

**ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY**

**READING GOSSE'S READING:**

**A STUDY OF ALLUSION IN THE WORK OF EDMUND GOSSE**

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requirements of Anglia Ruskin University  
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(i)

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(ii)

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF ARTS, LAW AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

READING GOSSE'S READING: A STUDY OF ALLUSION IN THE WORK OF EDMUND GOSSE

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Gosse's reputation, both during his lifetime and thereafter, was compromised by his propensity for error, a trait that Henry James famously described as 'a genius for inaccuracy'. Though much of his biographical and critical writing justifies this criticism, my study of Gosse's use of the device of allusion, mainly in his fictional writing, reveals a strategy of misprision that is creative and innovative. Since the concepts of Modernism and Postmodernism have changed the way in which texts are read, it is now time to re-read Gosse, and to explore the potential meaning of passages that would hitherto have been dismissed as error or exaggeration.

Using Ziva Ben-Porat's characterisation of allusion 'as a device for the simultaneous activation of two texts' as my methodology, I explore the complex and often subversive resonances of Gosse's allusive practice. Allusion requires four participants: author, reader, the source text by the precursor, and the alluding text. Because a phrase does not 'become' an allusion until all four parties have been 'activated', many of Gosse's allusions have for a long time lain dormant in the palimpsest of his writings.

I argue that Gosse's evangelical, tract-writing mother, rather than his father, exerted primary influence on him. I foreground the impact of her prohibition of fiction as the genesis for Gosse's idiosyncratic vision, showing that its legacy was more bewildering, and ironically more creative, than has hitherto been recognised. Using the revisionary ratios of Bloom's theory of the anxiety of influence, I establish a trajectory of charged interactions between the texts of Gosse as ephebe and those of his mother as precursor. Many hitherto puzzling and unresolved aspects of Gosse's writing now make sense in the context of his 'answering back' the spectral Bowes. Although Gosse never fully extricates himself from his maternal precursor, he metaphorically orphans himself, and transfers his ephebe allegiance to a host of literary foster-fathers, constantly invoking them in his texts. He thus secures his 'mental space' through the covert mode of allusion, and the zenith of this practice is manifested in *Father and Son*.

My thesis demonstrates the potential of allusion as a methodological tool in literary analysis. By his acts of re-reading, Gosse achieves the paradoxical act of simultaneously arresting and promoting a sense of cultural continuity. On the one hand, Gosse arrests tradition by fragmenting texts: by importing a phrase or a passage from a past work into his present text, he engenders textual instability in both. On the other hand, Gosse promotes cultural continuity by importing into his work fragments that serve as allusive bridges forging connections through space and time. I hope that this exploration of his practice will initiate a reassessment of Gosse's role in relation to the allusive mode as employed by the early Modernists.

Gosse, allusion, influence, Bloom, evangelical.

## Table of Contents

### Reading Gosse's Reading: A Study of Allusion in the Work of Edmund Gosse

(i) Acknowledgements

(ii) Abstract

(iii) Table of Contents

(iv-v) List of Figures

(vi) List of Appendices

Introduction: Gosse and the Process of Allusion	1
Chapter One: Gosse and his Mother: Reading and Writing Authoritative Truth	23
Chapter Two: Gosse and his Father: Reading and Writing the Fairy-Tale	53
Chapter Three: Reading the Mother-Son as Precursor-Ephebe: Bloom's <i>Anxiety of Influence</i>	95
Chapter Four: Gosse's Open Secret: Testing the Boundaries of Allusion	120
Chapter Five: From Saint to Sinner: Gosse's Fantasy Re-Creations of Emily Bowes	152
Conclusion	184
Bibliography	193
Appendices	224

## List of Figures

## Chapter One

1. Terracotta Relief Plaque of *The Sons of Cydippe* by George Tinworth (1884) 49

## Chapter Two

2. Pages One to Three of 'Sleep in the Deep' 63
3. Page Four of 'Sleep in the Deep' 64
4. Illustration of swordfish from Philip Gosse's *The Ocean* (1844:179) compared with Gosse's drawing in 'Sleep in the Deep' 67
5. Gosse's personalised bookplate, drawn by Edwin Abbey 84
6. Two of Abbey's illustrations for *Selections from the Poetry of Robert Herrick* (1882) 85

## Chapter Four

7. *Narcisse* (1890) by Gustave Moreau 122
8. Le Transi de René de Châlons by Ligier Richier Cadaver tomb at Bar-le-Duc 122
9. Three Images of woodcuts illustrating Petrarch's *The Triumph of Death*
- a: Predica dell'Arte del Bene Morire 134
- b: Countess of Pembroke's translation of Petrarch's *Trionfo della Morte* 134
- c: Bernard Quarich's edition of the works of The Italian Engravers of the Fifteenth Century. 135
10. Triangular composition of Petrarch's *Triumphus Mortis* 137
11. Christ on the Cross, flanked by thieves, painted wood, by Ligier Richier, Bar-le-Duc 143
12. *Artemis and her Hound* (1882) by Hamo Thornycroft. Marble. Eaton Hall, Cheshire 147
13. Detail from 'Mr Heinemann's Announcements' in *The Athenaeum*, 1895 149

**Chapter Five**

14. The eight illustrations from <i>The Booklover's Edition of Father and Son</i> (1912)	153
15. Gravestone and detail of epitaph for Emily Bowes-Gosse in Abney Park Cemetery	154-5
16. Portrait of Emily Bowes as a young woman	156
17. Portrait of Emily Bowes compared with Fashion-Plate of Romantic-Era dress.	159
18. Portrait of Bowes created for Dennis Potter's play, <i>Where Adam Stood</i> (1976)	161
19. Water-colour portrait of the dying Emily Bowes, 1857.	162
20. Bowes' deathbed photograph	163
21. 'Changes at Home' by Phiz from <i>David Copperfield</i>	165
22. Reynolds' <i>Muscipula, or Girl with Mouse-Trap</i>	169
23. Painting of Emily Bowes, aged 8, by W.A. Beechey R.A.	172
24. Max Beerbohm's caricature of Edmund Gosse in <i>Observations</i>	183
For sources of illustrations, and details of copyright, see Appendix 8.	236-38

## List of Appendices

### Introduction

- App. 1 A Brief Comment on Poetic Quotation in some of Philip Gosse's Natural History texts 224
- App. 2 Poem: The Whitethroat (*New Poems* 1879) 225-28

### Chapter One

- App. 3 Poem: The Wallpaper (*In Russet and Silver* 1893) 229

### Chapter Two

- App. 4 Transcription of Gosse's manuscript story: Sleep in the Deep (CUL Add.7027.17) 230

### Chapter Three

- App.5 Old and New (*Collected Poems*, 1911) 231-33

### Chapter Four

- App.6 Diagram showing triangular structure of relationships in *The Secret of Narcisse* (1892) 234

### Chapter Five

- App.7 Comparison portraits of Emily Bowes and Maria Edgeworth. 235

### Throughout dissertation

- App.8 Source List for Illustrations 236-38

## Introduction: Reading Gosse's Reading

**Put [Gosse] in a room with a shelf of books, and like Dr Johnson he would at once "pore over them almost brushing them with his eyelashes from near examination." He ran to books as a painter to pictures. (Charteris 1931:132)**

**Allusion is itself a way of looking before and after, a retrospect that opens up a new prospect. (Ricks 2002:86)**

This dissertation is a study in the slippery and elusive literary device of allusion, as employed by one of the most mercurial writers of the late-Victorian and Edwardian ages: Edmund William Gosse (1849-1928). Famous today for *Father and Son* (1907), the only text to endure out of his wide-ranging oeuvre, Gosse was one of the foremost 'men of letters' of his age. As biographer, essayist, journalist, editor, critic and bibliophile, Gosse expounded the history and mystery of literature to the public. It was Gosse who in the columns of *The Sunday Times* brought to life the work of long-neglected authors, and in an ironic gesture to his Plymouth Brethren upbringing,<sup>1</sup> he styled himself as a literary evangelist, offering 'ten-minute sermons' to his 'congregation' of readers (1921:vii). Contrary to the Brethren tradition which insisted that there be no priest between God and man, Gosse fostered a mediating role between literature and the reader, refracting the writing of the past into the consciousness of the present. Gosse's practice was to select a book from his extensive library, absorb and ingest its contents, then to re-present it for public consumption. Even the titles of his volumes of collected essays, such as *Gossip in a Library* (1891), *Some Diversions of a Man of Letters* (1919), or *Books on the Table* (1921), emphasise Gosse's roles of cultural stewardship and literary intercession. I investigate Gosse's acts of reading, and trace the exploitation of his personal 'libraries', analysing the relationship between his allusions and their originating contexts. The process reveals much, not only about the 'libraries' themselves, but also the nature and extent of Gosse's refashioning of them. As Gosse forges an identity within the unstable realm of reading, some of the textual voices from the past overwhelm and over-influence him, while others inspire and empower him.

The study of allusive practices is a much-debated but imperfect science that stems from the inherent instability of the reading process. According to the OED, an allusion is 'an implied, indirect, or passing reference to a person or thing': that is, it is not an accurate rendering but an ever-so-slightly-altered version of an existing phrase or text. It is an inherently unsettling device: Gosse, as alluder, destabilises the text that he is reading by lifting from it a particular

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<sup>1</sup> Members of the Plymouth Brethren distanced themselves from both the Anglican and the Dissenter churches: they believed the Bible to be inerrant; they rejected hierarchy and ritual, they proselytised through public testimony and expected the imminent return of Christ. (Coad 1968).



phrase which he then adapts for employment within his own writing. The allusion, in turn, destabilises Gosse's own writing by importing into it ideological and semantic connotations that belong to the originating source. The device of allusion has attracted various definitions over the decades: Joseph Pucci's observation that two distinct versions of allusion exist in the old (1965) and new (1993) versions of *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* highlights the difficulty in achieving a precise denotation of its characteristics and function (1998:4). However, I consider the most helpful and workable definition for my study is the one forged by Ziva Ben-Porat which characterises allusion as:

a device for the simultaneous activation of two texts. The activation is achieved through the manipulation of a special signal; a sign (simple or complex) in a given text characterised by an additional larger 'referent.' This referent is always an independent text. The simultaneous activation of the two texts thus connected results in the formation of intertextual patterns whose nature cannot be predetermined. (1976:107-8)

Ben-Porat's notion of 'activation' foregrounds a sense of revival or reanimation: the forces of an established text - linguistic, figurative, and structural - are exerted within a new context. Connections are thereby established that alter and affect both the text alluded to ('the past') and the alluding text ('the present'). This dynamic recalls T.S. Eliot's conception of the 'simultaneous existence' of literary texts in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919). Eliot posits a constant mobility between and within texts, across time and traditions, recalling their historical timelessness, their dynamic relationship between past and present, and emphasises that no act of creation can take place in a vacuum. 'No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists' (Eliot 1928:49). By this principle, allusion also functions as an agent of cultural transmission. Ben-Porat highlights furthermore the unpredictability of the outcome, the way in which allusion forges a new 'pattern', often a new narrative: the dynamic nature of the allusive process makes it an exciting research method.

Allusion, then, is the 'indirect' citing of another writer's work. Carmela Perri explains that the 'indirect' or tacit nature of an allusion 'is not a function of the marker but of the marked – the allusion's referent' (1978:291) and consequently it is the reader's task to work out the connection between the alluding text and the text alluded to. To 'work' an allusion, then, four participants are required: author, reader, the source text by the precursor, and the alluding text, and a phrase does not 'become' an allusion until all four parties have been 'activated'. Walter Pater commented of Gosse's poetry that 'the sense of his originality comes to one as but an after-thought' (1901:113); this observation suggests that there is an 'interval' or 'delay' whilst the reader activates and realises the connections. Joseph Pucci defines the ideal reader

as one who has the ability to ‘create something in the text that exists in it only *in potentia*’ (1998:43): his term, the ‘meaning-making’ reader, emphasises that meaning is constructed at the point of reception. Such an ‘act of reading’ is deconstructive. As Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle explain, deconstructive readings operate a double bind: ‘the reader makes the text and the text makes the reader . . . while any text demands a ‘faithful’ reading, it also demands an *individual* response’ (2009:16). Through my study of Gosse’s allusions, then, I explore his idiosyncratic ‘acts of reading’, as determined by personal needs and desires, inclinations and resistances.

Gosse’s allusive practice reaches its zenith in *Father and Son* which is studded with a wide range of references: quotations, figures, expressions, anecdotes, parodies, tropes, and echoes, appropriated from the work of other writers. Regardless of form or context, however, it is not until the reference is ‘triggered’ by the reader that it becomes an allusion: until that point it simply lies dormant in the palimpsest of the text. Indeed, an early work by Gosse, ‘A Norwegian Ghost Story’<sup>2</sup> seems to enact this condition of dormancy. The protagonist, Marie Bjornsen, who may be designated as the ‘reader’, resists the insinuations of her neighbours so that, Gosse says, their ‘allusions fell like spent arrows’(1967:12): being ‘spent’ here implies being ‘depleted’ and ‘wasted’, dying with their potential unrealised. This short story serves as a motif for my study, which analyses Gosse’s acts of appropriating specific figures from a huge range of literatures, phrases and expressions which are then manipulated before being ‘fired’ like arrows into his work. Many of these allusive arrows have lain buried and unrealised for over a century: the time is now right for their activation.

Gosse’s skill in employing allusions was the outcome of a lifetime of reading, and a long career of writing about the act of reading.<sup>3</sup> *Father and Son* is the lodestone of my study: although I explore Gosse’s earlier long-forgotten romances and poems, this ‘classic’ text is a pervasive presence throughout my discussion. Indeed, the structure of *Father and Son* as a whole reflects the notion of dormancy, discussed above: although Gosse describes many of his youthful reading experiences, ranging from volumes of religious exegesis, by ‘the Jukeses and Newtons’ to the ‘unplumbed depths of the *Penny Cyclopaedia*’ (2004:42, 32) there lie concealed in the palimpsest of the text two very significant bodies of writing, that is, the texts of his parents. The act of ‘working’ of Gosse’s language and structure reveals the influence and the

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<sup>2</sup> Rejected by *Blackwood’s Magazine* in 1871, Gosse’s story was forgotten until 1967, when it was published by The Toucan Press, Guernsey.

<sup>3</sup> For a brief outline of Gosse’s career, see ‘Sir Edmund Gosse’ in *The Literary Encyclopedia* [online] (Rees 2009).

presence of the evangelical oeuvre of his mother, Emily Bowes-Gosse<sup>4</sup> (1806-1857) and the volumes of natural history by his father, Philip Henry Gosse<sup>5</sup> (1810-1888); my study will unravel the complexities of this intertextual family 'triplicity' (2004:50). Gosse's reading of parental textual voices is manifested by various degrees of resistance and appropriation, and by analysing these trends, I challenge stereotypes about the Gosse family that have persisted across the critical corpus.

The importance of Gosse's agency as an alluder has been generally overlooked by critics, who from the point of Gosse's death until the beginning of the 1970s narrowed their focus to *Father and Son*, leaving the rest of his books to gather dust in library basements, casualties of Modernist indifference to all things Victorian. *Father and Son* was valued early on as 'a triumphant experiment in a new formula' being 'not a conventional biography; still less . . . an autobiography' (Nicholson 1927:146). Indeed, its generic elusivity long preoccupied critics, who focused on formal (Gracie 1974; Folkenflik 1979; Siebenschuh 1983) or classificatory concerns (Helsing 1979; Mandel 1980; Buckley 1983; Allen 1988). Even today, critics struggle to find appropriate terms to apply to *Father and Son*: in a recent *Guardian* article, it is described as 'a ground-breaking work of creative non-fiction' (Fiennes, 2014), which encapsulates some, but not all, of its paradoxical nature. The autobiographical aspect of the text continues to fascinate critics: Francis O'Gorman (2004) and Max Saunders (2010) both include *Father and Son* in their recent discussions of Victorian life-writing. Linda Peterson (1986), Ruth Hoberman (1988) and Heather Henderson (1989) are closely related to each other in their discussion on the parodic form and language of *Father and Son*, and focus particularly on Gosse's religious imagery and on Gosse's use of feminising allusions: out of respect to their interesting discussions, I do not include those two topics within my study, although at times I address some of the conclusions of those critics. In terms of evolutionary interpretations, criticism ranges from Roger Porter's Darwinian insights (1975) to David Amigoni's innovative reading of *Father and Son* as a contribution to the Victorian dialogue about culture and science (2007). The inter-generational conflict that structures the text (Grylls 1978; Malone 1993; Downing 2001) has encouraged dichotomous approaches to genre and theme: James Woolf (1972) and Victoria Arana (1977) debate the text in terms of comedy versus tragedy, while Philip Dodd (1972) reads it as a struggle between Puritanism and paganism, Alexis Harley (2007) as a tension between Hebraic and Hellenic values, and Joseph Fichtelberg (1991) as a play of presence against absence. In contrast to the generally negative or at best equivocal attitude to Gosse's biographical (Granqvist 1986a/b; Demoor 1987) and critical work (French

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<sup>4</sup> Hereafter referred to as Bowes. I use her maiden name because it encompasses her pre-marital authorial role.

<sup>5</sup> Hereafter referred to as Philip, to distinguish him from Gosse.

2010; Davison 2009), it is a testament to the power of *Father and Son* that this single text has dominated the Gosse corpus for so long. *Father and Son* has been used frequently for comparative analysis or as contextual background in discussions about Victorian religion, family, education, childhood or science (Ballantyne 1970; Perlman 1979; Cook 2005; Crackenthorpe 2009; Hurley 2011).<sup>6</sup> My approach is from the opposite direction: I start with a device – allusion – and I plunge into the minutiae of the texts that Gosse read and wrote. This is a dissertation of close reading, an immersion into the language of Gosse’s oeuvre.

Such critical interest as exists in Gosse’s allusive practice is brief but suggestive. Avrom Fleishman observes that the ‘appearance of dozens of verse and other quotations in the text . . . might open [Gosse] to the charge of exploitativeness or artificiality were it not for the palpable emotion with which he writes’ (1983:300). The dominant presence of allusions might, Fleishman implies, in the work of a lesser writer, appear ostentatious or contrived but in *Father and Son*, it impresses as sincere. He concludes that

all the quotations of verse – from the banal songs of childhood to the repeated soundings of a mighty line of Virgil – which have competed in *Father and Son* with the formulas of religious tradition, have been carefully placed to prepare the work as a narrative of vocation. (1983:308)

The allusions, then, remind the reader that this text is written by a famous man of letters, who has succeeded to that eminent role despite having been subjected to an eccentric maternal rule which denied him access to fiction, as described in *Father and Son*. Gosse’s mother was convinced that the reading or writing of fantasy constituted a dangerous distraction from spirituality, and ‘[i]n consequence of the stern ordinance . . . not a single fiction was read or told to me during my infancy’ (2004:17). With poignant but witty irony, *Father and Son* uses allusions, quotations and references – the evidence of *extensive* reading – to describe the bewildering experience of severely *restricted* reading. This apparent paradox moved many contemporary readers, when Gosse’s stature as ‘the pre-eminent, prolific, established and influential late-Victorian man of letters’ (Lee 2005:104) made his origins seem particularly astonishing: ‘To think of you, of all men, coming out of such an upbringing!’ wrote the historian Frederic Harrison<sup>7</sup> (Thwaite 1985:436). In this way, the book ‘worked’ in 1907 in terms of its shock factor: the child in the text who experiences an almost Dickensian deprivation of fairy-tales is transformed into the man then at the literary helm and hub of Edwardian culture. It is a tale of literary rags to riches.

It is this awareness of Gosse’s vocation as a critic that interests Michael Newton:

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<sup>6</sup> For detailed survey of Gosse corpus, see my online article in *Oxford Bibliographies in Victorian Literature* (2014).

<sup>7</sup> Frederic Harrison (1831-1923)

Gosse's book exists through a constant relationship to other books, that break in through allusion, quotation, or analogy. Gosse was a natural critic. Literature, that began as an escape, became an official and inescapable function. To understand his experience, he makes for the library.

the alert reader would be wise to look out for additional meanings whenever [Gosse] invokes another book. (2004:xii)

Newton is clearly charmed by the unforced character of Gosse's intertextual instinct: his judgment is sharpened, I suspect, by the experience of editing the 2004 Oxford edition of *Father and Son*<sup>8</sup> which brought him to the core of its language, and its sources.

Inspired by Fleishman and Newton, then, I 'make for Gosse's library'. Firstly, I 'visit' his famous personal collection of books, a large portion of which he had professionally catalogued by R.J. Lister in 1893, and again, by Euan Cox in 1924. Many titles here listed became the subject of Gosse's essays, published in journals and newspapers, and then re-published as collections, such as *Gossip in a Library* (1891).<sup>9</sup> Gosse delights not only in the esoteric subject matter of his collection but also its materiality:

*Camden's Britannia*: a folio of some eleven hundred pages, adorned, like a fighting elephant, with all the weightiest panoply of learning.

*The Shepherd's Hunting*: The book itself is very tiny and pretty, with a sort of leafy trellis-work at the top and bottom of every page, almost suggesting a little posy of wild-flowers thrown through the iron bars of the poet's cage, and pressed between the pages of his manuscript.

*Gerard's Herbal*: There is no handsomer book to be found, none more stately or imposing, than this magnificent folio of sixteen hundred pages. (1891:11, 33, 51)<sup>10</sup>

In a striking juxtaposition, Gosse claims: 'These books have been my tools and are still my companions' (1924:xxii); the catalogues establish his credentials both as a bibliophile and as a reader, emphasising his arcane, scholarly, and aesthetic taste.

An analysis of the titles itemised in the catalogues reveals furthermore Gosse's penchant for Restoration drama, particularly the work of Dryden, whose volumes listed there number forty-two. Only Pope (twenty-two volumes) and Aphra Behn (twenty volumes) come close to Dryden: seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writers are otherwise represented by only two or three volumes each. Gosse self-consciously established himself as a reader of Restoration plays: he told Swinburne in 1877 that 'The Restoration is a pet period of mine: I have gone into

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<sup>8</sup> I use Newton's 2004 edition throughout, other than for occasional references to The Booklover's Edition of *Father and Son* (1912).

<sup>9</sup> Gosse was satirised for this practice by Osbert Sitwell in *Triple Fugue* (1924), being characterised as 'Professor James Criscross . . . beloved author of *From a Library-Stool* and a million critical articles' (1924:293).

<sup>10</sup> These titles are listed in his catalogues (Lister 1893:24, 189, 68 and Cox 1924:61, 293, 130)

its bibliography, I really believe, more than anyone else living now' (Charteris 1931:98). This may have been for him an important apprenticeship in allusion, since those dramatists invoked references from 'ancestral', not 'parental' sources. W.J. Bate argued that Restoration writers alluded to 'distant and therefore 'purer' source[s] . . . remote enough to be more manageable in the quest for identity. The ancestral permitted one. . . even to disparage the parent in the name of 'tradition' (1970:12). Bate's insight points forward to my argument that Gosse, unable to extricate himself completely from parental authority, enacts a process of self-orphaning, thereby refashioning himself as a child of the English literary tradition, preferring those more 'distant ancestral' voices to more insistent parental promptings.

Dryden was, furthermore, 'the first major poet in English to allude extensively' (Ricks 2002:33) so Gosse is identifying with a fellow-alluder. Dryden's allusions, especially in *MacFlecknoe*, become particularly pointed when referring to matters of paternity, succession, and poetic inheritance (2002:29, 39), and Gosse shared Dryden's preoccupation with issues of cultural continuity and canonical progression. Gosse's library catalogues themselves function rather like the canon-forming lists first shaped by Dryden, and later by the Kit-Cat Club, an eighteenth-century Whig dining association which, Ophelia Field argues, fostered a sense of shared culture and history, a defiance of religious dogma, and a passion for liberty: such figures shaped the political and literary discourses of their age (2008:40-2). Indeed, Gosse openly inserts himself into that lineage by entitling his collection of essays about famous writers *Critical Kit-Kats* (1896). In his Preface, he explains that his essays are 'condensed portraits, each less than half-length' (1896:ix), an allusion to the portraits of the Kit-Cat Club members, painted that size because the ceiling of their meeting place was so low. Books, then, are what construct Gosse's identity: his reading of canonical texts, as 'broadcast' by his catalogues, underpins his role as man of letters.

Gosse's second library, the titles of his childhood reading described in *Father and Son*, is epitomised by *Tom Cringle's Log*, the retrospective charm of which he claims that he refused to dispel by re-reading, or by Scott's *The Lady of the Lake* which made him 'gasp with excitement' (2004:118, 134). These books are presented sentimentally, part of his construction of himself as the romantic child. Apart from a single text, Blair's *The Grave*, which features both in *Father and Son* and in Gosse's catalogue (2004:139; Cox 1924:48) there is no overlap between his 'official' library and this romanticised account of his childhood reading. Gosse's youthful encounters with literature as described in *Father and Son*, are furthermore 'coloured' by Bowes' prohibition against fiction, mentioned above; this ban denies Gosse what Stanley Fish calls 'literary competence' (1980:48), that is, what an informed reader learns by the experience of books and can bring to the act of reading. Gosse reveals, often light-

heartedly, in *Father and Son* the childhood consequences of this limited 'horizon of expectations' (Jauss 1982:40), but I shall show that its effects were both more bewildering, and ironically more creative, than has been hitherto recognised.

The third 'library' in Gosse's psyche has remained hidden for decades: it constitutes the texts written by Bowes and Philip. These texts suffered the same fate as befell Gosse's critical and biographical writing: stamped with the taint of Victorianism, they were irrelevant to the Modernist mind. The process of activating those parental textual voices will provide a fuller picture of the triangle of interactions within the family, the webs and arcs of their textual conversations. Gosse's 'library' then constitutes three layers: at the surface is the canonical collection, the public face of the man of letters; in the sub-stratum are the individual books of his childhood, fetishised and eroticised, while at base level are the texts of his parents, and it was, I suggest, his resistance to, and appropriation of, those deeply-absorbed texts that forged the stylistic and structural character of Gosse's vision.

As mentioned above, allusions require activation by the meaning-making reader, and I shall now illustrate this dynamic by analysing Gosse's appropriation of the canonical work, Coleridge's *Youth and Age* (1834). In *Father and Son* Gosse cites a quotation from Coleridge's poem to mark the awakening of his 'prosodical instinct' on the occasion of first hearing Virgil.<sup>11</sup> Although Gosse often omits identification of his borrowings, in this case he identifies authorship. He does not, however, indicate that he has subtly altered Coleridge's line, 'Verse, a breeze mid blossoms straying', by changing the last word to 'playing' (2004:96). Coleridge's 'straying' suggests limitlessness, the notion that verse can take him anywhere, but the inherent weakness of the word as a feminine rhyme subtly undermines that sense of youthful opportunity, and hints at an alternative reading, where 'straying' implies both wrongdoing (proverbially, one 'strays' from the path) or indeed even being a homeless 'stray', the very condition that Coleridge laments in this poem, being a 'poor night-related guest'. To Coleridge's already multivalent word 'straying', Gosse makes his small syllabic alteration to 'playing', leaving syntax and rhythm unaffected, but dramatically complicating the meaning.

Using Ben-Porat's characterisation of allusion as 'a device for the simultaneous activation of two texts' generating 'intertextual patterns whose nature cannot be predetermined' (1976:107-8), it is possible to read Gosse's handling of Coleridge's verse in different ways. Indeed, this example serves to illustrate the wide range of theoretical approaches to allusive practice. Starting from the perspective of Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), Gosse's alteration of 'straying' to 'playing' has the effect of infusing the breeze (verse) with

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<sup>11</sup> I discuss this incident in Chapter Two.

greater agency and purpose, drawing the reader's attention away from Coleridge to Gosse himself. Whereas Coleridge is negatively 'wandering' and 'homeless', Gosse, in his mode of 'playing' seems more vivacious and urbane. In Bloom's terms, Coleridge is 'the precursor' and Gosse is the 'ephebe' or 'apprentice' of poetry (1997:16). In that capacity, Gosse 'misreads' Coleridge: this is not an act of mistaking or misunderstanding, but a creative revision whereby Gosse injects his own thoughts into the Coleridgean idiom. Gosse's appropriation and alteration of Coleridge's poem is a Bloomian 'clinamen' or swerve, which produces a verse with a new meaning. Such an act of successful misreading allows Gosse the ephebe to carve 'clear imaginative space' for himself, and exert a voice of his own (Bloom 1997:5).

In terms of theories of influence and allusion, Christopher Ricks seems to situate himself at the opposite end of the spectrum from Bloom. In *Allusion to the Poets* (2002) Ricks characterises the alluding poet as 'the heir' who regards his elders not only with 'affectionate and independent respect' but with gratitude (2002:37, 90):

To allude to a predecessor is both to acknowledge, in piety,<sup>12</sup> a previous achievement and it is also a form of benign appropriation; what was so well said has now become part of my way of saying, and in advancing the claims of a predecessor (and rotating them so that they catch a new light), the poet is advancing his own claims, his own poetry, and even poetry. (2002:33)

By this account, Gosse seems to do homage to Coleridge; indeed, it could be argued that Gosse's reliance on Coleridge's words as a means of expressing the profound effect that Virgil's verse had on his childhood loudly proclaims Coleridge's genius. Gosse 'rotates' the word 'straying' and produces 'playing' in order to 'catch a new light', thus articulating his own momentous epiphany. Both Gosse and Coleridge emerge the stronger from the allusion: 'Allusion [is] itself a reflection from and upon a borrowed light, something that may be a lesser light but is no less light for having been borrowed' (Ricks 2002:49). In Ricks's view, Gosse aggrandises himself by overtly positioning Coleridge as his progenitor. Bloom, on the other hand, would contend that Gosse cannot help imitating Coleridge, whose influence is so profound, and that Gosse can assert his independence only through misprision. Both readings are suggestive, and I shall employ both approaches in the course of my dissertation.

Gosse's revision wittily emphasises that there is 'play' within Coleridge's verse, using the notion of 'play' in the sense of 'freedom from restraint' or malleability (*OED* 2009) or as Barthes describes 'play', being 'like a door on its hinges' (1977:163). It also comes close to

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<sup>12</sup> Ricks's use of this word suggests filial piety, ironically an attribute that Gosse was charged with lacking when he published *Father and Son* (Thwaite 1985:434). Also ironic, as I shall show in Chapter One, is Bowes' enactment of the notion of filial piety in her poetic re-telling of the story of Abraham and Isaac, a work in which allusive echoes undermine the very piety she espouses.



what F.R. Leavis called ‘analogical enactment’, when the words seem to do what they say (1968:237). Leavis emphasises that in such cases, imagery gives place to ‘movement’, and here the word inscribes what Gosse is actually doing to the poem, that is, he is ‘playing’ with it. ‘Playing’ is, however, an essentially childish activity and one might question whether Gosse has sufficient stature to play with Coleridge’s verse in this way. The source text and the alluding text are thus mutually destabilising, and the issue of authorial intention in both cases becomes irrelevant as it is the combined power of language and context that determine potential meaning(s). Reading is a profoundly indeterminate activity and it is this that makes allusion so exhilarating but so unpredictable a device.

There seem to be as many theories about allusion and the related fields of intertextuality and influence, as there are theorists. Although it is tempting to imagine a spectrum, as I have done, with Bloom at one end and Ricks at the other, such a division in fact shows a difference mainly in tone and attitude. Whether allusion is conceived as a violent reworking of the author’s voice (Bloom) or as a benign inheritance (Ricks), the fundamental four-part relationship between author, reader, source text and alluding text, outlined above, remains constant. Situated between the extremes on the Bloom-Ricks spectrum, allusive theorists such as Ziva Ben-Porat, Carmela Perri, Joseph Pucci, Christopher Reynolds, John Hollander and Allan Pasco all feature in my dissertation: I utilise different approaches as dictated by the nature of Gosse’s material. In Chapter Two, for example, I use Christopher Reynolds’ approach to allusion to structure my analysis of Gosse’s handling (in *Father and Son*) of the three women aspiring to be Philip’s wife; the fact that Reynolds’ specialism is nineteenth-century musical rather than literary allusion seems to enhance, not diminish, the usefulness of his terminology.

It is notable that Gosse emphasises in *Father and Son* his youthful struggle with the task of ‘learning by heart . . . in which [he] always failed ignominiously’ (2004:15). Gosse’s instinct is not to reproduce text faithfully and accurately, but to adjust and reposition it, and in Bloom’s sense of the word, to ‘misread’ creatively. Such an act of reading returns us to Eliot’s notion that ‘the whole existing order must be, ever so slightly, altered’ (Eliot 1928:50). Indeed, Gosse’s childhood constituted an apprenticeship in the allusive mode of expression, as he learned to interpret the ‘strange symbolic expressions’ used by Brethren congregation; indeed, their ‘habitual term’ for themselves, ‘the Saints’, was itself allusive (2004:113,9). Young Gosse was both the subject of allusive speech, being ‘mentioned at public prayer-meetings, not indeed by name but as . . . “a sapling in the Lord’s vineyard” ’<sup>13</sup> and was himself an allusive

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<sup>13</sup> An allusion to the question: ‘When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?’ (Matthew 21:40).

speaker, conversing with Mary Grace Burmington<sup>14</sup> 'on terms of high familiarity, in which Biblical and colloquial phrases were quaintly jumbled' (2004:104, 79). In the Brethren setting, the ability to make spontaneous Biblical allusions displayed one's knowledge of God, while the tendency to paraphrase and translate rather than to quote accurately might have implied a deep engagement with His Word. Gosse thus learns early on the imprecision inherent in alluding, and in maturity he remained fascinated by the 'incongruities, and the unintended import of words' (Charteris 1931:142).

There are varying degrees of tension between authority and allusion, according to genre (literary, religious, or scientific referencing) or mode (whether the allusion is written or spoken). Initially, Gosse would have learned the conventions from his parents' practice: their usage suggests a hierarchy comprising Biblical, factual and literary quotations, in that order. In a typical tract by Bowes, a Bible verse is positioned at the head, preparing the reader for the topic, as does a preacher before a sermon: 'The Faithful Nurse' (Tract 14) is headed by 'Let us not be weary in well-doing' (Galatians vi:9) or as in 'The Consumptive Death-Bed' (Tract 17), the verse comes after the illustrative story as a warning: 'your destruction cometh as a whirlwind' (Proverbs 1:27): story-telling is thus subjected to the authority of proof-texts. Bowes' 'The Old Soldier's Widow' (Tract 24) illustrates the danger of tentative belief, leaving one to 'linger, shivering on the brink/ And fear to launch away': although this verse comes from Isaac Watts' hymn, it is not attributed, possibly because it is purely illustrative rather than authoritative. Similarly, Philip, in his books on natural history, quotes accurately, embedding all biblical and scientific quotations within the text, and identifying their sources by footnote. His literary quotations (of which there are many, directed at both non-specialist users of his field-guides and school-age readers of his text-books) are differentiated by indentation, and therefore visually isolated from the body of the text; Philip attributes them only occasionally, as if he regards such literary 'tags' as public property, not requiring identification (See Appendix One). Gosse grows up then within an authorial print culture where quotations are invariably accurate, and where Biblical and factual citations merit identification, but where literary quotations, for reasons of familiarity or possibly because they were afforded a comparatively lower status, tend to remain unattributed.

In terms of literary 'authority', the practice of allusion constitutes a particular problem, since its use may constitute challenge or homage. Indeed, as is evident in the *straying-playing* example, the authority of the referent may be compromised as much as the alluding text. In *Conditions for Criticism* (1991), Ian Small delineates the period 1865-1890, coincidentally

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<sup>14</sup> The pseudonym for an active member of the Brethren congregation, over which Philip presided in Marychurch, Devon.

Gosse's formative years as a critic, as a time of crisis of intellectual authority, related to the rise of professionalization. The practice of literary criticism was increasingly appropriated by the universities and by the 1890s the academic community had achieved an explicit consensus regarding scholarly apparatus, particularly the verification of sources and the methods of citation thereof. Professional 'reading' was no longer for the gentlemanly amateur but for the university-trained expert. Allusion is not therefore a 'neutral' device; it is a mode that became entrapped in the heated debates about literary appropriation. In his work on plagiarism in Victorian England, Robert Macfarlane explains how allusion became tainted by the critical mind-set that 'repetitive literature was widely held to be bogus literature' (2007:23). The rise of mechanisation engendered mid-century concerns about literature being simply 'reproduced' like manufactured products, and in reaction to this, the qualities of authenticity, uniqueness and sincerity became so highly valorised that 'plagiarism hunters', minor critics who 'sought to legislate and adjudicate the proprietorial relationships between texts' dominated the literary landscape (Macfarlane 2007:42).

There was, however, from the 1870s onwards, a backlash against this Victorian obsession. Andrew Lang, E.F.Benson, and Brander Matthews argued that 'those types of writing which were often denounced as plagiaristic were actually nothing more than the inescapable, and often the beneficial effects of literary influence' (Macfarlane 2007:43). By the fin-de-siècle, an uneasy truce prevailed, allowing for the cyclical nature of literature and a wider legitimization of appropriation, and Gosse himself acknowledges this in his introduction to Edmund Garrett's edition of *Victorian Songs* (1895): 'It is true that we cannot pretend to discover on a greensward so often crossed and re-crossed as the poetic language of England many morning dewdrops still glistening on the grasses' (1895:xxxix). During the course of Gosse's lifetime, particularly after World War One, the significance of allusion shifted again. In the hands of the Modernists, particularly T.S.Eliot, the device acquired more abstruse and enigmatic qualities. Julian Hanna describes allusion in Modernist writing as:

a form of gate-keeping, an exercise in exclusivity. This has long been the accusation levelled against modernism: the bar is set too high, suggesting a desire on the author's part for an extremely select readership, or no readership at all. Modernist allusion may be read as a rather cynical means for authors to market their own exclusivity as an additional price of entry. (2009:61)

I shall discuss the implications of this in relation to Gosse in my Conclusion.

A legacy of the Victorian censure of plagiarism seems to be implicit in the various Dickensian epithets directed at Gosse. To Robert Louis Stevenson, for example, Gosse was Silas Wegg, 'the literary man' who reads on behalf of others in Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, a nickname inspired by the disposition of Gosse's initials, EWG, (Sitwell 1950:44). Though Dickens's Wegg

styles himself 'an official expounder of mysteries' (1997:51) he is actually a literary villain who adapts traditional ballads to express his own egotistical concerns; such behaviour is comic but also sinister in a novel which is about documents and their devastating effects on individual lives. Reading and writing in this Dickensian context is a serious matter, and to associate Gosse with Wegg, even playfully, was a disquieting act. John Churton Collins denigrated Gosse as Mr Pecksniff, a man 'in the habit of using any word that occurred to him as having a fine sound, and rounding a sentence well, without much care for its meaning' (1886:309), emphasising Gosse's use of allusion for ostentatious display. Evelyn Waugh described Gosse 'as a Mr Tulkinghorn, the soft-footed, inconspicuous, ill-natured habitué of the great world, and I longed for a demented lady's maid to make an end of him' (Gross 1969:163); Tulkinghorn, significantly, is a character who fills his mind with other people's knowledge. Even recently, Whittington-Egan cannot resist characterising Gosse as 'the artful dodger of the socio-political-literary landscape' (2003:231), intimating the 'artful' or 'contrived' nature of his professional and authorial persona. Although Collins's and Waugh's epithets were motivated by personal dislike of Gosse, they all evoke the sense of allusion as a parasitic device, a mode that feeds on other people's writing and lacks authenticity.

However, not all critics regarded Gosse's allusive practice negatively: writing in *The Guardian* in 1890, Walter Pater praised Gosse's 'large comparative acquaintance with the poetic methods of earlier workmen', and demonstrated how his 'poetic *scholarship*' becomes 'matter malleable anew' (1901:108, 112). Such practice naturally appealed to the author of *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (1873), an ostensibly historical text which cited unreliable texts and fanciful legends. Indeed, the disregard of generic boundaries and the random assimilation of other writer's phrases and ideas permeate the sentences of Pater's texts. In *Critical Kit-Kats*, Gosse describes Pater's method of gathering and employing allusions:

He read with a box of . . . squares [of paper] beside him, jotting down on each, very roughly, anything in his author which struck his fancy, either giving an entire quotation, or indicating a reference, or noting a disposition. When they were not direct references or citations, they were of the nature of a *memoria technica*. (1896:263)

Gosse claims that Pater never began writing 'without surrounding himself by dozens of these little loose notes', the import of which would become gradually 'interleaved' within his long sentences; as a result those sentences were 'sometimes broken-backed with having had to bear too heavy a burden of allusion and illustration' (1896:263-4). Gosse implies that Pater's allusions invariably overwhelm the sentence thereby compromising meaning. It is notable,

however, that Gosse's interest rests on Pater's failure in fluency: he evinces no qualms about the 'authority' of the writers being alluded to, or about issues of inaccuracy or plagiarism.

Gosse came into conflict with literary 'authority' in the person of John Churton Collins, who famously exposed Gosse's slovenly scholarship in *From Shakespeare to Pope* (1885).

Passionate about the status of English Literature teaching, Collins used Gosse (then Clark Lecturer at Trinity College, Cambridge) as an example of dilettantism at university level.

Collins's literary authority had a 'certain puritan pride' and sense of incorruptibility

(Cunningham 1998:75) and in his forty-page article in *The Quarterly Review*, Collins lists with painstaking pedantry Gosse's mistakes, misquotations, and misconceptions about

seventeenth- and eighteenth-century literature, fuming over Gosse's 'amazing nonsense' and 'reckless assertions' (1886:301, 312). Collins saw only Gosse's factual inaccuracies and

mistaken dates – he could not see that Gosse was rehearsing literary events in a 'storytelling' mode, however inappropriately, in a textbook. Collins cites, for example, Gosse's version of

the death of Sidney Godolphin, pointing out that although Clarendon, Gosse's source,

'enlarges on the meanness of [Godolphin's] person', Gosse insists that he was 'handsome and gallant', and that although the cavalier was 'shot dead by a musket ball', Gosse's expression

that he was 'cut down' implies a heroic sword-fight (1886:300). Collins, knowing that

Godolphin died in the month of January, is exasperated by Gosse's assertion that the attack took place 'late in the summer' when Godolphin was 'riding down the deep-leaved lanes'

(1886:300). That Gosse romanticises Godolphin the cavalier, only to be railed against by

Collins, the puritan, is a cogent motif for my dissertation, and I shall return to the tension

between Cavalier and Puritan in Chapter Two.

As a result of Collins' attack, Gosse gained a reputation for inaccuracy that still lingers today.

His name became so proverbial for the act of misrepresenting one's sources that in the 1880s it became 'a stock saying for anyone who had made a "howler" that "he had made a Gosse of himself" ' (Charteris 1931:194). Melville Andersen of *The Dial* commented that in *From*

*Shakespeare to Pope* Gosse had 'called from time's "vasty deep" spirits which he has not had the power to dispel' (1885:215), implying that his references and allusions had overwhelmed

the limits of his intellect.<sup>15</sup> Although during the 1950s, it was fashionable to condemn Gosse's carelessness (Elwin 1939:203-4/1950:180; Altick 1950:41, 58) some critics recognised that

Gosse 'was impeccable in feeling, if not always, it appears, in fact' (Sitwell 1950:36) and that despite 'scholarly slips, he nevertheless had a way of cutting through to essence' (Edel

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<sup>15</sup> Anderson's comment is an allusion to Glendower's speech to Hotspur: 'I can call spirits from the vasty deep' (*Henry IV Part 1*, Act 3, Sc.1, line 52). Like Gosse, Glendower was 'a worthy gentleman/ Exceedingly well read' (Speech by Mortimer: Act 3, Sc.1, lines 163-4). I shall return to this notion of allusions being too 'weighty' for Gosse in Chapter Four.

1963:20). Even so, Gosse's association with error persists, as exemplified in a blog by writer Andre Gerard who, on discovering a 'glaring howler' in his own book, *A Literary Anthology* (2011), notes how 'fitting' it is that his mistake occurs in his biographical sketch of Gosse: 'Perhaps my "genius for inaccuracy" was inspired by his' (Blog 40:29 March 2012). That phrase, a 'genius for inaccuracy', emanated from Henry James' verdict on the Gosse-Collins debacle (Thwaite 1984:339) and John Gross likewise mused that 'some of Gosse's [mistakes] are so glaring that one half suspects him of a psychological kink, an impulse towards self-betrayal' (1969:160). Ironically, these judgments can be read in a positive as well as a negative sense: Gosse's 'mistakes' are often inspired (his 'genius') and often intentional (his 'self-betrayal').

Based on the evidence of his unpublished novella, *Tristram Jones* (archived amongst the Gosse papers at Cambridge University Library (Add 2768/XV)) I contend that Gosse was a self-consciously allusive writer as early as 1872. In a cover note, written on 27 September 1902, Gosse describes the novella as 'a fragment of an Autobiographical Romance', adding that 'I, of course, am Tristram Jones'. The humdrum surname, Jones, gives emphasis by contrast to the evocative Christian name, Tristram, and shows Gosse's early sense of the connotative value of allusive names. In Gosse's story, the protagonist-narrator muses upon his romantic self-image: 'he considered that he had been named after the romantic knight, but this was a delusion, for his father had called him after Tristram Shandy, which is quite another thing in point of poetic feeling!' (1872a:9). Jones' reading of himself as Tristram, the knight who becomes the doomed lover of Iseult, a story deriving from medieval Celtic legend and popularised in Arthurian romance,<sup>16</sup> is thus in tension with his father's reading of him as Tristram Shandy, the Quixotic eighteenth-century 'knight-errant'.<sup>17</sup> Twenty-three year old Gosse is writing about a 'conflicted self', using literary references to distinguish between his desired self-image, the romantic Arthurian chevalier and the parentally-imposed persona, Sterne's garrulous protagonist.

Jones's self-reflexive act of discussing his name echoes Walter Shandy's theorizing about how a man's character was influenced by his Christian name (Sterne 1991:60-62). Gosse's youthful evocation of himself, as suspended between these two traditions, points up the key impetus behind my dissertation, namely, Gosse's kinship with the literary canon. Firstly, Gosse's relationship to legend, fairy-tale and mythology - Jones' longing to be the Arthurian knight - is a fraught subject, given Gosse's subjection to a maternal prohibition against fiction, the implications of which will be discussed in Chapters One and Two. Secondly, in *Tristram Jones*,

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<sup>16</sup> Tristram is a variant of Tristan.

<sup>17</sup> James Swearingen notes that Sterne explicitly signals Tristram Shandy's kinship with Don Quixote (1977:3).

he incorporates quotations from Shakespeare, Kingsley, Lovelace, Lodge, and Phineas Fletcher (1872a:6, 53, 28, 42); all are accurate, for Gosse has not yet learned the powerful effect of 'misreading' his sources. At this early stage, then, Gosse recognises the power of appropriating the work of other writers, a feature that is of course intrinsic to Sterne's method in *Tristram Shandy*.

The allusion to *Tristram Shandy* furthermore signals Gosse's interest in an unconventional approach to autobiography, one that is interwoven with allusions and imported texts. Like Sterne, Gosse achieves in *Father and Son* a deliberate generic elusiveness, sliding imperceptibly from one genre to another, never signalling or explaining the shifts, constantly playing with reader expectations; both writers exploit reader uncertainty about what is factual and what is fictional. Both writers use numerous allusions which, when unpicked by the reader, provide commentaries upon the primary narrative, and both employ a split voice, distinguishing between the narrated self of the past and the narrating self in the present. *Tristram Shandy* actually foregrounds many of the critical issues associated with *Father and Son* and in *The History of English Literature: An Illustrated Record* (1903) Gosse comments on Sterne's allusive practice:

Nor does the fact that a surprising number of his 'best passages' were stolen by Sterne from older writers militate against his fame, because he always makes some little adaptation, some concession to harmony, which stamps him the master, although unquestionably a deliberate plagiarist. (1903b:317)

For Gosse, then, the character Tristram Shandy is the mask and voice of a 'master' appropriator, an 'adapter' of the canon, and Gosse reassures the reader - and possibly himself - that this practice has not 'militated' against Sterne's fame.<sup>18</sup>

Sterne sets the tone for the playful, ludic strain in Gosse's work. The word 'allusion' derives from Latin *alludere* (*ad*: 'to' and *ludere*: 'to play') meaning 'to jest, sport, mock, play with' and certainly the device is rather game-like. Alluding resembles punning, a form of short-circuiting between texts. Averse to open rebellion, Gosse tells us that he 'let sleeping dogmas lie' (2004:130). This example illustrates Gosse's childlike delight in witty combinations which make their point economically; here the reader anticipates the familiar idiom, but is arrested by the substitution of 'dogmas' (doctrines authoritatively imposed). Gosse humorously subverts both the narrowness of religious authority but simultaneously ironises his own

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<sup>18</sup> Gosse was clearly known as a Sterne enthusiast among his friends: Lord Redesdale (whose book *Further Memories* was introduced by Gosse in 1917) gave Gosse the 9-volume set of *Tristram Shandy* in 1913 with the inscription: 'To Edmund Gosse – the man who loves and admires Sterne as I love and admire him' (Cox 1924:252).

cowardice in not challenging it. It is, furthermore, a self-reflexive 'joke', commenting on the form of allusion which undermines authority by indirect means.

Gosse's attitude towards authority is encompassed in one of his early poems, 'The Whitethroat', first published in *On Viol and Flute* (1873:1-5).<sup>19</sup> Gosse describes the experience of listening to a whitethroat at twilight, of empathising with the 'strain' of its exertion:

Pathetic singer: with no strength to sing,  
And wasted pinions far too weak to bear  
The body's weight that mars the singing soul,  
In wild disorder, see, her bosom heaves!

Gosse is profoundly moved: 'Ah! Pulsing heart of mine, /Flattered beyond all judgment by delight'; but then he realises that the whitethroat's song is an 'imitative strain', a melody copied from the (Keatsian) nightingale, 'unequalled Philomela', and Gosse 'marvel[s] at our light and frivolous ear', implying that he had been seduced by the whitethroat's 'broken music', 'her faulty song'. The poem seems to meditate on the tension between the imitation and the original. However, when Gosse reprinted this poem six years later in *New Poems* (1879), he inserted a sub-title, 'An Essay in Criticism', which despite the prepositional shift seems to allude to Pope's famous poem, *An Essay on Criticism* (1711). Although Pope allows that in the act of producing and criticising poetry certain conventions must be respected, following the example of the 'Ancients', he claims that irrational qualities, 'nameless Graces', are also important: 'thus Pegasus, a nearer way to take, /May boldly deviate from the common Track' (Pope 1990). Gosse's sub-title encourages the meaning-making reader to access the poem through Pope's lens, and to see that although the nightingale traditionally represents true poetic genius, emitting 'the tone austere/ Of antique passion', the whitethroat, a common warbler, also produces its 'own peculiar note', born out of her 'own lovely pain'. The whitethroat may be viewed as the alluding 'author/singer' and Gosse, the reader, recognises her appropriation of the nightingale's song. As noted above, Eliot, in his essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, posited that no act of creation could take place in a vacuum and that the past was 'altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past' (1928:50); from Eliot's perspective, it would seem that Gosse's response to the nightingale is profoundly influenced by his experience of the whitethroat. When the whitethroat sang, 'her fair smooth head/ *Vibrated*', but when the nightingale sang, all the woodland glades were '*Vibrating* with the song' (italics mine). His observation of the individual whitethroat equips him to see, and to hear redoubled, the power, authority, and influence of the nightingale; allusion thus permits a re-seeing of the source.

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<sup>19</sup> See complete poem in Appendix Two.



The second publishing of this poem, altered by the addition of the new sub-title, highlights Gosse's refashioning of his own work as well as that of others: this trait emerges several times during the course of my dissertation, as metaphors, motifs, scenarios, even pictorial images are recycled - manipulated and modified - across his oeuvre. 'Security', Gosse claimed in 1919, could 'only be found in an incessant exploration of the by-ways of literary history and analysis of the vagaries of literary character' (1919:12). In seemingly paradoxical fashion, Gosse locates his 'security' in constant movement, ever diverting, as from Pope's 'common Track', into 'by-ways' and unknown trails; this too points to the workings of allusion, where a text ostensibly 'secured' by print is dislodged and subjected to the 'vagaries' of a new and alien environment. The form and organisation of my discussion of Gosse's allusive trails has been to a large extent dictated by this movement across his oeuvre. It makes it impossible to focus on separate works, chapter by chapter, due to their intrinsic interconnections. Instead I have tried to assert Gosse's chronology as a reader: I start with Gosse's childhood interpellation by his mother's texts (Chapter One), moving towards fiction in adolescence by the help of his father's texts (Chapter Two), tracing Gosse's adult battle to extricate himself from the influence of Bowes' posthumous textual voice (Chapter Three), focusing in detail on Gosse's enthusiastic embrace of classical literature in his fin-de-siècle text, *The Secret of Narcisse* (Chapter Four), and finally, exposing covert re-readings of his mother within the palimpsest of *Father and Son* (Chapter Five). The focus on allusion means that I cite texts from different periods of Gosse's life, and from various genres in each chapter. There is, however, a clear spiral pattern to my structure, with Bowes' presence being foregrounded in the first, third and fifth chapters, representing my identification of her, rather than Philip, as Gosse's primary antagonist.

Chapter One of my dissertation addresses Bowes' 'library', in particular, her hierarchy of reading which placed fiction at the nadir. I explore her construction of a world premised on the reading of Scripture: I contextualise her imposition of a ban against fiction both on herself and on Gosse. Bowes' early death triggered two sanctifying biographies, one of which, *Tell Jesus* by Anna Shipton, became a Victorian 'best-seller' and which set the tone for literary critics and recent biographers to position her as the saintly 'lost mother'. However, a reading of Bowes' evangelical tracts and articles, particularly those in *The Mothers' Friend*,<sup>20</sup> reveals her public voice, and the theories she expounded, Gosse says, 'with unflinching directness' (2004:29). The mechanistic nature of her writing aligns her with Benthamite logic; she deals in simple binaries which separate godly from ungodly, and I argue that it is this uncompromising textual voice that continues after her death to direct Philip in his parenting of young Gosse.

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<sup>20</sup> This was a monthly magazine, published from 1848 to 1895, price 1d., that provided 'reading which it is hoped may supply a need long felt by those whose purses could not afford the able sixpenny magazines' (1848:1).

However, in her early twenties, the already pious Bowes produced verses that hint at a more worldly and transgressive response to literature, betraying a strong engagement with Dryden's translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*: the contrast between this and her later writing not only shows the depth of her repression, but sheds light on how disabling a temptation fiction was for her. Bowes' influence over Gosse is manifested both in his fiction and biography: his work betrays her insistent binaries both at structural and sentence level. Her presence is clear also in his poetic representation of females: he seems instinctively to turn even mythological characters like Eurydice and Cydippe into versions of his mother. This chapter re-writes the saintly Bowes, presenting her as a passionate reader, so powerfully tempted by secular verse that she became equally forceful in her condemnation of it. Bowes' imposition of strong filters across Gosse's vision of the world and of literature is the first step in understanding his oeuvre.

In Chapter Two, a similar revision of Philip is unnecessary in the light of recent biographies (Croft 2000, Thwaite 2002, and Wooten 2012) but I highlight the contrast between the positive response to Philip by the scientific/cultural corpus in their reading of his romantic handling of natural history, and the reluctance of the literary corpus to relinquish Gosse's caricature, since Philip needs to be a stern Calvinist in order for Gosse's rebellion to make sense. In 1907, Gosse is unable to explicitly criticise his saintly mother, so he recreates his father as a complex amalgam of Philip-as-Bowes, the vehicle for her prejudices and principles, and I match some of his parenting 'acts' with examples from Bowes' guide for Christian parents, *Abraham and His Children* (1855). Despite this sacrificing of Philip, Gosse admits in *Father and Son* that Philip introduced him to fiction, and by analysing examples of Gosse archive material in relation to Philip's lexicon, interesting correspondences emerge, suggesting a strong father-son bond. I establish the strength of Philip's literary presence, not only through his use of fairy-tale and mythological imagery across his oeuvre (an aspect of Philip's work hitherto overlooked), but also through the independent testimony of Victorian giants like Dickens and Kingsley, for whom Philip was a powerful catalyst. I show that not only is Gosse's appropriation of Philip's textual voice extensive, but his sense of rivalry is acute, manifesting itself in subtle one-upmanship. I illustrate this by unravelling Gosse's allusive strategies that undermine the narrative of Philip's wooing; Gosse upstages Philip at the point of his greatest vulnerability, that is, his subservience to the spectral Bowes, whose influence is felt even over his choice of a second wife (2004:184).

I structure Chapter Three according to Bloom's theory of the anxiety of influence. Although Bloom does not directly discuss allusion, he reads textual kinship through six 'revisionary' ratios, each of which embodies a shift in the textual relationship. The conception of such movement between texts adds an additional level of commentary onto my analysis of the

allusive conversation between Gosse's texts and those of his mother. I trace the way that Gosse, fortified by his appropriation of Philip's fairy-tale and mythological lexicon goes some way towards extricating himself from Bowes' influence. I start with Gosse's first swerve or 'Clinamen' showing how Bowes' method of reworking Bible stories is translated by Gosse into a reworking of fairy-stories. The second ratio of 'Tessera' is where the ephebe completes the precursor's work, and here Gosse ironically realises Bowes' idealistically spiritual goals by distinctly earthly conclusions. To achieve 'Kenosis', Gosse must 'empty' himself of Bowes and this he does by becoming the victim of the frenzied maenads in his poem 'Old and New', written around 1873 but not published until 1911. In the fourth ratio of Daemonization, the ephebe taps into a source of power that is bigger than the precursor, and here Gosse adopts Hellenic imagery, specifically the ambiguous figure of the condemned but powerful Atlas (2004:44) for this purpose. At the fifth point on the trajectory, Askesis, Gosse orphans himself by modelling his birth on that of Oliver Twist, which in turn casts and condemns Bowes as the 'erring Agnes'. However, instead of moving on to independence through the final ratio of the Apophrades, the impulse to self-orphaning becomes an end in itself: Gosse embeds himself as a child of the English literary tradition, seeking one foster-parent after another. By this reading, autonomy eludes Gosse and he remains ever the ephebe, constantly appropriating, borrowing and ventriloquizing. The use of many allusions serves to advertise Gosse's new canonical allegiance.

My fourth chapter explores the impact of Ovidian and Petrarchan allusions in Gosse's fictional work, *The Secret of Narcisse* (1892). Narcisse, a sculptor, creates a mechanically-operated skeleton known as the White Maiden, and his preference for this 'non-woman' over his fiancée, the hot-blooded Rosalie, seems to function as a conduit towards a homosexual relationship. Gosse's story is not only determined by Ovid's iconic myth of Narcissus, but is also imbued with its fin-de-siècle symbolism. *Secret* captures the imagery of reflections and shadows, not only connoting Ovid's myth but also commenting on the artistic process of allusion. The story also enacts Bloomian anxiety, for Narcisse the ephebe lives in the shadow of his 'magic working' precursor-sculptor, the historical figure, Ligier de Richier. While Richier is able to creatively 'misread' his precursors and to achieve his Apophrades, Narcisse only 'mistakes' his master and consequently dies with his work destroyed. Gosse's novella, however, proved too lightweight for its allusive burden, and it was largely judged a failure. By the time he wrote *Father and Son*, Gosse had learned to exert greater control over his Ovidian allusions.

Chapter Five spirals back to Gosse's underlying preoccupation with his mother, and I explore through a Barthesian lens a portrait of Bowes (a 'pictorial' allusion, dated to c.1825, published

by Gosse in 1912) which evokes the 'un-Puritan' worldlier aspects of her character, that I suggested in Chapter One were evident in her early verse. As an extension of Bloom's theory used in Chapter Three, I employ Freud's *Family Romances* (1909) to structure a reading of Bowes through the eyes of the young 'neurotic' Gosse. I achieve this sub-textual and subversive reading of *Father and Son* by 'working' Gosse's allusions, and by employing Suzanne Keen's device of the 'narrative annex', a technique that allowed Victorian writers to include impermissible subjects in their texts in a way that did not interfere with the plot. These strategies allow me to reveal the meeting of two trajectories in Gosse's act of writing *Father and Son*: his lifelong preoccupation with his mother intersects with his profound passion for literature. The indeterminacy and ambivalence of Gosse's allusive practice allows him to express his simultaneous appropriation of and resistance to his mother, and produces a subversive narrative within the palimpsest. Ironically, then, it is Gosse's very failure to extricate himself completely from Bowes' influence that generates his singular achievement - in Bloomian terms, his temporary Apophrades - in the pages of *Father and Son*.

The study of allusive practice is a particularly appropriate research tool in the case of Gosse, because its nature and function reflects Gosse's Janus-faced character, the outwardly respectable man of letters, devotee of the literary tradition, who can be dangerously and covertly subversive. Even Charteris, always enthusiastic about Gosse's charm, observed that 'though concealed within the silken velvet pads, the claws were there, ever ready to strike' (Elwin 1939:206). Gosse was conservative and clubbish in both person and authorship; he wielded quotations and epithets for his Old Boys' network, where the mutual recognition of such literary tags promoted a sense of exclusivity. Early in his career, when preparing *The Life of Thomas Gray* (1882) for the *English Men of Letters* series, Gosse was warned by the editor <sup>21</sup> 'against anything oblique and allusive in style' (Thwaite 1984:233); Gosse's elitist impulse seems to be at odds with Morley's democratising purpose. Beneath this rather decorous veneer, however, Gosse's allusions pulse with subversive potential; allusive practice allows Gosse to circumvent the issue of authority, for rather than directly challenging either parental or canonical authority, he simply absorbs their lexis and imagery, re-inscribing it for his own purposes. He exploits what Wordsworth called the 'counter-spirit' of language, described by Amigoni as a force 'unremittingly and noiselessly at work to derange, to subvert, to lay waste'; counter readings work 'noiselessly' without ever clearly signposting that the subversion has occurred' (2007:75). The unpredictable nature of allusive practice also permits the excitement of risk - Gosse may come close to misrepresenting, even plagiarising his sources - but his transformations, poetic, imaginative, and often comic, are invariably seductive. Even when

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<sup>21</sup> John Morley (1838-1923) edited both series: first series: 1878-92; second series 1902-19.

certain appropriations do backfire, Gosse's silken prose often beguiles the unwary reader, who may consequently leave the allusion benignly 'unworked'. Exclusive, subversive and risky: this I suggest is the nature of Gosse's allusive practice.

My reading will produce new narratives that will challenge traditional interpretations of *Father and Son*, and will facilitate a reassessment of Gosse's contribution to literary form. I will show how Gosse's language, read in tandem with its referents, has the power to overturn norms of gender: in my reading of the Gosse family it is Bowes, not Philip, who becomes the primary antagonist. I will offer new insights into Gosse's notorious penchant for committing errors, through the device of Bloomian misprision, which reveals not only Gosse's saturation in the textual voices of his precursors (first his parents, and later the English literary tradition) but also his ability to transform those texts, to undermine their meaning *sotto voce*, without disturbing the respectable surface of his text. Biographers have long accused Gosse of exaggerating and lying, but I shall show that Gosse's lying is not dissembling, but rather a demonstration to the alert reader that art is an act of fabrication. Since allusive meaning is completed by the activation of its four participants, I will show how the silences and contradictions in the text are invitations to the reader to realise Gosse's narrative. Gosse's allusive practice thus points towards those characteristics that were to become so familiar in the twentieth century: the fluidity of language, the relativity of authority, the unreliability of the narrative voice, and the incompleteness of the text.

## Chapter One: Gosse and his Mother: Reading and Writing Authoritative Truth

Ah! now that time has worked its will,

And fooled my heart, and dazed my eyes,

Delusive tulips prove me still

Unwise.

**'The Wallpaper' (Gosse: *In Russet and Silver* 1893)<sup>22</sup>**

Gosse's poem, 'The Wallpaper' (1893:62-3), encapsulates the ambiguous mother-son dynamic that I will explore in this chapter. Here, Gosse relates an incident where he, aged five, was lifted up by his mother to see a 'golden paper flower . . . [a] shining tulip . . . on a wall', and although she declares it to be 'your own, your very own', Gosse says that it is 'above/ My reach'. Bowes dies, leaving Gosse ever struggling to reach the unattainable tulip: his passions are deluded ('And fooled my heart') and his perceptions are bewildered ('and dazed my eyes') by her legacy: 'So has it been since I was born;/ So will it be until I die'. Gosse's birth-right from his mother leaves him perplexed and insecure.

This chapter interrogates the figure of Emily Bowes-Gosse, using her own reading and writing to challenge the traditional acceptance of her as fond mother and saintly tract-writer. Although Gosse explicitly directs the reader of *Father and Son* to Bowes' religious convictions, 'put forth, with unflinching directness, in her published writings' (2004:29) her evangelical works have stimulated little interest among literary critics. They are, however, crucial to our understanding of Gosse both as a reader and a writer. The Word of the Bible represented for Bowes the ultimate authority, and all other texts were measured against that standard. Bowes' sense of the authority of texts was based on what was 'authentic', a word linked etymologically to authority, and implying, at least since the eighteenth century, that the contents of the thing in question correspond to facts and are not fictitious; imaginative writing was therefore threatening for Bowes. She operated a personal hierarchy of reading, from which fiction was dramatically banished in a way that was, I shall demonstrate, more complex than a simple dissenter prejudice against novels, but an earnest struggle to retain a pure vision of God, a battle to resist the seductive lure of the imagination. Bowes' personal conflict with regard to reading had, I contend, profound consequences for Gosse.

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<sup>22</sup> When in 1911 Gosse selected key poems from his four published collections (1873, 1879, 1885, 1894), 'The Wallpaper' was omitted, possibly because its content was too revealing. The complete poem is reproduced in Appendix Three.

Reading was of fundamental importance to Bowes from an early age: she was a 'blue-stocking', Gosse claims, reading Greek, Latin and a little Hebrew (2004:6). From quite young, her reading profile was predominantly devotional (Boyd 2004:24, 27) and seems to have inspired her own later range of authorship. Bowes read evangelical poetry and hymns - Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, John Keble, John Moultrie, Henry Francis Lyte - and herself published two books of hymns in 1832 and 1834. She read biographies about missionaries, in particular, John Oberlin and Felix Neff, and eight of Bowes' poems reflect this interest in service overseas, such as 'The Duty of Prayer for Missionaries' or 'Compassion for the Heathen' (reproduced in Boyd 2004:130-31, 124-5). There is also a marked bias towards seventeenth-century Puritan divines: she copied quotations into her notebooks from Philip Henry, John Flavel, John Howe, and John Owen. Bowes' recorded her spiritual struggles in a (handwritten) notebook called *Recollections* (CUL Add.7035, 1835), describing how she responded to William Law's *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1728) by 'set[ting] apart a corner of my room for reading and prayer' and thus she became confirmed in her 'preference for evangelical religion as far as I knew the difference' (1835:24, 30). The works of Legh Richmond, particularly *Domestic Portraiture* (1833)<sup>23</sup> may have inspired Bowes' earnest exhortation on child-rearing: *Abraham and his Children or Parental Duties illustrated by Scriptural Examples* (1855a)<sup>24</sup> as well as several articles for Christian magazines, particularly a publication called *The Mothers' Friend*. Richmond's *The Young Cottager* (1809), Bowes records, 'made a great impression on me' (1835:22), influencing Bowes' writing of tracts, of which there were over sixty, about one third of which feature model deaths,<sup>25</sup> emulating the famously saintly demise of Richmond's 'Little Jane'. Bowes thus adopts conventional male evangelical models, based on doctrinal truth, which she believed to be objectively given and transcendentally true, relying on God as the guarantor of meaning.

