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Victorian Verse Satire

There is no single book on Victorian verse satire, and the general picture that emerges from studies of Victorian poetry is that it was serious, earnest, introspective, personal, often elegiac, often lyrical, and that it pursued beauty rather than ugliness. But as I shall show, there was a good deal of satire in Victorian poetry, although it tends to go unnoticed, since it usually occurs incidentally in poems that one does not think of as exclusively satirical. In fact, it is the incidental poetry that interests me more, since generally speaking the long satirical Victorian poems, such as Bulwer Lytton's *The New Timon* and Alfred Austin's *The Season* are very poor stuff: they are written in the worn-out eighteenth-century heroic couplet tradition; they are tired both thematically and technically. In no sense are they in any poetic mainstream. The absence of critical interest in Victorian verse satire may be due to the Victorians themselves. One often takes the cue, in writing a literary history, from the age itself. The Victorian poets were slightly ashamed of satire, doubted whether it was real poetry, and tried to reserve pride of place for life-enhancing, grandiloquent, positive and beautiful poetry. Most of them were wedded to the notion of the bardic and the poet as hero, and had a dignified image of what the poet and poetry could and should do. Time and time again one finds the status of satire called into question. Patmore, in an essay called "The Decay of Modern Satire"¹, thought there had been no significant satire since the Anti-Jacobin poetry of the 1790s, and he even ruled Byron out of court. This hesitancy resulted in the waning of the eighteenth-century tradition of satire, and a reluctance or inability to recognise satire when it did occur. Most of the major poets were cautious and distrustful of it, and were alarmed at its destructive tendencies. Experience had taught them to regard societies as more fragile than they had previously appeared, and they thought that a poet such as Heine was too destructive to be of any use in rebuilding or recasting society. They took their lead from the Romantics, who were anxious to promote the poet as a dignified priest

devoid of instinctive satirical tendencies. Wordsworth referred to the "scorn and condemnation personal/ That would profane the sanctity of verse."² Naturally enough, the feeling that poetry should be concerned with beauty took it away from satire, which was traditionally more hospitable to ugly grotesques. Satire required ugly sounds for its expression, and there was a fear that the most honey-tongued genius could have his voice made bitter once he courted the vituperative muse. Perhaps there was a remembrance of how Milton's mellifluous poetry had been spoilt when it had to make room for names like Colkitto, Macdonnel and Galasp.³ There was concern that lines could be damaged when they had to mention O'Connell—as Tennyson did in *The Wise, the Pure, the lights of our dull clime*.⁴ In Arnold especially we find explicit statements on the status of satire. In his prose he is able to exhibit a strongly satiric instinct, but the tone that came most naturally to him in his poetry was the elegiac rather than the critical or spiteful: he does not resort to the satirical voice when he visits the Grande Chartreuse, where the medieval way of life had prolonged itself into modern times with the oddity of Rip Van Winkle. In his famous inaugural lecture as Professor of Poetry at Oxford (14 November 1857), he spoke up for tolerance and the adequate view of life. He preferred the vital freshness, charm and geniality of Aristophanes to the "sceptical, frivolous and dissolute" tone of the key Roman satirist Menander.⁵ Arnold's ideal was to "see life steadily and see it whole", as he envisaged Sophocles did:

But be his

My special thanks, whose even-balanced soul,
From first youth tested up to extreme old age,
Business could not make dull, nor passion wild;
Who saw life steadily, and saw it whole.⁶

Seen in a certain light there is a limited view of poetry here: many theorists of poetry have thought that passion is a necessary ingredient in poetry. In Arnold's opinion the adequate view of life was 'the most invincible tendency to live', whereas the satiric, however much it was concerned indirectly with the prolongation of life, was more associated with the force of death. Menander, in Arnold's view, contained "the seed of death".⁷ Of almost equal significance was Arnold's onslaught on Horace, the darling of cultivated man from the Renaissance onwards: "Horace wants seriousness . . . the best men in the best ages have never been thoroughly satisfied with Horace. If human life were complete without faith, without enthusiasm, without energy, Horace, like

Menander, would be the perfect interpreter of human life."⁸ But it's not, Arnold is anxious to say. Arnold, coming nearer to his own time, was critical of the eighteenth-century frame of mind:

it proceeds by ratiocination, antithesis, ingenious turns and conceits. The poetry is often eloquent, and always, in the hands of such masters as Dryden and Pope, clever; but it does not take us much below the surface of things, it does not give us the emotion of seeing things in their truth and beauty.⁹

Arnold was, in fact, out of tune with the century whose most significant poetic achievement was satire. And of his contemporaries, there was the grave warning before his eyes of the dangers of inflicting wounds on others:

Therefore a secret unrest
Tortured thee, brilliant and bold!
Therefore triumph itself
Tasted amiss to thy soul.
Therefore, with blood of thy foes,
Trickled in silence thine own.
Therefore the victor's heart
Broke on the field of his fame.¹⁰

Perhaps at the back of Arnold's mind, all during his life, was the belief expressed by his father Thomas Arnold in "The Poetry of Common Life" (1831) that poetry "exalts and ennobles us, and puts us into a higher state of mind than that which we are commonly living in."¹¹ Given beliefs of this kind, it was only natural that the poets and readers should eschew poetry that they considered degrading. The civilization was too committed to the idea of progress and the ultimate perfectibility of man to contemplate a harsh view of itself with equanimity. It was too committed to ideas of reform and an organised society to harbour much toleration for the necessarily destructive and anarchic view of it that satire espouses. Tennyson's sketch of the poet in *The Poet* does not leave much room for hate:

The poet in a golden clime was born,
With golden stars above;
Dowered with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn,
The love of love.
He saw through life and death, through good and ill,
He saw through his own soul.
The marvel of the everlasting will,
An open scroll.

