Chivalry and the Arthurian Revival,' *Arthuriana* 26, no. 4 (2016), 6.
[332] William Lucas Collins, 'King Arthur and His Round Table,' *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 88, no. 539, 1860, 311-337

supernatural.'[333] The inhabitants of ancient Greece or Rome and those of mediaeval Europe shared a belief in a wide range of supernatural beings, for '[t]he mind of mediaeval Europe was saturated with the spiritual, the supernatural, the mysterious.'[334] The difference between them lay only in the new mediaeval idea of life as a struggle against evil, rewarded with 'the victor's crown beyond the grave, the beatific vision "far in the spiritual city."'[335] The quotation from Tennyson's 'The Holy Grail' is not noted in the text, but neither does it seem accidental, in the context of the author's argument. What character better embodies mediaeval faith in the material reality of the supernatural than Galahad?

The Grail myth's acceptance, despite the potential for polemic, may have been facilitated by gradual waning of the anti-Tractarian passions since the 1840s, and accelerated by the accumulation of new treatments of the legend that recast the quest as a romantic adventure.[336] Wordsworth's 'The Egyptian Maid or The Romance of the Water-Lily' (1830) is a remarkable example of this trend. The poem is a kind of Arthurian fairy tale, an amalgamation of the *Morte*, Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and 'Sleeping Beauty,' in which Galahad disenchants and marries an Egyptian princess. The Grail quest peaked in popularity with Tennyson's undeniably supernatural but ambiguously religious 'The Holy Grail' (1869), but Grail stories grew still more fantastical in later developments, such as John Payne's 'The Romaunt of Sir Floris,' an adventure story starring Sir Galahad which borrows from fairy tales and the *Arabian Nights,* and Arthur Machen's story *The Great Return* (1915), in which the Grail appears in a modern Welsh village, healing the sick, inspiring acts of kindness, and leaving in its wake 'a world rectified and glowing, as if an inner flame shone in all things, and behind all things.'[337]

Despite the growing acceptance of the story as a form of fantasy parable from the 1830s onward, it was not without trepidation that Tennyson included the Grail quest in his own *Idylls*. He wrote, 'I doubt whether such a subject could be handled in these days, without incurring a charge of irreverence. It would be too much like playing with sacred things. The

[333] W. S. Lilly, 'Supernaturalism: Mediaeval and Classical,' *The Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review* 14, no. 77, July 1883, 53.
[334] Lilly, 'Supernaturalism,' 53.
[335] Lilly, 'Supernaturalism,' 59.
[336] Popular anxieties about the Catholic minority in Britain and the perceived threat to Anglican Protestant values by Tractarianism and related movements waxed and waned across the century. They were at their height in the 1830s and 1840s, though even then they did not deter Tennyson from publishing *Sir Galahad* in 1842. Poulson, *Quest for the Grail*, 120; Simpson, 'Sacred Relics,' 52.
[337] Arthur Machen, *The Great Return* (London: Faith Press, 1915), 62.

old writers *believed* in the Sangraal.'[338] What, precisely, Tennyson was afraid of trifling with? Were the 'sacred things' he spoke of the Grail itself, or the modern religious practices with which it might be associated?[339] The problem did not in fact arise, as the story had already taken on the character, in the *Illustrated London News*'s words, of a 'strange legendary fiction, … a vehicle for bardic mysteries.'[340] In earlier works of art and poetry, the doctrinal associations with a Eucharist cup or the Catholic Mass had already been obscured by other themes: the reconception of the Grail quest as the pursuit of an abstract ideal and the otherworldly glamour of Galahad himself, whom the *News* reminded readers was 'the most saintly of all knights, as ordained by ancient prophecy to "achieve" the St Greal [sic].'[341] Even Galahad's saintliness was reframed as an heroic trait akin to courtesy or loyalty, rather than a reflection of his pious adherence to a non-Protestant Christian orthodoxy. Tennyson's assertion that 'the old writers *believed* in the San Greal' is the more telling part of his statement; to him, and to many of his contemporaries, the Grail was only *like* a 'sacred thing,' not a thing to be believed in – not anymore.[342] The more Galahad's exceptional virtue was generalised as a superpowered knightly excellence, the more fantastical, and the more accessible to artists and writers, he became.

Tennyson's Arthurian poems had foregrounded the fantasy elements of the story from the first. The weird spell cast on, and by, 'The Lady of Shalott' (1833, revised 1842) entranced the reading public and inspired innumerable paintings. 'Sir Galahad' (1842) simplified the story of the Grail quest into the journey of Galahad and his guardian angels through a magical realm, in search of the Holy Grail, ever in his sight yet ever out of his reach. 'Merlin and the Gleam' (1889), Tennyson's last Arthurian poem, like 'Sir Galahad,' narrates a relentless journey in search of an elusive ideal, 'Not of the sunlight, / Not of the moonlight, / Not of the starlight!' through a world animated with fantastical powers.[343] The

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[338] Alfred Tennyson, Letter to George Campbell, Duke of Argyll, October 1859, in *Letters of Alfred Lord Tennyson, Volume II: 1851-1870,* 244.

[339] Both possibilities, along with a fear of being branded as a secret Catholic himself, have been suggested as the basis for Tennyson's hesitation; see Dennis Taylor, 'Tennyson's Catholic Years: A Point of Contact,' *Victorian Poetry* 47, no. 1 (2009), 298, and Catherine Phillips, '"Charades from the Middle Ages"? Tennyson's "Idylls of the King" and the Chivalric Code,' *Victorian Poetry* 40, no. 3 (2002), 243.

[340] 'Frescoes in the Queen's Robing-Room,' 413.

[341] 'Frescoes in the Queen's Robing-Room,' 413.

[342] Alfred Tennyson, *The Letters of Alfred Lord Tennyson, Volume II: 1851-1870*, 244.

[343] Tennyson, *Poems and Plays*, 808.

poem conceives of Merlin's England as a Spenserian patchwork of fairy tale and mythology, made up of:

> Elf of the woodland,
> Gnome of the cavern,
> Griffin and Giant,
> And dancing of Fairies
> In desolate hollows,
> And wraiths of the mountain,
> And rolling of dragons
> By warble of water.[344]

Tennyson's Galahad also rides through a world steeped in wonders, furnished with 'a magic bark' and haunted by 'blessed forms in whistling storms,' where mysterious music and disembodied voices urge him on his road.[345] Like the journeys undertaken by Spenser's allegorical heroes and heroines, Tennyson's version of the Grail quest hovered on the borderland between religious pilgrimage and fantastical adventure.

The religious aspects of the poem are also intelligible as fantasies in part. The 'mightier transports' that 'move and thrill' Galahad represent a fantasy faith, founded not on 'the substance of things unseen' but on holiness made tangible in the Grail, as no Victorian was able to experience it.[346] According to the *Blackwood's* article of 1860, the Arthurian stories are not Christian, but *Christianized*, their moral code painted over the original 'pagan superstitions.'[347] The equivocal spiritual qualities of the legend arose from how each era imbued the legends with the values of their time, to justify the events of a story in which '[n]ature and art are alike inexplicable, except on supernatural principles.'[348] As a result, '[i]t is not hard to trace in the incidents of Arthurian romance the same kind of resemblance, real or fanciful, which has been remarked by those who love to find in the legends of heathendom types or foreshadowings of Christian truth.'[349] The Grail attracted modern readers, not as a

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[344] Tennyson, *Poems and Plays*, 807.
[345] Tennyson, *Poems and Plays*, 102, 103.
[346] Tennyson, *Poems and Plays*, 103; Heb. 11:1 KJV.
[347] Collins, 'King Arthur,' 323.
[348] Collins, 'King Arthur,' 336.
[349] Collins, 'King Arthur,' 313.

genuine relic of Christ's crucifixion, but only as an abstract symbol, 'the story of the search for the Supreme Good – where each finds what he brings,' or 'that enthusiastic longing for an ideal life, that craving for something beyond the mere material satisfaction of "earthly things."'[350]

Dyce's paintings had already demonstrated to his contemporaries that, like *The Faerie Queene* or the classical myths, the Arthurian legends could be treated as allegorical subjects. Though they did not court such interpretation as Spenser's work did, they were evidently sufficiently flexible to serve as morality tales, or as allegories of British history or of the nation's cardinal virtues. As the previous chapter has shown, allegorical qualities could blend seamlessly with fantastical qualities in the Victorian arts, so that the lines between a person, a personification, and a deity, almost ceased to exist. Galahad and the Grail were fantasies not because of what they *are* – on a physical level, a young man and an old goblet – but because within their ordinary forms they embodied unworldly ideals and powers. They are living allegories, whose higher meaning plays an active role in the narrative through which they move.

Making a Moral Fantasy

George Landow has argued that the intertwining of sincere moral beliefs with the suspension of *disbelief* is an integral element of the fantasy genre and the source of much of its power. '[T]he main drive of fantasy … is to deny the primacy of our everyday laws of cause and effect,' but the specific nature of that denial is determined by the underlying values of the story, which justifies its unreality by making it meaningful.[351] The specific spiritual argument allied to a fantasy story may be Christian, pagan, psychological, or utopian. What is essential is the internal consistency of the ideal framework that underlies its plot structure.[352] This idea was articulated in the nineteenth century by George MacDonald, who wrote that when composing a fairy tale, '[i]n physical things a man may invent; in moral things he must obey – and take their laws with him into his invented world as well. … The beauty may be plainer

[350] 'Art VII – Mr. Tennyson and the Round Table,' *The British Quarterly Review* 51, no. 101, January 1870, 205; Charles William Stubbs, 'God's Englishmen: I. Arthur, the Mythic King,' *Good Words* 25, December 1884, 466.
[351] Landow, 'And the World Became Strange,' 27.
[352] Landow, 'And the World Became Strange,' 28.

in it than the truth, but without the truth the beauty could not be, and the fairytale would give no delight.'[353]

It is possible to entertain a suspended disbelief in, for example, St George's defeat of a ferocious dragon, not just because St George is a competent warrior, but because he is good, the dragon is evil, and the underlying Christian ethos of the story holds that good is more powerful than evil.[354] A fairy tale's moral may be evident in its conclusion or implied by the fantastic linkages drawn between the characters' actions and their magical effects. In MacDonald's *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872), the heroine is guided by a magic thread that only she can sense, by virtue of her unquestioning trust in her grandmother's magic that created it.[355] The lesson, that we do right to place our faith in a higher power, is mirrored in the magic. In the case of *Le Morte D'Arthur*, the link between the story's value system and its fantastical elements is evident: Galahad's extraordinary purity of soul endows him with supernatural powers – to undo curses, exorcise demons, take up an enchanted sword and shield, and hear angelic voices that guide him onwards to his goal, the Grail which only he can claim. The entwining of supernatural effects with moral allegory in the Grail quest is captured in the oft-quoted lines from Tennyson's 'Sir Galahad' (1842): 'My strength is as the strength of ten / because my heart is pure.'[356]

Galahad's impossibility, his magic, is contained in that 'because.' The supernatural linkage of spiritual purity with physical power is not entirely original to his story. 'Tennyson was certainly working in a literary and cultural tradition which provided an adequate cause and effect relationship between Galahad's chastity and his strength.'[357] That tradition comprised not only Malory's Galahad, a supernaturally powerful agent of physical and spiritual purity, but also other sources, such as Milton's *Comus*, whose leading lady is, because of her virginity, defended by invisible angels, granted access to heavenly secrets, and

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[353] George MacDonald, *A Dish of Orts, Chiefly Papers on the Imagination, and on Shakspere*. 2nd ed., expanded (London: Sampson Low Marston & Company, Ltd., 1895), 316.
[354] Even within a culture that assents to the symbolic moral of a traditional narrative, it remains possible to complicate it through parody or deconstruction. Kenneth Grahame's 'The Reluctant Dragon,' first published in 1895, is a case in point. In Grahame's story, the true evil is not the dragon but the violent appetites of the townspeople who egg Saint George on to slay him for their entertainment. See Kenneth Grahame, *Dream Days* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1898), 179-245.
[355] George MacDonald, *The Princess and the Goblin* (London: Strahan & Co., 1872).
[356] Tennyson, *Poems and Plays,* 102.
[357] Philip L. Elliott, 'Tennyson's "Sir Galahad,"' *Victorian Poetry* 9, no. 4 (1971): 445-446.

blessed with eternal youth – a notion satirized by Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*.[358] Tennyson took up the concept of guardian spirits in a serious vein in 'Sir Galahad,' and again in 'The Holy Grail' (1869), in which Galahad is escorted on his journey, not only by angels, but also by the Grail itself, which he sees 'moving with me night and day,' a visible presence which bestows on him unnatural power: 'And in the strength of this I rode, / Shattering all evil customs everywhere.'[359]

Unlike Arthur, who, despite the magical circumstances of his birth, his enchanted sword, and his disappearance into Avalon, is himself essentially mundane, Galahad not only encounters enchantments but exercises supernatural powers of his own. The beauty and the magical aura of Galahad were emphasised by many Victorian poets. Thomas Westwood's 'The Quest of the Sancgreall' celebrates both traits in one: 'his visage pale, but pure / As holy angel's – all the orbs of heaven / Broke into twofold splendour as he came.'[360] In Payne's 'The Romaunt of Sir Floris' (1870), Galahad appears as much a prince of fairyland as a Grail knight, an angelic figure 'past mortal beauty' who heals the dying hero with a handful of magic flowers, and by making the sign of the cross in air, summons for their conveyance,

> The silver wonder of a boat,
> Gold-keel'd and fair with silken sails,
> Such boat as, in old Eastern tales,
> The genii bring at the command
> Of some enchanter's magic wand.[361]

The fusion of magical effects with religious symbolism peculiar to the Grail myth skews strongly towards the magic in Payne's interpretation. Though his is perhaps the most overtly fantastical Galahad, he is also characteristic of his period in his emphasis on Galahad's

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[358] Comus enjoyed a brief revival in the first half of the nineteenth century. Jan Piggott, 'Milton's "Comus": From Text to Stage, the Fine Arts, and Book Illustration, c.1750 – 1850,' *The British Art Journal* 15, no. 2 (2014): 28-31; Elliott, 'Tennyson's "Sir Galahad,"' 446.
[359] Tennyson, *Poems and Plays*, 396.
[360] Thomas Westwood, *The Quest of the Sancgreall, The Sword of Kingship, and Other Poems* (London: John Russell Smith, 1868), 36.
[361] John Payne, *The Masque of Shadows and Other Poems*, New ed. (London: W. H. Allen & Co, 1884 (1870)), 188.

personal beauty, and his identification of Galahad's inner goodness with his outer form, in which Sir Floris sees 'such a might / Of stainless virtue and of all / Perfection pictured.'[362]

In the visual arts, Galahad's special status as the predestined achiever of the Grail is made evident in his appearance. He is generally depicted as beautiful, youthful, beardless and slight of build, which sets him apart from the bulkier, bearded, and mature appearance popularly associated with mediaeval knighthood.[363] His ubiquitous suit of shining armour and red shield stand in for his exceptional knighthood. He is further distinguished by the angels that hover overhead or stand at his side, and in the luminous Grail that is often visible to him alone, and sometimes apparent to us, who see it, as it were, through his eyes. The fantasticism of the world of the Grail quest, as distinct from that of Galahad himself, is most vivid in the Arthurian designs of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, which combined radical stylistic experimentation with an unusual commitment to the more esoteric aspects of the legend.

Rossetti was a founding member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, whose enthusiasm for *Le Morte D'Arthur* and for mediaeval art attracted many fellow artists to the Arthurian. Knowledge of Dyce's commission prompted Rossetti to choose the *Morte d'Arthur* as the theme for the Oxford Union frescoes, in competition with the more prestigious works underway at Westminster, but was also motivated by his sincere enthusiasm for the Grail quest.[364] Among the many mediaevalist and Arthurian works which Rossetti produced around the time of the Oxford project, five related directly to the Grail: *The Quest of the Holy Grail* (1855), *Sir Galahad and an Angel* (1857), *Sir Galahad at the Ruined Chapel* (1857-1859), *The Damsel of the Sanct Grail* (1857), and *How Sir Galahad, Sir Bors and Sir Percival Were Fed with the Sanct Grael; but Sir Percival's Sister Died by the Way* (1864, Fig. 32).[365] This last work carries to an extreme Rossetti's irrealistic style from this period, later described by Ruskin as employing 'the principles of manuscript illumination, which permits his design to rival the most beautiful qualities of painted glass, without losing either the mystery or the dignity of light and shade.'[366] The watercolour

[362] Payne, *Masque of Shadows* 177.
[363] Christopher Oldstone-Moore, 'The Beard Movement in Victorian Britain,' *Victorian Studies,* vol. 48, no. 1 (Autumn, 2005): 13.
[364] Debra N. Mancoff, 'Problems with the Pattern: William Morris's Arthurian Imagery,' *Arthuriana* 6, no. 3 (1996): 57.
[365] The watercolour of 1864 is based on a design Rossetti originally created for use in the Oxford Union.
[366] Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 33, *The Art of England,* 269.

amalgamates multiple scenes from the *Morte*, including the fatal blood sacrifice of Percival's sister, and Bors's sight of the Grail maiden at the Castle of Corbin.

A brilliant red tone dominates the picture. The angels' wings are a pure, flat scarlet, and the colour recurs in varying degrees in the figures' clothing, in the altar cloth and candles, in the shadows around their faces, and in their hair. Even the petals of the daisies are reddened, and the earth beneath the grass has a ruddy tint. Much of what is not red is golden: the draped cloth, the faces of the figures, and the haloes around the lilies and the heads of the angels and maiden. The effect is of a world on fire. Its fierce brilliance brings to mind further scenes from Malory, such as Lancelot's experience at the portal of the chapel of the Grail, where 'there came out a great clereness, that the house was as bright as all the torches of the world had been there,' as well as the aged King Mordrains's praise of Galahad, 'thou art a clene virgin above all knights, as the flower of the lily in whom virginity is signified, and thou art the rose the which is the flower of all good virtues, and in colour of fire.'[367] The image trades in the most bizarre elements of the Grail legend – the unnatural coexistence of the natural world and the divine, the visually distorting effects of the presence of the Grail, the emphasis on symbolic colours, especially the red of blood and of fire, the deaths of young women, and the semi-divinity of Galahad as both knight and messiah.

The theme of the vision quest appealed to Rossetti as a writer as well as an artist. The story of the Grail seems to underlie his short story *Hand and Soul*, a fantastical parable of the sources of artistic inspiration. The fictional artist-hero of the story, Chiaro, is described as a beautiful young man whose face has 'a glory upon it, as upon the face of one who feels a light round his hair,' an appearance reminiscent of many portrayals of Galahad, including Rossetti's own.[368] Like Galahad, who yearns after the Grail he has seen in fleeting moments all his life, Chiaro suffers from childhood onward from an 'extreme longing after a visible embodiment of his thoughts.'[369] Chiaro is cheered and encouraged when at his lowest ebb by a divine visitation – a trope revisited by Rossetti's close friend William Morris in 'Sir Galahad: A Christmas Mystery' (1858). The vision that comes to Chiaro, of his own soul embodied as a woman in green and grey with long golden hair, bears a strong resemblance to Rossetti's early watercolour *The Damsel of Sanct Grael* (Fig. 33).[370]

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[367] Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, vol. 2, 257, 261.
[368] D. G. Rossetti, *Hand and Soul* (Hammersmith: Kelmscott Press, 1895), 9.
[369] Rossetti, *Hand and Soul*, 4.
[370] Rossetti, *Hand and Soul*, 32.

The quest for the Grail, and Chiaro's journey to artistic fulfilment, share a core tenet, that the ideal, whether artistic or spiritual, lies in some otherworldly realm, and can only be accessed through a combination of dedication, sacrifice, and grace. Malory's romance, the inward quest for one's own soul, the artist's search for a message and a means to convey it all blurred together in the fiery world of Rossetti's Grail art. Through his wild colours, and his enthusiasm for the most bizarre elements of the Grail legends, Rossetti thrust the story of the Grail quest into a strange realm, luminously fantastic as a dream.

The New Galahad

Paintings of Galahad proliferated from the 1850s through the turn of the century. These images showed remarkable diversity, in their styles, moods, and content. The multiplicity of possible approaches to Galahad are manifest in the wide-ranging work of one artist, the Scotsman Joseph Noel Paton, a close friend and contemporary of John Everett Millais, and a prolific painter of Galahad(s).[371]

Paton's earliest work on the theme treats Galahad as something like an earthbound angel. *Sir Galahad and the Angel* (1845-1860), a tiny oil painting, emphasises not Galahad's knightly prowess but his virginity (Fig. 34). The image of the Virgin Mary on the caparison of his horse and the lily carried by the white-robed angel, who leads his horse, symbolise Galahad's identity as the 'maiden knight,' whose gaze is upturned to heaven, or perhaps the Grail itself. In the almost identically named *Sir Galahad and his Angel* (1884), Galahad strains upward from his saddle, eyes once more fixed on something just out of our view overhead (Fig. 35). The lily and cross that his accompanying angel bears evoke his virginity and piety, while Galahad's pose, with sword in hand, and the stamping horse crowned with oak leaves (traditionally associated with strength and heroism) give him the aspect of a warrior saint. Yet a third variant appears in a small *Sir Galahad*, in which a young man in armour is caught on a mountainside between an angel and a bacchante-like woman, whom he repulses.[372] The scenario recalls both the choice of Hercules and the temptation of Percival, and again frames Galahad as both pious and valiant, militant yet mild. All three of these treatments of Galahad reflect what many Victorians saw in the character – an embodiment of

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[371] Girouard, *Return to Camelot*, 155.

[372] *Sir Galahad* is undated, but evidently related to a similar work entitled *The Choice*, which dates from 1886 (Fig. 8).

piety, resilience, and courage, a romantic lay saint for the young Anglican faithful. This version of Galahad is a fitting subject for Paton, an artist 'dominated by two passions, armour and religion.'[373]

A timely explanation for the appeal of these almost cartoonishly pure-minded and heroic Galahads appears in the writing of Andrew Lang. Lang, a folklore scholar, author and compiler of fairy tales, kept close watch on the fantastical tendencies of his era. In an essay from the late 1880s, Lang describes what he believes to be the appeal of 'romance' in literature, in the process explaining the allure of works such as H. Rider Haggard's *She* – or Paton's many Galahads. Lang identifies romance fiction with an intensified version of reality, where it is possible to experience 'such overflowing measure of strength, fortune, and love, … as life has *not* for giving.'[374] Thus considered, romance is not *always* 'concerned with impossibilities,' but it is only when it draws on the impossible and fantastic that it is able to satisfy the hungers that it awakens in its readers:

> it is only the impossible that can satisfy human aspiration: we all cry for the moon; and we can only meet the moon, like Endymion, in a dream…The Latmian is lapped for ever in a vision of these impossible felicities, and these adventures never to be achieved, which are in the land of Faery. Sometimes it is the function of Romance to transport us thither, and to lull us for an hour with dreams of the impossible.'[375]

Lang attributed the special popularity of fantastical romance literature to a widespread – but not universal – yearning after truly transcendent heights of unreal experience. Paton's subtly differentiated series of angelic knights each feed different forms of the same appetite for 'impossible felicities,' for a virtue beyond normal goodness, and valour beyond ordinary courage. Galahad, whose perfect knighthood astonished even the Round Table, represents an extreme even within the idealised mediaeval world of the legends. A superhuman character such as Galahad would thus appeal most to those same spirits, lovers of romance, including Lang and Edmund Gosse themselves – those who 'nourish, persistently, a desire to wander forth beyond the possibilities of experience, to enjoy the impossible, and to invade the inaccessible.'[376] That is, the idea of Galahad spoke to *fantasists*.