In *Father and Son* Gosse quotes from *Recollections* explaining Bowes' decision, aged only nine, to deny herself fiction and thenceforth to restrict herself only to Biblical and factual reading:

The longing to invent stories grew with violence; everything I heard or read became food for my distemper. The simplicity of truth was not sufficient for me; I must needs embroider imagination upon it, and the folly, vanity and wickedness which disgraced my heart are more than I am able to express. (Gosse 2004:16)

Bowes' confession on this issue is complex and heartfelt: 'I have also taken a wicked pleasure in reading of wickedness' (1835:19). While I do not seek to question the sincerity of her

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<sup>23</sup> This book outlines Richmond's religious principles as exemplified in the education of his family.

<sup>24</sup> Hereafter referred to as *Abraham*.

<sup>25</sup> Twenty of Bowes' tracts express the importance of a good Christian death. Some of her tract titles illustrate this emphasis: 'The Eleventh Hour' (6); 'The Consumptive Death-Bed' (17); 'The Dying Peasant Lad' (29), 'The Dying Postman' (39), (bracketed references refer to Tract Numbers).

renunciation, Bowes' perception of imaginative storytelling as a sinful activity could be interpreted as the spiritualization of a natural aspect of growing up. In *Child and Tale* (1977), André Favat's Piaget-driven researches into children's responses to fairy-tales show that ten is the age when most children give up make-believe, and Bowes' religion-driven renunciation of fiction coincides with that developmental norm. Bowes' language in *Recollections*, quoted above, underlines her conviction that fiction represents for her a temptation; the words 'distemper' and 'disgrace' reveal her belief that she suffered from a physical and moral aberration. Such a conviction accords with the culture of the nineteenth-century Puritan, for whom fiction constituted not only a distraction but an addiction: 'it was all a lie, and therefore damnably wicked' (Avery 1995:13). Indeed, Gosse records that in the early days of their courtship, when Philip recommended *Salathiel*, 'a pious prose romance' by the Rev. George Croly, his mother 'would not consent to open it' (2004:16), a refusal that implies an extreme fear of her own susceptibility to fiction. For Bowes, imagination is transgressive; she must resist because it may cause her to be reckless and self-serving. Given such convictions, it is not surprising that in the Gosse household, 'story-books of every description were sternly excluded. No fiction of any kind, religious or secular, was admitted into the house. In this it was to my Mother, not to my Father, that the prohibition was due' (2004:15). Bowes' stance is furthermore quite logical for 'what was the point of protecting the young from the evil of the world if they were to meet it vicariously in print?' (Rosman 2012:143). Gosse reiterates that the sole responsibility for the ban lay with Bowes; in fact Philip 'never entirely agreed with her [but] he yielded to her prejudice' (2004:117).<sup>26</sup> So authoritative was Bowes' stricture that even four years after her death (a third of Gosse's childhood) 'the embargo [she] laid upon every species of fiction . . . had never been raised' (2004:117). Anything invented or inaccurate offended Bowes' perceived standards of truth and authority.

Bowes states in her *Recollections* that she 'had not known that there was any harm in [fiction], until Miss Shore, finding it out, lectured me severely, and told me it was wicked'(CUL Add.7035, 1835). When Gosse quoted this passage in *Father and Son*, he inserted a bracketed commentary identifying Miss Shore as 'a Calvinist governess' (2004:16), an epithet with strong connotations. Firstly it conveys the impression of young Bowes growing up in a privileged home with governesses,<sup>27</sup> when in fact this period of Bowes' childhood was a time of domestic upheaval due to the decline in her father's fortunes. As a consequence of familial impoverishment, Bowes was sent away for eight months (October 1814 to May 1815), to the

<sup>26</sup> Despite this clear demarcation of responsibility, critics invariably implicate Philip: 'his *parents* forbade him to read fiction, for *they* regarded story-telling as a sin' (Porter 1975:179); 'it is personal pride that is responsible for *the father's usurpation of a child's customary privileges*, depriving him of pictures, all forms of fiction and above all, companions of his own age' (Finney 1985:146) (italics mine).

<sup>27</sup> I shall discuss Gosse's romantic embellishments concerning Bowes' social class in Chapter Five.



home of Revd. T. W. Shore (1756-1823) Rector of Otterton, Devonshire, where 'his daughter took in hand the teaching of the new arrival' (Boyd 2004:23). While Miss Shore was clearly a strict and committed Anglican, Gosse's epithet of 'Calvinist' seems motivated more by its literary resonances than by historical fact: in particular, it echoes Robert Louis Stevenson's childhood, famously influenced by his 'Calvinist governess', Alison Cunningham ('Cummie'). Not only does this implicit parallel between the childhoods of Stevenson and Bowes enhance her status as a natural story-teller, and therefore the poignancy of the suppression of her imagination, but that link is also heightened by Gosse's recollection of his mother explaining to him the meaning of James Hyslop's 1819 poem, 'The Cameronian's Dream' (2004:38), the very poem that Cummie taught young Stevenson (Balfour 1901:36). What presents, then, as an apparently innocuous piece of editing on Gosse's part is actually a very resonant allusion, with strong connotations.

For the two biographers (Philip and Anna Shipton) who wrote about Bowes after her death from breast cancer in 1857, there was no hesitation about how she should be presented: she was an exemplary Christian and her memory should be sanctified. Philip wrote *A Memorial to the Last Days on Earth of Emily Gosse* (1857) describing her resilient faith: it was explicitly penned to inspire fellow Christians (1857a:iii). Philip emphasises that despite her suffering, Bowes continued her proselytizing mission: in the Pimlico surgery, she moved 'among the patients like a ministering angel . . . offering to each one of her own Gospel Tracts . . . undeterred by the scornful refusal of some and the stolid indifference of others' (1857a:37). Despite the growth in satire against such women, epitomised by Dickens's caricature of Mrs Pardiggle, whose evangelistic activities met with similar 'scorn' and 'indifference' in instalments of *Bleak House* during 1852-3, the second biography of Bowes, a pious little volume by Anna Shipton, also emphasising Bowes' evangelical activities, was hugely popular. Shipton was Bowes' quasi-disciple and admirer, and her book *Tell Jesus: Recollections of Emily Gosse* (1863) had at least sixty impressions, and sold over 307,000 copies; ironically, it was still in print in 1911 (Cunningham 1979:323) while Bowes' own book, *Abraham*, was never reprinted. Describing Bowes' funeral, Shipton quotes Matthew 14:12: 'On Friday, the 13<sup>th</sup> of February, 1857, "they took up the body and buried it, and went and told Jesus"' (1863:82); the allusion, referring to the burial of John the Baptist not only reflects Bowes' role as an evangelist but inadvertently conveys a symbolic 'maleness' about her, an issue to which I shall return below.

This hagiographical treatment of Bowes' persona still lingers. In his biography of Philip, L.R. Croft, using *Father and Son* as a source, concludes that Bowes was a woman of 'outstanding piety': she was 'a perfect spouse'; 'a companion of perfect compatibility' who shared with her

husband 'an idyllic existence' (2000:82-94). Robert Boyd's tribute to Bowes' life and work (reproducing many of her tracts and poems) is another direct descendant of Philip's *Memorial*, commemorating 'the life of one who laboured so diligently for and continued to cling in faith so closely to the Saviour even in her intense suffering': Boyd criticises Gosse's 'failure to appreciate his mother's faith' concluding that he was 'embarrassed' by it (2004:70). Like Philip, Boyd writes in the hope that Bowes' example will draw his readers 'to love and serve the Saviour too with like unswerving faith' (2004:10); the aura of saintliness has embalmed Bowes' memory for decades.

This aura occasionally distorts assessments of Bowes in the context of *Father and Son*. Nancy Traubitz, for example, groups Bowes together with the anonymous old woman who breathed life into the new-born Gosse, and Miss Brightwen, his stepmother, to form a 'tripartite deity'. Straitjacketed by this schema of benevolent females set in opposition to Philip who is 'a vengeful, jealous and destructive masculine deity' (1972:148), Traubitz is forced to minimise Bowes' interdict against fiction claiming that 'Gosse sees this prohibition less directed toward himself than as a means by which his mother attempted to control her own natural bent as a novelist' (1972:150). Traubitz here misrepresents a key theme of *Father and Son*. Elihu Perlman similarly disregards the detail of the text in the idealisation of the mother-son relationship, claiming that young Gosse had 'a very satisfying relationship with his mother', and describing family life as 'intensely child-centred' (1979:22); this interpretation ignores Gosse's complaint that Bowes neglected him, being 'carried away by the current of her literary and philanthropic work' (2004:24). Perlman furthermore translates Emily's deathbed dedication of her son into a beneficent impulse arguing that 'Gosse's resilience in achieving an independent personality in the face of his father's inquisitorial demands was a heritage bequeathed to him by a mother who managed, even in dying, to communicate a sense of worth and value' (1979:23). Gosse's explicit resentment of that deathbed 'bequest', experienced as 'a weight, intolerable as the burden of Atlas' (2004:44) renders Perlman's view absurd. It is ironic furthermore, that in their feminist readings of Bowes, Traubitz and Perlman never once refer to Bowes' role as an author.

Douglas Brooks-Davis evinces the same tendency to idealise Bowes and to demonise Philip: he reads *Father and Son* as 'an elegy on maternal absence', interpreting it as a book 'so parodically patrilinear that it registers a yawning blank where the mother should be' (1989:119-20). Brooks-Davis manipulates *Father and Son* into his Lacanian framework, in what Stevick calls 'Procrustean' fashion (1990:282): he claims, for example, that Bowes' talent for writing fiction 'was sacrificed to the demanding patriarchy of the Plymouth Brethren' (1989:121) despite the fact that Bowes makes it very clear in *Recollections* that her decision to

eschew fiction occurred at the age of nine, long before her adult embrace of the Brethren sect, and that it was urged upon her not by a male cleric but by the above-mentioned Miss Shore. By his Lacanian lens, Brooks-Davis locates young Gosse in the 'imaginary order', identifying with the mother, united against Philip, the intrusive representative of the Law. He exemplifies his approach by interpreting the episode of the 'card of framed texts' (which flapped noisily in the draught and frightened young Gosse in his dark bedroom, until his mother discovered the cause of the eerie noises (2004:28)) as the mother's 'silencing' of the sacerdotal Word (1989:133). Such a conclusion sits uneasily with both the fictionalised Bowes in *Father and Son* where she is depicted as an 'enthusiastic' evangelical, and with the historical Bowes whose tract-voice is absolute and uncompromising: indeed, Bowes *is* 'the Word' and would never 'silence' it. During the course of the dissertation, I will counter this Lacanian interpretation by my exposure of the parents' authorial voices. I contend that Bowes inhabits the register of the Symbolic, representing the law, the 'no' of the prohibition against fiction, while Philip, as I shall demonstrate in Chapter Two, occupies the register of the Imaginary, the polysemic world of romance and the fairy-tale. My interpretation of Gosse's parents through their reading choices and writing profiles will result in an inversion of the gender norms on which Brooks-Davis bases his analysis.

Although Bowes' role as an author is addressed by some critics of *Father and Son*, her writing is invariably dismissed as Victorian proselytism. In his biography of Gosse, Charteris refers briefly to Bowes as a 'successful writer of tracts and a lifelong practitioner of good works', claiming that 'the whole energies of her mind were dedicated to the practice of her religious faith' (1931:15). Charteris defines Bowes by her faith and authorial output, but he is actually interested in neither. Vivian and Robert Folkenflik wrote a much-quoted essay on the conflict between the father's belief in 'The Word' and the son's attraction to the 'words' of fictional texts (1979:157-174) in the course of which they offer one of the few acknowledgements in the critical corpus of Bowes' role as an author:

Her pen, and her time are devoted to "persuasion." The narrator explicitly dissociates her from Mrs Jellyby, but she does spend her time convincing people of the truth of the Word, to some effect, apparently, since the narrator can remember a handsome soldier whom her preaching sent off to die in the Crimea. (1979:158)

The Folkenfliks have, however, missed the point here. Firstly, they accept at face value Gosse's reference to Mrs Jellyby, Dickens's notorious caricature of a mother devoted to a cause rather than to her children's welfare: they do not seem to recognise Gosse's sly use of *occupatio* – 'I would not for a moment let it be supposed that I regard her as a Mrs Jellyby, or that I think she neglected me' (2004:24) – which allows him to reproach Bowes with impunity. Secondly, the Folkenfliks' tone implies that Victorian religious fundamentalism is a legitimate target for

ridicule. They refer to Bowes' tract, 'The Young Guardsman of the Alma' (1855), but they clearly have not read it. The tract concerns a young soldier of ten years' standing, about to sail to the Crimea, where he dies: Bowes uses the figure to urge the need for spiritual preparedness. Situated in its historical and religious context the tract is a powerful piece of writing, but the Folkenfliks, sympathizing with the neglected child-protagonist, and playing up to the anti-evangelical attitude of the implied modern reader, become flippant, humorously implicating Bowes in the agency of the soldier's death: 'her preaching *sent* [him] off to die' (italics mine). It is unwise to dismiss a document that, judging by its circulation figure of 'half a million copies' (Gosse 1890a:260; 2004:20) was a successful text: indeed, a decade after Bowes' death, Morgan and Chase<sup>28</sup> noted in *The Revival* that there was 'a constant appeal' for Bowes' tracts, and that they were 'preferred by many distributors' (1867:571). Within the evangelical community, then, Bowes was a successful and popular author.

Critics have not recognised how much power and authority authorship afforded Bowes, both domestically and publicly. David Grylls, whose topic is Victorian parenting, adopts a playful tone in his discussion of Bowes' *Abraham*:

When Edmund Gosse was a boy of five his mother wrote a book on parental duties: it was called *Abraham and His Children*. Mrs Gosse argued that although, in the past, parents had often been too severe, the contemporary failing was the opposite of this: "... we are in danger of losing all parental authority in our fear of exercising discipline on our children." Rule, discipline, duty, subjection – these words wind familiar patterns through her prose. But Gosse's mother is optimistic: if a child is brought up correctly, she says, he will undoubtedly be "just what we make him." And if a child grows up differently- if he refuses to go the way he has been trained? In that case, Mrs Gosse concludes, the parents must have acted amiss. (1978:172)

Like the Folkenfliks, Grylls plays to the gallery, failing to appreciate the powerful impact of this evangelical 'handbook' on Philip and on Gosse. Ann Thwaite seems alone in recognising what a pervasive posthumous influence *Abraham* represented for the bereaved Philip as he tried to parent his son according to its strictures (2002:191). Thwaite's insight furthermore reinforces my inversion of the stereotypical gender roles, which positions Bowes as the male Symbolic authority and locates Philip in the female realm of the Imaginary. Bowes' writing may be naive, and as I shall show, very narrow, but to ridicule it thus terminates interest in what is a very revealing mother-son interaction.

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<sup>28</sup> In 1864, Morgan and Chase collected 56 tracts by Bowes and 4 by Philip to publish as a book entitled *Gosse Narrative Tracts*. Although Bowes work dominated, it was published as *Narrative Tracts* by 'Mr and Mrs P.H. Gosse'. Bowes was the driving force in this genre: Philip's tract-writing, claim Freeman and Wertheimer, was achieved only 'under the influence of Emily' (1980:9). I shall refer to Bowes' tracts by their designated numbers, since the pages are not numbered.

More recently, Ernest Rubinstein has approached Bowes' act of self-prohibition from a religio-philosophical rather than from a primarily literary perspective. Although he uses only *Father and Son* as his source, he sets Bowes' prohibition in a much wider context: he traces her conviction that 'falseness and wickedness are correlative' all the way back to Plato, 'a key originating point of a long tradition of religious censoriousness toward literature' (2007:27, 33). Bowes' position, he argues, echoes Plato's belief that fiction appeals to the 'inferior parts of the soul . . . constituted largely by undisciplined emotion and desire', a conviction that leads him 'to deliberately deny himself *and others* anything that blocks or postpones the vision of the Good' (2007:35-7 italics mine). Rubinstein's approach highlights the prejudice of the interpretations of the Folkenfliks and Grylls. His overview reads Bowes' act of prohibition not as an aberrant evangelical whim but as a determination to prioritise rational thought over disorderly emotion or distracting affection. Bowes' creation of a fiction-deprived home (like Plato, she denies herself *and others*) thus serves as microcosm of Plato's ideal city, described in Book X of *The Republic*, from which poets were excluded. This parallel with Plato's asceticism lends philosophical weight to Bowes' self-prohibition that is not recognised by traditional literary critics.

Some literary critics dismiss Bowes' prohibition as an example of Gosse's notorious inclination to exaggerate. Karin Manarin, for example, focuses on the passage where Gosse is musing about his mother's diary entry describing her self-prohibition, and Manarin notes that he describes it as 'so curious a point' (2004:16). Manarin plucks that word 'curious' from the text, and interprets it benignly:

her belief is only a curiosity; her prohibition against fiction . . . is not serious. What could have been the act of an ogre, the denial of fiction to a sensitive and literary soul, is disarmed by Gosse's interpretation of his mother as suffering victim of her own desires. (1996:61-2).

This is an echo of Traubitz's position, argued thirty-two years earlier. If the prohibition is not something 'serious' to Gosse, then what should readers make of the series of vignettes that illustrate the debilitating confusion he experiences as a result of it: the fragment of a 'sensationalist novel' that wound [him] up almost to a *disorder* of wonder and romance' (2004:25) or the 'scenes and images in *Tom Cringle's Log* which made not merely a lasting impression upon [his] mind, but *tinged* [his] outlook upon life' (2004:25, 118 italics mine) to name only two instances of Gosse's mistaken readings of fiction for reality. The subject preoccupies Gosse until old age: even one year before his death, he was telling readers, 'Novels were excluded from my Plymouth Brother home, as being essentially 'worldly' in their tendency' (1927:145). The act of denying Gosse fairy-tales is 'serious': Bruno Bettelheim argues in *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976) that the experience of the fairy-tale estranges the

child from reality, making psychological space for him to confront repressed problems. In other words, fairy-tales allow a child to take a temporary break from parental 'protection', to test the validity of rules imposed by parents, and to test the boundaries of autonomy. Bowes' ban is therefore not only psychologically damaging, but it retards Gosse's grasp of cultural and literary conventions. The above-named incidents depict young Gosse being plunged unprepared into a maelstrom of emotions which are 'disorderly' and 'tainting'. This deprivation engenders in Gosse a distorted literary vision that obscures the distinction between fact and fiction.

Blandly denying the serious nature of Bowes' prohibition, Manarin had clearly not encountered examples of Bowes' public voice, expressing her belief that fiction was profoundly unsuitable for Christian children. This extract from an article in *The Mother's Friend*, entitled 'More Raw Apples', has never been quoted or re-printed since its publication in 1855:

You may feed the young mind and infant imagination on . . . [trite and foolish nursery ditties] . . . and your child will like them. But if you make the mistake of thinking it is too soon to begin with spiritual teaching, and that you had better pave the way with nursery rhymes and other trash, you will find not only that you have lost the fairest and most favourable opportunity one human being ever has of influencing the mind of another, but also that you have been cramming it with sour apples till its appetite is lost for wholesome food. I was reminded of this yesterday morning, on being awakened by a little fellow at my side, who had crept out of his crib at daybreak, "Mamma," said he, "what is that about 'Heigh diddle diddle, and the cow jumping over the moon?'" I said, "Do you believe that story dear? Do you think that cows ever can jump over the moon?" "Yes, I do, ma" "And do you suppose that dishes can run away with spoons?" "Yes, mamma." "What a stupid child!" you will exclaim. Very well, your children may be wiser; but what I should think of great importance is – are you wiser than to teach your children all the nonsense you learned when you were a child? Time is short. Your child may die this year. Do all you can for him while you have him. Work while it is day, lest darkness come upon you; and pray for God's blessing on your labours and mine, in teaching our little ones. (1855b: 29-30)

This extract exemplifies Bowes' theories, put forth, Gosse says, with 'unflinching directness' (2004:29): her passion leads her to address the reader as 'you' or 'your' fifteen times, with imperious insistence. The target for her scorn is the imagined reader who mistakes the infant's credulity for stupidity: "'What a stupid child!' *you* will exclaim' (italics mine). By her sarcasm, Bowes inculcates the mother who arrogantly considers her child to be 'wiser', and therefore not needing such instruction. Her imperatives: 'do', 'work', 'pray', address this maternal complacency. Bowes' language does not simply 'describe' the world: it constructs it.

Her authorial status allowed Bowes to invoke a system of values that sanctified her work as important: representing authorship as a Christian mission provided such middle-class women with one of the few literary roles available within Victorian culture. Bowes depicts herself in

her tracts entering the sick rooms of dying males or engaging men in conversation in railway carriages; her marital state does not curtail her preaching activities, as was the fate of her fictional counterpart, Dinah Morris, the Methodist preacher in *Adam Bede* (1859). Gosse's comment that his parents were married 'without a single day's honeymoon' (2004:7) is significant in the sense that Victorian honeymoons were 'paradoxically a highly visible and deeply private transformation – a geographical and psychological site for transformation from single to married woman' (Mitchie 1999:421); Bowes, seemingly, did not relinquish the pre-marital freedom that evangelism afforded her. Indeed, her domestic power may be evinced from the analogy she offers in *Abraham*:

A wise and prudent father will ever remember that while he is the sovereign, the head and source of all authority, his wife is his prime-minister, carrying out family government in all its details, and with all its discouragements, for him, and his; and by his own appointment. (1855a:58)

Philip is afforded only titular authority, while Bowes holds the real reins of power. Bowes' Damascus Road conversion in relation to fiction aligns her furthermore with figures like George Cruikshank, whose conversion to teetotalism resulted in his campaign against alcohol (Dickens 1853). The urge to preach salvation through Bowes' tracts, or temperance through Cruikshank's penny pamphlets, reduces storytelling to an act of didactic moralising.

Bowes lived at a time when 'women were the moral lynchpin of society, whose special role was to mould and cultivate the minds of children' (Brown 2009:59-62). Within the pages of *The Mothers' Friend*, Bowes established herself as an authority on raising Christian children, preaching her maternal sermons, teaching young mothers to feed their children with what was wholesome and not indigestible, using food as a thinly-disguised metaphor for morality (1855c:15-16), warning against irresponsible nursemaids (1854a:189, 1856:34-35), exhorting patience and perseverance (1855d:110-11), and encouraging parents to pray regularly as an example to the young (1855e:178). There is a 'mechanical' quality to Bowes' system of childhood training, particularly with regard to the act of reading. An entry in Bowes' diary, dated 13 December, 1854, when Gosse was aged five, records his ability 'to read lessons and verses every morning, *but not willingly*' (1854b italics mine), a note that provides a flavour of Bowes' system<sup>29</sup> of early training. For Bowes, the purpose of reading was didactic, and only religious books had any value. Gosse was for example 'early *set to read* Jukes<sup>30</sup> aloud'

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<sup>29</sup> Gosse's use of the word 'system' acts as an ironic allusion to Bowes' application: in *Father and Son*, when referring to his parents' mode of educational and religious training, Gosse uses the word 'system' seven times (2004:15, 18, 99, 115, 127, 133, 168).

<sup>30</sup> The two most famous works by Andrew John Jukes (1815-1901), *The Law of the Offerings in Leviticus* (1847) and *The Types of Genesis* (1870), 'were in no small degree responsible for the typology that later became second nature' to the Plymouth Brethren during the nineteenth century (Coad 1968:78).

(2004:17 *italics mine*); the passive construction emphasises the clockwork nature of the task. In the Preface to *Abraham*, Bowes reminds fellow parents that: 'We hold in our grasp the seal on which the soft ductile impressible wax of infant character is to be moulded' (1855a:iii). This emphasis was noted by the review of *Abraham* in *The Evangelical Magazine*: 'the mission of woman in the early culture of the young is strikingly set forth' (1855:338). It is surely no coincidence that Gosse answers back in the same register, referring to the 'detached impressions which remain imprinted here and there on the smoothed-out wax of a child's memory' (1890a:258); one surmises that Gosse's memory is 'smoothed-out' in order to undo those maternal mouldings.

Two posthumously published articles in *The Mothers' Friend*: 'The Blind Irishman' (1857:185-87) and 'Early Control' (1858:14-16) seem to feature young Gosse as the subject of the model lesson. His identity is faintly camouflaged as 'little Edward' and 'little Willie'<sup>31</sup> respectively, while the mother in both stories is the barely disguised Bowes. Bowes sees nothing wrong in advertising the apparent 'failings' of her own child in order to provide a spiritual analogy to teach others. Little Edward claims to dislike reading<sup>32</sup> but his mother insists 'When you are older and wiser you will know the use of learning but now what you have to learn is to believe that I know better than you, and to do everything that I wish' (1857:185). The mother teaches her son through the analogy of an old blind man who is 'saved' by hearing his grandson read the Bible. 'Perhaps', the mother comments, 'the old man might have gone to the grave ignorant and wicked; instead of which, the grandfather learned the way of salvation through the lessons of his little grandson' (1857:186). The story concludes thus:

'O mother, mother,' cried Edward, 'I have found you out! I know why you told me that story; you want me to be a useful little boy, and read to other people when I can read myself; and so I will. I will go to school directly, and try to learn like that little boy. Here's my cap and bag. Goodbye mother.' (1857:187)

Bowes wants to encourage fellow mothers to adopt her methods, so she makes little Edward the voice of exemplary cheerful obedience. Similarly in 'Early Control', 'little Willie' is the foil for Bowes' moral. The story concerns Benjamin Haydon,<sup>33</sup> whose 'parents never subdued his will' and who finally 'killed himself because he could not have everything his own way':

"Had you any reason for telling me this sad story mamma? Do you think I am like Mr Haydon?" said Willie. "No, my love; but you often wish have your own way and . . . I wish you to see what is the end of self-indulgence. Let us ask God's grace that I may

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<sup>31</sup> Gosse was known as Willie throughout his childhood. In adulthood, he used the name Edmund.

<sup>32</sup> It is a delicious irony that Bowes seems puzzled by the fact that a child, whose reading is subjected to a ban on fiction, might be demotivated from learning to read.

<sup>33</sup> Benjamin Haydon, (1786-1846), artist whose reputation suffered from his tactless attitude to patrons.



bring you up under proper control, and that you may submit willingly, even when you do not understand my object in controlling you.”

The precocious Willie thus learns the didactic moral function of stories, then he silently fades from the scene as Bowes moves ‘front of stage’ to reiterate the benefits of maternal control and filial submission (1858:14-16).

Bowes’ use of illustrative stories in her tracts, designed to achieve a religious message, raises the issue of her denial of fiction and invention. Bowes claimed not to ‘invent’ her tract-stories but to model them on ‘actual conversations sustained . . . in a railway carriage or an omnibus’ (Gosse 1857a:15). Certainly many of Bowes’ tracts have a local and domestic focus: they concern women struggling with violent, irreligious, or sickly husbands or sons,<sup>34</sup> reproducing conversations with, or about, working-class figures such as the landlady, soldier, tailor, postman, bathing-woman, shoemaker, or railway-guard.<sup>35</sup> ‘This story is no allegory, but strictly true’ interjects Bowes in ‘The Drowning Sailor’ (Tract 51), and on the two occasions when Bowes employs a historical example, she adds the epithet: ‘A True Story’.<sup>36</sup> Philip described Bowes’ tract-related activities in his *Memorial*:

It was quite a common incident for a chance companion in an omnibus to open up to her the history of a life . . . Often has she come home and told me a story full of romantic passages, which had been confided to her by some forlorn woman whom she had met laden with trouble. (Gosse 1857a:24-5)

Philip, however, unwittingly compromises Bowes’ claims of veracity by his use of the phrase ‘romantic passages’ for though he seems to intend by this phrase, statements that go ‘beyond what is customary’, the word imports by association notions of fantasy (*OED* 2009). ‘Strict evangelicals,’ remarks Nancy Cutt, ‘saw no merit in romance’ (1974:18). Philip is clearly more comfortable with the word ‘romantic’ than Bowes would have been. Indeed, the word signals a division in attitude between Gosse’s parents: for Bowes the lure of fiction threatens to be a distraction from God’s Word whereas for Philip, romance provides a means of expressing wonder at God’s creation.<sup>37</sup>

Religious truths are presumed to be absolute and universally valid laws. Bowes’ tracts are consequently characterised by a strongly mechanistic discourse. It is a world of binaries: the reader must either accept or reject the gospel. By juxtaposing experiences, words and ideas, the tract-writer forces either capitulation or resistance to the ‘grand narrative’ of Christianity as the all-encompassing, teleological framework for understanding the world. This refusal of

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<sup>34</sup> Tracts 9, 24, 26, 27, 29, 47.

<sup>35</sup> Tracts 9, 24, 27, 39, 54, 43, 58.

<sup>36</sup> Tract 10 (‘The Two Maniacs’) and Tract 13 (‘The Fall of the Rossberg’).

<sup>37</sup> I shall discuss this further in Chapter Two.

any latitude can be illustrated by the structure and voice of Bowes' tract, 'The College Friends' (Tract 21), where she vividly presents the binary of life and death, relating the story of two American students: Mr E—, a Deist, and Mr Judson, 'the child of pious parents'. When Mr E— suddenly meets his 'melancholy end', and dies in the fullness of his sin, Mr Judson's eyes are opened to his own sinful state, and he becomes 'a most laborious and successful missionary'. There is a strong emphasis on Mr Judson having had an evangelical upbringing, implying that when the crisis comes, that early training is 'activated' and makes good. The basic juxtaposition of two figures, one unsaved, the other saved, reverberates through Bowes' rhetoric, posing 'choices' for the reader. The address to the reader is uncompromising: 'Reader! Which of these young men would you prefer to have been? Are you a scoffer or an infidel?' The reader is pressurised by Bowes' urgent exclamations ('There is hope for you while there is life!') and his response is channelled and prescribed by her rhetorical questions ('Was he a Christian, calm and peaceful at the prospect of entering a joyful eternity? Or an unconverted man, shuddering on the brink of a dark unknown future?'). Bowes' use of these oratorical devices recalls the language of the notorious Dickensian evangelical, Mr Chadband, who describes Jo, the crossing-sweeper, in terms of similarly well-balanced oppositions, as 'a Gentile and a heathen, a dweller in the tents of Tom-all-Alone's and a mover-on upon the surface of the earth', and addresses the assembled company by rhetorical questions: '[Jo] is devoid of the light that shines in upon some of us. What is that light? What is it? I ask you, what is that light?' (1971:414). It is ironic that W.E. Henley, who disliked Gosse, used a code in his letters to Robert Louis Stevenson, in which he alluded to Gosse by the epithet, 'Chadband fils' (Atkinson 2000:161); although Henley was thinking of Philip as Chadband, the tract language directs the allusion rather more strongly towards Bowes.

The mechanistic character of Bowes' tracts also aligns them with Benthamite thinking. Indeed, the rise of mechanisation in the first half of the nineteenth century has long been associated with the growth of evangelical practice. Coleridge despaired over the 'mysteries of religion' being 'cut and squared for the comprehension of the understanding' (quoted by Coveney 1967:85) while Thomas Carlyle wrote in his 1829 essay 'Signs of the Times': 'Not the external and physical alone is now managed by machinery, but the internal and spiritual also' (Landow 2004). Evangelical routines were ordered on the belief that virtue could be achieved through strict moral conduct and propriety, that is, a 'mechanics' of virtue. Bowes' interrogation of her young subject in 'The Stage Coach Companions' (Tract 35) illustrates that methodical approach:

A young girl, with a baby in her arms, was seated there before me, and we soon began a conversation together. Among other things, I asked her, 'Do you ever pray?' - 'Yes, I do,' she replied.

Do you ever ask that your sins may be forgiven?'- She hesitated.  
 'What sins have you committed?' – 'None!' I never did any sin.'  
 Did you never tell a lie?' – 'No.'  
 Were you never disobedient to your parents?' - 'No.'  
 Do you expect to go to heaven?' – 'Yes, I hope so.'

The girl's defensive answers bespeak her discomfort, and the questioner's persistence finally wears her down to silence. The questioner is concerned only to impose the dominant ideology rather than being interested in the girl's answers, pursuing a litany of rhetorical strategies as the prelude to an exposition of salvation by faith. This classic evangelical technique is impervious to the listener's will or emotion: between evangelist and neophyte, between adult and child, there is a marked power imbalance and the procedure seems inexorable. Dickens invests Mrs Pardiggle with a voice that is similarly 'business-like and systematic', and Esther complains that she has 'such a *mechanical* way of taking possession of people' (Dickens 1971: 156, 159 italics mine). D.C. Somerville argued that just as the Evangelicals focused on the pursuit of spiritual salvation, so the Benthamites had material happiness as their goal: the mechanics of the political quest mirrored the mechanics of the spiritual one:

Benthamism was a form of political individualism. It reposed great, in fact excessive, confidence in the capacity of individuals to 'work out their own salvation', as we say, so far as their social and economic welfare in this world was concerned . . . But Evangelicalism was also a form of individualism - individualism in religion. Its care was the salvation of the individual human soul. (1962:103)

Both groups were furthermore indifferent to tradition: Benthamites despised the teaching of history while the Evangelicals subordinated church theology to the authority of the Bible. Their overwhelming interest in prosperity and piety respectively meant that they were both indifferent to literature and art, and their different visions shared a suspicion of Romanticism. Like Benthamite utilitarianism, then, Bowes' style of proselytism evinces a mechanical and reductive approach.

In the Gosse household, the tract becomes more than simply a religious leaflet or persuasive treatise. Bowes herself becomes powerfully identified with her tracts, to the extent that the mediation of her own death becomes tract-like. Some weeks after her funeral, the Editor of *The Mothers' Friend* published what she called a 'cheering extract' from Philip's *Memorial*, describing the process of Emily's death from cancer. She introduces the extract in a series of tract-like clichés:

A dear friend and devoted young mother has lately been called from our world, one who was ever glad to lend a helping hand, when she could, in our work for mothers. Her sufferings were of no common order; indeed, they were so exceedingly painful that one's heart bleeds to think of them, though we view them now as past. Her sun

went down at noon, but it was a glorious setting. Come with us, and look at the dear sufferer, as she waits for the angel of death. (Gosse 1857b:141)

In this extract, Philip records that even on her deathbed, Emily had a servant beside her ‘folding and addressing tracts. . . under her dictation. It was her last act of earthly service’. As her death approached, Bowes’ interchanges with her husband slip into a register of tract allusions: “I’m going home”, Emily claimed, adding almost inarticulately, “And a hearty welcome!”; this was an allusion to one of her last three Tracts, *A Home and a Hearty Welcome*’ (Gosse 1857b:141). In this Chinese box structure of narratives, the Editor of *The Mother’s Friend* frames Philip’s extract in pious rhetoric: that extract reproduces the exchange between Philip and Bowes, in which she alludes to the title of one of her own tracts, indeed almost puns on it. In her tracts, Bowes often depicted the scene of a subject’s final moments, either dramatic conversions of hardened sinners or exemplary Christian deaths. Bowes’ own death, as reported here, enacts that very process, a dynamic that is further emphasised by the Editor’s concluding comments after Philip’s extract: ‘Such was the last day of our beloved and excellent friend. Mother! – young mother! You too must die. Are you living the life of the righteous? Then you may expect to die their death’ (Gosse 1857b:141). Bowes has finally shifted from subject to object, becoming a tract-death, a ‘model lesson’ for the reader.

Uncannily, Bowes’ death seemed to ‘re-activate’ her tract-world: when the death of a convert called ‘Badger Joe’ (on account of his badger-baiting) is reported in *The Revival*, his demise is closer to one of Bowes’ tracts than to reality. The man’s fame spread after having been

converted by reading Mrs Gosse’s tract, ‘The Stray Sheep’ . . . He had been apparently dying for two years, and time was thus given him in which to manifest his change distinctly . . . He died pointing at a scarlet drapery, and saying “My trust is in the blood of Jesus”. (1864:101)

Individuals were behaving like the dying converts in Bowes’ tracts.<sup>38</sup> Not only that, but Bowes’ voice was being mediated through numerous re-tellings: W.J. Lewis, writer of a letter to *The Revival*, published on 26 March, 1863, explained that Bowes’ tracts:

have proved of great service to myself at mothers’ meetings, children’s Sunday Schools etc. The plan I have adopted has been to introduce the narrative contained in any one of them at my address, and then finding them interested in the story at the close, make each one a present of the tale I have told, to read for themselves, or to give away to others. (1863:155)

‘Lewis’ is re-telling, then urging the re-reading of, the stories of Bowes’ tract-world. Gosse thus learned from a young age that it was impossible ‘to speak of anyone as dead until his

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<sup>38</sup> In ‘The Teacher’s Visit’ (Tract 26), for example, a teacher urges salvation on a dying man: ‘The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin’ to which the response is: “I see it, I see it! Why did I never believe it before?”

voice is silent' (1902:497); Bowes' words remained forceful through direct authorship and through mediation.

The confidence of Bowes' proselytism hides her own susceptibility to the fictional world; it is possible that mechanistic dogma helped Bowes to restrict the power of the imagination on her senses. For Bowes, fiction constitutes a 'temptation', not only in the sense of its being an enticement, but also in its archaic sense, as a 'process of testing or proving: a trial' (*OED* 2009). In her *Recollections* Bowes laments that even at the age of twenty-nine, 'the longing to invent stories' is 'still the sin that most easily besets me' (quoted by Gosse 2004:16). Bowes' handwritten musings constituted a private dialogue with God; they were certainly never intended for publication. Evangelicals revived this Puritan practice of using diaries 'to testify before God to their worthy spiritual life and to aid self-scrutiny' (Jalland 1996:10). Using Mikhail Bakhtin's theory in *Speech Genres and other Late Essays* (1979), I read Bowes' private utterances as 'dialogic overtones' that is, her thought is 'born and shaped in the process of interaction and struggle with others' thought' (Bakhtin 1986:92), part of a chain of speech communication that is formed by her long immersion in an otherworldly relationship. Bowes imports this Pauline phrase about her 'besetting sin' into her own prayerful meditations; in terms of addressivity, she employs Biblical language to reach God. The archaic lexis, 'it besets me', is very revealing: drawn from the Epistle to the Hebrews<sup>39</sup> it is construed in the passive voice. The epistle was originally written to prevent apostasy and to encourage perseverance in the face of persecution: the original context of the phrase is then one of mortal threat. According to the Victorian Bible commentator, Adam Clarke, this type of sin is a:

well circumstanced sin; that which has everything in its favour, time, and place, and opportunity; the heart and the object; and a sin in which all these things frequently occur, and consequently the transgression is frequently committed. Ευπεριστατος is derived from ευ, well, περι, about, and ιστημι, I stand; the sin that stands well, or is favourably situated, ever surrounding the person and soliciting his acquiescence.

What we term the easily besetting sin is the sin of our constitution, the sin of our trade, that in which our worldly honour, secular profit, and sensual gratification are most frequently felt and consulted . . . In laying aside the weight, there is an allusion to the long garments worn in the eastern countries, which, if not laid aside or tucked up in the girdle, would greatly incommode the traveller, and utterly prevent a man from running a race (1884: Hebrews 12:1).

The phrase thus has its own hinterland of contextual imagery and meaning: the Early Christian ambience furthermore mirrors Bowes' fundamentalist inclinations. Bowes experiences this sin as one which prevents her from running the Christian 'race'; it is utterly debilitating and

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<sup>39</sup> Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us (Hebrews 12:1).

unremitting, a 'weight' that impedes her progress.<sup>40</sup> Bowes' repression of the lure of fiction thus constitutes a perpetual 'trial' or 'test' of her faith.

Hints of Bowes' struggle with this besetting sin occasionally emerge within her early repertoire, and I shall illustrate this conflict by comparing Bowes' 1832 poem, 'Abraham's Temptation' (reprinted in Boyd 2004:105-112) with her most intransigent evangelical work, *Abraham and His Children* (1855). In the 1832 poem, Bowes suggests that Abraham's faith is deeply shaken by God's demand that he sacrifice his son: he is 'in anguish . . . his thoughts breathed of madness and despair' (Boyd 2004:107) a very human but, in Christian terms, distinctly blasphemous desperation. In the 1855 work, the eponymous patriarch 'stands pre-eminently at the head of every catalogue of believing parents, both as the first parent whose training of his family is detailed in God's word, and likewise as being, in so many things, a pattern to all believing parents' (1855:1). In this later work, Bowes urges Christian parents to imitate Abraham's example of unquestioning obedience to God, even if it demands the sacrifice of a beloved child, 'an Isaac'. As I shall show, Bowes' 1832 poem expresses the opposite extreme in terms of emotional empathy, exceeding the 'norm' expressed by contemporary depictions of Abraham's temptation by writers like Sarah Trimmer (1741-1810) in her *Scripture History* (1804) or Henry Girdlestone in his 1818 sermon on the topic. Bowes' shift in tone between 1832 and 1855 underlines the depth of repression of her storytelling instinct.

In her 1832 poem, Bowes' presentation of Isaac as the dutiful righteous son ready to embrace sacrifice is belied by the poetic form, which is resoundingly secular. At the moment when Abraham finally declares the horror of the truth of God's command to his son, Bowes juxtaposes the father's wavering and reluctant obedience with the son's undaunted acceptance of sacrifice:

"My son! thy lips have said the fearful word!  
Thou art the lamb selected by our Lord!  
Thy blood on this high mount he bids me spill!"  
"Then haste, O father! the command fulfil!  
You cannot hesitate to do his will. (Boyd 2004:110)

Bowes' contrast between Abraham's pained exclamation, 'thy blood . . . he bids me spill!', and Isaac's firm imperative that his father make haste to 'fulfil' the command, is emphasised both by being contained within the rhyming triplet and the masculine endings of the verse. The pace, dictated by the decasyllabic rhythm, barely gives the reader a chance to recognise the

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<sup>40</sup> I shall return to this example in Chapter Three to discuss how Gosse exploits this specific phrase to achieve an antithetical reading.

change of speaker in the exchange, and this makes Isaac's instinctive faith and godly obedience doubly arresting. Ironically, however, the style of this narrative illustrates Bowes' own susceptibility to temptation, her tendency to 'embroider imagination upon [truth]' (2004:16) which in this case is the spare account in Genesis 22:6-10. In the Genesis account, after innocently querying the absence of the lamb, Isaac has no voice, succumbing apparently in silence to being bound by Abraham and laid upon the 'altar' of wood, while in Bowes' version of the story Isaac makes a long and heroic speech:

"Then haste, O father! the command fulfil!  
 You cannot hesitate to do his will.  
 See, I am ready, to my breast I bare!  
 Be thou resigned, I die without a care.  
 Yet Oh! my mother! would that she were here!  
 But for her sake I had not shed a tear.  
 Tell her, my only pang on leaving earth,  
 Was for *their* grief to whom I owe my birth.  
 And now dear father, wherefore this delay?  
 Bind me, complete the sacrifice, I pray;  
 Think not of me with pity, fear, or woe,  
 Who shall thus soon heaven's sweet enjoyments know,  
 Yes think of me, but with soft pleasure think,  
 I go the streams of Paradise to drink;  
 Soon the sweet food of Angels shall I eat,  
 How soon shall worship at my Maker's feet!  
 Detain me not my sire, I pray thee, not!  
 Fair is my hope, and truly blessed my lot;  
 My bounding soul pants for her hoped-for rest,  
 My spirit longs to join the righteous blessed! (Boyd 2004:110)

In form, style and content, Bowes' Isaac is markedly unconventional. Indeed, it is difficult to find contemporary models for Bowes' dramatisation of Isaac's role. Hymns sung in the early nineteenth-century cite the story to emphasise Abraham's obedience to God's will; a verse by Isaac Watts (beloved of Dissenter congregations) typifies the minimisation of Isaac's role:

So Abrah'm, with obedient hand,  
 Led forth his son at god's command;  
 The wood, the fire, the knife he took;  
 His arm prepar'd the dreadful stroke (Winchell 1821:314).

Hymn-writers like Watts also tended to use tetrameters, whereas Bowes uses iambic pentameters. Although the model of Abraham and Isaac featured across the hierarchy of religious literature in many forms, from woodcuts in cheaply printed street literature (Collinson 1973:116) to complex exegetical tracts by writers like John Jukes (1885:258-265), it was rare for writers or sermonisers to deviate from the didactic biblical model of Abraham and Isaac as types for God and Christ respectively.

Bowes' Isaac uses language that is deeply ambivalent. Rather than sticking to his allotted role as passive cipher in the relationship between Abraham and God, Bowes' figure draws attention to himself, through insistent personal pronouns: 'I am ready', 'I go', 'I shall eat', 'Bind *me*' 'think of *me*', 'Detain *me* not', 'my only pang', 'My bounding soul', and 'My spirit'. He exudes heroic self-assurance and conviction. Bowes employs distinctly literary epithets: firstly, the Miltonic-sounding 'streams of Paradise', secondly, the form 'sire' to address a male parent, which by the Victorian period was an archaic form (*OED* 2009), and thirdly, heroic rhetoric ('my breast I bare!'; 'Detain me not my sire'). Isaac's lexis is also equivocal: the phrase, 'sweet enjoyments', for example, evokes the usage by Puritan preacher, Thomas Brooks who wrote 'St Paul lived in the light, sight and sweet enjoyments of Christ' (1866:150),<sup>41</sup> but it also conveys a sensuality that is reiterated by other words in Isaac's speech to create an erotic semantic field: 'my breast', 'wherefore this delay?' 'soft pleasure', and 'sweet food'. Similarly, the phrase 'My bounding soul pants' echoes the well-known verse, 'As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God' (Psalm 42:1), but set within the libidinous context, it becomes highly suggestive.

Also striking is the brisk and energetic pace of Bowes' verse: her use of that very English form, the iambic pentameter, rather than the dactylic hexameter characteristic of Homer and Virgil, points towards a non-Roman inspiration, and the most well-known model in this regard would have been Dryden's translation of Virgil's *Aeneid* (1697). Bowes certainly knew both Latin and Greek (Gosse 2004:6) but in this speech by Isaac the metrical and rhythmic patterns speak of Dryden rather than Homer and Virgil. It is notable that Bowes employs Dryden's technique of inserting occasional triplets (spill, fulfil, will) within the pattern of heroic couplets, in order to carve out 'more dramatic time for a particularly excessive moment to resolve itself' (Schoenberger 2012:43), as well as Dryden's rather un-Virgilian love of antithetical constructions: Bowes juxtaposes hesitation and readiness as well as contrasting Isaac's 'bounding soul' with 'hoped-for rest', opposing notions of movement and stasis. Also rather Dryden-like is Bowes' treatment of the Biblical source: Dryden's preference for paraphrase (where 'words are not so strictly followed as . . . sense' (quoted by Frost 1955:31)) over metaphrase and imitation is well-known. Although there were other translations of Virgil's *Aeneid*, Dryden's poetic version was considered seminal; indeed, this was a matter upon which even Gosse<sup>42</sup> and Churton Collins<sup>43</sup> later concurred. Astonishingly, then, Bowes is

<sup>41</sup> The phrase is used in *A Mute Christian under the Rod and Apples of God* (1866) by Thomas Brooks (1608-1680).

<sup>42</sup> Gosse asserted that 'no more satisfactory translation, as English poetry, has ever been produced' in *A History of Eighteenth Century Literature* (1889:70).

<sup>43</sup> Collins believed that Dryden had managed 'to substitute a masterpiece of rhetoric for a masterpiece of poetry' (*Essays and Studies* 1895:77).



ventriloquising - with evident enjoyment - a dangerously secular piece of English literature, written by a poet who not only had produced during the Restoration a host of indecent and blasphemous comedies, but who had also in 1686 rejected his Puritan upbringing and converted to Catholicism.

It appears, then, that Bowes reads Isaac through the lens of Virgil's *Aeneas*, as translated by Dryden. Not only does Bowes' act of reading illustrate Ricks's concept of the poet as heir, alluding to a predecessor and thereby 'acknowledg[ing], in piety, a previous achievement' (Ricks 2002:33) but Bowes actually employs Virgil's model of 'pius Aeneas'<sup>44</sup> in her reconceptualisation of Isaac as a classical hero. Owen Lee emphasises that in the case of Aeneas, 'pius' meant 'the ability to put compassion aside', a determination to do his duty regardless of his own feelings (1979:19-21) and it is this attribute that Bowes emphasises in her characterisation of Isaac. The figure is not only dutiful, but heroic: like a modern-day spin-doctor, Virgil models Aeneas as an Augustan 'saviour', the symbol of the rebirth of the Trojan people, and sixteen centuries later, Dryden refashions Aeneas to connect him with the new Augustan Age. This process of translation and reconfiguration is important: as Jan Parker observes, 'the translator's double-responsibility [is] to both his source-text and source-culture on the one hand, and to his audience in his own culture on the other' (2001:37). Dryden's Virgil thus provides a commentary on the original: 'it interprets by enactment not by analysis' (Frost 1955:16). This same principle can be applied to Bowes' poem: she is reading Genesis through a classical lens, an allusive process that is complicated by layers of cultural and literary appropriation. In effect, Bowes' Isaac makes a speech that is a commentary on his silence in Genesis. Although emotive and passionate, it is contained within a rigid structure: private feelings are being conveyed as public oratory.

At what point, then, might Bowes have engaged with Dryden's *Aeneid* in such a way that she could later adopt its form and tone? So 'epochal' a text would have graced the library of most well-to-do families, if only for show, and Bowes may well have encountered the text sometime after 1814, whilst living with Revd. Thomas William Shore, a man with classical inclinations. Although it was her contact with Shore's daughter that inspired young Bowes to renounce fiction, it does not mean that the religious convictions of the Shore family would have banished the *Aeneid* from their book-shelves. Shore's more famous elder brother<sup>45</sup> was the subject of a biography which stressed the liberal classical education at Hertford and Harrow enjoyed by the two brothers (Shore 1843:6-8) and Shore's son, John, (1793-1863) 'wrote many

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<sup>44</sup> To Virgil, the epithet 'pius' meant devout and dutiful, but also loyal to family.

<sup>45</sup> Shore's brother was Lord Teignmouth (1751-1834), Governor General of India and first president of the British and Foreign Bible Society. His son wrote the memoir, *Lord Teignmouth's Life and Correspondence* (1843).

classical and theological works' (*Dictionary of National Biography*). Gosse highlights the recognition in the Christian church that among 'the great writers of antiquity', Virgil 'is the most evangelical of the classics; he is the one who can be enjoyed with least to explain away and least to excuse' (2004:96). Indeed, Virgil commonly served the needs of 'superstitious' Christians:

it was long believed that in one of his shorter poems, Vergil had predicted the birth of Jesus Christ, and that the *Aeneid*, like Sacred Scripture, could be used as a magic book, a random selecting of one of its passages thought to offer advice to readers seeking higher guidance. (Clarke 1989:ix)

In this regard, Virgil's work actually rivalled the Bible. If, however, Bowes did not access the poem in the library of the Shore family, she may have encountered it during her lengthy period (1824-1838) as governess for Revd. John Hawkins (1824-38). Boyd's description of her avid reading during this period suggests that Hawkins owned an extensive library (2004:27); it would not have been unusual for an Anglican clergyman to own a copy of Dryden's translation, which was 'an act of piety, the hobby of many a Victorian village pastor' (Stallings 2007:135). There are then two libraries to which Bowes had access that could have offered the temptation of Dryden's *Aeneid*. The intimation that in 1832 Bowes was worldlier, and more transgressive, than might be expected from her sentiments in *Recollections*, is an anomaly that I will address in Chapter Five.

It is also revealing that Bowes, writing as an unmarried woman of twenty-six, affords so heightened a reference to the mother-son relationship:

Yet Oh! my mother! would that she were here!  
But for her sake I had not shed a tear. (Boyd 2004:110)

In Bowes' 1832 'schema' of the Christian family, the son's emotional allegiance and sense of 'origin' ('to whom I owe my birth') resides not with the father, but with the mother. Here Bowes emphasises the emotional bond between mother and son, a much gentler conception of the maternal role than was later conveyed in her evangelical works. By 1855, when Bowes writes *Abraham*, the Isaac-Sarah relationship manifests no 'pangs' nor 'tears', and Isaac is no longer heroic: he 'became not a great man,' Bowes asserts, 'he was what was better, a good man: pious, dutiful, devotional, meek', noted for 'the respect and affection he ever bore to [Sarah's] memory' (1855:40, 73) marking the final shift from classical heroism to religious duty, and from the literary and secular to the narrowly evangelical.<sup>46</sup> The transition shows not only

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<sup>46</sup> Heather Henderson argues that Gosse 'is a lamb as Isaac was to have been, a sacrifice symbolising the father's perfect unquestioning faith' (1989:131) but, as I have shown, the parent who is most closely associated with Abraham and Isaac is not Philip, but Bowes.

the depth of Bowes' repression, but explains why it was so important to her to 'protect' young Gosse through 'early control' from the same 'besetting' temptation.

Bowes believed that her son could be 'trained' into religion, and in utilitarian fashion she develops a 'system' to shape him into an obedient 'Little Edward' or 'Little Willie'. It is notable that Gosse states: 'I cannot recollect a time when a printed page of English was closed to me' (2004:14), and then a few pages later, 'I cannot recollect the time when I did not understand that I was going to be a minister of the Gospel' (2004:19). The parallel grammatical construction of these two statements emphasises their connection with each other, not only forging the link between the training to read and the training to evangelise, but also revealing Gosse's lack of agency, his indoctrination by a forceful religious parent. They echo furthermore Bowes' statement in *Recollections*: 'I cannot recollect the time when I did not love religion', also quoted in *Father and Son* (2004:6). Having been subsumed into Bowes' religious world from birth, the child Gosse thinks and speaks in Bowes' language. He cannot reject Bowes' discourse since he has been forbidden access to alternative modes of expression. This scenario invokes a postcolonial parallel, what Said calls 'the overlapping territories and 'intertwined histories' that highlight the intertextuality of the cultures of the coloniser and the colonised (1984:171-6), reiterating the difficulty of disentangling the experience and discourse of the ruler and the ruled.

In Althusserian terms, then, Bowes interpellates Gosse into a 'subject' even before his birth (Althusser 2001:115-124). Bowes 'hails' Gosse, making him 'become' various figures, from George Whitefield,<sup>47</sup> to the Old Testament Samuel, and 'the sacrificial lamb' (2004:19, 153, 44). Without any other discourse available to him, Gosse is programmed into automatic responses: '[I] testified my faith in the atonement with a fluency that surprised myself' (2004:105). A scene in *Father and Son* that reveals the extent of his interpellation is the exchange between the precocious Gosse and his father about the latter's forthcoming marriage to Miss Brightwen. In the same way that Dickens demonstrates the interpellation of Bitzer, a pupil shaped by the utilitarian principles and social theories of Gradgrind's school in *Hard Times* (1854), so Gosse depicts his younger self, a product of the evangelical beliefs and religious practices delineated in *Abraham*. The young Gosse, as Bowes' mouthpiece, embarrasses Philip by reminding him of his avowed belief in adult baptism, as with similar comic irony, Bitzer reminds Gradgrind of his cold pedagogy of facts and figures:

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<sup>47</sup> Whitefield (1714-1770) was an English Anglican preacher who worked in the American colonies. Bowes mentions him in 'The Power of the Word' (Tract 30). Gosse claims that Bowes imagined Whitefield as a model for Gosse's career (2004:19).

Our positions were now curiously changed. It seemed as if it were I who was the jealous monitor, and my Father the deprecating penitent. I sat up in the coverlid, and I shook my finger at him. 'Papa,' I said, 'don't tell me that she's a pedobaptist?' I had lately acquired that valuable word, and I seized this remarkable opportunity of using it. It affected my Father painfully. (Gosse 2004:126)

'Bitzer,' said Mr Gradgrind, broken down, and miserably submissive to him, 'have you a heart?'

'The circulation, Sir' returned Bitzer, smiling at the oddity of the question, 'couldn't be carried on without one. No man, Sir, acquainted with the facts established by Harvey relating to the circulation of the blood, can doubt that I have a heart.' (Dickens 2008:264)

Both Dickens and Gosse demonstrate Althusserian logic, that since we only ever exist in relation to society and culture and are always schooled by these, we can only ever speak the language they teach us, and are therefore always produced by the ideologies they perpetuate. An illuminating analogy for this situation exists in the working of imperialist power. Frantz Fanon, in *Black Skins, White Masks* (1952) considered language to be central to the coloniser's strategy: 'Mastery of language affords remarkable power' (1986:18). Frantz argues that language has the power to name, and therefore to construct the lens through which the user understands the world, and in the colonial situation, it is the culture of the *mother* country that holds sway (1986:18-22 italics mine). Young Gosse, as the colonised subject, can either reject the language of the coloniser, thereby cutting himself off from access to power, or he can subvert the language of the mother country by answering back, employing its idiom. I will show in Chapter Three that across his oeuvre Gosse employs both modes of response.

Young Gosse has been manoeuvred into an interpretive community,<sup>48</sup> what Susan Pedersen calls 'a single Christian culture', which operates by separating 'the godly from the ungodly', a division that is repeatedly conveyed in tract literature (1986:107-8). That Gosse's 'horizon of expectations' remains informed by this stark division of godly versus ungodly, long after Bowes' death, is evident from the structure and figuration of his novella, *The Unequal Yoke*, serialised anonymously in Macmillan's *The English Illustrated Magazine* for April, May, and June of 1886. The very title of Gosse's work, *The Unequal Yoke*, is tract-like, and its two protagonists are wooden ciphers in its symbolic scheme. The thematic binaries are highly transparent: Jane Baxter is a young woman of a Dissenter family living in Kilburn who becomes 'yoked' or engaged to Frank Capulett, a young man of an aristocratic family living in Kensington. The social divide is exacerbated by religious differences. The Capulett family is 'establishment' (1886:566) and Anglo-Catholic: as Frank explains to Jane, 'We *are* rather high', and this is exemplified by the Capulett interest in such anachronistic practices as religious

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<sup>48</sup> Stanley Fish argues that every reader belongs to a socio-historical 'community' of readers, and that one's response to a text is actuated by the conventions of reading into which one has been trained.

relics: they 'enjoy a perfume of skulls in the church of St Ursula' (1886:508, 510). The Baxters are Baptists, the father a minister, and though they are also backward-looking in their restrictive religious observances, they have 'a slightly boisterous cordiality . . . full of freshness and high spirits' (1886:506). The incompatibility between the two social worlds emerges quickly: Frank's snobbish mother, Lady Priscilla, is uncomfortable and out of place at the Baxters' home in Constantine Villas,<sup>49</sup> while Jane suffers a crisis of conscience when obliged to join the Capulett on one of their frequent visits to the theatre. Although Frank is initially attracted by the simplicity and goodness of Jane's world, the cynicism and pretentiousness of his own - represented by the gossip of the snobbish Mrs Percival - soon wins him back, and he jilts Jane by letter. Jane, though shocked, is dignified and forgiving.

The moral themes are expressed through the family contrasts: the Baxters are a united, loving family, their lives largely preoccupied with spiritual matters, while the Capulett are a divided family, often critical of each other and concerned with material and social advancement. The name Capulett of course, alludes to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, connoting the idea of two families of oppositional values linked by a youthful 'love affair', while the name Baxter underpins the working-class character of the family. The moral impetus of the story evokes what Jack Zipes calls the 'nobility of soul versus soulless nobility' (2006:95): Frank is a cad, who 'betrayed the traditions of his class' by acting in a 'callous' way, while Jane is virtuous, and 'without a murmur took the path of duty' (1886:609, 614). Not only oppositional structure but also the intrusive authorial voice echoes Bowes' tract-style. The reader is directed to the story's 'meaning' by the narrator who intervenes, sometimes deictically, as of Frank's jilting letter, reminding the reader that 'we have taken the liberty of reading [it]', and sometimes ironically, as of Frank himself: 'it is the privilege of youth', the narrator interjects, 'to be callous' (1886:609), assuming the reader's disapproval of such behaviour. Tract-like, the moral and social inequalities between the protagonists and their families are thus clearly signposted for the reader.

The strength of Bowes' influence is also evident in Gosse's biographical writing: Gosse adopts the 'rake-turned-devout' plot of her tracts. Bowes' 'Tom Fowler, the Boatman' (Tract 9) tells the story of 'a hardened sinner' who swore and beat his wife, but who through God's mercy, became 'an ornament to his Christian profession', while 'The Drunkard's Wife' (Tract 47) relates a man's descent into 'the service of Satan' until his wife's prayer 'convinced him of his guilt' and the next day he went 'to meeting'. In *The Life and Letters of John Donne, Dean of St Paul's* (1899) Gosse's manipulation of the facts about Donne's life caused the *Athenaeum*

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<sup>49</sup> The Baxters' address reiterates the fundamental character of their faith in its association with Constantine, the first Roman Emperor to be converted to Christianity.

reviewer to remark: 'With remarkable ingenuity the biographer traces the progress, the rise, and fall of this supposed passion, and it is only after a hard rub of the eyes that the reader realises on how very little, after all, the conjecture is based' (1899:646). An example of Gosse's micro-misreading that contributed to his overall thesis of the 'rake-turned-devout' is evident in Gosse's translation of the proverbial tag on Donne's youthful portrait. Gosse claims that 'Antes muerto que mudado' means 'Before I am dead, how shall I be changed' (1899:24) which neatly prefigures Gosse's reading of Donne's life as a dramatic change from 'a stormy and profane youth' to 'holy maturity of faith and unction' (1899:63), whereas a more accurate translation of the motto expresses the opposite: 'Rather dead than changed'. Gosse's mode of bio-criticism, even as late as 1899, still retained the pattern and structure of Bowes' tracts, and the imposition of the 'rake-turned-devout' structure onto Donne's life brought Gosse's biography into almost immediate disrepute (Granqvist 1986:538). That Gosse imbibes this tract-world as a child to such a degree that he reproduces it, seemingly unwittingly, in his adult writing, is a measure of Bowes' interpellation of him.

Bowes' presence in Gosse's oeuvre is signalled in other ways too. In his poetic presentation of powerful mythological women, such as Eurydice and Cydippe, he conveys reluctant awe for their single-minded vision but emphasises that the male figures in the legends (Orpheus, Cleobis and Biton) suffer on account of that matriarchal fanaticism. Gosse's retelling of Ovid's myth of Orpheus and Eurydice is consequently unconventional. In 'The Waking of Eurydice' in *New Poems* (1879), Gosse transforms Eurydice from sentimental passive victim into an assertive and stubborn spectre. Most of the nineteenth-century retellings of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice focused on the fatal act of 'turning back': Robert Browning's brief poem, 'Eurydice to Orpheus' (1864) gave Eurydice her voice, but kept her infatuated with Orpheus, and content to die once fortified by an exchange of glances: 'one look now/ Will lap me round forever' (1994:733), while Edward Dowden's 'Eurydice' (1876), despite being the first serious attempt to represent the Orpheus-Eurydice relationship from a female perspective, expressing her frustration at her husband's weakness: 'Why claimed I not some partnership with him/ In the strict test, urging my right of wife?' still pivoted on the act of turning (Miles 1999:154). Writing against the grain, Gosse's Eurydice is radically different: she does not even agree to follow Orpheus towards the earth:

Once I was thy bride, it may be; I am now the bride of Death,  
Vexed no more with throbbing pulses, led by no mad mortal breath;

Did I pledge my soul to love thee, yea! within the halls of hell?  
A woman's vow is nothing, like an autumn flower it fell.  
Now thy spirit scarcely moves me through the crystal of thy tears,

And thy lyre-strings crack with passion, but the soul is dead that hears.  
(1879a:221, 224)

Eurydice chooses her existence as ‘the shade of shadows’, preferring her wraith-like state where she finds ‘no reflection in the water’s sheeny glass!’ (1879a:221, 228). In Gosse’s oeuvre, as I shall show in Chapters Two and Four, shadows and reflections are strongly linked with the nuances and degrees of influence within loving relationships: Eurydice’s determined embrace of the Other makes her impervious to all human pleading.

Gosse’s appropriation of the legend of Cleobis and Biton in his poem, ‘The Sons of Cydippe’<sup>50</sup> in *Firdausi in Exile* (1885), suggests even more firmly Gosse’s resentment that his own needs were subjugated to Bowes’ passion for a higher and all-encompassing authority. He dramatises the fate of two dutiful young men whose mother, the priestess of Hera, values her sons’ spiritual worth over all else. While Cydippe was journeying to a festival in Hera’s honour, the oxen drawing her cart were exhausted, so her two sons took over, pulling Cydippe’s carriage forty-five stadia (over five miles). Their strenuous efforts are recognised by the high priest:

“Blessed art thou, Cydippe, blessed be  
Thy sons who shamed themselves to bring thee here!  
Oh not in vain for Biton, not in vain  
For Cleobis, the unfruitful toil, the sweat,  
The groaning axles and the grinding yoke!  
Unoiled their limbs, unfiled their hair,  
Unbathed their feet, hateful to maids and harsh;  
But to the gods, sweeter than amber drops  
That gush from fattest olives of the press,  
Fairer than leaves of their own bay, more fresh  
Than rosy coldness of young skin, their stains,  
Since like a sacrifice of nard and myrrh  
Their filial virtue sanctifies the winds” (Gosse 1885a:156-7)

The sons ‘shamed themselves’ for their mother, enduring indignity among their peers, becoming ‘hateful to maids’ in their physical exertion. Their efforts, so pleasing to the pagan gods, are framed in the Biblical lexis of nard and myrrh,<sup>51</sup> ointments eerily prefigurative in their association with anointing (John 12:3), death (Mark 15:23), and entombment (John 19:39). Cydippe’s prayer that Hera should reward Cleobus and Biton with the best gift a god could give to a mortal is answered by their instant death: the brothers are found dead, ‘smiling through ambrosial curls’ (1885a:158).

<sup>50</sup> First published in *The Century Magazine*, May 1882, pp.77-8.

<sup>51</sup> In the Bible, ‘nard’ is used by Lazarus’ sister, Mary, to anoint Jesus’ feet (John 12:3), and at the home of Simon the Leper, used by an unnamed woman to anoint Jesus’ head (Mark 14:3) while myrrh, another perfume, features at Christ’s birth (Matthew 2:11), death (Mark 15:23) and entombment (John 19:39).

Gosse's interest in this paradox, where the zenith of the mother's spirituality achieves the destruction of the son, clearly inspired the ceramic artist, George Tinworth (1843-1913), who made two large terracotta relief plaques<sup>52</sup> in 1884 depicting the moment when Cleobus and Biton finally arrive at the steps of Hera's altar (Fig. 1). A letter from Tinworth to Gosse, dated July 12 1883, reads, 'I am very glad to hear that you are pleased with the sketch that I made from your very clever poem' (Bonhams Auctions 2009). In the relief, the bowed subservient forms of the two brothers, kneeling on the ground, are contained within an 'imprisoning' triangle of sacerdotal figures, each one elevated, and each one an echo of the other, all striking verticals in the composition. The clothed hieratic figures assert their authority over the semi-naked brothers.