There was no room on the scroll for rude words. These then were the prevailing attitudes, and they had a degree of force, but I hope this essay will show that there *was* a satiric tradition in Victorian poetry, and that verse satire did not end, as a significant force in nineteenth-century poetry, with the death of Byron.

Rather belatedly I offer some working definitions of satire. Satire is an identification of and a protest against those adverse conditions of human life which are regulable or eradicable by acts of will. It has command of a wide range of tone, from the disarming Chaucerian smile to the animal savagery of Swift. It attacks follies and vices embodied in both invented figures and actual historical personages. It tends to deal with man in his social contexts and in circumstances where his values and behaviour impinge on others. It is on the fringe of other modes: of the comic, of the elegiac (when it bewails a decline from primitive virtue); and of the tragic (when it laments the macrocosmically foolish situation of man). When satire draws close to the tragic, as it does with Swift and Goya for instance, it is on the point of ceasing to be satire, since it deals with endemic elements in the human condition that are not reformable:

Goya had the laugh—
But can what is corrupt be cured by laughter?¹²

At its best it remains art because it is creative. Good satire is not crude invective or name-calling. If there is a specific living victim for satire to attack, the poet creates a vivid rival image of that victim in art, whose palpability and potency is superior to the living person's. The satirist creates a vacuum, and his own substitutions rush in to fill the place. The creative drive in the satirical poet is usually more powerful than the reformative, and in most cases the wish to create a fully realised ridiculous world is a stronger motive than a sense of indignation. Chaucer would have been the first to be sorry if he thought his satire had reduced the incidence of effete Prioresses (always supposing it could); Praed and Clough would have been the first to be sorry if they thought their verse had seriously reduced the incidence of empty-headed girls. Satire often looks like a radical literary mode, but there are distinctions to be made between the satire that is genuinely radical and criticizes the very bases of a society, and the satire that criticizes behaviour not conforming to the theoretical bases. In some societies—such as Chaucer's for instance—the deviance from theoretical standards of godliness was so prevalent, and the observance of goodness so distinguished in the

breach of it rather than the honouring, that one wonders whether the standards can in any sense be called "norms". Even so, until the Romantic Movement, it was assumed that most societies had enough moral presence of mind to be able to make some formulation of good standards. After the Romantic Movement, there tended to be less faith in the *social* mind and it was more common to believe that the highest levels of awareness could only be achieved by individuals. These individuals were never anxious to attribute any moral conscience to a consensus.

Satire that takes its stand on the righteousness of the individual and the wickedness of the majority is the *most* radical; this was the kind of satire that Byron wrote, and, insofar as Victorian poets were heirs to the Romantic Movement, this is the kind of poetry that they wrote. However, many of them remained conservative enough (by standards of some modern radicalism) to believe that there *was* a prospect for the good life in some kind of social context—if the social fabric could be made anew. In this they were the heirs of Blake and Shelley, and Byron. The latter especially is not famous for his explicit views on what good society can do for the individual, but he states implicitly that the best forms of life are impossible (especially for him) without a sophisticated social structure. Victorian satire is a mixture of the individualism that was naturally suspicious of social existence, and the progressivism that placed great faith in the power of social discipline to achieve worthy humanitarian ends. Like most of the men of letters, the Victorian poets shared, at some time or other in their careers, in the general air of confidence that was around at the time. There was hope in the air, a notion that the immediate age was going to bring better things, and that future centuries would be able to recognise the improved development of man as a species. But some of that confidence looked like arrogance and presumption, and there was a facile belief in the effectiveness of technology to make radical improvements in the human lot that was only shattered (in the public imagination) in our century by critics of H.G. Wells.

Poets are congenitally suspicious of mechanical philosophies, living as closely as they do to organic concepts of life. The Victorian poets speak with dissident voices against excessive faith in tight social organisation.

Locksley Hall (1842) strikes an early note:

Cursed be the social wants that sin against the strength of youth!
 Cursed be the social lies that warp us from the living truth!
 Cursed be the sickly forms that err from honest Nature's rule!
 Cursed be the gold that gilds the straitened forehead of the fool! (lines 59-62)

grimy nakedness dragging his trucks
 And laying his trams in a poisoned gloom; slaves who have
left his coal all turned into gold
 (I, 336-40).