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[373] Girouard, *Return to Camelot*, 143, 155.
[374] Andrew Lang, 'Romance and the Reverse,' *St. James Gazette*, November 7, 1888: 3
[375] Lang, 'Romance and the Reverse,' 3.
[376] Gosse, *Aspects and Impressions*, 263.

It is thus unsurprising to find that Paton, best known for his fairy paintings, was likewise a devotee of Galahad, the otherworldly knight. His painting *Beati Mundo Corde*, the fully-realised version of an oil sketch entitled *How an Angel Rowed Sir Galahad Across the Dern Mere* (1888-1890) brings all Paton's skill as a painter of fairy scenes to bear (Fig. 36).[377] Stylistically, it resembles his scenes from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and still more, *Oskold and the Elle Maids* (1874, Fig. 37), a fairy-tale allegory drawn, according to the artist, from a Scandinavian legend.[378] *Beati Mundo Corde* likewise employs the allegory at its core as the base for a heroic, fantastical narrative. The title celebrates Galahad's defining traits – his pure heart and his visions of the Grail, while the image itself is a baroque mediaevalist fantasy steeped in an atmosphere of weird enchantment. Galahad wears a suit of flanged armour, topped with a gold-winged helmet and complemented by a dramatically flaring red cloak, and leans on an equally elaborately kitted-out horse. Both horse and knight are passengers in an ornamented boat rowed by a haloed angel through a forbidding forest at twilight. Two women with flower crowns, diaphanous fairy wings and equally diaphanous drapery represent Pleasure and Despair, respectively.[379] Their gazes are fixed on the knight, who has eyes only for the guiding angel in the boat. The luminescence of the angel and the fairy women, the green-gold twilight, the intrigue of the dark wood – all awaken our imaginations, and, in typical Victorian fantasy style, work against a purely allegorical reading of the image.

The final example of Paton's Arthurian works, *Sir Galahad's Vision*, is a more sombre treatment of the legend (Fig. 38). The painting, exhibited at the RSA in 1880, can be read as a direct translation from text to canvas of a passage from Tennyson's 'Sir Galahad:'

> Three angels bear the holy Grail:
> With folded feet, in stoles of white,
> On sleeping wings they sail.

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[377] The title comes from Matthew 5:8 KJV, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.' The connection to Galahad, known for his pure heart and blessed with a vision of the Grail, is obvious.
[378] Paton's source for the subject is obscure, identified in an exhibition catalogue as 'Scandinavian legends of the beautiful and malevolent wood-spirits of Ellé-maids.' Paton offered his own allegorical explanation of the picture: 'the questing knight is the soul, the forest is the labyrinth of this world, and the Ellé-maids are the five senses.' See: Joseph Noel Paton, quoted in Alfred George Temple, *Corporation of London Art Gallery: Descriptive Catalogue of the Loan Collection of Pictures* (London: Charles Skipper and East, 1892), 24.
[379] Muriel Whitaker, *The Legends of King Arthur in Art* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990), 217.

> Ah, blessed vision! blood of God!
> My spirit beats her mortal bars,
> As down dark tides the glory slides,
> And star-like mingles with the stars.[380]

In lieu of the sunny picture-book clarity of his other versions of the knight, *Sir Galahad's Vision* is literally and figuratively obscure. The angels overhead are nearly lost in their own radiance, but the landscape below is dark and rocky and the path forward uncertain. Noted in passing as one of the artist's two 'poetical pictures' when exhibited at the RA in 1879 (the other was *A Dream of Latmos*, from Keats's *Endymion*), the picture seems to owe its mood to 'The Holy Grail,' however much its composition derives from 'Sir Galahad.'[381] The dark mountains and water, hardly illuminated by the lurid glow of the distant Grail bring Galahad's Gothically terrific description of it to mind:

> Fainter by day, but always in the night
> Blood-red, and sliding down the blackened marsh
> Blood-red, and on the naked mountain top
> Blood-red, and in the sleeping mere below
> Blood-red.[382]

The contrast between the brooding mystery of this scene and Paton's sunlit valleys in other pictures demonstrates the range of moods to which Galahad's story could be attuned, without ever losing the sense of a fantastic power underlying each scene. Paton's Childe-Roland-esque treatment of the quest as dark, mysterious, and lonely recurs in Sir John Gilbert's undated *Sir Galahad*, Edward Burne-Jones's *Sir Galahad* (1858, discussed further below) and *Lancelot at the Chapel of the Holy Grail* (1896), and Arthur Hughes's *Sir Galahad, the Quest of the Holy Grail* (1870) (Fig. 39, Fig. 40, Fig. 41, and Fig. 42).

In Paton's works all the various attractions of Galahad's story were manifested in turn – the facile morality, the lonely journey, the haunting mystery, and the magical adventure. The diversity of potential approaches to his story doubtless contributed to Galahad's

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[380] Tennyson, *Poems and Plays*, 103.
[381] George R Halkett, 'The Royal Scottish Academy's Exhibition, 1880,' *The Magazine of Art*, January 1880, 433.
[382] Tennyson, *Poems and Plays*, 396.

becoming the most often-represented male figure from the Arthurian legends, appearing far more frequently than either Arthur or Lancelot.[383] The increasing familiarity of art audiences with the Arthurian legends ensured Galahad's recognizability, regardless of how his story was presented.

Faith and the Imagination

This popular awareness of the legends was due in part to the availability of new editions of Malory from the 1810s onward, but more to the work of contemporary poets. The cultural dominance of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, which retooled Malory's *Morte* for Victorian tastes and Victorian values, cannot be overstated, making the *Idylls'*s insistence on the inherent magic of Arthur's England a key factor in the emergence of the overtly fantastical Victorian Galahad. In 'The Coming of Arthur,' the fantastical elements are present only in second-guessed memories, but magic is a pervasive presence in 'The Passing of Arthur' and still more in 'The Holy Grail.' The overt fantasticism of the latter instalment even surprised one commentator, who did not expect such 'a mystical story of a fabulous age as far removed as the stars from ordinary life and experience,' to come from the pen of a modern poet.[384]

According to popular understanding, the Grail narrative was of a piece with the entire tangled web of Arthurian tales, all of which were formed of 'the strangest conceivable mixture of Pagan sentiment with the formal language of Christianity, and sometimes with some of its most mystical doctrines.'[385] From a purely historical perspective, Victorian readers were quite correct to view the Grail Quest as a fairy tale (in MacDonald's broad sense of the phrase). The Holy Grail was, from its root, a purely fictional device.[386] Attempts to locate the Grail within the long history of holy relics lost and found came after its inclusion in the romances. In so far as the Grail has an original outside of the Arthurian quest narrative, it derives from the magic cauldrons or dishes of Welsh and Celtic legend.[387] Like other quest

[383] Christine Poulson, 'Arthurian Legend in Fine and Applied Art of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: A Subject Index,' *Arthurian Literature X,* ed. Richard Barber (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990), 111-134.
[384] 'The Poet Laureate's New Volume,' *The Times* 26628, December 23, 1869, 4.
[385] Collins, 'King Arthur,' 314.
[386] Juliette Wood, 'The Search for the Holy Grail: Scholars, Critics and Occultists,' *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 22 (2002): 237.
[387] Juliette Wood, 'The Holy Grail: From Romance Motif to Modern Genre,' *Folklore* 111, no. 2 (2000): 180.

objects, the Grail long enjoyed 'the kind of evocative but unspecified significance which was the stock-in-trade of mediaeval romance.'[388] The pre-Christian origins of the Grail and the quest were well known to Victorian readers. Although the *Blackwood's* article from 1860, identifies the 'Holy Graal, or Greal,' as 'the vessel from which the Saviour drank at the last supper,' he author goes on to explain that this pious history is only a later addition to a much older story, for 'the Holy Vessel and the Bleeding Lance, though they fall into their places so easily and naturally amongst the *regalia* of a fanciful Christianity, are indisputably of pagan origin.'[389] The Grail was understood as an emanation from a pre-Christian era, whose primary interest lay in its association with the more intelligible figure of Galahad, its dauntless pursuer.

Watts's Galahad

In fact, in what was perhaps the most widely known and frequently reproduced Grail quest image of the century, George Frederick Watts's *Sir Galahad*, the Grail is conspicuous by its absence (Fig. 43). The picture's subject is not the quest but the questing knight. While the diversity of Paton's approaches to Galahad shows how a single artist could vary his treatment of the subject, the history of the reception of Watts's *Sir Galahad*, and that image's influence on later depictions of him, show how a single potent fantasy image could refract within the diverse imaginations of its audience.

Watts's painting was produced simultaneously with Dyce's frescoes, in the midst of an enthusiastic Arthurian revival carried out by the circle of artists and writers centring on Little Holland House, where Watts was a full-time resident. At this time, all these artists moved in a shared milieu peculiarly saturated with Arthuriana. Little Holland House was the home of the Prinsep family, who welcomed both Tennyson and Burne-Jones for prolonged visits. Rossetti and Morris both dined there on at least one occasion.[390] All of these artists and writers were engaged in Arthurian projects during this period, as were the Prinseps themselves. Valentine Prinsep participated, with Watts's encouragement, in Rossetti's Oxford Union mural project, and Arthur Prinsep posed for the sketches which Watts

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[388] Wood, 'The Holy Grail: From Romance Motif to Modern Genre,' 176.
[389] Collins, 'King Arthur,' 327-329.
[390] Marilynn Lincoln Board, 'Art's Moral Mission: Reading G.F. Watts's *Sir Galahad*,' in *The Arthurian Revival: Essays on Form, Tradition, and Transformation*, ed. Debra N. Mancoff (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 137.

developed into *Sir Galahad*.[391] The web of personal and creative connections between the artists and writers who lived at or visited Little Holland House at this time is complex, the lines of indebtedness or appropriation impossible to trace with precision, but it seems certain that the Arthurian work of each individual benefitted from that of the others.

At this time Morris and Tennyson were both at work on Arthurian verses, Morris on *The Defence of Guenevere*, published in 1858, and Tennyson on the first four parts of what became *The Idylls of the King*, published in 1859. Tennyson and Watts discussed his Arthurian poems, and the relationship between painting and poetry, during walks on the grounds of Little Holland House, while Tennyson was also aware of the literary endeavours of Morris and his friends.[392] The majority of Rossetti's Arthurian watercolours were produced during this period, as were the first of Burne-Jones's many artworks inspired by the legends. Rossetti's artistic investment in the Arthurian legends waned after the 1860s, as did Watts's, but Burne-Jones, Morris, and Tennyson all returned to the stories for inspiration in their work throughout their lives. Their works based on the legend share a common narrative, of an exceptional hero's aspiration towards an unknowable ideal.

Watts's painting, *Sir Galahad*, which he sent to the Royal Academy's summer exhibition in 1862, depicts a delicate-featured young man in a suit of armour, his horse by his side.[393] Though bereft of the identifying attributes assigned to him by Malory, such as red armour or a shield marked by a cross, the youth, beauty, and posture of prayerful contemplation of its central figure all helped his audience identify him.[394] Watts worked from a drawing of the teenaged Arthur Prinsep from the mid or late 1850s, part of a series of sketches which he also used for two other images of idealised knighthood, *Aspiration* (1866) and *Una and the Red Cross Knight* (1869) (Fig. 44 and Fig. 45).[395]

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[391] Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, Vol. 1, 178, 181; Girouard, *Return to Camelot,* 153.
[392] Apart from their in-person meetings, Tennyson was sent (and expressed enthusiasm for), at least one issue of the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*. Watts, *Annals of an Artist's Life*, vol. 1, 169-170; Alfred Tennyson, Letter to William Fulford, January 1856, in Lang and Shannon, *Letters of Alfred, Lord Tennyson*, *Volume II: 1851-1870*, 142.
[393] The *Sir Galahad* which was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1862 was described by F.G. Stephens as 'life-size,' helpfully allowing us to identify which of the five extant versions it was, as only one, now at the Fogg Museum, Harvard, measures up. See F. G. Stephens, 'Fine Arts: The Royal Academy,' *The Athenaeum*, May 3, 1862, 602.
[394] Stephens, 'Fine Arts: The Royal Academy,' 602; 'The Royal Academy Exhibition,' *The London Review and Weekly Journal of Politics, Literature, Art, and Society* 4, no. 100, May 31, 1862, 511; 'The Royal Academy,' *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 13, no. 341, May 10, 1862, 531; Tom Taylor, 'Royal Academy Exhibition,' *London Times*, May 3, 1862, 14.
[395] Watts, *Annals of an Artist's Life*, Vol. 1, 158.

To his contemporaries, Watts's Galahad had an obvious immediate source: Tennyson's 'Sir Galahad.' One critic went into raptures over what he saw as a deliberate evocation of Tennyson's famous poem, asking, 'What can be said in sufficient praise of Sir Galahad? We do not now allude to the courage and virtues of the virgin knight, but to Mr. Watts's noble realization of the poet laureate's hero.'[396] Yet Watts insisted throughout his life that he had not even read 'Sir Galahad' until after painting his picture of the knight.[397] Given Watts's familiarity with the Arthurian legends, his friendship with Tennyson, and the fact that the poem had been in circulation for nearly twenty years by the time Watts began his painting, this claim seems doubtful. In private, Watts admitted to an ideological correspondence between picture and poem – 'Tennysons [sic] own Poem expresses all that my picture should convey.'[398] In a private note, Watts added that he saw his *Sir Galahad* and Tennyson's poem as expressions in different forms of Watts's personal motto, 'the utmost for the highest.'[399]

As an artist, Watts conceived of the impossible ideal to which he aspired in visual terms, as he wrote to Ruskin, 'my own views are too visionary, and the qualities I aim at are too abstract, to be attained, or perhaps to produce any effect if attained. My instincts cause me to strike after things that are hardly within the province of art, things that are rather felt than seen.'[400] Elsewhere he wrote poignantly of the limitations imposed on human perception, such that '[t]he one thing which is more than ever clearly perceived is the density of the veil that covers the mystery of our being, at all times impenetrable, and to be impenetrable, in spite of which conviction we ever passionately yearn to pierce it.'[401] He felt that an endless striving to transcend earthly experience was a fruitless yet necessary task: 'as long as humanity is humanity, man will yearn to ascend the height human footsteps may not

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[396] L. E. C, 'An Afternoon At "The Academy",' *London Society: An Illustrated Magazine of Light and Amusing Literature for the Hours of Relaxation* 2, no. 6, July 1862, 24.
[397] Board, 'Art's Moral Mission,' 135; Alan Lupack, 'Popular Images Derived from Tennyson's Arthurian Poems,' *Arthuriana* 21, no. 2 (2011): 93; George Frederic Watts, Undated, Marginal note on photograph of *Sir Galahad* (1862), taken by Frederic Hollyer, Watts Gallery Archives, COMWG2008.120.
[398] George Frederic Watts, to Reverend Basil Phillips, February 11, 1900, National Portrait Gallery Archives: Watts Collection, GFW1-13-92.
[399] Watts, Marginal note on photograph of *Sir Galahad* (1862), taken by Frederic Hollyer.
[400] George Fredric Watts to John Ruskin, quoted in Watts, *Annals of an Artist's Life*, vol. 1, 91.
[401] George Frederic Watts, 'The Present Conditions of Art I,' *The Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review* 7, no. 36, February, 1880, 243-4.

tread, and long to lift the veil that shrouds the enigma of being, and he will most prize the echo of this longing in even the incoherent expression of literature, music, and art.'[402]

As a hero who is defined as much by his unique vision as his moral uprightness, Galahad could be read as a model for the Watts's ideal artist – a visionary striving to achieve a truth that only he can see, his persuasive, compelling gaze standing for the visual impact of the truly great artwork. This heroic conception of the artist's vocation recurs in Symonds's writing as well:

> There is no denying the reality *for us* of this ideal. That elusive loveliness which 'hovers in the restless heads' of poets, may not be something tangible, demonstrable, in nature. But it remains a substantial fact for the subjective sentient being. The thirst to seize and capture it, which lures the artist on, 'for ever following and for ever foiled,' is no mere morbid or capricious longing … this element, in so far as it has been communicated to his work, constitutes its highest value.[403]

Symonds places artists in the same privileged position as Galahad, who alone among the knights in Arthur's hall could say: 'I saw the Holy Grail and heard a cry – / "O Galahad, and O Galahad, follow me."'[404] Summoned by an ideal which is, *for them*, real, they pursue it, and through the pursuit they realise their best work.

If Galahad is an artist, then art itself is the Grail. Art, Symonds writes, can hint at the higher visions which are disclosed only to the true artist, by 'shed[ding] this gleam, this light, upon the things which have been conscientiously and lovingly observed in nature … combining these in a harmony beyond the sphere of actual material things.'[405] In an oft-quoted letter, Burne-Jones, perhaps the most dedicated Arthurian artist of his age, explained his own understanding of the aims of art as the evocation of 'a beautiful romantic dream of something that never was, never will be – in a light better than any light ever shone – in a land no one can define or remember, only desire – and the forms divinely beautiful.'[406] This power of art to reveal the world in a new light echoes the effects of the Grail on its

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[402] Watts, 'The Present Conditions of Art I,' 255.
[403] Symonds, *Essays*, vol. 1, 218.
[404] Tennyson, *Poems and Plays*, 393.
[405] Symonds, *Essays*, vol. 1, 218.
[406] Edward Burne-Jones, quoted in Cosmo Monkhouse, *British Contemporary Artists* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), 123.

surroundings. A passage in Malory, later paraphrased by Tennyson, describes how in the hall at Camelot there 'entered a sunbeam more clearer by seven times than ever they saw day, and all they were alighted of the grace of the Holy Ghost. Then began every knight to behold other, and either saw other, by their seeming, fairer than ever they saw afore.'[407]

Though no enemy to idealism, in the arts and in every other part of life, Watts himself later tried and failed to sever the connection between his brand of idealism and his painting of Galahad. The correlation proved unshakable in the minds of his audience. When a small version of his *Sir Galahad* was shown at his one-man show at the Grosvenor in 1881, Watts asked that it be displayed with a quotation, not by Tennyson or Malory, but from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. His request that *Sir Galahad* (the title remained unchanged) be captioned by Chaucer's description of the Squire from the General Prologue, 'a lovyere and a lusty bacheler,' went unremarked upon at the time but has baffled art historians ever since.[408] Watts explained his choice, not then, but in 1897, when he presented Eton College with a new full-size version of his *Sir Galahad*. The *Eton College Chronicle* records Watts's speech on the occasion in part as follows: 'I should like my picture to be illustrated by Chaucer's description of the young Squire. In generous and perhaps unthinking youth seeds of good and evil may be sowed by very unexpected and apparently small means.'[409] The Squire is possessed of all social graces and soldierly skills, but, unlike Galahad, is also a showy dresser, promiscuous, and motivated primarily by the desire to distinguish himself before his lady. The lesson Watts meant to convey by the conjunction of the two characters, that a good start in life may be marred by poor choices, seems to have been lost on the student contributor to the *Chronicle*, who persisted in reading Watts's Galahad as 'the type of chivalrous, devoted and pure manhood,' in whom 'the painter declares that goodness and beauty may and ought to go together,' and concluded his essay by comparing Watts's Galahad, not to Chaucer's Squire, but to another figure from the *Canterbury Tales*, the more straightforwardly noble Knight.[410]

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[407] Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, vol. 2, 171.
[408] Board describes this pairing as merely 'puzzling,' but Wilfrid Blunt found Watts's request so bizarre that he argued it must have been a mistake on Watts's part, having confused Chaucer's Squire with the Knight from the same poem. See Wilfrid Blunt, 'Watts and Ellen Terry,' *The Burlington Magazine* 106, no. 730 (1964): 43; Board, 'Art's Moral Mission,' 135; Debra N. Mancoff, *The Return of King Arthur*, *The Legend through Victorian Eyes* (London: Pavilion, 1995), 126.
[409] 'Mr. Watts's Picture,' *Eton College Chronicle* 765, June 17, 1897, 369.
[410] 'Mr. Watts's Picture,' *Eton College Chronicle*, 369.

Watts's failed attempt to re-cast his Galahad as the Squire shows how potent and durable the image of Galahad, in particular *his* almost too ideal Galahad, had become.[411] However, his attempt to associate Galahad with a more achievable, practical goodness, rather than with self-annihilating idealism, *was* part of a wider trend in materials for children. In stories in magazines such as *The Quiver* and *The Monthly Packet*, Galahad was held up as a model of day-to-day Christian goodness, for children to emulate in small ways in their own lives.[412] In such stories Galahad is introduced to young readers as a generic 'pattern of all true knights in all times,' and as a lesson in how to resist small temptations and be self-sacrificing.[413] Small prints of Watts's picture were given as prizes at boys' public schools, possibly under the influence of this didactic trend.[414] It is to be hoped that the recipients of these prints appreciated the painting as much as the student contributor to the *Eton College Chronicle*, who favourably compared Watts's *Sir Galahad* with Hellenistic sculpture, Donatello's *St George*, and Dürer's *The Knight, Death, and the Devil*.[415]

The Solitary Quest

That very same print by Dürer was a source of inspiration for Edward Burne-Jones's early Arthurian work, in particular his *Sir Galahad* of 1858 (Fig. 40).[416] Burne-Jones's debt to Dürer is evident in the similar positioning of his knight, and in his emulation of the minute linework and close cross-hatching of the engraving in his own pen-work. Yet while Dürer's knight is haunted by grotesque creatures in a desolate landscape, Burne-Jones's Galahad is alone – the theme of this modern fantasy is not the dangers that may beset the knight but his own exceptional character. Burne-Jones's early vision of Galahad (he would return to the

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[411] In his review of the picture, William Michael Rossetti complained of a want of solid, real personality in Watts's Galahad, as '[i]deal tendency in ideal subject is always in danger of losing itself, "as water does in water."' See William Michael Rossetti, 'The Royal Academy Exhibition,' *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* 66, no. 391, July 1862, 72.

[412] See 'The Legend of Sir Galahad,' *The Monthly Packet of Evening Readings for Younger Members of the English Church*, July 1, 1852, 49-53; 'Cecil's Trial,' *The Quiver: An Illustrated Magazine for Sunday and General Reading* 12, February 17, 1872, 317-319.

[413] 'The Legend of Sir Galahad,' 49.

[414] Norris J. Lacy, Geoffrey Ashe and Debra N. Mancoff, *The Arthurian Handbook,* 2nd ed. (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 1997), 224.

[415] 'Mr. Watts's Picture,' *Eton College Chronicle*, 369.

[416] Susan Owens, '"A Dose of Paradise": Some Effects of Renaissance Drawings on Victorian Artists,' in *Burning Bright: Essays in Honour of David Bindman*, ed. Diana Dethloff, Tessa Murdoc, Kim Sloan, and Caroline Elam (London: UCL Press, 2015),183.

subject repeatedly throughout his life), gives a ghostly aspect to the world around him, emphasising his isolation and the strange, magical nature of his quest. The drawing was produced in a period during which the artist lived at Little Holland House, convalescing from one of his frequent bouts of illness. Despite his proximity to both Watts and Tennyson, Burne-Jones's work has more in common with Rossetti's watercolours of the period, as both artists employed antiquated elements in their work. Rossetti emulated the colours of mediaeval illustrations, while Burne-Jones worked in black ink on vellum, rather than paper.