Fig.1

In 1904-06, moreover, Gosse's poem inspired Tinworth's second terracotta on this theme, 'The Greek Mother', which depicts a Spartan mother bidding farewell to her soldier-son: the inscription reads 'Either bring this shield back or be brought back upon it' (Museum of Australian Democracy, 2008).<sup>53</sup> Tinworth may have recognised in Gosse's poem a shared personal narrative of ambivalence towards the religious mother-figure. Indeed, it was Gosse himself who revealed how Tinworth's upbringing had been dominated by 'a woman of a type peculiarly English', 'a narrow Dissenter':

Tinworth grew up in a Biblical atmosphere; the Scriptures were read to him and by him, from cover to cover, over and over, until they sank into his blood, and became part of his nature. For the religious lines upon which his talent has developed, his

<sup>52</sup> Now to be found in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

<sup>53</sup> Tinworth's panel, *The Greek Mother* was presented to the Commonwealth in 1929 by Henry Doulton, to be hung outside the Canberra Parliamentary Library (Museum of Australian Democracy, 2008).



mother must be considered wholly responsible. She trained him to look upon all other literature as dross, and to this day the Bible remains the only book which he reads without indifference. (Gosse 1883b:6)

Tinworth's terracottas have been compared with contemporary tract illustrations (Speel 2011), and certainly Gosse characterises Tinworth's aesthetic perspective as that 'of the average English evangelical', an artist who had 'no sympathy with the pagan feeling' (Gosse 1883b:28). Such a disposition makes Tinworth's attraction to the Cydippe legend, as mediated through Gosse's poem, even more remarkable. It is as though both poetry and ceramic gave both men an indirect vehicle to express the disquiet of having experienced maternity that was distorted by fanaticism.

Cydippe's willingness to sacrifice her sons is later re-framed in *Father and Son* using the Old Testament analogy of Hannah and Samuel. Bowes recorded in her diary, when Gosse was two months old, that: 'We have given him to the Lord', an evangelical metaphor that Gosse ironically translates back as: 'In their ecstasy, my parents had taken me, as Elkanah and Hannah had long ago taken Samuel, from their mountain-home of Rama-thaim-Zophim down to sacrifice to the Lord of Hosts in Shiloh' (2004:9,153). By 1907, Gosse had become adept at using allusion to convey his ambivalent feelings about his parents, particularly his mother. In *Father and Son*, for example he refers to Philip as 'my Father' and to Bowes as 'my Mother'. His use of capitalisation is puzzling, especially as he did not adopt this form in his *Life of Philip Gosse FRS* (1890).<sup>54</sup> As noted by Max Saunders, Gosse's strategy of publishing *Father and Son* anonymously required him to omit any reference to his parents' familial names (2010:158) and it is possible that capitalisation serves as formal compensation for that. On the other hand, it could be an ironic gesture to his parents' over-identification with God, the Bible and Christianity, words invariably capitalised. A study of Gosse's wider oeuvre suggests that the capitalisation of 'Mother' does have a peculiar significance for Gosse. The contrast with *The Life* suggests that in *Father and Son*, Gosse intended this typographical marker to achieve a dramatic effect. In Gosse's biography *Henrik Ibsen* (1907), the form appears in the abstract sense: he refers to 'Inger, the Mother of the Norwegian people' (1907c:57) and this 'inflexible and implacable' patriot is also twice described 'a Matriarch' (1907c:54, 57), tellingly capitalised. Gosse seems to employ this form when referring to strong, often fanatical women, a device that is again recognisable in Gosse's description of the role of Queen Praxithea in Swinburne's *Erechtheus* (1876), where Gosse alludes to the 'noble endurance of the Mother' (1917:230). Like her Norwegian counterpart, Praxithea's maternal 'endurance' takes an extremist form: she sacrifices her daughter to save Athens. It seems then that Gosse uses

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<sup>54</sup> Hereafter referred to as *The Life*.

capitalisation to characterise women who repress maternal feelings in the cause of patriotism or religion, and to achieve a distance from them.

Bowes' prohibition and its legacy certainly had inadvertent repercussions on Gosse's style. Firstly, it caused Gosse's experience of literature to be fragmentary. Throughout his childhood, Gosse's reading is constantly curtailed: he reads random pages torn from a sensationalist novel; he peruses unrelated articles in the *Penny Cyclopaedia*, his school Shakespeare readings are mysteriously terminated, his recitation of Blair's 'The Grave' is interrupted, and his copy of Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* is confiscated (2004:25, 50, 123, 142, 167). Gosse learns by these experiences to make imaginative links between disconnected texts, becoming an alluder almost by default. In the absence of the whole, Gosse is forced into writerly habits since he is constantly constructing his meaning out of incomplete material. Rarely afforded the luxury of whole texts for complete perusal, young Gosse adopts the mode of a 'crisis' construction of meaning. The disjointed nature of his reading experience offers new insights into his notorious 'carelessness', the habitual grasp of the part rather than the whole. Henry James' description of Gosse's 'genius for inaccuracy' suggests that very trait of making crisis-driven connections, some ingenious and inspired, others erratic and broken-backed.

Secondly, by forbidding fairy-tales, Bowes prevented Gosse's access to a major tranche of cultural heritage and literary history. This denial seems to engender in Gosse a desire to re-connect the past with the present, and this he achieves through allusive practice. Every appropriated phrase carries with it ideological struggles and tensions, which continue to reverberate within the new context. There is a constant mobility between and within texts, across time and traditions, recalling T.S. Eliot's conception of the 'simultaneous existence' of literary texts in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919), discussed above. Gosse thus reacts against Bowes' restricted view of literary culture by stressing its continuity: as the reviewer in the *Springfield Republican* comments, Gosse likes to 'illuminate the present from the past' (1921:6).

This chapter has shown that Gosse's portrait of his mother in *Father and Son* does not 'fill up the sketch with so firm a detail' (2004:9); in order to understand Bowes' motives and to assess her impact on Gosse, her textual voice must be heard. Bowes' role as an author has been sanctified (Philip, Shipton, Boyd), ignored (Traubitz, Perlman), or dismissed (Charteris, Folkenflik, Grylls); my interest, however, lies in Gosse's engagement, both in replication of and resistance to her voice. In this chapter I have shown Bowes as three different personae: firstly, the imaginative child for whom inventing stories became 'the chief pleasure of [her] life', as

described in *Recollections*; secondly, the young religious woman of conflicted passions, lover of God but also of Dryden's *Aeneid*; and finally the zealous and persuasive evangelist, who urges fellow mothers to substitute Bible stories for nursery rhymes. Bowes narrows her sights until they are one-dimensional: she declares in *Abraham* that God 'loves *a single eye*, and . . . accepts not a divided heart' (1855:134 italics mine). After death, this notion of single-eyed service becomes the mantra that defines her: Shipton uses this phrase in connection with Bowes five times in *Tell Jesus* (1863:7, 14, 34, 40, 68). Bowes' embrace of God makes her evangelism almost instinctive and automatic: 'the daily life of one whose eye is single is full of light and *cannot fail* to speak for God' (Shipton 1863:7 italics mine). In this regard, Bowes epitomises the rigidity of the stereotypical Victorian mind, what Matthew Arnold described in *Culture and Its Enemies* (1867) as 'a want of flexibility', an 'inaptitude for seeing more than one side of a thing', an 'intense energetic absorption in the particular pursuit we happen to be following' (Leighton 2012:241).

Bowes' rhetoric becomes increasingly like caricature, which is why Gosse's allusion to Mrs Jellyby is so resonant, pointing by association to both Chadband and Pardiggle; ironically, all these figures are products of Dickens's imagination, that mental impulse so resolutely repressed by Bowes. The process of such narrowing and hardening is encapsulated in Harold Bloom's use of the figure, 'the Covering Cherub', a term borrowed from Blake which means 'that portion of creativity in us that has gone over to constriction and hardness' (Bloom 1997:36); certainly the contrast between Bowes' 1832 poem, 'Abraham's Temptation' and her 1855 book *Abraham* illustrates the curtailment of her creativity, the hardening of her voice into its 'unflinching' tone. In Chapter Three I shall trace the conversation between Bowes as 'the Covering Cherub' and Gosse as her ephebe, struggling against her influence. Before that, however, I will trace the textual interaction between Gosse and his father, and explore how the fairy-tale imagery and romantic nature of Philip's writing inadvertently empowered Gosse in that Bloomian struggle.

## Chapter Two: Gosse and his Father: Reading and Writing the Fairy-Tale

On one occasion, I recollect, at Livermead, we came across a party of ladies, who were cackling so joyously over a rarity they had secured that our curiosity overcame our shyness, and we asked them what they had found. They named a very scarce species, and held it up to us to examine. My father, at once, civilly set them right; it was so-and-so, something more commonplace. The ladies drew themselves up with dignity, and sarcastically remarked that they could only repeat that it *was* the rarity, and that "Gosse is our authority."

*The Life of Philip Henry Gosse, FRS.* (Gosse 1890a:288)

This anecdote in *The Life* emphasises the Livermead ladies' faith in Philip's authority as a naturalist. In this instance, Philip's physical presence is outweighed by his own legendary authorial voice, but the story reveals the empowering and energising nature of Philip's texts; his books generated a nationwide passion for aquaria, stimulated holidays in Devonshire, and directed middle-class 'recreation' to the seaside. Philip was teacher, mentor, instructor, and comrade to his readers; like *The Saturday Review* critic of Philip's *Tenby: A Seaside Holiday* (1856), his readers enjoyed Philip's 'air of taking us upon his knee like a grandpapa' (Gosse 1890a:261). In this chapter, I will examine Gosse's experience as a reader of Philip's texts. I will suggest that Philip was a catalyst for Gosse's imagination, not only by his tentative breaches of Bowes' posthumous 'stern ordinance' against fiction (2004:17), but also through his fairy-tale lexis, his familiarity with Romantic poetry and his anthropomorphic characterisation of his specimens. By identifying instances of Gosse's borrowing from his father's scientific discourse, I will show how Gosse's practice ranges from the deliberate plundering of Philip's oeuvre to a subtle but playful rivalry with his textual persona.

Philip's vision, though profoundly religious, is not 'single-minded' and absolutist like that of Bowes; it is more accommodating of the fictional and the fantastic. In his earnest desire to explain the workings of God's creation, Philip enjoys using poetry and mythology, even folk- and fairy-tales, wherever such analogies and allusions illuminate the facts. Romantic poetry in particular was etched on his memory, and although in 1838, six years after having become a Christian, Philip 'ceased to read new prose books', he remained 'vividly affected' by poetry: 'Milton, Wordsworth, Gray, Cowper, and Southey, were at his fingers' ends . . . certain favourite passages of each of these he was never weary of intoning' (Gosse 1890a:70, 345, 351). The preoccupation of the Romantics with the natural world makes Philip's quotation of them in his books on natural history apt and unobtrusive. They help to communicate Philip's joy in expounding the intricacies of the natural world as manifestations of God's power. Philip explicitly approaches natural history through a Romantic lens, and his passion is implicit in such fanciful titles as *Glimpses of the Wonderful* (1845), *Seaside Pleasures* (1853) or *The*

*Romance of Natural History* (1860).<sup>55</sup> In the Preface to the latter publication, Philip compares 'Dr Dryasdust's way' of studying natural history with his own approach, that is, 'the poet's way . . . the aesthetic aspect, which deals, not with statistics but with the emotions of the human mind, - surprise, wonder, terror, revulsion, admiration, love, [and] desire' (1860:v). As a result of *Father and Son*, however, Philip was not remembered for his Romantic vision, only for his Calvinist narrowness. Nor did Gosse's 1890 *Life*, which revealed Philip's poetic nature, have an opportunity to mitigate the 1907 caricature, since it disappeared from twentieth-century bookshelves, a victim of Modernist antipathy to Victorian biography. Philip's own books also went out of fashion and his kindly earnest authorial voice faded from memory. Only *Father and Son* survived, and consequently Philip's reputation was doomed.

Some critics have learned to separate the 'two Philips', to distinguish the earnest and energetic naturalist, whom Stephen Jay Gould dubbed 'the David Attenborough of his day' (1985:100) from the myopic scientist and bigoted non-conformist, as he was popularly conceived after the publication of *Father and Son*. Although Philip's professional role and contribution has been steadily reassessed by scientific and cultural historians like Frederick Ross (1977), Lynn Merrill (1989), and Jonathan Smith (2006:77-91) and his life re-examined by biographers, L.R Croft (2000), Ann Thwaite (2002), and Roger Wooton (2012), this revision of Philip has impinged little on Gosse's powerful caricature of him. In literary criticism, the primary focus is invariably on Gosse rather than on Philip, and the demonisation of the latter has lingered long because *Father and Son* has been treated as an isolated piece of classic literature, detached not only from the rest of Gosse's oeuvre, but also from Philip's repertoire as well.<sup>56</sup> *Father and Son* was a potently seductive tale, and the rebellion of a poetic youth against the strictures of a repressive Victorian patriarch remains compelling reading. In literary terms, questions of fidelity and truth are irrelevant. To read *Father and Son* as an autobiography of Gosse and as a biography of Philip, is morally and artistically disorientating, since it simultaneously demands sympathy for, and stimulates dislike of, both father and son, hence the wealth of variant critical responses, from all theoretical perspectives. In this chapter I seek to tread a path through the circular debate of critical interventions into the genre and the form of *Father and Son* by focusing instead on the correspondences between the respective oeuvres of Philip and Gosse, to identify what Gosse draws from his father's writing, and how he exploits Philip's material in the production of fictional effects. I will show that

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<sup>55</sup> Hereafter referred to as *Romance* (1860); I use the date to distinguish it from Philip's book of the same title, published in 1861. See Footnote 73.

<sup>56</sup> As exemplified by the experience of my local reading group, which read *Father and Son* in 2010, typical readers today remain unaware of recent reassessments of Philip's life and work; Gosse's caricature of his father remains powerfully robust.

Philip is the means by which Gosse acquires an understanding of fiction and fairy-tale that partially counters the effects of Bowes' interpellation of him.

The most pressing question is why, if Philip was not really Gosse's primary antagonist, was he so demonised in *Father and Son*? As noted above, Gosse could not have directly criticised his saintly mother, and so in *Father and Son* he produces a complex amalgam of 'Philip-as-Bowes'. Gosse emphasises that his 'Mother was unquestionably the stronger of the two', and even after her death, there was 'the ethereal memory of my Mother's will, *guiding* [Philip], *pressing* him, *holding* him to the unswerving purpose which she had formed and defined' (2004:11 *italics mine*): the present participles reiterate Bowes' posthumous presence. Evidence for Bowes' domestic authority is epitomised by the ban on fiction, and as mentioned earlier, Gosse insists that Philip 'never entirely agreed' with Bowes' position, but that 'he yielded to her prejudice' (2004:117). Gosse may have felt a puzzled resentment against a father who understood the value of mythology and fantasy, and who shared such delights with his anonymous readers, yet permitted his own son to be denied all knowledge of them, because he was impotent against his wife's authority. After Bowes' death, furthermore, Philip tried to fashion his son into what Bowes describes in *Abraham* as 'a dedicated child, a child of many prayers' (1855:155) and certainly, Philip ventriloquises his dead wife in this regard, 'deprecating [Gosse's] frailty, saying in a tone of harrowing tenderness, "Are you not the child of many prayers?"' (2004:153). Philip thus adopts not only Bowes' language but also her expectations.

As noted in Chapter One, Thwaite recognised that Bowes' *Abraham* 'would have a powerful effect on [Philip's] handling of his son in the years ahead' (2002:191); certainly the times when Philip is at his most intractable and wrong-headed seem to be actions which coincide with advice in Bowes' *Abraham*. An example of this is the incident when the six-year-old Gosse was 'sacrificially' chastised by 'several cuts with the cane' (2004:30), a punishment condoned within the pages of *Abraham*, published in that very year, in which Bowes quotes five scriptures regarding corporal punishment and concludes that 'it is evident that the rod has a very decided place in the Lord's system of nursery government' (1855:187-191). Philip also seems to act on Bowes' advice in *Abraham*, that children should not be allowed 'to go unattended to children's parties, [or] children's balls!' (1855:99-100) when he tried to prevent young Gosse from going 'to tea and games' at the Browns (2004:141). Similarly, Philip seems to be influenced by Bowes' example in *Abraham* of the widow, 'Mrs M—' who hoped that her brothers 'would get situations for her boys when they grew old enough to require them': her boys compromised their spiritual lives in anticipation, but in the end the widow's brothers did not help, and consequently the sons abandoned their mother (1855:104). This anecdote

resonates strongly with Gosse's claim that Miss Brightwen persuaded her banker-brother to offer him 'an opening' in business, but that Philip refused this potentially lucrative opportunity on Gosse's behalf. One of Philip's letters, cited in *Father and Son*, reiterates his conscious adoption of Bowes' parenting strategy:

When your sainted Mother died, she not only tenderly committed you to God, but left you also as a solemn charge to me, to bring you up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. That responsibility I have sought constantly to keep before me: I can truly aver that it has been ever before me – in my choice of housekeeper, in my choice of a school, in my ordering of your holidays, in my choice of a second wife, in my choice of an occupation for you. (2004:184)

Philip's enactment of Bowes' priorities through those dogged parallel clauses represents a profound shift of power from the male to the female, as well as from the living to the ghostly. It seems that even Philip's 'choice of a second wife' (Gosse's presentation of which process I will discuss later) is directed by his promise to the dying Bowes. The caricature of Philip in *Father and Son* appears to be fuelled by Gosse's resentment at not having been taken 'upon his knee like a grandpapa' because Philip felt obliged to be Bowes' factotum.

Frederick Ross pointed out almost forty years ago that the modern world rejected Philip 'not because he wrote *Omphalos*, but because his son wrote *Father and Son*' (1977:96). Philip's after-life has been overwhelmingly negative: he was represented as the stubborn Calvinist patriarch by both Dennis Potter in *Where Adam Stood* (1976) and by Peter Carey in *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988). In John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), Dr Grogan and Charles Smithson cement their friendship over a shared scorn for *Omphalos* (1857) and a mutual dislike of Philip, a 'bag of fundamentalist wind' (1981:141), while Hanif Kureishi cites Philip's penchant for praying over every decision and awaiting God's direction as a model of eccentricity in *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990:112). Few readers fail to identify with the instinct of the child to resist parental authority and to achieve autonomy,<sup>57</sup> but coupled with the romance of rebellion in the cause of literature, *Father and Son* was destined to be a classic. For this, however, Gosse had to sacrifice Philip.

Philip was never permitted by literary critics to regain his own voice. He becomes 'the authoritative other', fixed, rigid and closed off from the reader, the obstacle to Gosse's literary yearnings, 'a symbol of fanaticism, suffering from 'a religious mania bordering on the insane' (Henkin 1940:162). James Woolf compared Philip with King Lear, reading Philip's vain

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<sup>57</sup> This is exemplified by a recent article about Ken Follett who, when asked 'to name one book that made you who you are today', replied "I was brought up in a strict family of born-again Christians, and as a teenager I began to doubt what I had been taught. In an agony of conflict, I read *Father and Son* by Edmund Gosse, about a young man who rejects his father's religion. The novel gave me the courage to do the same" ( *New York Times* 2014).

opposition to Darwinian evolution as his tragic fall, making him 'angry at God' and falling into temporary madness, in the course of which Philip/Lear alienates Gosse/Cordelia, the child he holds in greatest affection (1966:138, 142). Traubitz reads Philip as 'a jealous and destructive masculine deity' (1976:148) and Brooks-Davis sees Philip as 'a vituperative Old Hamlet' (1989:139). David Parker treats the narrative as Gosse's complex act of distancing himself not only from his father's beliefs, but also from Philip's claims of conscience on him, and the language that informed that obligation, in order to achieve a final point of self-definition (2004:53-72). Regardless of which critical framework is employed, the conclusions of the literary corpus about Philip are generally negative. From the start, Gosse's marketing strategy complicated the situation: Heinemann in London published *Father and Son* with the sub-title of *A Study of Two Temperaments* implying an objective investigation, while Scribner's (New York) used the sub-title of *Biographical Recollections* suggesting that it was a memoir of Philip. These variant rubrics reflect the book's deliberately ambiguous generic status. Was it a biography of Philip or an autobiography of Gosse? Was it an autobiographical novel or even an autobiografiction?<sup>58</sup> Victoria Arana cites Gosse's own definition of biography in the 1911 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* as 'the faithful portrait of a soul in its adventures through life', and concludes that '*Father and Son* cannot be construed as a biography of Philip, as so many critics have asserted, for we never get a glimpse of his soul in this book' (1977:68). This generic ambivalence, endlessly discussed, subtly undermined Philip's status further.

Similarly the binary structure of the text encouraged reductive approaches: truth versus imagination (Helsing 1979:57), Paganism versus Christianity (Dodd 1979:270), religion versus science (Malone 1993:23-4) and so on. Cynthia Northcutt Malone's analysis refines this oppositional structure by construing *Father and Son* as a dialogue, a Bakhtinian 'polemically coloured autobiography' (1993), but her scope is still limited to *Father and Son*, making the outcome of her essay inevitable. In her first example, where she cites Philip's letter printed in the Epilogue, Malone points out that Philip describes Gosse's life history as a 'rapid progress towards evil', and she argues that Gosse's opening statement about his 'being carried forward', exemplifies Bakhtinian double-voicedness, the process when the words of one speaker, here Gosse's, invests another's, here Philip's, with a new value (1993:17-18). Malone suggests other instances of this dynamic, but a closer look at this first example reveals the weakness of her strategy. Peter Allen, using Wertheimer as his source, claims that Gosse deliberately misquoted this letter from Philip (1988:494) and assuming this is correct, it undermines Malone's claim of double-voicedness: if Gosse has manipulated Philip's words,

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<sup>58</sup> Term coined in 1906 by Stephen Reynolds. For discussion of this term in relation to *Father and Son*, see Saunders 2010:152-59.



then it is not a true dialogic. Philip is thus misquoted and misrepresented. There can be no meaningful textual dialogue unless Philip's own writing is consulted.

A re-reading of *Father and Son* is also important in re-appraising Philip. Gosse's reading of Michael Scott's *Tom Cringle's Log* (1834),<sup>59</sup> for example, is an event that situates Philip as a catalyst, as a conduit for Gosse's access to the imaginative, and as a nervous co-transgressor against Bowes' spectral prohibition. Although it is not the first 'fictional' text Gosse experiences,<sup>60</sup> it is seminal for two reasons: he is now twelve, and this is the first time that Gosse accesses a complete text, and it is also the first time that he is made aware of the nature of fiction. The stereotypical response to Scott's novel is exemplified by the hero of Wells's *The History of Mr Polly* (1910), whose 'heart ached to see those sun-soaked lands before he died' (1993:102). *Tom Cringle's Log* typically engendered escapist aspirations, and virtually all the critics who have addressed this anecdote read it from Gosse's perspective, interpreting it symbolically as a portent of his escape from Brethren 'narrowness' (Gracie 1974:180; Folkenflik 1979:169-71; Dodd 1979:274-5; Brooks-Davis 1989:145-6; Henderson 1989:139). The book is often cited as part of Gosse's trajectory towards independence: Francis O'Gorman argues that this romance fostered detachment 'from the stern pre-Darwinian theology of his devout father' (2004:370). Critics have overlooked the fact that it was Philip who owned the book, and who gave it to his son.

Heather Henderson's claim that Gosse was allowed to read the book 'almost by accident' also seeks to minimise Philip's agency in this incident (1989:138). In fact, at this time (1861) Philip was re-reading the copy of *Tom Cringle's Log* that he had acquired during his 'less pietistic' youth (2004:118) in connection with an article he was preparing for the nonconformist journal, *Good Words*, called 'A Day in the Woods of Jamaica' (1862:235-39). In this essay, Philip describes in sumptuous detail the 'mountain-woods of glorious Jamaica' which 'retain so much of Paradise' (1862:235). Since Gosse even echoes Philip's lexis here, describing Jamaica as a 'terrestrial paradise' (2004:118), it seems quite feasible that Philip, reliving his Jamaican experience by consulting his old copy of *Tom Cringle's Log*, spontaneously shared his enthusiasm with young Gosse and handed over the book.

Philip furthermore offers his son guidance about how to read. Gosse approaches *Tom Cringle's Log* with a Bowes-trained 'horizon of expectations' (Jauss 1982:40). The incident illustrates a collision of generic expectations: Gosse anticipates that a 'Log' will live up to its denotation, that is, as a periodic record of factual conditions, while its author, Michael Scott,

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<sup>59</sup> Scott (1789-1835) was a Glaswegian author, who described Jamaica as it was in the 1820s.

<sup>60</sup> According to *Father and Son*, at the age of six, Gosse reads a page from a sensationalist novel, and aged nine he hears his father reciting Virgil (2004:25, 96).

assumes that a reader will approach the *Log* as a work of imagination. Gosse's bewilderment marks the 'disappointment of expectations' but with Philip's guidance, Gosse learns through this process; this is what Jauss calls the 'productive meaning of negative experience' (1982:40-41) and it marks the beginning of Gosse's role as a 'meaning-making reader'. Philip explains the book's fictional nature by telling Gosse that 'it was "all made up" ' (2004:118). Does that phrase, "all made up", awkwardly monosyllabic and surprisingly brusque from an eloquent man like Philip, suggest a sense of guilt for his contravention of Bowes' strictures on fiction? Of course, those may not have been Philip's exact words, since Gosse reconstructs the encounter, but in his article 'Full of Life Now', Barrett J. Mandel argues that the essential truth of autobiography is not destabilised by fictional techniques, because the reader already knows that autobiography is not the literal truth (1980:62). In this case then, we get the sense of Philip's discomfiture, torn between his commitment to Bowes' legacy and the desire to share with his son a once-treasured work of fiction.

The activation of such an allusion requires the reader to return to *Tom Cringle's Log*, and to test Gosse's description of it: few of the critics cited above seem actually to have read it, but the experience of this rollicking nautical adventure is not amenable to the method of reading that Philip suggests to young Gosse, that is, to 'read the descriptions of the sea, and of the mountains in Jamaica, and "skip" the pages which gave imaginary adventures and conversations' (2004:118). It soon becomes clear to any reader that the task of isolating the factual from the fictional is impossible, as Morris Mowbray observes in his Introduction to the 1895 edition of the text:

[Scott] had a keen eye for the picturesque, wherever it was to be found; but liberally as he loved her, he was no mere court-painter of nature. Always, wherever his scene is laid, - among the fogs and shoals of the North Sea or the sunny waters of the Caribbean Archipelago, in the breezy highlands of Jamaica, on the wooded slopes of Hayti [*sic*], or the sweltering lowlands of the Spanish main - there are human figures in the foreground; always through his pages beats the pulse of human life. (1895:xv-xvi)

Originally published serially in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1829, the book contains descriptive pieces which are integrated with the action and the characters: it is, as Gosse describes it, a 'picaresque romance', a 'wild masterpiece', a 'noisy amorous novel', certainly little given to the meditative (2004:118-9). The admixture of tone and ambience is furthermore conveyed by the clashing semantic fields Gosse uses to evoke the nature of the book's appeal. Its enchantment is implied by the words, 'flower', 'delicate', 'exquisite' and 'paradise', but this semantic field of physical beauty is undercut by the novel's 'spirited' and 'resolutely pagan' language, which Gosse energises by alliteration: the 'glow and gust' and the 'sudden storms' (2004:118-9). The vigour of Philip's romantic instinct overcomes his deference to Bowes, and

blinds him to the book's potential to 'let in a flood of imaginative light which was certainly hostile to [Gosse's] heavenly calling' (2004:117). By advising Gosse to 'skip' the 'imaginary' passages, Philip is paying lip-service to Bowes' prohibition: Philip knows that it is impossible to read *Tom Cringle's Log* in this way.

Gosse devotes more text-space to this book (1,021 words) than to any other book described in *Father and Son*. Under Bowes' regime, Gosse had been 'told about missionaries but never about pirates' (2004:17) and now Gosse is plunged into Tom Cringle's world where both species co-exist. Aged eleven, Gosse has had no experience of the protective devices that soften the impact of metaphor and style; he has no repertoire of frames and filters allowing him to understand irony and paradox; he has no awareness of the fictionality of fiction or the distortions of subjectivity or the weight of inscribed cultural codes. Neither has he learned that characters can be imaginary nor that a writer can adopt a persona, not necessarily speaking in his own voice. In short, he lacks Fish's 'literary competence' (1980:48): young Gosse has not internalised literary conventions such as wholesale shaping strategies (genre) or sentence-level devices (metaphors). Fish emphasises that such 'pre-understandings' need to be in place before meaning can be made, and with regard to that phrase, 'meaning making', Fish says that 'making' is 'intended to have its literal force', not taking it simply as 'making sense' but as 'creating sense' (1980:162). Gosse's experience is 'like giving a glass of brandy neat to someone who had never been weaned from a milk diet' (2004:118). The milk metaphor returns us to the mother's breast, but more particularly to Bowes' *Abraham*, wherein parents are instructed to 'feed your babes with the sincere milk of the Word' (1855:121). In Althusserian terms, Gosse's belated entry into the world of literature allows him to see Bowes' ideology in a new context, making it 'legible' to him, and therefore possible to reject, intellectually if not emotionally. The epiphany of *Tom Cringle's Log* meant that the nature of fiction became 'legible' to Gosse in this sudden and unprepared-for manner, but so dramatic was his initiation that fiction would long remain for him a bewildering genre.

The lexis used to describe the act of reading Scott's book is revealing: *Tom Cringle's Log* filled his 'whole horizon with glory and with joy'. Although Philip Dodd notes that such words 'pointedly echo the Bible' (1979:275), Gosse's lexis is actually more dynamic than Dodd suggests. I suggest that it functions simultaneously as the language of the child focaliser, and the voice of the adult narrator. Thus, as an expression of the child, it serves to reiterate the force of Bowes' interpellation which affords Gosse only religious lexis by which to express his excitement, while but at the same time, it marks Gosse's supplanting of Bowes' tract-world by a new fictional realm. This represents a Bakhtinian 'double-voiced' use of someone else's words: when Gosse echoes Bowes' words, he is investing them with a new value (Bakhtin

1984b:194). In this case, that Bakhtinian 'value' seems to be irony, given Gosse's emphasis on his constant re-reading of Scott's book; this act parodies the expectations around tract-reading. Tracts were intended to be 'perused and re-perused at pleasure', making their import 'less likely to fade from the memory than an address heard only once' (Hamilton 2011:32). This fetishising of *Tom Cringle's Log* is also an act of mimicry: Gosse mimes the act of Bowes' reading, de-authorizing the texts that she reveres. As Bhabha observes, 'mimicry rearticulates presence in terms of its "otherness", that which it disavows' (1994:130). This act of re-reading also aligns Gosse's new insight with Philip's adolescent Byronic epiphany: Gosse quotes Philip in *The Life* describing, almost as if it were a religious conversion, his encounter with *Lara* (1814):

[Philip] read and re-read, devouring the romantic poem with an absorbing interest which obliterated the world about him, almost the entire book imprinted itself upon his memory, and remained there indelibly impressed. 'The reading of *Lara*', he says 'was an era for me; for it was the dawning of Poetry on my imagination. It appeared to me that I had acquired a new sense'. (1890a:25)

Like father, like son: just as the youthful Philip is susceptible to *Lara*, so Gosse fetishises *Tom Cringle's Log*. Philip is the channel for Gosse to acquire a 'new sense' (1890a:25), indirectly contributing to Gosse's carnivalesque overturning of his mother's tract-voice.

As well as expressing the lexis of the child focaliser, Gosse's reference to 'glory and joy' also reveals the voice of the adult narrator, the man of letters who is steeped in Wordsworth. The phrase is a near-quotation from 'Resolution and Independence' (1807), referring to Robert Burns, 'who walked in glory and in joy/ Following his plough, along the mountain-side' (1815:29). As I shall show in Chapter Five, Gosse seeks to detach himself from parental influence, refashioning himself as a child of the literary tradition. Here, by allusion, Gosse is aligned with 'the Ploughman Poet, pioneer of the Romantic movement.

There are other ways in which the memory of the saintly Bowes is tarnished by Gosse's acquisition of *Tom Cringle's Log*. Critics have not commented on Gosse's observation that 'certain scenes and images . . . made not merely a lasting impression upon my mind, but *tinged* my outlook upon life' (2004:118 italics mine). Morris Mowbray warned readers that 'fastidious souls' might be 'shocked at Tom Cringle's revels', observing that 'it was Scott's habit to paint with a full brush'. He suggested furthermore that 'the wild reckless life' portrayed was matched by 'the very prodigality of the style' (1895:xvi, xviii). Gosse intimates a sexual awakening by his comment that 'the scenes *at night* surpassed . . . [his] experience' (2004:118 italics mine) and certainly Scott ranges from violent rape to luxurious prostitution. Scott describes such incidents as a young woman fatally traumatised by pirate assault, 'blood on her bosom ...gibbering an incoherent prayer', or the scene where Cringle's friend is 'pinioned into a

large easy-chair, with shawls and scarfs, amidst a sea of silk cushions, by four beautiful young women, black hair and eyes, clear white skins, fine figures and little clothing' (Scott 1999:49, 267). Hitherto, Gosse's notion of the feminine has been constructed through the figure of Bowes and her tract-world, but now he needs to make sense of the sexual Other. In his description of Cringle's encounter with a 'fallen' Spanish girl, 'poor dying Maria', Scott foregrounds the girl's 'long taper fingers as transparent as if they had been fresh cut alabaster' (1999:324). This distinctive image Gosse transfers to Bowes' death-bed, where, as I shall discuss in Chapters Four and Five, Gosse describes his mother's 'alabastrine fingers tightly locked together' (2004:38). The rarified world of his mother, 'the holiest and purest of women' (2004:44) is thus contaminated by the allusion from the blemished demotic register of Michael Scott. Gosse's sense of being 'tainted' recalls the analogy from postcolonialism raised in Chapter One: Gosse may resist Bowes, the coloniser, by acts of subversion, opposition or mimicry, but 'resistance always inscribes the resisted into the texture of the resisting: it is a two-edged sword' (Lye 1998). Gosse feels tainted by fiction, because he has been interpellated so to feel by his mother.

The story of 'poor dying Maria' is moreover resonant in other ways: Scott frames the description of Maria by two quotations from Byron's *Lara*, the very poem that awakened Philip's poetic sense, and Scott demonstrates to Gosse the act of appropriating quotations to serve a new context. Scott feminises the masculine pronouns applied to Count Lara to evoke Maria's sufferings through Byron's verse,

Light was his form, and darkly delicate  
That brow, whereon his native sun had sat,  
But had not marr'd (XXVI)

which becomes in Scott's version, '*her* form' and '*her* native sun' (1999:324 italics mine). Not only does this practice invert gender characteristics (a minute echo of my larger proposal that Bowes operates a male agenda) but it constitutes another form of 'tainting', the act of appropriating and distorting literary quotation.

Moving on from Gosse's eleventh to his fourteenth year, I will develop my premise that Philip shared a fictional language with his son by analysing a juvenile manuscript archived amongst the Gosse family papers (CUL Add.7027.17),<sup>61</sup> a story entitled 'Sleep in the Deep', 'Chapter 2', which relates the underwater adventure of a boy called Dowley (See transcription: Appendix Four). The manuscript, comprising one sheet folded to produce four 'sides', is secured in a

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<sup>61</sup> The document is archived as 'Part of a story written and illustrated by E.W.G.'.

grangerised version of Charteris' biography of Gosse (Figs. 2 and 3).<sup>62</sup> 'Chapter One' seems to have been lost and 'Chapter Two' is unfinished, ending abruptly mid-sentence, as if the writer was interrupted, or as if he continued on a fresh page which was subsequently mislaid.

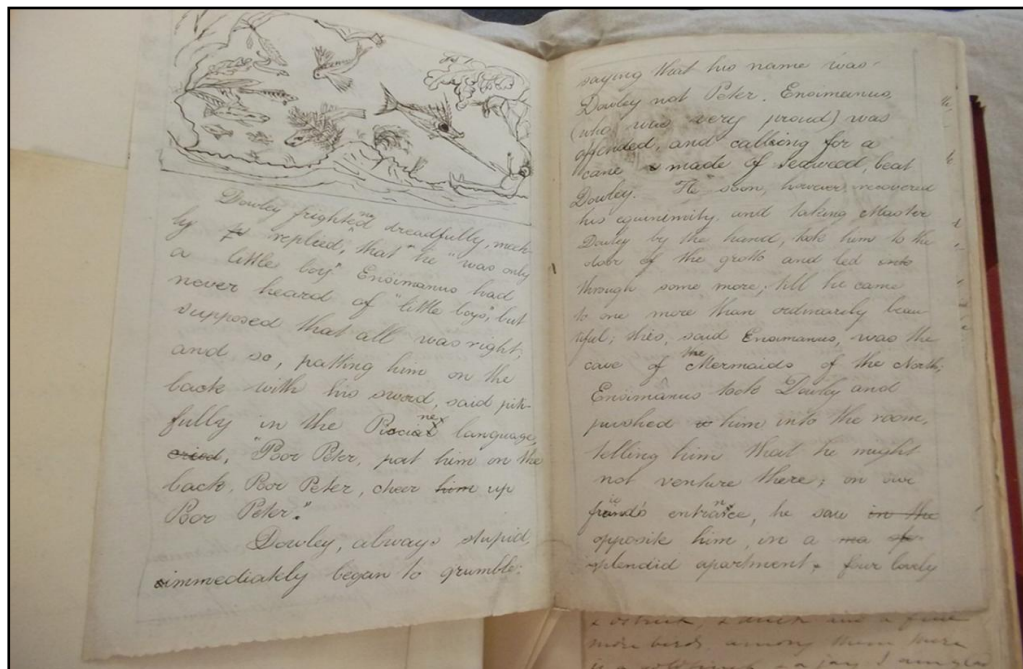
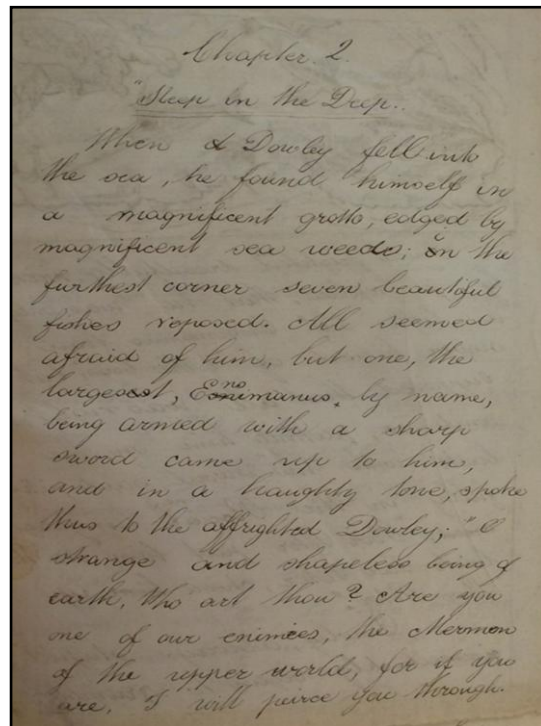
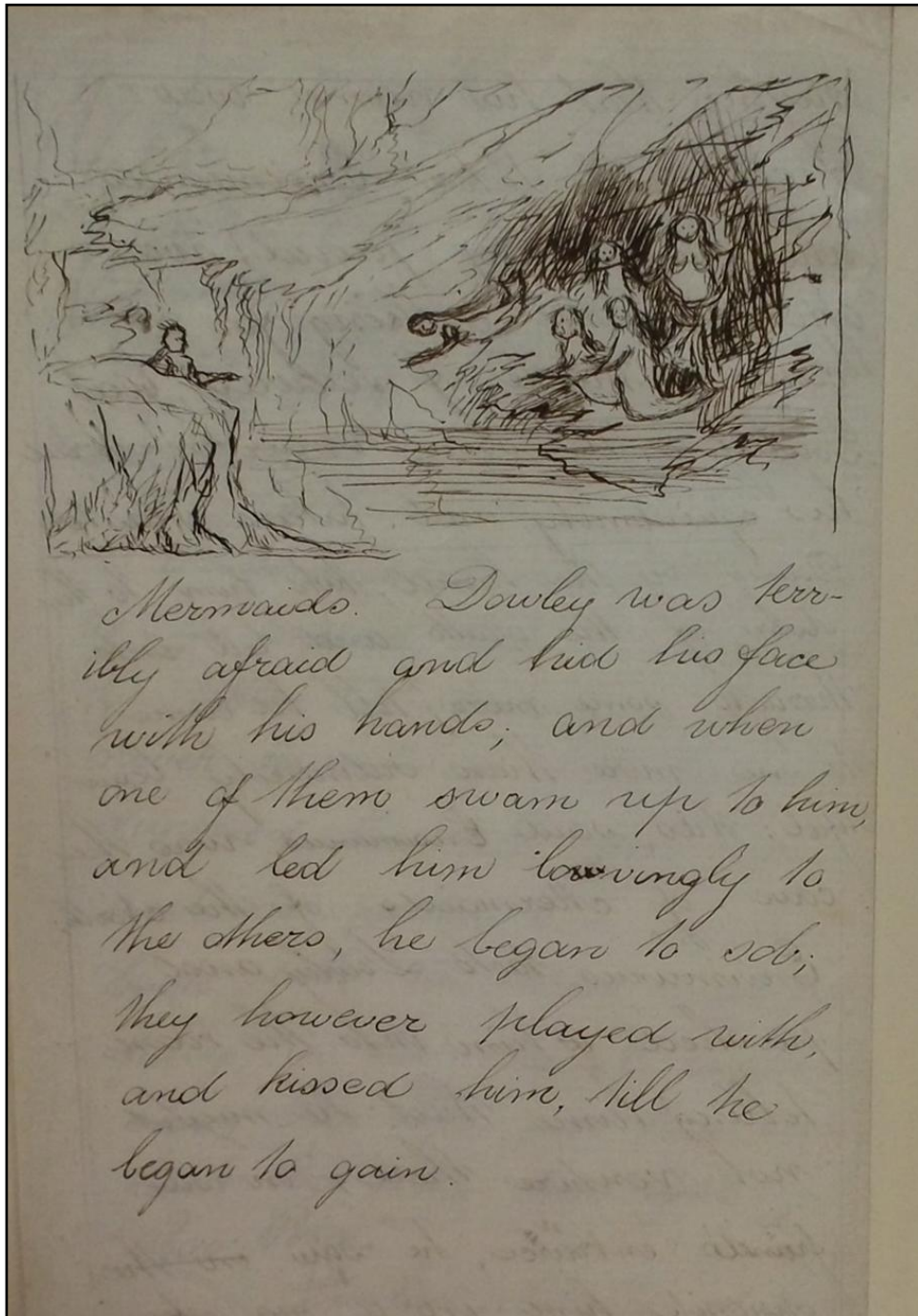


Fig. 2  
 Pages 1-3 of 'Sleep in the Deep'

<sup>62</sup> It is secured with other documents between pages 4 and 5, positioned before a series of letters from Gosse to Philip dated 1857-59. However, the style of handwriting in Dowley is closest to one of Gosse's later letters, postmarked Torquay July 1863.



Mermaids. Dowley was terribly afraid and hid his face with his hands; and when one of them swam up to him, and led him lovingly to the others, he began to sob; they however played with, and kissed him, till he began to gain.

Fig. 3

Page 4 of 'Sleep in the Deep'

The document is unremarked by Ann Thwaite or by any other Gosse critic, I suspect, because of its lack of date, but comparing the handwriting to one of Gosse's letters dated 1863, I suggest that it was composed when Gosse aged fourteen, around the time when he started at Thorn Park Boarding School in Teignmouth. It may be one of the 'ludicrous postiches' that

Gosse notes as being 'still preserved' amongst his father's papers when he wrote *Father and Son* in 1907 (2004:98).

In format, this manuscript bears a strong resemblance to Gosse's pastime (which Gosse, ever keen to suggest his precocity, attributes to his tenth rather than his fourteenth year) described in *Father and Son* of 'preparing little monographs on sea-side creatures, which were arranged, tabulated, and divided as exactly as possible on the pattern of those which my Father was composing for his *Actinologia Britannica*' (2004:98).<sup>63</sup> Although Gosse claims that he modelled his monographs on Philip's famous treatise on sea-anemones, it is unlikely that Philip would have permitted his son random access to a book still in preparation with its precious hand-painted illustrations. It is more likely that Philip would have given him a briefer and more expendable text to copy, and I suggest that this could have been a 'sample chapter' that Philip had prepared in 1843 for the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge whose committee had proposed that Philip write a book about the ocean. My reason for suggesting this is based on some of the lexical correspondences between Gosse's story and Philip's sample. In 1890, Gosse records in *The Life* that his father 'wrote a little essay of which only half a dozen copies were printed for the use of the committee', and he reproduces this fragment, noting that it was never actually used in *The Ocean* (1844) and had therefore never before been published (1890a:173-77). Gosse's interest in preserving this piece of ephemera may derive from the personal resonances it gave him, stimulating memories of his having imitated it as a boy. The subject matter, Gosse observes, is 'treated poetically and sentimentally', exemplified by the opening sentence of the sample: 'Waiving our privilege of breathing the thin and elastic air, let us descend in imagination to the depths of ocean, and explore the gorgeous treasures that adorn the world of mermaids' (1890a:177, 173). In both Philip's sample and Gosse's composition, the underwater world is peopled by mermaids.

Philip often describes his specimens anthropomorphically, producing a combination of biological clarity and atmospheric charm: 'The frogs' he observes, 'are busy depositing their strings of bead-like spawn, and announcing the fact to the world in loud, if not cheerful strains' (1860:5). This same impulse to lively personification and scientific precision is evident in Gosse's story of Dowley. Young Gosse's world is 'a magnificent grotto' into which a 'little boy' called Dowley descends and there converses with a 'haughty' swordfish, who takes him to meet four mermaids in a cave. The Latinate name of the swordfish, 'Ensimanus', evinces Philip-style exactitude. Gosse had been learning Latin from the age of nine under Philip's supervision (2004:95) and it is possible that this neologism might be his own invention, a compound created from Latin: 'ensis', a sword, and 'manus', a hand. Certainly, Ensimanus

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<sup>63</sup> *A History of the British Sea-Anemones and Corals* (1860).



lives up to his name in the story, 'patting [Dowley] on the back with his sword'. By giving Ensimanus a voice, however, Gosse moves beyond Philip's explicative anthropomorphism towards fantasy representation. Although the genre of talking animals developed with the mid-eighteenth century rise of children's literature (Coslett 2006:1, 5) Gosse was forbidden such fictional models. He would, however, through religious instruction, have encountered talking creatures such as the serpent speaking to Adam and Eve (Genesis 3), or Balaam and his talking donkey (Numbers 22:28-30).<sup>64</sup> Gosse would, furthermore, by this age, have become so familiar with the 'personalities' of marine animals that it seems feasible that he could imagine a swordfish ventriloquising an imperious adult.

Alongside such precocious flashes in young Gosse, there are obvious signs of immaturity such as the spelling errors (corrected by Philip?) and the awkward hyphenation of words at the line breaks ('piti-fully'; 'beau-tiful'). In *Father and Son*, Gosse describes how he 'was obliged to borrow sentences, word for word, from my Father's published books' (2004:99), a process that suggests itself in a comparison between Gosse's 'monograph' and Philip's sample: Gosse's title 'Sleep in the Deep' is an echo of Philip's description of the fish as 'tenants of the deep' (1890a:175)<sup>65</sup> while Dowley's encounter with 'four lovely mermaids' animates Philip's evocation of the 'world of the mermaids' (1890a:173). Ensimanus, furthermore, asks Dowley 'Are you one of our enemies, the Mermen of the *upper world*' (italics mine), surely a borrowing from Philip's sample when he discusses the dullness of the ocean plants compared with 'the variety which marks their sisters of *the upper world*' (1890a:171 italics mine). It is likely that the more technical lexis also derived from Philip's idiolect, for example the 'Piscine language' of Ensimanus: in the chapter entitled 'The Mermaid' in Philip's *The Romance of Natural History* (second series 1861) the term 'piscine' appears no less than five times (1861:126, 129, 133, 139, 145).<sup>66</sup> There are also visual echoes between the drawing of a swordfish in Philip's *The Ocean* and the image of Ensimanus in the manuscript (Fig 4). Indeed, in *The Life*, Gosse specifically praises, out of all fifty-two images in *The Ocean*, this 'drawing of the white shark,

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<sup>64</sup> As an adult, Gosse recalls those speaking animals, albeit inaccurately. In a letter to Hamo Thornycroft (5 May 1879), Gosse uses the story of Balaam's ass as an analogy illustrating the opposite of his own behaviour, for though intending to praise Thornycroft, he had just criticised him: 'Was it Balaam's ass that came to curse and went away to bless? It seems to me I have done the opposite' (Charteris 1931:111). Significantly, by his allusion, Gosse inadvertently conflates man and beast: it was Balaam, not his donkey, who when ordered to curse, pronounced blessings on the Jews (Numbers 23:11).

<sup>65</sup> The use of 'deep' as a noun is characteristic of Philip. In *The Romance of Natural History* (1860), he alludes to 'these giants of the deep' (53), describes his curiosity 'to learn what is at the bottom of the deep' (274), compares jelly-fish to the 'spirits of the deep' (276), is amazed at 'the crystal clearness of the deep' (279) describes the sea-serpent as 'the monster of the deep' (286) and later as 'the leviathan of the deep' (321).

<sup>66</sup> In that chapter, Philip relates a boyhood anecdote of visiting a 'show' at a local fair which exhibited a mermaid 'whose portrait, on canvas hung outside, was radiant in feminine loveliness and *piscine* scaliness' (1861:129 italics mine).

on p.284' (1890a:178);<sup>67</sup> it is possible that Gosse's renewed encounter with this particular image, some thirty years after his adolescent imitation of it, caused him to pick it out of a series of illustrations that are largely uniform in terms of ambience and quality. Gosse, then, is Philip's apprentice; the son learns the skills of his father's 'trade'.

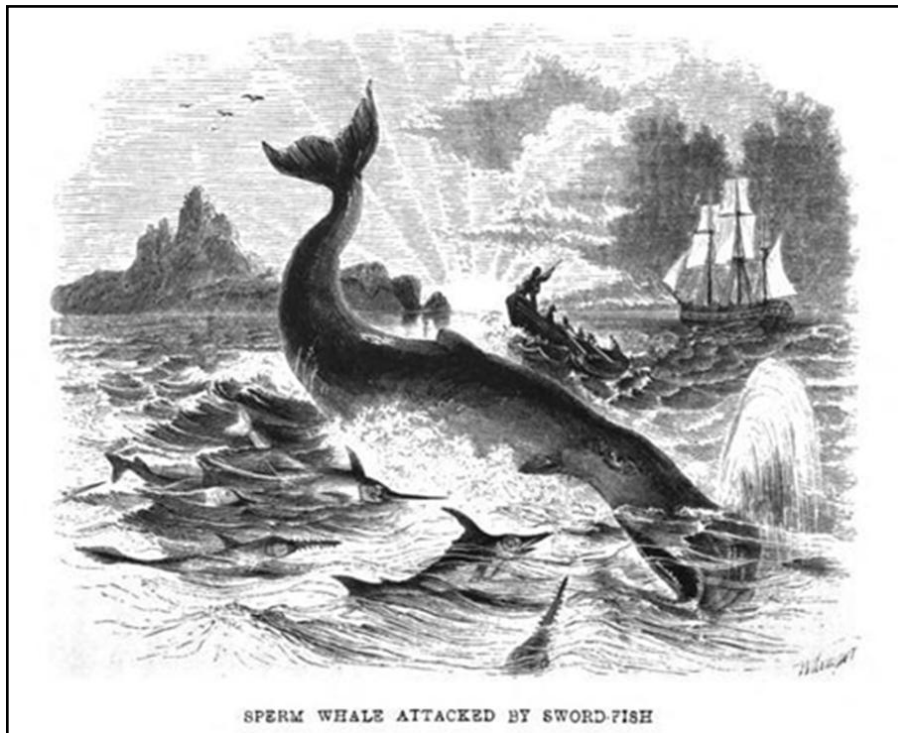


Fig. 4

Illustration of swordfish in Philip's *The Ocean* (1844:179)  
compared with Gosse's drawing in *Sleep in the Deep* (c.1863)

From 1853, Philip had shared his interest in the creatures of 'the deep' with another religious naturalist living nearby, Charles Kingsley, and although their friendship eventually 'foundered on the rock of *Omphalos*' (Chitty 1974:167) Gosse remembers Kingsley as 'a jolly presence that brought some refreshment to our seriousness' (2004:93). It is probable that young Gosse, accompanying Kingsley and Philip on their Torbay trawling trips (2004:93), would have heard many discussions about the scientific and spiritual significances of 'the deep'. For both Philip and Kingsley, the fascination with marine biology was energised by the spiritual symbolism of baptism. Valentine Cunningham links Kingsley's image of Tom the Sweep in *The Water Babies*, plunging 'downward towards and into the waters of purification', with Philip's image in *Sacred Streams* (1850) where the River Jordan:

<sup>67</sup> Gosse explains his father's collaboration with Josiah Whymper, 'the principal water-colour painter and engraver of scientific illustrations in that generation' (1890a:172).

stands as the type of penal death . . . Its very name is significant, whether we accept the etymology which reads “the descender”, the downward-plunger, or that, which seems the better one, of “the River of Judgement” . . . Kingsley, evidently, takes the river as the place of both downward plunging and judgement. (1985:134)

Kingsley’s fascination with this underwater world manifested itself not only in the above-mentioned famous *Fairy-tale for a Land-Baby* (serialised in 1862-3), but in its less fanciful forerunner, *Glaucus or The Wonders of the Shore* (1855).<sup>68</sup> Although Gosse, still technically under the shadow of Bowes’ interdiction, might not have been permitted to read *The Water Babies*, Kingsley’s *Glaucus* was certainly on the Gosse household bookshelves; Philip’s presentation copy is listed in Gosse’s library catalogues (Lister 1893:92; Cox 1924:159). *Glaucus* contained several tributes to, and lengthy quotations from, Philip’s *Tenby* (1856) and *A Naturalist’s Rambles upon the Devon Coast* (1853).<sup>69</sup> Philip was a catalyst for Kingsley: indeed, ‘*Glaucus* had grown directly out of [Philip’s] books on marine zoology’ (Klaver 2006:476). (I shall comment more below on Philip’s role in stimulating the writing of other authors.) In *Glaucus*, Kingsley evokes this underwater world by quoting (anonymously) from his own poem ‘Andromeda’ (not published in full until 1858),<sup>70</sup> a verse of which seems to return us to Gosse’s Dowley, a ‘sea-boy’ who dreams ‘haplessly’ of mermaids (‘sea-maids’):

on their knees lay the sea-boys  
 Whelmed by the roll of the surge, swept down by the anger of Nereus;  
 Hapless, whom never again upon quay or strand shall their mothers  
 Welcome with garlands and vows to the temples; but wearily pining,  
 Gaze over island and main for the sails which return not; they heedless  
 Sleep in soft bosoms for ever, and dream of the surge and the sea-maids.  
 (Kingsley 1856:115)

Gosse may have been rather moved by Kingsley’s orphaned ‘sea-boys’, and turned their feeling of abandonment into his own story of loss: the embrace of the mermaids causes Dowley to ‘sob’. As such, it shows Gosse’s early ability to appropriate sources, the writings of Philip and Kingsley, and to mould them into his own vision. In later life, Gosse seems to have remembered this adult male fascination with underwater realms: in *The Life*, Gosse quotes Philip’s diary entry that, whilst on the Florida Reef, he found it ‘pleasing to peer down into the depths below’ (1890a:118). In *Glaucus*, however, Kingsley wants to do more than simply ‘peer’: ‘And often, standing on the shore at low tide, has one longed to walk on and in under the waves, as the water-ousel does in the pools of the mountain burn’ (1856:113). Gosse is surely alluding to the work of both men when he claims in *Father and Son* that his childhood

<sup>68</sup> To conduct his reader underwater, Kingsley utilises Greek myth, in which a fisherman called Glaucus is seized by a ‘strange longing’ to eat a herb which allows him to follow the fish under the waves.

<sup>69</sup> Hereafter *Rambles*.

<sup>70</sup> Kingsley is coy about his own authorship of this poem: he introduces it by evoking the nightly revels of the sea-nymphs, ‘whereof *one* has sung’ (1856:135 italics mine).

'desire was to walk out over the sea as far as [he] could, and then lie flat on it, face downwards, and peer into the depths' (2004:60): critics have noted that Gosse's 'desire' recalls images of Christ walking on water in John 6 (Porter 1975:184; Amigoni 2007:169) and this reworking subtly upstages and ironises, Bakhtinian-fashion, both Philip's and Kingsley's more naïve sentiments.

Having established Philip's role as a catalyst and mentor for Gosse's fictional reading and writing, it is now important to look at specific correspondences between the adult oeuvres of both men, to expand on what I described above as Gosse's 'deliberate plundering' of his father's discourse. While in the act of allusion, the writer expects 'the knowing reader' to recognise the source, in the act of plagiarism the writer does not intend that recognition and I suggest that Gosse never wanted to acknowledge his debt to Philip. When Catherine Raine compared *Father and Son* with Gosse's biography of his father, written seventeen years earlier, she concluded that *The Life* emphasised Philip's poetic side 'in order to glamorise Edmund's literary ancestry' while *Father and Son* denies 'his father's imaginative power' so that Gosse's own literary talent might 'spring up all the more miraculously in the inhospitable soil of Calvinism' (1997:78). Gosse, situated at the hub of late Victorian and Edwardian publishing, would have sensed the sea-change in attitudes to biography: indeed, he himself contributed to that shift with *The Custom of Biography* (1901) in which Gosse attacked conventionally 'devotional' life-writing, the custom of burying 'our dead under the monstrous catafalque of two volumes (crown octavo)' (1901:195), and with *The Ethics of Biography* (1903), where he famously urges the biographer 'to be as indiscreet as possible within the boundaries of good taste and kind feeling' (1903c:323). Gosse took a risk with *Father and Son*, knowing that it contradicted much of what he had written in *The Life*, but his gamble paid off, because the fame of the later book obscured the import of the earlier.

In *Father and Son*, Gosse belittles Philip as 'a collector of facts and marshaller of observations', emphasising that 'his very absence of imagination aided him in his work' (2004:71) but in fact as a critic and literary historian, Gosse is even more of a classifier. Indeed, Harold Orel identifies classifying traits in Gosse's literary legacy, both the textbook-type study that divided literary history into discrete periods, and the practice of grouping essays around literary movements (1984:193-97). Gosse was anxious to differentiate himself from Philip's Linnean taxonomies; he claimed, even as late as 1924, that he had always been 'the disciple of one man, and of one man only – Sainte-Beuve. No-one else has been my master' (Charteris 1931:473), but in fact his methodology is essentially the same as Philip's. Indeed, the critical approach of Gosse's acclaimed mentor, Sainte-Beuve, was dismissed by Proust as 'literary botany', pursuing a process of gathering observations and classifying writers as if they were

either pure or hybrid plants (Sabin 1987:48-9). Following Sainte-Beuve's mode of operating on two principles, the biographical and the comparative, Gosse, his disciple, will ask of any writer: 'Where, in the vast and ever-shifting scheme of literary evolution, does he take his place, and in what relations does he stand, not to those who are least like him, but to those who are of his own kith and kin?' (1898:391). Gosse's process of answering this question is evident in relation to such figures as James Shirley whose 'high position in the second rank [of playwrights] is never likely again to be seriously assailed' (1888:xxx), and Thomas Beddoes who deserves 'a high place in the second order of British poets' (1928:xxxv). Sometimes Gosse articulates his struggle in 'positioning' a writer appropriately:

It would not be decent to claim for [James Thomson] a place among the ten or twelve supreme master whose magnitude quietly asserts itself more and more as each generation passes, and yet it is equally invidious to consign Thomson, with all his originality, his distinction, and his extended influence, to the class of secondary writers' (1906:xi).

The work of father and son thus evinces a disconcerting combination of the objective (the rational ordering of literature/nature) and the subjective (the discourse of fairy-tale and mythology).

Philip's reading of natural history as a 'romance' made his books very popular; back in 1955, Sacheverell Sitwell described Philip's illustrations in *The Aquarium* (1854) as 'submarine scenes of fairy-like intensity', comparing them with Japanese screen paintings depicting palace gardens in *The Tale of Genji* (1955:13), a parallel which emphasises a re-constructed and interiorised version of nature, an elegant and elitist genre of urban art (Shirane 2012:1-4). Sitwell argues furthermore that Philip should not 'be numbered among men of science. His rank is among poets and artists' (1955:15). Jonathan Smith's more recent work on Philip's image-texts produces a more religious but certainly no less poetic reading: the illustrations, Smith says, convey a harmonious 'post-millennial kingdom', 'a submarine 'happy family' with different species co-existing in a benign setting, each with adequate resources, untainted by competition or suffering (2006:84). Merrill also describes how Philip celebrates and animates the living world, a poet as much as a scientist: she focuses on Philip's

highly Romantic diction . . . he never hesitates to pronounce an event "solemn", "gloomy", "wonderful", or "fantastic": thinking of himself as a suitor in relation to female nature, he expected to be continually moved and amazed by her complexity, and never found himself disappointed.' (1989:202-3)

Literary critics seem, however, to ignore Philip's 'poetic side': writing in the same year, Heather Henderson remarks: 'Had Gosse written an objective, straightforward account of his life, stripped of every literary technique and allusion, he would have been not Edmund but

Philip Gosse' (1989:152). The Gosse critical corpus has been slow to address the widespread and now well-established revisions of Philip that belie his caricature in *Father and Son*.

Although Sitwell recognised the 'fairy-like intensity' of Philip's illustrations, no-one has specifically addressed his employment of fairy-tale lexis and analogy, examples of which are too numerous to be simply adventitious. Philip's rapturous attribution of scientific wonders to a benevolent and divine Creator inscribes his work within the teleological and analogical tradition of William Paley, but while the 'Watchmaker Analogy' presupposes an orderly universe, Philip addresses the more random and elusive aspects of the natural world, and so he employs mythology and fairy-tale in order to explain those mysteries. Nicola Bown maintains that fairy imagery was not uncommon in scientific writing (2001:98-101) and Philip was certainly not unusual in this practice, but it is noteworthy in the context of his Brethren principles and his wife's published views on fiction. It reiterates my notion of inverted gender roles in the Gosse marriage, raised in Chapter One, that located Bowes within the Symbolic register, the voice of prohibition against fiction, while situating Philip within the traditionally feminine realm of the imagination. In fact, less than a year after the publication of Bowes' article deriding 'foolish nursery ditties heard from the nurses' (1855b:28), Philip claims in *Tenby: A Sea-Side Holiday* (1856) that ordinary descriptive lexis is insufficient to convey the appearance of a chasm called Bull-Slaughter Bay:

No description, or at least none that I can pen, would do justice to this extraordinary chasm, or convey any adequate impression of its sublimity and grandeur. The immense depth, the rounded form, and the steep upright walls, with arched passages, and narrow doors, might make you fancy that you were looking down from the battlements of an old castle-keep into the interior, only that it must have been the keep of a giant; perhaps one of those "Welsh giants" whom we used to read of in our babyhood, conquered and slain, in good King Arthur's days, by the redoubtable "Jack." (1856:350)

Not only does Philip share with the reader the process of imaginative 'fancy', but he conjures the childhood experience of reading fairy-tales, specifically Jack the Giant-Killer, ironically one of the very stories that Gosse later claims in *Father and Son* to have been forbidden (2004:17). Indeed, 'Jack' had already appeared in *The Aquarium* (1854) where Philip helped his reader to envisage the Long-Legged Spider-crab by musing that 'if we had legs like these, we might cover the ground in a style that would put to shame the old giant-slayer's seven-league boots' (1854:57). This fairy-tale allusion may have been refracted through *The Prelude* (1850) since Wordsworth's verses were 'at [Philip's] fingers' ends' (Gosse 1890a:351) and Jack is twice conjured there, firstly as a figure of fantasy that appeals to a child's innocence,<sup>71</sup> and secondly

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<sup>71</sup> 'The child, whose love is here, at least, doth reap/One Precious gain, that he forgets himself' (Book V: 345-6).

as a theatrical figure for the urban spectator<sup>72</sup> who must watch with suspended disbelief: the penumbra of the Wordsworthian reading implies that Philip understood the timeless power of such tales.

Philip is somewhat self-conscious about his use of fairy-tale imagery, and in his Preface to *Romance*, he anticipates objections by some readers: 'I hope the statisticians will forgive me if they cannot see it with my spectacles' (1860:vii). I suggest that Gosse's eagerness to look through those spectacles resulted in the development of his own fairy-inflected mode of expression, applied in due course to the discourse of literary criticism. Gosse would doubtless have read Philip's *Romance* (1860)<sup>73</sup> in which he describes a process 'familiarily called silver-thaw':

It is caused by rain descending when the stratum of air nearest the earth is below 32 deg., and consequently freezing the instant it touches any object; the ice accumulates with every drop of rain, until a transparent, glassy coating is formed. On the shrubs and trees, the effect is magical, and reminds one of fairy scenes described in oriental fables. (1860:3)

Although Philip evokes the meteorological phenomenon through precise factual lexis, he conveys the human experience of it through the register of magic: he appeals furthermore to the readers' existing knowledge of exotic stories. As the narrative develops, Philip enters his own fantasy world until, by the act of shaking the tree-branch 'the spell is broken at once' (1860:4): this particular phrase about the breaking of a spell often appears when Philip wants to signal a moment of change, either in the context of time, a shift from the dark 'silence and stillness' of early morning, when 'the spell is broken' by the 'dazzling splendour of the risen sun' (1860:14), or in the context of an arresting experience such as his sight of two chuck-will's widow birds: 'By and by, a third further off in the forest joined them, and the first flew away. The spell was broken, and I went to bed; but even in sleep the magic sounds seemed to be ringing in my ears' (1860:175). Gosse thus learns from Philip how to employ the register of magic to convey a concept or an idea. In his discussion of Zola in *French Profiles* (1905), for example, Gosse translates the process of writing itself into something magical:

Zola's first book appeared under the title of *Contes à Ninon* . . . the young man takes a cobweb for his canvas, and paints upon it a rainbow-dew with a peacock's feather. It is an amusing circumstance that, while Zola was not only practising, but very sternly and vivaciously preaching, the gospel of Realism, this innocent volume of fairy stories should all the time have figured among his works (1905b:135).

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<sup>72</sup> 'The champion, Jack the Giant-killer: Lo! / He dons his coat of darkness; on the stage Walks and achieves his wonders' (Book VII:280-2).

<sup>73</sup> Philip published two books in consecutive years with the same title: this is the 'first series'. Merrill notes that it was originally titled *The Poetry of Natural History* (1989:197). See Footnote 55.

Not only are the *Contes* characterised as ‘innocent’ and ‘otherworldly’, in opposition to the implied dogma of the ‘gospel of Realism’, but the very act of creation is described in fantasy discourse: the metaphors of the cobweb, the dew and the feather position young Zola in a miniaturised universe, where intangible, gossamer objects evoke a filmy and unearthly atmosphere.