There is plenty of poetic and satirical power here, and though the poet does not have the resources at his disposal that can show the elaborate and incriminating connections in society, as in *Bleak House*, *Little Dorrit*, *Great Expectations* and *Our Mutual Friend*, he finds his targets with a sure aim. What the poets lack, by comparison, is the scope to *show* the elaborate social machine in action in a top-to-bottom picture. The sheer comprehensiveness of the slice of life technique was something new to Victorian fiction, and did not really have artistic precedents of any kind. The novel could *show* where poetry could only *tell*, and when it came to direct telling and naming names, the major Victorian poets became distinctively uncomfortable, since close political infighting was not in accord with the view that they liked to take of themselves as inspired, vatic figures. The important poets name names very little, and when they do it can be dangerously close to bathos. An example that comes to mind is in Patmore's Book II of *The Unknown Eros*. Now as a whole *The Unknown Eros* is a difficult and obscure poem, maundering about the difficult and obscure Cupid and Psyche myth. My experience of reading it is the closest thing I can imagine to being shoved blindfolded into a vat of warm Guinness. Most of it sounds something like this:

I mind me still
 I *did* respire the lonely auras sweet,
 I *did* the blest abodes behold, and, at the mountains' feet
 Bathed in the holy Stream by Hermon's thymy hill.

(II, XI, 50-4)

But Patmore, who was a stiff-necked, aristocratic, Roman-Catholic convert Tory, took it into his mind to introduce into this tremulous and ethereal poetry the palpable figures of Newman and Gladstone, the former provided with a local habitation and a name all too familiar:

Lo, yonder, where our little English band,
 With peace in heart and wrath in hand,
 Have dimly ta'en their stand,
 Sweetly the light
 Shines from the solitary peak at Edgbaston,
 Whence, o'er the dawning Land,
 Gleam the gold blazonries of Love irate
 'Gainst the black flag of Hate. (II, IV, 12-19)

In 1874 Gladstone had written an incendiary pamphlet against the ultramontane Catholics, after the Vatican Council adopted the dogma of Papal Infallibility in 1870. From his "solitary peak" at Edgbaston Newman issued a measured reply. Since I went to school in Edgbaston for nine years I can safely assert that this suburb of Birmingham has nothing to do with eros, either known or unknown, and that there are no "peaks": there is no hill there that need alarm even the most geriatric cyclist. In the Victorian age the only eminence in Edgbaston was Newman himself. The specificity of time and place is a moment of real bathos in the poem, not merely because Edgbaston (or 'Edgbarston' as the upper-class natives call it) is not one of the more elegant or resonant of the English place-names.

The minor poets, writing much more ephemeral political verse, are less frightened of naming names, but their poetry is in constant danger of being forgotten, because of its obscurity and the outdated nature of its political judgements. I am thinking of poets like Ebenezer Jones and Thomas Hood. The poetic diction of the Victorians did not adapt itself well to direct political judgement, which needs the kind of precision, archness and urbanity available to the Augustans. Augustan satire was usually conservative: its strategy was to recall England to the righteous standards of former days, and to ward off the dangers of innovation. We are used, in this century, to thinking of conservatives as intellectual dead-wood, but in the early eighteenth century, a lot of the most lively and accomplished thought came from conservatives. The political battles of that time seem so far from us that it is hard for us to take sides with any passion, and we do not bring to the poetry strong political commitments. As many scholars have said, the eighteenth century stubbornly resists modern attempts to make it available to "relevance". But because the Victorian period is nearer ours, and because we are still dealing with many of the issues it raised, Victorian politics is not isolated in this way, and our modern political instincts and alignments are bound to count for something. Prejudice and obscurantism, which can endow eighteenth-century political poetry with vigour and piquancy, suddenly seem disturbing in the nineteenth century. Hence we find that in *Maud* the act of imaginative fusion between the personal world and the political world is of a very high order, but at the same time a part of our minds reacts unfavourably to the notion that therapeutic cures for nations and individuals can be achieved through the solidarity of war, and Tennyson is not entirely protected by his *persona*. When we turn to rather more direct political poetry, we discover more unacceptable views. In "*Woe to the double-tongued*" and "*Hail Briton*" there is crude anti-Celtic feeling, and a reluctance to advance:

Men loud against all forms of power,
 Unfurnished foreheads, iron lungs,
 And voluble with windy tongues
 To compass all things in an hour.¹³ (lines 49-52).

He dreads what he calls the "noise of hands that disarrange/The social engine," and like Dryden he uses the word "innovation" as an adverse term. His ideal picture of political liberties, in "*You ask me, why, though ill at ease*", is that they should "slowly broaden down/From precedent to precedent." This poetry does not have the vigour and poetic ease of the best Augustan poetry. Tennyson liked to think in images, and the conditions he was dealing with here did not throw up enough.

The Victorian satirist was much happier dealing with social questions than political, since there it is easier to back the right horse. The main topics of social poetry are familiar: the class-divisions, the manners, the broad moral assumptions, the use of riches and the quality of life. Here the poets found help from literary precedent; social poetry is often in danger of getting bogged down in the ephemeral, but it is also easy to tie it in to more universal malaises. Alfred Austin was able to observe the same degrading characteristics in *his* London as Byron observed in his, and as Horace observed in Rome.¹⁴ It was not only that there was nothing new under the sun, but that a literary tradition helped him to see certain immemorial vices.