The composition of *Sir Galahad* is divided by a wall running across the middle ground. In the background is a garden, crowded with figures at their leisure: card players, musicians, and lovers in pairs. Galahad occupies the foreground, on the near side of the wall which encloses the garden. The little lantern in his hand, with its star-shaped cut-outs, calls to mind both the long, dark journey ahead of him and the object of his pursuit, the elusive, luminous Grail, that 'star-like mingles with the stars.'[417] The beams that emanate from the lantern are curiously distinct and self-contained. The light, like the lantern, is a solid thing, something Galahad carries with him, illuminating only his face in an otherwise shadowy world. It is an apt visual metaphor for his private awareness of the Grail itself, which guides him on his journey. Here, even if he were to turn aside, a wall stands between him and the idle figures, just as the strictures of his special destiny preclude any deviation from his course. Though nothing in the picture is overtly fantastical, the scene nonetheless conveys a feeling of entrancement and unreality in the downcast eyes and languid postures of the lovers, which suggest melancholy rather than pleasure, in Galahad's star-lamp, and his faraway gaze.

Burne-Jones's enthusiasm for Tennyson's 'Sir Galahad' once inspired him to found an order in the knight's name, and his passion for Malory's *Morte* remained as intense at the end of his life, when he still hoped to someday design an illustrated edition of the text, but it is the poetry of his lifelong friend William Morris that best complements his melancholy early Arthurian work.[418] The juxtaposition of Galahad's solitude with the crowded garden of strangely weary men and women recall passages from Morris's 'Sir Galahad, a Christmas Mystery,' published in the same year this drawing was completed. In 'A Christmas Mystery,' a dispirited Galahad broods in an abandoned chapel on a snowy night, comparing his lonely pursuit of the Grail with other knights' more rewarding dedication to their ladyloves. In sleep, a vision of Christ appears to him, reminding him that the love affairs that Lancelot and

[417] Tennyson, *Poems and Plays*, 103.
[418] Burne-Jones, *Memorials*, 77; Mancoff, 'Problems with the Pattern,' 64.

Tristram enjoy will end in strife and repentance, and reassuring him of his eventual success. That somewhat cold comfort is paralleled here in the presence of the lantern in Galahad's hands, lighting his way, but leaving the rest of the world in the dark. This version of Galahad is still an appealing fantasy, not despite the sad sense of longing it invokes, but because of it. Pater, in his review of Morris's poetry, identified the appeal of his work with the longing that it provoked, '[t]he secret of the enjoyment of it is that inversion of home-sickness known to some, that incurable thirst for the sense of escape, which no actual form of life satisfies, no poetry even, if it be merely simple and spontaneous.'[419]

Other works by Burne-Jones from the period share the antiquated medium and dark mood of *Sir Galahad*, notably *The Knight's Farewell*, which also dates from 1858 (Fig. 46). *The Knight's Farewell* depicts a garden in which a knight kneels before a woman, while a young man in courtly attire reads from a book, entitled 'Roman du Quete du Sangrail.' In the context of the picture the Grail quest is already the stuff of legend, emphasising the special status of the legend within Victorian medievalism. Even in an imaginary scene of courtly love, the Grail quest could be treated as something higher, set apart.

Recognizing Galahad

Burne-Jones's later depictions of Galahad, such as his designs for the Morris & Co. tapestry series (1891-1894), resemble the hopeful, golden-haired figure of Watts's painting. In an iconographic sense, Watts's *Sir Galahad* set a standard for representations of Galahad. While the tone of Grail quest artworks remained varied throughout the century, Watts's depiction of him as a young man, fully armed but helmetless, with red-gold hair, pale, androgynous face, and a serene expression, accompanied by a white horse, recurs over and over in Victorian art – in Arthur Hughes's *Sir Galahad, the Quest for the Holy Grail* of 1870, in all Joseph Noel Paton's depictions of Galahad, in Edwin Austin Abbey's Grail series (1890-1900), and persisting into the twentieth century, in Walter Crane's illustrations for Henry Gilbert's book *King Arthur's Knights* (1911), and Maud Tindale Atkinson's watercolour *Sir Galahad* (1906-1937, Fig. 47).[420] It is likely that the artists responsible for these works were familiar with Watts's *Sir Galahad*, given its prominence in art newspapers at the time of its first exhibition,

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[419] Pater, 'Art II: Poems by William Morris,' 300-301.
[420] See Walter Crane, 'Sir Galahad is Brought to the Court of King Arthur,' in Henry Gilbert, *King Arthur's Knights: The Tales Retold for Boys and Girls* (Edinburgh and London: T. C. and E. C. Jack, 1911), 260.

and the ready availability of reproductions.[421] Straightforward emulation of an impressive and well-known precedent is one possible reason for their commonalities, but the consistencies across representations of Galahad also reflect his allegorical significance within Victorian fantasy.

The bright red or golden hair signals Galahad's holiness by doing double duty as a halo, mirroring the luminous auras surrounding the Grail, the Grail maiden, or the angels that were so often shown escorting Galahad in his journey. That Galahad is almost invariably shown helmetless may partly be an expedient means of making his face and hair visible for aesthetic reasons, but he may also go helmetless out of respect for the sacredness of his quest, just as men remove their hats when entering a church.[422] Galahad's body is otherwise enclosed in armour, signifying his lack of ordinary corporal or spiritual weaknesses.

Though beauty and goodness do not always go hand in hand in the *Idylls*, as in the case of the beautiful but vicious Vivien, Galahad's youth, beauty, and knightly bearing are the three characteristics which Tennyson highlights at his introduction in 'The Holy Grail:'

> And one there was among us, ever moved
> Among us in white armour, Galahad.
> 'God make thee good as thou art beautiful,'
> Said Arthur, when he dubbed him knight; and none,
> In so young youth, was ever made a knight
> Till Galahad.[423]

By mid-century the pseudoscience known as physiognomy enjoyed widespread currency. For instance, a simplistic version of Johann Lavater's analyses, equating physical beauty with goodness of soul, still appeared in the late nineteenth-century in women's beauty guides.[424] In art, the correspondence between appearances and personality continued to carry weight, a

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[421] Alan Lupack, 'Popular Images,' 93.

[422] That men should go hatless in church was still the rule in Britain, as may be seen in paintings such as John Phillip's *Collecting the Offering in a Scottish Kirk* (1855), or Claude Andrew Calthrop's *In Church* (1869). The custom has a varied history across different cultures but may be traced in this instance to the New Testament. 'Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head.' 1 Corinthians 11:4, KJV.

[423] Tennyson, *Poems and Plays*, 391.

[424] Sarah Lennox, 'The Beautified Body: Physiognomy in Victorian Beauty Manuals,' *Victorian Review* 42, no. 1 (2016): 10-11.

rule dramatised in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, whose young, golden-haired hero only evades the disfiguring effects of his nameless crimes by the magic transference of his guilt onto his portrait.[425] Conversely, Galahad's purity shone out on dozens of Victorian canvases, where he is depicted as eternally young and beautiful, a living avatar of the principle that, as Symonds put it, '[f]rom the most abstract point of view, goodness, beauty, truth are in reality inseparable.'[426]

Was the consistency of Galahad's iconography so remarkable? How many ways to paint a mediaeval knight were, after all, available to Victorian artists? Comparing the standard version of Galahad to Herbert Gustave Schmalz's *Sir Galahad,* exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1881, which flouts almost all of the standard tropes of his character, showcases just how many other possibilities artists set aside in order to produce their homogenous hero (Fig. 48). Schmalz's Galahad enjoys the distinction of being the only Victorian Galahad to wield a battle-ax. He is bare-armed and bare-legged, clad in buskins, scale mail, a drab cloak and a winged helm. He wears his golden hair, not in the usual jaw-length waves, but in two long braids. Galahad's costume bears a striking resemblance to that worn by the god Wotan in the debut production of Wagner's *The Ring*, in 1876, suggesting that the painter's intention was to recall the pre-Christian origins of the Grail myth.[427]

The mixed critical reaction to Schmalz's atypical painting demonstrates the risks of innovating on the established conventions for portraying a fantasy figure. Alice Meynell, writing for *Tinsley's Magazine*, and Spielmann of the *Magazine of Art* admired Galahad's upright posture and striking costume, but Stephens of the *Athenaeum*, a partisan of the Pre-Raphaelite school that had set the standard for representations of Galahad, saw only 'a modern young gentleman, feverish, overwrought, deficient in fibre and muscle, and only a little more masculine than the lady who kneels at his feet.'[428] His criticisms recall those applied to Charles Napier Kennedy's *Perseus and Andromeda* in 1890, whose hero was likewise deemed insufficiently heroic, indeed 'a very tame figure. His legs are girlish, and he

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[425] Kate Flint, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 15.
[426] Symonds, *Essays*, vol. 1, 150.
[427] This connection was suggested to me by Dr. James Williams of the University of York. See Goldhill, *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity*, 137.
[428] Alice Meynell, 'Young Art at the Royal Academy,' *Tinsley's Magazine* 29, July 1881, 40; Marion Harry Spielmann, 'Pictures of the Year III,' *The Magazine of Art* 4, 1881: 366; F. G. Stephens, 'New Prints,' *The Athenaeum* 2884, February 3, 1883, 160.

holds Medusa's head as if he was afraid of it, although there is no reason whatever why he should be.'[429]

The problem of realising Galahad as a convincingly heroic figure was complicated by the multiple roles Galahad occupied within the Victorian imagination, and the sometimes conflicting expectations associated with those roles. Only a few years before, the central figure in Briton Rivière's *In Manus Tuas, Domine*, a knight before a smoking cave mouth, suffered similar criticism for failing to live up to the type of ideal knighthood:

> The Knight (a Sir Galahad), his head unhelmed, his armour bright and pure of stain, raises the cross-hilt of his sword … The obvious defect of the picture, which seems to strike one at once, is that the knight looks too trim and dainty for the encounter with the nameless powers which he has before him. We look naturally for … something less of the holiday and carpet knight, and more of the servant of God and his lady, sealed and marked for great and mystic achievements.[430]

According to this judgement, Rivière failed to assimilate Galahad's key traits: beauty, youth, and piety, with those of the generic mediaeval knight: strength, valour, and dedication both to 'his lady' and to 'mystic achievements.'

Contrasting the standard representation of Galahad to that of King Arthur shows how far Galahad deviated from the standard image of the mature (mediaeval) man. Arthur was portrayed as fully grown, even in contexts such as his retrieval of Excalibur from the Lady of the Lake when he ought (in keeping with the chronology of the story) to have been depicted in his youth.[431] In Daniel Maclise's illustration of 'Morte d'Arthur' for the Moxon edition of Tennyson's poems, the 'young' Arthur is bearded, bulkily muscular, and dressed in armour and helmet. In comparison, Rossetti's Galahad drawn for the same volume is evidently in early manhood, a status Rossetti was careful to preserve in the engraving, writing a note to

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[429] Alfred D. Fripp, 'The Grosvenor Exhibition,' *The Athenaeum* 3263, May 10, 1890, 612.
[430] 'Exhibition of the Royal Academy,' *The Times* 29558, May 3, 1879, 5.
[431] Debra N. Mancoff, 'To Take Excalibur: King Arthur and the Construction of Victorian Manhood,' in *King Arthur: A Casebook,* ed. Edward Donald Kennedy (New York, London: Routledge, 1996), 264-5.

his engraver to ensure that Galahad's facial hair remained appropriately wispy, no more than a 'slight mustache, which should be very faint as I have now made it.'[432]

Arthur, especially the Arthur of Tennyson's *Idylls*, was a model of the ideal man and the ideal husband.[433] His appearance in art contrasts powerfully with how 'the boy knight Galahad is portrayed – delicate, fine-boned, and feminized.'[434] Debra Mancoff reads these traits as a sign of 'arrested development,' signalling the sterility of his existence: 'He will never know a woman, he will never head a household, he will never be a leader of men. In short, to the Victorian mind, he was condemned to perpetual boyhood.'[435] Alternatively, one could read Galahad's 'arrested development' as a positive trait, part of his appeal to escapists.

Youthfulness was associated with the spirit of chivalry itself. In his book *The Broad Stone of Honour* (1822), Kenelm Henry Digby identified chivalrousness not with adherence to a strict code but with an attitude of the mind and heart, one that came naturally to the young romantic soul.[436] Never to mature could be both a blessing and a curse, a theme that J. M. Barrie would explore at the end of the century in *The Little White Bird* (1902) and his play *Peter Pan, or The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up* (1904). Galahad, like Peter Pan, travels to a Never-Neverland of his own, first Sarras and then the Heavenly City itself. Like Peter Pan, Galahad could invite other knights to share in his eternal youth – in Payne's 'The Romaunt of Sir Floris,' Galahad invites the young Sir Floris to join him among the ranks of the deathless guardians of Sarras, alongside the Percival, Bors, Titurel, and Lohengrin. Galahad is, famously, 'a maiden knight,' who never experiences a romantic or sexual relationship – but also evades the banal responsibilities of heading a household.[437]

Nineteenth-century audiences were conscious of the ways in which Galahad's nature – young, pure, and pious – could conflict with popular models of masculinity, such as Kingsley's muscular Christianity, with its celebration of married life which clashes with Galahad's virginity, a hard-won physical vigour that comes naturally to Galahad, whose

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[432] Rossetti's notes on Linton's proof engraving, reproduced in Alicia Faxon, 'The Medium Is NOT the Message: Problems in the Reproduction of Rossetti's Art,' *Victorian Periodicals Review* 24, no. 2 (1991): 70.
[433] Mancoff, *The Return of King Arthur,* 269.
[434] Mancoff, *The Return of King Arthur,* 265.
[435] Mancoff, *The Return of King Arthur,* 265.
[436] Girouard, *The Return to Camelot*, 62.
[437] Tennyson, *Poems and Plays,* 103. For a fascinating discussion of Galahad's sexuality in the *Morte,* see Megan Arkenberg, '"A Mayde, and Last of Youre Blood:" Galahad's Asexuality and Its Significance in "Le Morte Darthur,"' *Arthuriana* 24, no. 3 (2014): 3-22.

strength comes from his purity of heart, and on well-earned sensuous pleasures that had no part in Galahad's restless questing.[438] In Edgar Fawcett's satire *The New King Arthur: An Opera without Music* (published in 1885), the comically conceited Galahad is self-defensive about the potentially emasculating implications of his beauty and his virginity, protesting:

> the charms that I disseminate
> Are of manly sort, though mild,
> And I'm not at all effeminate,
> Though a lily undefiled.[439]

Briton Rivière's Galahad in his *In Manus Tuas, Domine*, may have disappointed his critic not because of any real evidence of frailty or incapacity in the figure, who shows no sign of fear before the unknown monster, but because the perceived delicacy of the figure seemed to invite speculations of the kind Fawcett's Galahad protested against. Indeed, though courageous unflappability might be expected to be the default state for Victorian knights in armour, depictions of knights wounded, dying, failing, or lost, were produced across the century – but never Galahad, who perhaps could not afford to show any such weakness.[440] Galahad is dauntless; 'all armed I ride, what e'er betide,' aptly describes his journey across Victorian canvases, from the lonely road in Burne-Jones's *Sir Galahad* (1858) to the stormy hilltop of Arthur Hughes's *Sir Galahad: The Quest for the Holy Grail* (1870).

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[438] Girouard, *The Return to Camelot*, 143; James Eli Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995), 107-108; Norman Vance, *The Sinews of the Spirit: The Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 37-38.

[439] Edgar Fawcett, *The New King Arthur: An Opera without Music* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1885), Act I, sc. v.

[440] Examples include William Bell Scott's *King Arthur Carried to the Land of Enchantment*, exhibited at the RA in 1847, Charles West Cope's *The Death of Lara* (from Byron), a fresco in the Houses of Parliament, completed in 1854, Arthur Hughes's *The Knight of the Sun* (1860), James Archer's *The Sancgraell, King Arthur Healed of his Grievous Wound* (1863), which is also notable for an unique depiction of Arthur's vision of a transparent angel bearing a luminous Grail, Robert Bateman's *The Dead Knight*, 1870, and Beatrice Offor's intriguing *The Knight*, painted between 1890 and 1910, depicting an aged and possibly blind man in armour. Only one form of failure, so to speak, seems to have been forbidden to knights in Victorian art: suicide. Paintings of the Cave of Despair scene from *The Faerie Queene*, in which the Red Cross Knight's nearly commits suicide before being rescued by Una, were common before the 1830s and apparently non-existent thereafter.

There were few other character types who shared aspects of Galahad's virtue and mild character, 'demure as a dove.'[441] Symonds saw the 'Ideal' version of the human race fleetingly expressed in 'beauty and modesty, the chastity of saints and the severe strength of athletes, the manhood of Regulus and the temperance of Hippolytus.'[442] Walter Pater's 'Hippolytus Veiled' likewise celebrates the ideal of chaste masculinity in the figure of the handsome and athletic Hippolytus, whose reverence for Artemis preserves him against all seductions, 'as if he never could be anything but like water from the rock, or the wild flowers of the morning, or the beams of the morning star turned to human flesh.'[443] By and large, however, Galahad was an anomaly in Victorian culture – an isolated and immediately recognizable figure in art, uniquely able to embody a fantasy of combined youthfulness and heroism.

Galahad's Gaze

All the Victorian Galahads shared one other trait, apart from their looks, their armour, their white horses, and their evident determination: a far-seeing gaze. Galahad's glance is, like his strength 'as the strength of ten,' a supernatural characteristic, with which he pierces the veil between the physical and the spiritual planes.[444] Commentators on paintings of Galahad habitually speculated about what it is that he sees, that ordinary onlookers cannot. Alice Meynell imagined Schmalz's *Sir Galahad* 'confronting some vision of the Holy Grail.'[445] The out-of-canvas gaze of Watts's *Sir Galahad* in particular provoked comment from his admirers, including Harry Quilter, who recalled the knight 'gazing before him at the vision none else might see,' and A. G. Temple, who saw a Galahad 'about to achieve the quest, reserved for him alone, of the "Holy Grail," and his eyes are rapt on the vision that rises before him in the gloom and solitude of the forest.'[446] During the printing process of his *Sir Galahad at the Ruined Chapel* for Tennyson's *Poems*, Rossetti's sent a note to his engraver with a detailed correction of Galahad's eyes, showing the importance of this element to the artist. Watts's only Arthurian subject work apart from *Sir Galahad*, a companion piece, *Sir*

[441] Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, vol. 2, 164.
[442] Symonds, *Essays,* Vol. 1, 170.
[443] Pater, *Greek Studies*, 181.
[444] Tennyson, *Poems and Plays,* 102.
[445] Alice Meynell, 'Young Art at the Royal Academy,' *Tinsley's Magazine* 29, July 1881, 40.
[446] Harry Quilter, *Preferences in Art, Life, and Literature* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1892), 220; Alfred George Temple, *The Art of Painting in the Queen's Reign* (London: 1897), 171.

Perceval, differs from its counterpart largely in its use of the gaze (Fig. 49). His Perceval's eyes are downcast, almost closed, while Galahad's glance is directed straight ahead of him and out the frame, at what yet another critic imagined as 'some wide waste spread below, peopled with adventures, and glorified with hopes of success in his quest for the Holy Graal.'[447]

In art, Galahad's glance is often deliberately directed at something out of sight, above or beyond the edge of the canvas, or downwards, in private contemplation. One rare fine artwork showing Galahad looking at something we too can see, Julia Margaret Cameron's photograph *Sir Galahad and the Pale Nun* (Fig. 50), depicts the moment in which these two characters share a visionary experience: 'She sent the deathless passion in her eyes / Through him, and made him hers, and laid her mind / On him, and he believed in her belief.'[448] Galahad later re-enacts this scene with Percival, who remembers how 'his eye, dwelling on mine, / Drew me, with power upon me, till I grew / One with him, to believe as he believed.'[449] In Tennyson's *Idylls*, Galahad's visionary capacities take on a transferable fantastic power: alone among the knights he sees the Grail clearly in the hall at Camelot, alone he sees the Holy Spirit enter into the bread and wine at the hermitage, and only at his invitation, under his enchantment, as it were, can Percival share his vision of the Grail.

In Morris's poems, Galahad's gaze likewise exerts a strange, even magical, power. In Morris's 'The Chapel in Lyoness,' Galahad is presented as having a vision of the dead knight Ozana reunited with his love:

> *Sir Bors.* Galahad sits dreamily:
> What strange things may his eyes see,
> Great blue eyes fixed full on me?
> On his soul, Lord, have mercy.
>
> *Sir Galahad.* Ozana, shall I pray for thee?
> Her cheek is laid to thine;
> Her hair against the jasper sea

447 Tom Taylor, 'Royal Academy Exhibition,' *London Times*, May 3, 1862, 14.
448 Tennyson, *Poems and Plays,* 391.
449 Tennyson, *Poems and Plays,* 396.

Wondrously doth shine.[450]

In Morris's 'Sir Galahad: A Christmas Mystery,' among the assurances offered to him by the vision of Christ is that, alone among knights, his vision remains unclouded: 'look up, I say, / And see how I can love you, for no pride / Closes your eyes, no vain lust keeps them down.'[451] In Westwood's 'The Quest of the Sancgreall,' Galahad's gaze is prophetic:

In the siege perilous sat Sir Galahad;
A dreamy splendour hovered in his eyes,
As though far down the vista of the years,
Beyond the cloud of conflict, shock of fate,
He saw the issue and the end of all.[452]

In Tennyson's *Idylls*, no one sees the Grail directly but Galahad – even the narration of the quest is told at second hand, through Percival's memory, not presented in real-time, as is largely the case in the other *Idylls.* The marvel of Galahad's visions is that – though he alone can see it – when he witnesses the Grail, it is *truly present* before him. The miracle is the same as that experienced by the artist Chiaro, in Rossetti's *Hand and Soul*: 'You knew that figure, when painted, had been seen; yet it was not a thing to be seen of men.'[453]

These fantastical poems, and their painted counterparts, invoke an anxiety about the waning human capacity to access, visually, objects of imaginative or spiritual fascination. The impulse to mourn for that lost experience predates Victorians – it appears in Wordsworth's complaint,

Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;

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[450] William Morris, 'The Chapel in Lyoness,' *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, September 1856, 579.
[451] William Morris, *The Defence of Guenevere*, reprint (London: Ellis & White, 1875), 52.
[452] Westwood, *The Quest of the Sancgreall*, 6.
[453] Rossetti, *Hand and Soul*, 48.

> Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.[454]

Ruskin invokes these same lines in *The Art of England*, to illustrate how his contemporaries must choose 'between the education or the extinction of the Fancy,' by training their imaginations to invite such visions, or abandon fantasy altogether. In his study of faith and superstition in the Classical, Medieval, and Modern periods, W. S. Lilly mourned for the visionary experiences which were once part of everyday life, when 'things visible faded into nothingness before the keen vision of things unseen.'[455] The price of modern advancement was losing that direct experience of the divine:

> Man may say in the nineteenth century: –
> 'It is not now as it hath been of yore; –
> Turn wheresoe'er I may,
> By night or day.
> The things which I have seen I now can see no more.'[456]

The only way to access a mental state akin to that of the lost 'Ages of Faith' was through fantasy works. In the imagination, the barriers raised by 'physical science' could be temporarily evaded, and every fantasist imagine themselves as Galahad, surrounded by newly visible wonders.[457]

Fantasy and the Divine

The Grail myth's narrative framework provided an imaginative pretext for entering into a state of suspended belief in a supernatural vision. Though its story is religious, it was received as a fantasy, not a sermon. The affronted response to Burne-Jones's *The Merciful Knight*, exhibited at the Water-colour Society's show in 1864 shows the risks of a too straightforward visual depiction of religious revelation, without the trappings of Arthurian

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[454] William Wordsworth, 'The world is too much with us,' in *Romantic Poets: Blake to Poe*, ed. W. H. Auden and Norman Holmes Pearson (New York: Penguin Books, 1950), 168.
[455] Lilly, 'Supernaturalism,' 60.
[456] Lilly, 'Supernaturalism,' 61. The quotation is from Wordsworth's 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality.'
[457] Lilly, 'Supernaturalism,' 61.

magic to veil it (Fig. 51). The *Art Journal* complained of the indecorousness of an image in which 'the artist has committed the grave blunder of forgetting the inherent distinction… between the metaphor permitted to written words and the more literal reading required in positive forms, which stand for visible facts, and cannot be received as mere impalpable conceptions.'[458] The literal rendering of a moment of communion between a mediaeval knight and his God offended the critic, finally triggering the accusation of 'playing with sacred things,' that Tennyson once feared, as 'such ultra manifestations of mediaevalism, however well meant, must tend inevitably, though of course unconsciously, to bring ridicule upon truths which we all desire to hold in veneration.'[459] If faith rests in 'the evidence of things unseen,' then, the thing being seen, might not the faith evaporate?[460] Ruskin articulated this problem memorably in 1883:

> You perpetually hear people say, 'I won't believe this or that unless you give me evidence of it.' Why, if you give them evidence of it, they know it, – they don't believe, any more. A man doesn't believe there's any danger in nitro-glycerine; at last he gets his parlour-door blown into the next street. He is then better informed on the subject, but the time for belief is past.[461]

The Grail, which meant nothing in particular, but was redolent with poetical associations, could be admitted into art and enjoyed as a fantasy: the crucified Christ was not so adaptable. *The Merciful Knight* introduces the supernatural into its story without transfiguring it into an allegorical personification or a fantastical object, trying and failing to compel conviction, rather than merely tempting the suspension of disbelief. 'The problem was that Burne-Jones took literally what was acceptable to Protestant Britain in a vaguely symbolic form.'[462] As an experiment in visualising the divine through a mediaeval narrative, *The Merciful Knight* still has something in common with Grail quest paintings – according to F. G. Stephens, who was

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[458] 'The Society of Painters in Water Colours,' *Art Journal*, June 1864, 170.
[459] Incidentally, *The Merciful Knight* was warmly praised by William Michael Rossetti, who cited it as proof of Burne-Jones's worthiness to succeed the late William Hunt as the chief artist of the society, to 'step,' in Rossetti's phrase, 'into this vacant "siege perilous,"' a reference reflective of the ubiquity of Galahad in the Victorian imagination. See: William Michael Rossetti, 'Art-Exhibitions in London,' *The Fine Arts Quarterly Review* 3, October 1864, 36.
[460] Hebrews 11:1 KJV.
[461] Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 33, *The Art of England,* 330.
[462] Phillips, '"Charades from the Middle Ages?"' 243.

among the few who admired the painting, the 'sentiment' of the picture was one of 'ineffable passion and yearning.'[463] Yearning after what, Stephens does not, perhaps could not, say.

The same desire for the unachievable which draws the Grail knight to the Grail, also draws fantasists to the fantastic. While in the classical period, Symonds wrote, such feelings of fruitless longing were seen as evidence of spiritual disfunction, '*l'amour de l'impossible* – the straining of the soul after the infinite, the desire to approximate in this world to a dream of the ecstatic fancy – all the rapture of saints, the self-denial of solitaries, the death in life of penitents – is not defined by us as a disease.'[464] Symonds himself observed that fantasy can provide an outlet for many forms of frustrated passion, by giving visible form to 'perturbations of [the artist's] spirit.'[465] Perhaps the most popular subject in all of Arthurian art, Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott*, revolves around the allure of a forbidden sight, as its heroine dies for looking directly at what she ought only to have seen as a reflection. Even in Fairyland, the yearning to see a denied vision is felt, painfully, by the hero of MacDonald's *Phantastes:* 'my heart fainted with longing in my bosom. Could I but see the Spirit of the Earth, as I saw once the indwelling woman of the beech-tree, and my beauty of the pale marble, I should be content. Content! – Oh, how gladly would I die of the light of her eyes!'[466]

Galahad Arrives at the Boston Library

The last great treatment of the legend in nineteenth-century art, Edwin Austin Abbey's sequence of Grail quest paintings, incorporates the theme of fantastic visions, both those that are granted and those that are withheld, into its execution as well as its subject matter. In 1894, Abbey was commissioned to paint a series of pictures for the Collecting Room of the new, and extremely lavishly decorated, Boston Public Library building in Copley Square. He

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[463] Stephens, 'Edward Burne Jones, A.R.A.,' 224.
[464] The phrase *'l'amour de l'impossible'* also held deeply personal connotations for Symonds. In his posthumously published *Memoirs*, Symonds associated the phrase with his own struggle to understand his own desires, and to form meaningful relationships, as a gay man, because of 'the impossible cul-de-sac into which nature has driven our sexual instincts, and the rebellion of the aspiring spirit, finding itself in a "waste of shame" or in the desert of unfulfilled longings.' Symonds, *Studies of the Greek Poets*, 406; Symonds, *The Memoirs of John Addington Symonds*, ed. Phyllis Grosskurth (New York: Random House, 1984), 266.
[465] Symonds, *Essays*, vol. 1, 243.
[466] MacDonald, *Phantastes*, 57.

was given free rein to choose his subject, settling on the legend of the Holy Grail, which he believed could stand for the literary heritage of all of Europe.[467] The series retells the entire story of the Grail quest across fifteen canvases, from the baby Galahad's first vision of the Holy Grail to his summons to heaven (Fig. 52). All fifteen pictures were painted and exhibited in London before being transported to America; the first five in 1895 and the second set of ten in 1900.[468] (These exhibitions were largely due to the efforts of Laurence Alma-Tadema, who was enormously enthusiastic about Abbey's work.)[469] The impetus for the sequence came from America, but its concept and execution were shaped by British precedents in art and poetry.

Like the first artists to revive the theme, William Dyce and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Abbey looked to textual sources predating Tennyson's *Sir Galahad*, combining Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* with elements lifted from Chretien de Troyes's *Perceval* and Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, from whom Wagner also drew.[470] According to Spielmann, the artist's friend, Abbey amalgamated multiple romances in order to construct 'a *cyclus* of his own, … the great literary expression of the trials and the progress of the Human Soul.'[471]

In that solemn enterprise, Abbey composed a version of the Grail quest that is permeated with magic and evident miracles. In one canvas, Spielmann notes the 'magically suspended … legend that proclaims the young knight's worthiness' that appears over the Siege Perilous, and in another admires his portrayal of 'the fearful spell' on King Amfortas, which Galahad breaks, and with it 'all the enchantments that had oppressed the land of Britain.'[472] Angels abound in the series, from the first panel, showing the baby Galahad's first

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[467] E. V. Lucas, *Edwin Austin Abbey, Royal Academician: The Record of His Life and Work*, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scriber's Sons; London: Methuen & Co. Limited, 1921): 232.

[468] Though Abbey was born and raised in America, he qualifies by every condition save that of birth as an English artist. Having lived in England for many years, he was admitted to the Royal Academy as an Associate and subsequently, with unusual rapidity, to the post of full Academician. Other honours included his election as the first and only president of the Artists' Cricket Club, having been voted that post *in perpetuum* after his death. In 1900, he submitted his contributions to the International Exposition in Paris as a member of the British group. The French committee's insistence on hanging his works in the American section prompted outraged protests from the British coalition's organisers. See E. Lucas, *Edwin Austin Abbey,* vol. 2, 317, 322-324, 334, 349-350; Walter Muir Whitehill, 'The Making of an Architectural Masterpiece: The Boston Public Library,' *American Art Journal* 2, no. 2 (1970): 19.

[469] Lucas, *Edwin Austin Abbey*, vol. 2, 278.

[470] Marion Harry Spielmann, 'Edwin Austin Abbey, R.A. (Concluded),' *The Magazine of Art*, January 1899, 251.

[471] Spielmann, 'Edwin Austin Abbey, R.A. (Concluded),' 248, 251.

[472] Spielmann, 'Edwin Austin Abbey, R.A. (Concluded),' 252.

vision of the Grail, to the last, where Galahad kneels, encircled by angels who wait to carry him to heaven. Abbey's wife Gertrude and their friend, the novelist Henry James, composed an explanatory pamphlet to accompany Abbey's work, which associates the legend with fables and 'folk-tales.'[473] Their references throughout the text to magic and spells indicate that the story was more akin to a fairy tale than a religious parable in their eyes.[474] At the last, Galahad departs for Sarras, where the Grail is at last revealed to him, as the quintessence of the vague, ineffable Victorian ideal, 'that which tongue may not describe, nor heart think ... that which is the source of all life and knowledge and power.' Although the story that the series tells spans many years, Abbey's Galahad never visibly ages beyond young adulthood, remaining, as Gertrude and James write, 'the "bright boy-knight" of Tennyson.'[475]

Although Abbey was enchanted by Burne-Jones's Italianate art, through which '[he] got people to believe in his No-man's land, with its Leonardo basaltic rocks and its Botticelli seas,' he felt compelled to honour his own artistic vision, and to set his own version of the quest some centuries further back in time from the Renaissance, explaining '[t]he "Grail" I beheld was four hundred years earlier.'[476] Abbey undertook zealous research into early mediaeval architecture and costume, to ensure accuracy in every detail.[477] Although, once the paintings were installed in the library, his carefully-studied castle halls and churches were half-lost in shadow, Abbey protested vehemently against rumoured plans to install footlights around the walls of the room: 'If some of the work is more or less in the dark, that doesn't hurt it. It is intended to be in the dark. Let us have a little mystery about.'[478]

Abbey may have been influenced in his choice of subject, and inspired his liking of shadows, by Symonds's *The Renaissance in Italy,* which he read in 1889. In the book, Symonds extolls the powerful imagination of Malory, the 'Northern mytho-poet,' and 'the gloom or glory, as of star-irradiate vapour,' in which he immerses his characters.[479] In the

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[473] Gertrude Abbey and Henry James, *Exhibition at the Guildhall Art Gallery of the Series of Paintings Presenting 'The Quest of the Holy Grail'* (London: The Corporation of London, 1901), 6.
[474] Abbey and James, *Exhibition at the Guildhall Art Gallery,* 7.
[475] Abbey and James, *Exhibition at the Guildhall Art Gallery*, 7.
[476] Abbey, quoted in Lucas, *Edwin Austin Abbey,* vol. 1, 263-4.
[477] Lucas, *Edwin Austin Abbey,* vol. 1, 262-3, vol. 2, 271, 361.
[478] Spielmann, 'Edwin Austin Abbey, R.A. (Concluded),' 251; Abbey, quoted in Margaret O'Shaughnessey, 'Edwin Austin Abbey's Reinterpretation of the Grail Quest: The Boston Public Library Murals,' *Arthuriana* 4, no. 4 (1994): 310.
[479] John Addington Symonds, *The Renaissance in Italy: Italian Literature, Part One*, 2nd ed. (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1898), 300; O'Shaughnessey, 'Edwin Austin Abbey's Reinterpretation of the Grail Quest,' 300.

low light that Abbey intended for the pictures to be seen in, Galahad and the Grail, the one always dressed in scarlet, the other haloed in polychrome and gold, would have stood out, panel by panel, from their dimmer surroundings, appearing and reappearing out of the shadows as his adventures progressed along the four walls.[480] Mystery, the allure of a story that could never be fully understood, because it touched on things beyond the limits of real human life, is the last thread connecting all Victorian treatments of the Grail quest. Dyce, too, wanted to evoke a sense of mystery, and not only of wholesome allegory, in his frescoes.[481] Years later, the highest praise that one critic found for J. Comyns Carr's play *King Arthur*, which opens with the knights departing on the Grail quest, was that it evoked 'the shadowy mystic beauty which appeals directly to the imagination and constitutes the very atmosphere of the legends.'[482]

Much more sinister fantasies throve in the pages of Victorian literature, in stories of vampires, ghosts, and ill-intentioned enchanters, but in their art, positive heroism, tinted by a shadow of mysticism, held sway. Victorian fantasy showed its moral idealism in Grail quest art. Powerful as their yearning for heightened experiences and a fantastical ideal was, other, less strenuous, more tangible fantasies also beckoned to imaginative Victorians. Arthur Hacker's *The Temptation of Sir Percival* (1894), depicts all the temptations of a sensual life out in the wild woods. A beautiful woman, crowned with flowers, seeks to divert Percival from his search for the Grail. As a knight on a holy quest, he is bound to resist her, but we, the audience, are free to imagine succumbing to her appeal. Similar idyllic fantasies, freed from the censorious context of the Arthurian legends, inspired innumerable paintings of life in an Arcadian wonderland, a world apart from the medievalist romance's urgent idealism.

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[480] O'Shaughnessey, 'Edwin Austin Abbey's Reinterpretation of the Grail Quest,' 310; Whitehill, 'Making of an Architectural Masterpiece,' 29.
[481] 'Frescoes in the Queen's Robing-Room,' 412.
[482] 'Drama,' *The Athenaeum* 3508, January 19, 1895, 93.

Chapter Five: Nature Myths and the New Arcadia

The cultures of Greece and Rome permeated every level of nineteenth-century life. Poetry, drama, painting, sculpture, architecture, education, sports, politics – all were marked by the Victorian obsession with the classical past. Unsurprisingly, the largest body of Victorian art susceptible to description as fantasy are those works associated with classical myths. This chapter will consider a sub-genre of fantasy art evidently motivated by the desire to escape into a pre-industrial otherworld, a pastoral Arcadia of the imagination. Its creators were, as a rule, devoted to a Greek rather than a Roman ideal, drawing on Roman artefacts and Latin texts such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as indirect routes into a more cherished Hellenic past. The squalid conditions of urban life and correlation of Greek myths with natural phenomena combined to inspire new myth-based 'nature fantasies,' a form of imaginative escapism strongly associated with the late Victorian period. Though my focus is on the visual arts, there is a parallel history of escapist appropriation of mythology in literature, involving the adaptation of classical myths for modern stories by Walter Pater, Vernon Lee, and Algernon Swinburne, among others. The late Victorian period was a mythopoeic age, when artists consciously employed mythological subjects as springboards for imaginative escape into an idyllic world where the boundaries between humanity, nature and the divine ceased to exist.

The pollution, poverty, and oppressive ambience of Victorian London has been described by many authors, from the Victorians themselves to modern historians. Nonetheless, it bears reiterating that the cities in which most Victorian artists lived were profoundly unpleasant in many ways. Clean air and clean water were both in short supply. The rapid outward expansion of the suburbs placed city dwellers at greater and greater distances from the countryside.[483] Contemporary rhetoric on the evils of modern life seemed to see no remedy for the conditions of urban living. Observers drew comparisons between demonised cities and the uncorrupted countryside, rather than between real and ideal forms of urban living. William Morris spoke of 'the spreading sore of London swallowing up with its loathsomeness field and wood and heath,' while John Ruskin grieved over 'the peculiar forces of devastation induced by modern city life' and the destruction wrought on open

[483] Alan Ruff, *Arcadian Visions: Pastoral Influences on Poetry, Painting and the Design of Landscape* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2015), 163.

country fields once 'wilder and sweeter than our garden.'[484] Even professional home-decor adviser Eliza Haweis, who made a career out of beautifying city-dwellers' houses, considered London *as a whole* an irredeemably ugly and unhealthy place, where the soot-heavy air was as deadly to human beings as to trees and shrubs, and even the best neighbourhoods were a labyrinth of 'long, black, featureless ravines.'[485]

Numerous citizen's groups were formed from the 1860s on in response to deteriorating urban conditions. They advocated for the preservation of urban green spaces, for clean air and water, and for the protection of animals.[486] Many artists made notable contributions to the burgeoning environmental and anti-industrial movements, including John Martin, who devoted years to advocating for cleaner water and better access to it in the city, and the classical subject painter William Blake Richmond, who was a founding member of the Society for the Abatement of Coal Smoke.[487] In addition to their artistic and political activism, Morris and Ruskin both protested vigorously against what they saw as the degradation of the natural world, and the human soul by urban evils.[488]

Shelley Cordulack has suggested that artists were especially sensitive to the urban environment. In particular, artists engaged with classical subjects could not but be excruciatingly conscious of the contrast between their own world and their vision of the ancient one.[489] Classical sources abound with references to the beauty and purity of the natural world, especially of water, whether in its natural form as lakes, rivers, and oceans, or rendered incarnate in innumerable water gods and goddesses, above all sea-born Aphrodite.[490] The contrast between the smoggy air, filthy water, and sparse greenery of

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[484] William Morris, *Architecture, Industry & Wealth: Collected Works* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1902), 124; Ruskin, *Complete Works,* vol. 34, *The Storm-cloud of the Nineteenth Century*, 266.
[485] Mary Eliza Haweis, *The Art of Decoration* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1881), 388, 385.
[486] John Ranlett, '"Checking Nature's Desecration:" Late-Victorian Environmental Organization,' *Victorian Studies* 26, no. 2 (1983): 197-198, 201.
[487] Richmond's dislike of industrialism and dedication to anti-coal activism increased over his life. After helping to found one anti-coal smoke coalition in 1881, he was elected president of the Smoke Abatement Society in 1889, and in 1899 formed his own organisation, the London Coal Smoke Abatement Society. See: Simon Reynolds, *William Blake Richmond: An Artist's Life* (Norwich: Michael Russell, 1995), 132, 208, 230; W.L. Hawksley, 'Smoke Abatement,' *Public Health* 26 (1912): 193; Ribner, 'The Thames and Sin,' 42.
[488] Jonathan P. Ribner, 'The Thames and Sin in the Age of the Great Stink: Some Artistic and Literary Responses to a Victorian Environmental Crisis,' *The British Art Journal* 1, no. 2 (2000): 44.
[489] Shelley Wood Cordulack, 'Victorian Caricature and Classicism: Picturing the London Water Crisis,' *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 9, no. 4 (2003): 540.
[490] Cordulack, 'Victorian Caricature and Classicism,' 537, 540.

Victorian London and the clear skies, blue oceans, and mountain vales of the Mediterranean could not be more profound. While some responded with public protests, others retreated into their imaginations, fomenting the revival of pastoralism in art and the creation of a new form of fantastical classicism.[491] Victorian paintings of historical or mythic Greece could carry the inhabitants of London, Manchester, Liverpool, or Birmingham out of their inaesthetic and unpoetical reality and into Arcadia. Neither classical subject art nor widespread dismay over the effects of industrialization were unique to the Victorian period, but this era saw the two long-running trends overlap, in a context in which artists and their audiences were responding to the same urban environment. In the late nineteenth century, a *new* kind of classical fantasy emerged, stimulated by a yearning for an ever more elusive sense of connection with an unspoiled natural world.

Roslyn Jolly identifies a particularly nineteenth-century feeling of wistful dissatisfaction with the modern disconnection from nature as 'nympholepsy.' Nympholepsy was 'a spiritual condition that was one of the most important legacies of the European classical heritage to Romantic and Victorian writers: the yearning for a personal connection with the natural world, coupled with the alienated sense that such a connection was no longer possible.'[492] Etymologically and in practice also literally associated with nymphs, the term nympholepsy was first employed in this sense by Byron in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, in reference to an ideal, and imaginary, nymph, 'a young Aurora of the air / the nympholepsy of some fond despair.'[493] Byron's use of the word in the poem set a precedent for its new meaning, 'to denote an aesthetic, emotional, or spiritual longing for unattainable beauty, love, or harmony.'[494] The yearning for a lost communion with nature called nympholepsy flourished in nineteenth-century literature. Though that longing might be expressed in many ways, its representation in a fantasied encounter between a human and an elusive supernatural being in the woods is an established trope in British literature. Just such a life-changing encounter is the central theme of Keats's *Lamia*, Shelley's 'Alastor' and 'Epipsychidion,' James Thomson's 'The Naked Goddess,' W. B. Yeats's 'The Song of Wandering Aengus,' and the 'Piper at the Gates of Dawn' chapter of Kenneth Grahame's *The*

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[491] Ruff, 'Ruskin, Morris and the Garden City,' 163-164.
[492] Roslyn Jolly, 'Nympholepsy, Mythopoesis, and John Addington Symonds,' *Victorian Review* 34, no. 2 (2008): 149.
[493] George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, canto 4, st. 116. The term also has a history of use in medicine, but the two usages are, and were, distinct from one another. See Goldhill, *Victorian Culture*, 53-54.
[494] Jolly, 'Nympholepsy,' 149.

Wind in the Willows. Such meetings with divine or magical women occur repeatedly as pivotal points in the works of William Morris and George MacDonald.[495]

In the art of the nineteenth-century, Greece and Southern Italy, the regions of Europe most saturated with classical associations, became the primary loci for such imagined encounters. According to accounts by more imaginative Victorian travellers, the mythical otherworld felt closer there, almost (but not quite) within reach. There they saw a landscape unmarked by the effects of modern industry and population growth, infused with a magical attraction derived from its association with classical myth and legend. Popular interest in ancient Greece was spurred by a classically focused education system and the new availability of classical texts in translation primed the Victorian imagination for fantasies about the Mediterranean landscape.[496] Even while Greece as a historical reality became better understood, and Greece as a modern reality became more accessible to tourists, Greece as an imaginary locus burned ever brighter in the Victorian imagination. Every civilization has its ideal otherworld, its Earthly Paradise, and the real Greece was overlaid by its imaginary counterpart. 'The golden land of Greece, longed for by Winckelmann, Goethe, Symonds, and Pater, is a nineteenth-century parallel to the ancient sunlit plains of Hyperborea: an aesthetic ideal place of the mind, where man, nature, art and the divine lived in perfect balance and harmony against a perpetually blue sky.'[497]

Whether they themselves travelled in the coastal Mediterranean regions where Hellenism originated, or vicariously experienced them in books and pictures, classical fantasists could convince themselves, with a little imagination, that the Hellenic world lived on in the Mediterranean sunshine, in the water, trees and rocks. John Addington Symonds's popular essays on his journeys through Italy and Greece demonstrate the persistence of this feeling in one of the era's dedicated classicists. At Mentone in 1874, Symonds was confronted with what seemed to him the actual settings of Romantic verse, of Latin pastoral poems, and of ancient Greek myths, all overlapping and all equally enchanting:

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[495] Though clearly not unique to the period, the proliferation of such scenes in nineteenth-century art and literature, and the Victorian revival of older works where such scenes occur (eg. *The Tempest, A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Faerie Queene*) does suggest a special affinity for them on the part of Victorians.

[496] Jenkyns, *Dignity and Decadence*, 2; Jeff Rosen, *Julia Margaret Cameron's 'Fancy Subjects:' Photographic Allegories of Victorian Identity and Empire* (Manchester University Press, 2016), 107.

[497] Lene Østermark-Johansen, 'Apollo in the North: Transmutations of the Sun God in Walter Pater's Imaginary Portraits,' *Cahiers Victoriens & Édouardiens* no. 80 (Autumn 2014): 2.