Philip employs the register of magic and mythology for highly technical aspects of nature as well as the homely and humdrum. With the precision of a naturalist, simile is most suited to the descriptions of his specimens, while his handling of humans is often metaphorical, intended to create a comic or ironic effect rather than to teach or instruct. In *Evenings at the Microscope* (1859), for example, he writes about the bewitching effect of Silver-fishes: ‘each speculum,<sup>74</sup> as it assumes or leaves the reflecting angle, is momentarily brightening or waning, flashing out or retiring into darkness, producing a magic effect on the admiring observer’ (1859a:37). Similarly, in explaining the phenomena of respiration, Philip refers to the ‘oval’ movements generated by the numerous hairs on the membrane called ‘cilia’: ‘now and then the whole are suddenly arrested simultaneously as if by magic’ (1859a:52); so incredible is this dynamic, Philip enthuses, that it seems to be an illusion. On the other hand, fairy-tale lexis serves to convey the domestic and the ordinary: the marine worm, for example, has

a row of wart-like feet, from each of which project two bundles of spines of exquisite structure. The bundles, expanding on all sides, resemble so many sheaves of wheat, or you may more appropriately fancy you behold the armoury of some belligerent sea-fairy, with stacks of arms enough to accoutre a numerous host. (1859a:299)

Such anthropomorphic treatment of animals is Philip’s trademark; ‘What I delight in’, Philip wrote to a friend in 1845, ‘is the minute details of habits, the *biography* of animals’ (Thwaite 2002:142). Plants too are personified: in ‘their drawing room beneath the waves . . . the *Laomedae* that fringe the walls light up their myriads of fairy lamps, and the tiny *Medusae* crowd in to the watery festivities with their elfish circlets’ (1859a:394). In *A Year at the Shore* (1865), Philip instructs the reader to hold the hollow box of a Sea-Urchin up to the light and to ‘look into the cavity from the under or mouth side’ in order to see ‘a multitude of minute holes, as smooth and regular as if drilled with a fairy’s wimble’ (1865:179).<sup>75</sup> Fairy-tale phraseology thus works seamlessly alongside biological nomenclature.

Philip is most liable to slide into metaphor when he describes humans rather than animals, and for this he employs the lexis of classical mythology: in *Tenby*, he characterises the ‘uncouth’ bathing-women as ‘brawny priestesses of Neptune offering a sacrifice to [their] divinity’ and he

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<sup>74</sup> Spiculum: a small needlelike structure such as a spine in marine and freshwater invertebrates e.g. sponges and corals.

<sup>75</sup> Wimble: an augur or hand-tool for boring holes.



describes the scene of some portly ladies being transported to land on horseback when cut off by the tide as 'Neptune reign[ing] supreme' forcing the 'Europas . . . to have the horse for their Jupiter' (1856:13, 19-20). In the third of his *Letters from Alabama* (1859), he addresses the reader thus: 'And now, as you have a long way to go tonight, you have need to spur your Pegasus' (1859b:68). Philip, then, employs simile for clarity and exposition, straying only into metaphor for less serious concerns.

In Gosse's biographies of literary figures, fairy lexis also harmonises with historical detail, and Gosse transforms real lives, including his own, into fairy-tales. He declares of Hans Christian Andersen, for example, that 'his laborious and beautiful life had been the most enchanting of his fairy tales' (1900:xiii) and then Gosse promptly inserts himself into that life, describing the scene in Andersen's mansion of Rolighed<sup>76</sup> where:

in his bright room open to the east, with the long caravan of ships going by in the Sound below . . . Andersen proposed to recite to me a new fairy tale. He read in a low voice, which presently sank to almost a hoarse whisper; he read slowly, out of mercy to my imperfect apprehension, and as he read he sat beside me, with his amazingly long and bony hand – a great brown hand, almost like that of a man of the woods – grasping my shoulder. As he read, the colour of everything, the twinkling sails, the sea, the opposite Swedish coast, the burnished sky above, kindled with sunset. It seemed as if nature was flushing with ecstasy at the sound of Andersen's voice. (1900:xii-xiii)

This scene bears all the characteristics of a literary fairy-tale: Andersen is powerfully individualised, the extraneous descriptions of Nature function as a heightened and poetic setting, and the lexis manipulates in the reader a sense of awe not only towards this legendary Danish storyteller but also towards Gosse, the listener, whose own skill as a storyteller allows the reader to share the experience vicariously. Andersen's physical hold on Gosse evokes echoes of Coleridge's figure of the Ancient Mariner who constrains the wedding-guest 'with his skinny hand'. The enthralled Gosse, the ecstatic Nature and the reader himself all become 'one' at this moment, arrested and transfixed listeners. It is significant furthermore that the story Andersen 'confided' to Gosse is 'The Cripple', describing a boy whose 'whole spiritual life is awakened' by a book of fairy-tales: 'in this story', Gosse claims, 'Andersen intended to sum up the defence of fairy tales and of their teller' (1900:xiii), the power of which Gosse enacts in this scene. This dynamic operates, regardless of whether Gosse is communicating admiration or aversion. Indeed, when Gosse employs fairy lexis to describe Andrew Lang (1844-1912)<sup>77</sup>,

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<sup>76</sup> Gosse would have been gratified by the inclusion of this passage into what was to become the definitive biography: *Hans Christian Andersen: The Story of his Life and Work 1807-75* (1975) by Elias Bredsdorff (1975:265).

<sup>77</sup> Andrew Lang, critic, anthropologist, poet and novelist, is best known as a collector of folk tales, and producer of the *Coloured Fairy Books*.

his friend of thirty-five years, the intention is not beneficent. Invited by *The Bookman*<sup>78</sup> to set down his personal recollections on the occasion of Lang's death in 1912, Gosse transformed his old friend into a cold-blooded and cunning 'fay':

Indeed, all his emotions were too fleeting, and in this there was something fairy-like; quick and keen and blithe as he was, he did not seem altogether like an ordinary mortal, nor could the appeal to gross human experience be made to him with much chance of success . . . He was the fairy in our midst, the wonder-working, incorporeal, and tricky fay of letters, who paid for all his wonderful gifts and charms by being not quite a man of like passions with the rest of us. (1912b:207-8)

Gosse strays into metaphor whenever it suits him, hence Lang 'was the fairy in our midst'.

Gosse subtly traduces the conventions that Philip respects.

At this point it is useful to be reminded of Philip's stature. Of course he was 'one of England's most popular scientific writers' (Ross 1977:85) but it is important to note that he also had some standing in the literary world. Philip's influence on Kingsley, discussed above, seems logical given their shared religious and scientific interests, but Philip's role as an inspiration for Charles Dickens is more remarkable. In fact, Dickens was so galvanised by Philip's similes that he could not resist extending and enlarging them into powerfully fanciful metaphors.

Dickens's essay, 'The Microscope' in *All the Year Round* (September 17, 1859) praises Philip's 'delightful book entitled *Evenings with the Microscope* (1859:486).<sup>79</sup> Dickens's mistake over the preposition of the book's title, his substitution of 'with' for Philip's more precise 'at', may simply reflect Dickens's hasty enthusiasm, but I read it as his subconscious resistance to simply looking objectively 'at the lens': Dickens goes beyond the science to read and exaggerate the subjective fantasy implicit in Philip's language. A simple example of this is Dickens's translation of Philip's description of a piece of cuttle-shell viewed under the microscope: Philip compares the cuttle-shell with 'stalactites and stalagmites in a cavern' (1859a:55), an image which Dickens represents as 'a *fairy* cavern of stalactites' (1859:487 italics mine), drawing out the implicit enchantment in Philip's minutiae. Dickens, ever alive to 'the romantic side of familiar things' (1971:43), accentuates the suggestive quality of Philip's similes: when, for example, Philip compares the periwinkle's tongue scooping up algae with 'the action of a mower cutting down swath after swath as he marches along' (1859a:65), Dickens feeds on Philip's anthropomorphic stimulus:

The microscope is never so bewitching as when it shows us the minute geometry of Nature. Her living mechanism is beautiful too, and strangely prophetic of the mechanical contrivances of man. Take the periwinkle: would you expect to find a mower, an Irish reaper, or a patent reaping-machine in him? Yet he does for the confervae exactly what the reaper does for grass and corn, and with not so very different means. (Dickens 1859:487-8)

<sup>78</sup> The article was reprinted later that year in *Portraits and Sketches*.

<sup>79</sup> This article is not acknowledged in Gosse's 1890 biography of Philip.

Dickens relates the 'strangely prophetic' aspects of Nature to Victorian industrial society. Philip's personification of the periwinkle tongue is daring, and Dickens wittily enlarges it step by step, transforming the simile into metaphor, then giving it 'a local habitation and a name': he connotes strength and power in the metaphors of the 'Irish reaper', typical of labourers emigrating from Ireland since the 1840s, and the 'patent reaping-machine' which may refer to McCormick's Mechanical Reaper exhibited at the Crystal Palace Exhibition (*New York Times* 1851). Dickens's wit is, however, dependent on Philip's initial analogy.

My third and final example of Dickens's dialogue with Philip concerns the topic of spiders, about the nature of which Philip offers a homely analogy:

I was one day in an omnibus, in the corner of which sat a butcher. Presently a man got in, whose blue gingham coat indicated the same trade. He seated himself opposite the other, and the two were soon in conversation. "Do you know Jackson?" says A. "No," says B: "Where does *he* slaughter?" The reply gave me a new idea; he evidently considered that "slaughtering" was the only occupation worthy of a man, and therefore the only one worthy of man's thought. Spiders are just the same. If an *Epeira* met a *Clubiona*, probably the first interchange of civilities would be something like- "Where do you slaughter?" (1859a:234)

Philip continues with detailed descriptions of the ways that the spider's body is 'contrived' to enable the efficient killing of flies. Dickens cannot resist Philip's anthropomorphised spiders and he responds with superlatives, lists and literary allusions:

Spiders are the most murderous animals in creation. They have nets and traps, caves, fangs, hooks, and poison bags – all the paraphernalia of robbers and assassins, with a stock-in-trade sufficient for half a dozen Mrs Radcliffes.

A fat old spider . . . is more like one of Bunyan's giants than anything else; he is the tyrant of the garden, the butcher, the assassin, the oppressor of the weak, the wily circumventor of the strong. (1859:490)

Dickens draws out the potential boundlessness of Philip's analogies, responding hyperbolically to Philip's defamiliarisation of the ordinary. Dickens, at this time at the height of his fame, currently serialising his twelfth major novel, openly acknowledges his debt to Philip, and publically enacts the creative process of appropriation; this offers a useful contrast to the covert way in which Gosse borrows and manipulates Philip's imagery.

That covertness may evince Gosse's embarrassment at his comparatively humble origins: certainly Peter Allen considers Gosse a snob (1988:496-7). Compared with his associate-writers engaged in the first series of John Morley's *The English Men of Letters* project (1878-1892), Gosse's parentage is atypical. Most contributors had professional fathers engaged in law (Trollope, Claverhouse Jebb, Traill), the civil service (Stephen, Ward), medicine (Symonds, Morley, Goldwin Smith), engineering (Dobson), architecture (Ainger), academia (Nicol,

Huxley), the army (Shairp), administration (Saintsbury, Oliphant), business (Colvin, Cotter Morison, R.W.Church, Dowden, Black) and the established church (Henry James, Froude, Myers, Courthope and Pattison): only Gosse and Richard Holt Hutton were sons of dissenting ministers. Most of Morley's group had enjoyed a university education: only Gosse and T.H. Huxley were different in this regard. Gosse then has an atypical inheritance in his biologist father, and while he recognised and exploited the wealth of organic imagery in his father's work, he was reluctant to draw attention to its influence among his literary colleagues.

Sometimes Gosse's utilisation of Philip's inheritance backfires: Gosse may lack the requisite biological grounding to make an appropriated phrase work properly. Philip, for example, describes 'the noble Agave, or what we in England call the American Aloe' which 'throws out its broad flashy, spine-edged leaves, and lifts its tall flower-stalk loaded with candelabra-like branches of bloom' (1861:214). This description shows Philip's characteristic trait of anthropomorphising his subject, evoking its 'nobility', its power of asserting itself ostentatiously (it 'throws out' its 'flashy' leaves), and its lavishness (flowers resembling chandeliers). Gosse clearly appreciates the extravagance of the 'Agave americana' plant, and tries to employ that same sense of exuberant 'flowering' in his description of the wit and vitality of Restoration literature In *Seventeenth-Century Studies* (1883). He describes the activities of Crowne, Behn, Wycherley, Settle, Otway and Lee, each publishing a first play during the period 1670 and 1675, as an 'efflorescence', an 'aloe-blossoming of bustling talent' (1883a:270). Although Gosse recognises the impulse behind Philip's image, he lacks his father's botanical knowledge, and this destabilises the allusion. Although Philip notes that the plant is an 'Agave', he does not explain that the name 'American aloe' is a misnomer in the sense that it is unrelated to plants in the Aloe genus.<sup>80</sup> Unlike the Agave, the plants of the genus 'Aloe' are well-known for their 'bitter taste and unpleasant odour and their use mainly as a purgative and laxative' (*OED* 2009). The constituent parts of Gosse's compound, an 'aloe-blossoming', consequently work against each other. The noun 'aloe' connotes a bitter purgative, a force that purifies anything undesirable by evacuation, but it is modified by its hyphenation with a gerund participle, 'blossoming', expressing the act of growing, developing, and flourishing; Gosse's appropriation of Philip's botanical discourse for the purposes of literary criticism here backfires. That Gosse was oblivious of his error is clear from his occasional but continued use of the compound: in a letter to Hardy (26 February 1906), for example, he comments that the latter's literary gifts had 'unfold[ed] like the aloe-blossom' (Charteris 1931:297). This self-imploding phrase contradicts the very meaning Gosse intends.

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<sup>80</sup> In *Hortus Third*, a dictionary of American plants, the American Aloe is not listed under 'Aloe', but under 'Agave' (Bailey 1976:36-39, 57-59).

Another similarly complex appropriation of Philip's imagery concerns the figure of the dying dolphin. In the diary of his voyage across the Gulf of Mexico (quoted by Gosse in *The Life*) Philip records the beautiful changing colours associated with the death-throes of a dolphin: 'When the expiring animal was first brought on board, it was silvery white, with pearly reflections; the back suddenly became of a brilliant green, while the belly turned to gold, with blue spots' (1890a:121). Gosse employs this phenomenon to evoke the era of Robert Herrick as 'the age of sunset, that dolphin-coloured decadence' (1882:xl): metaphors of dramatic brilliancy are here combined with notions of death and decline. Both Philip (for whom the 'dawning of Poetry on my imagination' was provoked by Byron (1890a:25)) and Gosse may have been attracted to this image by Byron's simile in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-18), where the

parting day  
Dies like the dolphin, whom each pang imbues  
With a new colour as it gasps away,  
The last still loveliest, till – 'tis gone – and all is grey. (1885:150)

This simile, in the fourth canto, stanza XXIX, would have been well-known to Gosse's contemporaries.

Gosse's anecdote about his fear of the beetle on his bed may also be derivative (2004:88). In *Evenings at the Microscope*, Philip details the physical structure of various types of beetle, describing first the mouth, which is formed of 'a pair of jointed organs, and between them an oblong horny plate', and later the antennae which, in a carnivorous beetle, 'are formed of a number of oblong, polished hard joints, set end to end' (1859a:166, 186). In *Father and Son*, Gosse's description of the beetle on his bed, 'all a twinkle of horns and joints' (2004:88) reads like a witty digest of his father's ponderous minutia. In this anecdote, furthermore, the beetle by-passes Philip's 'black ball of a head': this image is not only borrowed from *Evenings at the Microscope*, where the 'rather rare' Sabella worm is characterised by its gill-fan which is a 'stout, globose, nearly black ball' (1859a:388), but is powerfully zoomorphic, encouraging the reader to imagine Philip as the beetle itself.

Gosse's description of his recurring nightmare when he feels himself 'an atom' in the grasp of a powerful 'force', taking 'a mad gallop through space' (2004:86-7), has attracted various interpretations, being read as a symbol of ambition, sex, passion and rebellion. Gosse compares himself to Mazeppa<sup>81</sup> racing headlong into

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<sup>81</sup> This figure is the hero of Byron's narrative poem, *Mazeppa's Ride* (1819), the story of a man punished for an adulterous affair by being bound to a wild horse. The story was particularly popular in France, where it was painted by Gericault (1823), Delacroix (1824), Vernet (1826) and Boulanger (1827).

a monstrous vortex,<sup>82</sup> reverberant with noises, loud with light, while, as we proceeded, enormous concentric circles engulfed us, and wheeled above and about us... Far away, in the pulsation of the great luminous whorls, I could just see that goal, a ruby coloured point waxing and waning, and it bore, or to be exact it consisted of the letters of the word CARMINE. (2004:86-7)

Traubitz reads the dream in Freudian terms associating it with sexual passion (1976:149), while Hoberman theorises that since carmine is derived from female insects, the dream emphasises the association between Gosse's revolt and female sexuality (1988:309). The Folkenfliks focus on the typographical foregrounding of 'CARMINE' and argue that the child craves words unrelated to the obligatory requirement of religious praise (1979:166-8) while Henderson links the capitalisation with the Scarlet Woman, upon whose forehead 'was a name written MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH' (Revelation 17:5), arguing that the typography reinforces the association as much as the colour (1989:134)<sup>83</sup>. Catherine Raine, however, links Gosse's vision with the dream that Philip had as a child (1997:75) as quoted in the *Life*:

I suffered when I was about five years old from some strange indescribable dreams, which were repeated quite frequently. It was as if space was occupied with a multitude of concentric circles, the outer ones immeasurably vast, I myself being the common centre. They seemed to revolve and converge upon me, causing a most painful sensation of dread. (Gosse 1890a:10)

The strategy of returning to Philip as the source for Gosse's imagery is usually productive, and here it is the differences that are most revealing. Philip remains fixed and pinioned at the centre, while Gosse is caught up in the speed and sound of an external force, a dynamic that pervades the entire text, the caricature of Philip's stubborn fixity,<sup>84</sup> compared with Gosse's modernity, one who 'could not help being carried forward' (2004:5). However, Gosse is unusually directive in his comment on the dream, as if he wants the reader to unpick its allusions, and in that spirit he explicitly associates the CARMINE with the pigment Philip uses for his watercolors (2004:89). Guided by this, I suggest that the imagery for Gosse's dream is stimulated by Philip's use of carmine during his microscopic analysis. In *Evenings at the Microscope*, Philip describes his practice of diffusing red dye into the live-box,<sup>85</sup> in order to examine the behaviour of the Wheel-bearers, affectionately described as 'my little Brachion':

<sup>82</sup> In *Evenings at the Microscope*, Philip describes the 'vortex' in relation to the spinning motion of the water caused by the movements of the Wheelbearers (Rotifera) (1859a:263).

<sup>83</sup> This device of capitalisation recalls Bowes' practice whereby she draws attention to 'truth' in her tracts: in 'John Clarke: or, The Ground of Confidence' (Tract 3), the eponymous questioner asks how he can be assured of conversion: 'By BELIEVING GOD'S WORD', Bowes replies in her 'loud' tract-voice.

<sup>84</sup> In *Father and Son*, Philip's dogmatic belief in the fixity of the species is emphasised.

<sup>85</sup> The 'live-box' is the brass cylinder terminating in a clear glass plate, permitting inspection of living specimens.

The whole field is now filled with scattered granules of . . . a dark red hue. These are the particles of carmine floating in the water . . . They are in motion and their movement is more energetic the nearer they are to the little animal, which is rotating vigorously in the midst of them. They describe two great circles, concentric with the two wheels of the Brachionus, and it is easy to see that their rotations are the cause of the movement. (1859a:261)

I contend that Gosse's dream is energised by this image of vigorous movement, the ruby-hued carmine, and the concentric wheels, and Gosse positions himself as one of the 'floating' atoms being whirled rapidly towards 'destruction' (2004:87). Indeed, at his baptism, Gosse compares himself with one of the 'microscopical specimens, almost infinitesimally tiny' (2004:109), the very image conveyed here. Philip's description of the Rotifera eggs 'fitfully' hatching is also suggestive of Gosse's 'ruby-coloured point waxing and waning' (2004:87):

the outline of the young separates in parts from the wall of its prison, and fitful contractions and turnings take place. Soon an undefined spot of red appears, which gradually acquires depth of tint and a definite form, and we recognise the eye [then] you see the crystalline little prisoner, writhing and turning impatiently within its prison, striving to burst forth into liberty. (1859a:271)

Taken together with the baptism imagery, Gosse's dream conjures the trauma of birth, and re-birth.

Gosse camouflages his appropriation of Philip's discourse by overlaying it with striking allusions that cast him, Gosse, as the Byronic hero, Mazeppa. In this guise, furthermore, Gosse engages in a subtle one-upmanship with his father, overshadowing Philip's professed love of Byron's earlier poem, *Lara*. Gosse embraces Mazeppa's nakedness, turning his vulnerability into power, while Philip, like Lara, dresses himself in 'steel' and a 'plumed crest'.<sup>86</sup> Gosse foregrounds this distinction by applying it to the father-son conflict: 'I was naked, he in a suit of armour' (2004:180). Phillip Anderson reads Mazeppa as an anti-Romantic hero: 'his early life, central story and overall character constantly engage with Romantic conventions but only in order to offer a sharply critical assessment of, and serious non-Romantic alternatives to, those conventions' (2001:59). Gosse/Mazeppa is saying to Philip/Lara that he will not simply inherit and repeat the paternal Romantic voice, but will create a new vision, hurling himself and all the old traditions into the melting pot.

In *Rambles*, Philip describes the tentacles of the *Anthea* as 'snowy white, as if carved out of ivory, or rather as if modelled in the purest wax' (1853b:19), a description that Gosse adapts into his childhood memory of the '*anthea* waving in the twilight its thick white waxen tentacles' (2004:81). Gosse not only transforms Philip's simile of the wax into a factual

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<sup>86</sup> *Lara* Canto XV: Lara cheers his troops, 'waves or strikes his steel' but 'sudden droops that plumed crest'.

constituent of the blossom, but also intensifies the romantic context, evoking that ‘twilight’ time of half-tones and fading light. Similarly, Philip compares spring to the ‘opening of the gates of Eden’ (1853b:103) and conjures the waves on the beach by quoting Southey’s *Thalaba* (1801): ‘Each following billow lifted the last foam/That trembled on the sand with rainbow hues’ (Southey 1801:301). Gosse’s description of the primal nature of the shoreline in the 1850s, neatly combines Philip’s allusions, reframing them in fantasy: ‘if the Garden of Eden had been situate in Devonshire, Adam and Eve, stepping lightly down to bathe in the rainbow-coloured spray, would have seen the identical sights that we now saw’ (2004:81). Gosse’s voice obscures both Philip and Southey.

Another appropriation is the figure of the Soldier Crab: Philip describes the creature in *The Aquarium* (1854) as being:

reduced to the condition of a “houseless wanderer”. The Whelk-shell which it inhabited had been laid hold of by the sucking-feet of a Sea-Urchin (*Echinus miliaris*), the Soldier having bivouacked in unconscious proximity to this adhesive subject. The rest of the Urchin’s feet were firmly moored to the solid rock; so that when the Crab attempted to walk, he found his home-shell immovable. What was to be done? He was probably hungry after his repose, and food must be sought. After vainly dragging for a few minutes, he chose the alternative of exposure, let go his posterior hold, slipped from the shell and wandered naked. Half a day he roamed in this defenceless state, till, meeting with a large Whelk-shell empty, he gladly popped in, and though the tenement was inconveniently ample, kept possession, wisely judging that inconvenience was preferable to danger. (1854:161-2).

The anthropomorphism of the Soldier Crab who ‘bivouacs’ in military fashion, and who rehuses himself ‘gladly’ and judges the risk factors ‘wisely’ exemplifies Philip’s passion both as a scientist and an educator. Gosse adopts his father’s comic and sentimental tone, shifting it into a self-reflexive mode:

I compared my lot with that of one of the speckled soldier crabs that roamed about in my father’s aquarium, dragging after them great whorl-shells. They, if by chance they were turned out of their whelk-habitations, trailed about a pale soft body in search of another house, visibly broken-hearted and the victims of every ignominious accident (2004:167).

Unaware that this image derives from Philip’s *The Aquarium*, Roger Porter claims that it ‘looks back to the struggle of evolution’ (1975:187) while Linda Peterson considers that it ‘allows the adolescent Gosse to explain to himself *in his own terms* the reluctance he feels upon leaving home . . . it has a *personal effect* . . . manifesting an *ability to create metaphors*’ (1986:185-87 *italics mine*). In fact, it is a concise and witty reformulation of Philip’s observation. There are no examples of this image being used other than in the biological sense (*OED* 2009), so it is interesting that Gosse’s fellow man of letters, John Addington Symonds, with whom he enjoyed an epistolary friendship from 1875 onwards (Schueller and Peters 1967-69:381),



similarly applies the figure self-reflexively, though with melancholy rather than with irony. In a letter to Henry Sidgwick,<sup>87</sup> dated October 36, 1880, Symonds wrote:

My house was my home since I was ten years old, and I have sold everything that it contained. For a long time I felt very sore – like a soldier crab without his shell, molluscous properties being detected in me which my adventitious habitat had previously concealed. (Brown 1895:179)

Did the image derive from Gosse? Certainly, in a letter to Gosse penned four years earlier in May 27 1876, Symonds employs that image in what appears to be mutually understood shorthand: thus Symonds writes: ‘I know well what a bore ‘flitting’ is . . . always finding that my purse at that moment fell short of the wishes I had formed for the remodelling of my shell’ (Schueller and Peters 1967-69:415-6). Gosse was a great letter-writer and a ‘talker’, and I suggest that many of the images he plundered from his father were subsequently shaped and honed during constant interactions with his peers: A.C. Benson records in his diary for 19 February 1906, an encounter with Gosse at the National Club: ‘he was very brilliant and full of finished, amusing, polished reminiscences of his father and the Plymouth Brethren’ (Lubbock 1926:138). The vivid and resonant quality of Philip’s anthropological vision eases the transition of a phrase or idea from biological description to literary figure.

Although Philip is a valuable source of literary quotation, Gosse responds by trying to outperform his father: I shall illustrate this by reference to Virgil’s *Eclogues* (41-37BC). The incident where Philip recites Virgil to the nine-year-old Gosse is usually read as the dawning of Gosse’s poetic awareness. Gosse’s account of the incident in *Father and Son* reads thus:

And then, in the twilight, as he shut the volume at last, oblivious of my presence, [Philip] began to murmur and to chant the adorable verses by memory.  
Tityre, tu patulae recubans sub tegmine fagi.<sup>88</sup>  
he warbled; and I stopped my play, and listened as if to a nightingale, till he reached  
tu, Tityre, lentus in umbra  
Formosam resonare doces Amaryllida silvas.<sup>89</sup> (2004:96)

As with the critical attitude to *Tom Cringle’s Log*, Philip’s act of introducing his son to classical mythology has not been acknowledged: in this case, Philip is a conduit for ‘a literature of make-believe’, tempting Gosse with the seductive pastoral voice, ‘the happy school of Greek bards’ deriving from Theocritus (Hanford 1910:404). Theocritus is an important part of Philip’s own inheritance, representing that shift from fact to fiction, from realism to romance: Philip’s

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<sup>87</sup> Henry Sidgwick (1838-1900), philosopher and economist.

<sup>88</sup> Translation: ‘Tityrus, you who lie under the shade of the spreading beech’ (Virgil: *Eclogues*, i.i.). Coleman notes that Virgil’s ‘somewhat unusual employment of *tegmen* (meaning protective coverings) brings vividness to the pastoral commonplace of cool shade in the summer heat’ (1966:80).

<sup>89</sup> Translation: ‘You, Tityrus, reclining in the shade, make the woods echo the name of beautiful Amaryllis’ (Virgil: *Eclogues*, i,4-5).

father, Thomas, owned two books: 'a Bible and a Theocritus in Greek, which never quitted him, but formed, at the darkest moments of his career, a gate of instant exit from the hard facts of life into an idyllic world of glowing pastoral antiquity' (Gosse 1890a:1). Nor do we have to rely solely on Gosse for evidence of Philip's familiarity with this Virgilian tag: in *The Romance of Natural History*, Philip quotes 'Formosam resonare docent Amaryllida silvas'<sup>90</sup> in connection with the musical mating signals of cicadas: 'they are doubtless sexual sounds; the serenades of the wooing cavaliers' (1860:30) and in his article in *Good Words*, Philip describes a six-hour ascent in the Jamaican heat, after which they leave the 'faithful Sambo to enjoy the siesta which he will then gladly take 'patulae recubans sub tegmine fagi' (1862:239).<sup>91</sup> Here Philip conjures Virgil's verses suggestively and humorously. The *Father and Son* anecdote is a much more solemn moment, conjuring Virgil's pastoral idyll through its three traditional generic ingredients: the cool shade, the devotion to music, and the charms of a shepherdess. The context exudes melancholy: the unhappy speaker of these opening verses of the *Eclogue* is a shepherd called Meliboeus, who is faced with exile from these 'sweet fields', a fate which contrasts with the apparent good fortune of the 'reclining' Tityrus. It is only gradually during the course of the poem that we learn that Tityrus is in fact an old man and that part of his enthusiasm for Amaryllis is due to her being an efficient manager of his household; Tityrus furthermore had been a slave but he won his freedom by personal initiative and courage, unlike the timid Meliboeus (Coleman 1966:83-84, 97). Tityrus, who at first appeared to represent youthful complacency and frivolity, actually represents the reward of hard work in old age; this context for the allusion adds an important perspective onto the association between Philip and Tityrus. Philip furthermore is comfortable with the figure of the 'shepherd' since it combines classical imagery with the Christian figure of the pastor (Hanford 1910:427).

Gosse belittles Philip's transmission of the Virgilian verse by his use of the word 'warbling' which denotes a 'jocose substitute for sing[ing]' (*OED* 2009) and at the same time aggrandises his own reception of the verse, 'I stopped my play, and listened as if to a nightingale'. That subtle 'as if' creates ambivalence, implying that despite Philip's defective rendering of it, Gosse's own 'prosodical instinct' (2004:96) allows him to access the verse *as if* it were being conveyed by a nightingale. He thus implies that he does not 'inherit' anything from Philip: his heightened reception of the verse is instinctive.<sup>92</sup> The use of the word 'warbling' inadvertently evokes Milton's *Lycidas* (1637), where an unnamed shepherd, an 'uncouth swain', is '[w]ith

<sup>90</sup> Translation: 'the woods echo the name of beautiful Amaryllis' (Virgil: *Eclogues*, I,4-5).

<sup>91</sup> Translation: 'reclining under the shade of the spreading beech' (Virgil: *Eclogues*, i.I.).

<sup>92</sup> Gosse attributed the same innate poetic 'instinct' to the young Cowley, who read continually 'without much understanding of the matter, [and] he became so interpenetrated with the delicious recurrence of the rhyme and rhythm that he insensibly was made a poet' (1883a:193).

eager thought warbling his Doric<sup>93</sup> lay' (Milton 1975:296). Milton's narrator even alludes to the opening of Virgil's first *Eclogue* (the passage that Philip quotes) asking: 'Were it not better done, as others use/ To sport with Amaryllis in the shade?' questioning whether it is worthwhile ('what boots it with incessant care') to limit one's gratification and to live a disciplined existence, to 'strictly meditate the thankless Muse?' (Milton 1975:293). Milton is questioning whether the pursuit of art justifies the renunciation of erotic pleasure. The answer to this question is not revealed until the final lines of *Lycidas*, the place also where the reader encounters the word 'warbling': it is the point at which Milton alludes most closely to Virgil's tenth *Eclogue*. The warbling shepherd beholds the sunset, and sets his mind towards the dawn and the new work that awaits him:

And now the sun had stretched out all the hills,  
And now was dropt into the western bay,  
At last he rose, and twitched his mantle blue:  
Tomorrow to fresh woods, and pastures new. (Milton 1975:296)

It has long been documented (Hanford 1910:39; Hughes 1957:125; Condee 1974:39) that Milton's final lines evoke a similar spirit to that of Virgil's tenth *Eclogue*:

Surgamus; solet esse gravis cantantibus umbra,  
iuniperi gravis umbra; nocent et frugibus umbrae.  
Ite domum saturate, venit Hesperus, ite capellae.

Let us arise; the shade is burdensome to those who sing,  
the shade of the juniper, at other times the most wholesome, now grows noxious; it is  
hurtful even to the corn.  
Now homeward, the Evening-star arises, my full-fed goats go. (Virgil, *Eclogues* 10.  
75-77)

This is Milton's answer to the question he posed earlier: even if it 'boots' nothing to serve the



Fig. 5

<sup>93</sup> 'Doric lay' refers to the Dorian founders of pastoral poetry.

'thankless muse', he will continue, as an act of poetic faith. What is remarkable about this link between *Lycidas* and Virgil's tenth *Eclogue* is that it returns the reader to Gosse, whose personalised bookplate cites the Virgilian phrase, 'gravis cantantibus umbra'. The motto is displayed on a banner enclosing the figure of a Cavalier strolling in the sunlight (Fig. 5), drawn for Gosse by the American artist, Edwin Abbey, in 1885 (Thwaite 1984:265; Gosse 1891:4). The common word that links the opening of the *First Eclogue* and the closing of the *Tenth Eclogue* is *umbra*: while Philip/Tityrus is 'reclining' in the shade, at the beginning of the poem, Gosse has reached the end of the journey, has learned the danger of shadows,<sup>94</sup> and will, 'full-fed' or *saturate*, embrace the morning light, for 'the shade is burdensome to those who sing'.

By representing himself in the bookplate as a Cavalier, Gosse dissociates himself from the Puritanical 'shadow' of Brethrenism. The cavalier figure of Gosse's bookplate<sup>95</sup> is stylistically akin to Abbey's illustrations for *Selections from the Poetry of Robert Herrick* (1882) (Fig. 6). Abbey's flamboyant royalists conjure not only the protagonist of Herrick's verses, but also Herrick himself who was according to Gosse, in Ward's edition of *The English Poets* (1880), 'a Pagan and a hedonist' (1880a:125). These pictorial resonances thus link Herrick's sunny fairy-tale world of cavalier songs with Gosse's bibliophile persona.



Fig. 6

<sup>94</sup> As discussed in Chapter One, Gosse's Eurydice is so enthralled by the shadows of the Underworld that she sends Orpheus away (1879a: 212-229).

<sup>95</sup> This image on the bookplate so important to Gosse that he had it embossed in gold leaf on the cover of the first catalogue of his private library (Lister 1893).

It is an important distinction that the Cavalier poets produced songs and ballads,<sup>96</sup> a medium suited to the masses at a time when few could read. Gosse's metaphor of singing for making poetry – 'gravis *cantantibus* umbra' – gestures also at the notion of 'enchantment', a word that derives from Old French 'enchanter' (to bewitch, to lay under a spell), which in its turn, encompasses Latin 'cantare' meaning 'to sing'. Herrick was a singer, Gosse claims, who blossomed in the sunlight, and 'when the sunshine ceased to warm him, he simply ceased to sing'; by the time the Puritans ejected Herrick from his living in 1648, Herrick 'had sung all the songs he had to sing' (1913:44, 154). Gosse claims furthermore that with Herrick 'the poetic literature of fairyland ended. He was its last laureate,<sup>97</sup> for the Puritans thought its rites [were] superstitious, and frowned upon their celebration' (1883a:131). Gosse had a passion for Herrick's poetry that increased with every essay he penned. 'This Christian cleric,' exults Gosse in *English Literature: An Illustrated Record*, 'was a pagan in grain' (1903b:58), a resonant phrase that prefigures its antithesis in Gosse's later description of Bowes: 'My Mother was a Puritan *in grain*'<sup>98</sup> (2004:11 italics mine) and in that semantic echo there resides the ever-present tension between Puritan and Cavalier.<sup>99</sup>

The Puritan-Cavalier tension is also inherent in Milton's poetry, a viewpoint that Gosse himself foregrounds in his Introduction to *The Poetical Works of John Milton* (1911a): Milton was 'among the Puritans an artist, among Royalists a rebel, his years were spent in opposition to all the main currents of his time' (1911a:ix). The reader thus comes full-circle in working through the Virgil-Milton allusions, and at each stage Gosse seems to outshine his father: while Philip is static in the shade, Gosse moves into the light of the Hesperus; Philip's naiveté arrests him at the 'start' of Virgil's *Eclogues*, and while Gosse makes a claim to experience and knowledge by locating himself at the end of the poem. The particular handling of Virgil by father and son illustrates their respective attitudes to literature: Philip respects the authority of the literary text, rendering it accurately, while Gosse extracts the phrase that he wants to 'own' and resets it within a new context. This is a dynamic furthermore that Gosse discusses in his 'Essay on English Pastoral Poetry' which introduces A.B. Grosart's *Complete Works of Spenser* (1882). Gosse argues that an 'original' naïve rendering may need to be re-coined by a later writer with a different agenda, and this dynamic returns us to the device of allusion: 'To write of

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<sup>96</sup> In his manuscript story, *Tristram Jones*, Gosse/Tristram plays the organ to his aunt, 'playing at dame and cavalier' (1872:32).

<sup>97</sup> Gosse's positioning of Herrick became a critical tag, for example, Charlotte Newell in 'A Seventeenth Century Singer' in *The Sewanee Review* says 'Herrick has been truly called the last laureate of Fairyland' (1905:206).

<sup>98</sup> According to the *OED*, the phrase 'in grain' derives from the dyeing process: it means that the texture of the fabric is thoroughly saturated. Given this context, Bowes' puritanical character is 'downright' and 'by nature'.

<sup>99</sup> In *A History of Eighteenth-Century Literature*, Gosse describes 'the new Cavalier society, released from the intolerable oppression of Puritanism (1889:39).

shepherds and their loves merely for the love of them, and without *arrière pensée* had become an art lost since Theocritus' (1882:xi,xx). While Philip recites 'for love' the story of the shepherds, Gosse reformulates that recitation into a 'warbling' which alludes, possibly unconsciously, to Milton's *Lycidas*, the ending of which returns us to Virgil's Tenth *Eclogue*, the source of Gosse's personalised motto, with its peculiar '*arrière pensée*'.

Not only was Philip an acknowledged expert and a popular author in the field of marine biology, but his extremely retentive memory afforded him access to the Romantic poetry and prose that had entranced him during his youth; to Gosse it must have seemed that Philip had mastery of both disciplines. Although Philip curtailed the potential of literature by restricting his passion for Romantic poets to occasional quotations punctuating the text, and although he contained the power of mythology and fairy-tales within the form of simile, rarely crossing to the more exciting world of metaphor, yet his books had a revolutionary effect. The paradox of Philip's success must have baffled Gosse: his books changed people's behaviour, and stimulated new perceptions. After reading Philip's works, wrote Henry Bout in 1886, 'all the world wanted to possess an aquarium to verify his assertions and repeat his experiments' (Rehbok 1980:531). It was Philip 'who first opened the eyes of the British public, so that in the tidal pool they perceived exciting beauty where before they saw only dull ugliness' (Travis 1993:168). David Elliston Allen even claims that Philip was 'summoned from time to time to the Palace to give the royal children instruction' (1994:78), an event recorded neither in Gosse's *The Life* nor in Thwaite's biography, but which, even if it is hearsay, attests to Philip's fame in the 1850s. Even after the debacle of *Omphalos*, Gosse must have felt dwarfed by Philip's stature, and the act of acknowledging paternal authority by attribution would have further reiterated Gosse's own inferiority. Gosse therefore becomes Philip's rival in reading, upstaging him at every opportunity.

Gosse focuses then on Philip's 'Achilles heel', that is, his subservience to Bowes' posthumous voice: Philip suggests that his actions, even his 'choice of a second wife', were subjected to Bowes' 'solemn charge' concerning Gosse's religious dedication (2004:184). I suggest that the history of Philip's post-Bowes amours, read through Gosse's allusive depiction in *Father and Son*, enacts Gosse's final upstaging of his father. The acquisition of a stepmother for Gosse is subtly prioritised over the choice of a wife for Philip. Gosse describes three women who have marital aspirations towards Philip, and associates each one with a literary reference: Miss Marks is linked with anachronistic Chaucerian lexis, Miss Wilkes with satirical drama, and Miss Brightwen with the process of intertextuality. These allusions not only colour their personae and illustrate their characters, but they ultimately 'swivel' (the Dickensian connotations of this word will become clear below) each portrait away from Philip, the eligible widower, and back

to Gosse, the potential step-son; through comic rivalry and literary allusion, Gosse denies Philip a central role in his own history.

The first aspirant to Philip's hand is Miss Marks. She is associated with folk traditions through the use of a particular word, 'loathly'. Gosse says that Miss Marks 'cut off all food but milksop,<sup>100</sup> a loathly bowl of which appeared at every meal' (2004:68), but the word rebounds onto her, casting her as a witch or hag, due to its strong association with the medieval 'Loathly Lady'. The word, 'loathly', rarely used in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was revived in the nineteenth century as a literary word (*OED* 2009), and Gosse seems to use it in this esoteric sense. The figure of the Loathly Lady emerged from variant medieval tales, including Celtic and Germanic mythology, but was most widely popularised by *The Wife of Bath's Tale*. 'Thou art so loothly and so oold also' (Chaucer 1965:70) is the judgment of the Arthurian knight on the Loathly Lady he has reluctantly agreed to marry. Just as Miss Marks has 'prominent' teeth (2004:56) so the Loathly Lady's 'teethe hing overe her lippes' (Sands 1966:331) and just as Miss Marks schemes to become Philip's wife, so the wiles of the Chaucerian hag enable her to trick her way into matrimony. The resonant word, 'loathly' grafts this archetypal medieval tale onto the life of a frustrated Victorian governess. As Allan Pasco observes, 'the grafted cutting becomes an integral part of the new stock': the allusion is 'neither the reference nor the referent, it consists in the image produced by the metaphoric combination that occurs in the reader's mind' (1994:12). Miss Marks thus accrues the connotations of the Loathly Lady figure. The tales of the Loathly Lady are unfixed and uncanonical, varying between traditions and between countries, but they share a common theme which is the sovereignty of women. If the male agrees to hand over his authority to the female, then all will be well, and the old hag will turn into a beautiful woman. Despite his affinity with fairy-tales, Philip only ever used them for purposes of analogy, and he could never put his trust in so precarious a text: the 'loathly' Miss Marks is rejected.

This first example demonstrates how a single word, 'loathly', functions as an 'assimilative allusion', a term applied to musical intertextuality by Christopher Reynolds: it has the effect of amplifying and reiterating the sense of the alluding text (2003:45). In this case, the allusion is both textual and contextual, serving to conjure Miss Marks' individuality but also her cultural significance. Miss Marks belongs to that liminal zone of Victorian society: the unmarried and unmarriageable woman, the educated female who is too poor to live independently. In

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<sup>100</sup> The food effeminises the young male; the noun, 'milksop', refers to the dish of bread soaked in warm milk, but is also the name of a feeble youth, which as a consequence of eating only this food, is precisely what Gosse becomes, since his 'strength declined with it. 'I languished in a perpetual catarrh' (2004:68). Milk is a charged epithet in relation to Gosse. Miss Marks cannot offer natural 'maternal milk', only this adulterated form, and likewise Bowes' conception of maternal 'milk' was unnatural, since she was intent on feeding Gosse 'the sincere milk of the Word' (1855:121).

*Rabelais and his World* (1965), Bakhtin refers to such grotesque bodies as those 'in the act of becoming' which, poised between outward and inward features, point to the uncontrolled or the feared aspects of the world outside the societal order (1984:316-9). In Bakhtin's view, this liminal, grotesque figure challenges the society that creates it, forcing people to observe images that are usually unseen and hidden away, characters that society would rather not acknowledge. Marriage being the 'norm' in Victorian society, 'grotesques' like Miss Marks represent the awkward presence of ugliness and redundancy. Her 'wild fit of hysterics' (2004:127) furthermore locates her in the margins; like the Loathly Lady who lives outside the community, she manifests the 'uncontrollable'. Once her services are redundant, she is removed: we learn that 'the old-world sway of Miss Marks' (2004:128) is abolished by the new incumbent, and Gosse's final reference to her marks the point where grammatically she is reduced to 'a definite object': she has become 'the departed Marks' (2004:141) and is thus defined by her absence.

Miss Marks also attracts other assimilative allusions: she is 'a kind of eccentric Dickens character, a mixture of Mrs Pipchin and Miss Sally Brass' (2004:57). Such a powerful allusion could not fail to attract critical comment, and Michael Newton remarks that Gosse thereby 'cast[s] himself as Paul Dombey, the doomed child-hero of *Dombey and Son*' (1846-8) and certainly, 'the similarities are striking, since both are sensitive 'old-fashioned' children with dead mothers and stern fathers' (2004:xii). Interestingly no-one has commented on what is arguably the more evocative casting: as the ward of Sally Brass, Gosse becomes the downtrodden but spirited Marchioness who escapes her drudgery (that includes - very significantly - a ban on books). Literary deprivation leads her to Swiveller who expresses himself through allusions of all kinds: poetic snippets, borrowings, clichés, epithets, aphorisms, catch-phrases, thereby transforming his daily existence into literature. By language, he 'swivels' a small dirty servant into a marchioness, and her grubby back-kitchen into a palace. Deprivation of fiction, as experienced by Gosse/The Marchioness, thus engenders a wild attraction to literary fragments.

By the Gosse/Marchioness casting, Swiveller hovers on the side-lines, an alter ego for Gosse. The random and 'unparented' nature of his allusive speech is reiterated by his sense of himself as 'a miserable orphan' (Dickens 2000:177); this looks forward to Gosse's casting of himself as another Dickensian orphan, that of *Oliver Twist*, to be discussed in Chapter Three. Swiveller, like Gosse, is a reader who uses literature to enhance and enliven his response to experience. Both display their credentials as readers: Gosse is the man of letters and Swiveller is 'Perpetual Grand of the Society of the Glorious Apollers' (2000:111). Swiveller is ostentatiously devoted to reading, as symbolised by his 'turn-up bedstead' that functions as a book-case during the



day. By operating this contraption, Swiveller shifts an existing form (a bookcase) into a new formulation (a bed), echoing the movement inherent in the act of alluding. Judgments about Swiveller furthermore replicate opinions of Gosse: J. B. Priestley commented that Swiveller was 'sufficiently imaginative to appreciate art, but not imaginative enough to create it' (1925:225) while Rebecca West, writing in 1929, suggests that Gosse's *Secret of Narcisse* was a casualty of 'the small minds of 1892 that [tended] to say of a critic's creative work that, though he can pick holes in other people's work, he himself lacks the vital spark which enables them to do that work' (1931:93-4). This casting as Swiveller, then, though cheerfully uplifting, reduces Gosse to a lightweight.

Reynolds' second class of allusion is the 'contrastive', which tends toward parody and subversion, communicating an ironic or hidden meaning that requires 'an armed eye' to interpret (2003:85). I suggest that this is evident in Gosse's treatment of Miss Wilkes, the second aspirant to marriage with Philip. Gosse's anecdote runs thus: Miss Wilkes overhears Philip commenting that 'white' is 'the only becoming colour for a lady's stockings' (2004:94) and so she replaces her deep violet stockings by white ones. Stockings are highly suggestive: Shakespeare's outlandish figure of the cross-gartered yellow-stockinged Malvolio connects with Philip since both are caricatures of Puritan extremism. Even John Fowles' brief mention of Philip in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) feminises him through an allusion to stockings: 'Gosse was here a few years ago with one of his parties of winkle-picking bas-bleus' (1981:140). For the knowing reader, however, the reference to specifically *white* stockings alludes to Johan Herman Wessel's satirical play, *Love Without Stockings* (*Kierlighed uden Strømper*) of 1772. Gosse's paraphrase of the play in *Studies in the Literature of Northern Europe* (1879) conveys his delight in its absurdity:

The wedding-day of the two lovers has arrived; all is ready, the priest is waiting, the bride is adorned, but alas! the bridegroom who is a tailor, has no stockings, or, at all events, no white ones. What can he do? Buy a pair? But he has no money. Borrow a pair of his bride? On the one hand, it would not be proper; on the other, his legs are too thin. But his rival is rich, and the possessor of many pairs of white stockings. The lover fights a hard battle, or makes out that he does, between virtue and love – but love prevails, and he steals a pair. Adorned in them he marches off to church with his bride, but on the way the larceny is discovered, and the rival holds him up to public disgrace. For one moment the hero is dejected, and then, recalling his heroic nature, he rises to the height of the situation and stabs himself with a pocket knife. The bride follows his example, then the rival, then the confidante, then the friend; and the curtain goes down on the scene in the approved tragic manner. (1879b:145-6)

All notions of propriety and convention are sabotaged in this play - the institution of marriage, the law against suicide, the convention of tragedy; the 'hero' is a humble tailor and his

bourgeois rival is ridiculous. The force of the allusion ensures that reader focus is not on Miss Wilkes or even on Philip, but on Gosse's witty literary acumen.

The dynamic is the same in relation to Philip's third admirer, who is also described in relation to Gosse rather than in terms of her marriage to Philip. Gosse evokes Miss Brightwen through religious allusions: 'She was never a tower of strength to me, but at least she was always a lodge in my garden of cucumbers' (2004:127). This is a puzzling combination of allusions. The phrase, 'a tower of strength' is originally biblical;<sup>101</sup> 'The name of the Lord is a tower of strength, where the righteous may run for refuge' (Proverbs 18:10). Despite the fact that Miss Brightwen not only reduces Gosse's physical oppression (she removes the 'weight' of blankets on his bed, and symbolically opens the windows (2004:128)), but also weakens the legacy of Bowes' prohibition by introducing Gosse to the epic poetry of Walter Scott and even *Pickwick Papers* (2004:134-5), Gosse claims that she 'was *never* a tower of strength to me'. I suggest that Gosse is being ironic here, implying that Miss Brightwen did not, as did Bowes, represent godly strength, that impregnable bastion of faith that restricted freedom and imagination, as intimated by his self-analogy with Blanchefleur, who was 'most carefully withdrawn. . . in a marble fortress' (2004:22). For Gosse, Miss Brightwen's form of refuge was more precarious, and by implication precious: his allusion to her as 'a lodge<sup>102</sup> in [his] garden of cucumbers' evokes Isaiah 1:8: 'And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city'. While Bowes represents the strength and growth of the evangelical 'harvest field' (2004:24) going 'on her way, sowing beside all waters' (Shipton 1863:19), Miss Brightwen is by contrast associated with 'the daughter of Zion', the weakened remnant in the cucumber field that has barely escaped destruction. Gosse embraces her very lack of authority.

Gosse's allusions to Miss Brightwen also bear a sexual penumbra. Across all cultures and contexts the tower is a phallic symbol, while the reference to cucumbers evokes the Victorian pornographic use of the cucumber as a phallic signifier of the penis, immortalised not only by Dickens's cucumber-guzzling Mrs Gamp (Hall 1996:36) but also by Mrs Nickleby's gentleman-neighbour<sup>103</sup> whose cucumber missiles serve in lieu of a marriage proposal (Dickens 1999:595). The reference to towers signals Gosse's transition from childhood to adolescence: he moves

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<sup>101</sup> The phrase was later employed in *The Book of Common Prayer* (1549) for use in *The Forme of Solemnization of Matrimonie*, when the Minister prays for the couple, that God will 'Bee vnto them a tower of strength' (1892:299). This bears an appropriate gloss since Miss Brightwen is the chosen of the three aspirants.

<sup>102</sup> The 'lodge' was a temporary wooden booth erected on poles, used by the Old Testament farmers for shelter while protecting the crop; it was commonly abandoned after the harvest, becoming an image of decay and loneliness. Isaiah 1:8 implies that Jerusalem would be a similarly forsaken place at the time of its destruction (*Dictionary of the Bible* 1900:132).

<sup>103</sup> Nicholas Nickleby was serialised 1838-9.

from Blanchefleur's fortress<sup>104</sup> (2004:22) to Marlowe's version of the Greek myth of Hero and Leander, in which story the tower is the place of the lovers' consummation and finally of Hero's suicide (2004:165-6). Leander's comic sexual innocence gestures at Gosse's own naiveté in reading the poem to Miss Brightwen: her act in 'sharply' bringing the reading to a halt and confiscating the book reveals by contrast her own sexual awareness (2004:166). By signalling her embarrassment, Miss Brightwen inadvertently alerts Gosse to the eroticism of the poem. The sexual redolence surrounding Miss Brightwen foregrounds the difference between father and son as readers: Philip, who cannot read metaphorically, and whose sexual naiveté is 'fixed', does not perceive Miss Brightwen's sexuality. Philip preoccupies himself in 'inflaming her piety' (2004:128); Gosse's oxymoron here is devastatingly deliberate, introducing the idea of sexual passion only to arrest it with cold religious duty. The word 'inflaming' furthermore has negative connotations: Susie Tucker notes that 'because inflame is a medical term for an undesirable condition of the body, the verb tends to be used of undesirable enthusiasms' (1972:151). Gosse however, by trial and error, learns to read Miss Brightwen's sexuality, and his bouts of adolescent illness resulted in 'my pretty, smiling stepmother lavishing luxurious attendance upon me' (2004:165): the suggestiveness of this sentence is intensified by the sibilance.

The sexual penumbra around Miss Brightwen also casts her as Biddy, who is first Pip's affectionate friend and later his stepmother in *Great Expectations* (1860-61): Peter Allen's casting of Gosse as Pip (1988:490) is a trigger for this reading. Like Biddy, Miss Brightwen is a purveyor of learning. The texts themselves create an allusive bridge by associating both women with the symbolism of the open window: on Biddy's wedding-day to Joe Gargery, the window of Pip's old home on the marshes 'was open and gay with flowers' (1999:354), connoting the fresh air that blew away the haunting presence of Mrs Joe; Gosse in his turn had been 'protected from fresh air as if from a pestilence', but Miss Brightwen ensured that his 'bedroom window stood wide open all night long' (2004:128).<sup>105</sup> Like her Dickensian counterpart, Miss Brightwen shares her knowledge of books with Gosse and quietly effects beneficial change.

The association between Miss Brightwen and Turner's *Liber Studiorum* or 'Book of Studies' (1807-19) reinforces the alliance between Gosse and his stepmother. The *Liber Studiorum* is a profoundly eclectic work based on a diverse range of visual and verbal sources and constitutes

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<sup>104</sup> Blanchefleur is imprisoned in a tower because she has been chosen as the next bride of the Egyptian emir. Her lover Floris is smuggled into the tower in a basket of flowers. Discovered by the emir, they are granted their lives because the Emir is impressed by the strength of their love.

<sup>105</sup> The logical implication of this intertextual reading is that Miss Brightwen's regime of 'fresh air' blows away the 'haunting presence' of Bowes. Bowes is thereby cast as Mrs Joe, reiterating the masculinity of her persona, noted in Chapter One.

what Gillian Forrester calls 'a series of overlapping narratives, an amalgam of different models' (1996:28). Not only is the work inspired by Claude's *Liber Veritatis*, evincing a benign Ricksian notion of inheritance, through the emulation of the old master, but numerous intertexts<sup>106</sup> are discernible in the plates. Forrester notes that 'Turner's reworkings of the tabula rasa of the copper-plate also prompt comparison with the Romantic model of a literary text in constant flux, the palimpsest' (1996:18). Turner is constantly recycling and re-inflecting existing models, even continuing to rework the plates after impressions had been published, not simply, says Forrester, due to the practical necessity of counteracting the effect of wear on the mezzotint burr, but because he was fascinated by the notion of developing the images further (1996:19). By her connection with Turner's *Liber Studiorum*, then, Miss Brightwen becomes a model of intertextual practice, and in this sense, Gosse subtly indicates that she is less in tune with Philip than with himself. Even in his wooing and wiving, then, Gosse portrays Philip as a naïve and blinkered reader.

Philip is a 'compound ghost': his Romantic aesthetic impulse towards nature and towards God is overlaid by the restraints and strictures of Bowes-style monological reading of the world. He is cautious and circumspect because of the posthumous outworking of Bowes' 'will', presented by Gosse as a string of present participles, 'guiding', 'pressing' and 'holding' Philip to its principles (2004:11); the words suggest that he is indefinitely 'contained' within her will, that her influence never stops. Gosse's inheritance then is characterised by an inversion of the norms of both gender and genre. The act of reading Gosse's mother and not his father as the religious fanatic is an inversion comparable with the equivocal exclamation that Dickens gave Miss Tox on night of Paul's death in *Dombey and Son* (1848): 'Dear me, dear me! To think,' said Miss Tox, bursting out afresh that night, as if her heart were broken, 'that Dombey and Son should be a Daughter after all!' (1997:860). Originally the conclusion to Chapter 16 of the first printed version of the novel, this single-sentence-paragraph was omitted from subsequent editions. This may have been because, as John Forster remarked in his unsigned *Examiner* review of 1848, it caused a jar being 'too light an intrusion on a solemn catastrophe' (Forster 1848:692-3), but given that the paragraph stood in the first edition and its re-issues with a line marking off Miss Tox's comments from the famous sentences about the 'old, old fashion – Death', Dickens seemed thereby to have acknowledged that shift in tone. I suggest that originally Dickens subordinated the solemnity of Paul's death to the larger theme of the shift of power from male to female. This is certainly indicated by his first note under the left-hand 'Mems' in the Number-plan for Part VI: 'Great point of the No to throw the interest of Paul, at

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<sup>106</sup> This text is significant in that the Biblical allusions (Rispa, the Plagues of Egypt) are outnumbered by the mythological Ovidian references to Jason, Procris and Cephalus, Aesacus and Hesperie, Apulia in search of Appallus, Glaucus and Scylla, and to poetic works, especially Spenser's *Fairy Queen*.

*once on Florence'* (quoted by Tillotson 1951:82). However, the overwhelming national response to Paul Dombey's death seemed to force Dickens to sacrifice this detail in his more controversial scheme of overturning gender expectations. In *Father and Son*, similarly, the transposition of gender and persona is intimated only, borne indirectly by the allusions. Gosse could never have publically acknowledged the powerfully negative force of the 'saintly' Bowes - indeed, even facing it privately may have been too overwhelming - and so, as I shall show in Chapters Three and Five, the many permutations of his mother are consequently contained within the sub-text.

In this chapter, I have explored Gosse's debt to Philip, ranging from his father's tentative breaches of Bowes' ban in the form of Virgil and Michael Scott, experiences that are both bewildering and inspiring for Gosse, to Philip's voice as a naturalist from which Gosse derives his organic imagery, his fairy-tale discourse, and his hierarchical methodology in literary criticism. Although Gosse displays no gratitude for this inheritance but actively seeks to hide his debt, Philip's presence in Gosse's oeuvre illustrates Ricks' notion of poetic inheritance: it is as though Gosse recognised Philip's images as being 'so well said' that they had become part of his own 'way of saying', rotating the claims of a predecessor 'so that they catch a new light' (2002:33). Rather than gratitude, Gosse's manipulation of Philip's writing is his way of 'containing' his father, who threatened 'to overshadow all [his] potentialities' (Ricks 2002:32). The Folkenfliks' article, which opposes Philip's belief in 'The Word' to Gosse's attraction to the words of fiction, might have reached a different conclusion had they known how much of Gosse's discourse derived from Philip. Gosse must have been acutely aware of his status as the son of a man who could by his pen not only mobilise hundreds of ordinary people to travel to the coast to spend their days hunting in rock-pools and combing beaches, but also inspire such literary giants as Dickens and Kingsley. Gosse needs to move beyond Philip's broad 'shadow', so he covertly avails himself of Philip's discourse to animate his 'song'. Philip's honest integrity appealed to thousands: like the Livermead ladies, readers trusted him unquestioningly and he became their 'authority'. Though Gosse was content to exploit that paternal 'authority', he did not wish that debt to be recognised: the act of recreating himself as a Cavalier and caricaturing Philip as a Puritan iterates his opening statement in *Father and Son* that 'neither spoke the same language' (2004:5). Gosse's many canonical allusions, as I shall show in future chapters, emphasise Gosse's devotion to his literary 'fathers', a process which thoroughly obscures his debt to his biological father.

### Chapter Three: Reading the Mother-Son as Precursor-Ephebe: Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence*

**Was my Mother intended by nature to be a novelist? I have often thought so, and her talents and vigour of purpose, directed along the line which was ready to form 'the chief pleasure of her life', could hardly have failed to conduct her to great success. She was a little younger than Bulwer Lytton, a little older than Mrs Gaskell, - but these are vain and trivial speculations!**

**(Gosse 2004:16-17).**

Gosse's comments connote the dialectical 'double-bind relationship' that lies at the heart of Bloom's theory of influence. Gosse's grouping of Bowes with these two popular Victorian writers, Lytton and Gaskell, may seem puzzling given the generic and thematic differences between their works, but I suggest that the comparison is motivated by Gosse's admiration of all three as instinctive story-tellers. It is the story-telling that is so crucial to Gosse. He loves Bowes as a story-teller, hints of whose skill peep through the didactic overlay of her tracts, and he hates her for her repression of that instinct. This profound mixture of love and hate, attraction and repulsion, is what makes Bloom's approach so useful, for Gosse, as ephebe, assumes a 'stance': he is poised for an embrace, but at the same time, braces himself for attack.

The aim of this chapter is to trace the dialogue between Gosse and the posthumous voice of Bowes: I structure their interaction by Bloom's six revisionary ratios. Bloom's theory rests on the notion of authority as power to influence the conduct and actions of others: Bowes' interpellation of Gosse, as discussed in Chapter One, her hailing of him as the Infant Samuel or the sacrificial lamb, is achieved primarily by prohibiting fiction, thereby denying him access to rival ideologies or languages. Since Bloom's theory rests on the notion of involuntary imitation and conscious or unconscious resistance to it, it is an appropriate vehicle to display the act of Gosse's texts rewriting her, challenging her by subtle imitation, subjecting her professions to discreet revisions, and contrasting her evangelical language with the mythological and fairy-tale lexicon that he gleans from his father. Whatever Gosse does however, Bowes continues to haunt him: in postcolonial terms, Gosse's resistance, by acts of subversion, opposition or mimicry, operates as a double-bind, for Bowes' ideology remains inscribed within the subversive act. Many of Gosse's occasional asides, incidental anecdotes and equivocal comments that have long puzzled critics may now be read as part of a charged conversation with the spectral maternal voice. Although I will chart Gosse's growing resistance to Bowes' textual presence, using Bloom's six categories, this is not a simple trajectory towards freedom and autonomy. As I will argue in Chapter Five, it is the tension between Gosse's dependence on, and resistance to Bowes, that produces his most subtle and suggestive writing in *Father and Son*. This tension produces a subversive narrative in the palimpsest of *Father and Son*,

where Gosse achieves that final Bloomian ratio, when the ephebe manages to dwarf the precursor, but this is a tentative and temporary triumph that Gosse is unable to sustain.

My reading then is a twist on the usual notion of 'anxiety of influence'. I start with a modified version of Bloom's theory given that Bowes is obviously not a traditional canonical precursor. It is a suggestive paradigm through which to view the varying manifestations of the Gosse-Bowes interaction, not only because it structures both the resonances and resistances between their discourses, but also because it reveals Gosse's ultimate inability to extricate himself from the 'anxiety' of influence. The flexibility of the framework allows me to show how, in the process of distancing himself from Bowes his primary precursor, Gosse is propelled into dependency on a host of canonical literary precursors.

The force of Bowes' influence on Gosse positions her as the 'Covering Cherub',<sup>107</sup> Bloom's term for the blocking agent, the one whose presence frustrates the ephebe in his aim to become a great poet. Bloom's 'blocking agent' does not necessarily have to be male: the Cherub is 'at least a male female' (1997:36). As suggested in my earlier chapters, while Philip inhabits the female realm of imagination, Bowes espouses the male world of the symbolic: her textual voice qualifies her to be regarded as 'a male female'. The Covering Cherub is furthermore 'a demon of continuity' and 'discontinuity is freedom' (Bloom 1997:39): continuity connotes inheritance and I have emphasised in Chapter Two the effect of Bowes' spectral legacy on both Philip and Gosse. The anxiety she causes Gosse seems, in Bloom's words, 'irresistible': Gosse cannot 'bury' her, or 'escape' her, or 'replace' her (1997:xviii). The child Gosse is over-influenced by her, and the adult Gosse is weighed down by her posthumous presence. The oppression of her deathbed legacy was 'a weight, as intolerable as the burden of Atlas' (2004:44) and in order to achieve the 'freedom of weightlessness' (Bloom 1997:79) the adult Gosse must ruthlessly misread his mother's writing. Indeed, the very act of alluding to the primordial Titan Atlas, conjuring the forbidden world of mythology, at the sanctified moment of Bowes' death exemplifies the savagery of that misreading: it is an image to which I shall return later in the chapter. As discussed in Chapter One, Brooks-Davis underscores the unity between mother and son, positioning Gosse as 'the inheritor of his mother's silenced voice' (1989:124): I contend that Bowes is far from silent, and that in her powerful position as a Bloomian precursor, she keeps Gosse in her shadow as ephebe, frustrating his voice with her

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<sup>107</sup> The term, the 'Covering Cherub' is borrowed from Blake, who used it as an emblem '(out of Milton, and Ezekiel, and Genesis) for that portion of creativity in us that has gone over to constriction and hardness' (Bloom 1997:36).

own. It is not only Philip's comparatively benign textual shadow that provokes Gosse's motto: 'gravis cantantibus umbra'.<sup>108</sup>

To illustrate how Gosse often writes with Bowes consciously and unconsciously in mind, I shall use the example of Pater, who remained long in Ruskin's shadow. Bloom points out that 'Pater suffered under Ruskin's influence, though from the start he maintained a revisionary stance in regard to his precursor'. 'Ruskin is ignored, by name, in the books and essays', Bloom continues, 'yet he hovers everywhere in them' (1974:xv-xvi). Pater writes, then, always with Ruskin in mind. J.B. Bullen gives an example of this, noting the textual conversation between Pater and Ruskin. When Ruskin denounces Michelangelo as 'the chief captain in evil' of the Renaissance, describing as 'bad workmanship' Michelangelo's lack of finish, Pater 'makes no attempt to refute Ruskin directly' but within six months he has published an essay declaring this incompleteness to be Michelangelo's way of identifying the sculptured figure with the living rock from which it is hewn (Bullen 1981:55-6). Like Pater, Gosse struggles against the authority of a 'hovering' repressive 'parent', and he answers back obliquely and indirectly.

Gosse's first act in the Bloomian process of addressing Bowes' influence is the 'Clinamen', the ratio where the ephebe 'swerves' from the precursor, a term deriving from Lucretius, 'where it means a 'swerve' of the atoms so as to make change possible in the universe' (Bloom 1997:14). As discussed in Chapter Two, Bowes' posthumous influence over Philip holds him 'to the *unswerving* purpose which she had formed and defined' (2004:11 italics mine). Gosse, however, must swerve from Bowes' purpose, and his first swerve as an 'atom' occurs in his Mazeppa dream. At this point, Gosse is not executing the swerve himself, but is propelled by an 'undefined force', which 'proceeded in a straight line but presently it began to *curve*' (2004:87 italics mine). Bloom's 'swerve' effects that initial transformation; it occurs when the writer executes in his own work a 'creative corrective that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation' (Bloom 1997:30). Gosse's initial swerve from Bowes is evident in two forms, firstly his deflection from her prescription of biblical stories into the realm of fairy, and secondly, his shift from Brethren-style 'intensive' perusal of texts to the secular 'extensive' mode of reading.