Social satire varies in tone a good deal: at the dark end of the spectrum we have the demented outcries of the hero of *Maud*; at the light end something that is very gentle, and shades off into *vers de société*. Even in the field of social satire though, we see difficulties facing the Victorians which did not challenge their eighteenth-century predecessors. Pope had a reasonably clear idea of what society should be like; it was comparatively easy for him to identify forces—both as abstractions and as personifications—working against the preservation or the attainment of the ideal. In his image of the good life he would have found a broad measure of agreement, transcending even party differences. In the nineteenth-century such coherence was virtually impossible to find: some poets, for instance, continued to nurture the pastoral dream, but to the decent industrialist the Augustan image of society would have seemed hopelessly backward, and certainly unlikely to improve the desperate lot of the starving millions. The old Augustan theme of the use of riches, so beloved of the eighteenth-century satirist, was becoming harder to use in the Victorian age, since extravagant expenditure could easily be viewed as expansionist, forward-looking activi-

ty. If the poet wished to make poetry out of the "use of riches" theme he was likely to get much more gloomy than his ancestors, since moneyed growth was more and more associated with industrialism and the ruination of the countryside. Faced with the devastations of the grandiose landscape-gardeners of the eighteenth century there was always hope, in Pope's words, that 'laughing Ceres' would "reassume the land". That sanguine expectation was harder to maintain if one looked at a slag heap. In fact, a good deal of the Victorian melancholy experienced by poets confronting enormous mechanised forces is not what I would call satire, but something more akin to elegiac melancholy, in which there is virtually no hope for cure. What was required of the Victorian satirists was not so much a faith that would move mountains as a faith that would stop them being moved. The Victorian poets had a certain amount of faith that they might continue to be unacknowledged legislators of mankind, but this vatic confidence, interestingly enough, did not lead them to cultivate one of the voices of satire: the prophetic voice, the voice Andrew Marvell is using in *Tom May's Death*:

When the Sword glitters ore the Judges head,
 And fear has Coward Churchmen silenced,
 Then is the Poets time, 'tis then he drawes,
 And single fights forsaken Vertues cause. (lines 63-6)

Perhaps the last poet to cultivate this voice was Wordsworth, notably in *The Prelude*. Byron tried to convince himself and his readers, in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, that he was reaching for a prophetic, almost impersonal voice, but the bid seems to me a shade thin. By the time Alfred Austin was after a similar effect in 1861 the pose is very unconvincing indeed. There are times when Tennyson made a bid for the prophetic voice, but in the trial edition of *Maud* there are lines in which the hero, speaking perhaps for Tennyson too, expresses a lack of confidence in it:

What use for a single mouth to rage
 At the rotten creak of the old machine;
 Though it makes friends weep and enemies smile,
 That here in the face of a watchful age,
 The sons of a gray-beard-ridden isle
 Should dance in a round of an old routine,
 And a few great families lead the reels,
 While pauper manhood lies in the dirt,
 And Favour and Wealth with gilded heels
 Trample service and tried desert.¹⁵

This is a grim picture, reminiscent of other gloomy satires down the ages. It was hard for Victorian satirists to find secure resting places or vantage points. Even Victorian religion failed to provide the necessary confidence and stability: there too one was likely, as Clough found at Oxford, to get sucked into a vortex of questioning and doubt. Far from providing a centre of certainty, Victorian religion was liable to provide further items for the satirist. There are in fact some very good satires on this topic; one thinks of Tennyson's *St. Simeon Stylites* of 1842, described by Leigh Hunt as "a powerfully graphic, and in some respects appalling satire on the pseudo-aspirations of egotistical asceticism and superstition".¹⁶ Browning's *Caliban upon Setebos* is another, but this poses a thorny problem, since no one has ever agreed, either in Browning's time or subsequently, what the poem is about, and what religious abuse is being specifically attacked. This is inevitably the problem when satire operates in a wide-open society rather than a closed one. A poem such as *A Bishop Orders his Tomb* has also been regarded as in some sense satirical when one considers its immediate occasion.¹⁷ From a completely different camp Hopkins produced *Andromeda*, a rare venture into the genre for him. Even more obscure than Browning, the poem depicts Christ as Perseus rescuing the Church on its rock from the new powers of Antichrist.