> This shore would stand for Shelley's "Island of Epipsychidion," or the golden age which Empedocles describes, when the mild nations worshipped Aphrodite with incense and the images of beasts and yellow honey, and no blood was spilt upon her altars – when "the trees flourished with perennial leaves and fruit, and ample crops adorned their boughs through all the year." This even now is literally true of the lemon-groves, which do not cease to flower and ripen. Everything fits in to complete the reproduction of Greek pastoral life.[498]

Walking in the less cultivated mountain slopes, Symonds felt connected, not just to particular poets or poems, but to a long-lost nature-religion: 'Hesper still gazes on the shepherd from the mountain-head. The slender cypresses still vibrate, the pines murmur. Pan sleeps in noontide heat, and goatherds and wayfaring men lie down to slumber by the roadside, under olive-boughs in which cicadas sing. … Nothing is changed – except ourselves.'[499]

What attracted Symonds to these landscapes was not only their capacity to bring stories and myths to mind but the sensation that in these ancient places those legends felt almost real. This sense of the mythical past as an immanent presence, however, was a conscious pretence, dependent on an effort of the imagination for the sake of an enchanting experience – that is, a fantasy. For all the intimations that the Mediterranean landscape brought to Symonds of the life of the ancient Greeks, he could not convince himself that their religion truly endured, either in the daily lives of the local farming communities or in his own heart. An unbridgeable chasm had opened between him and the gods whom he longed to meet. Modern thought was too imbued with Christian ideals to be contented by an all too earthly pantheon. '[I]n spite of ourselves we must turn our eyes heavenward, inward, to the infinite unseen beyond us and within our souls. Nothing can take us back to Phoebus or to Pan. Nothing can again identify us with the simple natural earth.'[500] Nothing, that is, but fantasy.

The Hellenic world could not be revived, but neither could Symonds or his contemporaries deny its appeal. For all that scholars were genuinely interested in the historical reality of the Greek world, the Greece of myth and legend retained a worth that

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[498] John Addington Symonds, *Sketches and Studies in Italy and Greece*: *First Series* (London: Smith, Elder & Co.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), 87.
[499] Symonds, *Sketches and Studies,* 88.
[500] Symonds, *Sketches and Studies*, 89. The words 'in spite of ourselves we must turn our eyes heavenward' are a paraphrase of a passage from Alfred de Musset's poem 'L'espoir en Dieu.'

outweighed archaeological discoveries, even the supposed relics of the Trojan War excavated by Heinrich Schliemann.[501] For a subset of Victorian readers, 'what matter[ed was] not the existence of Troy in history, and certainly not the existence of Troy in classical scholarship, but rather the existence of Troy in the playground of the passionate imagination.'[502] The popularity of mythical art alongside painstaking historical tableaus by artists such as Alma-Tadema reflects the popular investment in the imaginative appeal of an idealised classical world, on a level with their interest in actual historical truth.

Communion with the landscapes of the Mediterranean was seen as a prerequisite for understanding Greek myths, as much or more than study of antique texts and artworks. As Ruskin put it, if a myth 'first arose among a people who dwelt under stainless skies, and measured their journeys by ascending and declining stars, we certainly cannot read their story, if we have never seen anything above us in the day but smoke; nor anything round us in the night but candles.'[503] Symonds concurred:

> Nature is thus the first, chief element by which we are enabled to conceive the spirit of the Greeks. The key to their mythology is here. Here is the secret of their sympathies, the wellspring of their deepest thoughts, the primitive potentiality of all they have achieved in art. What is Apollo but the magic of the sun whose soul is light? What is Aphrodite but the love-charm of the sea? What is Pan but the mystery of nature, the felt and hidden want pervading all?[504]

Landscape was the key to the Greek myth-world, but mere physical exposure to it was not enough; the imagination, too, had a key role to play. Though total liberation from Christian and rational patterns of thought was impossible, some effort must be made to temporarily suppress those ways of thinking, in order to commune more directly with the Greek world: 'Some will always be found, under the conditions of this double culture, to whom Greece is a lost fatherland, and who, passing through youth with the *mal du pays* of that irrecoverable

[501] Meilee Bridges, 'The Eros of Homeros: The Pleasures of Greek Epic in Victorian Literature and Archaeology,' *Victorian Review* 34, no. 2 (2008): 166, 178.
[502] Bridges, 'The Eros of Homeros,' 172.
[503] Ruskin, *The Complete Works,* vol. 19, *The Queen of the Air,* 301-302.
[504] Symonds, *Studies of the Greek Poets*, 556.

land upon them, may be compared to visionaries, spending the nights in golden dreams and the days in common duties.'[505]

As is the case for enjoying any fairy tale or fantasy, escape into a mythopoeic mindset required enthusiasm and the wilful suspension of disbelief: yet 'surely,' Symonds argued, 'our intellectual life will be richer, and our intuition into the world will be truer, when we yield once more to the belief upon which those myths were founded, when we cease from standing aloof from nature and repelling the constant spiritual intimations she is giving us.'[506] Not believing, but pretending *as if* one believed in Pan, Hesper and Diana, could enrich the real world with a sense of immanence. Ruskin proposed, in the interests of a deeper appreciation of landscape, cultivating a Hellenic awareness of the inner lives of natural things:

> imagining our God upon a cloudy throne, far above the earth, and not in the flowers or waters, we approach those visible things with a theory that they are dead; governed by physical laws, and so forth. But coming to them, we find the theory fail; that they are not dead; that, say what we choose about them, the instinctive sense of their being alive is too strong for us; and in scorn of all physical law, the wilful fountain sings, and the kindly flowers rejoice. … But the Greek never removed his god out of nature at all; never attempted for a moment to contradict his instinctive sense that God was everywhere.[507]

Without the fiction that the earth is inhabited by divine spirits, Ruskin argues, something essential is lost to our apprehension of the landscape – not just pleasure, but a real understanding of the fundamental character of things. He presents ancient myth as profound parables, conveying, with the help of the imagination 'truths lost or scorned by the arrogant materialism of the benighted modern world.'[508] Adopting a mythological state of mind could open the way to a more reverent way of living in the world for Victorians tired of their own

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[505] Symonds, *Studies of the Greek Poets*, 570.
[506] Symonds, *Essays,* vol. 2, 135.
[507] Ruskin, *Complete Works,* vol. 5, *Modern Painters III*, 231.
[508] Dinah Birch, '"The Sun is God": Ruskin's Solar Mythology,' in *The Sun is God: Painting, Literature, and Mythology in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. J.B. Bullen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 113.

spiritual apathy.[509] As a further benefit, suspending their disbelief in order to enjoy the benefits of imaginative escapism could, he writes, brings all of nature to life:

> the earth, the waters, the fire, and the air; and the living powers of them are Demeter, the Latin Ceres; Poseidon, the Latin Neptune; Apollo, who has retained always his Greek name; and Athena, the Latin Minerva. … They are the rulers of the earth that we tread upon, and the air that we breathe; and are with us as closely, in their vivid humanity, as the dust that they animate, and the winds that they bridle.'[510]

The intimacy which Ruskin or Symonds could imagine enjoying with the Greek gods set those deities apart from the monotheistic God of Christianity, present everywhere and yet nowhere. The Greek gods were further distinguished by their spheres of influence, given personality, physical features, a tactile presence, by their association with specific natural phenomena, all of which made them attractive objects for imaginative contemplation.[511]

Ruskin and Symonds could have drawn encouragement for their view of the Greek myths as raw material for fantastical and spiritually uplifting daydreaming by the same book, the first volume of *A History of Greece* (1846), by George Grote. Grote was a widely read author whose views influenced a generation and more of creative work.[512] Symonds, Ruskin, Pater and Paget were all among his admirers. Grote's *History* made two assertions about mythology: first, that the Greek myths had not begun as morality tales or as distorted history but were born of the 'personifying impulse' of imaginative and unscientific minds confronted with the wonders of the natural world, and secondly, that for modern readers would understand myths best if they approached them not as religious texts, but as poetic stories.

The Greek myths were made, according to Grote, to speak to the imagination, not to the critical intellect. They satisfied their creators' need to see narrative in the phenomena of the natural world, and to manifest their emotions externally, in the form of divine personifications.[513] The myths articulated 'an omnipresent religious and personal interpretation of nature,' describing a world ruled by ubiquitous spirits of varying degrees of

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[509] Janet Burstein, 'Victorian Mythography and the Progress of the Intellect,' *Victorian Studies* 18, no. 3 (1975): 318.
[510] Ruskin, *The Complete Works,* vol. 19, *The Queen of the Air*, 303.
[511] Symonds, *Essays,* vol 2., 226.
[512] Goldhill, *Victorian Culture*, 8.
[513] George Grote, *A History of Greece*, vol. 1, new ed. (London: John Murray, 1888), 388.

divine potency and distance from humanity.[514] To Grote, the same search for a meaningful narrative in the world drove the mediaeval crafting of saints' lives and the legends of King Arthur. These fantastic stories were 'emanations in detail of some current faith or feeling, which they served to satisfy, and by which they were in turn amply sustained and accredited.'[515] Myths, whether classical or mediaeval, were still valuable for some of the same reasons that their originators had prized them: as stories of wonder, expressive of universal human emotions and elevated aesthetic ideals.[516] Grote's syncretic view of all myth-making is similar to Symonds's description of fantastic art, as a pan-cultural phenomenon producing 'beautiful or terrific forms in correspondence with some vision of the excited imagination,' in which 'real conditions of man's subjective being have taken sensuous shape at the bidding of creative genius.'[517]

According to Grote, belief in the myths, then as now, was motivated by a sincere wish to live in a world where such stories could be true: 'it is enough that what he hears be intrinsically plausible and seductive, and that there be no special cause to provoke doubt.'[518] Thus it would be possible to share in the wonder of the mythopoeic age, if readers of myths were willing to suspend their disbelief, and make themselves, like children, temporarily credulous of the fantastical.[519] If Grote's descriptions of myth recall previously-cited essays on fairy tales and modern fantasy literature by MacDonald, Gosse, Machen, and Scott, that is no coincidence. One marked tendency in Victorian mythography from mid-century onwards was the reassessment of myths as *stories*, creative works available for adaptation, not as relics, suitable only for delicate handling by antiquarians.[520] Grote was among those who authoritatively recast mythology as a 'mental realm of beauty and fanciful animation that answered to the deeper needs of the human situation.'[521] This reconceptualization freed artists and writers to make the world of myth their own.[522]

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[514] Grote, *History of Greece*, vol. 1, viii, 323.
[515] Grote, *History of Greece*, vol. 1, 420, 425.
[516] Grote, *History of Greece*, vol. 1, 434.
[517] Symonds, *Essays,* vol. 2, 243-4.
[518] Grote, *History of Greece*, vol. 1, 320.
[519] Grote, *History of Greece*, vol. 1, 310, 318-319.
[520] Kissane, 'Victorian Mythology,' 8, 21.
[521] Frank Miller Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1981), 94, 96.
[522] Norman Vance, 'Heroic Myth and Women in Victorian Literature,' *The Yearbook of English Studies* 12 (1982): 172.

Examples of their work abound. Nathaniel Hawthorne's popular retellings of myths, *A Wonder Book* and its sequel *Tanglewood Tales*, dared to re-render them in 'Gothic, or romantic guise.'[523] Morris's *The Earthly Paradise* intermingled classically derived stories with Norse and German tales. Paget and Pater both composed new stories about reincarnated Greek Gods (Aphrodite in Lee's work, Apollo and Dionysus in Pater's). Swinburne invented a new son of Apollo to be the titular hero of his narrative poem 'Thalassius' (1880). The range of new treatments of mythology extended beyond the nature fantasies that are the focus of this chapter, but the natural world still played a role in each one. Lee's Dionea, Aphrodite reborn, arrives and departs the scene of the story by sea. Doves flock to her and roses bloom in profusion where she sleeps. Pater's Apollyon is a charmer of animals, and a kind of genius loci of the wild green valley where he lives. His Dionysus likewise has an unnatural control over wild animals and is a master gardener, a nurturer and destroyer of living things. In the arts, too, nature myths were taken up as stories to be freely re-presented in new forms, to satisfy new imaginative hungers.

Making a Fantasy of Nature

A notable practitioner of the new mythopoeic art, the painter William Blake Richmond's upbringing made him not only a painter but also a devoted classicist, driven by an idealistic vision of art's high purpose. His father, the painter George Richmond, named him in memory of his revered late friend William Blake, appointed Samuel Palmer as his godfather, and introduced him at a young age to the company of his fellow Ancients. In his art, mythological subjects were depicted with a romantic fervour reflective of his own intense feelings for the classical world. Like his idol and artistic mentor, Frederick Leighton, Richmond was among those hospitable figures who did so much to maintain social connections between the leading literary figures of late Victorian England.[524] He numbered Ruskin, Pater, Robert Browning, William Morris, and Andrew Lang among his friends, and was at least acquainted with Symonds.[525] Richmond's diverse acquaintance among London's cultural circles ensured that he was aware of most important developments in contemporary mythography and literature as they occurred. Though it would be a stretch to call Richmond,

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[523] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *A Wonder Book: Tanglewood Tales* (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1937), ix.
[524] Reynolds, *William Blake Richmond,* 200.
[525] Reynolds, *William Blake Richmond,* 28, 127.

or any single artist, a 'typical' member of the heterogeneous classical school, his art reveals the impact of the mythological theories and enthusiasms of his era on a receptive artist.

In 1890, at the height of his fame, Richmond exhibited a work now known as *Venus and Anchises* (Fig. 53). The painting reflects the artist's personal obsession with Greek myth and the Mediterranean landscape, as well as contemporary interest in the role of nature in Greek religion. As an activist in the cause of coal abatement in England's cities, Richmond was acutely attuned to the impacts of modern industry on the natural world. Throughout his life, he sought respite from the conditions of life in London in visits to Greece, Italy, and Egypt. Though imperfectly understood by the critics of his day, *Venus and Anchises* can retrospectively be seen as the quintessential Victorian nature fantasy, a scene set in a semi-mythical Mediterranean countryside and intended as an escape from the personal and general dissatisfactions of modern life. Considering *Venus and Anchises* in that light resolves certain ambiguities in its composition that complicate readings of it as an illustration of a passage from a classical text.

Richmond's early predisposition for the art, mythology, and history of ancient Greece was encouraged by his father's friend, the more than half-pagan Edward Calvert. A childhood interest in the Greek world turned into a near-obsession in adulthood, what his biographer Simon Reynolds calls 'a passion verging on a mania.'[526] In his art, Richmond pursued a modern neo-classical style, one suited to the mythological subjects closest to his heart. Like the Pre-Raphaelites, Richmond saw himself as a revivalist, not an innovator, expressing this view in an 1882 lecture:

> Perhaps it is still worth while to cling to the old-fashioned idea that the best artist is he who expresses the greatest number of beautiful thoughts, who lifts us out of our common drudging life into his own world of beautiful ideas, and into the fields of his fancy and inner quiet life, and be thankful to him for opening the gates of a paradise, even for a moment, that we may see, though but mistily, through the clouds of critical antagonism, some revelation of poetic and truly human suggestions.[527]

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[526] Reynolds, *William Blake Richmond*, 168.

[527] William Blake Richmond, 'Monumental Painting,' in *Lectures on Art*, *Delivered for the Support of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings*, ed. J. H. M. (London: MacMillan and Co., 1882): 39-40. Liz Prettejohn has pointed out that the quotation is a partial paraphrase of a passage from Ruskin's *Modern Painters I* (1843), though considerably expanded and altered by Richmond.

Richmond attempted to live up to this dreamy ideal in his work, when he was not occupied with the portrait commissions on which his reputation and finances largely rested. When freed to choose his own subjects, his imagination wandered to the fields of Arcady and Attica, populated by the gods and goddesses of ancient myth. To him, the Hellenic world remained the land of enchantment.

This conviction was reinforced by fantastical experiences during his frequent visits to Greece, Italy and Egypt throughout the 1880s. Wherever he went, he felt the enduring presence of the divinities of myth and legend. Marooned by unfavourable winds on the island of Delos in 1882, he watched the sun set over the ocean and reflected that '[i]t looked as though the wheels of the chariot of Apollo had escaped from all boundaries and wrapped themselves in tortuous spirals about the empyrean.'[528] In Sparta in 1883, he recorded an evening ride through fields where 'little streams pursued their hidden way under vines and fig trees, and their gentle murmur came to the ear like the song of river maidens, clear to those who listen, and speaking of the secrets of pastoral life.'[529] At Marathon in the same year, he sank into a reverie, envisioning the Persian ships on the sea, the Spartans at bay against the hills, and 'a strange ghostly form of a God in armour [who] led them to the victory.'[530]

His reverence for the beauty of the Greek landscape and for the lost deities that he imagined still lived there grew into a sincere faith in the divinity of nature. Richmond had begun to distance himself from Christianity in the late 1860s.[531] In 1903, he wrote hopefully in the *Magazine of Art* of the role that art would play in opening the hearts of the masses to the mythic experience of nature:

> When Beauty, as underlying all matter, is accepted and seen, a profound Pantheism will receive assent, not a vulgar interpretation as of the late Romans, or of plausible ecclesiastics, but a growth from that exquisite temper of mind which directed to the human heart the voices of Divinities, who speak in streams and woods, and are also revealed in all that is animate.[532]

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[528] Richmond, quoted in A. M. W. Stirling, *The Richmond Papers: from the correspondence and manuscripts of George Richmond, R.A., and his son Sir William Richmond, R.A., K.C.B.* (London: William Heineman Ltd., 1926): 301-302.
[529] William Blake Richmond, Diary II, Richmond archives, London, quoted in Reynolds, *William Blake Richmond,* 163.
[530] Richmond, Diary II, quoted in Reynolds, *William Blake Richmond*, 168.
[531] Reynolds, *William Blake Richmond*, 71.
[532] William Blake Richmond, 'The Real and Ideal in Art,' *The Magazine of Art* 1, January 1903, 402.

Richmond attempted to realise this ideal in his own work in 1892. That year, his *Venus and Anchises* emerged as the most celebrated work of the summer. It was reproduced in the *Magazine of Art* and the *Art Journal*, latterly as an illustration to a laudatory biographical study of Richmond's artistic career.[533] The vast canvas, nearly ten feet long and half as high, hung in 'the place of honour in the big room' at the New Gallery, and occupied a similarly prominent position in almost every commentary on the year's shows.[534] Yet no two critics could agree on the subject of Richmond's painting, or even what to call it. *Venus and Anchises* daringly, and bafflingly, seamlessly blended multiple stories and themes to produce an original mythological fantasy.

According to Alfred Higgins, author of two long articles on Richmond in the *Art Journal* that summer, the subject of the painting was the meeting between the goddess Venus and Anchises, the future father of Aeneas.[535] Only two commentators apart from Higgins connected the painting with the myth. Their confusion, in combination with the range of improvised titles they applied to the painting, suggests that its catalogue entry, like Henry Blackburn's *New Gallery Notes* for that year, eschewed a conventional name in favour of an excerpt from Percy Bysshe Shelley's 'Epipsychidion.' Blackburn also included a summary of the picture:

> Venus, in light pink robe and yellow drapery, among hawthorn-trees in blossom, preceded by a tame lion and lioness, and followed by doves, approaches a youth in scarlet robe, with a musical instrument in his hand. Crocuses spring up under her feet.[536]

The scene so succinctly described derives – in part – from the 'Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite,' a Greek text from the sixth or seventh century BCE. The hymn narrates the goddess's seduction of Anchises, which resulted in the birth of Aeneas. Richmond's painting depicts their first meeting, when Aphrodite, inspired by Zeus with love for Anchises, approaches him

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[533] Marion Harry Spielmann, 'Current Art: The New Gallery,' *The Magazine of Art*, 1890, 304; Alfred Higgins, 'Mr. W. B. Richmond's Work and His Life as an Artist,' *Art Journal,* August 1890, 237.

[534] 'The New Gallery,' *The Speaker: The Liberal Review* 1, May 17, 1890, 537.

[535] Alfred Higgins, 'Mr. W. B. Richmond's Work,' 238.

[536] Debbie Innes of the University of York kindly supplied the quotation from the catalogue, as well as all other information from Blackburn's notes on the 1890 New Gallery exhibition, via email, April 28, 2019.

on the side of Mount Ida in the guise of a mortal woman. Her presence draws all the wild animals of the forest to her, but she dismisses them, and they depart in affectionate pairs, lion with lion and bear with bear, before she comes to Anchises's home. Anchises, awed and terrified by her beauty, appeals to her as an unknown goddess, praying for her blessing. In certain respects – the setting of the encounter on a remote hillside, the lyre in Anchises's hand, the tamed lions, and Anchises's expression of blank wonder – the painting draws directly on the hymn for inspiration.

However, by borrowing lines from Percy Shelley's poem 'Epipsychidion' (1821) as a caption for his painting, Richmond provided an alternative subject for his work, enfolding the picture in an irresolvable interpretive uncertainty. Thus presented, the scene is neither classical nor romantic, but both at once. Although the catalogue's description appears to commit to a single subject, by identifying the woman as 'Venus,' its mistaken description of the flowers behind her as hawthorn, instead of apple blossom, suggests that it was written by Henry Blackburn, the catalogue compiler, and not Richmond. Uncertain subject matter suits Richmond's technique in the painting, in which neoclassical figures and drapery mingle with animals and flowers rendered with a Pre-Raphaelite attention to detail. Stylistically unsettled, *Venus and Anchises* also evades straightforward interpretation by its excess of potential meanings. Like the Spenserian fantasy works of his period, Richmond's painting employs both classical and Romantic allusions to adumbrate the significance of the pictured encounter between man and goddess. *Venus and Anchises*, and its pendant texts, the *Hymn* and 'Epipsychidion,' play upon the emotional cues associated with nympholepsy: the commingled yearning for an impossible girl and, still more, for an impossible world.

In a 1903 article in the *Magazine of Art*, Richmond, sounding rather like Symonds on 'fantastic' art, wrote that 'the idealist is ever searching for a complete, harmonious, and consequently most beautiful embodiment of a conception which has been forced upon him by an overpowering pressure from within.'[537] In the case of *Venus and Anchises*, his travel diaries give a strong indication of what kind of conception he felt compelled to try to express through the language of colour and the subject matter of myth and romance: the sensation of a Mediterranean twilight. Richmond's highly imaginative response to being in Greece, the land of myth, has already been noted; he showed a particular penchant for daydreaming at twilight. It was during a ride at early evening that he described hearing 'the song of river

[537] Richmond, 'The Real and Ideal in Art,' 442.

maidens' in the countryside.[538] At Mycenae, in 1883, he looked out in the evening on 'hills looking like transparent blue crystal, I never saw a more ethereal sight in my life,' and wrote that '[w]hen the moon went down behind the mountains, she looked like the remnant of a flame, more beautiful and suggestive of Apollo's warmth upon her than I have ever seen.'[539]

Richmond's dramatic reaction to the twilight's afterglow, the meeting of night and day in a passing moment of extraordinary luminous 'unreality,' is a prime example of his transference of reverence from an abstract monotheistic God to the divine as embodied in natural beauty. In the 1880s, it was the divine as revealed in the twilight that most consumed Richmond, and he longed to find some expression for his feelings in his art – 'these colours give me strange longings, would that I could accomplish something – Courage, go on, it may come.'[540] The problem of how to capture the *sensation* of the afterglow, not only its visual effects, worried him. He reflected in his journal that 'it could be painted but only poetically not realistically. One should saturate one's soul in beauty and then let that be applied to poetic subjects.'[541] *Venus and Anchises* is, I argue, Richmond's attempt to express imaginatively what he felt unequal to depicting literally; that is, to produce a new nature myth, a visual fantasy of the afterglow embodied in a goddess. The painting exploits the blurred lines between deities, personifications, and characters that typifies allegorical paintings of the period, in the service of a new version of an old myth, celebrating a natural phenomenon sacred to the artist.