As Bowes' ephebe, Gosse swerves from her practice of reworking biblical stories: her advice to readers of *The Mothers' Friend* is to tell 'little stories from Scripture giv[ing] them at first in your own language' and to 'repeat them over and over again' (1855b:28-9). Gosse certainly reworks narratives in his own language, but in doing so, he actively swerves away from religious content. This is evident in *King Erik* (1876), his blank-verse drama based on the

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<sup>108</sup> Translation: 'the shade is burdensome to those who sing'.



section of *The Knythinga Saga* (c.1250)<sup>109</sup> which describes the pilgrimages made to Jerusalem by the Danish royals, Erik Ejegod and Queen Boedil (Phelpstead 2006:62). Gosse converts this source, which records Erik's charitable foundations and donations for pilgrims, into a romance where Erik, having mistakenly accused Botilda of adultery, violently kills the man he suspects of being her lover. Gosse thus transforms a record of medieval piety into a drama of intrigue, passion, and vengeance. Gosse's second verse-drama, *The Unknown Lover* (1878), is also a romance, the reworking of a fairy-tale. The plot concerns two families, one English, and one Italian. Dorothy, daughter of the Valentine family is betrothed to Giovanni, son of the Bianco family; many years earlier their 'little rose-leaf hands were laid together' (1878:8) but now that Dorothy has met a young man called John, she is resisting her father's choice of suitor:

Mr Valentine: All so fixed, so planned!  
 And now blind Cupid, like those little foxes,  
 Runs with his torch through all my standing corn  
 And ruins me at harvest. (1878:19)

In an attempt to prevent the rival attentions of 'John' towards their daughter, the Valentines take a journey by stage coach, but are held up by a 'highwayman', who turns out to be 'John', who is in fact Giovanni in disguise. The character, Giovanni, is an amalgam of King Thrushbeard, hero of one of the *Grimm's Fairy Tales* (1812), and Goldsmith's Mr Burchell in *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766): both suitors disguise themselves and feign poverty in order to test the mettle of their intended wives. Dickens used this same fairy-tale pattern in *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5) for the relationship between John Harmon and Bella Wilfer (2011:588-602, 606).

In the process of reworking, however, Gosse's religious interpellation seems to assert itself almost involuntarily. This tension is exemplified by Mr Valentine's speech, quoted above. Gosse compares Cupid, the mythological god of love and erotic force, with 'those little foxes', a phrase borrowed from *The Song of Songs*: 'Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes' (Solomon 2:15). Commentators gloss 'the little foxes' as crafty and cunning creatures (false teachers) that disturb the vineyard (the church or the 'bride' of Christ) (Longman 2001:124-5), an apt parallel for Giovanni's unsettling of the Valentine family. The simile echoes an earlier Old Testament image, Samson's act of defiance against the Philistines:

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<sup>109</sup> Gosse's interest in the Icelandic sagas at this time is evident from his *Academy* review of William Morris's 'Sigurd the Volsung' (1876a:557-8).

And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took firebrands, and turned tail to tail, and put a firebrand in the midst between two tails. And when he had set the brands on fire, he let *them* go into the standing corn of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shocks, and also the standing corn, with the vineyards *and* olives. (*Judges* 15:4-5)

As with other images used by Gosse, there is a tension between the biblical and the literary usage, and in Pope's version of Ovid's 15<sup>th</sup> Epistle (1707), Sappho laments Phaon's infidelity thus: 'I burn, I burn, as when thro' ripen'd corn/ By driving winds the spreading flames are borne!' (Pope 1806:5), evoking that same drama of the insidious and unstoppable destruction of expectations about to be realised or 'harvested'. All three references furthermore share the context of thwarted love: in *The Song of Songs*, the vineyard functions as a metaphor for the bride's body and she is calling her lover to deliver her from those who wish to profane it; in *Judges*, Samson's act of vengeance is in response to his being barred from his wife's presence; and Ovid's Sappho, abandoned by Phaon, leaps to her death at sea. Gosse's reworkings thus embrace fairy-tale, myth and poetry, but retain strong vestiges of his Old Testament education.

Clearly the Clinamen is not a single event that leads automatically on to the next ratio; Gosse must continue to 'swerve' from Bowes' influence. Ironically, the struggle is sharpened by the generic proximity of Bowes' religious writing to Gosse's fairy-tale-based narratives; this is highlighted by Max Lüthi's comparison of the saints' life with the folktale. Both genres, Lüthi claims, originate from common experience, but the former is subjected to religious interpretation. The saint's life 'wants to explain. One senses its purpose. It demands faith in the truth of the story told and in the correctness of its interpretation', whereas the folk-tale 'demands nothing: it merely observes and portrays' (Lüthi 1986:85). The saint's legend 'wants to provide a definitive and binding account of the nature and meaning of supernatural powers' but 'the folk tale leaves these powers unexplained at the same time as it shows their distinct and meaningful effects' (Lüthi 1986:85). Gosse asserts his belief in the power of the fairy-tale by organising, in 1916, a war-time collection of fairy-stories representing each of the allied nations. In his own childhood, his mother had denied him 'the affecting preamble, 'Once upon a time!'' (2004:17) and Gosse now tries by that formula to inspire in readers of all ages a sense of patriotic cross-cultural unity. That tag, 'once upon a time', which opens most of the tales Gosse selected for the collection, is suggestive: the preposition 'upon' exerts a temporal and geographical displacement on the story, and like Scheherazade's tales, such narratives exist out of time and place, and suspend 'real life'. However, Gosse cannot completely immerse himself in that make-believe world: in his introduction to this work, *The Allies' Fairy Book* (1916), Gosse explains that '[t]o understand what is essential and what is not in a fairy-story, it

is needful to have the heart of a little child' (1916:xvi), an allusion to Matthew 18:3.<sup>110</sup> Make-believe still unnerves Gosse: he must bolster its interpretation by religious suggestion.

From matters of content, I shift to Gosse's method of reading. Tract-writers like Bowes advocated reading that was 'slow, deliberate, repetitive, and reflectively studious' (Nord 1995:245-6), a ponderous mode of re-reading, described by Karin Littau as 'intensive' reading, a style of scrutiny which gave way in the second half of the eighteenth century to a more rapid and superficial 'extensive' mode (2006:19-20). Bowes laments this change to cursory reading habits:

I have seen a sick man at the very borders of the grave; the world seemed shut out; he could not go to it, but it came to him in the shape of the novel, the magazine, the newspaper; and when the minister of the gospel came with words of peace and healing, the voice was drowned by the love of light reading, which choked the Word and made it unfruitful. ('The Towing Net': Tract 19)

Gosse 'swerves' by playfully combining both styles of reading in his response to *Pickwick Papers* (1836-7), a book given to him by Miss Brightwen, the non-evangelical rival to Bowes' legacy:

'my stepmother . . . procured for me a copy of 'Pickwick', by which I was instantly and gloriously enslaved. My shouts of laughing at the richer passages were almost scandalous, and led to my being reprov'd for disturbing my Father while engaged, in an upper room, in the study of God's word. I must have expended months on the perusal of 'Pickwick', for I used to rush through a chapter, and then read it over again very slowly, word for word, and then shut my eyes to realise the figures and the action. (2004:134-5)

Gosse embraces the randomness of reading, making a carnivalesque inversion of the historical trend: he starts with the modern 'extensive' reading, and then applies the traditional Biblical 'intensive' mode. Applying Bowes' method to this secular text ironically promotes an over-identification with Dickens's portly protagonist: Gosse thus subverts, indeed, 'misreads' Bowes' prescription. Not only does he contrast his rollicking hilarity ('shouts of laughing') with religious solemnity (Philip's Bible study) but he turns reading into an 'enslaving' experience with 'scandalous' outcome. It becomes an erotic event: 'I suppose no child will ever again enjoy that *rapture* of *unresisting* humorous appreciation of 'Pickwick'. . . [I] accepted Mr Pickwick with an unquestioning and *hysterical abandonment*' (2004:135 italics mine). Gosse is accessing that traditionally feminine 'rapture' that his repressed and repressive mother would never have countenanced. The luxurious associations of the word 'abandonment' suggests Gosse's instinct towards what James Kincaid calls the Pickwick 'world of infinitely yielding

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<sup>110</sup> 'Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven' (Matthew 18:3).

cushiony flesh', a book of 'pure ego, pure limitlessness, pure carnival, pure lust' (1994:22, 31). Gosse is here enacting Bowes' greatest fear of the effect of fiction. Miss Brightwen represents the hiatus in Bowes' line of influence: she is another 'force' helping Gosse to make his swerve.

The Clinamen is described as 'a side-step away from the precursor's footwork', in Mary Orr's analogy of Bloom's revisionary ratios as a dance, and she looks forward to the second ratio, the Tessera, as 'a leap invented by the precursor but used as a different dance step by the newcomer' (2003:69). The Tessera constitutes the poet's attempt to 'complete' the precursor's language in the sense of 'an antithetical use of the precursor's primal words that must serve as the basis for an antithetical criticism' (Bloom 1997:66). The term 'Tessera' derives from mosaic making and Bloom's 'vessel' is the poetic continuum: the ephebe provides the missing pieces of the mosaic in order to 'complete' the unfinished precursor poem, a 'completion' that is as much misprision as a revisionary swerve is' (1997:66). The Tessera operates in Gosse's 'completion' of the advice Bowes gives to Christian parents in *Abraham*, that children should be taught to do good deeds, such as 'having their little hands and feet made the channels of communication between their parents' purse and the Missionary Box' as well as being sent to visit 'the cottages of the pious poor' (1855a:69-70). Gosse 'completes' Bowes' sentimental evangelical narrative in the discourse of fairy-tale and mythology by making his 'hands and feet' a channel of communication between the Brethren centre that is his father's home and the house of an 'extremely poor' couple called John and Ann Brooks. Gosse feminises himself by an implicit self-casting as Little Red Riding Hood: he carries his gift of coins 'in a little linen bag', and his encounter with the 'wolf' is evoked by John Brooks whose 'pock-marked face' has 'side-whiskers' and who is described by Miss Marks as a 'brute' (2004:120-1). The violent fairy-tale critiques the naïve Biblical scenario: Bowes' intention is subverted by Gosse's 'completion' of the story, that 'the infant plant of philanthropy was burned in my bosom as if by quick-lime' (2004:121).

Bowes' picture of Christian children visiting 'the cottages of the pious poor' is similarly idealistic and ironically conjures the homes of characters like Hansel and Gretel, or Jack and his widowed mother in the tale of the Beanstalk. Gosse 'completes' Bowes' fantasy with harsh facts, urging that in such cottages, one encounters 'feminine odours, masquerading as you knew not what, in which penny whiffs, vials of balm and opopanax<sup>111</sup> seemed to have become tainted, vaguely, with the residue of the slop-pail' (2004:78). The experience of feminine odour leaves him 'incapable of eating' (2004:78); this is what Bloom describes as 'turning-

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<sup>111</sup> This is a fetid gum resin taken from the root of *Opopanax chironium* formerly used in medicine. When the resin is taken from *Acacia farnesiana* ('opopanax tree'), it is used as a perfume. Gosse could intend either meaning here. Gosse's reference to opopanax in *Secret* (see Chapter Four) denotes another type, the resin deriving from the myrrh tree (*OED* 2009).

aggression-against-the-self' since the Tesserae convert activity to passivity, and transform agency to immobility (2003:98). Although painful and costly in terms of self-humiliation, the Tesserae show that the precursor's words are 'worn out', and that they are newly enlarged by the ephebe's version. Gosse reduces Bowes' spiritual vision to an 'earthly', and indeed in the case of the feminine odours, 'earthy' level.

By way of exploring further Gosse's 'antithetical use of Bowes' 'primal words', I return to her use of the Biblical phrase, already discussed in Chapter One: 'the sin that most easily besets me' (2004:16). Gosse later employs the phrase in relation to Ann Burmington, whose practice of self-examination starkly contrasts with Bowes' intense soul-searching: 'Ann was a very worthy woman, but masterful and passionate, suffering from an ungovernable temper, which, at calmer moments she used to refer to, not without complacency, as "the sin which doth most easily beset me"' (2004:76). The use of quotation marks is revealing: unlike Bowes for whom the Biblical text is internalised into her thinking, Ann Burmington seems to be parroting the phrase she has heard at Brethren meetings: it is adopted, not assimilated. Gosse ironically intimates that the habitual use of Biblical allusions by members of a sect may actually inoculate the speaker from the original sense and intention of the phrase; the use of the past continuous tense, Ann 'used to refer', indicates something done repeatedly over a period of time, and which by implication is never changed. Furthermore, Gosse's mischievous subordinate clause, 'not without complacency', makes Ann Burmington's acknowledgement of her personal volatility read like a statement of unalterable fact rather than a personal shortcoming with which she wrestles. Gosse's repetition of the phrase in this new context casts an ironic shadow on both women, one for her excess of religious zeal and the other for her complacency, at the same time highlighting, by the 1611 idiom, the incongruous and anachronistic presence of the Plymouth Brethren sect within Victorian society. Gosse's playful use of the phrase recurs in other contexts: in correspondence with George Moore, for example, Gosse cites it in ironic self-deprecation: 'I chaffed you with too heavy a hand. It is a sin that doth easily beset me' (Thwaite 2004:47). Biblical authority is thereby undermined by Gosse's ironic and secularising lexicon.

The next two ratios, 'Kenosis' and 'Daemonization', are closely related: they seek to repress the memory of Bowes' worn out discourse, and to further individuate Gosse, the new poet. Kenosis is characterised by the darkness of self-abnegation, the reduction of the poet from fullness to emptiness. To achieve Kenosis, Gosse must 'empty himself' of Bowes. The term Kenosis derives from St. Paul, who uses it to explain Jesus' emptying of the divine out of himself in order to assume human form; in scripture it is associated with the act of baptism. The ephebe empties out the creative impulse of the precursor, and in so doing, the precursor

too is emptied out. Bowes' creative impulse derives from her evangelical mission: 'He who is destitute of enthusiasm in his own mind', she urges in *Abraham*, 'will never succeed in stirring the heart of another' (1855a:117). Seemingly in response to this, Gosse notes that aged six, the very year when *Abraham* was published, his mother 'was seized with a great *enthusiasm*' being 'carried away by the current of her literary and her philanthropic work' (2004:24 italics mine). This is not simply dialogic but a highly charged allusion that critiques Bowes' intent: Johnson defined 'enthusiasm' as something ill-regulated, almost delusional, a 'fancied inspiration, a vain confidence of divine favour' (*OED* 2009). Gosse would have been well aware of the changing etymology of the word, particularly of its synonymy since the eighteenth century with fanaticism,<sup>112</sup> but it is the word's archaic etymology that is most resonant: the Greek 'enthousiasmos' is formed from '-en' (in or within), and 'theos' (god), that is 'entheos': the notion of 'having the god within', which in turn derives from 'enthousiazein', 'to be inspired by a god'. Through Kenosis, then, Gosse must empty himself of Bowes' 'enthusiasm', her 'religious impulse'.

In Euripides' tragedy, *The Bacchae* (405BC), it is this uncontrolled 'possession by a god' that leads Agave, to kill her son, Pentheus, King of Thebes. Agave was a maenad, the word meaning literally, the 'raving one'. Maenads indulged ritual states of drunken ecstasy in their worship of Dionysus,<sup>113</sup> becoming sexually unrestrained and violent, often attacking animals, even humans, tearing them to pieces. For his part in banning the worship of Dionysus, King Pentheus was torn apart by the maenads and his corpse was mutilated by his own mother, Agave; she, thinking he was a wild beast, carried his head on a stick back to Thebes. In his poem, 'Old and New' (1911)<sup>114</sup> Gosse actually situates himself as the victim of the maenads' frenzy:

Take me, too, Maenads, to your fox-skin<sup>115</sup> chorus,  
 Rose-lipped like volute-shells,<sup>116</sup>  
 For I would follow where your host canorous  
 Roars down the forest-dells:

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<sup>112</sup> Several Protestant sects of the 16th and 17th centuries were called enthusiastic. After the Glorious Revolution of 1688, 'enthusiasm' became a pejorative term for advocacy of any political or religious cause in public. Such behaviour was held to be the cause of the English Civil War and its attendant brutalities, and thus it was regarded offensive to remind others of the war by engaging in enthusiasm.

<sup>113</sup> 'Dionysus (Roman 'Bacchus') is the spirit of unthinking, physical enjoyment, of the instinctive group-personality, of anti-intellectual energy' (Grant 1962:284).

<sup>114</sup> See complete poem: Appendix Five.

<sup>115</sup> The fox-skin symbolises a mystic and intimate relation between the god, the victim and the votary' (Farnell 1896:165).

<sup>116</sup> This line exemplifies more lexical echoes with Philip's *Romance*: he describes the Stentor (an animalcule) unfolding its body into 'an elegant trumpet, with one portion of the *lip* rolled-in with a sort of *volute*' (1860:160-61).

The sacred frenzy rends my throat and bosom!  
 I shout and whirl where He,<sup>117</sup>  
 Our Vine-God, tosses like some pale blood-blossom  
 Swept on a stormy sea. (1911b:41)

Gosse's phrase, 'the Vine-God' is suggestive of Hebraic-Hellenic echoes: wine was the vehicle of Dionysian inspiration, possibly a pagan anticipation of the Early Christian spiritual metaphor of 'Christ the Vine' (Farnell 1896:97). Certainly, the Dionysian origins of Christology were attested in Christ's miracle at Cana (John 2:1-11). George Williamson points out that during the first half of the nineteenth century Schelling, Hölderlin, Görres, Creuzer, Weisse, and Wagner all sought antecedents to the Christian revelation in pagan mythology (2004:227). Readings of the mystery cults suggested Dionysus as a portent for Christ: parallels exist in the doctrine of his incarnation as the child Iacchus,<sup>118</sup> Dionysus also prefigures creation by his involvement in the material world; he presages the Crucifixion when torn to pieces by the Titans; finally he foreshadows the resurrection when restored to wholeness by Apollo (Williamson 2004:133,2). The pagan foreshadowing of Christian rites is also implicit in the maenads' act of drinking the blood of the raw flesh of an animal that incarnated Dionysus (Farnell 1896:162), an act which has sacramental echoes in the Eucharist. The 'sacred frenzy' of the maenads in addition has resonances with Old Testament women such as Hannah whose praying is so intense that 'Eli thought she had been drunken' (1 Samuel 1:14), and in *Father and Son* Gosse explicitly compares his mother with the 'ecstatic' Hannah (2004:153). Gosse emphasises Bowes' readiness to emulate Hannah's dedication of Samuel to God's service (1 Samuel 1:27-8), noting that when he was only two months old, Bowes' priorities were fixed on his spiritual rather than his earthly welfare: 'if the Lord take him early, we will not doubt that he is taken to Himself' (Bowes' diary, quoted by Gosse 2004:9).

The entire poem 'Old and New' pivots on a Hellenic-Hebraic tension, the same opposition that Dodd (1979) and Harley (2007) identified in *Father and Son*. The first section, subtitled 'BC' renders the classical scene, an immersion into a 'canorous' and 'corybantic' world of noise and violence: 'tabrets shaken high, and trumpets blowing, And resonance of drums'; 'brown limbs with white limbs madly intertwining'. The second section, 'AD', depicts the calm Christian realm, where those with 'weary feet' and 'weary spirits' enter 'the long, long day of bliss that never closes'. Indeed, this denouement is not one of Christian triumph, but an echo of the resignation with which Gosse described his childhood: 'Not unhappy, not fretful, but long,—

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<sup>117</sup> Gosse misuses the convention that capitalises 'He' in reference to God, by applying the honorific to Dionysus, again overturning Bowes' religion with his mythological allusions.

<sup>118</sup> In the Eleusinian mysteries Iacchus appears as a child in the arms of Demeter, a parallel with the Christian Virgin Mary and Jesus. In verse 2 of 'Old and New', Gosse use 'Iacchus' as an epithet for Dionysus.

long, long' (2004:47). In Gosse's poem, the Christian world is characterised by a series of strange negations:

We have no hopes if Thou art close beside us,  
And no profane despairs,  
Since all we need is Thy great hand to guide us,  
Thy heart to take our cares;  
For us is no to-day, to-night, to-morrow,  
No past-time nor to be,  
We have no joy but Thee, there is no sorrow,  
No life to live but Thee.

The repetitive structures and use of predominantly monosyllabic lexis produce a robotic effect, as though the lines are prescribed for chanting or mourning. This section of Gosse's poem alludes loosely to Swinburne's 'Hymn to Proserpine' (1866), where the fourth-century Roman narrator laments the passing of the colourful pagan life, overtaken by a Christian world 'grown grey' from the breath of Christ, the 'pale Galilean'. Although not published until 1911, Gosse's poem was actually written around 1873, during the period when Gosse enjoyed a close friendship with Swinburne (Thwaite 1984:111-17). In *Collected Poems*, Gosse lists 'Old and New' as having been published in *On Viol and Flute* (1873) but it never appeared in that volume possibly because its theme was too disturbing. Gosse explains its inclusion in the 1911 volume as being an illustration of 'the passions, the reveries, the tender hopes and fears of adolescence' (1911b:v).<sup>119</sup>

In terms of the Kenosis as 'a breaking device', as 'a movement toward discontinuity with the precursor' (Bloom 1997:14), Gosse signals his seduction by pagan energy and his detachment from the Christian world. Although 'the choir of nymphs is mute;/ Iacchus up the western slope is fleeting, /Uncheered by horn or flute' (an echo of Swinburne's lament of the 'gods dethroned and deceased, cast forth, wiped out in a day') the form of Gosse's poem suggests his prioritising of the pagan over the Christian, his discontinuity with Bowes. Using the two verses already cited, Gosse responds to the pagan world by the first person singular, using active verbs: 'Take me', 'I would follow', 'I shout', whereas his acquiescence in the Christian realm is the collective and anonymous 'all we need', while the negative sentences debilitate the verse, and auxiliary verbs predominate: 'We *have* no hopes', 'We *have* no joy' 'there *is* no sorrow'. Though the tone of 'A.D.' is respectful, it echoes the tired voice of Swinburne's Roman narrator: 'I am fain/ To rest a little from praise'. Gosse evokes the pagan world

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<sup>119</sup> Gosse's rather self-deprecating justification for including 'Old and New' in *Collected Poems* was needless since its cabalistic theme earned it canonical status six years later when it was published in *The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse* (1917), the timing of which anthology reflected, according to its editors, a change 'in the fortunes of mysticism . . . a spiritual revitalisation' in search of 'the Reality that is eternally underlying all things' (Nicholson 1917:378-81,v-vii). Gosse's poem thus found a context and an audience over half a century after being written.



through hyphenated compound nouns, such as 'volute-shells', 'forest-dells' and 'blood-blossom',<sup>120</sup> suggesting a creative impulse, a concentration of imagery produced by unconventional word-combinations, whereas in the Christian world, his only compounds are mundane and repetitive: 'to-day, to-night, to-morrow'. Even though the pagan world spells death for Gosse/Pentheus - 'The sacred frenzy rends my throat and bosom!' - this is the cost of Kenosis. Bowes/Agave too is 'emptied out': as Burkert remarked: 'The Mother's role is inverted into its terrible opposite' (1985:164).

The notion of maenads dismembering their victims and of Dionysus being torn to pieces by the Titans has resonances in a book by Andrew Jukes, of which Bowes was 'inordinately fond' (2004:17). This work of typological exegesis, *The Law of the Offerings* (1847), centres on the image of the mutilation of Christ: 'In the Types, if I may be allowed the expression', Jukes says, 'God takes His Son to pieces' (1848:14). Christ is represented as the sum of five 'offerings' (the burnt animal, meat, peace, sin and trespass respectively) and although it is an allegorical and mechanical categorization of the doctrine of redemption, it employs the language of dismembering. This book, which to young Gosse was an 'abomination' (2004:18), gradually assumed authority 'as the classic typological interpretation of its subject' (Rowdon 1967:78). By the ratio of Kenosis, Gosse refuses to let this book settle comfortably in its canon: by a combination of his role as writer and editor of *Father and Son*, he subtly attacks its prestige in a way that severely compromises his own stature as a bibliophile and editor. He refers to Jukes eight times in *Father and Son*. In the Heinemann (Mudie's Select Library) edition, Gosse cites Jukes's *On the Apocalypse* (1907a:279), but in the fourth impression of *Father and Son* in 1908, Gosse changes this title to *On the Pentateuch* (Wertheimer 1978:331), an amendment that is retained by Heinemann in both the Popular edition (1909:250) and the Booklover's edition (1912:233). However, no such works were ever written by Jukes. Gosse also 'plays' with references to Jukes the author as well as his texts: the 1907 version reads 'when I turned to Jukes or Newton for further detail, I could not understand what they said' (1907:105), but two years later, in the Popular Edition, that reference became: 'Habershon or Newton' (1909:94) only to be returned in 1912 to 'Jukes or Newton' in the Booklover's Edition (1912:87). Gosse's seemingly casual act of interchanging the names was undertaken, Wertheimer observes, as a series of 'silent changes' (1978:330) made without recourse to his fellow Heinemann editors. Wertheimer believes that Gosse 'confused' the references (1978:331) while Newton accuses Gosse of 'sporadic and desultory' editing (2004:xxxii) but neither explanation captures the almost manic atmosphere of Gosse's irrational textual

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<sup>120</sup> The comparison of Dionysus tossing like a 'blood-blossom Swept on a stormy sea' may allude to Swinburne's image of Venus – 'the blossom of flowering seas'.

substitutions. Although 'emptying himself of his own afflatus' (Bloom 1997:14), editing his text in this apparently random and chaotic fashion, Gosse uses confusion as his weapon. By making the names interchangeable, Gosse detaches the signified from the signifier, thereby dismissing these mid-Victorian exegetes en masse, and re-writing the canon in a way that excludes them.

Closely related to Kenosis is the fourth ratio, 'Daemonization' or the Counter-Sublime, where the ephebe taps into a daemonic power that is superior to the precursor: it 'is a self-crippling act, intended to purchase power by playing at the loss of power' (Bloom 1997:109). It is exemplified by Gosse's response to Bowes' appeal to imperial history in *Abraham*. Bowes argues that a young man needs to be hardened into Christian service:

as in the history of the Roman Empire, a king "born in the Purple" was usually a weak prince, so has it been in all ages.

The Emperor . . . has a son; he spares nothing for his education; he desires to see his arm as strong to wield the mighty sceptre, to see his shoulders as broad and athletic, and as *able to bear the weight of a huge Empire* as his own have been; but the youth is not like his father, his limbs faint under the *weight* of arms. (1855a:26 italics mine)

Gosse takes Bowes' primal language of 'weight', and transforms it into Hellenizing discourse by describing her deathbed dedication of him as 'a weight, intolerable as the burden of Atlas' (2004:44). By this 'self-crippling' allusion, Gosse does more than 'bear the weight of a huge Empire'; rather he bears the weight of Uranus, god of the sky. The self-casting as Atlas positions Gosse as the Titanic rebel against Zeus and the Olympians, who in defeat was petrified<sup>121</sup> and condemned to stand at the western edge of Gaia (the earth), supporting Uranus on his shoulders. Although Gosse-Atlas is grotesque in terms of defeat and condemnation, 'playing at the loss of power, he 'purchases power' by being simultaneously translated into a sublime state as upholder of the celestial sphere. Although Gosse empties himself of the weight of Bowes' Christian intent by this paralysing allusion, he acquires the counter-sublimic energy of the Hellenic Titan.

Daemonization occurs at points of threshold, not only at Bowes' deathbed, the threshold of life and death (or in Bowes' view the transition from mortal life to eternal life) but also at Gosse's baptism, a symbolic threshold marking the death of the 'old' and the birth of the 'new'. Gosse does not 'die to self' at his baptism: ironically his use of mythological imagery empties that very ritual of its significance. The clergyman, 'Mr S', whose mystique is

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<sup>121</sup> There are echoes of petrification in *Father and Son*: after spoiling the garden fountain, the guilty 5-year-old Gosse 'turned to stone within'; aged 8, Philip's stories about Burke and Hare 'nearly froze me into stone' (2004:23,67). On moving to London, he described himself as 'half-frozen out of the cold storage of English Puritanism' (Charteris 1931:58). I shall discuss this theme further in Chapters Four and Five.

immediately heightened by his anonymity, is ‘an impressive *hieratic* figure’ with ‘*Titanic* arms’ (2004:108-9 italics mine): the adjective derives from Greek, *hieratikos*, ‘pertaining to a priest or his office, priestly’, while the pagan significance of *Titanic* is emphasised by the capitalised letter, indicating Titan, the elder brother of Kronos, of the race of giants. According to Hesiod, the wounded Uranus named his sons *Titenes* (Τιτῆνες) meaning ‘straining ones’, reflecting their daring to overstep their limits (Room 1983:297). The Hellenic references compromise the Christian meaning of the baptism. Alexis Harley’s reading of Gosse’s philhellenic rhetoric as signifying sexual deviation (2007 para.20-24) also suggests a counter-sublime state as Gosse resists definition as either male or female, and embraces the androgynous. Gosse has thus ‘undone the precursor’s pattern by a deliberate willed loss in continuity’ (Bloom 1997:90).

At this point in Bloom’s trajectory, Gosse must start to act independently, no longer in opposition to Bowes. In the previous ratios, the ephebe acts to counter the pressure of the precursor, but this still signifies an attachment. As her colonised subject, Gosse resists the imperialising Bowes by subversion, by opposition, and by mimicry, but these strategies do not win him independence, since she continues to be a focus of his writing. Askesis, the fifth ratio, is ‘a curtailment’, where the ephebe sacrifices ‘some part of himself, whose absence will individuate him more, as a poet’: Askesis is a ‘movement of self-purgation which intends the attainment of a state of solitude’ (1997:121,15). I shall now begin what will be a lengthy exploration of Askesis with Gosse’s allusions to figures from *The Tempest*, a significant work in this context because it depicts a time of ‘self-purgation’, when the experience of displacement or ‘happy shipwreck’ refines and purifies the characters: ‘that which we account a punishment against evil is but a medicine against evil’ (Kermode 1958:xxv). Gosse suggests that at the age of fourteen he was an uneducated ‘Caliban’ seeking his literary ‘Prosperos’:

I was busy providing myself with words before I had any ideas to express with them. When I read Shakespeare and came upon the passage in which Prospero tells Caliban that he had no thoughts till his master taught him words, I remember starting with amazement at the poet’s intuition, for such a Caliban had I been:

I pitied thee  
Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour  
One thing or other, when thou didst not, savage,  
Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble, like  
A thing most brutish; I endow’d thy purposes  
With words that made them know.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Gosse changes Shakespeare’s use of the past tense ‘known’ to the present tense ‘know’, implying a process that is not limited to the experience of Shakespeare’s Caliban, but is what he is undergoing himself.

For my Prosperos I sought vaguely in such books as I had access to, and I was conscious that as the inevitable word seized hold of me, with it out of the darkness into strong light<sup>123</sup> came the image and the idea. (2004:159-60)

Gosse changes the Proper Nouns, 'Prospero' and 'Caliban', into Countable Nouns, translating them from individual characters into types: 'a Prospero' symbolises a state of erudition and significantly, *book*-learning, while 'a Caliban' represents the condition of ignorance. However, the powerful connotative charge of these names problematises any reading of this allusion as a simple transition from illiteracy to understanding. By citing *The Tempest* (c.1616), Gosse signals his entry into the Victorian debate about creative imagination.

As 'a Caliban', Gosse is a creature which, although his language and 'purposes' are curtailed, has an instinctive poetic sense, being naturally attuned to the island's noises, 'Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not' (*Temp* 3.2.134). He cannot, however, interpret the 'sweet airs' without 'a Prospero'. Shakespearean stage tradition presented Caliban as 'a thing most brutish', but the Romantics directed the Victorians towards a more sympathetic viewpoint from the 1830s onwards: Caliban may be 'the essence of grossness' says Hazlitt, 'but there is not a particle of vulgarity in it': Shakespeare 'shews us the savage with the simplicity of a child, and makes the strange monster amiable' (1817:118-20). Hazlitt also argued that Prospero had usurped Caliban's position as ruler of the island, signalling again that underlying theme of Gosse as a 'colonised' subject. In the wake of Darwin, furthermore, Daniel Wilson read Caliban as 'the missing link', the intermediary between the true brute and man, a creature that symbolised 'nature' without the benefit of 'nurture'. Wilson argued that although his 'narrow faculties [had] been forced into strange development' (1873:88), Caliban was:

in perfect harmony with the rhythm of the breezes and the tides. His thoughts are essentially poetical, within the range of his lower nature; and so his speech is, for the most part, in verse. No being of all that people the Shakespearian drama more thoroughly suggests the idea of a pure creation of the poetic fancy than Caliban. (1873:90)

Gosse's presentation of himself in *Father and Son* as the strange child, deprived of the nurturing qualities of fiction and yet owning a 'prosodical instinct' (2004:96) that simply needed activating, resonates with Wilson's interpretation. Gosse's self-fashioning as 'a Caliban' is not then as risky as it first appears: the Victorians romanticise Caliban's poetic discourse so that it overshadows his bestiality.

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<sup>123</sup> Just before the speech that Gosse quotes, Caliban says that Prospero used to 'teach me how To name the bigger light, and how the less, That burn by day and night.' This alludes to Genesis 1.16: 'God then made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day and the less light to rule the night'.

Gosse alludes to Caliban even in critical and biographical writing: reviewing Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* in *The Spectator*, he exploits the sympathetic view of Caliban:

In the next act, Peer is living all alone in the forest, tormented with spiritual and physical affliction. In this down-hearted condition, hunted by day and plagued by night, we almost forget his selfish cunning in pity, even as the woes of Caliban soften our hearts. (1872b:445)

And conjuring the dramatist of *Peer Gynt* himself, Gosse describes Ibsen as a 'stranger' to the inhabitants of Grimstad, 'not speaking their language; or, rather, wholly "spectral," speaking no language at all, but indulging in catcalls and grimaces. He was now discovered like Caliban, and tamed, and made vocal, by the strenuous arts of friendship' (1907c:21-2); Gosse implies that the acquisition of an appropriate discourse is crucial to identity. Using the allusion to Caliban also implicates Gosse in the Victorian appropriations of the character, the most influential of which was Robert Browning's 1864 prequel-poem to Shakespeare's play: *Caliban upon Setebos*<sup>124</sup> (1994:726-31). Browning's Caliban also learns speech from his masters, but employs it to meditate on the nature of Setebos, 'that other, whom his dam called God', but 'to talk about Him vexes' (l.16-17). For both Gosse, and for Browning's Caliban, the mother figure is the voice and 'vexing' representative of God. Browning's Caliban 'sprawl[s]' sensually in the cool mud, and 'talks to his own self', evincing the same dual consciousness that 'rushed upon [Gosse's] savage and undeveloped little brain', aged six (2004:24). The 'infantile species of natural magic' in which young Gosse indulges, imagining the ability to exert control over his environment, inducing 'the gorgeous birds and butterflies in my Father's illustrated manuals to come to life' (2004:26) seems furthermore to echo the fantasies of Browning's Caliban as he imagines being a sculptor, 'I yet could make a live bird out of clay' (l.76), or a magician who 'Weareth at whiles for an enchanter's robe' (l.155), or a poet who 'made a song / And sung it' (l.275-6). As 'a Caliban' then, Gosse signals his instinctive poetic voice, which through Browning's mediation becomes both sophisticated and subversive.

That Gosse seeks enlightenment from various 'Prosperos' suggests that he appraises many masters. Indeed, I would argue that Philip, as Gosse's conduit to Virgil (see Chapter Two), is the first of his 'Prosperos'. Like Caliban, who takes the foolish Stephano as his master, Gosse must, however, learn to discriminate between authentic and untrustworthy literary foster-parents. Although the plot of *The Tempest* assures Gosse that he will finally achieve literary

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<sup>124</sup> Like most literary Victorians, Gosse would have known Browning's poem well. Indeed, Gosse seems to have been involved in anthologizing it: on 15 March 1885, Browning responded to a request from Gosse for 'four poems, of moderate length, which represent their writer fairly'. Browning chose *Caliban upon Setebos* to represent the dramatic aspect of his art (Browning 1933:235).

parenting, for Prospero says of Caliban, 'This thing of darkness/ I acknowledge mine' (5:1:20), the allusive resonances become more sinister at this point, for Prospero's status as an authority is flawed: one is never certain whether his magic is black or white. Such doubts are implicit in the discussion of *The Tempest* in Gosse and Garnett's *History of English Literature: An Illustrated Record* (1904), where they read Prospero as James 1, and treat the confession that he lost his dukedom through being "rapt in secret studies" as manifestly intended as a warning to King James (1904b:252). The underlying question then is whether Caliban/Gosse is opening himself to exploitation by a charlatan or to influence by a virtuous magician, or is Prospero a complex amalgam of good and bad? Egan points out furthermore that the word 'prospero' in Italian means 'faustus' (1972:175), bringing to the allusion negative connotations of necromancy and soul-selling. Stephen Orgel lists the spectrum that encompasses Prospero's character: 'a noble ruler and mage, a tyrant and megalomaniac, a necromancer, a Neoplatonic scientist, a colonial imperialist, a civilizer' (1987:11); as mentors, then, Gosse's 'Prosperos' are powerful but possibly malevolent. The allusive realm, Gosse is learning, can be treacherous. Linda Peterson reaches a similar conclusion about Gosse's interaction with *The Tempest*, though she takes a different route: she argues that Gosse's quotation implies that poetry is a creative constructive power, but only because Caliban's counter-speech - 'You taught me language, and my profit on't /Is, I know how to curse' - is suppressed (1987:188). Certainly Caliban's famous and destructive retort is present within the texture of the allusion but I would argue that his naively forthright outburst is much less dangerous than Prospero's duplicitous discourse. As Gosse detaches himself from Bowes, he learns new discourses from his 'Prosperos', his newfound literary masters, but he treads an uneven path, as he negotiates the indeterminacy of the reading process and the artfulness of his canonical mentors.

The self-allusion to Caliban is one of several signals indicating that Gosse has chosen to sacrifice his birthright, his biological 'legitimacy', his status as the child of Philip and Bowes. In the same way that Bowes and Philip had 'given him to the Lord' when Gosse was two months old, and 'had girt me about with a linen ephod' like Samuel (2004:9, 153), Gosse now deprives them of the status of parenthood, by casting himself as an orphan.<sup>125</sup> This is an act of self-sacrifice, since to be a Victorian orphan consigned one to permanent outsider status (Peters 2000:43-5). The figure of Gosse, newly-orphaned, aged eight, spending long periods 'leaning against the window', marks his location at a boundary between inside and outside, not belonging in either sphere: 'I feel now the coldness of the pane, and the feverish heat that was

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<sup>125</sup> By the death of Bowes, Gosse technically became 'an orphan' since 'in Victorian culture the term also referred to one who was deprived of only one parent' (Peters 2000:1), but I am suggesting that in the reconstruction of his early life, Gosse effects a metaphorical self-orphaning that he dates back to his birth.

produced, by contrast, in the orbit round the eye' (2004:48). Like Jane Eyre, in connection with whom Bronte uses the window motif to root her story in concrete space and time but also to symbolise her quest for liberty (Lapraz-Severino 2008), this location marks for Gosse the 'coldness' of orphanhood and the heat engendered by its imaginative possibilities. Hochman and Wachs argue that literary orphans suffer an incapacitating sense of abandonment that prevents them from achieving 'a viable identity' (1999:134) but from Gosse's perspective as an author, this option is liberating in its very indeterminacy. Indeed, an *Athenaeum* reviewer used this very image to convey Gosse's status: 'His habitual moderation makes him, certainly, something of an outsider . . . He seems to lean from the window while the battle of the books is being fought out in the streets' (1893:215).

That Gosse had long brooded on his self-orphaning is implied by the description of his birth in the 1890 biography of his father where, as Philip's 'seed', he implicitly compares himself with the 'seeds' used in Philip's experiments: 'In the midst of all this, and during the very thrilling examination of three separate stagnations of hempseed, poppy-seed, and hollyhock seed, his wife presented him with a child, a helpless and unwelcome apparition' (1890a:223). While his father's absorption with the plant seeds is 'very thrilling', Philip seems strangely disconnected from the event of fatherhood. Gosse suggests that this is not simply the classic remoteness of the Victorian paterfamilias: the baby is an 'unwelcome apparition'. The lexis is strong: the baby is not desired, it is Other.

When Gosse describes himself as a 'cuckoo' (2004:68) the concept of orphanhood is reiterated, since Bowes is thereby cast as a species of maternal brood parasite, which lays its eggs in the nest of an 'adoptive' bird. As a literary trope, this notion goes back to Old English poetry wherein the speaker of one of the 'Exeter riddles' is an abandoned child, who survives only because of its adoptive mother (Bitterli 2004:105)<sup>126</sup>. This is intensified by the traditional association of the cuckoo with bastardy, either through literary conceits or by etymology. In terms of the former, Edward Armstrong traces this tradition from Aristophanes' *Kokku*, through Chaucer's *The Parliament of Fowls*,<sup>127</sup> to Shakespeare's *Love's Labours Lost* (1970:203).<sup>128</sup> Etymologically, 'cuckold' derives from Old French 'cocu', and echoes the male

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<sup>126</sup> Riddle 9 from *The Exeter Book*: 'In these days my father and mother gave me up as dead; nor was there a spirit for me as yet, a life within. Then a certain very faithful kinswoman began to cover me with garments, kept me and protected me, wrapped me in a sheltering robe as honourably as her own children, until I, under the garment, as my fate was, grew up, an unrelated stranger. The gracious kinswoman fed me afterwards until I became adult, could set out further on my travels. (Bitterli 2004:103)

<sup>127</sup> 'the cokkou evere unkinde' (Chaucer: Librarius 1997, line 358).

<sup>128</sup> 'The Cuckoo then, on every tree,/Mocks married men; and thus sings he, Cuckoo!' (Act 5, Scene2).

bird's mating cry, while the German 'kuckuk' and the Provençal 'cogotz' were 'applied to the adulterer as well as the husband of the adulteress' (*OED* 2009).

The exploration of Gosse's self-allusion to the cuckoo generates an intertextual link between *Father and Son* and Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). In the opening paragraph, Stephen identifies himself with a literary figure<sup>129</sup> by responding to his father's story of 'baby tuckoo': 'He was baby tuckoo' (Joyce 1960:7 italics mine). Like Gosse, Stephen feels himself to be an alien presence in the nest: 'he is not truly of the family into which he was born' (Kelleher 1958 para. 11). Other intertextual echoes amplify this theme: both Steven and Gosse are sundered from their parents by an 'abyss of *temperament*' and they orphan themselves: Steven 'felt that he was hardly of the one blood with [his family] but stood to them rather in the mystical kinship of fosterage' (Joyce 1960:96, 98). Both turn away from family to embrace literature: Stephen, feeling that his 'childhood was dead' achieves a numb distance by 'repeat[ing] to himself the lines of Shelley's fragment' (1960:96). Certainly, Howard Helsing recognized, in Gosse's final resolution to throw off the 'yoke' of his 'dedication, the spirit of Stephen Dedalus who rejects Catholicism to become a priest of art (1979:62). Suzette Henke's reading of Stephen's rejection of threefold 'yoke of matriarchy', represented by the biological mother, Mrs Dedalus, the ecclesiastical Mother Church, and the political Mother Ireland (1993:321), furthermore accords with my conception of Gosse's resistance to Bowes. Just as Gosse cannot 'fashion his inner life for himself' (2004:186) without orphaning himself from Bowes, so Stephen cannot 'forge in the smithy of [his] soul' (Joyce 1960:253) his allegiance to the classical Daedalus until he blots out 'his mother's sobs and reproaches [which] murmured insistently' and rids himself of the haunting 'image of his mother's face' (Joyce 1960:224). The parallels between these autobiographical novels, separated by only nine years, point to a reading of Gosse's allusive practice as proto-Modernist in its implications: I shall discuss this in my Conclusion.

In view of Bowes' public voice as a writer for *The Mothers' Friend*, Gosse's compulsion to orphan himself metaphorically is telling. In that publication, Bowes valorises the maternal role, warning readers against neglectful maidservants, for example, the nurse who let her charge's toes become frost-bitten (1854:189) or the 'ignorant' maid who mismanages a little boy on the tram (1856:34-35). In *Abraham*, she argues that the highest standard of maternal care is illustrated by Hannah's care of the Infant Samuel:

Hannah kept her Samuel at her side – she would not leave him with strangers ... she considered it her place to remain with him. Who can tell what injury to soul or body he

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<sup>129</sup> Just as Gosse reworks himself in multiple literary identities, so Stephen Dedalus casts himself as Edmond Dantès (from *The Count of Monte Cristo*), Byron, Christ and Daedalus.



might have sustained had he been consigned for a few weeks or even days to the care of thoughtless servants? (1855a:161).

In *Father and Son*, Gosse resists being the Samuel of Hannah/Bowes: in describing his own birth, Gosse emphasises that 'consignment' to a servant actually saved his life. He was, he claims, believed to be dead, and was 'laid, with scant care, on another bed'; it was only through the efforts of 'an old woman who happened to be there, and who was unemployed' that he was revived (2004:8). This story evokes intertextual parallels with the birth of Oliver Twist,<sup>130</sup> who is left 'gasping on a little flock mattress, rather unequally poised between this world and the next', until helped to breathe by 'a pauper old woman' (Dickens 2003:3-4). The Dickensian allusion invests Gosse with insecure origins; he accrues to himself the romance of Oliver Twist's mysterious parentage, while the anonymous old woman, who intervenes in both narratives, evokes the stock fairy-tale figure of the old crone or hag. More humbling for Bowes is Gosse's self-allusion to the illegitimate Oliver, since it casts her as Agnes, who was 'weak and erring' (Dickens 2003:455). Dickens evokes Oliver as the sacrificial lamb<sup>131</sup> through simile:

"Did he come quiet?" inquired Sikes.  
 "Like a lamb," rejoined Nancy. (2003:167)

while Gosse, through metaphor, *becomes* that very lamb:

[Bowes]: "Won't you take your lamb and walk with me?"

She became agitated, and she repeated two or three times: "Take our lamb, and walk with me!" (2004:44)

"Ah, poor lamb," Kate said trivially, "he's not long for this world" (2004:83)

[Mrs Paget] said that it grieved her to see "one lamb among so many kids." (2004:130)

To read Gosse as Oliver Twist is my own revisionary 'swerve' from the critical corpus, wherein Gosse is conventionally viewed as Pip (Allen 1988:480) or Paul Dombey (Newton 2004:xii). The revision forms part of a chain of associations with Dickensian orphans highlighted in the previous chapter, where Gosse casts himself as Sally Brass's ward, the pseudo-orphan,<sup>132</sup> the Marchioness, and by extension, with her orphan-lover, Dick Swiveller, whose quotation-filled speeches highlight the un-parented nature of allusion. My reading of Gosse as Oliver Twist furthermore receives confirmation from an unexpected quarter. Of Philip's notes prepared for *Rambles* some unused sections were reprinted in Gosse's 1890 biography of his father. One such note is Philip's description of how he boiled and ate some specimens of *Actinia* (sea-

<sup>130</sup> *Oliver Twist* was published from February 1837 to April 1839.

<sup>131</sup> 'He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter' (Isaiah 53:7).

<sup>132</sup> Gerald Grubb discusses a cancelled passage from *The Old Curiosity Shop* showing that although the Marchioness's parentage is left unresolved, Dickens originally intended to expose Sally Brass as her mother and Daniel Quilp as her father (1953:162-5).

anemone). Although he and his wife struggled with the 'sensation' of the strange meal, Philip comments that "My little boy, however, voted that 'tinny [*actinia*] was good," and that he "liked 'tinny"; and loudly demanded more, like another *Oliver Twist*' (1890a:242). Again, Philip's Romantic lexicon inadvertently fortifies Gosse against Bowes' principles.

*Oliver Twist* is the classic Romantic child: he is beautiful and pure but defenceless, a 'victim-hero'. Askesis demands self-purgation, and in this vulnerable role Gosse acquiesces to passivity. 'A fairy tale hero' writes Anny Sadrin, 'must pay the price of overprotection that will ensure the happy ending; he has no say in what happens to him'; he must 'trust his fate entirely into the hands of the almighty narrating authorities' (1988:146). Since Gosse is both narrator and subject, the effect of the Askesis is doubled. Gosse has placed himself in Bloom's Purgatorial limbo, and he must expect to undergo the pains of refinement. In the scene where Fagin suspects that Oliver has witnessed his stash of stolen jewellery, Fagin wields a bread-knife in a 'threatening manner' (2003:68), and Jarlath Killeen reads this incident as Dickens's reconfiguration of Abraham wielding the knife over Isaac (2009:64). This parallel recalls Bowes' valorisation of Isaac's willingness to be sacrificed, a trope expressed in her poem, 'Abraham's Temptation' (1832) discussed in Chapter One. Becoming *Oliver Twist* does not then immediately resolve the problem of Gosse's interpellation: the allusion may be a 'Twist[ed]' path that leads back to Isaac and the threat of Abraham's knife.

Having orphaned himself through a fictional allusion, Gosse must now construct a story of infancy and adolescence; for this purpose, he appropriates a factual source, *The Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, edited by Ernest Hartley Coleridge (1895). Since Gosse worked as William Heinemann's mentor and chief adviser during the 1890s (John St John 1990:14-15), he would have known this work, published by his firm. The work contains several letters from Coleridge to his long-standing friend, Thomas Poole, and those written in 1797, when Coleridge was twenty-five, recount anecdotes of his early family life; certain instances are echoed in Gosse's narrative of his own childhood. Coleridge, for example, explained to Poole that, aged only two, 'the circumstance of [his] first words' were quite dramatic; he had burned himself by picking up a live coal, and he remembers that 'while my hand was being dressed by a Mr. Young, I spoke for the first time (so my mother informs me) and said, "nasty Doctor Young!"' (E H Coleridge 1895:9).<sup>133</sup> This somewhat literary conceit of the precocious young Coleridge, the budding poet, who remained silent, until he suddenly spoke in fully articulated words, resonates in Gosse's account of himself:

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<sup>133</sup> Letter dated Sunday, 19 March, 1797.

It has been recorded that I was slow in learning to speak. I used to be told that having met all invitations to repeat such words as 'Papa' and 'Mamma' with gravity and indifference, I one day drew towards me a volume, and said 'book' with startling directness (2004:14).

Through this anecdote, which was sufficiently important to Gosse that he repeated it nineteen years later, in his introductory essay to Cox's Catalogue of his library,<sup>134</sup> Gosse not only subtly inserts himself into the literary canon, aligning himself with one of the great Romantic poets, but also affords himself a fairy-tale provenance.

In another letter dated 9 October 1797, Coleridge described the sense of superiority he felt over his peers:

[B]ecause I could read and spell and had, I may truly say, a memory and understanding forced into almost an unnatural ripeness, I was flattered and wondered at by all the old women. And so I became very vain, and despised most of the boys that were at all near my own age, and before I was eight years old I was a character. (E.H. Coleridge 1895:12)

Again, these sentiments are echoed in Gosse's recollection of his tenth year: when examined as to his suitability for baptism, he recollects how the elders testified to his precocity, claiming that his 'answers had been so full and clear . . . [his] acquaintance with Scripture so amazing, [his] testimony to all the leading principles of salvation so distinct and exhaustive' (2004:106), and when the church was divided over the issue of baptism for one so young, Gosse delights in the memory that 'a war of the sexes threatened to break out over me', the women being his strongest supporters (2004:104). Both youths felt superior in the company of their peers: Gosse recalls that 'the other little boys presently complained to Mary Grace that I put out my tongue at them in mockery, during the service in the Room, to remind them that I now broke bread as one of the Saints and that they did not' (2004:110). Like Coleridge, Gosse implies, he was a prodigy.

The parallels moreover do not end here. Coleridge describes how the *Arabian Nights* 'made so deep an impression on me (I had read it in the evening while my mother was mending stockings) that I was haunted by spectres . . . My Father found out the effect, which these books had produced – and burnt them' (1895:12). There is an uncanny similarity in Gosse's experience with Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*: reading the poem to his step-mother (who like Ann Coleridge, is busy with her needlework), Miss Brightwen abruptly confiscates the book, and later shows it to Gosse's father, who immediately burns it (2004:166-7). By these three

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<sup>134</sup> 'If I may be forgiven for the fatuity of speaking of my own childhood, I will begin at the beginning by telling my indulgent reader that my bibliophily was discerned in the age of bib and tucker, since it has been handed down that, refraining until rather late from such elements of speech as "Mama" and "gee-gee," the earliest word I was known to utter was "book," laying my hand upon a specimen to show what I meant' (Cox 1926:xv). Note how the phrase 'begin at the beginning' echoes fairy-tale lexis.

parallels, it seems that Gosse appropriates anecdotes from Coleridge's childhood to dramatise the fairy-tale of his own life, rewriting his origins.

The appropriation of the childhood of Coleridge reiterates the centrality of Bowes' prohibition in Gosse's psyche. The issue of children's access to fairy-tales preoccupied Charles Lamb and Coleridge as they reviewed their childhoods in 1802: 'Think what you would have been now, if instead of being fed with Tales and old wives' fables in childhood, you had been crammed with geography and natural history?' (Lucas 1912:261). Lamb's exclamation, furthermore, encompasses those classic notions of fiction as 'feeding', a nurturing process. Gosse has hitherto been exposed to Bowes' discourse where the analogy for fiction was 'raw apples', that is, 'unwholesome food' and 'indigestible trash' (1855c:15-16). Gosse has for so long resented his mother's prohibition on fiction, that he answers back by thus modelling his early life on a poet whose early life was filled with fairy-tales, who was permitted to 'read through all the gilt-cover little books that could be had at that time, and likewise all the uncovered tales of Tom Hickthrift, Jack the Giant-Killer, etc, etc, etc, etc' (E.H. Coleridge 1895:11), tales which influenced his entire literary vision.

From a simplified perspective, the Bowes-Gosse struggle is a microcosm of the cultural divide between Bentham and Coleridge, between rationalism and Romanticism. This schism was articulated by J.S. Mill's influential pair of essays, *Bentham* (1838) and *Coleridge* (1840). In Chapter One, I situated Bowes as Benthamite, not only by the mechanical nature of her tracts, but also through the individualistic emphasis of her faith and her profound suspicion of Romanticism. For Bentham and for Bowes the purpose of reading is to determine whether a book is true or false: indeed, Mill claims that Bentham trained his followers to question 'any ancient or received opinion: Is it true?' (1962:99). The allusive resonances between Gosse's youthful experiences and those of Coleridge, on the other hand, situate Gosse in the Romantic tradition: Mill emphasises that Coleridge taught his acolytes not to focus on accuracy and principle, but to ask 'what is the meaning of it?' (1962:99).<sup>135</sup> Furthermore, according to Mill, Coleridge promoted the 'cultivation of learning', in particular, the maintenance of an essential balance between preserving traditions and encouraging social progress and innovation. Indeed, Coleridge's mode mimics the paradoxical working of allusion, its capacity to perpetuate tradition while simultaneously achieving 'innovation'.

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<sup>135</sup> 'Bentham judged a proposition true or false as it accorded or not with the result of his own inquiries; and did not search very curiously into what might be meant by the proposition, when it obviously did not mean what he thought true. With Coleridge, on the contrary, the very fact that any doctrine had been believed by thoughtful men. and received by whole nations or generations of mankind was part of the problem to be solved, was one of the phenomena to be accounted for' (Mill 1962:100).

The opposition is not, however, clear-cut: though Mill claims that Bentham and Coleridge resembled ‘inhabitants of different worlds’ (1962:101), he shows that their philosophies were complementary:

In every respect the two men are each other’s “completing counterpart”: the strong points of each correspond to the weak points of the other. Whoever could master the premises and combine the methods of both, would possess the entire English philosophy of their age. (1962:102)

When F.R. Leavis re-published Mill’s two essays in 1950, he emphasised Mill’s role in synthesizing the two positions: ‘as we follow Mill’s analysis, exposition and evaluation of this pair of opposites we are at the same time, we realise, forming a close acquaintance with a mind different from either - the mind that appreciates both and sees them as both necessary’ (1962:8). Real power derives from the complementarity and interdependence of the two philosophies. The oppositions of Bentham and Coleridge are moderated by Mill’s synthesis: this is characteristic of Bloom’s *Askesis*, an act of ‘narrowing the creative compass of precursor and ephebe alike’ (1997:119). Gosse himself implies that synthesis when he describes his library as his ‘workshop and playground . . . These books have been my tools and still are my companions’ (Cox 1924:xxii). Gosse’s act of grafting events from Coleridge’s childhood (a playful, sociable act) onto his Bowes-dominated ‘Benthamite’ upbringing (characterised by the ‘workshop’ with its ‘tools’) represents what Bloom claims is the final product of *Askesis*: ‘the formation of an imaginative equivalent of the superego’ (1997:119).

Bowes’ influence is thus diluted since Gosse-as-orphan is strengthened by his acquisition of new foster parents. Through his allusive practice he proclaims his fealty to the English literary tradition. In a letter to Robert Louis Stevenson (January 4, 1886), Gosse enthuses about his new ‘deity’:

This Mission is an outward and intelligible symbol to the public of that inward and inexplicable thing, the essential greatness of Literature. The individual *litterateur* is nothing, but Literature is everything. I grow a deeper idolator of this deity every day – the great books, the phrases of the great men, give me a more thrilling pleasure the older I live, seem more supernatural than ever, satisfy my nature more completely. And to touch the skirts<sup>136</sup> of this glory, live in the repletion of it, be conductors of the warmth of it, this is quite as much as religion! – again, I speak augur to augur. (Charteris 1931:184)

Gosse embraces the canon as his mentor and guide. Unable to slough off the custom of sonship, he refashions himself as a foster-child of Literature, ‘touching the skirts of this glory’; indeed, this graphic image conjuring obeisance reiterates Gosse’s deference. After the

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<sup>136</sup> Matthew 14:36: ‘And besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole’.

Bloomian struggle with Bowes, Gosse now embraces a Ricksian style of homage to his foster-fathers. By regularly reiterating 'the phrases of great men' across his oeuvre, Gosse signals his allegiance to the deity.

My discussion of the Apophrades, Bloom's sixth and final revisionary ratio, does not constitute for Gosse a fairy-tale-happy-ever-after ending. Although he has partially confronted his anxiety over Bowes' influence on him, he cannot relinquish the role of ephebe/foster-child. Bloom's term, Apophrades, refers to 'the dismal or unlucky days upon which the dead return to inhabit their former houses', a metaphor that represents the poet's final triumph of:

having so stationed the precursor in one's own work, that particular passages in *his* [or her] work seem to be not presages of one's own advent, but rather to be indebted to one's own achievement . . . The mighty dead return, but they return in our colours, and speaking in our voices. (Bloom 1997:141)

Gosse certainly understands this process for he recognises it in other writers:

The method of use of the classical poets by a master of such genius as Jeremy Taylor was either that he said, with their help, but by no means in literal translation, what had not been said in English before; or else that he transposed the style of the ancients into another style, entirely distinct from theirs and personal to himself. . . Taylor does not dream . . . of illustrating the ancient authors in any way; he forces them to illustrate him, generally very much indeed against their will, with haughty disregard of their intention. (Gosse 1904a:222-23)

Gosse describes Taylor's misreading of the classical poets: Taylor's version of the ancients permits his own 'distinct' voice to be heard. Gosse suggests that Taylor now dwarfs those precursors, so that we read them in his terms: 'he forces them to illustrate him' rather than vice versa. Gosse, however, does not achieve that final public triumph; Gosse's new-found literary freedom is present in *Father and Son*, but it does not constitute a complete Apophrades, since it is contained within the palimpsest. Allusion is a covert mode, and until it is worked by those four participants identified in my Introduction (reader, author, text alluded to, and alluding text) Gosse's voice is concealed. The liberation of that voice will be the task of Chapter Five. Before that, however, I will explore Gosse's attempt to assert his new allegiance to the canon through his allusive practice in *The Secret of Narcisse* (1892); this is an experience through which Gosse learns that the path of allusion can be a precarious one.

#### Chapter Four: Gosse's Open Secret: Testing the Boundaries of Allusion

Allusion eschews simple before-after hierarchies, for it is neither an original, a copy, a plenitude, nor the part for the whole, but connected parallels that take meaningfulness forward, and differently. Like an echo, it depends on the noise that makes it, but is no less a presence that resounds, reverberates, distorts, mocks or amplifies.

Mary Orr: *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts* (2003:139)

. . . vana diu visa est vox auguris: exitus illam resque probat letique genus novitasque furoris.<sup>137</sup>

Ovid: *Metamorphoses Book III*:349-50

In this chapter, I focus on a single text, Gosse's *The Secret of Narcisse: A Romance* (1892), which I will examine in the light of trends that have emerged thus far in my research. Gosse's titular emphasis on the genre of *Secret* as *A Romance* returns us to a key trigger of my dissertation: Bowes' outlawing of fiction. More than any other form of fiction, Victorian romance evinced the spurious, the unnatural, and the unreliable: by the end of the nineteenth-century, the genre had been 'revived and interpreted afresh' and in consequence emerged 'in a bizarre variety of forms: daydream, allegory, history, fairy-tale, horror-tale, psychological fantasy' (Beer 1970:66), all of which modes appear to some degree in Gosse's *Secret*. Gosse's embrace of fin-de-siècle romance not only challenged the legacy of Bowes' antipathy to fiction, but also marked his distance from Philip's idealistic Romanticism, which was for him an expression of the sublimity and awe of Creation. Gosse was adding his voice to 'what was arguably the most popular literary form of the fin-de-siècle'; 'romances were so commonly the best-selling novels of the period . . . that the genre itself became strongly associated with the taint of rank commercialism' (Ferguson 2006:54). By comparison with the novel, which at this time was dominated by psychological realism and preoccupation with social issues, the 'escapist' romance was also derided for its 'tendency to simplify and allegorise character, to offer tableaux instead of processes of choosing' (Beer 1970:69) and it is this static 'tableau' quality that George Saintsbury criticises in *Secret* in the *News Review*: 'We want a play, and we get a series of arras-pieces or cartoons – beautiful things enough, but sometimes a trifle inanimate' (1892:741). Being flagrantly extravagant, and having no social or moral function, the romance represents the antithesis of what both of Gosse's parents valued in the printed word. It appeals to Gosse, however, because 'like a dream, [romance] combines the fantastic and the factual' (Scheick 1994:29).

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<sup>137</sup> 'But what befell proved its truth – the event, the manner of his death, the strangeness of his infatuation' (Ovid 1977:149).

Gosse's apprenticeship in romance is illustrated by his now little-known stories (all of which I have mentioned in previous chapters), including *A Norwegian Ghost Story* (written 1871), a tale about apparitions and spectral wraiths; *Tristram Jones* (written 1872), a 'slice-of-life' narrative of an unsuitable coupling; *King Erik* (1876), the 'jealousy play';<sup>138</sup> *The Unknown Lover* (1878) a fairy-tale style 'testing' of a romantic heroine, and *The Unequal Yoke* (1886) a light romance marred by its tract-like stiffness. Most of these stories concern dysfunctional liaisons that do not end 'happily ever after' and as I shall show, the relationship between the lovers of *Secret* is also doomed. The fate of Narcisse, however, is more relentlessly tragic than any of Gosse's earlier protagonists, because the trajectory of the character's fate is driven by the force of allusion.

At the end of Chapter Three I proposed that Gosse, unable to extricate himself completely from Bowes' influence, alleges his fealty to the English literary tradition, a homage that he vigorously demonstrates in *Secret*. Indeed, Gosse depicts his protagonist, Narcisse, as a young man who is devoted to his mentor, 'never seeking to be himself a master'; with his 'clear imitative brain', Narcisse seeks only to impress, not to surpass his precursor (1892:12, 65). Narcisse remains always the ephebe, 'under the spell of his old idolatry' (1892:65) subjecting himself to his 'magic-working' master's influence and authority. It is as though in this tale Gosse is testing the role of the ephebe. The name of the eponymous protagonist, furthermore, immediately identifies the most dominant allusion in the novella: the myth of Narcissus. Gosse would have been well aware that by appropriating this myth, he was embracing not simply one legend but an entire intertextual network that had influenced writers since antiquity. As Louise Vinge (1967) shows, the myth was reconfigured by innumerable writers, including Guillaume de Lorris, Boccaccio, Dante, Shakespeare, Jonson, Calderón, and Goethe, to name but the most famous. Ovid represents poetic authority: allusion to his work has an authenticating function.

In fin-de-siècle circles, 'Narcisse était dans l'air' in various media (Genova 1994:7).<sup>139</sup> Gosse's friend, the painter-sculptor Frederick Leighton,<sup>140</sup> created a 'Narcissus Hall' in his sumptuously decorated South Kensington home. Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* conjures the myth both

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<sup>138</sup> Phrase used by Theodore Watts in his review of *King Erik* in the *Examiner*, 5<sup>th</sup> February, 1876, where he discusses the difficulties of characterising a jealous hero in relation to *Othello*. On the reprint of the play in 1893, Watts' review was prefixed as an Introductory Essay (1893:vii-xx).

<sup>139</sup> Quotation from Gide in interview with Jean Amrouche, 1949.

<sup>140</sup> Leighton's house served to represent his position as President of the Royal Academy and an exponent of the new aestheticism. In his retrospective survey of English sculpture in *The Art Journal* in 1894, Gosse nominated Leighton's *Athlete Wrestling with a Python* (1877) as the inaugural work of the 'New Sculpture'. Gosse argued that Leighton's sculpture marked a shift from Victorian pictorial representation to the Aesthetic expression of form and beauty (1894a:140).



by reference and by analogy.<sup>141</sup> In France, texts such as Gide's *Le Traité de Narcisse* (1891) and Valéry's *Narcisse parle* (1891), as well as paintings by Gustave Moreau (Fig. 7) and Jules-Cyrille Cavé, both completed in 1890, all use Narcissus to interrogate the limits of personal identity in terms of Aesthetic ideology. Indeed, just as Gosse's protagonist has a gender-ambiguous name, so it is unclear whether Gustave Moreau's strikingly epicene *Narcisse* is male or female. Gosse was fascinated by the Paris Symbolists at this time, and describes an occasion, in the company of Decadent writers and artists in 1893, when a poetess 'decorated us all with sprays of the *narcissus poeticus*' (1905b:185), the emblem of poetic self-awareness. The European Symbolists treated Narcissus as a metaphor for the poet's fate, reading the figure more sympathetically than Ovid had done. *Secret*, then, marks Gosse's decision to expose himself to the force of allusion, and in particular to a myth that strongly resonated among artists and writers in the early 1890s.



Fig 7



Fig 8

Before further discussion of *Secret*'s

allusive qualities, it is important to outline the plot of this little-known work. A tragedy, *Secret* is set in 1548 in the Barrois town of Bar-le-Duc, where within the course of one week, misunderstandings between two lovers, Rosalie Mercillat and Narcisse Gerbillard,<sup>142</sup> escalate into an act of judicial execution. Gosse characterises Narcisse as apprentice to the historical figure, Ligier Richier

<sup>141</sup> *Dorian Gray* was serialised in Lippincott's monthly magazine in 1890, and revised into novel format in 1891. Lord Henry tells Basil that the figure in the portrait 'is a Narcissus', Dorian recalls that Sibyl Vane 'shook like a narcissus', and Dorian kissed his portrait 'in boyish mockery of Narcissus' (1992:6, 62, 85). Dorian becomes 'proud, pale and indifferent' to Sibyl (whose suicide, precipitated by Dorian's rejection, echoes the death of the broken-hearted Echo) being in love with his own reflection (the portrait) (1992:69).

<sup>142</sup> Gosse initially uses the surname Gerbillon (1892:9,11, 12) but later adopts the form Gerbillard (1892:50, 95, 164, 168, 175), an inconsistency noted in *The Saturday Review* (1892:574).