If it is in general true that one does not find the lonely voice raised in broad condemnation of political and social life, nevertheless there are points at which the continuation of the satirical impulse is strong in Victorian poetry. The satirical pen-portrait, for instance, is much in evidence; there are vigorous examples in *Maud*. One finds the dandy:

- That jewelled mass of millinery,
That oiled and curled Assyrian Bull
Smelling of musk and of insolence; (I, 232-4)
- the *nouveau* who has bought himself a commission:
a padded shape,
A bought commission, a waxen face,
A rabbit mouth that is ever agape; (I, 358-60)
- the modish clergyman:
The snowy-banded, dilettante,
Delicate-handed priest; (I, 310-11)
- the peace-at-any-price man:
This broad-brimmed hawker of holy things,
Whose ear is crammed with his cotton, and rings
Even in dreams to the chink of his pence. (I, 370-2)

These strong portraits derive their strength from the fact that Tennyson was not fighting with shadows, but with people vividly before him, and closely related to his obsessions. Feeling is important in satire; Dr. Johnson tells the story of Pope thrown into a state of agitation by the onslaught of his enemies:

I have heard Mr. Richardson relate, that he attended his father the painter on a visit, when one of Cibber's pamphlets came into the hands of Pope, who said, 'These things are my diversion.' They sat by him while he perused it, and saw his features written with anguish; and young Richardson said to his father, when they returned, that he hoped to be preserved from such diversion as had been that day the lot of Pope.¹⁸

Whatever the actual truth of the story, Johnson feels it is important to tell it, to remind us that satire can be as much enmeshed in personal feeling as other poetry. Satire needs a drive, and a prime drive is personal malice. Even before one sees it confirmed by Rader it is not difficult to see that *Maud* is fuelled by private anger.¹⁹ It shows in the drafts and the trial-edition. The *nouveau* was more fully delineated prior to publication:

Captain! he to hold a command!
 He can hold a cue, he can pocket a ball;
 And sure not a bantam cockerel lives
 With a weaker crow upon English land,
 Whether he boast of a horse that gains,
 Or cackle his own applause, when he gives
 A filthy story at second hand,
 Where the point is missed, and the filth remains.²⁰

This was dropped, because it could be in danger of distorting the lineaments of the poem at this point and also because Tennyson may have felt that private vindictiveness was beginning to run away with him; almost certainly he incorporated into the portrait some features of the rich and vacuous grandson of Bobby Shafto who married Rosa Baring. In satire through the ages some of the deepest and most disturbed feeling has been invested in portraits of women, and Tennyson provides a characteristic example. The failure to capture Rosa (a member of the rich banking family) left its mark, and she appears in *To Rosa*, *The Gardener's Daughter*, *Locksley Hall*, *Pelleas and Ettarre*, *Maud*, and *Three Sonnets to a Coquette*. The sonnets, written in 1836 but not published until 1865, express disillusionment, and conclude that "the form, the form alone is eloquent." Another poem possibly associated

with Rosa, "*How thought you that this thing could captivate*", was never published in Tennyson's life-time; it may have grown from the pique he felt when he had been rejected.²¹ One of its powerful images, of the queen upon the playing card, was re-used in *Aylmer's Field*. The balance in the line "An angel's form—a waiting-woman's heart" has a Popean ring to it. It is interesting that Tennyson suppressed the one poem in the series that had really strong feeling in it. Some of the feelings about Rosa never even reached the trial-edition, doubtless because Tennyson was afraid of artistic distortion. There is harsher treatment of Maud in the following lines than in the stanzas where she is described as "faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null":

Well, I was half-afraid but I shall not die for her sake,
Not be her 'savage' and 'O the monster'! their delicate ways!
Their finical interlarding of French and the giggle and shrug!
Taken with Maud—not so—for what could she prove but a curse.²²

The only Victorian poem that comes at all close to *Maud* for sheer power is Swinburne's *Triumph of Time*, which also taps the negative resources of anger and despair as well as the positive ones of love and enthusiasm. The poem grew, most likely, from an unsatisfactory encounter (so brief that it could not really be called an affair) in the summer of 1862 with Miss Faulkner. Most of the poem is wild, wilful self-pity of a lyrical intensity, but we should remember that Swinburne was not only a beautiful songster, but a satirical writer, whose *Undergraduate Papers* still make one laugh aloud, and who in *Heptalogia* wrote some of the most devastating parodies in a century of devastating parodies. This sudden flash of anger reminds us of the abrupt transitions in *Maud*:

'What should such fellows as I do? 'Nay,
My part were worse if I chose to play;
For the worst is this after all; if they knew me,
Not a soul upon earth would pity me.

And I play not for pity of these; but you,
If you saw with your soul what man am I,
You would praise me at least that my soul all thro'
Clove to you, loathing the lives that lie;
The souls and lips that are bought and sold,
The smiles of silver and kisses of gold,
The lapdog loves that whine as they chew,
The little lovers that curse and cry. (lines 237-48)

As with Shakespeare, to bring a whining dog onto the scene when one is piqued is for Swinburne almost a Pavlovian reaction. Satire of individuals is a curious business, since it often satirises elements in people that cannot be reformed. Some of the grotesques we meet in satire remind us that there is, in art at least, a correlation between physical and mental states so complete that reform is out of the question. If Chaucer's Pardoner, for instance, were to reform he would still be left with a body indicative of past moral degeneracy, and it is probably the case that his bodily state inhibits reform. To look at a person satirically may mean depriving him of some of the elements which constitute varied and flexible humanity, in order to convert him to a limited allegorical machine conveying a certain point of view. One sees this happening in an early poem of Tennyson's, describing a Cambridge acquaintance, Thomas Sunderland. Here are the last two stanzas:

Most delicately hour by hour
 He canvassed human mysteries,
 And trod on silk, as if the winds
 Blew his own praises in his eyes,
 And stood aloof from other minds
 In impotence of fancied power.