The painting is, both literally and metaphorically, a depiction of the peculiar, warmly luminous, Mediterranean twilight. The yellow moon hangs low in the evening sky at the back of the canvas, its cool light just catching the surface of the lake and the pale blossoms of the apple trees in the middle ground. The distant mountains appear lit from within by some gentle light, the lower slopes turned into the 'translucent blue crystal' Richmond admired in Greece, while their tops slopes are tinged pink by the lingering sunset.[542] In the open space of the foreground, a warm light mingles with the pale glow from the sky, leaving the grass silvery and shadowless.

In the middle of this moon and sunlit landscape, a second, metaphorical meeting of astronomical forces is enacted. If the lady is identified as the goddess Aphrodite, then her

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[538] Richmond, Diary II, quoted in Reynolds, *William Blake Richmond,* 162.
[539] Richmond, Diary II, quoted in Reynolds, *William Blake Richmond*, 161, 162.
[540] Richmond, Diary II, quoted in Reynolds, *William Blake Richmond,* 184.
[541] Richmond, Diary II, quoted in Reynolds, *William Blake Richmond,* 184.
[542] Richmond, Diary II, quoted in Reynolds, *William Blake Richmond*, 161

association with the planet Venus, the wandering evening star, makes her a suitable divinity to watch over this twilight moment. In her own person, Venus also represents the beautiful commingling of warm sunlight and cool moonlight. When first seen by Anchises in the *Homeric Hymn*, she is 'clad in vesture more shining than the flame of fire, … and like the moon's was the light on her fair breasts.'[543] Similar imagery appears in the lines from 'Epipsychidion' which Richmond employed as a caption, which describe a moment of union between moon and sun, when all the beauties of twilight and spring flowers are united in a woman:

> Athwart that wintry wilderness of thorns
> Flashed from her motion splendour like the Morn's
> And from her presence life was radiated
> Through the gray earth and branches bare and dead;
> So that her way was paved, and roofed above
> With flowers as soft as thoughts of budding love.[544]

The metaphorical confrontation of cold and warm, sun and moon, winter and spring, in both texts, parallels the transient moment of afterglow, when the retreating sunset lingers and mingles with the brightening moonlight. Beyond these visual metaphors, both the 'Hymn' and 'Epipsychidion' provide narrative contexts for the painted encounter.

'Epipsychidion' is a difficult poem to parse, part romance narrative and part ode, at once autobiographical and allegorical. Written in Italy, the poem is dedicated to a young woman whom the Shelleys met there, Emilia Viviani, with whom Percy struck up an intense albeit brief romantic friendship. 'Epipsychidion' partly describes the conflict between his affections for her and for his wife Mary. Yet the poem was in fact begun before the Shelleys met Emilia; it transcends the personal in order to address higher themes of love, imagination, and escape from the mundane. '"Epipsychidion" was not in its deeper movements a love poem to a particular Italian girl, though it masqueraded as one. It was Shelley's attempt to

[543] Andrew Lang, translator, *The Homeric Hymns: A New Prose Translation, And Essays, Literary and Mythological* (London: George Allen, 1899): 171.
[544] Percy Shelley, *Poems and Prose*, ed. Timothy Webb and George E. Donaldson (London: J.M. Dent, 1995), 240, l. 323-328.

arrest and to project an apparition with which his imagination had always been haunted.'[545] It is easy to understand Richmond's adoption of the poem as a caption for his painting. Shelley's Romantic fantasy sets a precedent for the creative synthesis of myth and private daydreams which *Venus and Anchises* also employs. The poem is an imaginative exercise in the externalisation of Shelley's psychology through a series of astronomical metaphors. Both Emilia and Mary are manifested in the poem in the form of rival astronomical divinities, but the goddess-like sun and moon avatars who represent them are also interpretable as purely personal fantasies born of Shelley's own imagination.

'Epipsychidion' begins with an introduction by a fictive editor, presenting the text as the work of a deceased poet, who died on the eve of his departure for an island in the Aegean – where he hoped to live the rest of his life in rustic seclusion. The verses which follow are a paean to a figure called Emily, who is associated with the sun, the planet Venus, abstract love, and the coming of springtime. She is part woman, part allegory, and part goddess:

> A shadow of some golden dream; a Splendour
> Leaving the third sphere pilotless; a tender
> Reflection of the eternal Moon of Love
> Under whose motions life's dull billows move;
> A Metaphor of Spring and Youth and Morning.[546]

Emily's spiritual influence is contrasted with that of another womanly entity, associated with the 'cold chaste Moon.'[547] The tension in 'Epipsychidion' derives from the contest between these two women, 'Twin Spheres of light who rule this passive Earth, / This world of love, this *me*;' whom the poet implores to strike a balance between them, that they may shine on him as the sun and moon do, and 'all their many-mingled influence blend, / If equal, yet unlike, to one sweet end.'[548]

The lines Richmond selected to caption his painting come from a passage in which Shelley describes the vision of Emily coming to awaken him from a deep sleep, 'a death of ice, immovable' into which he had been cast by the moon-woman's enchantment. Taken

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[545] Carlos Baker, *Shelley's Major Poetry: The Fabric of a Vision* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), 219.
[546] Shelley, *Poems*, 235, l. 116-120.
[547] Shelley, *Poems*, 239, l. 281.
[548] Shelley, *Poems,* 241, l. 346-346, 358-359.

literally, these lines are at least as suitable a caption for Richmond's painting as the 'Hymn to Aphrodite.' A true 'splendour like the Morn's' radiates from the goddess-woman at the centre of the canvas, illuminating her and her immediate surroundings. Her 'way' is 'paved, and roofed above / With flowers,' for she is framed by the branches of the apple tree, while on the ground where she walks bloom crocuses, the first flowers of springtime, and green grass springs up beneath the dead leaves and dry brambles in her path. It is possible to see the painting's central figure not just as either Venus or Emily, but as both at once. Emily's entrancing presence and her identification with the pilot of the 'third sphere,' the planet Venus, make her an alternative incarnation of the Greek goddess. The man on the right side of the painting is similarly ambiguous. He might be identified with the unnamed poet of 'Epipsychidion,' while his lyre and the lions by his feet connect him to Anchises and the 'Hymn,' but also associate him with a different Greek character, Orpheus, who tamed wild beasts with his songs.

The interrelation of setting and subject (or subjects) in *Venus and Anchises* may be Richmond's attempt at painting the twilight 'poetically not realistically.[549] In a pure landscape, he could, at best, convey only the *appearance* of a Mediterranean twilight. The introduction of a mythological-poetical theme endows the work with deeper associations, ensuring that the viewer cannot take in the twilit scene without also reflecting on divine love and the divide between mortal and immortal, between the real and the ideal. It is a fantastical allegory, personifying the twilight, playing on the feelings of reverence and delight that Richmond associated with the Mediterranean evening. The sensation of being in the presence of something sacred, benevolent, and unknowable, is conveyed by the meeting of an overawed man with a mysterious woman who brings with her warmth, light, and springtime.

Symonds spoke of fantasy images as the product of the artist's impulse to 'symbolise the perturbations of his spirit.'[550] In Richmond's case, the myth he adapted, of astronomical and seasonal fusions, of winter melting into spring and moonlight into sunlight, reflects his own divided self. Greece appealed to the classicist and the dreamer in him, but England was his home. Richmond was much in demand as a portraitist of the English upper classes and had a wife and six children whom he left behind on most of his journeys abroad. These internal conflicts might never have come so overtly into his art, were it not for a novel, *The World's Desire*, the third text necessary to the interpretation of his 1890 painting, next to the

[549] Richmond, Diary II, quoted in Reynolds, *William Blake Richmond,* 184.
[550] Symonds, *Essays*, vol. 1, 243.

'Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite' and 'Epipsychidion.' *The World's Desire* is the missing link between an ancient Greek ode and an early nineteenth-century poem.

The novel was a collaboration between Henry Rider Haggard and Andrew Lang, first published in book form in November of 1890, after running as a serial in the *New Review*.[551] It is reasonable to assume that Richmond was acquainted with the book's contents, probably well before it first appeared before the public, as the book was dedicated to him by its authors. Lang was a close friend of Richmond's. He dined frequently at the artist's house, purchased his painting *Perseus and Andromeda* (1880), and sat to him for his portrait in 1885.[552] Whether Richmond's own meditations on Aphrodite and 'Epipsychidion' inspired the book or vice versa is unknowable, but there is a definite thematic concordance between painting, poem, and novel.

The World's Desire is a sequel to Homer's *Odyssey*, narrating the adventures of a now-widowed Odysseus in Egypt. With assistance from Aphrodite, he must find and woo Helen, no longer the wife of Menelaus but nearly a goddess in her own right. To win her, Odysseus must contend with the wiles of Meriamun, a necromancer and sister-wife of the Pharaoh. In a final twist, the story is timed to coincide with the events of Exodus. Odysseus himself witnesses Moses and Aaron's appeals to the Pharaoh and the infliction of the ten plagues, and Pharaoh's loss of his army in the Red Sea is a pivotal point for the romance plot. Although stylistically and sentimentally the opposite of 'Epipsychidion,' *The World's Desire* parallels the poem in its use of astronomical metaphor, the identification of its female figures with divine and opposing powers, and a triangular romance which can only be resolved through the fusion of two of its participants into one. Its peculiar mixture of Homeric epic, Haggard's African adventure stories, and the Old Testament proved distasteful to critics, but provides an analogy to Richmond's own mythopoetic syncretism in *Venus and Anchises*.[553]

In a similar manoeuvre to that employed by Shelley in 'Epipsychidion,' Lang and Haggard cast their female leads, Helen and Meriamun, as avatars of the sun and moon, respectively. 'Golden Helen' is seen at one time 'shining with changeful beauty like the Dawn,' at another, 'all about her rolled a glory – like the glory of the dying day.'[554] Meriamun is her opposite, the 'moon-child,' 'pale and cold' of face, whose 'beauty paled

[551] Henry Rider Haggard and Andrew Lang, *The World's Desire* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1894).
[552] Reynolds, *William Blake Richmond*, 127, 133.
[553] J. Barrow Allen, 'New Novels,' *The Academy* 969, November 29, 1890, 500.
[554] Haggard and Lang, *World's Desire,* 21, 99, 152.

before the face of Helen, as a fire is slain by the sun.'[555] In a dream, Meriamun sees Helen 'rising out of the sea, more beautiful than I, with a beauty fairer and more changeful than the dawn upon the mountains;' marking her as an avatar not just of the sun but also of the sea-born Aphrodite, much as Emily is associated with Venus.[556] The two women enter a convoluted struggle for Odysseus' affections, through which it is revealed that the trio are the reincarnations of a primal pair of lovers, divided into three by a malevolent force, and destined to be reborn again and again until they can at last achieve spiritual and bodily reunification into a single loving pair, one woman and one man.

It is telling that neither Shelley's poem nor Lang and Haggard's novel ends with this perfect union's achievement. Instead, both works are narratives of unsatisfied longing for an idealised and inaccessible beloved figure. They are expressions of Symonds's '*amour de l'impossible'* in the form of a romance narrative. The assimilation of the duelling female powers in both works to the sun and moon folds in an element of nature myth – as a folklorist, Lang rejected the idea that all myths were best understood when broken down to a solar myth, but he recognized the power of solar allegory as a storytelling technique.[557] His, and Richmond's, association of true love with a union of a man, the sun and moon, adds up to a novel nature myth, addressing a distinctive Victorian experience – nympholepsy, tinctured with the wistfulness and idealism of the late nineteenth century.

Come with us, ye whose hearts are set
On this, the Present to forget;
Come read the things whereof ye know
They were not, and could not be so!
…
There lives no man but he hath seen
The World's Desire, the fairy queen.
None but hath seen her to his cost,
Not one but loves what he has lost.[558]

[555] Haggard and Lang, *World's Desire,* 55, 200, 188.
[556] Haggard and Lang, *World's Desire,* 70.
[557] Richard M. Dorson, 'The Eclipse of Solar Mythology,' *The Journal of American Folklore* 68, no. 270 (1955): 401.
[558] Haggard and Lang, *World's Desire*, 2.

The poem Lang wrote as prologue to *The World's Desire* introduces a theme that pervades the entire novel: the permanent inaccessibility, not only of the world of the fantasy narrative, but of the ideal woman. Helen's power in the book comes from her 'changeful beauty,' which allows her to appear to each man differently, so that 'they who had not loved saw in her that first love whom no man has ever won, and they who had loved saw that first love whom every man has lost.'[559] Except for Odysseus, destined future lover of Helen, it is, according to the novel, the fate of all men to spend their lives yearning for an ideal woman who exists only in their imagination. Richmond was personally familiar with the feelings of frustrated love and unappeasable longing expressed in both novel and poem. He lost his first wife, Charlotte Foster, after little more than a year of marriage. Charlotte became for him as much a symbol of love and loss as a particular woman to be mourned. At seventy-three, he wrote that in her, 'Love was incarnate in the flesh; to me there could be nothing beyond it. An Ideal and a Real were interwoven.'[560] Charlotte was to Richmond what Emily was to the poet of 'Epipsychidion,' or what Helen was to Odysseus.

The woman at the centre of *Venus and Anchises*, then, is potentially charged with the significance of two, three, or four romances: she is at once Aphrodite, Emily, Helen, and the lost Charlotte. She is nebulous, a 'changeful beauty' who oscillates between woman, goddess, spirit, and allegory, symbolising the sun, the moon, springtime, and love itself, as well as its loss. The Anchises-poet figure is literally marginalised in her presence, barely fitting in the upper righthand corner of the canvas, existing only as witness to the perfection who stands just out of his reach. Though Anchises does enjoy a night with Venus, he knows her only in her human disguise. At waking, he is confronted with a still higher ideal: the goddess in her true form, who admonishes him never to reveal the truth of their encounter, then vanishes. Hence Anchises' possession of Venus is only ever partial, their meeting on the mountainside a prelude to a lasting loss.

The 'Epipsychidion' poet is consumed with yearning for the vision who haunted his imagination. His poem ends with a plea to his beloved to come live with him all alone in his island, a 'far Eden of the purple East,' a request that readers know is made unfulfillable by his own untimely death. The island is a pastoral paradise, where they will enjoy perpetual

[559] Haggard and Lang, *World's Desire*, 152. What or whom *women* see when they look at Helen is never addressed.
[560] Reynolds, *William Blake Richmond*, 25.

summer, kept company by fearless yet wild animals. The bucolic island is inhabited by an indwelling spirit,

> a Soul no less
> Burns in the heart of this delicious isle.
> An atom of th' Eternal, whose own smile
> Unfolds itself, and may be felt not seen
> O'er the grey rocks, blue waves, and forests green,
> Filling their bare and void interstices.[561]

Shelley's island paradise – green, lush, welcoming, animated by a disembodied presence, offering an implausibly idealised dream of outdoor living – exhibits all the traits celebrated in Victorian nature fantasies, from Tennyson's 'The Lotos-Eaters' to Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*. Most importantly, it has that ineffable charm of inaccessibility, what Ruskin describes in *Modern Painters III* as the 'sweet bloom of all that is far away, which perishes under our touch,' for the poet never arrives at his destination, and we can only see it at second-hand, through Shelley's evocation of it.[562] The dream of Shelley's island, of Phaedria's isle, lives again in *Venus and Anchises*, though the delight that Richmond's painted fantasy offers is limited by his medium. Like the man in the scene, we can see, but not *feel*, the presence of the ideal. The spring bursts into life about the goddess's feet and the sunset's glow surrounds her; on the poet's side it is winter still and the evening is a dark one, though the light of her radiance is on his face. In his review, Alfred Higgins of the *Art Journal* understood the daydreams that Richmond sought to assimilate into his work, identifying *Venus and Anchises* as 'no merely illustrative or literary work, but one dealing with a theme as old as human nature and as fresh as a newly-opened leaf – the association of love with the renewed life of nature in spring-time.'[563]

With a subject neither classical nor romantic, at once allegorical and historical, Richmond's *Venus and Anchises* resists categorisation. Critics could tell that something was meant by the work, but could not guess what, precisely, that was.[564] The difficulties they faced might have been somewhat ameliorated by greater familiarity with the work of

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[561] Shelley, *Poems,* 244, ll. 477-482.
[562] Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 5, *Modern Painters III,* 182.
[563] Higgins, 'Mr. W. B. Richmond's Work,' 238.
[564] 'The New Gallery, Regent Street,' 577.

Richmond's friend Ruskin, in particular his lecture 'Mythic Schools of Painting: E. Burne-Jones and G. F. Watts,' delivered at Oxford in 1883. As the title indicates, Ruskin was interested in a *modern* school of mythic painting, which made use of a visual medium 'to teach you the spiritual truth of myths.'[565] Such a school, he hoped, could produce paintings that captured in a single potent image all the aspects and implications of a complex myth, and impress its truth upon the viewer: 'the scholarly and sympathetic thought of the mythic designer now assures you of the meaning, in what a fable said.'[566]

The 'Mythic School' of Victorian Art

Considering Richmond's *Venus and Anchises* as an example of mythic painting in Ruskin's sense of the term helps to explain its eclectic merger of romantic verse and classical subject. According to Ruskin, the role of a painter of mythological subjects is not to attempt to recreate, for the modern eye, exactly those artworks which the original myth-making culture produced. Instead,

> [h]e is to place, at the service of former imagination, the art which it had not – and to realize for us, with a truth then impossible, the visions described by the wisest of men as embodying their most pious thoughts and their most exalted doctrines … bringing the resources of accomplished art to unveil the hidden splendour of old imagination.[567]

By that reasoning, a painter is entitled to draw on all the resources of their own time in the representation of mythic material; and if their own imagination suggests to them a complimentary relationship between the 'kernel of thought and feeling' in a Romantic poem and a post-Homeric hymn, then they may realise the meaning of both in a single image, to the enrichment of romance and myth alike.[568] Richmond's successful merger of an eclectic range of materials in the service of his theme could be seen as a fulfilment of Ruskin's vision for the 'Mythic School' of art. Ruskin's definition of mythic painting also addressed the

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565 Ruskin, *Complete Works,* vol. 33, *Art of England,* 294.
566 Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 33, *Art of England,* 294.
567 Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 33, *Art of England*, 296.
568 Symonds, *Studies of the Greek Poets*, 42.

technical side of its production, showing a similar concern for a concord between subject and style: in mythic painting,

> we are … to accept gratefully, any kind of strangeness and deliberate difference from merely realistic painting, which may raise the work, not only above vulgarity, but above incredulity. For it is often by realizing it most positively that we shall render it least credible.[569]

Ruskin was an astute observer of the art, and audiences, of his time, and keenly aware of the challenges associated with the convincing realisation of fantasy art, discussed in the second chapter. That 'deliberate difference' from reality which he recommends to would-be fantasy artists for the realisation of their subjects is indeed present in Richmond's painting, in the perfection of the flowers and animals, and especially in the person of the goddess. As one contemporary critic observed, '[t]he carefully finished magic crocuses in the foreground are far less frail than the lady herself.'[570] There is an aura around her that can be explained by no ordinary light source, a gentle golden glow that warms her skin and drapery, the grass, tree branches, and flowers beside her, while leaving the orchard at her back and the forest to the right in shadow. If the work is read as an example of Ruskin's mythic art, then Richmond's use of unnatural light effects must be interpreted as an attempt to give this scene the 'strangeness' of the mythic, to convey what could be conveyed by no other means: the true otherworldliness of his goddess. The breadth of subject matter which Ruskin associated with the school of Mythic Art – not just Greek myth but Norse tales, English folklore, and allegory in general – likewise suits Richmond's blend of inspirations for his painting. Even so, the label 'Mythic Painting' it does not capture Richmond's achievement in full. Ruskin's investment in mythological art was rooted in its utility as a teaching tool, its ability to convey 'truth,' 'pious thoughts' and 'exalted doctrines,' not the excitement, reverence, or futile passion that permeate Richmond's *Venus and Anchises*, and its literary counterpart, *The World's Desire.*[571] *Venus and Anchises* is not just a modern representation of an ancient myth, but a new-fashioned story, rooted in the artist's personal investment in its subject.

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[569] Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 33, *Art of England,* 300.
[570] 'The New Gallery,' *The Speaker: The Liberal Review*, 537.
[571] Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 33, *Art of England,* 296.

Emotion, as much or more than intellect, fuelled the creation of *Venus and Anchises*, making it not just a mythic painting but a fantasy.

Modern Mythopoesis

Symonds declared that the Victorian era was a new 'mythopoeic age,' an assertion amply supported by the works of Swinburne, Pater, Paget, Tennyson, Morris, MacDonald, and Machen, all of which demonstrate the facility with which modern writers could – and would – manipulate mythological and legendary materials in novel ways.[572] These and other writers translated myths and legends into stories and poems suited to the emotional needs of their audiences, just as Grote argued the original myth-makers had done. In art, a similar process took place. Richmond's *Venus and Anchises* was not the only example of a painting could be both an illustration of a specific passage from a classical text, and a free translation of a personal fantasy into a work of visual art.

Briton Rivière's *Apollo* (1874) is, like *Venus and Anchises,* a unique iteration of its subject in Victorian art (Fig. 54). In *Apollo,* which depicts the god performing on the lyre for an audience of animals, the natural world is brought to life, animated with more than its ordinary degree of life and intelligence. It is a scene without a story, without any plain moral or argument, motivated instead by the artist's profound attachment to the animal world. Best known today for his sentimental paintings of loyal dogs, Rivière's oeuvre also included classical subjects, including *Circe and the Friends of Ulysses* (1871), *Apollo* (1874), *Pallas Athena and the Herdsman's Dogs* (1876), *Endymion* (1880), *An Old World Wanderer* (1887), and *Phoebus Apollo* (1895). All these works combine the animals in which Rivière specialised with figures out of Greek myth, set in idealised landscapes. Each one presents a vision of an alternative world in which animals and people can relate to one another with greater-than-natural directness, although the degree of overt supernaturalism motivating the spiritual connection between his human and animal figures varies from painting to painting.