(1500-67), the Lorraine sculptor famous for his figurative monuments, especially the transi-tomb<sup>143</sup> of René de Châlons (Fig.8), still extant in the church of Bar-le-Duc. Because Narcisse has failed his master's expectations, he is left behind to earn his living as a metal worker, while Richier moves his workshop to St.Mihiel. Although betrothed to Rosalie, Narcisse nurses strong affections for the Duke's trumpeter, who remains unnamed, as though anonymity is appropriate for an affection that is sexually taboo. The 'romantic' nature of this alliance is, however, overt: at the gala supper, for example, 'the trumpeter's large hand, brought emphatically, half caressingly down upon the knee of Narcisse,<sup>144</sup> filled him with a vague contentment of spirit' (1892:38). A virile, loud and gregarious character, the trumpeter shows up by contrast Narcisse's child-like innocence, and his isolation within the community. Narcisse, desperate to establish his artistic reputation in order to regain Richier's approval, becomes preoccupied by his creation of the White Maiden, known also as the Musical Skeleton, a clockwork-operated figure that plays the zither. Gosse emphasises the deep psychological investment Narcisse makes in his creation. The jealous Rosalie, angered by Narcisse's lack of attention, misreads the situation, takes the White Maiden for a rival, and publicly accuses Narcisse of sorcery. Once the religious authorities are set in motion, Narcisse's descent towards death is remorseless.

Narcisse's skeleton invokes the medieval tradition of the Danse Macabre, where the female figure of personified Death summons representatives from all social classes to 'dance' to the grave. This allegorical figure had been revived during the early nineteenth century, particularly in France: there were facsimiles and cheap copies especially of Holbein's woodcuts, editions for bibliophiles, scholarly studies, preservation movements for the monumental versions and numerous retellings in the graphic arts and literature. Saint-Saëns' 'tone-poem' for orchestra, *Danse Macabre* (1874), further popularised the motif. Gosse's reading of Gautier, Baudelaire and de Banville during the 1880s and early 1890s, as attested in *French Profiles* (1905b:11, 117, 319, 362) is significant given that writings by all three explored the motif of the Dance of Death. In Gautier's melodramatic series of poems, *La Comédie de la Mort* (1838), the figure of Death is compared to a coquette, a queen who grasps the dead body tightly like a jealous spouse, while Baudelaire's poem *Danse Macabre* presents Death as a well-dressed woman at a ball (Kurtz 1934:247). In addition, the French symbolist poets were interested in Richier's medieval transi-tomb: one member of their group, Paul Valéry, inhabited a room in Paris in

<sup>143</sup> Kathleen Cohen points out that the noun, 'transi', derives from the Latin *transire* (*trans* – across and *ire* – to go) referring to the passage from life through death to the Resurrection (1973:8).

<sup>144</sup> This understated representation of male bonding was acceptable by 1892 conventions; at this time, the 'cultural machinery was consciously nurturing a less daring form of decadence for the masses' (Denisoff 2007:40).

1892 which was as severe as ‘a monk’s cell’: the only decoration was a photograph of the skeleton by Ligier Richier (Mackay 1961:54). The two sculptures in *Secret*, then, forge close links between Gosse and Symbolist/Aesthetic culture.

The reception of *Secret* was tentative. In a letter of 30 August 1892, Gosse’s friend, Henry James, tried to dissuade publication:

the precious pages are very graceful, very easy, and the incident is curious, naturally, and picturesque; but to speak frankly, I am not sure that a weaker pen than yours mightn’t, on the whole, were the publication anonymous, have carried off equally well the credit of having produced them.

[T]he old-fashioned, the *vieux jeu*, in your subject and treatment, constitute, for me, a bar to the last rapture. . . the English ‘historical-tale’ [has] for me, as a form, ceased to have any interest – it is too cheap!

I don’t think you should expect a success that will count much for *you*. . . The thing is extremely pretty and perhaps that is all you – or anyone – wants. (Horne 1999:251-2).

James’s subsequent letters to Gosse further betray his low opinion of *Secret*, diminishing it as a ‘little tale’ (September 1, 1892), and a ‘historical anecdote’ (September 3, 1892) (Moore 1988:88-9).<sup>145</sup> Other anonymous reviewers shared James’s reservations:

It is a very charming little tale for anyone to have written – critic or novelist or poet. (*St James’s Gazette* 1892:25)

Might not we rather call it a little genre picture, in the style of Alma Tadema? In its slight but adequate characterisation, its attention to detail, its carefully regulated medieval atmosphere, it has, from a literary point of view, the same merits – and perhaps the same shortcomings – as we detect in the great painter’s work. (*Black and White* 1892:611)

The list of favourable and enthusiastic comments about *Secret* that featured in the end pages of subsequent Heinemann volumes<sup>146</sup> subtly misrepresents the generally qualified and cautious critical response. This may be exemplified by the quotation from *The Saturday Review*, recorded in the promotional blurb as “Mr Gosse, with consummate art, elicits our sympathy, and has convinced us of the tremendous tragedy<sup>147</sup> The book resembles some delicate-finished, clear-coloured picture of the late Flemish painters[.]” but which originally read as:

<sup>145</sup> James’s reservations must be read in the light of his own ambivalence about romance. His critique of the genre is evident from his *Theory of Fiction* (1905-7), where he uses the famous metaphor of ‘the balloon of experience’, whose cable linking it to the earth is cut by the romancier, who then tries to make the reader not notice that this liberation from the laws of reality has taken place (Miller 1972:109).

<sup>146</sup> Reproduced on the back cover of the Amazon imprint of *Secret* (ISBN 9781500168377).

<sup>147</sup> The absence of punctuation here also betrays the manipulation of the original sentence.

The book resembles some delicate-finished, clear-coloured picture of the late Flemish painters with the perspective awry, which leaves the traces of the renaissance and decadence that set in almost simultaneously in Northern Europe. (1892:574)

To the present generation the charge of sorcery is always wanting in plausibility. We cannot get rid of its ludicrous side; but Mr Gosse with consummate art, elicits our sympathy, and has convinced us of the tremendous tragedy by the *method* of the accusation rather than by the accusation itself. (*The Saturday Review* 1892:575)

By withholding the qualifying clause, 'with the perspective awry', Heinemann/Gosse avoids the suggestion of something flawed; similarly the phrase 'consummate art' implies artistry rather than the reviewer's original intimation of Gosse's 'artfulness' in convincing the reader.

Although there was no outright condemnation of *Secret*, there is a vague sense of something indiscreet, even embarrassing, about the text: the 'imitation skeleton . . . is a *grotesque* idea' (*Athenaeum* 1892:736), the tale is 'weirdly picturesque' (*The Morning Post* 1892:2), and it has 'unsavoury details' (*Daily News* 1892:6) (italics mine). It is as though Gosse's immature appropriation of allusion imported into it connotations that went beyond his control; the situation recalls Anderson's comment, cited in my Introduction, that Gosse 'called from time's "vasty deep" spirits which he has not had the power to dispel' (1885:215). *Secret* exposes Gosse's insecure grasp of the workings of fiction, the legacy of Bowes' prohibition. In 1929 Rebecca West argued that critically *Secret* had been a casualty of 'the small minds of 1892' that said 'of a critic's creative work that, though he can pick holes in other people's work, he himself lacks the vital spark' (1931:94). Certainly, several reviewers were anxious to remind readers of Gosse's transition from critic to novelist, and his lack of experience in that genre:

As a writer of romance [Gosse] is new to most of us. His new book is not a very exciting nor a very ambitious composition. (*Pall Mall Gazette* 1892:3)

When a critic turns novelist both fellow-critics and fellow-novelists are apt to be extreme, or at least keen, to mark if anything be done amiss. This is a not unnatural, nor need it be put down to malevolence. It is first a result of the curiosity with which one watches the unaccustomed steps in a new course of a familiar figure in other walks. To this ordeal has Mr Gosse submitted himself with his new novelette, or rather romancelette, *The Secret of Narcisse*, and very well he comes out of it. (*St James's Gazette* 1892:25)

Though ostensibly praising *Secret*, the *St James's* journalist slyly undermines it by his playfulness over 'novelette' and 'romancelette',<sup>148</sup> both depreciatory terms; the suffix in both cases proclaims *Secret's* 'littleness', returning us to Henry James's original criticism. West's conclusion that 'so absolutely did [Gosse] accept the verdict of his ineptitude as a novelist that he never attempted fiction again' (1931:94) seems, however, to overstate the case. I suggest rather that the timing of *Secret* was problematic. Its allusions would carry Gosse into the

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<sup>148</sup> More commonly 'romancelet': 'a little romance'.

arena of Decadence, with all the associations of Wilde's trials and Beardsley's illustrations in *The Yellow Book*: as a result Gosse seems to have engineered *Secret*'s demise himself, not republishing it until 1917, as a 'New and Cheaper Issue' (Gosse 1917: frontispiece), by which date its dangerous associations had become less potent.

Usually prompt to send his new publications to friends, Gosse was dilatory in the case of *Secret*: he confessed to Stevenson<sup>149</sup> that 'it was a kind of shyness, of which I promise to have no second accession. For good or bad you shall have my books in future' (Charteris 1931:228). Gosse's summary of his novella, conveyed in a letter to Watts-Dunton, is furthermore remarkable for what it omits:

I am afraid the *donnée* of it was not transparent enough for less intelligent readers. What I meant to depict was the failure of sympathy between a girl of slight intelligence but very strong instincts and a man of comparatively feeble sexual powers, easily distracted by art. Her robust and fiery temper finds him cold, and she cannot understand it. So in a vague tumult of anger she brings the charge of witchcraft against him. (quoted by Thwaite 1984:311)

What is so arresting about this reductive account is that Gosse makes no reference either to Narcisse's relationship with the trumpeter with its strongly homoerotic undertones, nor to the central role of the mechanical skeleton. For Watts-Dunton, and by extension, his friend and charge, Swinburne, Gosse foregrounds instead the threatening nature of female sexuality, the force of female passion ('strong instincts') and her instinct to prohibit ('the charge'). Gosse's circumscribed reading of his own novella suggests a coded communication that reiterates the positioning of the female as 'Other', signalling the primacy of male bonding. As I have already suggested, there is nothing covert or hidden about Narcisse's relationship with the trumpeter, so the eponymous 'secret' must refer to the White Maiden, a female who is at the same time a 'non-woman'. The status of the White Maiden is suggested by Narcisse's riddle about her at the gala-supper: she is 'no man's maid who shall be all men's mistress' (1892:48). By this riddle, we understand the White Maiden to be female but without sexual function ('no man's maid') and therefore not threatening like Rosalie, but allegorically and artistically she is powerful ('all men's mistress'). *Secret*, then, is a text about homosexual desire and the associated role of the non-woman. Narcisse's riddle about the White Maiden, furthermore, is too obscure for the other guests at the gala: they become irritated by 'these enigmas' (1892:49). As Bennett and Royle point out, the etymology of the word 'enigma' derives from the Greek verb 'ainissesthai' meaning 'to speak allusively or obscurely' (1995:271) and this episode seems to enact the problem of *Secret* itself: Gosse's romance is too lightweight to bear the weight of its allusions.

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<sup>149</sup> Gosse's letter is dated 19 August 1893.

The primary allusion in *Secret* is of course the myth of Narcissus, whose fate not only resonates throughout Gosse's story, but determines its tragic course. Given the multiple Victorian appropriations and modernisations of the myth, each with its own nuances, I will paraphrase it from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book 3, beginning with Tiresias' prophecy that overshadows the story: the warning that Narcissus will achieve old age only if he does not come to 'know' himself. Despite his physical beauty, Narcissus seems to be indifferent to sex: he scorns the advances of both female and male. The distress of his female admirer Echo causes her body to turn into dust and her bones into stone, leaving nothing but a disembodied voice, while the angry male suitor prays to Nemesis that Narcissus be cursed by unrequited love. Out hunting, Narcissus comes upon a pool and leans over it to drink: perceiving his reflection in the water, he falls in love with it, believing it to be another person staring back at him. After some time, Narcissus realises that the loved one is only a reflection: he understands that the image is part of himself: '*iste ego sum*'<sup>150</sup>(*Met* 3.463).<sup>151</sup> The knowledge is overwhelming, but Narcissus is so enthralled that he cannot separate the reflection from himself. Like Echo, he pines away, yearning for an unattainable beauty. He is metamorphosed into a narcissus, and his spirit descends to the underworld, where he lies in the same fixed posture, contemplating his own watery image in the Styx. From Ovid's myth, then, *Secret* imports the traditional tropes of self-knowledge, beauty, arrogance, self-love, reverie, vengeance, and mortality as well as imagery of shadows, reflections and death.

The setting for *Secret* is 1548, a time of intense debate about the origins of art. Such debate often incorporated interpretations of Ovid's myth: in *De Pictura* (1436), for example, Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472) famously calls Narcissus 'the inventor of painting', asking 'What is painting but the act of embracing by means of art the surface of the pool?' (1991:61) while Tommaso Stigliani, the literary critic, read the Narcissus myth as a demonstration of 'the unhappy end of those who love their things too much' (quoted by Dillon 2014). Alberti's and Stigliani's 'acts of reading' imply that a reader, who believes in the depicted image so wholeheartedly that he identifies with it, confuses the boundary between reality and fantasy; since art, *ars*, means 'deception', Gosse's Narcisse is at the mercy of its illusion. Art theorists through the centuries struggled with Alberti's dictum, pointing out that Ovid describes Narcissus' reflection as simply a shadow, an 'umbra', something fleeting and insubstantial, and this metaphor, they protested, reduced art to mere 'trickery'. Ovid himself highlights the reflection of the pool as both true and deceptive: '*mendacem . . . formam*' (*Met*. 3.439).<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Translation: 'I am he'.

<sup>151</sup> For all references to *Metamorphoses*, I cite line numbers, taken from the version in the Loeb Classical Library, translated by F.J. Miller, 1977:149-161.

<sup>152</sup> Translation: 'lying form'.

What Ovid furthermore calls the 'simulacra fugacia' (*Met.*3.432)<sup>153</sup> draws attention to the role of light and shade in painting, that other artistic 'trick' of rendering three-dimensional form on a two-dimensional surface by modelling. From the Renaissance onwards, then, the figure of Narcissus constitutes the reflection that becomes the originating impulse for artistic creation; he represents an illusion, whereby art is divorced from 'reality' and associated with deception and trickery and he is associated with death, his dissolution in the watery pond. Gosse's story, then, imports into itself these complex and contradictory theories about the act of creation, 'rotating them so that they catch a new light' (Ricks 2002:33).

Gosse borrows several details (as italicised) from the scene in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* which depicts Narcissus beside the pond:

He looks in speechless wonder at himself and hangs there motionless in the same expression, like *a statue carved from Parian marble*. Prone on the ground, he gazes at his eyes, twin stars, and *his locks*, worthy of Bacchus, worthy of Apollo; on his smooth cheeks, *his ivory neck*, the glorious beauty of his face, the *blush mingled with snowy white*: all things, in short, he admires for which he is himself admired. (*Met.*418-424 italics mine)

At his first appearance in *Secret*, Narcisse's body is sculptural in its stillness: enraptured by Ligier's transi-tomb, he 'stand[s] motionless, in a reverie' (1892:23). Similarly, Narcisse has 'curling locks . . . of reddish hair' in which he 'took so much pride', and a pale complexion with the tendency to blush, 'very red for anxiety' (1892:25,175,48). Narcisse's paleness, reiterated six times in the text,<sup>154</sup> evokes Ovid's reference to *eburnea colla* (*Met.* 3.422).<sup>155</sup> Sarah Annes Brown observes that ivory is 'a type of bone, the dead trace of a once living creature' (2012:116) and this forges another association, albeit at one remove, with Narcisse's creation, since the White Maiden is created out of sycamore, also a once living material. Further parallels, such as Narcisse's hunting expedition by the river-meadows, and his 'veritable passion' for flowers (1892:61-2, 15) reinforce the connection between Ovid's Narcissus and Gosse's Narcisse.

Both Ovid's and Gosse's protagonists are constructed as shadows and reflections. Narcissus 'creates' an illusion by his belief in the substance of his own reflection, but he is doomed thereby to become an insubstantial 'shadow'. Vinge points out that Ovid uses both 'imago' and 'umbra' to describe the reflection that Narcissus sees in the water: 'the words for shadow and reflection remained interchangeable for a long time . . . they also stand for the 'shadows'

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<sup>153</sup> Translation: 'fleeting image'.

<sup>154</sup> Narcisse is a 'pale young man from the south': Gosse's repetition of the adjective seems deliberate. (1892:11, 111, 137, 152, 155, 175)

<sup>155</sup> Translation: 'ivory neck'.

of the dead' (1967:12).<sup>156</sup> Narcisse is not only insubstantial himself – on his first appearance, he is a 'slight shadow [that] seemed to flutter across the chapel' (1892:22) – but he is also the creator of artistic illusion (a deceptive appearance) in the form of his Musical Skeleton (an image of death). As discussed in Chapter Two, 'shade', 'shadow', and 'umbra' are resonant words in Gosse's personal lexicon. Not only is Narcisse subject to the institutional 'umbra' of religious authority, since his workshop is physically 'under the shadow of the great church' but he even arranges a tryst with Rosalie under the shadow of the 'awful symbol' of a colossal crucifix (1892:12, 17). Gosse's motto, 'gravis cantantibus umbra',<sup>157</sup> connotes the state of the artist, the singer, being overshadowed: in the case of Narcisse, those shadows are ecclesiastical jurisdiction and Rosalie's jealous spite.

Narcisse's mechanical sculpture is lovingly wrought out of sycamore wood and operated by clockwork. The figure literally springs into action whenever Narcisse triggers a performance, mimicking human behaviour by producing music:

[Narcisse] set a spring in motion between the ribs of his skeleton, and a buzzing sound was heard; then he bent one of the pendant arms upwards and confined it below the neck, settling the zither firmly within its grasp. He then bent the other arm lower down, so that its fingers touched, or nearly touched, the strings of the zither. Then he retreated to a distance of eight or nine feet, and put a flute to his lips. As he blew the first note, the fingers of the skeleton struck the same note on the strings of the zither, and continued to the end of the tune to accompany the flute with surprising exactitude. It was a very fine duet on the two simple instruments. (1892:122-23)

In this scene, sculptor and sculpture face each other, performing together in a synchronicity of sound and timing, and this mirroring conjures an Ovidian reflection. Narcisse plays the zither, a southern instrument hitherto unknown in Bar-le-Duc, which 'seemed in some sort the token of his alien fortunes' (1892:29) and this zither-playing counterfeit woman reflects and amplifies Narcisse's 'foreign' self. By reproducing in the White Maiden these features of himself, Narcisse evokes the Ovidian theme of self-love: 'uror amore mei: flammas moveoque feroque' (*Met.*3.464).<sup>158</sup> However, as Narcisse's double, the sculpture is an ominous signifier, given the belief that an encounter with one's double presages death. Herein reside echoes not only of Wilde's *Dorian Gray* but also of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's uncanny narrative, *St Agnes of Intercession*, where a young painter encounters his own double, and that of his fiancée, in the works of an Italian artist painted four hundred years earlier. Although Rossetti's

<sup>156</sup> Shade connotes death throughout literature, for example: Psalm 23, 'the valley of the shadow of death' or Shakespeare's Sonnet 18, 'Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade'.

<sup>157</sup> Translation: 'the shade is burdensome to those who sing'.

<sup>158</sup> Translation: 'I burn with love of my own self; I both kindle the flames and suffer them'.



tale is unfinished, the imagery of disease and mental disturbance that surrounds the encounter is highly suggestive of death.<sup>159</sup>

Narcisse is furthermore 'entrapped' by his obsession with the sculpture: when offered the chance to escape the threatening mob, Narcisse falters: "'I could not leave her behind" [and] he pointed to the Musical Skeleton' (1892:141). This infatuation with a sculpture conjures another Ovidian allusion, much retold in the nineteenth century: the story of the sculptor Pygmalion who fell in love with his ivory sculpture of a virgin.<sup>160</sup> His prayers for a wife that resembled his creation were answered by Venus, who duly brought the sculpture to life. Pygmalion's love is unnatural, while Narcissus's love is futile: though some critics contrast Pygmalion's 'amour de soi', an other-directed love, with Narcissus's fatal 'amour-propre', his inward-looking passion, many readers regard them as similar, since they both fall in love not with a true Other, but with images of the self. This uncertainty is imported into Gosse's tale, where it is unclear whether Narcisse's obsession with the White Maiden is motivated by virtue of her being his own creation or because she is in many ways a reflection of his own self.

One of the many retellings of Ovid's *Pygmalion* was a verse rendering, produced in 1821-25 by Thomas Lovell Beddoes,<sup>161</sup> a work that Douglas Bush described as 'the poem which most of [Beddoes'] critics have united in ignoring' (1937:193) but which Gosse praised as 'one of Beddoes' most ambitious exercises in narrative blank verse' (1894b:266). Gosse was thoroughly immersed in Beddoes' work during the 1880s and early 1890s,<sup>162</sup> and the fate of Gosse's Narcisse seems closer to that of Beddoes' Pygmalion than to that of Ovid's protagonist. Whereas Ovid's Pygmalion marries his metamorphosed sculpture and has a child

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<sup>159</sup> This text was begun in 1848 for inclusion in *The Germ* and taken up again in 1882 in an unsuccessful attempt to finish it before his death (Doughty 1949: 60, 663). Gosse and Rossetti were friends for many years: they had a high regard for each other, and their poetry was on one occasion considered to be similar. Gosse lectured on Rossetti in America (Thwaite 1984:997,138,247). Given their closeness it seems likely that Gosse would have read Rossetti's novella.

<sup>160</sup> Other texts such as *Roman de la Rose* link the figures of Narcissus and Pygmalion. Before his statue comes to life, when Pygmalion is miserable and frustrated, he announces that at least he is not like Narcissus who never could possess the image before him: 'I am in any case less of a fool, for when I wish, I go to this image and take it, embrace it, and kiss it: I can thus better endure my torment' (Knoespel 1985:102). Kenneth Knoespel observes that 'In contrast to Narcissus who sees only dead images of himself, Pygmalion generates living images' (1985:102). Gosse regarded *Roman de la Rose* as 'one of the most influential works which ever proceeded from the pen of man... it glowed like a fire, it flashed like a sunrise' (1905c:337).

<sup>161</sup> Gosse includes the poem, 'Pygmalion', in the section entitled 'Poems Collected in 1851' in *The Poetical Works of Thomas Lovell Beddoes* (1890b:20-27). I use this source for references to Beddoes' poem.

<sup>162</sup> Gosse made himself an 'authority' on Beddoes: in 1880, he wrote the Introduction to selected poems by Beddoes in T.H. Ward's *The English Poets*; in 1883, a biographical article on Beddoes in *The Athenaeum*; in 1885, an entry on Beddoes in *The Dictionary of National Biography* and in 1890, Gosse wrote the preface to *The Poetical Works of Thomas Lovell Beddoes*. At the time when Gosse was writing *Secret*, he was also editing *The Letters of Thomas Lovell Beddoes*, eventually published in 1894.

called Paphos (*Met.* 10.297), Beddoes' ending is more ambivalent, implying that the sculpture absorbs Pygmalion into itself. She, 'the loved image' has been fashioned from Pygmalion's imagination, 'his breast', and 'therefore loves he it': this echoes the notion discussed above of the sculptor loving his creation because it is essentially 'part' of him. The cost of this identification with the sculpture is that Pygmalion's soul is sucked out of him: 'Is there not gone/ My life into her, which I pasture on; /Dead where she is not?' (Gosse 1890b:25-26). Christopher Ricks's reading of Beddoes' verse emphasises the sense of oneness between creature and creator: the poem, he argues, ends with 'the sweet woman-statue clasping the dead body which had given her life, had given her its life' (1987:138). Although critics are divided<sup>163</sup> as to whether Pygmalion finally dies or not, Beddoes implies that the state of obsession with an animated sculpture devastates his existence. Beddoes' Pygmalion is reduced to a wretched condition comparable with that of the imprisoned Narcisse, who is 'sunken on his straw' (1892:189); Pygmalion's 'foot is stretching into Charon's barge/ Upon the pavement ghastly is he lying' (Gosse 1890b:27). Just as Beddoes' Pygmalion and his sculpture become finally and ominously fused, so Narcisse and his skeleton become 'one' in their analogous fates: Narcisse is condemned to be 'strangled and burned' while the White Maiden was 'broken up and burned' (1892:180,189). The parallels return us full circle to Ovid's Narcissus: 'nunc duo concordēs anima moriemur in una' (*Met.* 3.473).<sup>164</sup>

However sympathetically Narcisse and Pygmalion are portrayed, there is always a sense of disquiet about the animation of an object. To fin-de-siècle readers, the clockwork animation of the sculpture would have connected with widespread concerns about the technologizing of all aspects of Victorian culture, religious, industrial and social. Its resemblance to such figures as the Death skeleton that strikes the hour on the Prague Astronomical Clock (1410) or even more ominously, to the 'Iron Maiden', a metal or wooden torture device associated with the Spanish Inquisition, used to extract confessions from blasphemers and heretics, gave it macabre connotations. Notorious through literary allusion rather than by historical evidence, the Iron Maiden, created as an effigy of the Virgin Mary, was controlled by a concealed mechanism so that

when set in motion . . . the figure extended its arms, as though to press someone most lovingly to its heart . . . the prisoner was led to her embrace; she drew him nearer and nearer, pressed him almost imperceptibly closer and closer, until the spikes and knives just pierced his chest'. (Abbott 2012:281-2)

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<sup>163</sup> Some commentators read the ending as Pygmalion's death (Thompson 1985:99; Bush 1937:194), while others argue that the oblique nature of the ending precludes a definite interpretation (Brown 2002:166; Guy-Bray 1998:468).

<sup>164</sup> Translation: 'we two shall die together in one breath'.

The simultaneity of the victim's embrace and his death echoes the eerie mechanical function of Narcisse's 'White Maiden' and the sculptor's passionate identification with it, bringing his death in its wake. Indeed, in literature the process of animating a statue usually results in the contamination of the person who releases the sculpture from its stillness:

one reflex of such an unbinding is that this condition begins to bind the living, to infect them with the silence, opacity, materiality or formality that the animated statue has – at least in part – renounced. Giving a statue life becomes a transgression, a piece of violence, an act that must be paid for by a death, or at least (and this can feel deathly enough) a radical transformation of the terms of what we call life. (Gross 2006:115)

Gosse's Narcisse and Beddoes' Pygmalion transgress spiritually in their obsession with an inanimate object. Gosse taints Narcisse with a note of uncertainty at the end, not only through Rosalie's mistrust of Narcisse's spiritual state: 'though she loved the man, she did not wish the sorcerer to touch her', but even having Narcisse doubt himself: 'I have come to think that I may have been - what they say I am' (1892:188, 187). Narcisse must pay for the 'violence' of animating his sculpture.

As well as such pervasive allusions, *Secret* has at its heart a very specific allusion to a Renaissance emblem comprising a device or 'pictura' of Death personified and a text or 'subscriptio' taken from Petrarch's *Triumphus Mortis* (1470). Emblem-books were best-sellers during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; the genre was utilised for moral, religious, or political purposes. Individual emblems operate by their constituent parts being taken out of context: the visual and verbal references have little or no meaning and their conjoined significance has to be deduced by the viewer, so, rather like an allusion, it becomes a catalyst for private meditation. Gosse's statement that the drawing 'had a meaning which [Narcisse] kept to himself' invites the reader of *Secret* to 'decode' the emblem in relation to his protagonist. The effect of the discordant relationship between 'subscriptio' and the 'pictura' anticipates a similarly disruptive combination of text and image in *The Booklovers' Edition of Father and Son*, which I will discuss in Chapter Five.

The emblem makes explicit a pictorial source for the female skeleton: pinned onto the wall of Narcisse's room is 'a drawing in sanguine', a picture that Richier had given Narcisse because 'of the impassioned interest [Narcisse] had always shown in it' (1892:108).

It represented two soldiers, in Florentine dress, lying dead, side by side, in what seemed to be heather or fern, since their bodies were sunken in it. They had, apparently just been slain suddenly by a skeleton which had come behind them, and which was even now dancing with rage above them, and brandishing in its fingers a small dagger. The skeleton was female, for its hair was flowing in the wind, still uplifted by the speed with which its owner had descended the long brae-side which sank from a little turreted city far away up in the background, against the sky. The

cere-cloths, which had enfolded the bones, were flapping elegantly and conventionally around the skeleton, like narrow banners or like strap-work in a decorated ceiling. Underneath the drawing were scrawled some Italian verses—

Era miracol novo a veder quivi

Rotte l'arme d'Amor

the rest illegible. What it all meant might have puzzled the most learned emblemist at Venice<sup>165</sup> or Lyons.<sup>166</sup> To Narcisse it had a meaning which he kept to himself, and in the melancholy refinement of which he found the satisfaction of his temperament. (Gosse 1892:108-09).

The 'subscriptio' is not only incomplete but also misquoted. The full verse reads 'Era miracol novo a veder ivi/Rotte l'arme d'Amore, arco e saette, e tal morti da lui, tal presi e vivi'<sup>167</sup> (Petrarch 1859:371). The context for this verse is Petrarch's passion for Laura: the opening stanza praises her beauty and modesty, claiming that she has defeated Cupid - with his 'arco e saette' - and has taught her followers how to convert illicit love into chaste affection. This theme seems to bear little relationship to the image of the vengeful skeleton. Indeed, the 'wit' of the emblem genre was to juxtapose normally discrete traditions, the apparent discrepancy being intended, says John Manning, to achieve 'a mutually illuminating flash of understanding' (2002:26). The emblem produced 'a new significance hitherto unsuspected in the previous life of the image' and the text is 'what does the work in making the [wood]cut convey the meaning' (Manning 2002:86). Although the image was intended to catch the reader's attention and arouse curiosity, it was the verbal argument that took priority (2002:90). As suggested above, the emblem requires 'activation' by the reader, and in this regard it resembles an allusion.

The image in Narcisse's emblem evokes the late medieval tradition of the Danse Macabre, as discussed above. Narcisse's image seems to be an example of a type of woodcut executed in various forms to illustrate Petrarch's *Triumphus Mortis*. In the three illustrations of this scene pictured below (Fig. 9 a-c), all show the scythe-bearing female skeleton with hair streaming in

<sup>165</sup> Venice was a centre of emblem book production: between 1500 and 1523 the Triumphs of Love, Chastity and Death were illustrated with vignettes and wood engravings by Zoan Andrea Veneziano (Green 1870:55).

<sup>166</sup> (Lyon was historically spelled 'Lyons'). This allusion reflects Gosse's knowledge of the medieval publishing industry. Alison Saunders explains that from 1545, Lyon overtook Paris as the centre for the production of emblem books. As well as a strong literary and printing fraternity in Lyon, there were two energetic publishers, Jean de Tournes and the Venice-trained Guillaume Roville, who developed the form of emblem books to widen the target audience. 'Lyon was not just the intellectual, but also the trading capital of the country. With its excellent geographic situation, its regular trade fairs, Lyon quite naturally looked outward toward Europe for its commerce. . . in Lyon emblem books were created and tailored to target as wide a European market as possible' (1993:78). Traditionally an emblem comprised three parts, an image, a quotation, and a motto, but Narcisse's emblem lacks its motto or 'inscriptio'.

<sup>167</sup> 'It was a miracle on earth to see /The bows and arrows of the deity/ And all his armour broke' (Petrarch 1859:371).



Fig. 9a

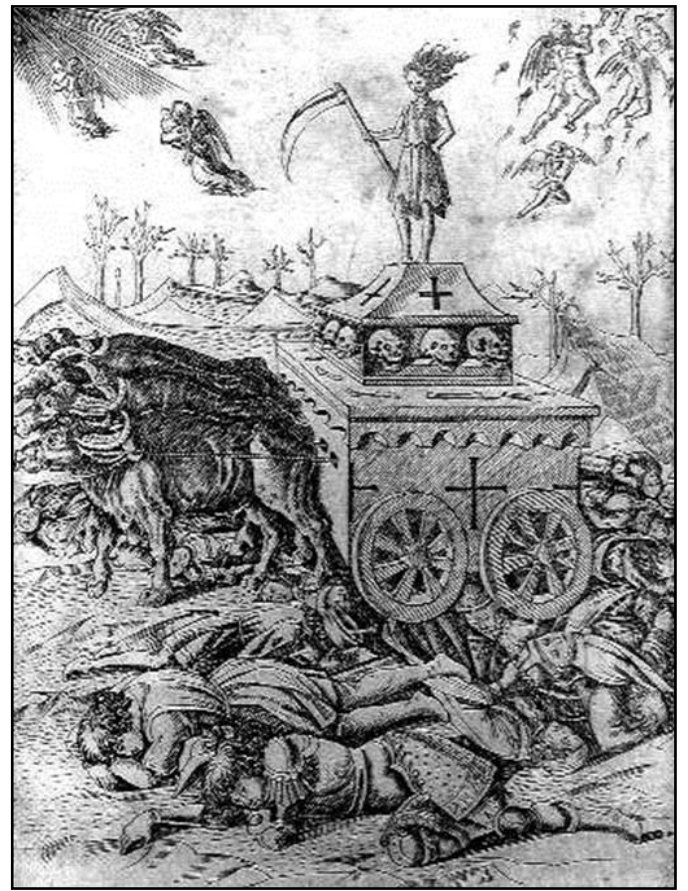


Fig. 9b

the wind. The first image, (Fig. 9a) from the *Predica dell'Arte del Bene Morire*, uses traditional iconography, emphasising that Death's victims represent a cross-section of society: peasant, patrician, pope and nun. The second image, from the Countess of Pembroke's translation of Petrarch's *Trionfo della Morte* (Fig. 9b)<sup>168</sup>, also features Death with her streaming hair, but it is closer to Narcisse's 'drawing in sanguine' since two male figures, possibly soldiers,<sup>169</sup> lie in the foreground; this represents a departure from the customary depiction of socially

<sup>168</sup> The *Trionfo della Morte* is the 1595 translation of Petrarch's 1470 *Triumphus Mortis*.

<sup>169</sup> The costume worn by the figure nearest to the viewer suggests that he is a Florentine soldier given the style of the armour, particularly the fluted loin-guard, which is similar to that worn by the infantry commander in 'Portrait of a Man in Armour' (c. 1510) attributed to Francesco Granacci (1469/70-1543). We know Granacci's figure is Florentine because he stands in front of the Palazzo della Signoria. (Dunkerton 1991:98-99).

representative figures exemplified by Fig. 9a. I shall discuss these two figures in more detail below. The third image, from Bernard Quaritch's edition of the works of *The Italian Engravers of the Fifteenth Century* (Fig. 9c), evinces buildings that resemble Gosse's 'little turreted city far



Fig.9c

away up in the background' (1892:109).

While specific features may differ between these images and Narcisse's picture, there is sufficient congruence to establish the latter within the traditional iconography of the Triumph of Death. So what stimulates Narcisse's 'impassioned interest' in his 'emblem'? It seems to embody the extremes of the feminine spectrum: in the 'pictura' the skeletal figure of Death wreaks her vengeance with energy and fury, while in the 'subscriptio' the chaste figure of Laura wields her power with calm and confidence. Whether violent or calm, however, both figures are essentially spectral, and it seems to be this quality of bloodless insubstantiality that Narcisse seeks in the female form, hence his creation of the White Maiden. This returns us to the coded meaning in Gosse's letter to Watts-Dunton, which distances the female as 'Other'.

Narcisse's fascination with the spectral female seems to fuel his discomfiture with Rosalie's sexuality. Gosse's allusion to Zola's romance, *La Fortune des Rougon* (1871), makes Narcisse's uneasiness in this regard particularly poignant. The custom of Narcisse and Rosalie to walk 'so lover-like under one ample cloak' (1892:104) is an allusion to Zola's discussion of the 'ample



cloak' or pelisse worn by mid-nineteenth century Provencal working-class women.<sup>170</sup> When Miette Chantegreil met her lover Silvère Mouret, she 'opened her huge warm pelisse . . . and threw one of its folds over Silvere's shoulders, covering him completely, drawing him to her. They put their arms round each other, becoming, as it were, a single person' (2012:15). Zola emphasises the romantic bond both symbolised by, and facilitated by, the cloak:

The girl has only to open her cloak and clasp her sweetheart to her in her ready-made hideaway . . . they can spend whole evenings arm-in-arm in public without the slightest risk of being recognised and pointed at.

The couples know they are well hidden; they talk in undertones and feel at home in their little worlds; most often they walk for hours in silence, at random, content in their embrace within the same piece of calico. It is both voluptuous and virginal. (2012:17)

Gosse gives this traditionally female garment to Narcisse; its 'southern' provenance, like the zither, signals his foreign character. Although Narcisse echoes Zola's sentiments of being like 'a single person', he and Rosalie are separately preoccupied by a 'diversity of thoughts': ' "let us walk along as we are used to do – swing, swing, swing – so that we seem to make one person and not two" ' urges Narcisse, ' "let us march, march" ' (1892:104). Such military-style repetition is, however, ominous, an eerie prediction of how Narcisse will soon be 'marched' between halberdiers to court (1892:165-6) and will 'swing for' his crime. The activation of this allusion, forging the association between the pelisse, which Zola says 'is a form of dress that must date back many years' (2012:13), and Narcisse's southern heritage, is unsettling; this symbol of amatory union in Zola's text becomes an image of sinister division in Gosse's.

In seeming opposition to the female skeleton, Rosalie is characterised throughout as a blood-driven character: her passion and sexuality vie with her jealousy and rage. On her first appearance in the text Rosalie is described as 'carrying an even flow of healthy blood under the creamy pallor of her complexion' (1892:2). Although the lovers share a pale complexion, Rosalie's 'pallor' barely conceals her passionate nature. Narcisse's paleness associates him with the White Maiden, while Rosalie's burgeoning sexuality separates her from both. A somewhat bizarre Romance triangle ensues: Rosalie, disturbed by Narcisse's preoccupation, assumes that the White Maiden is a rival lover. Indeed, when Rosalie spies on Narcisse playing music with the White Maiden, 'what she saw, made her blood run scarlet behind her eyes' (1892:79); the common Gothic idiom of one's blood running cold as an expression of horror

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<sup>170</sup> Andrew Lang notes this connection in his letter to Gosse, 25 June, 1894: 'You get the strolls and the cloak from *La Fortune des Rougon*, or might have'. Unpublished letter in Brotherton Library, quoted by Demoor (1987:503)

and dismay<sup>171</sup> is inverted here thus reiterating Rosalie's passion. The irony is that Rosalie's suspicion is not entirely spurious: Narcisse is abnormally obsessed with his creation, unthinkingly affording it emotional qualities, describing it/her as 'stubborn' and 'obstinate' (1892:124-5). In contrast with his anthropomorphising of the sculpture, Narcisse seems to wish that Rosalie was more 'mechanical', since her ardency unnerves him: Narcisse catches 'thrown full at himself, that fiery, tender gaze of [Rosalie's] which often troubled him, so little did he feel able to respond to the self-abandonment it hinted at' (1892:59). Certainly, Narcisse is more comfortable with the White Maiden's sightless hollows than with Rosalie's 'burning eyes . . . full of love' (1892:118); he flinches at Rosalie's blossoming womanliness, preferring his

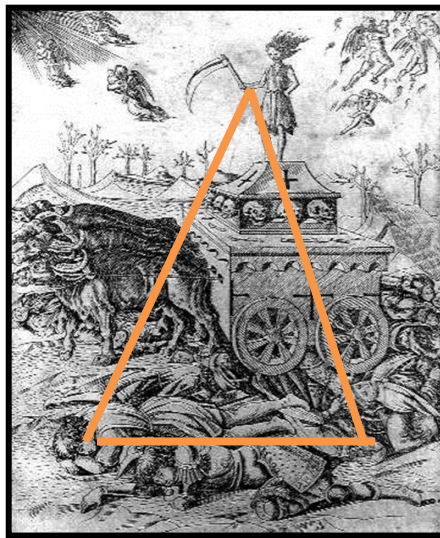


Fig.10

sculpture's clean impassivity. This 'love triangle' thus echoes Ovid's story: Narcissus /Narcisse rebuffs the 'incaluit'<sup>172</sup> Echo /Rosalie preferring his own reflection /sculpture (*Met.* 3.371). Both Echo and Rosalie lack oral independence: just as Ovid's Echo is unable to articulate her desire, permitted to 'speak' only indirectly, so Rosalie feels constrained from expressing to her lover her fear of abandonment. By the time she finally makes her accusation against Narcisse, Rosalie looks 'like the very Witch of Endor' (1892:87);<sup>173</sup> she has adopted the voice of another.

The pictorial allusion of Petrarch's *Triumphus Mortis* supplies the paradigm for another 'love triangle' in *Secret* (Fig. 10). In the description of the drawing Gosse gives prominence to 'the

<sup>171</sup> Jane Austen parodies such Gothic phrases in *Northanger Abbey*: 'Catherine's blood ran cold with horrid suggestions' (1995:176).

<sup>172</sup> Translation: 'inflamed'.

<sup>173</sup> The Witch of Endor is a medium who conveys the voice of the dead Samuel to Saul (1Samuel 28, v3-25). This allusion reinforces Gosse's Othering of the female in *Secret*: Amigoni argues that Victorian science often constructed superstition and religion as 'waywardly feminine' (2007:176).



two soldiers, in Florentine dress, lying dead, side by side' (1892:108). The image from the Countess of Pembroke's translation encourages a visualisation of their horizontal postures, imitating each other, looking more like peaceful sleepers than corpses, and at the apex of the triangle is the brooding female figure. It is as though the homosexual union is facilitated by the presence of the 'other', the non-woman. The paradigm of another Ovidian artist, Orpheus, constitutes an intertextual echo here: Orpheus' wife Eurydice becomes a 'non-woman' in the shadows of the underworld, and as a result, Orpheus 'shunned all love of womankind' and instead 'giving his love to tender boys, and enjoying the springtime and first flower of their youth' (*Met.* 10: 79-80, 84-85). This triangle is echoed in the text when Narcisse imagines himself with the trumpeter and the White Maiden:

No! he would never sell it. His maiden should never play with anyone else than with himself. Except perhaps, with his *dear friend* the trumpeter; and he smiled to think of the figure with its *docile* white bones accompanying the *brazen* notes of the trumpet, while Narcisse stood by anxiously superintending and applauding. (1892:127 italics mine)

In his vision, the trumpeter is insistently masculine, the word 'brazen' denoting his brass instrument but also connoting shameless, blatant behaviour, while Narcisse's subservient role emphasises his effeminacy. The White Maiden here functions as the facilitator of that relationship: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick observes in *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (1986) that a key feature of the Gothic genre is that the self is 'massively blocked off from something to which it ought normally to have access' (1986:12) and that the truth is often exposed through an artefact, such as a key that unlocks a concealed chamber or a document that reveals a secret history. In *Secret*, of course, that artefact is the White Maiden.

'To Narcisse [the Petrarchan drawing] had a meaning which he kept to himself, and in the melancholy refinement of which he found the *satisfaction of his temperament*': it is notable that the only other time that Narcisse achieves such mental calm is in the company of the trumpeter whose caressing hand 'filled [Narcisse] with a *vague contentment of spirit*' (1892:109,38 italics mine). The other link between the drawing and the trumpeter is through blood: the drawing is 'in sanguine'<sup>174</sup> and the trumpeter is a 'red-blooded braggart child of the Barrois', memorable for his narration of the legend of the blood-filled hanap (1892:108, 38, 41-43). He is a 'laughing Esau' (1892:39); Esau's nickname is 'Edom' (name of the land where Esau settled) meaning 'red' (Hebrew: *`admoni*) and Esau was known for selling his birth-right for a

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<sup>174</sup> 'Sanguine' is a reddish-brown chalk resembling the colour of dried blood. Given Gosse's preoccupation with Philip's use of carmine, and the 'ruby-coloured point of his 'Mazeppa dream' in *Father and Son* (see pp. 78-80), Gosse seems to evince a peculiar fascination for the colour red. This images features also in Gosse's criticism, for example, he describes Thomas Amory's life as 'a streak of crimson on the grey surface of the eighteenth century' (1891:218).

‘mess of red pottage’.<sup>175</sup> This association with the colour of blood is further reinforced by the trumpeter’s ‘vermillion feather’ and his gift to the imprisoned Narcisse of the flask of wine, ‘a red tributary’ (1892:60, 165). In Sedgwick’s terms, the drawing is another ‘artefact’ that reveals a poignant truth in the narrative.

Another ‘love triangle’, this time between Rosalie, Narcisse, and the trumpeter, emerges in the scene where Rosalie joins Narcisse and the trumpeter outside the workshop. Narcisse is in a ‘trance of composition’ sketching his friend, while the trumpeter poses, ‘in an attitude of studied and exaggerated grace, perfectly immovable’ (1892:57): the two men are united by their (sculptural) stillness, like the two Florentine soldiers who are affixed ‘in sanguine’. Rosalie is isolated at the ‘apex’ of the triangle, since she ‘did not so much as exist’ in the eyes of the trumpeter, while Narcisse is ‘troubled’ rather than tempted by Rosalie’s ‘fiery, tender gaze’ (1892:59). Rosalie’s presence, being thus denied, ironically reinforces the connection between the two men: Sedgwick comments in *Between Men* (1985) that women are used ‘as exchangeable, perhaps symbolic, property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men’ and she refers to Levi-Strauss’s argument that ‘the total relationship of exchange which constitutes marriage is not established between a man and a woman, but between two groups of men, and the woman figures only as one of the objects in the exchange, not as one of the partners’ (1985:25-6). Rosalie correctly senses that she is an exchangeable object, but she mistakes the identity of her rival. She fails to look beyond the White Maiden (the reflection of Narcisse) to the trumpeter (who constitutes reality *for* Narcisse).

Through his allusions, Gosse has imported into *Secret* this compositional structure of the triangle, which I shall now use to structure other reflective relationships in the novella. Another triangular scenario constitutes three figures, two of which are sculptural: Richier’s transi-tomb of René de Châlons is set at the apex of the triangle, while at the base are Narcisse’s White Maiden, and Anne of Lorraine, the Duchess of René de Châlons (See Appendix Six). All three figures inhabit the threshold between life and death, hovering on the brink between animation and stasis. Both sculptures are skeletal yet they manifest signs of human life: Narcisse activates his White Maiden to play the zither, and Richier eschews the classic horizontal pose for a tomb-figure, adopting a stylised standing posture. Anne of Lorraine, trapped in the ritual of grief, is reduced to symbolic and repetitive acts, almost mechanical in their exactness of timing – every Monday ‘at an hour before sunset, the unhappy Duchess reversed the order of her terrible pilgrimage’ (1892:4). Her life and body thus become robotic,

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<sup>175</sup> And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom (Genesis 25:30).

while the two sculptures become animated. The reflections between the three figures are reinforced by mirroring images and symbols.

Richier inhabits the apex of my triangle, since he is 'the master' of Narcisse, and he sculpts the transi-tomb of René de Châlons, who is Anne's 'master'. Richier's sculpture imitates the decaying corpse of René de Châlons buried below it; the decomposing flesh of Richier's sculpture gestures at Ovid's evocation of Narcissus' slowly dissolving form, 'liquitur et tecto paulatim' (*Met.* 3.490).<sup>176</sup>

Carefully carved out of two blocks of the creamy white stone of St Mihiel, and relieved against an ermine-dotted shroud of black basalt, a statue of the skeleton of the soldier-prince, whose actual bones were growing green within the tomb below, leaped into the light. At his own special desire, the prince was represented not as he was when he died, but as he would be three years after his decease – that is to say, with the osseous structure still lightly covered, here and there, as by veils of gauze and webs of gossamer, by the last filaments of skin and flesh. (Gosse 1892:23-24)

The left hand of the sculpture is 'outstretched above the head to its full length' and 'in the uplifted hand was held a small box of chased silver, empty at present, but destined to receive the heart of Anne of Lorraine upon the decease of that princess' (1892:24). By this gesture, the transi-tomb seems inextricably to anchor to itself the two figures at the base of the triangle: Narcisse (who is 'present' through his identification with the White Maiden) and the Duchess. Narcisse's posture, on his first appearance in the text, has his 'hand and arm raised in a wide gesture' mimicking that of René de Châlons' cadaver-figure. It is as though Narcisse is so fixated on impressing Richier that he is himself physically becoming Richier's statue. Anne of Lorraine is anchored to the cadaver by an equally macabre route: the awaiting empty silver box. This is Gosse's fictionalisation of the historical artefact: Cazin (2008:32) and Cohen (1973:178) both confirm that Richier placed a sculpted model of de Châlons' own heart in that outstretched hand, whereas Gosse invents the empty casket. By this shift, Gosse asserts the 'umbra' of the legacy of the dead being imposed on the lives of surviving 'loved ones', an allusion to the 'weight, intolerable as the burden of Atlas' that Bowes laid on Gosse as a 'little fragile child' (2004:44). The petrified René de Châlons, set against the '*shroud* of black basalt' leaves behind his grieving wife who, 'entirely *shrouded* in black flowing garments' (1892:23, 3), has no other function than to supply the heart that will finally complete the sculpture.

As discussed above, Gosse emphasises the master-apprentice relationship between Richier and Narcisse, and this is reiterated in the artistic traditions represented by their respective sculptures. Richier's transi-tomb may be interpreted as a Bloomian 'misreading' of the medieval tradition of 'memento mori'; the transi-tomb is an innovative creation that

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<sup>176</sup> Translation: 'he slowly pines away'.

represents a new Renaissance sophistication and modernity. Philippe Ariès notes that by the late medieval period the customary horizontal pose of the sepulchre becomes vertical, as if 'the pull exerted on the recumbent figure, drawing it out of its framework of repose, was that of life' (1985:56). The depiction of putrefying flesh is 'no longer an emphasis on humiliation and punishment for sin, but merely a necessary prelude to man's final triumph, his resurrection and glorification' (Cohen 1973:170). Richier's use of precious marble and heraldic arms reiterates this new desire to commemorate de Châlons' worldly glory. By contrast, Narcisse looks back a century to the tradition of the 'danse macabre', as illustrated by his attempt to make the White Maiden dance:

'I tried to make her dance as well as play, like those skeletons that are painted on the rood-screen at St Mihiel,<sup>177</sup> that take their rebecks and fifes, and foot it, foot it, so merrily in a country galliard. But I could not contrive it. She was too stubborn. I could not teach her feet to learn the saraband, and so, to punish her, I fixed them down so tightly to this board that they will never stir, however madly she rattles on her zither' (1892:124-25)

In the 'danse macabre', the role of Death was to summon an individual to dance to his/her grave, but Narcisse disables his skeleton, preventing it from fulfilling that appointed role. This act conjures notions of death and sex by two associations. Firstly, it echoes Ovid's transformation of the maenads who, angry with Orpheus for his scorn of their sex, dismember him, and in punishment their feet are similarly 'fixed' to the ground (*Met.* XI:67-84), and secondly it is associated with preventing the erotic sarabande, a dance considered disreputable in sixteenth century Spain, reiterating the link between femininity and unwelcome sexuality.

The transi-tomb and the White Maiden reflect each other in their impulse to animation: Richier's sculpture 'seemed vitalised and elastic. It was Death itself but in an ecstasy of life' (1892:24), a life-likeness that uncannily prefigures the final humanising impulse of the White Maiden, during the scene of Narcisse's trial. The White Maiden is presented as 'evidence' of Narcisse's sorcery, and although by that stage it is reduced to a sack of dismembered pieces, it is still capable of instigating 'extreme terror and revulsion':

two or three of the servants thrust the ruined skeleton back into its sack. In doing so the fingers of its right hand caught in the folds of the sacking, and the strain broke the central spring of the machinery. There was one loud ringing note from the corner

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<sup>177</sup> The medieval rood-screen or jubé formed a barrier both symbolic and physical between the priests in the sanctuary and the people in the chancel. Images of skeletons facing the laity reminded them of the consequences of sin. Although Richier worked at St Mihiel, Gosse seems to be thinking more of skeletons typical of painted Norfolk rood-screens.

where the sack was ignominiously thrown, and the heart<sup>178</sup> of the Musical Skeleton was broken. (1892:173-74)

That 'one loud ringing note' echoes over the paragraph like an agonised scream, and despite or possibly because of Gosse's use of the cliché of the 'broken heart', the pathos of its/her demise is deeply affecting. The very act of her 'death' paradoxically alerts us to her humanity: the act echoes the fate of the sculpture in Wilde's *The Happy Prince* (1888), at the point where the Swallow 'kissed the Happy Prince on the lips, and fell down dead at his feet. At that moment a curious crack sounded inside the statue, as if something had broken. The fact is that the leaden heart had snapped right in two' (Wilde 1908:181-2). This intertextual echo between Gosse and Wilde goes beyond the mechanical animation of sculpture to the metaphysical notion of a created being acquiring a soul.

Thus far, I have traced the connections between Richier's transi-tomb and the Duchess through the empty silver casket, and established its reflection with the White Maiden through their shared animated qualities and through Narcisse's identification with its posture. To complete the third side of the triangle, I will now explore the reflections between Anne and the White Maiden, which are surprisingly strong. Anne shrouds herself in 'black flowing garments, embroidered in white with deaths-heads and pierced hearts', two emblems which link her inextricably with the mechanical skeleton, which has a sycamore skull 'parqueted together, piece upon piece' and whose final gesture emphasises its broken (pierced) heart (1892:3, 124, 174). Just as the White Maiden springs into action, playing the zither at Narcisse's command, the Duchess's *raison d'être* is to re-enact in a 'weekly apparition' her husband's funeral procession between the Court and the Church (1892:4). According to Freud's essay *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), internalisation is a fundamental defensive response to the loss of a loved one, a process in which the ego identifies with and absorbs the object being mourned, in an attempt to preserve the lost figure. Anne of Lorraine's 'preservation' of René de Châlons through extreme mourning prevents his ghost from being finally laid: that is why his putrefying corpse is on display for all to shudder at. Such mourning is self-consuming and it inhibits all future attempts to construct the self: it is therefore inevitable that the Duchess becomes statue-like, an 'arrested' figure, like the sculptured René de Châlons. She represents a once-living thing whose life has been interrupted, like Lot's wife or Niobe;<sup>179</sup> Anne of Lorraine is also a 'non-being', for her ritual 'no longer impressed or

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<sup>178</sup> By explaining that the zither is 'a small instrument, shaped like a heart' (1892:28), Gosse reiterates the association of the White Maiden with the 'heart'.

<sup>179</sup> The uncanny inversion implied by the lifelessness of Anne of Lorraine and the signs of life exhibited by the White Maiden is a condition conveyed in a painting called *Studio Interior* (1888) by Wilhelm Trübner (1851-1917). In this work, the mannequin assumes a dynamic, contorted pose, showing

excited the spectators' and even her pages are 'indifferent' (1892:4,3). By contrast, the clockwork skeleton 'rattles madly on her zither', a noise and mannerism which incites the sacristan to 'tremble so exceedingly that he could scarcely stand' and which causes the crowd to become 'crazed with superstition and alarm' (1892:125, 150-51). The intertextual 'conversation' between Anne of Lorraine and the White Maiden, through the shared motifs of skulls and hearts, alerts us to the uncanny state of life-in-death, an existence in a shadowy world that occupies both sides of the threshold.

In addition to the motif of the emblem, Gosse also employs religious allusions, particularly in connection with Narcisse. His Christ-like attributes are signalled by his physical poses which connote the crucifixion: significantly, Narcisse adopts these poses on completing his sculpture:

*He stretched out his arms, as though exhausted with a long and critical exertion, which was now over, altogether done with and completed. He could relax all the muscles, let them lie open to the heavens in that awkward helpless posture, for their work was done.* (1892:112 italics mine)

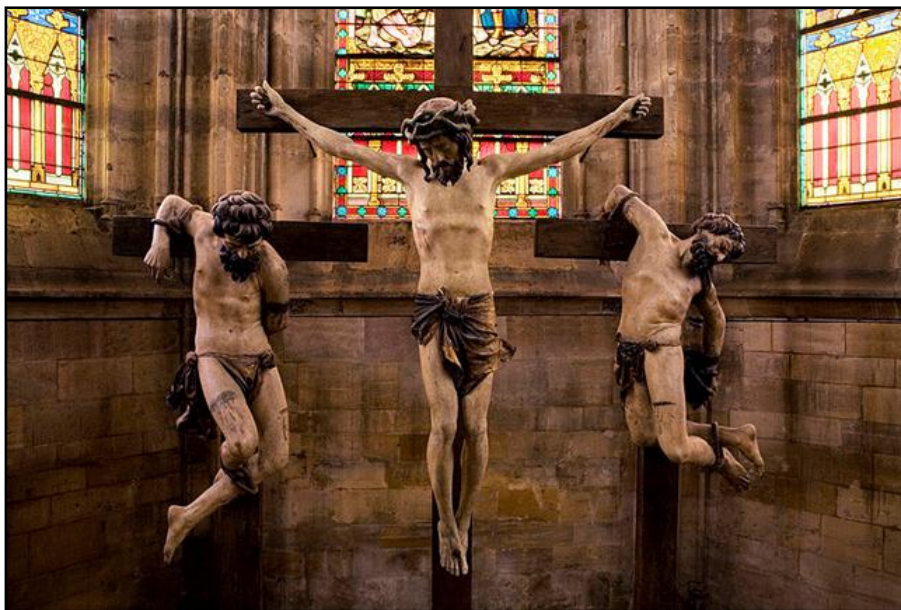


Fig.11

At first Narcisse stretches (extending, tautening) his arms, echoing the iconic posture of the crucifixion, then he relaxes the muscles into an 'awkward helpless posture'. Indeed, the visual shapes conjured here evoke carvings by Richier at the church of Bar-Le-Duc, a set of wooden polychrome figures: *Christ en croix avec les deux larrons* (Fig.11).<sup>180</sup> The frontality of the graceful figure of Christ contrasts dramatically with the misshapen ugliness of the bodies of the

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notional or vicarious signs of life, while the painter's model, a seated female figure, sits rigidly as if in a trance; her face betrays no expression. Trübner cultivates the uncertainty that Jentsch later traces to 'the doubt as to whether an apparently living being is actually alive, and its opposite, as to whether an inanimate object might not be alive' (Munro 2014)

<sup>180</sup> Translation: The crucified Christ with the two thieves.

two criminals: 'on sent ici une volonté manifeste de différencier la raideur majestueuse du Christ des mouvements désordonnés des larrons, certainement pour souligner leur nature purement humaine par rapport à l'essence divine du Christ' (Cazin 2008:55).<sup>181</sup> Just as the Calvary postures convey the distinction between heavenly and earthly,<sup>182</sup> so Narcisse's actions resonate first with divinity and then with humanity. Narcisse's sense that the work 'was done' echoes Christ's final utterance on the cross: 'It is finished' (John 19:30).

The association between Narcisse and Calvary is further intimated by the presence of perfumes (imbued with Christian symbolism) arising from the herb garden:

There was the sweet, light scent of herb *frankincense*, so gay and wholesome to the senses. That coarser, heavier perfume, mingling with it, yet easily distinguishable, came, he knew well, from the great clump of hairy growth, with umbels of rough yellowish blossoms, out of which *wise women*, like Rosalie's mother, distil the precious gum *opoponax* . . . [the scents] arose and interpenetrated, making one great *altar*-mist of perfume, the various invisible clouds of wholesome odour. It seemed a morning *sacrifice* in honour of his *toil accomplished*, his *victory won*. (1892:112-13 italics mine)

The allusions to two of the magis' gifts, frankincense which symbolised Christ's priestly role, and myrrh (opoponax) representing Christ's sacrificial death, in connection with 'the altar', the place of blood sacrifice, are powerful in evoking the imagery of the crucifixion and in predicting Narcisse's fate. The third of the magis' gifts, gold, symbolizing kingship, is not included here because Narcisse has already played his 'regal' role in the game of 'the king who cannot lie', wearing his makeshift crown at the gala supper (1892:45-49). Symbols of Christ cling to Narcisse: just as there were three days and three nights between Jesus' death and resurrection, so Narcisse lived in Bar-le-Duc for three years, he is in prison for three days, and the interval between sentencing and execution is three hours (1892:166, 182). Gosse thus maps Biblical allusions onto his Ovidian foundation: religious discourse, rather than being an end in itself, now provides the imagery to serve aesthetic aims.

The Christ-like imagery also determines Narcisse's identity as a sacrificial 'lamb': a haunting metaphor for Gosse. Not only is he propelled into this role by Bowes' deathbed speech, but the event is indelibly recorded in Philip's *Memorial* (1857a:76). Although Narcisse is innocent, it is inevitable that he must be sacrificed in order that equilibrium be restored within the

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<sup>181</sup> Translation: One feels here a clear desire to differentiate between the majestic erectness of Christ and the disorderly movements of the thieves, which certainly emphasise their purely human nature in relation to the divine essence of Christ.

<sup>182</sup> This traditional iconography of the contrast between Christ's perfection and the thieves' deformity reflects the Gospel account. The thieves' legs were broken in order to hasten their deaths, 'But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already they brake not his legs' (John 19:31-33). 'For these things were done, that the Scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken' (John 19:36)

community. Narcisse's fate is sealed at the moment when he completes the White Maiden: the language prefigures his ghastly execution by strangling and burning, as indicated by my italicisation:

He strode up and down the room, loosening his *girdle* and unfastening the points of his jacket, as though the *pressure* of his garments *suffocated* him. His shirt was tied low in the *throat*, but he pulled the *loop* of it and threw it open. His face was lighted up by an odd smile, *flickering* and *fugitive* while a bright colour like the *hectic crimson* in a consumptive girl, *burned* out in his cheeks that were commonly so pale . . . He looked as though he was addressing a crowd, for *his lips moved, although there was no sound from them*' (1892:110-111).

The lexis enacts Narcisse's strangulation: the connotations of the garrotte are conveyed by the words 'girdle' and 'loop', placed around his throat, and the involuntary silent mouthing of the lips intimates his suffocation, choking and gasping until the breath is finally cut off, while the 'crimson colour' and the 'flickering, hectic' movements suggest the ritual burning. The imagery also returns us to Ovid, since the 'hectic crimson' recalls 'iam color est mixto candour rubori' (*Met.* 3.491),<sup>183</sup> and his open shirt conjures Narcissus's action at the point of climax in Ovid's tale: 'dumque dolet, summa vestem deduxit ab ora nudaque marmoreis percussit pectora palmis' (*Met.* 3.480-81).<sup>184</sup>

Gosse had learnt from Bowes the determining force of language, the effect of 'prophecy' on a person's fate; it is no coincidence that Rosalie resembles the Witch of Endor at the moment of her denunciation (1892:87). Narcisse is the 'scapegoat': in the sixteenth-century context, his foreign identity and his secretive obsession with his craft rouse mob hatred, but a fin-de-siècle reader would also read the homophobic prejudice against the aesthete. As René Girard argues in *Violence and the Sacred* (1972), the origin of sacrifice and the foundation of human culture lay in 'the scapegoat mechanism'; he saw religion as being necessary to human evolution as a means of controlling the violence caused by mimetic rivalry. According to Girard, the sacrificial victim must always be someone who is both in a respected position and at the same time, an outsider who will have no avenger. The ritual elimination of Narcisse allows Bar-le-Duc to return to a state of calm. Gosse indicates this by beginning and ending the novella with the scene of the Duchess's weekly procession: her measured enactment of death frames the explosion of passion and violence contained within the week-long duration of the plot. Equilibrium has been restored.

Though set in 1548, *Secret* explores the issues of 1892, and this is an auspicious date in many ways. 1892 was the year when the word 'homosexuality' entered the English lexicon with

<sup>183</sup> Translation: 'that ruddy colour mingling with the white'.

<sup>184</sup> Translation: 'While he thus grieves, he plucks away his tunic at its upper fold and beats his bare breast with pallid hands'.



Chaddock's translation of Kraft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*. The 1890s was a time of intense anxiety surrounding issues of gender, class, and race, and Gosse's protagonist is at odds with his community in all three aspects. Narcisse's implied androgyny, his artistic passions, and his 'alien' status, locate him beyond the pale, a challenge to natural ascendancy of instituted hierarchies, whether of relations between the state and the individual, or of relations between male and female. Narcisse may be a sixteenth-century 'provincial craftsman' (1892:121) but he has the characteristics of a fin-de-siècle aesthete, and he lives up to the popular identification of the 'decadent' artist as effeminate and homosexual. The aesthete's passion for what is beautiful and rare on the surface makes Ovid's Narcissus a potent symbol for its creed, and the figure of Narcisse echoes those suggestive characteristics.

I suggest that the characterisation of Narcisse as a sculptor is informed by Gosse's preoccupation, during the twelve years preceding *Secret* and for two years thereafter, with reviewing developments in sculptural tradition, an interest stimulated by his friendship with Hamo Thornycroft.<sup>185</sup> In my Introduction, I cited Walter Pater's insight into Gosse's allusive practice, his ability to exploit 'matter malleable anew' (1901:112) and, with neat circularity, art historian David Giesy notes the same urge to allusivity in Thornycroft's practice, commenting that:

Pater's assessment of Gosse's poetry could equally well be applied to Hamo Thornycroft's sculpture:

Gosse takes, indeed, 'old themes' and manages them better than the old masters, with more delicate cadences, more delicate transitions of thought, through long dwelling on earlier practice. (2003:337)

In different media, it seems, writer and sculptor share the impulse to create anew by reference to the past. Gosse himself emphasises Thornycroft's allusivity when reviewing his work for such magazines as *The Cornhill*: Gosse declares for example that *Artemis* (Fig 12: 1880 plaster, 1882 marble) is:

a figure full of simplicity and dignity, modern in sentiment and antique in form, blending the present and the past by sympathy rather than by antiquarian study, and answering to the usual mock-antique of sculpture as a poem of André Chenier or Keats answers to an ode of Akenside. (1880b:183)

Michael Hatt notes furthermore that when Thornycroft exhibited *The Mower* (1884 plaster, 1894 bronze) at the Royal Academy, his catalogue entry included a quotation from Arnold's

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<sup>185</sup> Whether or not Gosse and Thornycroft had a homosexual relationship has long been a matter of speculation. Lytton Strachey famously punned that Gosse was 'Homosexual' and Phyllis Grosskurth 'outed' him as a closet homosexual in her biography of John Addington Symonds (1964). However, Ann Thwaite, following Leon Edel, suggests that Gosse's relationship with Thornycroft was very close but probably not sexual (1985:534).

*Thyrsis* (1866) (2003:33),<sup>186</sup> and I suggest that Thornycroft's increasingly explicit exploitation of literary allusion may be a measure of Gosse's influence over him.

Gosse's writing of *Secret* coincides with his defining statements about 'The New Sculpture' in a series of *Art Journal* articles in 1894. Gosse's experiences with Thornycroft and their shared interest in the sculptural mode also seem to be linked to the imaginary events in *Secret*. Thornycroft was sculpting *Artemis* 'as their friendship grew and Gosse quickly took her progress as a symbol for their own developing relationship' (Getsy 2004:68):

Recognising the importance of *Artemis*, it seems that Gosse identified himself with the statue to an extent and indeed with Thornycroft's sculpture in general, however inverted the relationship: 'My thoughts hang about you as a sculptor's do about his clay model'.<sup>187</sup> (Getsy 2004:68)

Getsy's reading of Gosse's conception of *Artemis* as a conduit to reach Thornycroft resonates with Narcisse's imagined access to the trumpeter through the White Maiden: 'he smiled to think of [the White Maiden] with its docile white bones accompanying the brazen notes of the trumpet, while Narcisse stood by anxiously superintending and applauding' (1892:127).