With lips depressed as he were meek,
 Himself unto himself he sold:
 Upon himself himself did feed:
 Quiet, dispassionate, and cold,
 And other than his form of creed,
 With chiselled features clear and sleek.²³

Tennyson did not write much more of this kind of thing, perhaps, as Ricks suggests,²⁴ because Sunderland subsequently went mad. There are, however, two important dialect poems that are, in a gentle sense, satirical: *The Northern Farmer: Old Style* and *The Northern Farmer: New Style*. Though critical, these are portraits *con amore*, in a Chaucerian tradition, and in neither does Tennyson have any serious intention of reforming. He is content to delineate.

I have been suggesting that in many respects, Victorian satire does not continue the eighteenth-century traditions, but there is one important field in which there certainly is continuity: artistic controversy. It is vast in area, containing on the one hand high-flown aesthetic debate, and on the other puny, vicious personal literary squabbles. In the latter activities one finds the deployment of that energy and passion I alluded to in surveying the pen-portraits.

There were a number of important literary squabbles during the century. As in previous centuries there were important moral and aesthetic issues at stake, but most of the real energy and interest was concerned with aggression between personalities. It is interesting that Clough, who is generally thought of as the major Victorian verse satirist, did not get himself involved in such quarrels, but Tennyson, who one regards as the aloof bardic figure, did. One of the most famous literary quarrels of the century was between Tennyson and Bulwer Lytton. Lytton's poem *The New Timon* attacked Tennyson for being awarded a pension in 1845; Tennyson believed that Lytton had adversely reviewed his poems in 1832. So Tennyson countered with a poem called *The New Timon, and the Poets*, published anonymously (signed 'Alcibiades') in *Punch* for 28 February 1846. Shakespeare's Timon died with a noble hatred:

So died the Old: here comes the New.
 Regard him; a familiar face:
 I *thought* we knew him: What, it's you,
 The padded man—that wears the stays—

The ninth and tenth stanzas come closer to the imagery of Pope's Sporus portrait in the *Epistle to Arbuthnot*:

What profits now to understand
 The merits of a spotless shirt—
 A dapper boot—a little hand—
 If half the little soul is dirt?

You talk of tinsel! why we see
 The old mark of rouge upon your cheeks.
You prate of Nature! you are he
 That spilt his life about the cliques.

Another anti-Lytton poem was not published until 1931. Tennyson did not warm to literary quarrels in the way that Pope did, and on 7 March 1846 published a retraction in *Punch* called *Afterthought*. This is a good example of the topic I began with—the almost instinctive distrust of satire felt by most of the Victorian poets. When Tennyson saw that personal bile had entered this quarrel, he drew back, deciding that antagonism was an unworthy element in a bardic career. Pope had more self-protective devices at hand to hide from himself the fact that there were personal sources for his hatred; one of them was the ability to cast himself in the role of the protector of the public good. But given the status and reputation of poetry in Pope's time it was more possible to

make a correlation between literary crimes and social ones. Because so much Victorian poetry was administering to private needs and individual perceptions outside the scope of social utility it was hard to make the connections explicit. Tennyson and Browning followed the lead of Pope in their quarrel with Alfred Austin: they looked with Olympian disdain on the pin-pricks of a Grub Street insect—who, as it happened, was only about five feet high. Austin wrote a carping series of criticisms collected together in *The Poetry of the Period* (1870). Tennyson responded in a poem not printed until 1931:

Somebody being a nobody,
Thinking to look like a somebody,
Said that he thought me a nobody:
Good little somebody—nobody,
Had you not known me a somebody,
Would you have called me a nobody?

Swinburne was incensed by Austin, attacking him in *Under the Microscope* (1872) and a vicious poem (in manuscript in the Ashley Library) concluding

Let that Muse her breath exhaust in
Sickly, broken winded Austin . . .²⁵

Improbable rhymes with "Austin" were also a feature of Browning's attacks, which were so involved that it is necessary to attribute a degree of obsession to Browning. N.B. Crowell has suggested, plausibly, that it is not merely the last five hundred lines of *Pacchiarotto* that are about Austin, but the whole work.²⁶ Browning called Austin "Quilp-Hop-o'-my thumb" and "banjo Byron". Austin became Poet Laureate in his respectable middle-age, and he repented at leisure some of the hasty indiscretions of his youth.

A quarrel that occasioned even more personal spite and passion was the so-called "Fleshly School of Poetry" controversy. Buchanan attacked pre-Raphaelite poetry, especially as exemplified by Rossetti and Swinburne.²⁷ The victims replied, Rossetti writing an article titled "The Stealthy School of Criticism"²⁸ and a vicious limerick:

As a critic, the Poet Buchanan
Thinks Pseudo much safer than Anon;
Into Maitland he shrunk,
But the smell of the skunk
Guides the shuddering nose to Buchanan.