An Old World Wanderer depicts a Greek sailor on the shore of a hitherto-unvisited island, where the nesting seabirds show no alarm at their discoverer's approach (Fig. 55). Only the pearlescent sea and sky have a hint of something unreal in their shimmering colour – the rest is a realistic scene of sand, birds, and seaweed. Yet the scenario it depicts is certain to bring to mind the impossibility, for modern viewers, of ever sharing in the wanderer's

[572] Symonds, *Studies of the Greek Poets*, 35.

quiet encounter with the birds on the shore. A visitor to Rivière's studio while *Wanderer* was in progress mused wistfully that real animals knew humans too well not to fear them. He fantasied that '[i]f one could only find a corner of the British coast frequented by the birds of the sea who had never seen a human being before, one could approach the members of the feathered tribe in the same way as the ancient Greek in the picture, and could smooth their backs and feed them from the hand.'[573]

Rivière's *Apollo lies* on the more overtly magical side of the fantastical spectrum – a scene of enchantment as palpably magical as any of Joseph Noel Paton's fairy paintings. Much as Richmond sought in his *Venus and Anchises* to meld classical myth with Romantic vision, Rivière found a pretext in a Greek drama for a fantastic vision of an enchanted natural world. His *Apollo* was captioned (one might say narrated) in the catalogue by an excerpt from Euripedes's *Alcestis*:

> Apollo's self
> Deigned to become a shepherd in thine halls
> And tune his lays along the woodland slopes
> Whereat entranced the spotted lynxes came,
> To mingle with thine flocks; from Othry's glen
> Trooped tawny lions; e'en the dappled faun
> Forth from the shelter of her pinewood haunts
> Tripped to the music of the Sun-God's lyre.[574]

Rivière depicts Apollo as a golden-haired figure, crowned with laurels, reclining against the trunk of a pine tree in a dark wood, playing on his lyre to an audience of wild animals enraptured by his music. Compositionally, the picture shares many characteristics with Richmond's later work – the golden aura surrounding the god, the exotic animals made tame by a divine presence, and the broad-trunked pine trees, with shadows between them. Its large scale and wide format facilitate the audience's pretence that the scene is really there, as though we too have been drawn to the clearing by the music, like Keats in pursuit of the nightingale, or like the animals, come to throw ourselves at Apollo's feet.

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[573] Harry How, 'Illustrated Interviews,' *Strand Magazine: An Illustrated Monthly* 11, January 1896, 4.
[574] *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy of the Arts: The One Hundred and Sixth* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1874), 19.

This painting has been highlighted as an example of Rivière's tendency to blur the lines between human and animal subjects.[575] His paintings portray his animal subjects with more than animal sensibilities, and his human figures present an unnatural capacity to relate to or control their animal companions. Rivière's precursor in animal painting, Landseer, was widely admired for his talent for endowing his animal subjects with near-human emotions. Rivière's mildly anthropomorphising works likewise generally enjoyed a positive reception, but occasionally (always in cases where an element of magic or miracle was in play), his paintings of animal-human encounters crossed the line between sentiment and supernaturalism. They gave the impression of 'human and animal bodies as in some sense "unfixed:" sometimes, not quite one thing rather than the other.'[576]

In later works such as *Circe and the Friends of Ulysses* or *Daniel in the Lions' Den*, the animals appear not just to relate to their human companion but to enjoy an equal share of personhood. They are too alive, too responsive, their expressions too legible for ordinary animals.[577] *Daniel in the Lions' Den* proved divisive; one critic claimed that. '[s]o realistic are Daniel, the lions, and the den, … that the story has never been made to look more credible than in this picture,' while another, less ready to suspend his disbelief, was profoundly disturbed by his anthropomorphic creatures, 'more and less than lions; they are endowed with emotions bordering on the human, and yet they have the sinuousity of the snake, the treachery of the reptile.'[578] Rivière himself had related more easily to animals than humans from childhood onwards.[579] This aspect of his character was on display in an interview in 1896, in which he described his family pet, 'Speed,' as 'a dog who thinks,' and dismissed Speed's habit of biting him and other family members as 'the eccentricities of genius.'[580] All his life, Rivière was very uncomfortable in urban surroundings – his penchant for images of animals communicating easily with solitary figures, in otherwise deserted landscapes, might be seen as fantastical wish-fulfilment on the part of a self-proclaimed shy man and animal lover.[581]

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[575] Poppy Mardall, 'Briton Riviere (1840-1920) and the Unfixed Body,' *The British Art Journal* 8, no. 1 (2007): 61.
[576] Mardall, 'Briton Riviere,'59.
[577] Mardall, 'Briton Riviere,' 61.
[578] 'The Royal Academy,' *Examiner* 3353, May 4, 1872, 456; 'The Royal Academy,' *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 33, no. 865, May 25, 1872, 663.
[579] Mardall, 'Briton Riviere,' 57.
[580] How, 'Illustrated Interviews,' 16.
[581] Mardall, 'Briton Riviere,' 57.

Remembered as 'one of *the* pictures' of the year at the Royal Academy, Rivière's *Apollo* proved a popular success despite troubling some critics by its seeming transgression of the natural boundaries between species.[582] One complained that '"Apollo", charming the beasts of the forest by his lyre, the God is less than a man, while the lions and the lynxes pass into hybrids which nature abhors.'[583] The description of Apollo as 'less than a man' might imply effeminacy. On the other hand, the critic might also have been troubled by Apollo's seeming kinship with the animals around him. His comfort in the wilderness, reclining at the base of the tree, and his easy communion with his animal audience, lower the god to the level of beasts. At the same time, their attentive gaze and rapt postures suggest a level of appreciative awareness that should be beyond their natural capacities. The lioness, with furrowed brow, recalls a serious amateur at a concert, closing her eyes to better concentrate on the music. The lynx, propped up on its paws with pricked ears and rapt gaze, is strangely reminiscent of the young man dressed in fur in Alma-Tadema's *A Reading from Homer* (1885, Fig. 56) – both are vigorous young creatures consciously enjoying a performance.

Like Richmond's *Venus and Anchises*, Rivière's *Apollo* derives from a classical text, but can best be understood in relation to modern retellings of the ancient myths. Richmond's *Apollo* fuses his obsession with the Mediterranean landscape and classical myths with Shelley's poetry and his friends' Homeric romance, while Rivière's painting draws on Euripides's play, but was also part of a developing nineteenth-century re-appraisal of Apollo as a *nature god,* as much as a god of the arts, and of inspiration. An essay by Leigh Hunt on Greek religion extolls how their reverence for every god had a connection to the earth, including the solar god Apollo:

> Imagine Plutarch, a devout and yet a liberal believer, when he went to study theology and philosophy at Delphi: with what feelings must he not have passed along the woody paths of the hill, approaching nearer every instant to the divinity, and not sure that a glance of light through the trees was not the lustre of the god himself going by![584]

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[582] W. W. Fenn, 'Our Living Artists,' *The Magazine of Art*, January 1879, 254. Emphasis his.
[583] 'The Royal Academy,' *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 37, no. 972, June 13, 1874, 748.
[584] Hunt, *Essays*, 229.

Hunt imagines the pervasive divinity of the Greek world as an entirely benevolent experience, reassuring rather than intimidating, the ordinary believer. On the other hand, nature, for the Victorians, could be not only a source of aesthetic pleasure and passive site of destructive human interventions, but also cruel, 'red in tooth and claw' – a possibility which also found its way into new mythological art and fiction. Rivière's animalistic *Apollo*, anomalous in its own decade, anticipated a notable literary treatment of Apollo as the charmer of beasts, and a danger to ordinary men – Walter Pater's 'Apollo in Picardy.' In Pater's story the Sun god presents himself as a French peasant, a friend and servant to the monks living in an isolated yet idyllic mountain retreat. 'Apollyon,' as they call him, is at once more than human and half-animal. He goes about dressed in 'skins strangely spotted and striped,' seeming to the monks like 'some imperiously beautiful wild animal tamed,' and his presence in the valley leads to the untimely death of a young man whom he befriends there.[585] Like Orpheus, his music enchants the animals, and the ominous darkness of the woods and the prominence of the carnivorous hunting animals recalls Orpheus's bloody death at the hands of the maenads. Looking at Rivière's Orphic *Apollo*, one thinks with some trepidation of Pater's Apollyon, who 'seemed able to draw the wild animals, too, to share their sport, yet not altogether kindly. Tired, surfeited, he destroys them when his game with them is at an end.'[586]

A contemporary observer noticed a distinction in *Apollo* between the wild animals, who are enthralled by the music, and the domesticated animals, who seem indifferent to it: 'the idle and apathetic goats are gathered to ruminate *en masse.*'[587] Apollo's special kinship is not with the animals nearest humans, but with the wild creatures of the woods – they, like him, are their own masters. Unlike the wild cats in Leighton's *Syracusan Bride,* who seem cowed by the ordinary women who lead them, in *Apollo* the wild animals are enchanted by a magical power greater than us, the merely human audience. The picture, though lacking an obvious moral, does seem to ask us to choose whether, like the tame and civilised goats, we would be insensible to the god's music, or would throw our lot in with the woodland creatures, and listen avidly to the music of Apollo's lyre. The painting offers us an opportunity to imagine ourselves akin to wild animals, a fantasy that might have appealed strongly to Rivière himself.

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[585] Walter Pater, *The Collected Works of Walter Pater Vol. 3: Imaginary Portraits,* ed. Lene Østermark-Johansen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 208, 203.
[586] Pater, *Collected Works,* vol. 3, 206.
[587] F. G. Stephens, 'The Royal Academy,' *The Athenaeum* 2431, May 30, 1874, 739.

Painting Greece, Imagining Arcadia

While Richmond was especially drawn to the skies of the Mediterranean, and Rivière to mythical links between humans and animals, Sir Frederick Leighton, the most prominent member of a classical school whose profile he helped to define, painted fantasies that brought all the natural elements of ancient Greece – its air, water, and earth, to life. Leighton's classicism manifested itself across a wide range of genres, from *Winding the Skein*, a domestic scene reminiscent of Alma-Tadema's vignettes of Roman or Athenian daily life, to *The Bath of Psyche*, a sensuous yet coy study of an idealised nude, to *Flaming June*, a work that resonates equally with the aestheticism of Albert Moore and the statuesque grandeur of the Sistine Chapel frescoes. Myth was not Leighton's only point of entry into the classical, but each of his mythological subjects is a striking exploration of earth, sea, and sky, in which the elements are represented in their own forms and allegorically in the human figures. They are new treatments of old stories that champion a novel fantasy, of human assimilation to an aspect of the natural world, in which the divide between the human, the divine, and the elemental, is blurred.

For example, *Daedalus and Icarus* (1869) depicts a young man and his father on a clifftop, the son ready to take to the sky. Like so many Victorian portraits of Galahad, his upturned glance leads out of the canvas and towards a far horizon which he can see but we can only imagine (Fig. 57). Though we know his wings are artificial, the band across his chest seems wholly inadequate to support their weight. Looking at the picture, setting aside all prior knowledge of the story, he appears truly winged, a creature of the sky, impatient to return to his airy realm. The original myth of Daedalus and Icarus is a warning about the dangers of soaring too high, of aspiring too greatly. This painting's triumphalism seems to tell a different story, of how one boy, at least, learned to fly, taking to the air with the ease and confidence of a bird. A later work, *Perseus and Andromeda* (1891, Fig. 58) presents a staged battle of the elements whose human hero seems to achieve godlike status. Perseus appears as an avatar of Apollo in his roles as both sun god and slayer of the Python. He is a luminous figure silhouetted against the sun, bow at the ready to fire on the sea serpent. The prize of his victory, Andromeda, embodies aspects of both fire and water. Her sinuous pose and tumbling, almost liquid drapery are at once erotically appealing, and suggest her own

affiliation with the sea at her feet, as does her rippling, loose hair, whose brilliant red colour also evokes the fiery breath of the dragon.[588]

The Garden of the Hesperides (1892, Fig. 59) likewise employs its figures as personifications of their environment. Painted on a circular canvas, evoking the shape of the earth itself, it is a vision in the round of an unearthly paradise. Three women lie at the foot of a broad-trunked apple tree, its branches heavy with golden apples. Fittingly for the keepers of the tree, their clothing matches its red trunk, yellow apples, and green leaves. Behind the women are more trees and bushes in blossom, a green lawn leading down to the yellow beach and a smooth, sparkling ocean. All is serene and attractive. Birds drink from the water at the women's feet, without fear of the massive blue snake that winds around the drowsy women is tame as a pet. This is, of course, the dragon Ladon, set at the foot of the tree to guard against would-be thieves and ultimately dying in battle with the Hercules. But here there is no thieving hero, no cause for alarm, only three drowsy women, a lush, half-wild garden, and the music of voice, harp, and ocean waves.

The picture was remarked on for the completeness, and total serenity, of the scene, in which 'Hercules "panting with fury" would have seemed out of place.'[589] Leighton pictures the myth as C. S. Lewis would describe it, without narrative or drama, yet still a subject in its own right: '[t]he Hesperides, with their apple-tree and dragon, … already a potent myth, without bringing in Herakles to steal the apples.'[590] The subject is not the quest but its destination, a well-guarded garden in the far west of the world. Leighton could have been inspired to produce the image by any one of a number of classical sources – the tale is told by Hesiod and Apollonius, among others. The garden is mentioned in Milton's *Comus*, or Leighton might have been prompted by Hawthorne's retelling of the story in his wildly popular *Wonder Book.* Leighton's source of inspiration is unknown, but the critic Ernest Radford, who devoted an entire article in *The Art Journal* to the painting in 1895, did not hesitate to identify Leighton's *Garden of the Hesperides* with that described by Morris in *The Earthly Paradise* – 'as nearly as may be, the island of which we have so sweet a glimpse in

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[588] Andromeda's remarkable tresses may simply be an exaggeration of Dorothy Dene's own hair, but they also seem to owe a debt to the red-haired goddess in William Stott of Oldham's *Venus Born of the Sea Foam*, which provoked a minor scandal when exhibited in 1887. See Margaret F. MacDonald, 'Maud Franklin,' *Studies in the History of Art* 19 (1987): 24.
[589] Ernest Radford, 'The Garden of the Hesperides,' *Art Journal* 121, January 1895, 12.
[590] Lewis, *Experiment in Criticism*, 43-44.

the picture,' 'a garden fair beyond all thought,' filled with 'things strange and fair and sweet.'[591]

Leighton travelled and made numerous oil sketches of landscapes in both Greek and Italy, some of which made their way into his finished paintings.[592] Yet he was also a fantasy artist, nostalgic for a Greek landscape he could never see, except in his own art. He spoke wistfully in his Academy lectures of the lost Greece as the ancient Greeks had known it, 'not in those times parched and thirsty as we see it now; the dusty olive groves which to-day are white along the arid track where Kephissus should flow are not the "thousand fruited" bowers ringing with the nightingale, of which Sophocles sang so lovingly.'[593] Once Greece was the haunt of a hundred nature gods, but now '[t]he great god Pan himself, the all-pervading spirit of the fruitful earth, Pan with his "jolly Satyrs," is no longer heard along the mountain-tops; his pipes are no longer "sweet, piercing sweet, by the river;"' instead Greece has become like any other country, ruled by a Christian ethos that teaches 'that the things of this world are a mirage and a snare, and the enjoyment of them culpable.'[594]

As Leighton imagined it, Greek life in the pre-Christian period was marked by an intense vitality, their religion revolving not around sin and sacrifice and 'the depravity of the flesh' but motivated by 'a joyous and an exulting spirit, full of the pulse of life, shunning the thought of death, little concerned with the pale Beyond which might await those whose hearts had ceased to beat.'[595] The focus of such a religion was naturally on those features of their world which brought them the most joy, 'the personified forces and phenomena of nature,' embodied in the form of gods envision as 'the ideal of a man in his comeliness, in his wisdom, and in his strength.'[596]

Leighton's idea of Greece, and of the Greek religion, is sensuous, earthy, youthful, and joyous. He sees the Greek gods as having once represented the human spirit, intensified in all ways by their divinity but not especially elevated, morally or intellectually, over their mortal counterparts. It is as though the Greek myths were a great romance after Lang's

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[591] Radford, 'Garden of the Hesperides,' 12; William Morris, *The Earthly Paradise*, vol. 4 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1905), 14, 15.
[592] Karl Kilinski II, 'Frederic Leighton's *Daedalus and Icarus*: Antiquity, Topography and Idealised Enlightenment,' *The Burlington Magazine* 148, no. 1237 (2006): 258.
[593] Frederick Leighton, *Addresses Delivered to the Students of the Royal Academy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1897), 90.
[594] Leighton, *Addresses*, 143.
[595] Leighton, *Addresses,* 144, 141.
[596] Leighton, *Addresses*, 90, 141.

definition of the genre, in which the characters enjoy 'such overflowing measure of strength, fortune, and love, ... as life has *not* for giving."'[597] Leighton's *The Garden of the Hesperides* seems like a window into that imaginary world of abundant natural energy. This secret garden in the west of the world is undisturbed by any trouble of the heart or mind, any dread of death or change. Everything is alive, lush and richly coloured under the golden sunshine. The round canvas seems to suggest the enclosed and endless nature of the unwithering garden. This timelessness of the scene, and of its associated myth, is mirrored in the critic Ernest Radford's reception of it:

> The Hesperides are three or more maidens. The earth is their god-mother. They have lived from the beginning of time without marking its progress. They are wholly unoccupied, except that one plays on a lyre, and sings. The one who should be shelling peas is asleep. The business of looking after the apples belongs to the snake. The words youth and age are unknown to them. As it was in the beginning, it is now, and shall be.
>
> The Island of the Hesperides was vaguely supposed by the ancient to lie far away in the West. It will help to the understanding of what is before us to accept his conjecture as fact. At sunrise we enter the Garden. The blue is the blue of the sea. The voice is the voice of a maiden. The notes are those of a lyre.[598]

Radford slides between tenses and between narration of the myth and analysis of the painting. For those susceptible to the fantasy, as Radford seems to have been, the picture casts a spell; as his narration progresses, his sentences grow shorter, more and more consumed with the specific details of the scene. He seems to drift off into a daydream while writing, absorbed by the fantasy garden before him, and the one he has discovered in his own imagination.

Although the idyllic fantasy of Leighton's *Hesperides* was complete in itself, it remained part of a larger story, of the labours of Hercules, whose arrival, 'panting with fury,' is implied in the pacific tranquillity of the scene he must, eventually, interrupt.[599] For all the languorous peace of works such as *The Garden of the Hesperides*, or Rivière's *Apollo*, or

[597] Lang, 'Romance and the Reverse,' 3.
[598] Radford, 'The Garden of the Hesperides,' 11-12.
[599] Radford, 'The Garden of the Hesperides,' 12.

John Reinhard Weguelin's *Bacchus and the Choir of Nymphs* (exhibited at the New Gallery in 1888, Fig. 60), these were drawn from a mythos best known to Victorians as a linked series of compelling *stories.* Few of those myths inspired as many paintings as the story of Cupid and Psyche. Like the story of the Gardens of the Hesperides, the myth of Cupid and Psyche was retold in Morris's *The Earthly Paradise*. Given Morris's close friendship with Burne-Jones, that retelling almost certainly contributed to the conception of Burne-Jones's *Pan and Psyche*, exhibited at the Grosvenor in 1878 (Fig. 61).

The painting was applauded for the vividness of its fantastical setting, which prompted one observer to praise Burne-Jones for having 'entered in imagination into the mythical creation' and 'impressed upon it [his] own individuality.'[600] The sheer grey rocks hemming in the lush green meadow, clear water and perfect blooms of iris and honeysuckle painted with defined outlines and in clear, bright colours recall early mediaeval depictions of saints in the wilderness. They also add up to a seductively convincing portrait of an idyllic natural garden, a picnicker's paradise. In place of two lunchers on a chequered blanket, the foreground is occupied by two creatures of myth. Psyche looks like what she is meant to be at this stage in her story, not yet a goddess but already the most beautiful woman alive, and the lover of Cupid. Pan, kneeling above her, is distinctly inhuman, with furred goat legs, pointed ears, and long shaggy hair. Though his pose and expression are not threatening, the more dangerous and animalistic side of his character is hinted at by his crown of ivy, whose dark blue berries are poisonous to humans, though nourishing to birds and other animals. One of his hands, ending in pointed nails, rests gently on Psyche's head as she crouches below him. The touch might be a benediction or a gesture of childlike curiosity; certainly no one has ever told Pan to 'look but don't touch.'

Despite the nudity of the two figures the overall effect of the picture is distinctly unsexual. Both figures are posed in profile, arms and limbs disposed to conceal breasts and genitalia. The chasteness of the encounter reflects that of the source narrative. Psyche, abandoned by Cupid whom she loves, has thrown herself into the river in despair. The river, in true fairy-tale fashion, sets her safely on the shore rather than allow her to drown. On emerging from the water, she is greeted by Pan, who introduces himself as an old shepherd (a show of modesty that does not deceive Psyche). He makes a futile attempt at cheering her up by, ironically, urging her to pray to Cupid for relief from what he recognizes as frustrated

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[600] Frederick Wedmore, 'Some Tendencies in Recent Painting,' *Temple Bar: A London Magazine for Town and Country Readers* 53, July 1878, 336.

young love. It is after this encounter with Pan that Psyche begins the long adventure that ends with her reunion with Cupid.

Though not completely isolable from its original narrative context, the painting also tells a story of its own. Interpreted allegorically (as some audience members would doubtless have done), the painting depicts the human soul, meeting and comforted by the spirit of the untamed Earth. Pan here appears not as the inspirer of panic fear, but as a benevolent guardian. His benign look recalls Spenser's *The Shepheard's Calendar*, where Pan is celebrated as the 'god of shepheards all, / Which of our tender lambkins takest keep, … Als of their masters hast no less regard.'[601] Victorian treatments of the Pan tended to retain Spenser's vision of a kindly, humanity-oriented god, while restoring to him more of his ancient associations with untamed animals and wild country.[602] In Francis Bourdillon's *A Lost God* (1891), Pan functions as a cicerone of the woods, helping humans to find the divine in the natural world:

> Among us, with us, of us; god with man,
> As man with man; to death-expectant eyes
> Revealing, in the rainbow and the flower,
> That mortal tenements might entertain
> Immortal tenants, love and loveliness.[603]

In Symonds's major work of this decade, *Studies of the Greek Poets*, Pan is presented as the personification of the spirit of the natural world as it is experienced by humankind, 'the mystery of nature, the felt and hidden want pervading all.'[604] In 1876 Pater wrote of Pan as 'a presence; the *spiritual form* of Arcadia, and the ways of human life there; the reflexion, in sacred image or ideal, of its flocks, and orchards, and wild honey.'[605] Pater's Pan is not a wholly wild god but one who bridges the world of plants and animals with the lives of human beings who live in harmony with that world.

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[601] Edmund Spenser, *The Shepheards Calender: Containing Twelve Eclogues, Proportionable to the Twelve Months*, canto 12, ll. 7-11.
[602] Miles A. Kimball, 'Aestheticism, Pan, and Edwardian Children's Literature,' *CEA Critic* (Fall 2002, vol. 65, no. 1): 51.
[603] Francis William Bourdillon, *A Lost God* (London: Elkin Matthews, 1891), 19.
[604] Symonds, *Studies of the Greek Poets*, 558.
[605] Pater, *Greek Studies*, 15.

As earlier chapters have shown, no allegorical construct in this period is immune to being read as a character-driven narrative. Pater describes Pan as having 'almost no story,' but he does play a character role as part of the myth of Cupid and Psyche.[606] *Pan and Psyche* is legible not only as a symbolic embrace by the natural world of the human soul that dwells within it, but also as a friendly encounter between a human woman (as Psyche is at this point in her story) and a wild, otherworldly creature. It was this reassuring narrative that captivated at least one visitor to the exhibition, who saw in the painting,

> Psyche, whom the 'kind river,' 'with all gentle care,' as William Morris has it, 'has cast ashore within a meadow fair,' and Pan, the brown river god, haunter and lonely dweller in places beautiful yet desolate, the brown god bending tenderly over the rescued being still wan and dazed with water – bending tenderly, do we say? – bending chivalrously too, if a word of medievalism may be applied to antiquity.[607]

In Pan's benign company, Psyche lives the fantasy that pervades so much Victorian writing on mythical Greece. She is safe and welcome in a natural world that is imagined as a place of soft grass, clean water, and blooming flowers, inhabited by supernatural beings who are like and yet unlike herself. *Pan and Psyche* is the equivalent in visual form of the highly charged meetings with magical figures so frequent in nineteenth-century poetry and fantastic fiction, moments when, at a glance, the divide between worlds is bridged. The painting draws on classical myth, but as the basis for a very modern fantasy of escaping to a world where humanity, nature, and the divine could meet one another face to face. Like Leighton's *Garden of the Hesperides*, or Rivière's *Apollo,* this is a superficially simple but entrancing fantasy, complete with a convincing and immersive landscape in which to imagine oneself as witness or participant in the myth.