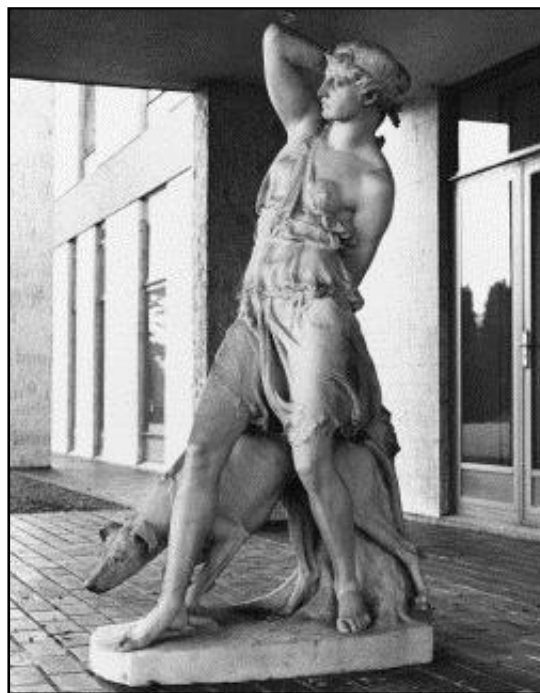


Fig.12

<sup>186</sup> Thornycroft's tag; 'A mower, who as the tiny swell/Of our boat passing, heaved the river-grass,/Stood with suspended scythe to see us pass' is a translation of Arnold's question in stanza 13: 'Where are the mowers, who, as the tiny swell?' etc.

<sup>187</sup> Getsy quotes from Gosse's letter to Thornycroft, 16 January, 1881 (Brotherton Library, Leeds).

Gosse even shifts into fairy-tale lexis, describing Thornycroft as ‘the fated fairy Prince who has wrought this magic change [in sculpture]’ (1881:703). Getsy argues that this intense focus on Thornycroft’s act of sculpting *Artemis* influenced Gosse’s codification of ‘The New Sculpture’:<sup>188</sup> ‘For Gosse, imagined tactility became emphasised and eroticised in his sculpture criticism as he drew upon a fantasmic identification of himself with Thornycroft’s clay models’. Hatt furthermore highlights the anthropomorphic aspect of Gosse’s conception of New Sculpture, the sense of the sculpture being alive, that is ‘inhabited by a self’, promoting a sense of reciprocity between object and viewer: the New Sculpture ‘allows a fuller intersubjective relationship with the statue’ (2003:48). These notions are, as I have shown, played out in *Secret*.

Gosse’s *Art Journal* essays serve as an important gloss on *Secret*. Hatt notes Gosse’s conception of the New Sculpture as ‘an art of the surface’, claiming that ‘Gosse’s analyses return again and again to the skin of the sculptural body’ and attributes Gosse’s shift from form to surface to the Paterian suggestion that ‘sculpture is most successful, most profound aesthetically and subjectively, when it hovers on the brink of dissolution’ (2003:47). Although Gosse does not, Hatt asserts, engage with the profounder aspects of Pater’s theory, he ‘nonetheless picks up the idea that the surface is where the object’s meaning resides’ (2003:48) and no sculptural surface could be more intriguing than that of Richier’s transi-tomb, with its surface-skin in a state of dramatic ‘dissolution’. Gosse, however, intimated a bleak future for the New Sculpture: ‘the great movement begun in 1879 has now’ he asserts, ‘worked itself into an almost quiescent state’ (1894a:310): within a year Gosse had relinquished his position as its chief spokesman.

It was with similar abruptness that Gosse aborted his plans to have *Secret* published in a large quarto edition illustrated by Aubrey Beardsley, the artist who had produced the controversial illustrations for Wilde’s *Salome* (1891). In 1894, Beardsley embarked on ‘a series of five designs’ for *Secret*; ‘Beardsley had told Gosse, “I mean to do something very beautiful for you,” and commenced the work at Windermere’ (Benkovitz 1981:118). Indeed, a letter from Beardsley to Gosse dated 20 February 1895<sup>189</sup> indicates that he was waiting for Heinemann to agree terms (Beardsley 1970:64) but only three months after this letter, Wilde faced trial for gross indecency, and Beardsley was implicated in Wilde’s disgrace. Gosse judiciously ‘urged Beardsley to move on from [*Secret*], and pressed him to illustrate not some “ephemeral work

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<sup>188</sup> Gosse coined this term to define the late nineteenth-century sculptural movement which marked a shift away from stylised and didactic neoclassicism towards a more naturalistic and dynamic rendering of the human body.

<sup>189</sup> Although the date given in *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley* is 1894, Benkovitz corrects this to 1895 (1981:118).

of the day” but an acknowledged masterpiece of “old English literature”, which might be “in [Beardsley’s] own spirit” (Sturgis 1998:269). It was uncharacteristic for Gosse to forfeit an opportunity for his own work to be promoted, but any association between *Secret* and the now compromised Beardsley would have been damaging to Gosse.

Gosse distanced himself from Aestheticism after 1895; indeed, only two months after Wilde’s conviction, William Heinemann, anxious to distract the public from his association with *The*

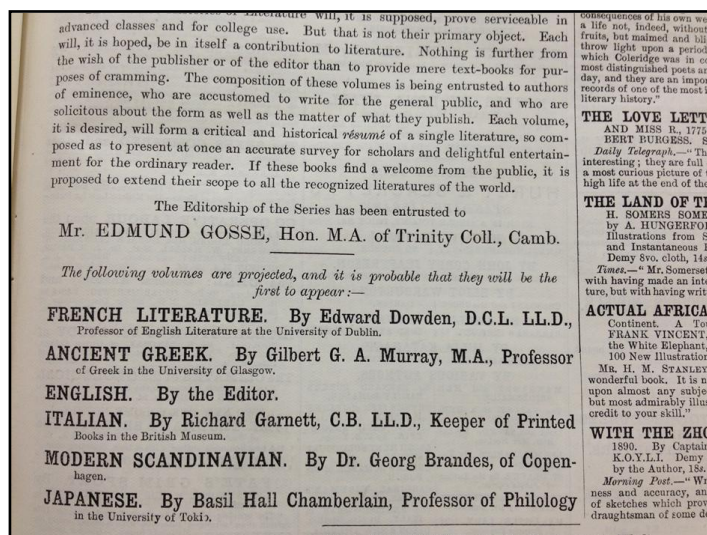


Fig.13

*Yellow Book*, made a bold announcement in the *Athenaeum* of a new series in literary criticism: *Short Histories of the Ancient and Modern Literatures of the World* (27 July 1895:117) (Fig.13). Heinemann’s front man for this highly respectable series was boldly announced: ‘Mr. EDMUND GOSSE, Hon. MA of Trinity College, Camb.’. *Secret*, then, was best forgotten: this was for Gosse a costly lesson about the wayward nature of the allusive process, and its potential for dangerous associations.

I view Narcisse’s ill-fated desire to please Richier as a metaphor for Gosse’s desire to serve his adoptive literary fathers: *Secret*’s plunge into an Ovidian world which had so many Aesthetic connotations was for Gosse a salutary experience, and he learned thereafter to exert greater control over his allusive practice. This is illustrated by his Ovidian imagery in characterising Bowes and himself in *Father and Son* fifteen years later. Gosse’s depiction of his dying mother, ‘leaning like a funeral statue, like a muse upon a monument’ with her ‘alabastrine fingers tightly locked together’ (2004:37-38) conjures the Ovidian notion of being suspended on the life/death threshold:<sup>190</sup> just as Narcissus’ body is evoked by the *eburnea colla*, so

<sup>190</sup> In this visual image, I suggest that Gosse may also have been influenced by Thornycroft’s sculpture, *Lot’s Wife* (1878), which portrays the metamorphosis from living flesh to stone. Susan Beattie describes

Bowes' disease paralyses her into the pale stillness of sculpture. Bowes' petrification is furthermore a macabre reversal of the enlivening of the White Maiden from a motionless sculpture to an animated zither-player. After death Bowes is remembered as a 'flower-like thought' (2004:51), another allusion to Narcissus' metamorphosis into a daffodil. By 1907, Gosse had learned to complicate his allusive practice, to prevent the domination of any single reference: his simile for Bowes, 'like a muse on a monument', also evokes Shakespeare's Viola who, disguised as a male page, describes her state of death-in-life as being caused by her frustrated love for Duke Orsino, sitting 'like patience on a monument, / Smiling at grief' (*Twelfth Night* Act 2, Scene 4). While this allusion subtly reinforced the notion of petrification, it also mischievously transforms the evangelical Bowes into a 'muse', technically one of nine Greek goddesses, daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, the personification of memory, who inspired creativity in the arts and sciences, an ironic gloss for a woman who eschewed all fiction.

Gosse also reads his childhood self through Ovidian allusion, adopting Narcissus' iconic pose by the pond's edge, but rendering its comically precarious nature:

The shallow pan, with our spoils, would rest on a table near the window, and I, kneeling on a chair opposite the light, would lean over the surface till everything was within an inch or two of my eyes. Often, I bent, in my zeal, so far forward that the water touched the tip of my nose and gave me a little icy shock. In this attitude an idle spectator might have formed the impression that I was trying to wash my head and could not quite summon up resolution enough to plunge – in this odd pose I would remain for a long time, holding my breath, and examining with extreme care every atom of rock, every swirl of detritus. (2004:82-3)

Gosse captures the sense of himself becoming a statue by holding his breath, like Narcissus who lies 'vultuque inmotus eodem haeret' (*Met.* 3.417).<sup>191</sup> Indeed, Gosse explicitly associates himself with petrification in *Father and Son*: firstly, his guilty conscience for not owning up to his destruction of the rockery fountain leaves him 'turned to stone within', and secondly, his horror at Philip's tales of violent crime 'nearly froze [him] into stone with horror' (2004:23, 67). The Ovidian allusion thus persists, but Gosse can now simultaneously invoke and undermine it.

I regard *Secret* as a key transitional text in the trajectory of Gosse's allusive practice. Read as a conventional romance, it may be dismissed, in Henry James' words, as a 'pretty thing', but when read through its mythic lens, it acquires greater depth, tighter structure, and more profound meaning, a dramatisation of the fundamental oppositions of human existence: presence/absence, subject/object, male/female, reality/illusion, involvement/detachment.

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the figure 'gazing back with fear and longing on the destruction of her city, the dense pleating of her drapery already resembling the stratification of rock' (1983:47).

<sup>191</sup> 'motionless with countenance unchanged'

*Secret* is very introspective: human and sculptured figures are closely knit, twinning each other in a series of reflections. What is so crucial about these mirrorings is that they are all inexact: not one of them is a perfect mirror image, and in this way, they enact the process of allusion, which takes its source, adjusts it and repositions it in a new context. When the reader comes to 'work' the allusion, he often finds that the original image and the alluding image are similar but not identical, what Ricks calls 'likeness-in-difference' or 'a newly true combination of similitude and dissimilitude' (2002:42,85). As a critically 'untried' text, *Secret* is a pertinent work to test the conclusions of my early chapters, exploring particularly Gosse's status as an ephebe, signalling his allegiance to the English literary tradition and his resistance to Bowes' interpellation. *Secret* attests to Gosse's continuing preoccupation with the power of myth and fairy-tale, with the position of the artist in society, with the resonances of pictorial sources such as Petrarch's *Triumphus Mortis*, and with the Othering of the female. His immersion in a romance also provides a platform from which to explore Gosse's romanticising of Bowes in *Father and Son*, to be discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter Five : From Saint to Sinner: Gosse's Fantasy Re-Creations of Emily Bowes

Many kind readers of previous impressions have expressed a curiosity to know what some of the places and persons mentioned in [*Father and Son*] looked like more than half a century ago. Accordingly, I have searched in bureaux and albums for material with which to indulge a fancy which is flattering to me, and may even be helpful to the comprehension of my text. I can assure those who examine these illustrations that they are as scrupulously genuine as the narrative itself.

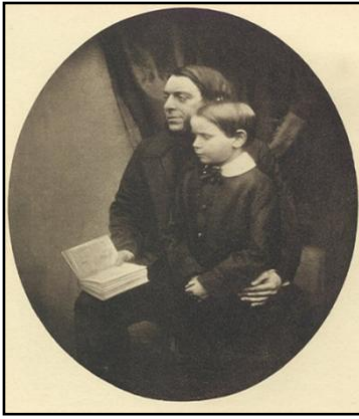
(From the Preface to *The Booklover's Edition of Father and Son*, Gosse 1912:ix)

We know not what is false or what is true  
But in the firm perspectives of the past  
We see the picture duly, and its faults  
Are softly moulded by a filmy blue.

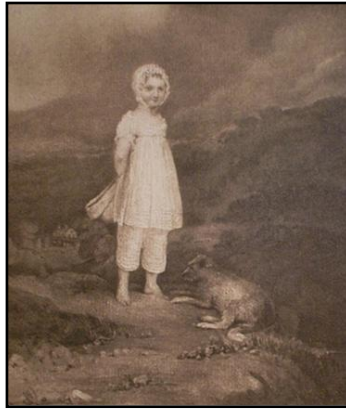
(From 'On Certain Critics' in *Firdausi in Exile* by Gosse 1885a:204)

In this chapter I will show how Gosse's resistance to and appropriation of his mother's voice finds its most subtle and subversive expression in *Father and Son*. This text is an unparalleled 'moment' in Gosse's career when two key trajectories in his writing intersect: Gosse the creative artist fuses with, and feeds upon, Gosse the man of letters. The first trajectory is a creativity fuelled by his ambivalent relationship with the spectral maternal voice, and the second trajectory is the breadth and depth of Gosse's intimacy with the canon, allowing him to wield his allusions productively. Because of his evangelical interpellation, schooled in the 'unflinching' language of tracts which allows no middle way, it took Gosse a long time to find a mode of expression that could capture the ambiguity of his feelings for his mother, in a way that was, as he claimed in the Preface to *Father and Son*, 'scrupulously true' (2004:3). This 'truth' is achieved partly by the gaps and spaces that open up between the two voices in the text, that of the precocious but fragile child focaliser, and that of the urbane and cultured narrator. The text is infused with tension generated between the naivety of childhood hopes and the consciousness of disappointed reality, and the process of interrogating and unpacking Gosse's allusions reveals how those 'firm perspectives of the past . . . / Are softly moulded' (1885a:204). It was a book of re-enactment: Gosse told William Archer that its writing caused him 'more *nervous anxiety* than anything I ever published before' (Thwaite 1984:431 italics mine).

I shall approach *Father and Son* from a perspective not hitherto applied to the text, that of 'pictorial allusion'. Central to this chapter is a portrait of Bowes as a young woman, an image that Gosse published in *The Booklover's Edition of Father and Son* (1912), a version enhanced by eight illustrations showing people and places intimately connected with his youth (Fig.14).



1857



*'On the Slopes of Snowdon'*



*'My Mother'*



*'The motherless Islington house'*



*'The little house, or  
'villa' as we called it'*



*'A careful and conscientious  
governess'*



*'She was Miss Brightwen'*



*'But what does my Lord tell me?'*

Fig.14



In the portrait, Bowes is dressed in fashionable clothes of a strikingly 'un-Puritan' nature, and I will show how this image haunts Gosse's fiction, becoming the vehicle for a series of fantasy re-creations of his mother. Gosse alludes to this distinctive dress firstly in his unpublished manuscript, *Tristram Jones* (1872) and secondly in his novella *The Unequal Yoke* (1886) while referring overtly to it in *The Life* (1890). In *The Booklover's Edition*, the image is finally physically embedded, somewhat disruptively, within the text. As Susan Sontag comments: 'A photograph is only a fragment, and with the passage of time its moorings become unstuck. It drifts away into a soft abstract pastness, open to any kind of reading' (1977:71). This process I shall demonstrate through various theoretical frameworks, which will reveal the impact of this 'pictorial allusion': firstly, Barthesian notions of the *studium* and the *punctum* serve to differentiate between the historical context and the emotional power of an image; secondly, Freud's *Family Romances* (1909) provides a useful extension of Bloom's theory, structuring a reading from the point of view of the young 'neurotic' Gosse, and thirdly, Suzanne Keen's idea of the 'narrative annex', a technique that allowed Victorian writers to include impermissible subjects in their texts in a way that did not stop the plot. Throughout, however, it is the power of allusive connections that work together to produce a sub-textual and subversive narrative about Bowes.

I shall start with two of Gosse's reworkings of Bowes' life, one biographical and one poetic, both of which exemplify Gosse's urge to creatively misread her. In his short entry about his mother in the *Dictionary of National Biography* (1890c:258) Gosse 'mistook' the date of Bowes' death, representing it as 9 February, 1857,<sup>192</sup> when in fact she died one day later, as recorded on her gravestone (Figs. 15a and b). This small shift in Bowes' historical identity dislocated her from the figure who 'slept in Jesus' and who '*awaits here the morning of the first resurrection*' (italics mine). The use of the present tense in the epitaph emphasises her brooding wait, reiterating her haunting presence. Indeed, this evangelical rendering of Bowes'



Fig. 15a

<sup>192</sup> Gosse gives the same erroneous date – February 9<sup>th</sup> – in *The Life* (1890a:270).

spectral state may have actively discouraged Gosse from visiting her grave, even after his return to London from Devon in 1867, and consequently the specific death-date was never impressed on his memory.

Gosse transforms Bowes further by characterising her as ‘one of the earliest modern workers in the East End’, modernising her into a type of female social reformer. Bowes’ evangelical identity is further undermined by Gosse’s casual deprecation of Shipton’s *Tell Jesus*, by which his mother was known to thousands of readers. It is ironic that Gosse denies the validity of this text on the grounds that it is ‘slightly sensational’ (1890c:258), using a word with strong connotations of fiction, when he himself employs literary devices to realise his claims to ‘scrupulous truth’. Three years later, in his poem ‘The Wallpaper’, discussed in Chapter One, Gosse claimed that he was five, not eight, when Bowes died, another apparent attempt to divorce the trauma of her death from reality (1893:62). In biography and in poetry then, Gosse is detaching Bowes from her tract-like death, taking small but deliberate steps in his cumulative refashioning of her persona.



Fig. 15b

I contend furthermore that Bowes’ presence is palpable in Gosse’s *The Unequal Yoke*, the plot of which I outlined in Chapter One, emphasising its tract-like structure, and moralising outcome. Although the story opens with the heroine, Jane Baxter, jumping into the canal to rescue a boy, this act is overshadowed by the girl’s bizarre solution to the problem of how she would now, dripping wet, return home. In the event, Jane calls at the nearby home of Mrs Pomfret, ‘the new Scripture-reader’s wife’, to borrow some dry clothes, but the only available garment is an outlandish ‘flaunting dress’ and thus strangely attired, Jane attracts much attention. Gosse describes the garment with peculiar attention to detail: it is ‘rose-coloured sateen’, a material specifically woven to achieve a luxurious finish; it is ‘cut low at the neck’ and fashioned in ‘a worldly shape!’; Mrs Baxter is surprised that so ‘serious’ a woman as Mrs Pomfret even owned such a garment and wonders whether ‘she had it before she was converted’ or whether ‘somebody gave it to her where she went out charring’ (1886:501-2). A similar costume is later worn by ‘The Dragonetta’,<sup>193</sup> the musician at the Capuletts’ soir  e.

<sup>193</sup> Although there is no record of the word ‘Dragonetta’ in the *OED*, a ‘dragonet’ refers to a South American lizard, *Crocodylus*, which is significant given the zoomorphic associations afforded to this figure (*OED* 2009).

Although the Dragonetta makes no contribution to the plot, other than to emphasise the worldliness of the Capulets, disproportionate attention is again devoted to the costume:

Her hair stood out in a multitude of rolls and loops, and her dress, which was the only really low one in the room, was a maze of lace and flamboyant emerald ribbands. She was pinched to a wasp-like slenderness at the waist, and her hands were encased up to the elbow in yellow gloves. (1886:576)

The Dragonetta seems to feature in the story only because of the dress she wears. Both women, clothed in these dresses, attract arresting similes that bespeak fairy-tale metamorphosis: in her borrowed sateen, Jane is ‘like some gigantic species of gaudy lizard escaping into a cavern’ (1886:501) while the Dragonetta presents as ‘a brilliant insect of vast size, one bite of which would certainly be fatal’ (1886:576). The costumes thus effect a zoomorphic transformation of the women from human to animal, a process of shape-shifting that gestures at fairy-tale narrative.

Andrew Lang ‘was not exactly wild with enthusiasm’ about *The Unequal Yoke*, but he commented: ‘I don’t like anything better than Chapter 1’ (Demoor 1987:497), as though the motif of the Romantic-Era dress is one of the few evocative features in this somewhat laboured narrative. Gosse’s fascination with the dress is not something new: he evokes a similar situation in *Tristram Jones*, the manuscript novella mentioned in my Introduction, where again the appearance of a female character is heightened by her wearing an



Fig.16

incongruously old-fashioned dress. During that story, Tristram meets Margaret Wilbye,<sup>194</sup> who is romanticised by being:

dressed in the most exquisite old garments that she must have gathered out of her grandmother’s wardrobes, a dress of the days of Sir Joshua,<sup>195</sup> soft and pale.

It was something quite out of [Tristram’s] previous experience to see a girl so sweetly and yet so strangely dressed. (1872:22)

Two chapters later, Gosse reiterates the nature of Margaret’s appearance, through servant gossip about the girl: ‘But don’t she dress up in queer clothes rather!’ (1872:39). For Gosse, the dress is,

<sup>194</sup> The name alludes to John Wilbye, English madrigal composer (1574-1638). In the story, Tristram’s passion is for music, and the girl’s name suggests the possibility of romance between them, but this plot line is left unfulfilled.

<sup>195</sup> I will return to this later in this chapter.

however, more than simply a symbol of bold worldliness or romantic creativity; it is, I contend, an allusion to a portrait of Emily Bowes (Fig. 16), painted when she was roughly the same age as the fictional Margaret and Jane. With respect to costume, cosmetics, and coiffure (to be discussed in detail below) Bowes' un-Puritan appearance is puzzling, and it is this disjunction between the portrait and her authorial voice that seems to generate Gosse's fantasies.

Before I discuss the picture of Bowes in detail, it is useful to survey Gosse's relationship with portraits. Indeed, Gosse seemed to distance his mother by enclosing her in a frame as though trying to confine her within tangible bounds. This is evident firstly in George Moore's relation of Gosse's description of his mother's announcement of her illness: 'I saw my mother *standing in the doorway* and as she saw my father, she said "Oh Philip, it is cancer. . ."' (Thwaite 1984:320 italics mine), and secondly in *Father and Son*, Gosse remembers his mother in Wales, '*perched in a nook of the high rocks*' (2004:36 italics mine) like the sculpture of a saint in a niche of a cathedral façade. Portraits of individuals were important to Gosse: he often began an essay about a famous artist by alluding to his or her portrait, as exemplified by 'Thackeray's daughter' in *Books on the Table* (1921): 'Here Mr Sargent, with his wonderful discernment of character, gives us a commentary on Lady Ritchie's nature, which almost makes further analysis needless' (1921:293). Reflecting the wide late nineteenth-century interest in physiognomy and phrenology, Garnett and Gosse's work *English Literature: An Illustrated Record* (1903) seeks to use portraits pedagogically, as is emphasised in the Publisher's Introduction:

It appeals to the eye as well as to the ear, and the reader becomes attracted to the writings of this or that writer, and feels his enthusiasm enkindled, he desires to know, and to know instantly and without disturbance, not only who the writer was and what he wrote, but what he looked like.

The illustrations form a feature of the book which is of supreme importance . . . it will be admitted that no previous attempt to teach the history of English literature by means of the eye has approached the present enterprise in fullness and variety. (1903a:v-vi)

Just as Gosse interprets a writer's work through his or her biography, the publishers imply that the reader's understanding of the literature is enhanced by his familiarity with the writer's physiognomy.<sup>196</sup> This imbrication between biography and portraiture marks a merging of representational boundaries.

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<sup>196</sup> In 1905, Gosse also enlarged his *Short History of Modern English Literature* (1897) to include portraits of the writers described therein, making explicit the connection between their physical appearance and their literary expression: 'We cannot account for the sinister sharpness of Sterne's face, for Tennyson's dark majesty, for the rugged and stormy head of Ben Jonson, but we are forced to recognise that they are severally consistent with the intellectual character of these men's writings' (1905c:vii).

Gosse moreover pursued that nineteenth-century penchant for assembling portrait collections ‘as representations of the relationships that were central to professional life’ (Jordanova 2000:142) and the walls of certain rooms in Gosse’s Hanover Terrace home were covered with engravings or photogravure reproductions of famous men, ranging from aristocratic or ecclesiastical dignitaries such as Viscount Dunedin (NPG:D9727) or Edward Benson Archbishop of Canterbury (NPG:9627), to fellow writers such as Swinburne (NPG:D9960) or Andrew Lang (NPG:D9819). Indeed, Gosse was a child of his time: from the 1880s there was a growing interest in the physical appearance of public figures, an interest duly fostered by photographic portraits. It was probably Gosse’s excitement in the impact of the visual, and the potential of the reproductive photogravure technique that encouraged his insertion of the eight images from the Gosse family album into *The Booklover’s Edition*.

Two of the eight images in *The Booklover’s Edition* are reproductions of portraits of Bowes. ‘No portrait of my beloved existed,’ wrote Philip in *Memorial*, ‘except one which was taken in her early childhood, and another taken in youth, which is in the possession of a distant relative in America’ (1857a:66). I have not found any record of the date when Philip obtained reproductions of these images, but the reference to the dress in *Tristram Jones* suggests that Gosse had had sight of the portrait by 1872. It is as though Gosse’s focus on the materiality of the portrait counters Bowes’ ethereal presence as the saint preserved in Philip’s *Memorial* and in Shipton’s *Tell Jesus*, and quietens the ‘tract-voice’ perpetuated in her tracts; the portrait, particularly the old-fashioned dress, distances her as a remote historical figure and thus renders her susceptible to re-reading and re-constructing. Bartsian terminology is helpful in articulating Gosse’s likely reactions to the portrait. In *Camera Lucida* (1980), Barthes describes the shock on finding a photograph of his dead mother:

I could read my nonexistence in the clothes my mother had worn before I can remember her. There is a kind of stupefaction in seeing a familiar being dressed *differently*.

This is the only time I have seen her like this, caught in a History of tastes, fashions, fabrics.

Thus the life of someone whose existence has somewhat preceded our own existence encloses in its particularity the very tension of History, its division. History is hysterical; it is constituted only if we consider it, only if we look at it – and in order to look at it, we must be excluded from it. (1982:64-5)

Barthes views the image on two planes: first, the *studium* or ‘subject’, its cultural meaning and its historical context, and second, the *punctum*, that is, its touching, poignant aspect, its power to conjure the dead person.

Reading Bowes' portrait through the lens of the *studium*, the distinctive nature of her fashionable gown serves to date the image to 1825-30, when she was in her early twenties; it was the period

when tight, boned stays were used to give a young woman an hourglass figure, which was itself emphasised by the belt and by the leg-of-mutton or gigot sleeves, full at the upper arm and fitted at the elbow. This was the time of the 'Romantic-era dress.' (Takeda 2010:38)

Although Bowes' dress appears to be plain-weave muslin rather than the silk crape of the fashion-plate pictured below (Romantic-Era Clothing 2013) (Fig. 17), both display the characteristic dropping of the shoulder-line of the dress, and the setting of the sleeve much lower on the arm in order to 'display' the slope of the woman's shoulder. The width of the shoulder was also emphasised by the horizontal pleats over the bust and around the shoulders. Although Bowes has eschewed the customary combs, ribbons, flowers or jewels that accompanied such dresses, presumably in accordance with her puritan principles, she



Fig. 17  
Comparison of Bowes' dress with 1836  
fashion-plate of Romantic-Era dress

indulges the contemporary practice to part the hair in the centre and to sleek down the front section, looping it over the ears, and winding the rest into a knot at the crown of the head (Ashelford 1996:192, 202). Gosse certainly seems to have Bowes' hairstyle in mind when he describes the Dragonetta's hair as 'a multitude of rolls and loops' (1886:576). In *The Unequal Yoke*, the motif of the mother's dress is detached and contrived, limited to the historical *studium*, but by the time Gosse writes *Father and Son* he seems to have imbibed the image,



and its presence contributes to the 'punctum', the general aura of the romantic heroine, as I shall discuss below.

As an 'illustration' of *Father and Son*, Bowes' worldly dress is at odds with the text on the adjacent page: 'My Mother was Puritan in grain' (1912:14). In the preface, Gosse justifies his inclusion of the 'illustrations' as being 'helpful to the comprehension of my text' (1912:ix). In general, illustrations serve to elucidate or explain a text, but in this case, Bowes' portrait dramatically disrupts rather than enhances understanding. Such a gap between text and image actively destabilises the sense of *Father and Son* as a biographical narrative, propelling it into the genre of romance. The portrait was never intended for the purpose to which Gosse subjects it, and the Romantic-Era dress and coiled loops of hair dramatically belie the textual assertion about Bowes' puritanism. It also contrasts strikingly with the portraits of Miss Marks and Miss Brightwen, neither of whom were fervent evangelicals like Bowes, yet both of them are modestly attired in Puritan black. Although Bowes' portrait is a painting, in contrast with theirs which are photographs, and therefore by implication more truthful to 'reality', it is the clothing rather than the medium that sets Bowes apart.

The clause in the adjacent text, 'My Mother was Puritan in grain', is abbreviated to become the caption, 'My Mother'.<sup>197</sup> This act creates a triangle of intertextual tension between the caption (the 'allusion'), the main body of the text (the 'source' of the allusion), and the image (which pertains in varying degrees to both caption and text, and is in its own right another allusion). Readers are unsure whether to prioritise the text or the caption. Any attempt to read the 'illustration' in relation to the sentence, 'My Mother was Puritan in grain', fails because there is no connection between the physical image on the page and the mental image of a stereotypical Puritan. If, however, one reads the portrait in relation to the caption, 'My Mother', one senses a new narrative, that is, for Gosse this pretty 'romanticised' Bowes *is* 'his' mother.<sup>198</sup> Kevin Barnhurst, furthermore, observes that 'The caption eliminates all the potential narrative frames but one, the depicted content' (1996:91); this principle directs the caption to be viewed as an integral part of the illustration. This is certainly a reading of *Father and Son* that is possible, as I shall argue later in this chapter, through the lens of Freud's *Family Romances*, where the text deconstructs to reveal the young neurotic Gosse transforming his mother into a socially elevated if morally diminished Gothic heroine. As Hirsch observes, photographs 'say more about family romances than about actual details of a familial life'

<sup>197</sup> I have discussed the capitalisation of 'Mother' in Chapter One.

<sup>198</sup> Gosse's desire for an attractive mother is suggested in his description of Miss Brightwen who nursed him during adolescent illnesses: 'my pretty, smiling stepmother lavish[ed] luxurious attendance upon me' (2004:165). See p.92.

(1997:119), and in this case the caption points up the dream that Gosse might have wished for his childhood, of having a romantic 'fairy-tale princess' for his mother.

Not only does the relationship between caption, image and text inject instability into the reading, but there is also the problematical status of the portrait as an illustration. Marsha Bryant asserts that when the caption 'functions as the valued term, photography is subordinated to the role of 'illustration' (1996:13). By being transformed into an illustration, its purpose is subtly changed. Even at the point of origin it is a mediated image, 'a record of how X had seen Y' (Berger 1972:10), and it is 'woven together by the energy of countless judgments [whereby] everything about it has been mediated by consciousness, either intuitively or systematically' (Berger 1982:93). Equally important is the fact that it is a record of how Bowes saw herself: it is a construction as valid as her projection of her religious persona in her evangelical tracts. She has fashioned herself to appear attractive, and her choice of clothing is important: Anne Hollander remarks that 'clothes create at least half the look of any person at any moment' (1975:314). Bowes' intention was probably that the portrait be viewed by family and friends, and by her descendants: a private audience. However, the process of translating the painting into an illustration, making it randomly and indiscriminately available to any reader dramatically overturns the original intention, changing its narrative status from private record to public fiction.

The only other commentator to notice this portrait of Bowes was Dennis Potter in his television play, *Where Adam Stood* (1976). Through the softening of the facial expression, the use of atmospheric lighting, and the addition of colour, Potter's version markedly



*Fig. 18*



romanticises the original (Fig.18). By adding the seascape as background, Potter alludes to the plot of his drama: young Gosse's deep desire for a model ship displayed in the village shop-window (identical to the one in the painting) becomes a bone of contention between Gosse and his father because Philip fears that his son's dreams and prayers are contaminated by the desire for the 'toy'. The deep blue tone of the mother's dress strongly associates her with the ocean, reinforcing the female symbolism of that element, but also links her strongly with her son. John Cook observes:

Cut into sequences depicting Edmund's dreams are shots of a painting of his mother in which, clearly visible in the background, is a sailing ship. The desire for the toy ship is really a symbol of the child's longing for his mother who has departed for the 'far shore', something which his father, whose Puritanism forbids toys, cannot comprehend. (1995:86)

Although Potter's reading of the portrait reflects the 1970s interpretation of Bowes as 'the lost mother' who sympathises with the son against the father, as argued by Traubitz and Perlman (discussed in Chapter One), what is notable is the visual power that the image exerts on the drama. The camera lingers on the painting twice, firstly, in the dining-room scene, and secondly in young Gosse's dream: for the child, then, the maternal portrait dominates both conscious and unconscious spheres. It is as though Potter recognised its haunting presence.



Fig.19

In the Gosse household, portraits of Bowes were revered items. Philip comments in his *Memorial* that his wife wanted to leave her son with 'some means of keeping in remembrance his mother's features' and this resulted in the creation of three deathbed portraits: a water-colour impression (Fig.19) and two photographs (1857a:66)<sup>199</sup>. Philip had one of the photographs reproduced as the frontispiece of *Memorial* (Fig. 20), his moving testament to Bowes' exemplary Christian death: in both images, Bowes' hand is splayed on her Bible as if gaining strength from its touch. When deciding which images to publish in the 1912 *Booklover's Edition*, Gosse

<sup>199</sup> Two of these three portraits are now in the Manuscript Room at Cambridge University Library. Figures 19 and 20 are reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

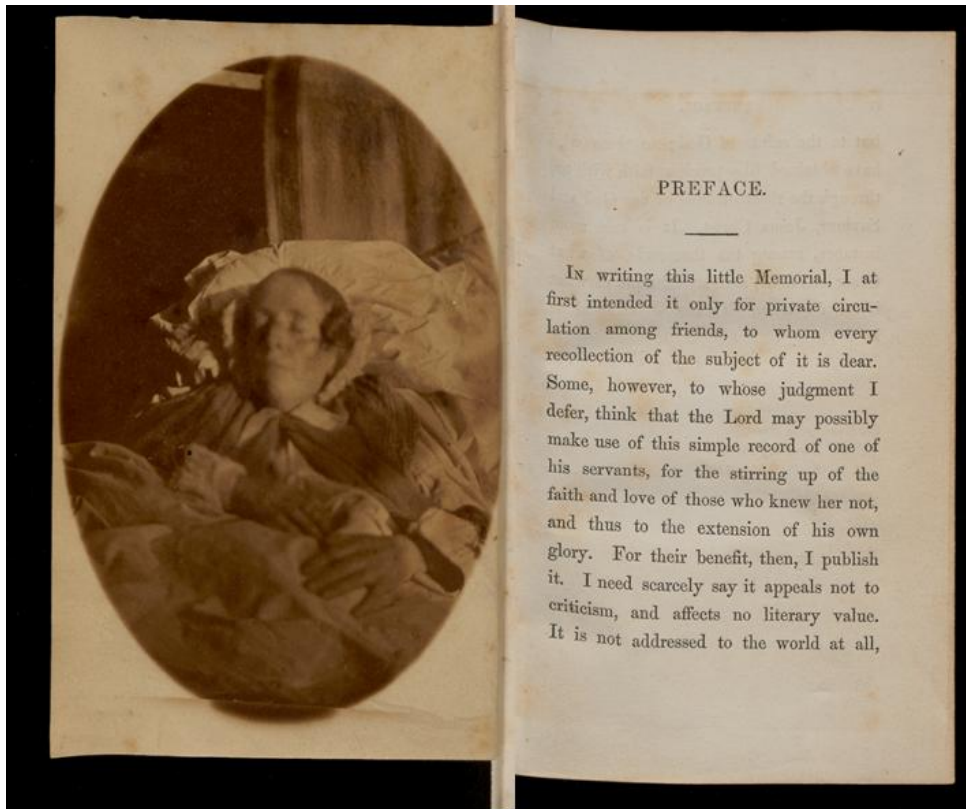


Fig.20

would have had to choose between portraits of youthful vitality or deathbed sanctity; as I demonstrate below using the lens of Freud's *Family Romance*, Gosse's transformation of Bowes into a Gothic heroine in his textual annex, made the choice of the earlier photograph inevitable. In making that decision, Gosse suppressed the image of the saintly Bowes, the way she wanted to be remembered, the way she was in 1857, and made public an image that undermined everything that Bowes valued by the time she died.

The portrait of Bowes in the Romantic Era dress and the depiction of Jane Baxter wearing the borrowed robe in *The Unequal Yoke* points to other correspondences between the two figures. Like Gosse's mother, Jane leads an exemplary life, distributing tracts in the slums, teaching in Sunday-school, and attending family prayers (1886:509, 609).<sup>200</sup> In terms of its olfactory resonances, Jane's Sunday-school, a 'malodorous little place' (1886:569) looks forward to Gosse's Marychurch experience of the upper room over a stable, pervaded by 'ammoniac odours' (2004:72). Like Bowes, Jane has two brothers, 'who had been to college' (1886:503).<sup>201</sup> Jane has 'strength of will' and is 'as hard as a bit of iron' (1886:566), an allusion

<sup>200</sup> Just as Jane's family 'kneel on the floor, with their foreheads against the backs of their chairs' (June 1886:609), so in *Father and Son*, Gosse's forehead is 'chafed by the texture of the horsehair' (2004:142).

<sup>201</sup> Bowes had two brothers, Edmund and Arthur: Gosse claims that both went to university (2004:13) but in fact only the elder brother took a degree (Boyd 2004:31).

that recalls Bowes who was ‘possessed of a will like tempered steel’ (2004:8). That characteristic

Dissenter phrase, that such-and-such an event or person ‘is a blessing to us’ (quoted from Bowes’ *Recollections* by Gosse 2004:9) is also much used by Jane who ‘thinks she will be blessed to [Frank]’ and hopes that she will ‘benefit his soul’ (1886:566, 611, 614). In *The Unequal Yoke*, Jane is obliged to attend the theatre as a guest of her fiancé’s family, a situation that causes her intense disquiet: indeed, this situation may have been suggested to Gosse by an entry in Bowes’ *Recollections* about being ‘entrapped’ into visiting the theatre:

I was much ashamed at some of the expressions in the play and sorry for the waste of money. Since then the Miss L’s<sup>202</sup> have several times entrapped me to the theatre. I wd always have preferred staying away but had not the courage to offend them, and felt not sure of the unlawfulness of going, and knew not what excuse to make. (1835:29)

Doreen Rosman explains that ‘by displaying the passions and appealing to the senses, the theatre nurtured just those facets of the personality which evangelicals believed it was the task of religion to suppress’ (2012:58), and Jane tries to minimise the bad influence of the theatre by ‘shrinking back as much into the darkness as possible’ and persuading herself that ‘it is not my fault, I was brought here unwittingly’ (1886:574). Like the young Bowes, Jane tries to avoid offending her host: ‘To Mr Capulett’s inquiry how Jane had enjoyed [*Cymbeline*], she answered with pathetic alacrity, “Oh! It was very amusing, thank you,” and then sank back by Edith’s side’ (1886:575). Indeed, the entire story of the doomed engagement between Jane and Frank may have been stimulated by Gosse’s reading of another intriguing note in Bowes’ *Recollections*, when she takes stock of the blessings and afflictions that have been her lot up to 1835; at the end of her list of afflictions, which includes everyday problems like ‘slight illnesses’ and ‘separation from friends’, Bowes mentions, tantalisingly, ‘the bad conduct of . . . . .’ (1835:13).<sup>203</sup> Did Gosse’s mother experience a Capulett-style rejection?

Gosse’s allusions to Bowes’ portrait seem to function in projection and retrospection: in *The Unequal Yoke*, the Romantic-Era dress may be interpreted in terms of the different life-pathways available to the young Bowes: life is all before her and she can choose either artistic creativity (the Dragonetta) or religious duty (Jane Baxter), but by *Father and Son* the fantasy of the romantic heroine is retrospective: this is how things might have been. The shift from a forward-looking viewpoint to a backward-glance is reminiscent of an illustration in *David Copperfield* (1849-50) called ‘Changes at Home’ (2012:124) (Fig.21).

<sup>202</sup> Bowes was staying with the Lloyd family: this is her shorthand.

<sup>203</sup> Bowes makes nine deliberate dots in the manuscript suggesting not vague ellipsis but rather a specific name.

Phiz's drawing juxtaposes the two Claras: on the wall is the pretty smiling portrait of young Clara Copperfield, in an oval frame that incidentally recalls the shape of Bowes' portrait, wearing a similarly-styled Romantic-Era dress: this is what Barthes calls the *studium*. Seated below the painting is Clara Murdstone, her face obscured, inaccessible to David, and this is the more disturbing *punctum*, the 'sense' of the lost figure. Once allied to 'the Murdstone religion which was austere and wrathful' (2012:59) and associated with the unrelenting nature of extreme evangelicalism, poor Clara fades away and dies. Similarly, in *The Unequal Yoke* Gosse crudely imports the historical 'subject' of Bowes, but in *Father and Son* he conjures more poignantly the *punctum* with all the ambivalence of the mother-son relationship:

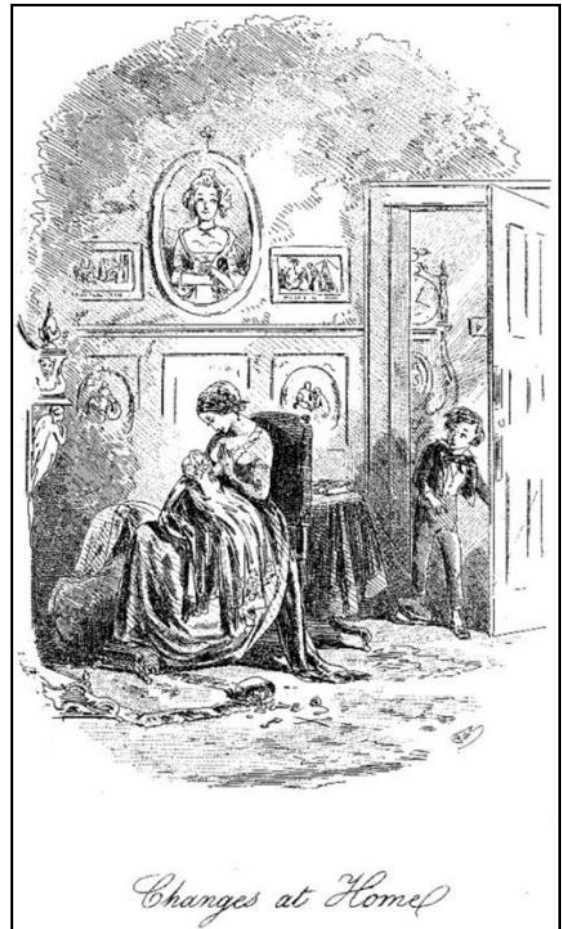


Fig.21

this shift into a more tentative voice marks Gosse's creation of a newly haunting and innovative mode.

Two artefacts, the portrait and Bowes' *Recollections*, seem to be 'pressed into service' by Gosse so that in his characterisation of Jane Baxter he conjures Bowes' young private self, before its effacement by her public evangelical voice, a process described by Jo Spence in *Family Snaps* (1991):

Memories evoked by a photograph do not simply spring out of the image itself, but are generated in an intertext of discourses that shift between past and present, spectator and image.

These traces of our former lives are pressed into service as a never-ending process of making, remaking, making sense of, ourselves – now. (1991:18-19)

Indeed, when Gosse submitted *The Unequal Yoke* to Andrew Lang's judgment in 1884, the latter commented that certain aspects of the novella seemed uncannily like the work of a woman (Demoor 1987:497) almost as though Bowes' influence was percolating through.

When, at Gosse's death in 1928, his son Philip presented to Cambridge University Library his father's own bound copy of the instalments of *The Unequal Yoke*, the librarian pencilled a note on the inside page: 'The donor of this work thinks that it may have been written by his mother rather than his father'. Again, there is that strong intimation of the female voice, but I suggest that it was not written by Philip's mother, Nellie Gosse,<sup>204</sup> but that it was motivated by Philip's spectral grand-mother, Emily Bowes, not only by her image, but also by her didactic voice.

Gosse's Clinamen<sup>205</sup> in *The Unequal Yoke* is tentative, as he tries to swerve away from Bowes' persona in her tracts, and to reach out to fairy-tale, through allusion. The theatre is the space in which the clash of inherited rival value systems becomes most obvious: for Frank's sister, Edith Capulett, 'the charm of the foot-lights had been a second-nature to her since she was a child' whereas for Jane 'a scruple of conscience, inherited without reflection from a long line of ancestors, is not so easily broken through, or defied with impunity' (1886:574). The event is the first night of *Cymbeline*, a play which is not, declares Northrop Frye, 'a historical play: it is pure folktale' (1965:67) and therefore doubly out-of-bounds for dutiful Dissenters.<sup>206</sup> The universality of its folktale elements make it easy to graft the plot of *Cymbeline* onto *The Unequal Yoke*: in the background, two groups stand in opposition in *Cymbeline*, the English and the Romans mirroring the Capulett-Baxter division, while in the foreground, there is a romance between a flawless heroine, Imogen/Jane and a flawed hero, Posthumus /Frank. The latter is seduced by gossip voiced by Iachimo/Mrs Percival, casting Imogen/Jane in a negative light. Even the figure of Lady Priscilla Capulett echoes the unnamed evil queen in *Cymbeline*: Lady Priscilla's blind fondness and social ambitions for Frank reverberate with *Cymbeline*'s wife's attitude to Cloten. Moreover, as the daughter of an Irish earl, Lady Priscilla comes from another realm, and according to Lüthi, Irish queens and mothers who persecute their stepdaughters or daughters-in-law, clearly display 'witchlike characteristics' (1984:5), a notion that Gosse intimates by Lady Priscilla's shrewish behaviour. Though fairy-tale elements are present in *The Unequal Yoke*, Gosse cannot translate them effectively because he is trammelled by the imperatives of the tract structure. Whereas *Cymbeline* ends happily ever

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<sup>204</sup> Ellen Epps (1850-1829) was Edmund Gosse's wife, a landscape painter and sister of Lady Alma Tadema. Although Nellie did publish occasional short stories, *The Unequal Yoke* is not her work: it contains numerous lexical and idiomatic features typical of Gosse's writing.

<sup>205</sup> Bloom's terminology discussed in Chapter Three, meaning a corrective movement, away from the precursor.

<sup>206</sup> Gosse later mentioned this play twice in *Father and Son*: it is listed together with *The Merchant of Venice*, *Julius Caesar* and *Much Ado* as the four Shakespearean plays that 'steeped [Gosse's] horizon with all the colours of sunrise' (2004:161), but he particularly cites *Cymbeline* as a play that it would have been impossible for him to justify reading if it had been proved that Shakespeare was unconverted (2004:162), presumably because of the play's phallic aggression, as enacted by such figures as Cloten (who vows to rape Imogen on Posthumous's corpse) or Iachimo (who indulges in literary masturbation fantasies). Posthumous's dream of Jupiter descending as an eagle could also be read as a parody of the notion of prophecy.

after, with Imogen and Posthumus reconciled, Gosse prioritises the moral resolution where the cowardly Frank acquiesces to selfish vanity, bringing disrepute on his family and his class, leaving Jane bruised, but with her faith unshaken.

Although Gosse is still imbued with Bowes' didacticism, his 'swerve' in *The Unequal Yoke* is evident in his allusion to the folkloric elements of *Cymbeline*. The recurrent motif of the grasping of hands is one such detail: Jane explains to her mother that Frank 'got a sort of power over [her]':

You know that first day when he pulled me out of the canal with his two hands? Well, his hands seemed to take possession of mine for a minute, and – I never felt anything like it before – it seemed as if it gave him a power over me. And whenever I was with him those first weeks, and he spoke directly to me with that coaxing voice of his, I felt my little hands in his grip. (1886:610)

This speech is the culmination of a series of references to that first physical contact at the canal. The memory of the grasped hands is significant to Frank as well as Jane: 'still in the palms of both his hands he felt thrillingly the violent pressure of those cold, girlish hands' (1886:506). These comments make intertextual sense when read in the light of the 'handfast' agreement, as undertaken between Imogen and Posthumus (*Cymbeline* I:v:78), an ancient form of irregular or probationary marriage contracted by parties joining hands and promising to live as man and wife (the word 'handfast' is used only once again by Shakespeare, in *The Winter's Tale*). Indeed, straight after the canal episode, Frank calls on Mrs Pomfret, who regales him with all the details about Jane's background and family situation in a way that recalls the fairy-tale crone or match-maker. Andrew Lang objected that Jane and Frank 'never were yoked' (Demoor 1987:497) but the allusion to *Cymbeline*, and indirectly to the 'handfast', and the role of the garrulous Mrs Pomfret actually give the relationship a folkloric quality of 'yoking'.

In allusions beyond *Cymbeline*, Jane and Frank are exposed to the world of the fanciful and the nostalgic: walking around London, they are transported into Arthurian legend, when the tower of Lambeth glows like 'the walls of mystical castle of Sarras' (1886:572), home of the Holy Grail. Jane's attraction to the catholic Frank is implied by her being described as 'the Queen of the May' (1886:501), a traditional figurehead in a catholic spring-time rite devoted to the Virgin Mary. Frank's moral compass becomes confused as he, 'gazing like a Narcissus', becomes convinced of his superiority over Jane (1886:604). Lacking his own moral direction, Frank's actions are increasingly prompted by superstition: he invents a 'magic enclosure', a triangular area visible from his window, and he makes the decision about his future marriage according to the random chance of anyone entering that defined area (1886:606). This sense of the magical is reiterated when he wanders into another enclosed space, and feels 'hemmed

in' with the two churches 'frowning' at him (1886:607) and he gives himself over to the incidental and the anthropomorphic. The allusions to Frank become increasingly complex: Gosse tells us for example that Frank's self-justifying reflections on his conduct 'buzzed about his head like the assiduous sylphs around a dreaming Rosicrucian' (1886:612). Sylphs are 'airy spirits' like the fairies in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but here the 'Rosicrucian' context imports into the allusion the satirical pressure of Pope's *Rape of the Lock*. In the dedication of his mock-heroic poem, Pope explains that he has introduced the fairy world through 'the Rosicrucian Doctrine of Spirits', a concept which advocated four types of spirit, the sylph being one of them (1896:xii). In the poem, the sylphs facilitate and accommodate vain and selfish female behaviour:

Oft when the World imagine Women stray,  
The Sylphs through Mystic mazes guide their Way.  
Through all the giddy Circle they pursue,  
And old Impertinence expel by new. (Canto I, 91-4)

By this allusion Gosse intimates Frank's feminising vanity and petulance, an inversion that is balanced by Jane's masculine pursuit of the path of 'duty'. It is a gender inversion that prepares for my paradigm of Gosse's reading of his parents in *Father and Son*.

Gosse must surely have had that portrait of Bowes in her un-Puritan dress in front of him when he wrote his father's biography:

Her figure was slim and tall, her neck of singular length and grace; her face small, with rather large and regular features, clear blue eyes delicately set in pink lids, under arched and pencilled auburn eyebrows; the mouth very sensitive, with something of the expression of Sir Joshua's little 'Child with the Rat-Trap'; the whole face surmounted by copious rolls and loops, in the fashion of the period, of orange-auburn hair (1890a:217).

The reference to 'arched and pencilled' eyebrows underscores Bowes' worldliness: this is not the act of a Puritan. Indeed, contemporary attitudes to 'pencilling' were disapproving even outside religious circles: 'The Lady of Distinction', who wrote *The Mirror of the Graces* (1811), observed:

Pencilling eyebrows, staining them, etc., are too clumsy tricks of attempted deception for any other emotion to be excited in the mind of the beholder, than contempt for the bad taste and wilful blindness which could ever deem them passable for a moment. (1830:43)

Interestingly, her strongly moralistic language encompasses notions of fabrication and invention: it is the sin of making a 'fiction' of one's face.



The painting to which Gosse alludes in this passage is listed in Northcote's *The Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds* <sup>207</sup>(1819:351) as *Muscipula, or Girl with Mouse-Trap* (1784).<sup>208</sup> The painting (Fig.22) depicts a young girl holding a trap that contains a live mouse, at which a cat stares intently. It was furthermore hung from 1875 in the Crimson Drawing Room (then known as the 'Sir Joshua Room') at Holland House, very close to Gosse's home. Diana Donald observes that the girl's face 'as she titters and looks out provocatively at the spectator, is astonishingly feline in feature'



Fig.22

(2007:19) and she locates the work within a genre of comparative physiognomies, developed in the treatises of Giovanni Battista della Porta and in the late eighteenth century, by J.C. Lavater (2007:115). The physical correspondence between Emily Bowes and the cat, via Reynolds, echoes Gosse's similar anthropomorphic urge that associates Jane Baxter with the 'gaudy lizard' and the Dragonetta with an enormous 'brilliant insect'. The similarities evoke on the one hand Aesop's fables wherein animals represent humans in order to illustrate moral maxims, and on the other, contemporary debates in the wake of Darwin<sup>209</sup> about animal 'instinct' and human 'reason' as attributes on a developmental continuum.

The animal imagery is highly ambiguous: the feline child in Reynolds' *Muscipula* can be linked with the mouse and seen as a victim, or associated with the cat and seen as predator.<sup>210</sup> Not

<sup>207</sup> The allusion to Reynolds returns us to Gosse's description in *Tristram Jones* of 'the dress of the days of Sir Joshua' (1872:22). This interest in Reynolds may reflect family influence since Gosse's artist-grandfather 'had worked at the schools of the Royal Academy under Sir Joshua Reynolds' (1890a:2). It also emphasises the practice of depicting a lady in anachronistic garb; in his seventh *Discourse* Reynolds advised his audience, 'not to paint [a lady] in modern dress, the familiarity of which alone is sufficient to destroy all dignity' (1842:138).

<sup>208</sup> The descriptive title was popularised by John Jones's stipple engraving of the work from 1786.

<sup>209</sup> Darwin's *The Descent of Man* (1871) posits 'the common descent of the species', arguing that humans descended from primates and manifested similar embryological developments and strategies of mating.

<sup>210</sup> The ambiguous dynamic between child, caged bird and predatory cat echoes Hogarth's painting, *The Graham Children* (1742), where the boy imagines that the fluttering goldfinch is responding to his playing (the serinette is furthermore decorated with a scene of Orpheus, the first artist, charming the beasts with his music), being oblivious to the threat of the cat. It is unclear whether Hogarth is suggesting that the boy's happy sense of control is a delusion or whether the boy will eventually become like the cat and secure his prey.



only animal but plant imagery compounds the idea of threat: the title, *Muscipula*, evokes additional destructive associations by its link with the Venus Fly-trap (*Dionaea muscipula*). The notion of the female as predator returns us again to the Dragonetta, who, as a vast insect can inflict a bite 'which would certainly be fatal' (1886:576), a potentially malefic figure. In fact, Gosse evokes other female figures in *Father and Son* who sport alluring hairstyles, rather like that of Bowes and the Dragonetta, characterising them by animal metaphors that produce a negative effect: the first is the 'serpent' in crinolines, Miss Wilkes, whose 'ringlets seemed to vibrate and shiver like the bells of a pagoda' (2004:92-3) aspiring in vain to be Philip's wife, and the second is the 'grim vixen', Mrs Paget, whose forehead was 'bordered with glossy ringlets' (2004:151, 148), a meddling, self-righteous puritan. In these two cases, the contrivances of female allurements register negatively with Gosse the child focaliser, as though he is baffled by the contradiction between appearance and reality. The comparison of Bowes' portrait with *Muscipula* then foregrounds its ambiguous nature: is Bowes a victim or predator?

The 'moorings' of the portrait of Bowes are by now thoroughly loosed, and in order to structure the fantasy that Gosse weaves about his mother, I shall use the framework of Freud's *Family Romances* (1909). Bloom locates the origin of anxiety in the process of the child's separation from its mother, and explicitly cites Freud's theory:

I am afraid that the anxiety of influence, from which we all suffer, whether we are poets or not, has to be located first in its origins, in the fateful morasses of what Freud, with grandly desperate wit, called 'the family romance'. (1997:56-7)

In *Family Romances*, Freud suggests that the progress of society depends on the opposition between successive generations: 'the liberation of an individual, as he grows up, from the authority of his parents is one of the most necessary though one of the most painful results brought about by the course of his development' (1953:237). In his early years, a child regards his parents as the primary point of authority, desiring above all else to resemble that revered figure, but with increased maturity, the child grows disillusioned, and the perceived status of the parent diminishes. Freud points out that most individuals go through this process by the time they reach adulthood; his interest was in those neurotics whose condition is determined 'by their having failed in this task' (1953:237). Freud argues that the neurotic child imagines 'a fulfilment of wishes, and a correction of actual life' in response to the parents whom he deems unsatisfactory. In his fantasy, he may replace his birth parents with adoptive parents, and affords these substitutes a much more elevated social status than that of his 'real' parents; he may also imagine that his birth was the outcome of maternal infidelity, thus imputing moral failings to the mother. As Bloom comments:

In the wholeness of the poet's imagination, the Muse is mother and harlot at one, for the largest phantasmagoria most of us weave from our necessarily egoistic interests is the family romance, which might be called the only poem that even unpoetical natures continue to compose. (Bloom 1997:63)

Such hostile displacement, Freud argues, is simply the child's way of forging a separation from those early idealistic days when he believed his father 'the noblest and strongest of men, and his mother the dearest and loveliest of women' (1953:241). Gosse's version of his mother's life has long perplexed both his critics (Allen 1988:492-94) and her biographers: 'Why', asks Robert Boyd, 'does he so misrepresent his own mother?' (2004:69). If, however, we read Gosse's version of Bowes' life in terms of Bloom's 'phantasmagoria', Boyd's question is answered: Gosse needed his mother's life to be a fairy-tale, in order to make sense of his own.

Like the child in *Family Romances*, Gosse characterises himself as 'neurotic', evoking that condition<sup>211</sup> through his aversion to the female smells that he encounters in the cottages of the Marychurch 'saints', as discussed in Chapter Three. Unlike male smells, female odours were particularly offensive because they were disguised and surreptitious:

There were fine manly smells of the pigsty and the open drain, and these prided themselves on being all they seemed to be; but there were also feminine odours, masquerading as you knew not what, in which penny whiffs, vials of balm and opponax, seemed to have become tainted vaguely, with the residue of the slop-pail. (2004:78)

We have returned to Gosse's disquiet about female contrivances, of their 'dressing up' in order to be alluring. He is disturbed by the 'masquerade' of feminine odours, treacherous and dissembling; contact with the physicality of the female appals and sickens him so that he cannot eat. Consequently he transforms his mother into an 'ethereal' figure (2004:8) and places her within an elevated social sphere, detached from the horrors of working class slop-pails. Bowes, Gosse contends, originated from a family 'which had been more than well-to-do in the eighteenth century' (2004:5 *italics mine*). Peter Allen attributes Gosse's emphasis on his parents' social standing to 'his fear of appearing less than genteel', and suggests that:

Virginia Woolf was one reader who could see behind the mask: Gosse claimed to be the child of cultivated parents, but what Woolf understood was 'the narrowness, the ugliness of his upbringing . . . the absence from his home of culture, beauty, urbanity, graciousness'. That is, she understood more than Gosse himself would ever have admitted, perhaps even to himself. (1988:501)

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<sup>211</sup> 'Neurosis' was a concept that arose in 1870s and became popularised in the 1880s and 1890s: sometimes termed 'neurasthenia' for males or 'hysteria' for females.

Allen is quoting from the same essay where Woolf famously described Gosse as being 'as touchy as a housemaid and as suspicious as a governess' (1988:81), making her insight here particularly poignant. Revolted by mundane ugliness, this proud, neurotic child is set upon ennobling his maternal origins. It was maybe Woolf's own obsession with her mother, a haunting that persisted until she killed off Mrs Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* (1927) that helped her to recognise the nature of Gosse's

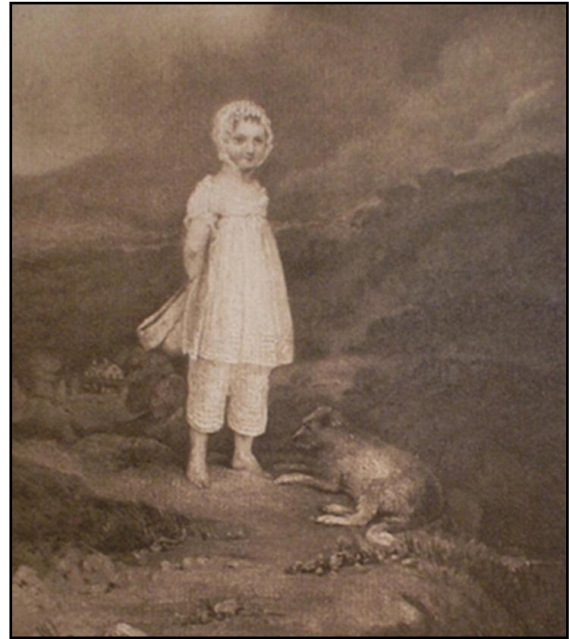


Fig.23

embarrassment. The initial impulse to

ennoble Bowes is easy for Gosse since she was actually born into wealth: Gosse's insertion of the reproduction of an oil portrait of Bowes aged eight<sup>212</sup> into the *Booklover's Edition* confirms her socially elevated origins (Fig.23). Few families could afford professionally painted portraits, especially one by so eminent an artist as W.A. Beechey R.A. (1753-1839), portrait painter to Queen Charlotte. Thus Gosse achieves the first step in his Freudian 'correction' of Bowes' real life.

There have been many condemnations of Gosse's exaggerations and misrepresentations, but the blatant disparity between the easily ascertainable facts of Bowes' life<sup>213</sup> and Gosse's romantic fabrication of it is what makes Freud's theory so productive, for Gosse is not simply lying: he is making explicit his acts of fantasy, signalling that they are the imaginings of a neurotic child. The next stage in Freud's *Family Romances* is for the ennobled subject to be plunged into a situation of romantic poverty, hence Gosse's attribution of the Bowes' family loss of fortune to the profligacy of his grandfather, asserting culpable agency, rather than

<sup>212</sup> Its provenance is noted in the monograph by William Roberts: *Sir William Beechey, R.A.* (1907), which includes the artist's account books and a list of works exhibited in his lifetime: there is a reference to the painting of Emily Bowes, dated 'to 1814 or 1815' when she would have been 8 or 9 (1907:203).

<sup>213</sup> In a letter written to a long-lost cousin Sarah Stoddard, dated 16 Sept, 1841, Bowes gives an outline of her life: 'I am 34 years old, and as you take an interest in your relations, I will tell you something about my life. When I was 17, I left home as a governess in a clergyman's family in a little country village, it was a small young family when I entered it, but I remained there 14 years, and when I left it, there were 12 children, the elder ones of course grown up. I then took charge of five little girls at Brighton, the daughters of Sir Charles Musgrave, but they had lost both father and mother and were under the care of two aunts. I remained with them nearly three years and left them this spring. Since that time I have been at home and intend if it please God to remain at home as long as my mother lives, she being very lame and infirm.' (CUL: Add 9713 [Letter 25])

making him a passive victim of economic forces.<sup>214</sup> Gosse describes the consequences of financial ruin for Bowes thus:

When the catastrophe of my grandfather's fortune had occurred . . . my Mother, in spite of an extreme dislike of teaching, which was native to her, immediately accepted the situation of a governess in the family of an Irish nobleman. The mansion was only to be approached, as Miss Edgeworth would have said, 'through eighteen sloughs, at the imminent peril of one's life', and when one had reached it, the mixture of opulence and squalor, of civility and savagery, was unspeakable. (2004:13).

Gosse does not expect his reader to believe that this is actually what happened to Emily Bowes; he wants us to realise that he, a sensitive and fastidious child oppressed by narrowness, cannot help but resort to a fictional tale.<sup>215</sup>

In this passage, the reference to Maria Edgeworth<sup>216</sup> has its own peculiar hinterland. The quotation comes from a long letter that Edgeworth wrote to her brother during an extended journey around Connemara in 1834. The letter, published in Augustus Hare's *The Life and Letters of Maria Edgeworth* (1894:204-245) focuses on the difficulties of travelling by horse and carriage in that undeveloped region of Ireland: 'Well! well! I will not wear your sympathy and patience eighteen times out, with the history of the eighteen sloughs we went, or were got, through at the imminent peril of our lives' (1894:124). Given the detailed account of the journey over the forty-one pages of the letter, Gosse's selection of this particular exclamation seems strange, until one realises that he would have encountered the quotation in Emily Lawless's biography, *Maria Edgeworth* (1904), published in the Macmillan 'English Men of Letters' series, in which Gosse played a central role.<sup>217</sup> The only sustained passage of quotation that Lawless lifts from Edgeworth's description of her journey begins with the exclamation about the 'eighteen sloughs', so the comment was virtually 'pre-selected' for Gosse. This much-travelled allusion then, began life in Edgeworth's private letter in 1834, was made public by her editor, Augustus Hare in 1894, cited by her biographer in 1904, and then employed by Gosse to fictionalise the ostensibly factual account of his mother. Gosse's use of the Edgeworth allusion validates the notion of Ireland as a wild country where a young

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<sup>214</sup> Robert Boyd contends that the real cause of the Bowes' family bankruptcy in 1814 was shipping losses incurred by Lloyd's Insurance, of which William Bowes was a member (2004:21).

<sup>215</sup> It is notable that this scenario is not part of Gosse's profile of his mother's life in Chapter 1 of *Father and Son*, but is narrated in Chapter 2 alongside other anecdotes like the greyhound seizing the leg of mutton, 'family myths' as mediated through the filter of the child.

<sup>216</sup> Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849) was a prolific writer of adult and children's fiction. Her books were very popular during Emily's lifetime. Interestingly, in his *History of English Literature: An Illustrated Record*, Gosse includes a portrait of Edgeworth (1905a:93) wearing a wide-necked 'evening dress' and complex hair-style which links her visually with Bowes. See Appendix Seven.

<sup>217</sup> Morley, as editor and as writer of one volume, Leslie Stephen as writer of five volumes and Gosse as author of three volumes, were the three most important contributors to the series.

woman's life would be adventurous, even dangerous, rather different from Bowes' quiet sojourn in Berkshire.

The tone of Edgeworth's exclamation is furthermore witty and high-spirited: such blatant exaggeration evokes the ambience of the Irish bull, a genre that Edgeworth was particularly knowledgeable about. In the late 1790s, Edgeworth collated the many Irish bulls that she had been collecting since adolescence into *An Essay on Irish Bulls* (1802), a work that celebrates Irish native intelligence and linguistic humour in 'an informal philosophic dialogue' (Desmarais 2006: no pagination). Gosse conveys that same vein of playfulness by his use of epistemic modality: 'as Miss Edgeworth *would have said*' (italics mine) implying 'a tale' that might or might not be true.