He was amongst the other low forms of life put under Swinburne's powerful lens in *Under the Microscope*.

Satirists on the offensive in the Victorian age—such as Austin and Buchanan—found their task more difficult than in the Augustan age, when it was easy to identify bad poetry by excessive enthusiasm, intolerant thought, excessive particularity, indulged passion and rough numbers; whereas in *their* age a place had been found for all these abuses in the most approved poetry. Ultimately this generated a lack of critical confidence, and even today we are living with its aftermath.

One area in which it was possible for the Victorian satirist to feel a unanimity with other artists and the bulk of the public was French realism, which remained a minority taste. So Tennyson's hero in *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After* speaks with plenty of endorsement behind him, even if his tone is a little shrill:

Authors—essayist, atheist, novelist, realist,
 rhymster, play your part,
 Paint the mortal shame of nature with the living
 hues of Art.
 Rip your brothers' vices open, strip you own foul
 passions bare;
 Down with Reticence, down with Reverence—forward—
 naked—let them stare.
 Feed the budding rose of boyhood with the drainage of
 your sewer;
 Send the drain into the fountain, lest the stream
 should issue pure.
 Set the maiden fancies wallowing in the troughs of
 Zolaism,—
 Forward, forward, ay and backward, downward too
 into the abyss
 Do your best to charm the worst, to lower the rising
 race of men;
 Have we risen from out the beast, then back into
 the beast again? (lines 139-48)

Here at least Tennyson was at one with Alfred Austin, who was anti-realist and thought that poetry should be a "Transfiguration of the Actual or Real into the Ideal at a lofty elevation".²⁹

The last topic I turn to is architecture. This was an important theme in eighteenth-century satire, since buildings, by virtue of the cost and effort that goes into them, always make important cultural statements. In both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there were "battles of the standards" in which the issues went far beyond the stylistic differences between one tradition and another. The eighteenth-century battle was

between Baroque and Palladian—between the exotic and exuberant and the severe. Hence in his visit to Timon's villa Pope spells out the pretentiousness of structures like Blenheim and Canons. Ultimately in this battle neither side had the outright victory: English architecture retained, generally, a Palladian restraint and chasteness, but the best of it assimilated from the Baroque the lessons of thinking in terms of imposing and picturesque masses. There was at last something like a spirit of reconciliation, which continued in the Grecian Revival at the end of the century. In the nineteenth century the battle lines were drawn further apart, not between rival branches of classicism but between the Classic and the Gothic. As in the eighteenth century the battle of styles was part of a broader moral and political battle, but it would be true to say that it was at its most vigorous not in the poetry but in prose such as Ruskin's *Seven Lamps of Architecture* and "The Nature of Gothic". For most of the century the gothic style was in the ascendancy. Some architects and patrons clung to the style with an almost religious fervour, but we should not forget that the nineteenth century was far more eclectic than the eighteenth, so that for every Pugin there were half-a-dozen architects building simultaneously in several styles, employed by clients whose political, social and moral complexions were not necessarily betrayed in the styles they chose. There was an intelligent variety in Victorian taste that closed those avenues, both symmetrical and serpentine, open to Pope for satirical exploration.

There were mutterings of discontent at the Gothic Revival. One strange example occurs in Tennyson, who was one of the moving forces in the fashion. In *Maud* the *nouveau* has a modern castle:

New as his title, built last year,
 There amid perky larches and pine,
 And over the sullen-purple moor—
 Look at it—pricking a cockney ear. (I, 348-51)

Tennyson was more guilty of fake medievalism than just about any other Victorian poet, yet he is sensitive to its architectural manifestations. I think the answer lies partly in his life: that the hated Tennyson D'Eyncourts, who inherited the Tennyson fortune instead of Tennyson's father, used their newly acquired riches to rebuild Bayons in a pretentious neo-feudal style. There is point, but it is sharpened by personal feeling. Another anti-medieval passage comes in Clough's *Dipsychus*, spoken by the mephistophelean spirit:

Come leave your Gothic, worn-out story,
 San Giorgio and the Redemptore;
 I from no building, gay or solemn,
 Can spare the shapely Grecian column.
 'Tis not, these centuries four, for nought
 Our European world of thought
 Hath made familiar to its home
 The classic mind of Greece and Rome;
 In all new work that would look forth
 To more than antiquarian worth,
 Palladio's pediments and bases,
 Or something such, will find their places:
 Maturer optics don't delight
 In childish dim religious light,
 In evanescent vague effects
 That shirk, nor face, one's intellects;
 They love not fancies fast betrayed,
 And artful tricks of light and shade,
 But pure form nakedly displayed,
 And all things absolutely made. (V, 204-23)