A Green and Pleasant Land

Not all works classifiable as examples of Victorian classicism benefit from being viewed through the interpretive lens of fantasy. Alma-Tadema's genre paintings of life in ancient Athens or Rome are readily identifiable as forms of elevated escapism yet are unmarked by

[606] Pater, *Greek Studies,* 15.
[607] Wedmore, 'Some Tendencies in Recent Painting,' 338.

that '*amour de l'impossible*' that characterises a fantastic escape.[608] But alongside these domestic daydreams hung works that spoke to a preoccupation not with historical realities but with an imaginary world. The diverse subjects of mythological paintings in this period are all linked by their use of an idyllic landscape setting, populated with beings who enjoy a *connection* with the natural setting out of reach for mere mortals, especially those living in modern, urbanised Britain. The yearning to escape into a green world of endless summer and unspoiled nature, is a ubiquitous element in Victorian fantasy art – evident not only in classical mythical subjects, but in fairy art, and in scenes from Spenser, Malory, Milton, or mediaeval romance.

England has its own nymphs, and British fairies their sacred springs. In Victorian art and poetry, the ancient Mediterranean world, animated by the divine and semi-divine inhabitants described in Greek mythology, blurs into a folkloric Britain, green and unspoiled, animated by tiny, yet often classically proportioned, fairies. The resurgence of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* brought its synthesis of England, fairy land, and ancient Greece back into prominence, as did the revival of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with its cast of woodland fairies, Greek heroes, and country bumpkins, and of Milton's *Comus*, whose most oft-quoted passage was the invocation of Sabrina, an English river goddess.[609] New art and literature gave evidence of a 'vogue for a whimsical Hellenic Englishry: writers took pleasure in tinging the ordinary, pleasant English landscape with a numinous otherness.[610] That quintessential work of Victorian classical fantasy, Richmond's *Venus and Anchises*, prominently features a grove of blossoming apple trees, which might have been modelled on some originals growing in Greece or Italy, but are more likely to derive from a source much closer to home: the flowery gardens that grew around Richmond's house in the London suburbs.[611] *Venus and Anchises* assimilates mythic Greece to an idealised British countryside. In his review, Alfred Higgins identifies this aspect as the pinnacle of the painting's many reconciliations of opposing entities: the moon and sun, day and night, winter and spring, and, finally, North and South:

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[608] Richard Jenkyns, 'Hellenism in Victorian Painting,' in *Rediscovering Hellenism: The Hellenic Inheritance and the English Imagination*, ed. Clarke, G. W., and J. C. Eade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 106.
[609] Piggott, 'Milton's "Comus,"' 20-21, 27.
[610] Jenkyns, *Dignity and Decadence*, 288.
[611] Reynolds, *William Blake Richmond,* 82-83.

> Nowhere perhaps is the sudden outburst of spring more lovely than in this England of ours. No wonder then that when an English artist sees the goddess of love, robed in tints of yellow roses, descend upon the earth, driving before her all things that wear the dull colours of winter, the verdure that spreads itself beneath her feet has a northern greenness, and the flowers that break so profusely into blossom about her are the apple-blossoms of an English orchard, though the deep sapphire of the distant mountains and the gloomy background of pine forest tell of a land of southern passion and romance.[612]

Richmond travelled almost annually to Italy, Greece, or Egypt. When in England, he lived at Beavor Lodge, his home in Hammersmith, then on the semi-rural outskirts of London. The divided parts of Richmond's own life meet in his painting: the lakes and mountains of Italy, the twilight of Greece and Egypt, and his family home in the English springtime.

Richmond's synthesis of Greece and England had many counterparts in art, such as Leighton's *Crenaia, Nymph of the Dargle* (Fig. 62), in which the artist imagines a Greek nymph as the spirit of an Irish river. John Atkinson Grimshaw's *Endymion on Mount Atlas* (1879) portrays Diana as a fairy figure with shimmering dragonfly wings. Charles Sims's *The Little Faun* (1908) imagines an Edwardian garden invaded by a mythic creature (Fig. 63). As active participants in the new mythopoeic age, these artists could and did transfer the world of myth from ancient Greece to modern England. If Arcadia is nowhere, these pictures suggest, then it might be anywhere. The infusion of the spirit of ancient Greece into modern landscapes *re-enchanted* those landscapes for modern eyes. This effect, the restoration to familiar reality of a lost charm, is fantasy's lasting gift to its audiences, a sensation that persists well beyond the momentary excitement of the encounter with the fantasy itself.

[612] Higgins, 'Mr. W. B. Richmond's Work,' 238-9

Coda: Looking for Enchantment

Living in the real world, and dreaming about another one, Victorians built a fantasy universe in their art. Works such as Walter Crane's *Such Sights as Youthful Poets Dream* realised this creative work as a fantastical subject in its own right. What if, the painting asks, we could look up from the pages of a fairy tale and see it come to life before our eyes? What would that look like? How would it feel, to see it? The popularity of fantastical images, stories, and poems in this period is enough to demonstrate that, however fleeting or illusory the relief from reality that these artworks offered, they nonetheless provided an experience that Victorians wanted, even needed, to have. Indulging in fantasy art and literature was both an escape from real life, and a way to make that real life better. Fantasy is a bright thread that weaves through all of Victorian culture, from their novels and poems to their art to their fanciful architecture and domestic decorations. The exercise of the fantastic imagination itself was celebrated as enjoyable and salutary by famous writers, such as Dickens and Ruskin, and anonymous contributors to popular magazines. Fantasy was understood as an integral part of intellectual, and even spiritual, life. The enjoyment, not only of fantasy, but of much of real life depended, as one minor critic opined, on the capacity to suspend disbelief,

> to believe even against knowledge; a belief that borrows more from our feelings, and perhaps our better ones, than from our understandings. You cannot love truly with this ever-vigilant, prying knowledge, for to do so you must take something for granted, and borrow a few fascinations from imagination.[613]

For the Victorians, being able to 'master your mind so as to throw it into a belief' could lead to a happier state of existence.[614] As Leigh Hunt promised, '[i]t is not mere words to say that he who goes through a rich man's park, and sees things in it which never bless the mental eyesight of the possessor, is richer than he. He is richer. More results of pleasure come home to him. The ground is actually more fertile to him: the place haunted with finer shapes.'[615] Cultivating a rich supply of fantastic imaginings could bring the world to life, could cast an

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[613] Eagles, 'The Natural in Art,' 440.
[614] Eagles, 'The Natural in Art,' 440.
[615] Hunt, *Essays*, 70.

enchantment over ordinary places. Alternatively, fantasy could carry people out of their real world entirely, and into a better one, as Oscar Wilde argued in 1882:

> From the mean squalor of the sordid life that limits him, the dreamer or the idyllist may soar on poesy's viewless wings, may traverse with fawn-skin and spear the moonlit heights of Cithæron though Faun and Bassarid dance there no more. Like Keats he may wander through the old-world forests of Latmos, or stand like Morris on the galley's deck with the Viking when king and galley have long since passed away.[616]

Wilde's praise of the power of fantasy comes from his famous lecture, 'The Renaissance of English Art,' and British art did in fact rise to the challenge of supplying its audiences with all the fantastic visions that Wilde conjured for them. John Collier's *Maenads* (1886) brought the wild revels of mythic Greece to life. Paton's *A Dream of Latmos* (1879) and Hughes's *Endymion* allowed audiences to envision the magical, romantic scenes of Keats's poem (Fig. 64). In addition to realising literary fantasies, Victorian painters also invented their own stories, as in Edward Matthew Hale's *Mermaids' Rock* (1894), in which a mediaeval ship rushes to its doom though mermaid-haunted waves (Fig. 65).

The world of Victorian fantasy is vast, and this thesis has explored only a few of its major thoroughfares, leaving much material unexplored, and awaiting further study. Their literature and criticism abound with references to the old and new fantasies that formed the substance of their imaginative universe. Illustration, barely touched on in this thesis, formed a significant body of new art, that introduced popular fantasies into the home. Domestic spaces were further enlivened by fanciful furnishings in any number of historic or exotic styles, and animated by amateur fairy plays or legendary tableaus, akin to the re-enacted battle of St George and the dragon performed by Crane and his wife and friends in 1908. Fantasy was everywhere in the nineteenth century, from the stage to the parlour to the art gallery. Its roots stretched back to Middle English works such as *Gawain and the Green Knight*, and its influence is still present in the fantasies of today. Much remains to be learnt about nineteenth-century fantasy art, and about how it impinged upon other art forms of its day.

The foundations of nineteenth-century fantasy were laid by Romantic poets, painters, and theorists, but the great edifice of fantasy was built up by Victorian creators. For instance,

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[616] Oscar Wilde, *Essays*, ed. Robert Ross, 4th ed. (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1913), 139.

fairy paintings, largely an innovation of the Romantic period, became a Victorian institution through the work of Richard Dadd, Joseph Noel Paton, Richard Doyle, and John Anster Fitzgerald, among many others. These fantasy artworks allowed Victorians to enjoy imaginary encounters, in this case with 'a smaller, more fragile, more magical version of themselves.'[617] Fairy paintings drew from existing poetry and folklore, but also inspired stories of their own – a single collection of pictures by Richard Doyle prompted both the poet William Allingham and the folklorist Andrew Lang to compose stories to accompany them.[618] Such paintings invited their audiences not only to imagine themselves among the pictured fairies, but to dream that they might be present in the real world, just hidden under a leaf or around a corner. 'The enchantment of the fairies lies in their power to work a little magic on the world, to make it once more a wondrous place, to turn modernity into fairyland.'[619]

These moments of enchantment were contingent on the artist's skill in inventing sufficiently plausible fantasies, worthy of suspending one's disbelief to enjoy them. The artist Richard Doyle's entire fame rested on his capacity to realise his fantasy scenes. He was identified in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* as 'the man who had been in Elfland,' an expert in the minutiae of the miniature world of the fairies.[620] In fact, his work ranged across the spectrum of Victorian fantasy, from pastoral idylls to chivalric adventure. Doyle's watercolour painting, *The Dragon of Wantley* (undated), is somewhat unusual, in that the monster and the hero who challenges it are not fairy-sized, but on a human scale (Fig. 66). Still, '[n]o living naturalist knows so much about dragons as Doyle,' his admirer warmly asserted.[621] A hero in armour brandishes a sword at the lively dragon, who looks up at him with, as one commentator put it, 'an aspect suggestive of irritated feeling and bad language.'[622] The picture, based on a comic ballad preserved in *Percy's Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, leaves us in no doubt as to the outcome of the battle. The hero is silhouetted, like Leighton's Perseus, against the sunlight, and like Turner's Jason, has his weapon at the

[617] Bown, *Fairies in Nineteenth Century Art*, 11.
[618] Andrew Lang, *The Princess Nobody: A Tale of Fairyland* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1884); William Allingham, *In Fairyland: Pictures from the Elf World, by Richard Doyle* (London: Longmans & Co., 1869.)
[619] Bown, *Fairies in Nineteenth Century Art*, 197.
[620] 'The Pictures of Richard Doyle,' *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 137, no. 834, April 1885, 485, 489.
[621] 'Pictures of Richard Doyle,' 485, 489.
[622] 'Pictures of Richard Doyle' 489.

ready, evincing 'stern purpose in the turn of the crestless helmet, visible victory in the drawing back of the prepared right arm behind the steady point.'[623]

The Dragon of Wantley is a quintessential Victorian fantasy, at once a heroic and a whimsical picture, suited to an era which produced Lewis Carroll's nonsense monster, the Jabberwocky, and Kenneth Grahame's Reluctant Dragon. It borrows the trick of matching its setting to its subject from more serious counterparts in the heroic-fantasy genre, such as Rivière's *In Manus Tuas, Domine*, and Burne-Jones's *Merciful Knight*. As in Burne-Jones's picture, in which **'**the associations of the very colour of the landscape impart to us horror appropriate to the subject,' the shadowed form of Doyle's dragon matches the dark green gloom of the forest surrounding it.[624] It is evident that, as soon as the hero steps down from his sunlit ledge, he will be in the dragon's territory, and that in this 'weird wood, all the growths of which help to suggest impure enchantments and powers of evil,' anything might happen.[625]

Fantasy artworks such as Doyle's *Dragon*, Fitzgerald's *The Dream After the Masked Ball*, or Hale's *Mermaids' Rock*, were double-sided. These works both realised their fantastical subjects and made reality fantastical. Through fantasy art, the forest, the sea, or even an ordinary bedroom, took on associations with fairy tales and fabulous creatures. Doyle's *Dragon* is made easier to believe in by its perfect integration into its sylvan environment, a realistically rendered rocky hillside, complete with boulders, moss, and tangled tree roots. At the same time, the hillside itself takes on an aura of enchantment, by playing host to the dragon. These fantastic visions could confer their allure on real forests as well for enthusiasts, for whom 'in spite of the geographers and the disenchanting encyclopædias, and that general suffusion of knowledge (upon all of which we congratulate ourselves) – life, in spite of all these, is still the vast forest, mapped out, indeed, but by them and theirs untraced.'[626]

Fantasy art conferred its enchantment on more than just the landscape. Images of ghosts, fairies, and mysterious visions encouraged belief in the existence of unseen things, of fantastic possibilities just out of sight. The revival of the Grail quest came at a critical moment, when waning traditional faith, modern science, and the rise of rationalism all

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[623] Ruskin, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, *Modern Painters II,* 259.
[624] F. G. Stephens, 'Edward Burne Jones, A.R.A.,' *The Portfolio: An Artistic Periodical* 16, January 1885, 221.
[625] 'Exhibition of the Royal Academy,' *The Times* 29558, 5.
[626] Gosse, *Aspects and Impressions*, 263.

conspired to hollow out the places where belief once held fast. As one writer observed, '[a]s dogmatic religion slips more and more from under their hold, there is often a dry emptiness left in that part of the soul which faith has deserted and which no excitement can satisfy.'[627] In its place, fantasies of Galahad, Arthur, Merlin, and the Grail arose, with Tennyson as their champion and visual artists as his vanguard:

> like Dante in the under world, he skirts the margin of the darkest places of modern doubt and difficulty, and faithfully overseeing them, yet returns with the image of a fairer reality ever present to the eye of his imagination. It is the continued yearning after this, … which makes him advance and then wistfully turn back, to break into sad, yet not despondent song.[628]

Art was key to the full enjoyment of these legends. Putting the story of the Grail into words risked diminishing it, by instilling it with too concrete and limited a significance, as one of Tennyson's critics observed of 'The Holy Grail,' '[t]he old story seems now and again to be too directly divorced from its real ground – from its deepest, because undefined, human interest and meaning.'[629] In art, on the other hand, the Grail was kept just out of view, or present only as a beautiful, burning, and symbolically ambiguous cup. Such art, as Burne-Jones once wished, kept 'all the highest things secret and remote from people; if they wanted to look they should go a hard journey to see.'[630] Fantasy art invited those who struggled to really *believe* in their religion, to entertain instead a suspended disbelief, by holding forth not a real divine truth, but an imaginary one. Nor was the legend of the Holy Grail the only way that fantasy invited the sacred and the transcendent back into the world. In the ambiance of undefinable significance cultivated by MacDonald in his novels, or in allegorical fantasies inspired by *The Faerie Queene*, the entire world became a place steeped in secret meaning and higher purpose.

Fantasy art opened a door to a lost realm of natural magic, of Greek isles inhabited by dangerous enchantresses, woods haunted by Pan and the nymphs, and the small realm of the fairies, 'peopled by dragons and their heroic conquerors, witches, "white ladies," imps full of

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[627] Emilie Isabel Barrington, 'Is a Great School of Art Possible in the Present Day?' *The Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review* 5, no. 26, April 1879, 730.
[628] 'Art VII – Mr. Tennyson and the Round Table,' 202.
[629] 'Art VII – Mr. Tennyson and the Round Table,' 204.
[630] Edward Burne-Jones, quoted in Georgiana Burne-Jones, *Memorials,* vol. 2, 258.

gentle mischief, and fairies clothed with tender grace, … a very attractive region in which it is a temptation in these days of realism to linger.'[631] In fantastic allegories, good and evil walked, embodied, in the form of knights and ladies, fauns and enchantresses, at once human and not. These paintings, again, did more than depict fantastical creatures; they made their ordinary contents – trees, flowers, sky, and water – fantastical in their own way as well. Like the Grail, which lit up Arthur's hall with 'a sunbeam more clearer by seven times than ever they saw day,' and made all the knights in the hall appear 'fairer than ever they saw afore,' the gaze of the fantasist cast a spell over the real world.[632]

The power of fantasy to re-enchant the world is symbolically re-enacted in Arthur Machen's *The Great Return*, in which the Holy Grail's brief return to Earth leaves behind 'a world rectified and glowing, as if an inner flame shone in all things, and behind all things.'[633] This power is likewise represented, in a semi-classical guise, in Kenneth Grahame's children's story, *The Wind in the Willows.* First published in 1908, Grahame's story distils the many facets of Victorian fantasy into one long daydream about a secret world of talking animals, whose adventures run the full gamut of Victorian fantasy, from surreal comedy (how *does* Mr. Toad steal a car intended for a human driver?) to the high drama of the Mole's flight from unknown monsters in a dark wood. In one chapter, Grahame's anthropomorphic animal characters have an adventure that dramatically illustrates how a fantastical encounter radiates wonder over the whole world. While searching the river for a lost baby otter, the Mole and the Water Rat hear a strange, piping music, and at the same time notice that the familiar landscape looks quite different from usual. 'On either side of them, as they glided onwards, the rich meadow-grass seemed that morning of a freshness and a greenness unsurpassable. Never had they noticed the roses so vivid, the willow-herb so riotous, the meadow-sweet so odorous and pervading.'[634] At the end of their journey the Mole has a brief glimpse of Pan himself, the source of the enchanting music and the god of small creatures and the wild wood, 'for one moment breathless and intense, vivid on the morning sky; and still, as he looked, he lived; and still, as he lived, he wondered.'[635]

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[631] 'Retrospect of Literature, Art, And Science: Art,' *The Annual Register, A Review of Public Events at Home and Abroad,* 119, 1877, 362.
[632] Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, vol. 2, 171.
[633] Machen, *The Great Return,* 62.
[634] Kenneth Grahame, *The Wind in the Willow*s, 102nd ed. (London: Methuen & Co., 1951 (1908)), 91.
[635] Grahame, *The Wind in the Willow*s, 93.

Few moments in Victorian literature (for Grahame lived most of his life in the Victorian era) can match this one for the beauty and clarity of its effect. Fantasy, as Grahame's story shows, touches all those who are willing to draw on its powers, from the most poetic spirits, like the Water Rat, to the most prosaic, the Mole. It welcomes, comforts astonishes and delights – and when, at the last, the book is closed, or we turn away from the painting, it stays within us, allowing us to see the world in a new light.

'We should meet the centaur and the dragon,' J. R. R. Tolkien pronounced, 'and then perhaps suddenly behold, like the ancient shepherds, sheep, and dogs, and horses – and wolves. This recovery fairy-stories help us to make.'[636] In so saying, he echoed the words of an earlier evangelist of fantasy, G. K. Chesterton, who wrote of fairy tales that their primary purpose was to accomplish the needful re-enchantment of the world: 'These tales say that apples were golden only to refresh the forgotten moment when we found that they were green.'[637] The shining fruit on the tree in Leighton's *The Garden of the Hesperides* are like no fruit in reality, but they might prompt a more appreciative glance at the apples on the tree in one's own garden.

Victorians had real reasons to feel disenchanted with their modern world – reasons which the prologue to Morris's *The Earthly Paradise* articulates,

> Forget six counties overhung with smoke,
> Forget the snorting steam and piston stroke,
> Forget the spreading of the hideous town;
> Think rather of the pack-horse on the down,
> And dream of London, small, and white, and clean,
> The clear Thames bordered by its gardens green;[638]

The world that Morris's famous prologue offers as an alternative to modern Britain is, while superficially historical, in fact a fantasy as otherworldly as that of any of the folktales that follow. It is an ideal England, like a picture in a children's book. Escaping into it is thus a matter, not of strenuous and costly historical revivalism, but of imagination alone.

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[636] Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, 57.
[637] Chesterton, *Orthodoxy,* 46.
[638] Morris, *The Earthly Paradise*, vol. 1, 2.

Edmund Gosse put the problem of modern living in less physical terms. The trouble he saw fantasists escaping from was not pollution and squalor, but rampant rationality. Still, the means of escape from it were the same:

> The world is very old, and it is troubled about many things; it is full of tiresome exigencies and solemn frivolities. The denizens of it are, as a rule, incapable of seeing or conceiving wonders. If the Archangel Michael appeared at noonday to an ordinary member of the House of Commons, the legislator would mistake his celestial visitant for an omnibus conductor. He would rejoice at having sufficient common sense and knowledge of the world to make so intelligent an error. But those who are privileged to walk within the confines of fairyland are not of this class. They are members of a little clan who still share the adolescence of the world; for, as this world is, in the main, dusty, dry, old, and given to fussing about questions of finance, and yet has nooks where the air is full of dew and silence, so among men there are still always a few who bear no mark upon their foreheads, and move undistinguished in the crowd, in whom, nevertheless, the fairies still confide.[639]

Gosse's point is persuasively put – the more so, as he illustrates his argument with a fairy-story of his own. Once upon a time, Gosse might have said, the Archangel Michael came down from Heaven to pay a visit to the House of Commons, but because he was not *expected* to be there, no one noticed him at all.

In fact, it is very difficult to talk about fantasy without calling on fantasy itself to come to one's aid. The nature of fantasy, its attractions, and its effects, are not readily susceptible to abstraction from the *substance* of fantasy. The best argument for the importance of fantasy art in the Victorian period is contained, not in these chapters, but in the paintings that illustrate them. These pictures say more of Victorian fantasy art's technical accomplishment, originality, and lasting powers of enchantment, than any further words on the subject could convey.

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[639] Gosse, *Aspects and Impressions*, 262.

Figures

1. Edward Drummond Young, *'Masque of St George and the Dragon' Mr. Walter Crane, Mrs Walter Crane, Miss Cecile Walton, Mrs E.A. Walton*, 1908. Platinum/palladium print, dimensions unknown. Edinburgh, National Galleries of Scotland, Scottish National Portrait Gallery Collection.

2. James Thurber, *Look Out, Here They Come Again!*, 1935. Ink on paper, dimensions unknown. Reproduced in *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism,* ed. Alfred H. Barr, Jr. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1936), 181, plate 581.

3. Thomas Cole, *The Titan's Goblet*, 1833. Oil on canvas, 49.2 x 41cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

4. Herbert Draper, *Calypso's Isle,* 1897. Oil on canvas, 84 x 147.3 cm. Manchester Art Gallery.

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