The tale of Bowes working for an Irish nobleman is, I contend, what Suzanne Keen terms a 'narrative annex', a device that is:

initiated by a combined shift in genre and setting that changes the fictional world of the novel, and [it] works by interrupting the norms of a story's world, temporarily replacing those norms, and carrying the reader, the perceiving and reporting characters, and the plot-line across a boundary and through an altered, particular, and briefly realised zone of difference. (1998:1)

The annex allows the writer to challenge both cultural and literary conventions by inserting a dissonant interlude, without interrupting narrative coherence. Since Freud characterises the neurotic's family romance in terms of day-dreams (1953:238), the annexes, as bounded shifts into alternative realms, imitate that notion of reverie. Keen explains that an annex has four distinct features, and I shall now discuss Gosse's version of Bowes' early adulthood in relation to those four markers. Gosse's sketch is a 'misrepresentation' but not a random one: his 'neurotic' hostility is thereby conveyed at a safely sub-textual level.

The first characteristic of a narrative annex is that it employs a shift in genre, and I would argue that the language of Gosse's sketch with its import of the 'unspeakable' is explicitly Gothic. As a governess, Bowes is transformed into a classic heroine of Gothic Romance. As Helena Michie observes,

The position of governess, metaphorically speaking, is no more than a temporary disguise which it is the duty of both the hero and the reader to pierce. Underneath the subdued costume of the governess is the delicate and sensitive body of the leisure-class heroine. (1987:48)

The dramatic decline in the Bowes' family fortunes allows Gosse to pitch his mother into this romantic role. Gosse furthermore re-enacts scenes to heighten the melodrama: we later learn that on receiving the 'news that her younger brother had taken his degree, then and there,

with a sigh of intense relief, [Bowes] resigned her situation' (2004:13-14); such dramatic immediacy imitates the tone of Gothic romance.

The second and third features of the narrative annex are closely related. The annex has literal and metaphorical boundaries in terms of its setting, 'geographical pockets of excess, 'natural' or 'foreign' places in which community is no longer explicit' (Keen 1998:29). Gosse thus isolates Bowes in her '*ultima Thule*'; the use of this term from medieval geography, meaning a place beyond the boundaries of the known world, reiterates remoteness. This far-flung location is Ireland: not only is it characteristic of early Gothic which traded in xenophobia, casting the Irish as dangerous and malevolent, but it is a 'foreign land' dominated by Catholicism, a mode of faith explicitly condemned by Bowes.<sup>218</sup> The Irish nobleman's 'mansion' is a classic Gothic edifice which Devendra Varma notes is 'traditionally associated with childhood stories of magic'; it satisfied the craving for 'something strange, emotional and mysterious' (1987:17). Here Gosse's use of Gothic Romance is yet another manifestation of his inclination towards fairy-tale: as Varma observes, 'the Gothic romances are themselves in the nature of adult fairy-tales' (1987:17). In Gothic novels, the 'approach' to a mysterious edifice is invariably imbued with sinister portent,<sup>219</sup> and Edgeworth's 'sloughs' evoke a struggle through menacing terrain.

Keen claims that the fourth and final feature of annexes is that they 'were often singled out by critics and contemporary readers as especially unlikely or peculiar' (1998:4). I have found no contemporary references to this passage; indeed, I have already highlighted that the father-son focus eclipsed contemporary interest in Bowes. In terms of later critics, John Gross, quoted in my Introduction, senses the apparently deliberate and thus 'peculiar' nature of Gosse's mistakes, considering them 'so glaring that one half suspects him of a psychological kink' (1969:160), while Peter Allen specifically addresses the passage under discussion, and point by point, he counters the claims with factual evidence to the contrary: '[Gosse] implies that his mother was a young woman when his grandfather's money was lost. In fact she was eight years old. Emily Bowes became a governess nine years later, not immediately, and for a clergyman in Berkshire, not a nobleman in Ireland' (1988:493). Like Gross, Allen senses

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<sup>218</sup> Bowes makes no secret of her antipathy towards Catholicism in her tracts: in 'The Portuguese Covert' (Tract No.15) Bowes describes the old man, Arseni Nicos Silva as a 'man of rank and fortune' but 'like the rest of his countrymen, a poor and ignorant Papist, who knew nothing of the truth of God's word'; in 'The Good Physician' (Tract No.23) Bowes comments that the maltreatment of Protestants in Madeira 'proves that the Papacy is unchanged as a persecuting power from what it was in the dark ages' and in 'Mary Kelly's Letter' (Tract No.55), she describes how 'a neglected little Irish girl' possesses a Bible, and the priest tried to take it away from her.

<sup>219</sup> Catherine Morland's approach to Northanger Abbey 'without obstacle, alarm or solemnity of any kind, struck her as odd and inconsistent' (1995:152).

something deliberate in Gosse's equivocations in *Father and Son*, and he attributes it to personality rather than to authorial device:

The problem was not simply inattention to factual detail. Gosse's use of language was habitually influenced more by his sense of audience than his sense of truth. His upbringing had left him much in need of affection, and he strove constantly to impress, to charm. (Allen 1988:493-4)

Keen's theory of narrative annexes offers therefore a convincing structure by which to re-read some of the apparently 'unlikely' passages in *Father and Son*. The annex furthermore draws attention to Bowes: it intimates something arresting, even disturbing, about her character, but then allows that uncertainty to subside within the texture of the narrative. Gosse is playing a literary game here, challenging his reader to follow him beyond the prescriptive conventions surrounding the Victorian mother to his more daring realm of representation. Gosse cannot openly criticise the 'saint' of *Tell Jesus*, and so must employ more subtle ways of alerting the reader to his ambivalence about her. Having been denied the childhood experience of learning to distinguish between the real and the fictional, Gosse now exposes his reader to that state of ignominious bewilderment; the normative is being undermined without warning. He wants the reader to understand the debilitating nature of Bowes' prohibition.

There is an interesting adjunct to my reading of Bowes as a heroine of Gothic romance. Alexis Harley discusses Gosse's allusion to himself as St Teresa, his claim that Philip 'so worked upon [his] feelings that [he] would start forth like St Teresa, wild for the Moors and martyrdom' (2004:115).<sup>220</sup> Harley considers this simile to be 'startling' in its presentation of Gosse as a Renaissance Catholic girl responding to 'religious instruction doled out by his militantly Protestant father'; she argues that 'by placing himself in sixteenth-century Spain - thereby transferring himself from Protestant England to the depths of Catholic Europe - [Gosse] places himself in a scenario apt for transplantation to a Gothic romance' (2007:para.9). This reading creates a resonant allusive bridge: my reading of Gosse's description of Bowes-as-governess in terms of the romantic Gothic heroine connects with Harley's placing of Gosse-as-St Teresa in the same generic mould.

When the allusion to St Teresa is interrogated, it emerges that there are strong resonances between the life-histories of St Teresa and Bowes, namely their identical decisions to eschew all fiction, a self-prohibition that was in both cases maintained until death. Both critique

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<sup>220</sup> According to the myth, St Teresa (1515-1582), aged seven, attempted to leave home for Moorish territory seeking Christian martyrdom but was prevented by her uncle. Gosse may have encountered the story through his reading of Richard Crashaw's 'Hymn to St Teresa' (1642) which he discusses in *Seventeenth Century Studies* (1883a:157-190).

parental laxity: just as St Teresa rejects her mother's time-wasting Books of Chivalry, so Bowes was (according to Gosse) 'diametrically opposed in essential matters to her easy-going, luxurious and self-indulgent parents' (2004:6). Both assume a traditionally male prerogative, not only in terms of religious authorship, but also in their proselytising: St Teresa founded several reformed Carmelite convents, being afforded an authority conventionally denied women, while Bowes, as I have shown in Chapter One, undertook evangelical outreach, with a freedom unusual for a Victorian married woman. Both furthermore are associated with religious rapture: St Teresa famously experiences ecstasy during an angelic visitation, when she felt her 'very entrails' to be pierced (St Teresa 1888:235) while Bowes-as-Hannah and Philip-as-Elkanah went (according to Gosse's ironic representation of The Great Scheme, his religious dedication) to Shiloh 'in their *ecstasy*' (2004:153 italics mine). The parallels between Bowes and St Teresa are particularly ironic given the former's overt hostility towards Catholicism, discussed above.

Gosse's allusion is, however, directed to himself and not to Bowes, and rather than focusing on St Teresa's remarkable achievements, he cites the one aspect about her life that is a notorious fiction, the attempted journey to Moorish territory in search of martyrdom. Although in her autobiography St Teresa refers to her youthful dream 'to go into that country of the Moors, asking alms for the love of God, that so we might come to be beheaded' (Manning 1865:3) it was no more than an inspired vision. The fiction, however, acquired the status of fact, being gradually translated into a childhood 'event', to be perpetuated, even embellished, by nineteenth-century biographers and poets (Manning 1865:3-4; Coleridge 1881:8-9; O'Hara 1883:8-11). It is thus ironic that, ultimately, fictive childhood stories may prove more memorable and inspiring than the reality of adult spirituality. Certainly, it was an irresistible story: George Eliot alludes to it throughout *Middlemarch* (1871-72) and opens the Prelude with an explicit reference to the saint, citing as the cause of her 'child-pilgrimage' frustration with such trivialities as 'many-volumed romances of chivalry' (1980:25), that Bowes-like antipathy to fiction and inclination for self-denial.<sup>221</sup> Jill Matus observes that Dorothea 'is presented initially as an interesting example in the 'history of man' – the generic, perhaps ungendered seeker whose demand for an epic life illustrates that passion, rapture, and their expression in a transcendent cause are enduring human problems' (1990:232). Matus's sense of St Teresa as an 'ungendered' seeker finds resonances in my own suggestion that Bowes as well as young

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<sup>221</sup> Dorothea Brooke preferred 'old theological books' to fiction (1980:31) and embraced opportunities for self-denial, for example, she 'enjoyed [horse-riding] in a pagan sensuous way, and always looked forward to renouncing it' (1980:32). She is known for her 'excessive religiousness', her 'flighty sort of Methodistical stuff' (1980:43. 81).



Gosse, regardless of considerations of gender, seem to inhabit the figure of the impassioned saint. It is an allusion that both binds and separates mother and son.

The use of the narrative annex in *Father and Son* subtly destabilises the reader's view of Bowes, and lays the ground for Gosse's bolder step of insinuating moral laxity. My reading continues to be informed by Freud's *Family Romances*, of which the second stage has a sexual component:

The child, having learnt about sexual processes, tends to picture to himself erotic situations and relations, the motive behind this being his desire to bring his mother (who is the subject of the most intense sexual curiosity) into situations of secret infidelity and into secret love-affairs. In this way the child's phantasies, which started by being, as it were, asexual, are brought up to the level of his later knowledge. (1953:237)

Two episodes serve to illustrate this second stage: the first anecdote about Gosse in the garret belongs to the same chapter as the story of Bowes as a governess, a chapter punctuated by subtle 'forays into the risqué' (Keen 1998:2). I suggest that this passage, where six-year-old Gosse, alone in the garret, discovers a sensational novel, used as a lining for the lid of a skin-trunk, may be read as another 'narrative annex':

It was, of course, a fragment, but I read it, kneeling on the bare floor, with indescribable rapture. It will be recollected that the idea of fiction, of a deliberately invented story, had been kept from me with entire success. I therefore implicitly believed the tale in the lid of the trunk to be a true account of the sorrows of a lady of title, who had to flee the country, and who was pursued into foreign lands by enemies bent upon her ruin. Somebody had an interview with a 'minion' in a 'mask'; I went downstairs and looked up these words in Bailey's English Dictionary, but was left in darkness as to what they had to do with the lady of title. This ridiculous fragment filled me with delicious fears: I fancied that my Mother, who was out so much, might be threatened by dangers of the same sort; and the fact that the narrative came abruptly to an end, in the middle of one of its most thrilling sentences, wound me up almost to a disorder of wonder and romance. (2004:25).

Irony indeed: Gosse implies moreover that Bowes placed herself in the compromising situation of the sensationalist heroine through his condemnatory subordinate clause, revealing that she 'was out so much'. Bowes offends the expectations of mid nineteenth-century marriage which 'redefined the borders of the female body to include the husband and children, [making] more impermeable the boundaries between home and the outside world' (Michie 1999:420). Bowes, who advises mothers not to leave their children with irresponsible maids,<sup>222</sup> is herself 'out so much'. Indeed, in *Abraham*, Bowes offers this pious advice to Christian parents:

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<sup>222</sup> Emily writes two pieces for *The Mother's Friend* emphasising the thoughtlessness of servants: See Chapter Three.

It too often happens with those who occupy a very prominent place in the service of God, that their own children are neglected and turn out ill. They are so much occupied with the service of God out of doors, that they make his service in their family a secondary consideration, and their children degenerate accordingly. (1855a:139)

At the mercy of the 'thrilling sentences' which he mistakenly reads as if they were fact, young Gosse becomes '*wound up* almost to a *disorder* of wonder and romance' (2004:25 italics mine): the sexual lexis intimates his 'degeneration'. Nancy Traubitz touches on this episode describing the skin trunk as 'marvellously Freudian', and its contents as the cause of 'indescribable rapture'; she points out that Gosse 'immediately' associates such rapture with Bowes, implying Oedipal desire (1976:151). Robert Aguirre also situates Gosse in the phallic stage, describing his reaction as 'near masturbatory delight' (1990:212). The anecdote is therefore all about boundaries: generic, sexual, and psychological. Gosse, prohibited from fiction and therefore unable to read the sensation novel as intended, is catapulted into another area of prohibition, incestuous desire for the mother.

The status of the episode as a narrative annex is also indicated by its generic shift, as Bowes is pitched into a sensationalist novel, a genre which promised its readers adventure, crime, violence, or sex,<sup>223</sup> the sort of trashy, pornographic material that Bowes and her fellow evangelical writers sought to expunge from society by their tracts.<sup>224</sup> Acts of kidnapping and seduction, of persecuted innocence, of ruined heiresses, and of sinister disguises are all implied by Gosse's lexis. The crossing of a boundary is signalled by the setting of the garret, a place emanating both private and cultural resonances. Privately, the garret is inextricably linked with his mother: her childhood experience, recorded in *Recollections*, was to seek privacy there:

I used to go when I could into the garret to read and pray using a little book called *Incitement to Early Piety*. I wrote several hymns there, which I afterwards burned. I can remember when out of spirits finding great comfort from the text when my father and my mother forsook me. (1835:23)

Gosse simply appropriates Bowes' childhood emotion to himself. Just as she, feeling abandoned by her parents, retreats to the garret to comfort herself spiritually, so Gosse feeling in turn abandoned by Bowes, also resorts to that space for comfort, but replaces pious tracts with salacious romance in order to wound her. For Gosse, too, the garret is a refuge, but it is 'a fairy place', a location where according to Harry Stone, 'everyday reality is re-seen

<sup>223</sup> Classic sensationalist novels of the 1860s and 1870s include Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859), Ellen Wood's *East Lyme* (1861), and M.E. Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862).

<sup>224</sup> Susan Pedersen argues that tracts were designed to undermine 'not only the content of popular literature but also the very existence of a popular culture autonomous from dominant society [by] outlining the norms of a single Christian culture and differentiat[ing] the godly from the ungodly of all classes by their adherence to these standards.' (1986:107-8).

imaginatively, even fantastically, but the result increases rather than diminishes our sense of the reality depicted' (1968:56). Because this room is formed within the roof, it functions as a literal 'annex', separate from the rest of the Gosse household where fiction is prohibited; fantasy is accessible here. Culturally, the garret was the home of the Romantic Poet, ever associated with Henry Wallis's *The Death of Chatterton* (1856). Not only did Chatterton's Holborn garret of 1770 become an iconic Romantic location, but the poet himself was transformed into a ghostly figure; Nick Groom suggests that Chatterton arrives 'from nowhere, is available to strangeness and spectrality, eating nothing, having no father, leaving no heirs' (2002:209). The image of Chatterton made by the Romantics, and re-made by the Victorians in his garret, hovers between 'real' and 'literary' worlds; he is ever crossing and re-crossing that boundary.

The second sub-textual erotic fantasy centres on Gosse's deconstruction of Bowes' most famous tract, *The Guardsman of the Alma*. In *Father and Son*, Gosse recreates the scene where Bowes interviews the handsome young guardsman, describing how he himself, aged five, 'suddenly burst into the breakfast-room' and interrupted their meeting: 'my Mother... promptly told me to run away and play, but I had seen a great sight' (2004:20). Karen Manarin reads the soldier as 'the son's rival because he is her evangelical work personified' (1996:61) but the lexis is more urgent than she allows, investing the encounter with an erotic charge: the 'tall young man [was] as stiff as my doll', a notion that Gosse repeats only five sentences later: 'I see him still in my mind's eye, large, stiff, and unspeakably brilliant' (2004:20). Gosse's exclamation 'I had seen a great sight' suggests the lingering effect of the scene on his neurotic sense; it conjures Freud's 'primal scene', the premature witnessing of the sex act that generates libidinous fantasies. Indeed, the insistence that Bowes sat 'quite far away' from the guardsman, with the open Bible between them, seems so orchestrated a pose that it acquires comic overtones. Young Gosse's mind is moreover full of newly-revealed notions of sexual difference when he 'bursts' into the breakfast-room, for in the preceding paragraph, whilst playing with his three dolls, Lizzie, the maid-servant exclaimed, 'What? a boy, and playing with a soldier when he's got two lady-dolls to play with?' (2004:20). Lizzie's suggestive comment precipitates in Gosse the dawning of sexual awareness. His mind is ready and honed to receive 'a great sight'.

Pervasive in *Father and Son* is the effect of Bowes' prohibition: to forbid a child access to fairy-stories is a particularly poignant deprivation, and Gosse seems resolved in this text to have the 'final word' on this issue. Gosse states that Bowes' prohibition meant that he 'had never heard of fairies' (2004:17) yet his description of his childhood is characterised by numerous allusions to the fairy; it is an act of literary *trompe-l'oeil*. The empty garret where he played was, for

example, 'a fairy place', while the land surrounding the neighbouring village of Barton was 'fairyland': 'All was mysterious, unexplored, rich with infinite possibilities' (2004:24, 79). Although schooled by his father in the discourse of marine biology, Gosse describes the rock-pools on the seashore as a 'fairy paradise' (2004:81). Even the story of his kidnap by Mary Flaw is hedged about with fairy imagery: not only did this eccentric 'saint' entertain young Gosse in the fairy-like haunt of her 'cowry-shell bower' but she would regularly sweep 'in fairy majesty out of the chapel' (2004:85-6). In her act of kidnapping Gosse, 'Miss Flaw, with incredible swiftness, *flew* along the line' and '*plucked*' him from his pew then '*darted*' out into the dark, reminiscent of J.M. Barrie's Tinkerbell,<sup>225</sup> that character being represented on stage by a darting light, and evincing a similar mixture of fairy kindness and jealousy. Gosse himself often 'becomes' a fairy-tale character such as Blanchefleur or Andromeda, a typical 'princess' who is invariably 'saved up' for a predestined fate of some kind (2004:22, 82). There is a formal irony in all this: Gosse uses fairy-tale imagery to describe a childhood during which, he alleges, no access to fairy-tales is permitted. He is making explicit the fanciful nature of the reconstruction of childhood, indeed, of any experience: he is exposing the fictionality of autobiography, the fantastical nature of any story-telling. Like other destabilising techniques discussed in this chapter, from his insertion of photographs in the *Booklovers' Edition* to his use of narrative annexes, Gosse is demonstrating, to the alert reader, the fabricated nature of art. As Oscar Wilde intimates in *The Art of Lying*, Gosse is 'lying' because art itself is a designed and calculated act of re-reading reality.

More seriously subversive is Gosse's apparent 'closure' of the Brethren sect to which his mother belonged. He describes *Father and Son* as 'a record of educational and religious conditions, *which having passed away, will never return*'; it is, he continues, 'the diagnosis of a *dying Puritanism*' (2004:3 italics mine), and this statement operates as another 'narrative annex'. It constitutes a generic shift in claiming to be a '*document*' (the word significantly italicised by Gosse) which is generically incompatible with the more subjective form of the autobiographical and 'slice of life' narratives promised in his Preface. Both metaphorically and literally, Gosse also locates Brethrenism as something 'bounded' and belonging to another realm, another 'epoch'. Another feature of annexes is that they are singled out by contemporary readers as 'peculiar', and certainly Gosse's insistence that the Brethren sect was by 1907 an anachronism puzzled the reviewer in *The Academy*: 'this stifling, joyless creed is neither dead nor dying; it is today a power in the land. The Puritans we have always with us, and their creed is the same now as it was in the beginning' (1907:188). More recently, Max

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<sup>225</sup> Barrie's play *Peter Pan* was staged from 1904.

Wright, author of *Told in Gath* (1990),<sup>226</sup> an account of his growing up in a Brethren household in 1930s and 1940s Belfast, also asked:

Why was Gosse so confident in 1907 that he was producing a document which was already, in an age when all was changed utterly, of merely historical interest? ...Did the great metropolitan critic never go back to Devon or even, out of sentimental curiosity, seek out the gospel halls of Clapham or Blackheath or Hackney or Wembley or Deptford or Burnt Oak, which must have been thriving then, since they assuredly were forty years later? (Wright 1990:5)

Gosse's insistence on the demise of Brethrenism clearly contradicted the facts but his assertion, when read as a narrative annex, turns it into a literary device, a means of conveying an otherwise 'impermissible' subject.

Although chronologically an 'Edwardian text', the resonant allusivity and generic complexity of *Father and Son* separates it from contemporary trends epitomised by the Bennett-Wells-Galsworthy triad. The traditional linearity and closure of Edwardian plot-driven narratives address an audience rather different from the reader to whom Gosse aspires. Gosse's skill, as Pater predicted, was to exploit 'matter malleable anew' (1901:112) and this text, with its incomplete and shifting nature, with its narrator who is simultaneously child and old man, and with its subject a mother who is at once victim and predator, saint and sinner, evinces a complexity and a modernity that has never been fully recognised. It was also a mode that Gosse could never repeat. Either shocked by his own audacity or exhausted by the psychological *agon*, Gosse's resistance to Bowes faded after *Father and Son*, and gradually her voice began to re-assert itself in Gosse's writing. Writing his regular column in the *Sunday Times*, Gosse styled himself as a literary evangelist, delivering 'ten-minute sermons' to his 'congregation' of readers (1921:vii). This trait was ridiculed by Ezra Pound who complained that Gosse's biography of Swinburne was 'decked out for a psalm-singing audience' (1918:323). Even Gosse's public oratory related to the War Effort becomes evangelical in tone and lexis. His 'Plea for Books', arguing for state protection of the production and dissemination of books in war-time, illustrates this: 'What will be the profit to us if we gain the whole world and lose our own souls?',<sup>227</sup> Gosse asks, 'for it is a national benefit to pour oil into the lamp<sup>228</sup> by which the hunted spirit of Man<sup>229</sup> may trace its path over the dark moorland to victory' (*New York Times*, 1918). Gosse's language here clearly echoes not only Matthew's

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<sup>226</sup> The title is - significantly - allusive, from Samuel 1:20 and Micah 1:10. Gath would exult at any calamity that befell the Hebrews, so this advice is to avoid gratifying those who exult over God's chosen people.

<sup>227</sup> For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? (Matt.16:26).

<sup>228</sup> See parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (Matt.25:1-4).

<sup>229</sup> Gosse borrows Mary Angela Dickens' phrase: the Church 'gives sanctuary to the hunted spirit of man' (1916:17) used in her book *Sanctuary*, a devotional work, encouraging readers to view Christ as a 'sanctuary' from the spirit of the age, from sorrow, from sin, from success etc.

Gospel but also a contemporary evangelical work entitled *Sanctuary* (1916) by Mary Angela Dickens. Although the latter text may have interested Gosse because its author was the granddaughter of Charles Dickens, his act of appropriation shows an easy familiarity with the genre.

Having begun this chapter with the portrait of Bowes, I shall conclude it with a different style of portrait, a caricature in which Bowes is not depicted but in which her haunting presence dominates. The first portrait of Bowes in the Romantic-Era dress was the key that unlocked the series of narrative annexes hitherto buried in the text: it established Bowes as central to Gosse's romantic vision. It helped to reveal how Gosse's simultaneous appropriation of and resistance to her generated the stylistic and structural ambivalences of *Father and Son*. It is only in *Father and Son* that Gosse is able to exploit the tension between these powerfully contentious forces. The final portrait is Max Beerbohm's caricature, 'The Old and the Young Self' in *Observations* (1925): it captures, I suggest, that precarious moment of Gosse balancing those contradictory impulses (Fig. 24). Gosse, in his establishment white tie and tails, has suddenly been interrupted by his youthful precocious self, arms uplifted evangelist-style, asking 'Are you saved?' (1925:34). The child is the infant whom Bowes tried to shape and mould, and the adult is the feted Litterateur who claimed to have achieved his own 'self-fashioning'. His position as Bowes' ephebe is exposed to the startled onlookers, but the resolute man of letters keeps this unwelcome apparition at bay by a stern glance. In *Father and Son*, Gosse both confronts and exploits his precursor: this text is Gosse's temporary Apophrades.

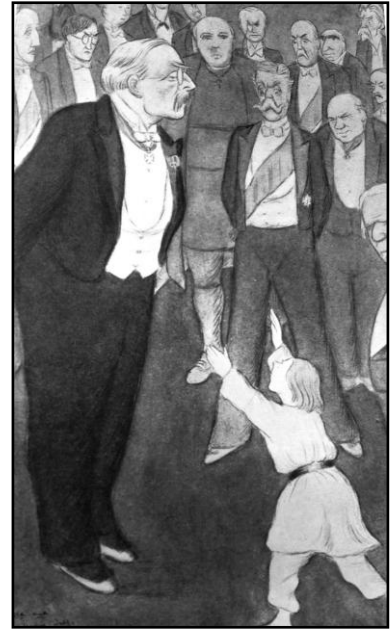


Fig. 24

## Conclusion

**To me it seems that security can only be found in an incessant exploration of the by-ways of literary history and analysis of the vagaries of literary character. To pursue this analysis and this exploration without bewilderment and without prejudice is to sum up the pleasures of a life devoted to books.**

**Edmund Gosse, *Some Diversions of a Man of Letters* (1919:12)**

**As a literary man-of-the-world, unbewildered and unprejudiced, [Gosse] goes forth to pay his calls here and there down the centuries, and returns to his club in Victoria Street to chat with his intimates... A Major Pendennis of Literature, one might say, he plays an important part in the world which he has so long cultivated. He diffuses knowledge of it, brings the right people together, promotes, in short, its sociability.**

**Robert Morss Lovett, Mr Gosse Grows Old Gracefully, *The Dial*, June 1920, pp.777-778.**

Gosse's observation in *Some Diversions of a Man of Letters* (1919) serves as an epigraph both for his work, and for my dissertation. It conveys Gosse's conviction that his sense of security, the freedom from doubt and anxiety, is located in what is indirect and unpredictable: 'by-ways' are obscure and unfrequented paths while 'vagaries' denote wanderings. Joy, Gosse intimates, is attained by immersing himself in the indeterminacy of reading, unhindered by 'bewilderment' and 'prejudice'. Gosse articulates his sense of assurance and satisfaction in the very complexity of literature, declaring that ambivalence and indirection are attributes to be savoured, not condemned. Like many of Gosse's critics, Lovett is distracted by the public persona of the clubbish and conservative Gosse, fraternising like Thackeray's Major Pendennis with titled celebrities. Eventually, however, Lovett stumbles onto one of Gosse's most important skills, his ability to 'diffuse' meaning by achieving the 'sociability' of literature, to initiate through allusion a dialogue between old textual voices and new textual respondents.

By my interrogation of Gosse's allusive practice, I have made an original contribution to scholarship in three ways, which are inter-related. Firstly, my dissertation demonstrates the value of allusion as a methodology of analysis. By setting in motion Ben-Porat's principle of allusion as a 'device for the simultaneous activation of two texts', I have generated new readings of Gosse's work, several of which illuminate hitherto unresolved aspects of the Gosse corpus. Responding to Gosse's various acts of reading, I match his allusions to their possible sources, exploiting parallel textual echoes and interpreting their shifting implications and associations. The spectrum of approaches to allusion, from Bloom's Freudian conflictual model to Ricks's notions of inheritance, has provided various methods of containing and organising the complex resonances of allusive material. The indeterminacy of the allusive method furthermore allows a reading of *Father and Son* that is informed by Postmodernist understanding of the instability of reading, and as I shall show later in my Conclusion, this

approach to Gosse's work prompts a re-assessment of his contribution to early twentieth-century developments in literature.

Secondly, I have restored the textual voices of Bowes and Philip, and revealed the conversational arcs that exist between Gosse's writing and their respective oeuvres. Bowes' discourse is stereotypically evangelical, structured by binaries that allow no latitude: it is mechanistic, authoritarian and dogmatic. Bowes' public and private injunctions against fiction are furthermore imperious and fanatical. Philip's voice, by contrast, is earnest and informed but companionable, and (as attested by scientific and cultural rather than literary commentators) Romantically-inclined; building on this, I have foregrounded specifically Philip's use of fairy-tale lexis, which offered Gosse a partial melioration of Bowes' prohibition of that genre. The disposition of these voices, together with the ambivalence of Gosse's representation of his parents across his oeuvre, leads me to challenge traditional readings, and I have inverted the gender hierarchy so that Bowes is positioned as Gosse's primary antagonist. I suggest that the figure of Philip becomes a vehicle for Bowes' principles and prejudices, and I show that *Father and Son* reveals new meanings when read as an opposition between mother and son.

In the light of these two shifts in approaching Gosse, that is, the focus on his allusive practice, and the primacy of Bowes' influence on Gosse's childhood reading and subsequent writing, I have produced a new reading of Gosse's oeuvre, and particularly of *Father and Son*. I contend that *Father and Son* was produced by an intersection of two trajectories, one personal (the familial 'textual' inheritance) and the other professional (his role as a 'reader', a man of letters). The personal trajectory concerns Gosse's preoccupation with his mother, manifested in terms of a simultaneous appropriation of and resistance to her. Ironically, it is his failure to extricate himself completely from Bowes' influence that generates his singular achievement in *Father and Son*, and as I shall discuss below, this contradictory push-pull (resistance-appropriation) dynamic is inextricably linked with the process of allusion. The professional trajectory is Gosse's lifetime of worshipful reading: I have traced Gosse's reading and writing across many disciplines, and demonstrated his reliance on literature to ventriloquize his world. The writing of *Father and Son* in 1907 was the moment when these two trajectories intersected and Gosse achieved his – albeit temporary – Bloom-style Apophrades. Empowered by wide-ranging literary knowledge, Gosse could at last explore through the indirect medium of allusion the ambivalence and unresolved nature of the maternal relationship that had long haunted him. This submerged narrative, contained within the palimpsest, can now be accessed by the current interpretative community, that is, by readers accustomed to the unreliability and fragmentation of Postmodernism.



My working of Gosse's allusions has required me to move simultaneously in two opposite directions. Moving 'backwards', I have delved into what I have called Gosse's 'three libraries': first, the official collection of canonical texts set down in his catalogues, second, the romanticised tales of childhood reading, and third, those deeply inscribed voices of the parental texts, particularly the 'tract-voice' of Bowes. At the same time, I moved 'forward' into Gosse's writing, exploring the patterns of resistance and appropriation, of Bloomian misreading and sub-textual fantasy. In his role as reader, Gosse appropriates a text, he re-locates it in a new context, and then he allows the text to do its own work. If the newly-generated narrative reveals itself too indiscreetly, as was the case with *Secret*, discussed in Chapter Four, then Gosse can step back from it, and disclaim responsibility: hence the downplaying of this novella as some "ephemeral work of the day" (Sturgis 1998:269). On the other hand, his sub-textual narratives in *Father and Son* are more discreet: many have long remained hidden in the palimpsest. The study remains essentially a process, never reaching a final point of stasis, since the re-readings and reformulations may be 'ever so slightly, altered' (Eliot 1928:50) by the inclusion of new material. This is both an advantage and a disadvantage of my methodology, a necessary corollary of the way that allusion brings the text alive; my thesis thus marks a stage on the Gosse journey rather than a final destination.

Before discussing the wider significance of Gosse's use of allusion in relation to literary history, I will summarise its function within the bounds of my dissertation. I shall exemplify through Gosse's employment of classical allusions the way in which their resonances form a 'web' which in turn becomes a new narrative. I will show how various members of the Gosse family are associated, for example, with the work of Virgil. As argued in Chapter One, Bowes' attraction to the form and ambience of Virgil's *Aeneid*, or at least Dryden's translation of it as manifested in 'Abraham's Temptation', is for her so seductive that she must suppress it. Philip, by contrast, makes direct homage to Virgil, quoting the *Eclogues* in different contexts, as discussed in Chapter Two. Philip's knowledge and love of the classics imitates his own father: just as in his youth, Philip recited Virgil to his friend in Carbonear, so his father, Thomas, wooed his patrons with 'tags of Theocritus' (Gosse 1890a:39,3). The father-son relationship between Thomas and Philip is thus reflected in their literary preoccupations: both learned these classical poets by heart so that they could spontaneously utter the verses. This in turn mirrors the literary affiliation between Theocritus and Virgil, since the former's *Bucolics* were the source for the latter's *Eclogues*. Blood father-son relationships and literary father-son relationships jostle in the palimpsest. Philip's quotation of the Virgilian line, 'lentus in umbra

formosam resonare doces Amaryllida silvas',<sup>230</sup> evokes the notion of teaching the woods to re-echo sounds, which John Hollander (1981:14) points out is itself an echo of Theocritus' shepherd Thyrsis speaking of the sweet music of the whispering pine-tree beside a spring (*Idyll* 1:1-3). Virgil's Latin verses thus allude to Theocritus' Greek pastoral foregrounding the subject of echoic resonances, an observation on the allusive process there being enacted; the weight of Theocritus' verses serves to authenticate the Virgilian echoes. Gosse of course attributes the awakening of his 'prosodical instinct' to hearing Virgil's 'adorable verses' (2004:96). The tension between 'instinct' and 'inheritance' reiterates Gosse's fashioning of himself as a child of the literary canon, and his distancing the parental inheritance. These classical threads thus weave connections that tighten the structures of filiation and authority in Gosse's palimpsest.

The classical allusions also reinforce the acts of transformation operating within Gosse's texts. As poets 'warble' of Amaryllis through the centuries, the name of this shepherdess is appropriated as a botanical subfamily, Amaryllidoideae. A fictional figure thus metamorphoses into a scientific classification. One genus within the Amaryllis family is the Narcissus, which name also of course denotes the mythological youth whose fateful demise Ovid described in *The Metamorphoses*. This link between Virgil's Amaryllis and Ovid's Narcissus returns us to Philip and Gosse, and their respective handling of the mythological figures: Philip cites Amaryllis by way of illustrating his scientific text, while Gosse immerses himself in Ovid, allowing the story of doomed youth to direct and overwhelm his story, *The Secret of Narcisse*. Both classical figures, Amaryllis and Narcissus, are metamorphosed into flowers, and this act of translation, I have suggested, is echoed in *Father and Son* where Bowes metaphorically petrifies into an alabastrine 'monument', and finally emerges as a 'flower-like thought' (2004:37-8, 51). Such allusions furthermore gesture at textual processes: in this case they mirror the transition traced in this dissertation from tangible material form (Bowes' tracts) to ethereal haunting (Bowes' spectral voice).

A deep-seated fear of the maternal presence is also conveyed through classical allusion. Gosse writes a poem about Cleobis and Biton, the young men whose faithful duty to their religious mother earns them instant death (Chapter One), and he also alludes to the figures of Orpheus and Pentheus<sup>231</sup> (discussed in Chapters One and Three respectively) who are linked by their analogous deaths at the hands of frenzied maenads, a drama enacted in Gosse's poem 'Old and New' (1911). By such references, Gosse amplifies his own anxiety at being Bowes' 'sacrificial lamb'. The 'plot' of a mother dealing death to her son is out of the ordinary, so the

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<sup>230</sup> Translation: 'reclining in the shade, you make the woods echo the name of beautiful Amaryllis.' (Virgil: *Eclogues* I,4-5)

<sup>231</sup> Ovid's version of the Death of Pentheus (*Met.* III 692-733) is based on Euripides' tragedy.

fact that these particular references feature across Gosse's writing is highly suggestive. In *Secret*, however, Gosse finds a means of restraining that female threat: Narcisse fixes the feet of the White Maiden so that 'they will never stir' (1892:160) and this act strongly resonates Bacchus's punishment of the maenads for their dismembering of Orpheus: 'For the path that each one then pursued clutched at her toes and thrust their tips into the solid earth' (*Met*: Book XI: 71-2). Classical allusions serve to tighten parallels between Gosse family members, but also to enact impermissible emotions and address profound fears.

Some allusions constitute what Christopher Ricks calls the 'scaffolding' meaning those texts that are not necessarily 'called into play' but which have contributed to the creative process (2002:3). Dickens is a writer whose presence permeates the texture of my dissertation: sometimes his characters are directly cited by Gosse but often they are simply evoked by the text, implicit, illuminating but unnamed. By way of a summary to illustrate the web of Dickensian allusions that link the Gosse family members, I shall create a notional 'Gosse landscape' onto which I shall map references to Dickens, real and fictional, explicit and implied.

I will begin with the 'literary-critical' connections between Dickens and Gosse's parents. Dickens's admiration of Philip's *Evenings at the Microscope* marks a meeting of literary minds; Dickens's extravagant and witty amplification of Philip's analogies heightens Philip's role as a literary catalyst. Dickens's open acknowledgement of Philip's inspiration also contrasts with Gosse's own covert appropriation of his father's discourse. Bowes, by contrast, would have resisted any association with Dickens, but by Gosse's sly characterisation of her as 'Mrs Jellyby', even though he uses the device of *occupatio*, she becomes irrevocably one of Dickens's many monstrous mothers. Another 'monstrous' Dickensian caricature is the strident evangelical, whose profile became so memorable a Victorian stereotype that it is difficult not to assume its 'tone' in Bowes' tracts. Indeed, in Chapter One, I read into Bowes' tracts both the 'mechanical' discourse of Mrs Pardiggle and the rhetorical structures of Chadband's preaching. Bowes' imposition of the embargo on fairy-stories is furthermore a childhood trauma that equates with Dickens's experience in Warren's Blacking Factory. Indeed, Gosse's endurance of the prohibition may have been an even worse predicament, given that Dickens, speaking as David Copperfield, claims to have been fortified by the knowledge of fairy stories that 'kept alive my fancy and my hope of something beyond that place and time' (2000:47). Dickens's belief in the psychological value of fairy-stories for children is attested by his *Frauds on the Fairies* (1853), and Gosse's claim that he was denied such emotional comfort is a strong indictment of Bowes.

It is notable that it is Miss Brightwen who interrupts Bowes' line of influence by introducing Gosse to Dickens; Gosse's erotic and 'scandalous' response to *The Pickwick Papers* brings the reader full circle by demonstrating why Bowes was so antagonistic towards fiction. Bowes knew that fiction would lead to a loss of perspective, a loss of control. Miss Brightwen, as stepmother, was not a spiritual 'tower of strength' but she simply responded to young Gosse's need for culture, especially literature (see Chapter Two). Her role is best understood by extending Peter Allen's reading of Gosse as Pip from *Great Expectations* (1988:490) at which prompting I cast Miss Brightwen as Biddy, Pip's 'stepmother'. Like Biddy who shared her learning with Pip, Miss Brightwen broadens Gosse's 'horizon of expectations'. My Dickens 'allusive map' sharpens the pervasive sense of the Gosse family connections with each other and with the wider literary world.

This Dickensian mapping also exposes the reflective, mirroring characteristics of Gosse's practice. As stated in my Introduction, Gosse's contemporaries afforded him various Dickensian epithets, such as Silas Wegg, Mr Pecksniff and Mr Tulkinghorn, appellations that point up the blurred line between reality and fiction. Whenever Gosse looks in the mirror, furthermore, he sees not himself but the reflection of another literary self: in *Father and Son* Gosse casts himself as Blanchefleur, Andromeda, Fatima, St Teresa, Bassanio, Gehazi, Elihu, Ahab, and Mazeppa. This multiple casting seems to give critics permission to extend the practice, and invariably, it seems, Dickensian figures spring to mind. Just as Peter Allen reads young Gosse as Pip, so Michael Newton reads him as Paul Dombey (2004:xii), whereas in my scheme, Gosse casts himself variously as Bitzer in his critique of Philip, as the ebullient Marchioness, fellow victim of a book-ban, and by association with her, as Swiveller, the ultimate alluder, while that seminal casting as Oliver Twist, by the depiction of the circumstances of his birth, metaphorically detaches Gosse from his parental lineage, freeing him to seek new literary allegiances. T.S. Eliot suggests furthermore that the past is 'altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past' (1928:50). Readers therefore experience Dickens afresh by the parallels between the childhoods of Gosse and the Marchioness: Gosse's subjection to Bowes' ban and his hunger for fairy-tales constitutes the present, and this tale re-reads the Marchioness's similar deprivation of books and her creation of 'an Arabian Night instead of a London one' (Dickens 2000:476) which constitutes the past. The two scenarios reinvigorate each other with a mixture of pathos and irrepressibility. That the figure of young Gosse in *Father and Son* is so amenable to casting emphasises furthermore its inherent literariness, and this in turn undermines the historical, autobiographical nature of the text. Gosse's mirror generates inexact reflections: he looks at himself but sees only literary archetypes. Such inexactness returns us to the nature of allusion: it is never an accurate copy

or quotation, but in Eliot's terms an 'ever so slightly altered' version, and in Bhabha's terms, 'almost the same but not quite', a shadowy rendering which retains the essential characteristics, but is susceptible to constant alteration. This is why those persistent tropes of slightly mismatched reflections and shadowy figures, discussed in relation to *Secret* in Chapter Four, are significant features in Gosse's oeuvre.

The exploration of Gosse's work through allusive practice highlights the paradox that allusion simultaneously arrests and promotes a sense of cultural continuity. As I have shown, allusion disrupts the sequential flow of the act of reading. By its importation of a phrase or a passage from a past work into a text of the present, allusion creates sudden and startling juxtapositions: these supple transitions from one stratum of experience to another appear to confound any sense of textual linearity or cultural continuity. This act engenders textual instability: the process of allusion works by fragmentation, which disturbs the text alluded to, as well as the alluding text. On the other hand, although it is only fragments that Gosse imports into the new textual environment, they serve as allusive bridges forging connections through space and time, which actively promote a sense of cultural continuity. Old traditions are summoned, ancestors are resurrected. The foregrounding of this paradox in Gosse's oeuvre is, I suggest, a key outcome of my study.

This recognition of allusion as an agent of cultural fragmentation and continuity is a paradox almost religious in its resonances: 'whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it' (Luke 17:33). It is an area with great potential for future research, and I suggest that a route for developing this contradiction lies in the exploration of the respective allusive practices of Gosse and T.S. Eliot. Both writers are 'outsiders' in relation to English literature: just as Gosse's fiction-depriving Brethrenism means that he can never take the canon for granted, so Eliot's American cultural background gives him a unique perspective on the English tradition. They have, however, different motives for employing allusions. Gosse's use of allusion, although it resembles the behaviour of a child, constantly seeking the attention of an indifferent mentor, is at the same time, a demonstration of his passion for, and deference to, his new literary foster-parent, the English literary tradition: it is a sign of *belonging* to the canon. Gosse fragments the canon in order to transmit and preserve it, but his misreadings are often highly creative and innovative. Although Gosse aspires to a select readership, he does not set the bar as high as does Eliot. Eliot, indeed, employs the device in order to proclaim his uniqueness and modernity, asserting his *separation* from tradition and simultaneously his power over it. The complexity of Eliot's position is illustrated by 'The Wasteland' (1922), where on the one hand, his allusions appear to promote the conservation and transmission of canonical literary values: 'these fragments I have shored against my ruins' (1961:57), while on the other hand, his

accompanying Notes, his 'tongue-in-cheek' references, belittle that very continuity. Although Eliot is more concerned than Gosse to 'market his own exclusivity' (Hanna 2009:61), the dynamic working of his allusive practice is similar: the work of both writers embodies the paradox of simultaneous acts of fragmentation and transmission.

Gosse's allusive practice, though less ostentatious, represents a threat to the Modernist claim to have broken with tradition. His small-scale destabilisation of canonical texts quietly anticipates Modernist avowals of challenging norms of language and perception. Indeed, in a much-vaunted statement, Eliot pronounced Gosse an anachronism:

The place that Sir Edmund Gosse filled in the literary and social life of London is one that no one can ever fill again, because it is, so to speak, an office that has been abolished . . . He was, indeed, an amenity, but not quite any sort of amenity for which I can see any great need in our time.<sup>232</sup>(1931:715)

By that statement Gosse's significance within twentieth-century literature was dramatically invalidated; he was rendered irrelevant as an 'amenity', that is, something inessential. Eliot, however, 'doth protest too much, methinks'. Gosse's allusive practice in relation to Modernist writing is a vein still to be tapped. Indeed, I suggest that *Father and Son* constitutes a bridge between Victorianism and Modernism; it is a bridge, furthermore, which spans Edwardianism, overarching the spirit of the writing of his contemporaries, Bennett, Wells and Galsworthy, and aligns itself rather with early Modernist writing, such as Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916),<sup>233</sup> and 'The Wasteland'. It is a link that Eliot was clearly anxious to deny, hence his pronouncement in 1931, which reduces Gosse's significance and draws attention away from the bridge.

Because we have moved through Modernism and Postmodernism, we can now re-read Gosse in a new way. Dennis Potter (1976) and Peter Carey (1988) turned *Father and Son* into an allusion for their own narratives. I suggest that there are even more subtle presences to be explored in the work of such writers as Jeannette Winterson and Hanif Kureishi. *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) tells the story of another 'dedicated' childhood dominated by an evangelical mother. For Winterson, as for Gosse, the fairy-tale functions as 'a secular imaginative discourse in dialogic relation to the prescription of the Bible' (Makinen 2008:164). Winterson furthermore alludes pervasively, conjuring ideas of inheritance, of the inevitability of the human life-cycle, and of literary recycling. Exactly mid-way through the text, and therefore symbolically at its heart, are a series of minor sentences that seem to forge an intertextual connection with Gosse: 'Getting old, dying, starting again. Not noticing. Father

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<sup>232</sup> This comment was included in Eliot's response to Charteris's *The Life and Letters of Sir Edmund Gosse* (1931) in *The Criterion*, July 1931.

<sup>233</sup> See Helsinger's parallel between Gosse and Steven Dedalus, developed in Chapter Three.

and Son. Father and Son. It has always been this way, nothing can intrude' (1985:87): the text thus uncannily evokes Gosse's title. Similarly, in *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) the homodiegetic narrator, Karim, compares Philip's habit of praying over every decision with the Buddhist practice of Eva Kay, the novel's female protagonist (1990:112). It is as though the fictional Karim recognises, in his reading of *Father and Son*, the feminine genesis of Philip's behaviour, the shaping presence of Bowes that re-emerges intertextually in the figure of the influential Eva (the archetypal 'Eve'). It is striking and perhaps not wholly coincidental that Kureishi should have structured his novel on a father-son relationship (Haroon and Karim) and yet it is the religious mother-figure who determines the action. The resonances of Kureishi's novel echo the argument of my study that situates Bowes and not Philip as Gosse's primary antagonist. The act of reading has come full circle: Gosse the alluder has now become the allusion, importing into our modernity effects both illuminating and disturbing.

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## Appendix One

### A Brief Comment on Poetic Quotation in some of Philip Gosse's Natural History texts

Philip's practice is to embed all biblical and scientific quotations within the text, and to identify their sources by footnote, while most of the literary quotations stand out in the text by indentation. Philip occasionally attributes the literary quotations, but never gives the title of the poem to which he alludes. He assumes that literary quotation is relevant to every audience, regardless of age or specialism.

The span of dates included here, from 1844 to 1865, also shows that Philip sustained this practice throughout his career, always quoting with accuracy. Romantic poetry dominates, reflecting both the theme of nature and Philip's personal inclinations, as stated in Gosse's 1890 *Life*. Occasionally, Philip cites verses from more obscure poets which he finds in other scientific publications: In *Tenby* for example, when describing the scent of the Bog Myrtle, he quotes the line: 'gale from the bog shall waft Arabian balm' (1856:205). This quotation appeared (also unattributed) in W. J. Hooker's *British Flora* (1830), a book which Philip certainly owned as it is listed in the *Catalogue of Furniture and Effects, Valuable Books and Orchids belonging to Philip Henry Gosse FRS: November 20-21, 1900* (Cox 1900:17), drawn up at the auction of Philip's effects (see Lot 351).

Numbers in brackets refer to pages of Philip's texts.

In *The Ocean* (1844) Philip quotes from *Palmyra* by Thomas Love Peacock (1); *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* by Coleridge (9,174-5); *Greenland* (113-4,121-2) and *Pelican Island* (263-4, 303, 353-4) by James Montgomery; and *The Southern Seas* by Mary Howitt (203-4).

In *A Text Book of Zoology for Schools* (1851), there are allusions to *Marmion* by Scott (65); *Paradise Lost* by Milton (106); *Edwin and Angelina* by Goldsmith (133), and *The Bird's Nest* by James Hurdis.

In *Tenby: A Sea-Side Holiday* (1856), Philip alludes to Wordsworth's *Intimations of Immortality* (7); Chaucer's *The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* (8); Henry Howard's *The Soote Season* (9); Ebenezer Elliot's *The Excursion* (70); Cowper's *The Task* (101); Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (204); a sonnet by Gaetana Passerini (224); Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (254); Shelley's *Summer and Winter* (291); and an ode by Southey (339).

In *A Year at the Shore* (1865), Philip selects verses from Thomas Parnell's *The Hermit* (21) Drayton's *Polyolbion* (118), Milton's *Paradise Lost* (137); Thomson's *The Seasons* (298), Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* (326), and cites a poem about Medusae (jellyfish) by Drummond, sourced from the *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy* (1839).

**Appendix Two: The Whitethroat**

First published in *On Viol and Flute* (1873). Reprinted with sub-title in *New Poems* (1879)

I HEARD the Whitethroat sing  
Last eve at twilight when the wind was dead.  
And her sleek bosom and her fair smooth head  
Vibrated, ruffling, and her olive wing  
Trembled. So soft her song was that it seemed  
As though, in wandering through the copse at noon,  
She must have found the holy bough where dreamed  
The day-struck Nightingale,  
And, listening, must have overheard too soon  
The dim rehearsal of that golden tale  
That greets the laggard moon.  
But through the imitative strain,  
Between each gentle cadence, and again  
When those clear notes she tried, for which her throat  
Was not so capable as fain,  
I joyed to hear her own peculiar note  
Through all the music float.  
And when the gentle song, that streamed away.  
Like some enamoured rivulet that flows  
Under a night of leaves and flowering may,  
Died on the stress of its own lovely pain,



Even as it died away,  
It seemed as if no influence could restrain  
The notes from welling in the Whitethroat's brain;  
But, with the last faint chords, on fluttering wing  
She rose, until she hung in sunset air;  
A little way she rose, as if her care  
Were all to reach the heavens, her radiant goal,  
Then sank among the leaves.

Pathetic singer! with no strength to sing,  
And wasted pinions far too weak to bear  
The body's weight that mars the singing soul,  
In wild disorder, see, her bosom heaves!  
Scarcely, with quivering plumes.

She wins the sparse bough of that tulip-tree.  
Whose leaves unfinished ape her faulty song,  
Whose mystic flowers her delicate minstrelsy.

But, hark! how her rich throat resumes  
Its broken music, and the garden blooms  
Around her, and the flower that waited long,  
The vast magnolia rends its roseate husk.

And opens to the dusk;  
Odour and song embalm the day's decline.

Ah ! pulsing heart of mine,  
Flattered beyond all judgment by delight,

This pleasing harmony, this gentle light,  
This soft and enervating breeze of flowers,  
This magic antechamber of the night  
With florid tapestry of twilight hours,  
Is this enough for thee?  
Lo ! from the summit of the tulip-tree  
The enamoured Whitethroat answered, ' Yes! O yes!  
And once again, with passion and the stress  
Of thoughts too tender and too sad to be  
Enshrined in any melody she knew,  
She rose into the air;  
And then, oppressed with pain too keen to bear,  
Her last notes faded as she downward flew.  
  
And she was silent. But the night came on:  
A whisper rose among the giant trees,  
Between their quivering topmost boughs there shone  
Broad liquid depths of moonlight-tinted air;  
By slow degrees  
The darkness crept upon me unaware.  
The enchanted silence of the hours of dew  
Fell like a mystic presence more and more,  
Aweing the senses. Then I knew,  
But scarcely heard, shot through to the brain's core,  
The shrill first prelude of triumphant song,

Cleaving the twilight. Ah! we do thee wrong,  
Unequalled Philomela, while thy voice  
We hear not; every gentle song and clear  
Seems worthy of thee to our poor noonday choice.  
But when thy true fierce music, full of pain,  
And wounded memory, and the tone austere  
Of antique passion, fills our hearts again.  
We marvel at our light and frivolous ear.  
Ah ! how they answer from the woodland glades!  
How deep and rich the waves of music pour  
On night's enchanted shore!  
From star-lit alleys where the elm-tree shades  
The hare's smooth leverets from the moon's distress.  
From pools all silvered o'er,  
Where water-buds their petals upward press,  
Vibrating with the song, and stir, and shed  
Their inmost perfume o'er their shining bed,  
Yea, from each copse I hear a bird,  
As by a more than mortal woe undone,  
Sing, as no other creature ever sang,  
Since through the Phrygian forest Atys heard  
His wild compeers come fluting one by one,  
Till all the silent uplands rang and rang.

### Appendix Three: The Wallpaper

from *In Russet and Silver* (1893)

When I was only five years old,  
     My mother, who was soon to die,  
 Raised me with fingers soft and cold,  
     On high;

Until, against the parlour wall,  
     I reached a golden paper flower.  
 How proud was I, and ah! how tall,  
     That hour!

"This shining tulip shall be yours,  
     Your own, your very own," she said;  
 The mark that made it mine endures  
     In red.

I scarce could see it from the floor;  
     I craned to touch the scarlet sign;  
 No gift so precious had before  
     Been mine.

A paper tulip on a wall!  
     A boon that ownership defied!  
 Yet this was dearer far than all  
     Beside.

Real toys, real flowers that lavish love  
     Had strewn before me, all and each  
 Grew pale beside this gift above  
     My reach.

Ah! now that time has worked its will,  
     And fooled my heart, and dazed my eyes,  
 Delusive tulips prove me still  
     Unwise.

Still, still the eluding flower that glows  
     Above the hands that yearn and clasp  
 Seems brighter than the genuine rose  
     I grasp.

So has it been since I was born;  
     So will it be until I die;  
 Stars, the best flowers of all, adorn  
     The sky.

### Appendix Four: Transcription of Gosse's 'Mermaid Story'

#### *Page One*

#### Chapter 2.

#### "Sleep in the Deep.

When Dowley fell into the sea, he found himself in a magnificent grotto, edged by magnificent sea weeds; in the furthest corner seven beautiful fishes reposed. All seemed afraid of him, but one, the largest, Ensimanus by name, being armed with a sharp sword came up to him, and in a haughty tone, spoke thus to the affrighted Dowley; "O strange and shapeless being of earth, Who art thou? Are you one of our enemies, the Mermen of the upper world, for if you are, I will pierce you through<sup>235</sup>.

#### *Page Two*

Dowley frightened dreadfully, meekly replied, that he "was only a little boy." Ensimanus had never heard of "little boys", but supposed that was all right; and so, patting him on the back with his sword, said pitifully in the Piscine language, "Poor Peter, pat him on the back. Poor Peter, cheer up Poor Peter."

Dowley, always stupid, immediately began to grumble;

#### *Page Three*

saying that his name was Dowley not Peter. Ensimanus, (who was very proud) was offended, and calling for a cane made of seaweed, beat Dowley. He soon, however, recovered his equanimity, and taking Master Dowley by the hand, took him to the door of the grotto and led through some more, till he came to one more than ordinarily beautiful; this, said Ensimanus, was the cave of the mermaids of the North; Ensimanus took Dowley and pushed him into the room, telling him that he might not venture there; on our friend's entrance, he saw opposite him, in a splendid apartment, four lovely

#### *Page Four*

Mermaids. Dowley was terribly afraid and hid his face with his hands; and when one of them swam up to him, and led him lovingly to the others, he began to sob; they however played with, and kissed him, til he began to gain

---

<sup>235</sup> There is an echo of Cervantes in this speech: Don Quixote threatens a hapless barber 'resolved to pierce him through and through' (Cervantes 1900:129). Philip would, however, have been an unlikely conduit for such an allusion, since 'Don Quixote was a book to which [Philip] retained through life an inexplicable aversion' (1890a:26)

**Appendix Five: Old and New** (from *Collected Poems*, 1911)**I****B.C.**

Come, Hesper, and ye Gods of mountain waters,  
 Come, nymphs and Dryades,  
 Come, silken choir of soft Pierian daughters,  
 And girls of lakes and seas,  
 Evoë! and evoë lo! crying,  
 Fill all the earth and air;  
 Evoë! till the quivering woods, replying  
 Shout back the echo there !

All day in soundless swoon or heavy slumber,  
 We lay among the flowers,  
 But now the stars break forth in countless number  
 To watch the dewy hours;  
 And now Iacchus, beautiful and glowing,  
 Adown the hill-side comes,  
 Mid tabrets shaken high, and trumpets blowing,  
 And resonance of drums.

The leopard-skin is round his smooth white shoulders,  
 The vine-branch round his hair,  
 Those eyes that rouse desire in maid-beholders  
 Are glittering, glowworm-fair;  
 Crowned king of all the provinces of pleasure,  
 Lord of a wide domain,  
 He comes, and brings delight that knows no measure,  
 A full Saturnian reign.

Take me, too, Maenads, to your fox-skin chorus,  
 Rose-lipped like volute-shells,  
 For I would follow where your host canorous  
 Roars down the forest-dells;  
 The sacred frenzy rends my throat and bosom I  
 I shout, and whirl where He,

Our Vine- God, tosses like some pale blood-blossom  
Swept on a stormy sea.

Around his car, with streaming hair, and frantic,  
The Maenads and wild gods  
And shaggy fauns and wood-girls corybantic  
Toss high the ivy-rods;  
Brown limbs with white limbs madly intertwining

Whirl in a fiery dance,  
Till, when at length Orion is declining,  
We glide into a trance.

The satyr's heart is faintly, faintly beating,  
The choir of nymphs is mute;  
Iacchus up the western slope is fleeting,  
Uncheered by horn or flute;  
Hushed, hushed are all the shouting and the singing.  
The frenzy, the delight.  
Since out into the cold gray air upspringing,  
The morning-star shines bright.

## II

### A.D.

Not with a choir of angels without number,  
And noise of lutes and lyres,  
But gently, with the woven veil of slumber  
Across Thine awful fires,  
We yearn to watch Thy face, serene and tender,  
Melt, smiling, calm and sweet,  
Where round the print of thorns, in thornlike splendour.  
Transcendent glories meet!

We have no hopes if Thou art close beside us,  
And no profane despairs.  
Since all we need is Thy great hand to guide us.  
Thy heart to take our cares;

For us is no to-day, to-night, to-morrow,  
 No past time nor to be.  
 We have no joy but Thee, there is no sorrow,  
 No life to live but Thee.

The cross, like pilgrim-warriors, we follow,  
 Led by our eastern star;  
 The wild crane greets us, and the wandering swallow  
 Bound southward for Shinar;  
 All night that single star shines bright above us;  
 We go with weary feet.  
 But in the end we know are they who love us,  
 Whose pure embrace is sweet.

Most sweet of all, when dark the way and moonless,  
 To feel a touch, a breath,  
 And know our weary spirits are not tuneless,  
 Our unseen goal not Death;  
 To know that Thou, in all Thy old sweet fashion,  
 Art near us to sustain!  
 We praise Thee, Lord, by all Thy tears and passion,  
 By all Thy cross and pain!

For when this night of toil and tears is over,  
 Across the hills of spice,  
 Thyself wilt meet us, glowing like a lover  
 Before Love's Paradise;  
 There are the saints, with palms and hymns and roses,  
 And better still than all,  
 The long, long day of bliss that never closes,  
 Thy marriage festival!



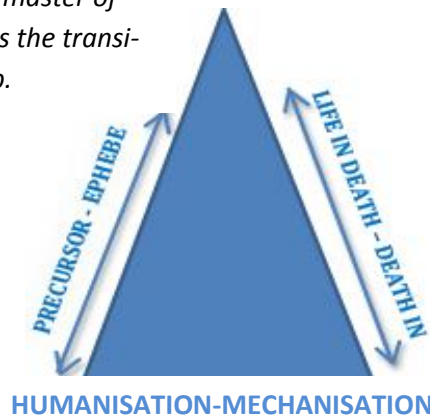
## Appendix Six:

Triangular structure of relationships in *The Secret of Narcisse* (1892)

*Ligier Richier, master of Narcisse, sculpts the transi-tomb.*



*René de Châlons, subject of the transi-tomb, was the husband of Anne of Lorraine, whose heart will fill the empty silver box.*

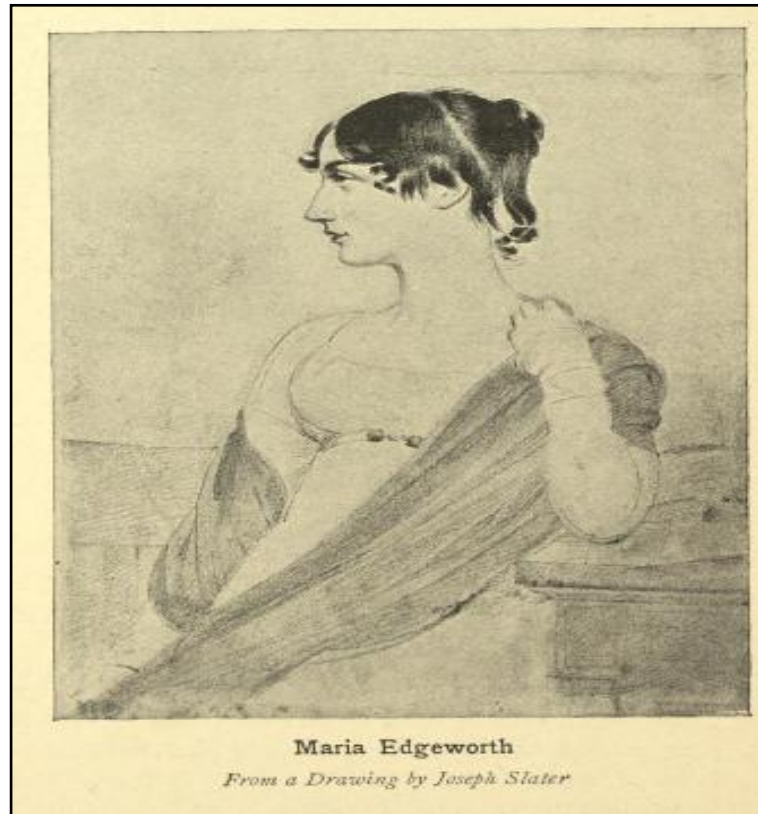


*Narcisse's Musical Skeleton, or White Maiden is inspired by Richier's transitomb.*



*The White Maiden is anthropomorphised by Narcisse's obsession while Anne of Lorraine becomes 'mechanised' by ritual grieving.*

Appendix Seven



Portrait of Maria Edgeworth  
from *English Literature: an Illustrated Record, Volume IV: From  
The Age of Johnson to The Age of Tennyson*

By E. Gosse and R. Garnett  
1905



Portrait of Emily Bowes  
from *The Booklovers' Edition of Father  
and Son*

By E. Gosse  
1912

## Appendix Eight: Sources of Illustrations

### Chapter One

Terracotta Relief Plaque of *The Sons of Cydippe* by George Tinworth (1884)

<https://www.bonhams.com/auctions/16755/lot/66/>

### Chapter Two

Pages One to Four of 'Sleep in the Deep'

Gosse Family Papers: Add.7027.17. Cambridge: Cambridge University Library.

Illustration of swordfish compared with Gosse's drawing in 'Sleep in the Deep'

From Philip Gosse's *The Ocean* (1844:179)

Gosse's personalised bookplate, drawn by Edwin Abbey

Affixed to flyleaf in Lister's *Catalogue of a Portion of the Library of Edmund Gosse* (1893)

Two of Abbey's illustrations for *Selections from the Poetry of Robert Herrick* (1882)

1. <http://www.davidrumsey.com/amica/amico112998-91256.html>

2. <http://www.illustration-art-solutions.com/edwin-austin-abbey.html>

### Chapter Four

*Narcisse* (1890) by Gustave Moreau

From *Monographie et Nouveau Catalogue de l'œuvre achevé* by P. Mathieu (1998:406)

Le Transi de René de Châlons, by Ligier Richier

From *Ligier Richier: Un Sculpteur Lorrain de la Renaissance* by N. Cazin (2008:29)

Three Images of woodcuts illustrating Petrarch's *The Triumph of Death*

a: Predica dell'Arte del Bene Morire

<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/25.30.95>

b: Countess of Pembroke's translation of Petrarch's *Trionfo della Morte*

<http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/ceres/sidneiana/triumph2.htm>

c: Bernard Quaritch's edition of the works of The Italian Engravers of the Fifteenth Century.

<http://petrarch.petersadlon.com/trionfi.html>

Christ on the Cross, flanked by thieves, painted wood, by Ligier Richier

From *Ligier Richier: Un Sculpteur Lorrain de la Renaissance* by N. Cazin (2008:29)

*Artemis and her Hound* (1882) by Hamo Thornycroft. Marble, life-size. Eaton Hall, Cheshire.

From *Marble & Bronze : The Art and Life of Hamo Thornycroft* by E. Manning (1982:73)

Detail from 'Mr Heinemann's Announcements', *The Athenaeum*, 27 July 1895, p.117.

## Chapter Five

The eight illustrations from *The Booklover's Edition of Father and Son* (1912)

Gravestone and detail of Epitaph for Emily Bowes-Gosse in Abney Park Cemetery, London

<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=7469054>

Portrait of Emily Bowes as a young woman

*The Booklover's Edition of Father and Son* (1912): opposite p.14

Portrait of Emily Bowes with Fashion-Plate of Romantic-Era dress.

<http://romantic-era-clothing.blogspot.co.uk/2012/05/romantic-era-fashion-plate-april-1836.html>

Portrait of Gosse's mother used in Dennis Potter's play, *Where Adam Stood* (1976)

Nettlesome: <http://jbsource.blogspot.co.uk/2010/12/where-adam-stood.html>

Water-colour portrait of the dying Emily Bowes, 1857. Gosse Family Papers: Add.9713.

Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

Bowes' deathbed photograph

Frontispiece: Philip Gosse's *A Memorial of the Last Days on Earth of Emily Gosse* (1857)

Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

'Changes at Home' by Phiz

From *David Copperfield* by C. Dickens (2012:124)

Reynolds' *Muscipula*, or *Girl with Mouse-Trap*

From *Picturing Animals in Britain c.1750-1850* by D. Donald (2007:19)

Painting of Emily Bowes, aged 8

*The Booklover's Edition of Father and Son* (1912): opposite p.2

‘Are you saved?’: Caricature of Edmund Gosse

From *Observations* by Max Beerbohm (1925:34)

### **Appendices**

Appendix 7: Portrait of Maria Edgeworth

From *A History of English Literature: An Illustrated Record*, Vol 4, by Richard Garnett and Edmund Gosse, (1903:92-3)