Clough was in Venice and composing this at the same time that Ruskin was writing *The Stones of Venice* and reviling Palladio. It is true that the Spirit provides only half the story, but Clough was sufficiently a respecter of certain eighteenth-century values to believe that they should be given their due. The classical rationalism of the Spirit is often devastatingly critical of the romantic sentiment of Dipsychus. This classical undercurrent never entirely died out in the nineteenth century: we find it in Clough, Arnold and Swinburne. A part of the classical inheritance was satirical awareness, which at its best draws on the collective wisdom of the tribe. The satirical voice was always present as a tonic and a corrective against the kind of subjective and self-indulgent poetry that Arnold was anxious to avoid. Victorian poets tended to keep in reserve various correctives which restricted Romantic excesses: one thinks of the taste for classical poetry, the taste for Dryden, the taste for Donne (the poet excluded from Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*). These never entirely died out; they remained as standards of vigour and precision which poets as diverse as Clough and G.M. Hopkins could reach out for.³¹

In extreme forms the traditions of English rationalism could threaten to destroy the very grounds on which poetry is built, but in the form they are offered by Clough in my final quotation they represent an escape route from the morass of Neo-Romantic poetry that at times threatened to overwhelm the entire age, and they offer a timeless recipe for effective satirical poetry:

This austere love of truth; this righteous abhorrence of illusion; this rigorous uncompromising rejection of the vague, the untestified, the merely probable; this stern conscientious determination without paltering and prevarication to admit, *if* things are bad, that they are so; this resolute upright purpose, as of some transcendental man of business, to go thoroughly into the accounts of the world and make out once for all how they stand: such a spirit as this, I may say, I think, claims more than our attention—claims our reverence.³²

NOTES

1. *North British Review*, 29 (November 1858), 506-18.
2. *The Prelude* (1850), XI, 60-1. For a study of Wordsworth and satire see Ford T. Swetnam, Jr., "The Satiric Voices of *The Prelude*", in J. Wordsworth, ed., *Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies in Memory of John Alban Finch* (Cornell U.P., 1970), pp. 92-110.
3. "A Book was writ of late call'd 'Tetrachordon'" (*Poems*, 1645).
4. For a study of the reluctance of the major poets to engage in explicit political poetry see John Lucas, ed., *Literature and Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1971), pp. 7-43.
5. R. H. Super, ed., *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold* (University of Michigan Press, 1960), I, 30.
6. "To a Friend" (1849), lines 8-12.
7. *The Complete Prose Works* . . . I, 30.
8. *Ibid.*, I, 36.
9. *Ibid.*, IX, 202; "Thomas Gray".
10. "Heine's Grave" (1867), lines 121-8.
11. *Miscellaneous Works* (London, 1845), p. 253.
12. Louis Macneice, *Autumn Journal* (London, 1939), VI, 43-4.
13. Tennyson's "Hail Briton" was first printed by M.J. Donahue in *PMLA*, 64 (1949), 385-99; it is in C. Ricks, ed., *The Poems of Tennyson*, (London, 1969), pp. 480-89.
14. For comparisons between Austin, Byron and the Roman satirists see N.B. Crowell, *Alfred Austin: Victorian* (University of New Mexico Press, 1953), pp. 44-51.
15. Quoted in Ricks, *Poems*, p. 1059.
16. *Church of England Quarterly Review*, 12 (October, 1842), p. 371.
17. For the contemporary relevance of the poem see R. A. Greenberg "Ruskin, Pugin, and the Contemporary Context of 'The Bishop Orders his Tomb'", *PMLA*, 84 (1969), 1588-94.
18. Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. L.A. Hind (London, 1925), 2, 198.
19. See Ralph Wilson Rader, *Tennyson's "Maud": The Biographical Genesis* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1963).
20. Quoted in Ricks, *Poems*, p. 1058.
21. First printed by Sir Charles Tennyson in *Nineteenth Century*, 109 (1931), 508. It is in Ricks, *Poems*, pp. 652-5.
22. Quoted in Ricks, *Poems*, p. 1046.
23. "A Character", Ricks, *Poems*, pp. 218-9.
24. C. Ricks, *Tennyson* (London, 1972), p. 52.
25. Quoted by Crowell, *loc. cit.*, pp. 123-4.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 111-20.
27. Robert Buchanan (signed "Thomas Maitland"), "The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr. D. G. Rossetti," *Contemporary Review*, 18 (October 1871), 334-50.
28. *The Athenaeum*, no. 2303, (16 December 1871), 792-4.
29. Quoted by Crowell, *loc. cit.*, p. 132.
30. Bayons is in Lincolnshire, near Tealby. For a description see Mark Girouard, "Picturesque Gothic in Decay: Bayons Manor, Lincolnshire," *Country Life*, 127 (1960), 430-33.
31. Hopkins writes of Dryden in a letter to Robert Bridges of 6 November 1887: "What is there in Dryden? Much, but above all this: he is the most masculine of our poets; his style and his rhythm lay the strongest stress of all our literature on the naked thew and sinew of the English language"; in C.C. Abbott, ed., *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges* (London, 1955), pp. 267-8.
32. "Lecture on the Development of English Literature from Chaucer to Wordsworth", in *Prose Remains of Arthur Hugh Clough*, ed. Blanche Clough (London, 1888), pp. 347-8.